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Wednesday 17 January 2024

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 17 January 2024

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

Portfolio Question Time

Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time. The first portfolio is wellbeing economy, fair work and energy.

Torness Power Station

1. **Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the announcement by EDF that its ambition is to extend the life of Torness power station. (S6O-02958)

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): Although the Scottish Government does not support the building of new nuclear fission power stations in Scotland under current technologies, we are supportive of extending the operating lifespan of Torness if strict environmental and safety criteria continue to be met.

Torness has contributed significant value to Scotland's economy over several decades, and the facility plays an important role for the East Lothian community. Extending its power generation will provide supply as the capacity of renewable alternatives is increased.

Craig Hoy: New data shows that nuclear accounted for 16 per cent of Scotland's electrical output in 2022. Over its lifespan, Torness power station has produced enough electricity to power every Scottish home for 29 years, but, when it is decommissioned, the Scottish National Party will block any further nuclear development in Scotland. European nations including Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden will all harness nuclear energy as part of their net zero journey. Why not Scotland?

Gillian Martin: Craig Hoy mentions quite a lot of countries that are continuing to use nuclear technology for fuel, but he does not mention the major economies of Europe such as Germany that are not.

One of the reasons that we are not putting any of our efforts into nuclear is that offshore wind will

provide the security of supply that we need. I also mention pumped storage hydro, which the United Kingdom Government has not supported in any significant way. Nuclear has favourable contracts for difference conditions, UK funding and a regulated asset base model that reduces risk for developers, but pumped storage hydro does not have any of that. Nuclear costs £92.50 per megawatt hour, whereas offshore wind is £37.65 per megawatt hour. Nuclear is far too expensive.

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy will visit Torness in the near future. We recognise that the station has made a significant contribution to Mr Hoy's region.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful that the Government is now celebrating the contribution that Torness has made, but I am disappointed that it is not putting efforts into nuclear. How will the Scottish Government ensure that the baseline continues for periods of up to 24 hours when there are no renewables and the water storage has fallen and turned its turbines?

Gillian Martin: Martin Whitfield has mentioned on many occasions that he is pro-nuclear energy, and he does so again today. The Scottish National Party remains of the position that it is not necessary to invest in nuclear for Scotland when we have an abundance of renewable energy.

I mentioned pumped storage hydro. That sector has not been able to utilise any market mechanisms that the UK Government has put in place for other technologies, such as nuclear. That is a distinct unfairness, given that pumped storage hydro is able to plug gaps in intermittent supply from offshore and onshore wind. The energy that is available from pumped storage hydro is significant.

South of Scotland Enterprise (Funding)

2. **Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on future funding for South of Scotland Enterprise. (S6O-02959)

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): South of Scotland Enterprise has made a significant impact since its launch in 2020. Last year, the agency provided tailored advice and support to more than 1,100 enterprises. It invested £10.5 million into businesses and communities and a further £5.4 million into strategic projects.

We have prioritised funding for SOSE to the extent that is possible, given the extremely challenging funding settlement. The 2024-25 budget allocates almost £27.4 million to the agency to support economic and community development across the region. SOSE is

committed to boosting investment, accelerating opportunities and helping businesses and communities to grow and achieve their potential. We will keep working with it to support those shared ambitions.

Rachael Hamilton: South of Scotland Enterprise was launched four years ago. Since it started, its funding has been cut year on year. This year, it was cut to £34.5 million, which was down nearly £3 million. Next year, as the cabinet secretary has said, its funding will be slashed to £24.7 million. The promise—which is in the financial memorandum that I am holding—has been broken of a fair share per capita of population equivalent to the funding of Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Businesses have been betrayed. Will SOSE be expected to cut its operating and labour costs to ensure that it can deliver its five-year action plan on that budget?

Neil Gray: The funding that was provided in the autumn statement fell well short of what we need. Scotland needed more money for infrastructure, public services and pay deals; instead, the autumn statement delivered a real-terms reduction in the block grant. *[Interruption.]* It is a bit rich for Conservatives who are pro-austerity to complain about its impact.

Rachael Hamilton: You are breaking your financial memorandum promise.

The Presiding Officer: Throughout this session, since it began, I have heard almost constant commentary as members have put or responded to questions. I ask all members to cease that.

Neil Gray: As I said, it is a bit rich for Conservatives who are pro-austerity—a decade and a half of austerity—to come here and complain about the impact that austerity has on services.

In that context, we have prioritised funding for the enterprise agencies to the extent that we possibly can. The budget allocates more than £307 million to enterprise agencies. If the Conservatives wish to see a change, they are more than welcome to suggest cuts for elsewhere in the budget—or, even better, to persuade their colleagues at Westminster to stop the cuts at source.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary provide further detail on how Scottish Enterprise's blueprint for economic growth, which was launched on Monday, will help to deliver a more successful, fairer and greener economy?

Neil Gray: I was pleased to be at the launch of Scottish Enterprise's new strategic focus, which has three key missions at its heart. It is about ensuring that we support the energy just transition,

that we have innovation at the heart of our economy and that we attract capital investment that improves productivity. We will keep working with Scottish Enterprise, SOSE and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to ensure that those key areas of investment are supported.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The budget cut to South of Scotland Enterprise represents some 20 per cent. That is coupled with a 12.8 per cent cut to Highlands and Islands Enterprise and a 15.2 per cent cut to Scottish Enterprise. What assessment has been made of the impact that that will have on headcount and, critically, the number of businesses that, collectively, those agencies will be able to support?

Neil Gray: We continue to work with all our agency partners to ensure that the budget that they have available, which we have been able to prioritise, goes as far as possible towards ensuring that the service that they provide is well tailored to the areas that they serve and the sectors that we must continue to support.

If Labour has a proposition to change the allocation that goes to enterprise agencies, the Deputy First Minister and I would, of course, welcome that. However, to have any credibility, Labour will need to suggest what areas need to be cut back from elsewhere in the budget.

Budget (Offshore Wind Supply Chain)

3. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its budget for 2024-25 will help to develop the offshore wind supply chain to ensure that Scotland benefits from the reported global expansion of wind energy. (S6O-02960)

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): The budget kick-starts our commitment of up to £500 million over five years to anchor Scotland's offshore wind supply chain, with an investment of £67 million in the next financial year. Our strategic investment will stimulate and support crucial private investment in the Scottish supply chain to maximise the economic opportunities and benefits from Scotland's offshore wind potential.

Audrey Nicoll: It is welcome that the Scottish Government is providing the support that is needed to stimulate and support the growth of the sector, which is particularly relevant to my constituency, Aberdeen South and North Kincardine. That said, the reality remains that real-term cuts to the Scottish Government's capital investment budget, which have been imposed by the United Kingdom Government, risk undermining our ability to invest in our energy transition. Will the minister outline how the full capital borrowing

powers of an independent Scotland could make such investment much more achievable? [Interruption.]

Gillian Martin: I hear groans from the Conservatives, because Audrey Nicoll is pointing out that it is absolutely obvious that, at just £450 million per year, or 0.2 of gross domestic product, our ability to borrow to invest is severely constrained compared with that of an independent country. At a time when the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has said that the transition to green energy will require an additional investment of up to 1.5 per cent of GDP per year, that is just not enough.

The Scottish Government has outlined plans to set up a dedicated building a new Scotland fund to invest up to £20 billion during the first decade of an independent Scotland and lay the foundations for a green and fair net zero economy. Other nations across Europe are making significant investments in transitioning, and we should be able to do that, too.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): We all welcome the focus on the offshore supply chain and the fantastic opportunities for our economy, but we need to get on and realise them. The First Minister made that commitment in October last year, but my understanding is that only £20 million has been allocated so far. Will the minister confirm how the funding will be distributed, what mechanism will be used and when we will see the money making a difference on the ground? For example, will she highlight what ports will benefit from the investment?

Gillian Martin: There are a number of issues in Sarah Boyack's question. I note that £87 million has already been allocated, and I have mentioned the figures from the budget. Other work is also being done to support the supply chain.

The member mentioned infrastructure. Work is on-going on the strategic investment model; that has been taken forward by the Scottish offshore wind energy council, which I co-chair. That is attracting £9 billion of capital expenditure, which will be leveraged through private investment and the funds that I have outlined that will be delivered by the Scottish Government.

A significant amount of joint working is being done in the sector. It would not be appropriate for the Government to take a top-down approach and say what the industry should be doing. We are working with the industry. It knows what it needs to deliver on the ScotWind and innovation and targeted oil and gas—INTOG—leasing rounds, and we want to work with it in the room at all stages of the process.

Energy Infrastructure Projects (Consultation)

4. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to review the consultation process for energy infrastructure projects. (S6O-02961)

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): The power to alter the Electricity Act 1989 to change the legislative basis for consultation processes under that act is reserved to the United Kingdom Government. However, the UK Government's transmission acceleration action plan, or TAAP, makes it clear that changes to the consenting regime in Scotland under the 1989 act are necessary to accelerate the determinations process, and the UK Government has committed to a review. The Scottish Government supports such a review, and we will work with the UK Government to progress it.

The Scottish Government is currently undertaking work to streamline the consenting regime for offshore energy infrastructure projects, including reviewing the consultation processes.

Tess White: North-east residents who are affected by the Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks pylon and substation proposals have increasingly shared their concerns with me about the consultation process for the new infrastructure. They feel that it is being railroaded through. That has impacted the community's wellbeing and has caused significant distress to many. Surely there must be a better way of engaging with affected residents. As energy infrastructure projects ramp up, will the minister commit to listening to communities about the way in which the consultations are run and work with the developers to improve them?

Gillian Martin: The simple answer to that question is that I will not only listen, but I am listening and I am working with the industry to improve those consultations. It is important to mention that.

I appreciate Tess White's support, given that pre-application consultation with the community is led by developers. Although pre-application consultation is mandatory in town and country planning systems for bigger infrastructure capacity of over 50MW, it is not mandatory. The Electricity Act 1989 could be reformed to include that.

I would very much welcome the support of Tess White and her UK Government colleagues not only to make community engagement mandatory in cases such as the one that she mentioned, but to make community benefits mandatory. I have been liaising with my UK Government counterparts on the issue, and I am afraid that I have not had agreement on that. I would therefore very much welcome Tess White's support in those endeavours.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Despite being at the mercy of volatile and unstable UK energy and climate change policy, how will plans to develop a green industrial strategy for Scotland bring about the investment that is needed for energy infrastructure projects?

Gillian Martin: I appreciate where Colin Beattie is coming from. He raises a very important point about policy certainty, which is absolutely crucial for investment. When a UK Government flip-flops on climate change policy, we lose out to companies that would otherwise invest in the UK, and they go elsewhere, where the policy regime is better. I give the example of the United States Inflation Reduction Act.

The global transition offers enormous economic opportunities for Scotland, which is why we are developing a green industrial strategy that sets out how the Scottish Government will help businesses and investors to realise those opportunities. It will offer a clear view of the economic sectors and industries in which we have the greatest strength and the most potential, and of what the Government will do to support them. In covering themes such as skills and investment, it will bring the full weight of Government to bear and give the private sector the confidence to make decisions to invest in Scotland, if not the wider UK.

Glasgow Prestwick Airport

5. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the latest expression of interest in buying Glasgow Prestwick airport. (S6O-02962)

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): At the Economy and Fair Work Committee meeting on 6 December, I set out details of an expression of interest in purchasing Prestwick airport. Other parties have also approached Glasgow Prestwick with a potential interest.

Due to commercial sensitivities, as Mr Simpson will understand, it would not be appropriate to share further details, including the identity of an organisation behind any expression of interest, at this time. However, I will endeavour to update Parliament at the earliest appropriate point, should a proposal be received.

Graham Simpson: I thank the cabinet secretary for that very interesting answer. From what he said, it sounds as though there are two expressions of interest on the table. There have been a number over the years, and they have always hit a barrier. Can the cabinet secretary tell us exactly what the Scottish Government is looking for in a buyer for the airport?

Neil Gray: I thank Graham Simpson for his constructive question and acknowledge his ongoing interest in this area.

The Scottish Government intends to return Glasgow Prestwick airport to the private sector at the appropriate time and with the best opportunity. Any decision to sell must be informed by what is right for the long-term success of the business and the contribution that it makes to the local economy.

The airport is not being actively marketed for sale at present, but it is understood within the aviation industry that ministers are open to considering credible purchase offers. Any potential purchaser must demonstrate how it will maintain Glasgow Prestwick airport as an operational airport and maximise its economic benefits and employment potential. We must be confident that any sale would represent good value for the taxpayer and put the business on a firm footing.

As I said, I am happy to continue to liaise with Mr Simpson, the committee and Parliament as the expressions of interest progress.

Budget (City Centre Recovery and Small Businesses)

6. Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what impact its budget will have on city centre recovery and small businesses. (S6O-02963)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government's £685 million non-domestic rates relief package will see the small business bonus scheme being maintained and continuing to be the most generous scheme of its kind across the United Kingdom. The basic property rate has been frozen at 49.8p, and more than 95 per cent of non-domestic properties will continue to be liable for a lower property tax rate than such properties elsewhere across these islands.

The commitment to the £1.9 billion city region and regional growth deals remains, with the forthcoming budget providing £203 million to support them and the work of the Scottish Cities Alliance.

Roz McCall: The Scottish Retail Consortium has said that the Scottish budget will cause "self-inflicted economic harm" and that its plan for a new levy

"smacks of incoherent policy-making within Government".

All that comes on top of the Scottish National Party's failure to pass on the 75 per cent rates relief to retail businesses. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the member.

Roz McCall: Does the minister accept that the cumulative effect will stifle the economy, further hinder the retail sector, prevent city centre recovery and, ultimately, pass additional costs on to Scottish consumers?

Richard Lochhead: The measure that the member outlined is currently subject to a consultation. We will listen to all views, including the member's, and we will await the outcome of that consultation before moving forward.

This is another example of a Conservative MSP complaining about some of the budget proposals after the dismal budget settlement that the Scottish Government received from the Conservative UK Government. I urge the member and her colleagues to put as much pressure as possible on their Conservative colleagues in the UK Government to recognise the extraordinary pressures that Scotland and our budget are under as a result of those UK policies, so that we can address some of those concerns.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): Scotland's small businesses are facing higher energy costs, labour shortages due to Brexit, and the impact of inflation on goods and services due to United Kingdom Tory Government mismanagement of the economy. Given the paltry consequential that the Scottish Government has received, which severely limits its ability to repair some of that damage, what continued calls is the minister making to the UK Government to provide further much-needed support?

Richard Lochhead: Gordon MacDonald raises an important issue. The latest data from the business insights and conditions survey show that the main concerns for businesses in December 2023 were energy prices, which is an issue reserved to the UK Government; falling demand, which is influenced by policies at UK Government level; and inflation in the cost of goods and services, which is influenced by Tory economic mismanagement at the UK level.

The Scottish Government is raising those and other issues with the UK Government. For example, we are calling on the UK Government to help with the costs by introducing a VAT reduction for business energy bills, and for it to make changes to the skilled worker visa provision, reduce VAT for the tourism and hospitality sector, and act on a number of other issues, so that the UK can step in and help the Scottish business community. I hope that the UK Government will do that sooner rather than later.

Budget (Economic Growth in North Ayrshire)

7. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what

measures in its proposed budget will support economic growth in North Ayrshire. (S6O-02964)

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): Our proposed budget includes a range of measures to support economic growth in North Ayrshire and the three missions of equality, opportunity and community. They include continued rates relief for businesses, which is part of a national package worth £685 million for 2024-25. The region also benefits from our investment in digital connectivity across Scotland, which has increased from £93 million to £140 million.

Such measures will benefit the North Ayrshire economy. Added to that is our continued support of the Ayrshire growth deal, in which we are investing £103 million over 10 years to transform the economy of the wider region.

Ruth Maguire: A recent report by the Trades Union Congress has shown, among other things, that the UK is the only G7 economy in which real household income per head has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels. It describes that as

"a damning indictment on the Conservatives' economic record",

and it says:

"Their failure to deliver decent growth and living standards over the last 13 years has left millions exposed to skyrocketing bills—and is pushing many ... into debt."

We have low growth, high inequality and a Westminster-inflicted cost crisis. Does the cabinet secretary agree that Scotland could do so much better for our citizens with full fiscal autonomy as an independent nation once again?

Neil Gray: Yes, I absolutely agree with Ruth Maguire's assessment. Today's rise in inflation will exacerbate the United Kingdom cost crisis challenge that businesses and households face.

The Scottish Government is limited in its ability to unleash Scotland's economic potential. Too much decision making regarding our economy still rests at Westminster. We remain locked into the UK Government policy-making decisions that the Resolution Foundation says have doubled the productivity gap with France and Germany since 2008 and given the UK stagnant wages, inequality levels that make a typical household income £8,300 worse off and an economy that is 2.5 per cent smaller than it would have been in the European Union. That is while Scotland's economy has experienced faster earnings growth than the rest of the UK in 2023, 4 per cent greater gross domestic product growth per person, and double the UK's annual productivity growth since 2007.

Ruth Maguire is right. For us to truly reach our economic potential and match the growth,

productivity and wider economic performance of our European neighbours, we need to take our place as an independent nation in the EU.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary explain how his Government's decision to slash funding for Scotland's economic development agencies in the budget will benefit economic growth across Ayrshire, or does he subscribe to the view of his Scottish Green colleagues that economic growth is something to be avoided?

Neil Gray: The Government supports continued economic growth, and we support our enterprise agencies and the role that they play to deliver that. It is quite rich for a Conservative member who supports austerity being inflicted on Scotland and the rest of the UK to come here and complain about its impact. If the member is serious about enterprise budgets being increased, he needs to talk to his Westminster colleagues to ensure that our settlement is a fair one and is not a real-terms cut to our budget.

Finance and Parliamentary Business

Local Authorities (Provisional Revenue Allocations)

1. **Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its provisional revenue allocation is for local authorities for 2024-25. (S6O-02966)

The Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning (Joe FitzPatrick): Despite a real-terms reduction in the Scottish Government's block grant, the Scottish Government has provided local government with record revenue funding in 2024-25, and the local government settlement's share of the discretionary Scottish budget has also increased. Together with the funding that is provided to support a council tax freeze, councils will receive almost £13.4 billion of revenue funding next year.

Willie Coffey: The figures independently reported by the Scottish Parliament information centre clearly show a 5 per cent increase on last year's provisional budget—one of the largest increases seen over the past decade—but the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and others regularly challenge the figures and claim that they do not include additional obligations that arise or additional cash that is given to councils during the course of any given year. Can the minister assure Parliament that the figures in the provisional budget statement are accurate and are based on like-for-like budgets in previous years? Can he suggest any further mechanism that might allow the Government and all stakeholders to

reach agreement on the figures that are used in future provisional budget announcements?

Joe FitzPatrick: I confirm that the local government settlement has increased by £795.7 million, which is equivalent to a 6 per cent cash-terms increase, or 4.3 per cent in real terms. The figures that the Scottish Government uses are as required by the written agreement between the Scottish Government and the Finance and Public Administration Committee. We have compared the 2024-25 draft budget with the 2023-24 draft budget, which provides the most accurate like-for-like comparison of available funding at this stage in the budgetary cycle. Adopting any other approach would go against the agreement with the Finance and Public Administration Committee and the Parliament, and it would potentially be misleading to Parliament.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In relation to the revenue allocations for local authorities, what has happened to the new fiscal framework between local and central Government, which the Accounts Commission said would be delivered by September 2023 and which was supposed to include multiyear settlements?

Joe FitzPatrick: A huge amount of work is ongoing to achieve agreement on the fiscal framework between the Scottish Government and our partners in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Clearly, it has proven to be more complex than was expected. Everyone is of the view that it is important that we get this right, because it is an important step forward.

We absolutely accept the aspiration to get the agreement in place as soon as possible; that will be to the benefit of not only the Scottish Government and local government, but the Parliament. We are all working hard, but it is important that we get this right. We are taking forward a partnership between the Scottish Government and COSLA. No one side can drive this forward at pace. We need to work out how best we can achieve a fiscal framework that works for everyone, including the Parliament.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Local authorities across Scotland are struggling to meet the needs of citizens within the current financial set-up. The Accounts Commission highlights that the total budget gap in local authorities has increased to £725 million for the next financial year, which is almost double that of the previous year. Does the Scottish Government consider that that is in line with good governance practice?

Joe FitzPatrick: One important thing in the Accounts Commission's recent report was its assertion that no Scottish local authority was at risk of going bankrupt, as has happened down

south. That shows a real difference in the way that the Scottish Government treats our local government partners compared with the way that local government is treated south of the border.

It is clear that this is a difficult settlement for us all in Scotland. The autumn statement did not provide the resources that Scotland requires, so the Deputy First Minister had to make difficult decisions in setting the draft budget, and I absolutely appreciate that local government colleagues across Scotland will have to make difficult decisions in setting their budgets.

Participatory and Deliberative Democracy

2. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the work it is undertaking to deliver its commitments on participatory and deliberative democracy. (S6O-02967)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): The Scottish Government's vision for public participation is that people can be involved in the decisions that affect them, making Scotland a more inclusive, sustainable and successful place. Officials have been progressing work to deliver on recommendations by identifying the skills and resources that are required to provide effective support for public participation across Government. I anticipate that, by February, I will be able provide further information on how the work will be progressed.

David Torrance: What role does the minister see citizens' assemblies playing in the future of Scotland's democratic process?

George Adam: Citizens' assemblies are best used for complex issues of national significance, and they remain a priority of the Government. We remain committed to high-quality participation. However, in many instances that is better approached through smaller-scale methods such as lived-experience panels. At present, much of our public participation work is delivered through such smaller-scale methods, which will focus on establishing the skills and resources to raise the overall standard of participation.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): If the citizens' assembly recommends the abolition of the council tax, will the Government back it?

George Adam: As I said, we are listening to the various panels that we have. Mr Rennie is already jumping the gun and making decisions for the citizens' assemblies. The point of the participation is for the public to have their say, and we take advice from them.

Vehicle Excise Duty (Devolution)

3. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the potential future devolution of vehicle excise duty. (S6O-02968)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): We have made a number of attempts to engage the UK Government on motoring tax reform without any meaningful response. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition wrote to the UK Government in October 2023, setting out the actions that the UK Government needs to take to accelerate the transition to net zero, and called on it to take a comprehensive approach to reforming motoring taxation to help deliver our climate change ambitions. If the UK Government is not willing to take the actions that are needed, it should devolve powers so that the Scottish Government can.

Christine Grahame: The recent RAC survey of potholes across the UK estimated that there are at least 1 million potholes UK wide, yet the UK Government collected around £7.3 billion in 2022-23 in vehicle excise duty—better known as road tax. That money is completely swallowed up by the Treasury. Does the minister agree that it would be far fairer if Scotland collected its own road tax and used it appropriately—for example, by ring fencing it? Some of the money in the 2022-23 figures would provide Scotland with £700 million per annum, not simply to plug potholes but to maintain the network.

Shona Robison: I agree with the sentiment of Christine Grahame's point that it would enable the Scottish Government to deliver on priorities in Scotland if we had that share of vehicle excise duty and were able to make those decisions here. It could be used to address some of the issues that Christine Grahame has alluded to or to help to reduce car travel by 20 per cent by 2030—which is our ambition—and to fund more sustainable travel and infrastructure that meets the needs of people in Scotland.

Budget (University Funding)

4. Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the finance secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding the potential impact of the reduction in the funding allocation for Scottish universities in its proposed budget on graduate skills development and employability. (S6O-02969)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): Our

block grant funding for the budget, which is derived from United Kingdom Government spending decisions, has fallen by 1.2 per cent in real terms since 2022-23. Against that challenging fiscal environment, tough decisions have had to be made. I have had a number of discussions with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills about funding for her portfolio, as I do for every portfolio.

Although the 2024-25 budget is the most challenging budget that has been delivered under devolution, it still allocates nearly £2 billion to universities and colleges to support their delivery of high-quality education, training and research. We will work with the Scottish Funding Council and the sector on how to use the available budget to best effect in line with our priorities.

The Scottish Government has committed up to £90 million in 2024-25 to employability support. That underlines our commitment to the no-one-left-behind approach as we, together with local partners, support those who need it most.

Sharon Dowey: The Scottish Government is set to provide guidance to the Scottish Funding Council on budget allocation for the 2024-25 academic year on the basis of a real-terms cut of more than £141 million to the council's budget in the financial settlement for higher education in the 2024-25 fiscal year. In the light of that, alongside the shocking admission by the finance secretary that more than 1,200 places will no longer be available to Scottish students, will she confirm that there will be no additional budget cuts to university teaching grants in the current academic year as a consequence of the December budget, and will she provide information on what alternative routes for success will be made available to school leavers in Scotland?

Shona Robison: Let us remind ourselves of the origins of the 1,200 places to which Sharon Dowey referred. They were funded by United Kingdom Government Covid moneys, which then stopped. Despite our efforts to make the UK Government continue to provide those Covid moneys, it did not do so. Despite that, the Scottish Government continued to fund the places for two years on a temporary basis, on the clear understanding that that was not a sustainable position. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the cabinet secretary.

Shona Robison: Instead of complaining about the impact of her Government's cuts to Scottish Government budgets, perhaps Sharon Dowey should have put a bit more effort into lobbying her UK Government partners for a better funding settlement for Scotland. That would have meant that we could get a little bit further, but it might

have just been too much effort for Sharon Dowey to do that.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Yesterday, the Deputy First Minister was unable to tell MSPs how many university places for Scottish students would have to be cut to meet the £28.5 million reduction in university funding in her budget. Universities Scotland says that one of two things will happen: there will be either far fewer students or far less money per student. Universities Scotland is clear that it is up to the Scottish National Party Government to decide, so which is it?

Shona Robison: As I said at the Finance and Public Administration Committee's meeting yesterday, the Scottish Funding Council will have to work with universities in relation to the number of places. I have been clear on the funding source for the 1,200 places and the reasons why we cannot continue to fund them. Aside from that issue, we will work with the SFC to identify the remaining savings that are required, which amount to less than 2 per cent of the budget. The number of places will be agreed with the Scottish Funding Council.

In a really tough settlement, £2 billion has been delivered for higher and further education. If Michael Marra or anyone else in the chamber believes that more funding should be provided for higher education, they can suggest from where else in the budget the money should come. As part of the budget process, I look forward to hearing from Michael Marra what the spending priorities should be.

Economy 2030 Inquiry (Public Finances)

5. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the recommendations outlined in the final report of the economy 2030 inquiry, "Ending Stagnation: A New Economic Strategy for Britain", as they relate to public finances in Scotland, including those relating to taxes and local government investment. (S6O-02970)

The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance (Tom Arthur): We welcome the report. In particular, I agree with its assessment of the United Kingdom economy as a "stagnation nation" characterised by low growth and high inequality. That combination has led to a fall in UK living standards relative to peer economies. The report also recognises the UK's poor record on public investment relative to other countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the need to provide sustained investment.

That is the key reason why Scotland needs full powers to drive economic growth—powers that

independence would transfer to the Parliament so that we would no longer be held back by the UK Government's anti-growth policies. Using the powers that we have, we will continue our efforts to grow the economy in Scotland, reduce inequality and invest in public services across the country, to deliver a wellbeing economy.

Clare Adamson: The Tories have imposed the highest tax level on record. Meanwhile, income inequality in the UK is higher than in any comparable European economy. The report calls for better, not just higher, taxes. Yesterday, we discussed the visitor levy, which is a common form of income generation in Europe. Does the minister agree that, although most taxpayers in Scotland continue to pay less income tax than in the rest of the UK, we remain hamstrung by the majority of UK tax policy and are prevented from fully delivering a fairer tax system and reducing income inequality?

Tom Arthur: I agree. There are two fundamental issues. First, the number of fiscal powers that are reserved to the UK Government means that we are exceptionally limited. Secondly, there is the way in which the UK Government conducts fiscal policy. Beyond the catastrophic mishandling of the mini-budget, we still have a cycle of fiscal events that seek to serve political purposes more than to soundly manage public finances. For example, we are still to find out what our final budget position is for this year through supplementary estimates. With regard to the financial position for next year, we are awaiting a budget on 6 March, in which—potentially or potentially not—rabbits may be pulled out of the hat. That is not a way to govern public finances, and it stands in stark contrast to the Scottish Parliament's approach where, collectively operating within those restrictions, a budget is introduced and scrutinised long in advance of the start of the financial year. There is much that the UK Government and, indeed, the UK Parliament could learn from the way in which we do things in this chamber.

Hospices (National Funding Framework)

6. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the finance secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding the allocation of funding for the development of a national funding framework for adult and child hospices in Scotland. (S6O-02971)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): I held discussions with cabinet secretaries and ministers in the run-up to setting an extremely challenging budget, which will deliver funding of more than £19.5 billion for national health service recovery,

health and social care. Despite that investment, the system is under extreme pressure as a result of the on-going impact of Covid, Brexit, inflation and United Kingdom Government spending decisions. It remains for integration joint boards to plan and resource hospice care, using the integrated budget that is under their control. We highly value the vital support that hospices provide to people and continue to work on developing a national guidance framework.

Miles Briggs: I do not praise the cabinet secretary very often, so she may enjoy this moment. During her time as health secretary, it was very welcome that a five-year funding framework for child hospices in Scotland was developed, which has now come to an end. This year, the hospice sector is reporting that it has been destabilised by rising staffing costs, especially as a result of the agenda for change NHS pay awards. In future budget discussions, will the Scottish Government agree to ensure that a sustainable funding model for hospices has an in-built mechanism for future NHS pay awards to recognise the knock-on effects on pay pressures for the hospice sector? Will she agree to meet the sector to discuss that further?

Shona Robison: I recognise Miles Briggs's long-term interest and work on the matter, as well as his role on the cross-party group on palliative care. It is a complex area, as I know Miles Briggs is aware. Some of the pay issues that he described are complex, for example in relation to commissioned services. We need to work through those issues carefully. I know that hospice and health and social care partnership leaders welcome the honest and frank discussion that they had with the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, which was convened in December, and health and social care partnership chief officers have already followed through with their own discussions. The minister and her officials will continue to work with chief officers and independent hospices in order to support longer-term sustainable planning and commissioning for the sector.

I know that the minister has written to everyone who was involved in the round table to stress that she is keen to build on the dialogue that has been opened, and she will continue to work on the matter through the draft national guidance framework. I would expect some of the issues around pay to be resolved as part of that.

I would be very happy to suggest that the minister have another meeting with Miles Briggs to discuss the matter further. I will keep a close eye on developments.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I thank Miles Briggs for lodging his question, which goes beyond year-to-year budget settlements.

Indeed, I think it goes beyond even a five-year basis. As we face demographic change, there will be increasing pressures, and hospices are only partially funded by the state.

I ask the cabinet secretary to reflect on that point, and on our need for a genuine, long-term solution to reflect the changing need that we will have for the hospice sector and end-of-life care in general.

Shona Robison: Much as I said to Miles Briggs, I say to Daniel Johnson that I have a lot of sympathy with the point that he makes. Some of the issues are complex but, ultimately, the national guidance framework that the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health has been developing is the right place to try and resolve these matters. Some of them relate to pay, and some relate to commissioned services and how they sit within the wider health and social care landscape.

As I said to Miles Briggs, I will keep a very close interest in the development of the framework. The minister leads on this matter, and I will draw to her attention the fact that Daniel Johnson has raised what are very important matters here today.

Independent Scotland (Industrial Policy)

7. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has undertaken of the potential impact on Scotland's exchequer and public finances of the measures referred to in the speech by the First Minister on 8 January. (S6O-02972)

The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance (Tom Arthur): The speech set out measures for effective industrial policy in an independent Scotland, including a programme of targeted investment through the building a new Scotland fund. Modelling shows that a fund of an equivalent scale to the proposed building a new Scotland fund would have both a short-term demand effect and a longer-term supply effect by increasing long-term productive capacity and providing a sustained boost to the economy. The speech also highlighted how Scotland lacks macroeconomic powers, including over migration, with economic modelling suggesting that, with higher levels of migration, a growing labour force would have a positive economic impact.

Bill Kidd: In that speech, the First Minister referred to a Resolution Foundation report that stated that, if the United Kingdom had

"the average income and inequality"

of similar countries,

"the typical household would be £8,300 better off."

The First Minister added that

"If we use the same analysis for countries that are similar to Scotland",

households here could be £10,000 better off.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that those figures serve as a stark reminder of the failure of Westminster governance and that only through the full powers of independence can Scotland's true potential be realised?

Tom Arthur: The speech served as a stark reminder of the economic stagnation that the UK is in. For far too many people, the UK economy has stopped working. It is characterised by low growth, high inequality and poor productivity, which are the key drivers of living standards.

No one is saying that an independent Scotland could achieve transformation overnight. Whether we succeed or not will be down to our decisions as a country. However, the success of countries similar to Scotland, such as Denmark, Ireland and Norway, surely demonstrates the potential prize of independence and improving our economic performance.

Fiscal Policies (Rural Economy)

8. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how its fiscal policies support the development and growth of the rural economy. (S6O-02973)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): Scotland's land-based and marine sectors are vital to our economy, and that is why the Scottish budget has allocated more than £700 million to agricultural support and related services, along with £97.9 million across Scottish Forestry and Forestry and Land Scotland and £93 million across Marine Scotland and support for fisheries and aquaculture.

Scotland's non-domestic rates relief package includes rural rates relief and the United Kingdom's most generous small business rates relief. The hospitality sector in the islands will get 100 per cent relief for hospitality, capped at £110,000 per ratepayer.

It has to be said that the UK Government has failed to meet previous European Union funding levels, has cut capital funding and has not provided certainty regarding any post-2025 rural funding.

Brian Whittle: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, but the budget has slashed funding in vitally important portfolios, including support for bus and rail services. In cash terms, the agriculture and forestry budgets have been cut by £32 million and £34 million respectively. It has also been recently reported that no homes have been

secured through the rural affordable homes for key workers fund.

Does the cabinet secretary not realise that those decisions are actively undermining the growth and development of rural economies, because the fiscal policies do not make rural Scotland a viable place to live and work?

Shona Robison: The UK Government's real-terms cuts to the Scottish budget have consequences for all parts of our budget. That is the reality of the difficult decisions that we have had to make. A 10 per cent reduction in capital budgets affects infrastructure investment in rural Scotland as well as in urban Scotland, so Tory MSPs cannot pitch up here with their list of asks when their Government has slashed the funding for Scotland's public services. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the cabinet secretary.

Shona Robison: We will continue to invest in Scotland's rural economy. We have invested and will invest in rural housing, and we will make sure that we work with partners to deliver on the priorities for rural Scotland. However, that is no thanks to the UK Government's funding settlement.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Brian Whittle is talking about choices. In December last year, a headline in *The Scottish Farmer* read:

"Upland farms are facing a cut of 37% in support payments as direct payments are being phased out with new schemes failing to bridge the gap."

That was in relation to farmers in England and Wales, not Scotland—a UK Government choice. More than half of Scotland's agricultural land is dedicated to upland sheep farming and mixed beef cattle and sheep farming, and the cabinet secretary, Mairi Gougeon, confirmed in committee today that less favoured area payments will be maintained in the current funding cycle. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the treatment of farmers in England is definitive proof that the development, growth and prosperity of our rural economy is best served by this Scottish National Party-led Government and its commitment to active farming, food production and direct payments—and even more so in an independent Scotland?

Shona Robison: Jim Fairlie has utterly exposed the hypocrisy of the Tories in this Parliament and in the UK Government, and their chuntering from a sedentary position shows that he has done so very effectively indeed. I cannot agree with Jim Fairlie more.

As I said in my final point to Brian Whittle, the UK Government has failed to meet previous EU

funding levels, despite all the promises that were made during the Brexit debate. The UK Government has cut capital funding and has not provided any certainty whatever around post-2025 rural funding. The Tories should get their act together before coming here and demanding action from this Government. They should be getting on the phone to their own Government colleagues before coming to complain here.

The Presiding Officer: Before I draw this part of the session to a close, I remind members to reflect on where they are. I may even have witnessed the spectacle of a member who was out of his seat and still commenting on proceedings. That is simply not acceptable. We have a great privilege in representing the people of Scotland in this chamber, and I ask all members to remember that at all times.

Portfolio question time has now concluded.

Point of Order

14:53

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Can I ask you to confirm the temperature in the chamber and say whether it is regarded as sufficient?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I will come back to your question as soon as I can, Mr Carlaw.

Before we move to the next item of business, I will allow a moment or two for members on the front benches to organise themselves.

Education

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-11875, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, on stand up for quality education. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

14:55

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): My party and I have long believed that education can be a great leveller, spreading opportunity for all, and that it should be built on the values of opportunity and ambition and of high aspiration and standards for every child who passes through the gates of any school in any part of our country. However, we know that it will not do that by accident; it happens only by design.

I and my party have brought this debate to the chamber today because we are worried that we face systemic challenges in education that could hold back our potential. Since I became Scottish Labour's spokesperson on education, I have found that, no matter what stone I turn over or what corner I look around, there are deep and wide-ranging challenges, despite the best efforts of our outstanding teachers, the hard work of our pupils and the tenacity of our parents.

There is a quote from a teacher in the national discussion report that has stuck with me and it sums up the challenges well. It is this:

"In my class of 30, 4 have ASD ... 3 have longstanding ... anxiety difficulties ... one has been adopted, one"

is

"experiencing a form of trauma, one is a young carer, 2 others have severe learning difficulties. ... There is only one of me—I can't give those ... children enough of my attention to support their wellbeing, never mind their and the other ... children's learning needs I know exactly what support each child needs but can't split myself 30 ways".

That quote not only sums up the complexities that our teachers face but shines a light on why classrooms are becoming a bit like pressure cookers. With concerns bubbling up, they are vulnerable to overflowing. The result is behavioural concerns, teachers at the end of their tether and, yes, declining standards in education. We have to address all of that if we are to rebuild our education system and spread opportunity for all.

Back in December, I was grateful to the cabinet secretary for finally recognising that standards are slipping, but it should not have taken Scotland falling behind our neighbours and our international peers for the Government to take action. For too long, pupils, teachers and parents have seen a reality that is very different from the picture that

their Government has painted. That disconnect has left them wondering why their Government is not listening and why the promises that were made on contact time and free breakfasts for primary school pupils, which ensure that they start the day fed and ready to learn, remain undelivered. They are watching in anticipation of what we—their representatives and the Government—will do to give them the education system that they want and deserve; to make classrooms the safe, nurturing and conducive environments that they should be; and to ensure that children are in those classrooms. They are looking for leadership to address the decline not just in academic performance but in pupil engagement.

Parents, teachers and unions recognise, as I do, that we must view challenges not in isolation but as interconnected parts with a cause-and-effect relationship that demands our urgent attention. The Educational Institute of Scotland's stand up for quality education campaign is a fantastic example of an interconnected and systemic approach to delivering the education that we need. The first issue that it raises is teacher workload, which is a concern that will resonate with all who are working across our education system. Teachers are the architects of our children's futures and the backbone of the system, and we need them to be at their best if we are to achieve our goal of opportunity for all. Right now, however, they are overburdened by an excessive workload, stretched across competing demands and tangled up in bureaucracy, all of which hinders their ability to deliver the quality education that they got into the profession to provide. The solution lies in concrete measures to alleviate those burdens, including the promised increase in non-contact time to provide teachers with the breathing space that they need. I repeat my ask that the Government confirms when that will be delivered.

However, it is not just the conditions that are difficult. The issue is compounded by the continued use of temporary teaching contracts. Five thousand of our teachers are without stable, permanent positions and are facing insecurity. It is no wonder, then, that teacher numbers are down in secondary schools, but we need them to be on the rise. Furthermore, the number of teachers who are still teaching after their first year has dropped from its level five years ago. It is a self-perpetuating cycle that is created by Government inaction. Reduced teacher numbers also make it more difficult to deliver on the promise of non-contact time.

The shortages are not felt equally. Some areas and subjects are faring worse. One way to address that is to ask probationary teachers to opt in to the preference waiver payment scheme. However, as a result of the precarity of the

situation, the number who opt to do that has reduced, which is exacerbating gaps in geographical provision and undermining equality.

Teaching is an incredible profession to enter. The opportunities to shape lives are numerous, and we should cherish and value it. However, there is a recruitment and retention crisis, which is a product of much more than concerns about salaries and wages. It is about the conditions in the room, the lack of support for pupils with additional support needs, and pupils' violence and poor behaviour. Furthermore, the prevalence of declining standards and disengagement weighs heavy on teachers. All of that needs to be addressed.

The solution cannot simply be, as the Government has suggested previously, to teach teachers how to be better. Teachers are already excellent—I know that the cabinet secretary believes that—but they are too often going it alone. The number of teachers who are specially qualified and equipped to handle complex needs has dwindled, falling by more than 700 during the past decade. Where additional support staff exist, they are scarce and spread thinly. That figure is masked by poor monitoring and reporting and by the conflated definition of the remits that different support staff have. The stand up for quality education campaign rightly emphasises the need for strategies to tackle those issues head on.

The Scottish Government's international council of education advisers is right: we must recognise that the time for commissioning reviews is over and the time for action is now. The motion calls for the Government, as a start, to do what it promised and set out a clear timetable to deliver not just on the review recommendations—we continue to wait for it to do that—but on non-contact time, ASN support and free breakfasts. In short, the motion is a call to action. It is a rallying cry for a concerted effort to deliver high and rising standards of education in Scotland, with classrooms where everyone feels safe and is safe and where all pupils, regardless of their backgrounds, can learn.

The challenges are formidable, but so, too, is our resolve. Let us set aside political differences and unite in the pursuit of a brighter future for our children. The time for reviews is over. The time for action is now.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, and the conclusions that educational standards in Scotland are declining; considers that there are a number of contributing factors that have led to the current difficulties in Scotland's classrooms; notes the Educational Institute of Scotland's (EIS) Stand Up for Quality Education campaign, which sets out recommendations on teacher workloads, resourcing for pupils with additional support needs (ASN) and addressing violent and disruptive behaviour in

classrooms as key steps to improving the experience of pupils and teachers; agrees with the Scottish Government's International Council of Education Advisers that "the time for commissioning reviews is now over", and calls on the Scottish Government to set out a timetable for when it will deliver on its promises in education, including addressing the continued use of temporary teacher contracts, improving workloads by increasing non-contact time for teachers, addressing the gaps in teacher provision in geographical and subject areas, delivering structural reforms, including to the SQA and Education Scotland, and meeting its commitment to offer free breakfasts in primary and special schools.

15:02

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): The Labour motion refers to the programme for international student assessment results, teacher workload, additional support needs, challenging behaviour, workforce challenges, structural reform and free school meals. I have no aspiration to compose Opposition motions, but I must say that the idea that we will be able to fully debate all those topics in a truncated Opposition debate this afternoon is simply not credible.

There was an opportunity to have a genuine debate on education in the national debating chamber this afternoon, but I fear that what we will hear instead will create a highly predictable political rammy, given the language that is used in the motion. In sincerity, I have to ask who that will serve. It will not serve Scotland's children and it will certainly not serve Scotland's teachers. That is why I will move my amendment, which sets out the facts about Scottish education and which all members should be able to support.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Jenny Gilruth: I am happy to give way to Ms Duncan-Glancy.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: With respect, the motion includes all those things because they are interconnected. For too long, parents, teachers and pupils have seen this Government pick and choose bits of the system, tinker round the edges and deliver little change in education. That is why all those issues are mentioned in my motion.

Jenny Gilruth: I am not necessarily sure that I agree with the rationale behind Ms Duncan-Glancy's thinking. Her motion looks to me a bit like a copy-and-paste job. Nonetheless, I will turn to the task at hand and attempt a dissection of the Labour Party motion.

Scotland's PISA results were published in December 2023. As I set out in my statement to Parliament then, both the First Minister and I have accepted that the results were not good enough. I have previously outlined a comprehensive plan on

how we will improve attainment and achievement by, for example, focusing on curriculum improvement, which I updated the Education, Children and Young People Committee on this morning. Our curriculum improvement cycle will start with maths, led by a maths specialist, with English and literacy being the next subject area to be reviewed.

Although the PISA results are important, they are one data set that should not be considered in isolation. As Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, I spend much of my time going in and out of our schools, and I am always blown away by the committed teachers and young people. Only last week, proud pupils at St Paul's Roman Catholic high school in Pollok told me about their journey to achieving gold status in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework's school ambassador programme. There are many positives in Scotland's education system, so it is somewhat disappointing that the Labour Party could not bring itself to acknowledge in the motion a single positive achievement by our pupils and teachers.

Another data set that is strangely lacking from the Labour motion is the achievement of curriculum for excellence levels data. The ACEL data that was published last month shows that, for literacy and numeracy, the proportions of primary school children achieving the expected curriculum for excellence levels are at record highs for children from both the most and the least deprived areas of Scotland. I remind members that the ACEL data is predicated on the judgment of the teachers who we trust to teach our children and young people every day.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for mentioning the ACEL data. Are those the same teachers that we did not trust with the assessments during Covid or with the changes that the Scottish Qualifications Authority demanded be dropped so that we could go back to the old system?

Jenny Gilruth: I am not sure that I understand the member's point in relation to what happened during the pandemic. However, it is important that we look at a broad range of data sets. It is somewhat dispiriting that the Scottish Labour Party motion does not say anything positive about Scottish education. What does that say about the offer from Scottish Labour in relation to its vision for Scottish education? I would like to hear that.

The attainment gap in literacy in primary schools is at the lowest level on record, and we are also seeing the gap reduce in secondary schools. Given those results, I am dispirited that the motion does not mention that data.

I do not shy away from the areas where we face challenges. Indeed, during December, I spent a

large amount of my time in the chamber discussing some of those challenges in detail. However, I question why the Labour Party would want to shy away from the genuine positives in our system. It is also strange that we do not hear mention from the Labour Party of last year's examination results. In the summer of 2023, we had the highest number of passes at national 5 since the qualification was introduced in 2014, and a record number of vocational and technical qualifications were achieved. Advanced higher and higher passes are also above those that were seen before the pandemic.

The Government is doing all that we can within our limited powers—

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary is in her last 20 seconds.

Jenny Gilruth: —to protect Scotland's children from the impacts of Westminster austerity. That is why we have invested in the Scottish child payment, lifting an estimated 90,000 children out of poverty this year. It is why we are investing in the most generous free school meals provision of any nation in the United Kingdom. The 2024-25 budget also commits to further roll-out in relation to the Scottish childcare element of that.

Presiding Officer, I am conscious of time, but there is a lot to be positive about in Scottish education. We have record attainment levels in primary schools, a record low attainment gap in literacy in primary schools, exam passes at above pre-pandemic levels, and the highest investment per pupil and the lowest pupil teacher ratio in the UK.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, you need to conclude.

Jenny Gilruth: I have been clear in acknowledging the challenges, but I am asking once again for all members to engage constructively in the debate, because it is only by working together—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary.

Jenny Gilruth: I move amendment S6M-11875.2, to leave out from “and the conclusions” to end and insert:

“which highlight areas for improvement in Scottish education, particularly in mathematics; understands that the Scottish Government is taking forward a planned and systematic curriculum improvement cycle to enhance standards, which will focus initially on maths; welcomes the recent publication of the 2022-23 Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACELE), which it recognises is the most comprehensive and up-to-date national data set on attainment and which shows record levels of attainment across primary school level and

improvements in secondary school level; agrees that these results by Scotland's pupils, teachers and school staff deserve commendation; notes that Scotland has the highest investment per pupil and lowest pupil/teacher ratio in the UK, and that, in addition to a record £830 million spend on additional support for learning (ASL), work is underway to update the Additional Support for Learning Action Plan and deliver a range of measures to improve the experiences and outcomes of pupils with additional needs; welcomes that Scotland has the most comprehensive free school meal offering of any nation in the UK, which will be further extended by investment in the 2024-25 Budget, and further welcomes the sector-wide agreement on the need for a holistic package of education reforms, which it agrees should be taken forward in partnership with Scotland's teachers and young people.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have no time in hand to speak of, so I invite members to stick to the time that they have agreed to. Members have actually agreed to their speaking slots, and I really invite them to stick to those.

15:08

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): This is an incredibly important debate, because I think that we would all agree that education is the key brief in sorting out the myriad of issues that Scotland faces after 16 years of Scottish National Party Government. However, I have a mere four minutes to set out the Scottish Conservatives' proposition as, yet again, it is left to the Opposition parties to use our debating time to demand that education be on the agenda.

Despite the Opposition having significantly fewer opportunities; despite the endemic violence in our schools, which the Scottish Conservatives forced a debate on last summer; despite the PISA figures from last year showing sliding standards, which the Scottish Conservatives also forced a debate on; and despite plummeting teacher numbers and morale due to a lack of resources, the Opposition has called more debates on education than the Scottish Government has since the current cabinet secretary took office. The Government has called one such debate in that time, yet it dares to criticise Pam Duncan-Glancy for bringing this debate to the chamber. Perhaps that tells Parliament all that it needs to know about where the Government's priorities lie.

I welcome Labour's motion. It is right to highlight the appalling statistics that the Government has presided over, including—to go into more detail—the PISA results, which show that Scotland's maths, reading and science scores are plummeting, sometimes to record lows. My research has revealed that more than 11,000 teachers and support staff are stuck on temporary contracts, while more than 6,000 teachers and school staff were signed off with stress or poor mental health during the past academic year. There is the fact that, last year, 600 pupils had

zero attendance at school, with one in eight, on average, absent on any day—and the Scottish Government does not even collate data on who they are or why they are away. There is also the failure, as we heard, to deliver free breakfasts to primary and special school children, as the Government promised.

I could add other areas where the Scottish Government is falling behind, such as the fact that more than 1,000 Scottish schools lack life-saving defibrillators, or that rural schools are twice as likely to be in a poor condition than urban schools. Of course, there is the abject failure to tackle violence in schools, whether against teachers or other pupils, despite the important briefing that we received from Zero Tolerance concerning how rife violence against women and girls and misogyny are in Scottish schools.

Into that, however, the cabinet secretary submits an amendment that deletes all the substantive points that are raised by the Labour motion. Instead of acknowledging the issues and saying, “Let’s work together to the betterment of Scotland and its people,” the Government prefers to ignore the reality and blames everyone and anyone but itself.

As my time is limited, I will cut to the chase. My amendment seeks to recognise the issues that the Labour motion, which we will vote for, raises, but it also seeks to help the Government with solutions. Last April, the Scottish Conservatives proposed a new deal for teachers, which set out eight priorities to help our teachers. Those include more powers to headteachers and budgetary autonomy, cutting red tape and unnecessary bureaucracy, reforming teachers’ pay and contracts, and introducing life skills as a core part of the curriculum. Crucially, we also note the EIS’s stand up for quality education campaign, and we echo in our new deal its calls for smaller class sizes, less contact time and proper resourcing for ASN and schools more generally.

We all want what is best for Scottish education. We want to support our teachers, school staff and pupils in their efforts to be the best that they can be, to deliver a positive future for themselves and others, and to help Scotland’s economic and social recovery from the past 16 years of the SNP Government. Therefore, at decision time tonight, let us put the politics aside and do what is right for Scottish education. Let us vote for the Labour motion to acknowledge the issues, and then start to move forward with the constructive solutions proposed by Pam Duncan-Glancy, the EIS and the Scottish Conservatives by voting for the amendment in my name, which I hereby move.

I move amendment S6M-11875.1, to insert at end:

“; supports the principles of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party’s New Deal for Teachers, and calls on the Scottish Government to reduce contact time and class sizes and end the culture of temporary contracts.”

15:12

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I hope that it will be a constructive and reasonable Willie Rennie who makes this contribution.

Jenny Gilruth: Let us see.

Willie Rennie: It might not last, but.

Actually, I have some serious issues to raise, some of which we raised this morning in the Education, Children and Young People Committee, and I want to extract a little from that.

We are eight years into a 10-year SNP education reform programme. The programme was a response to what was seen as a crisis at the time, which was about international performance and the poverty-related attainment gap. However, I think that the education secretary knows that very little has changed since then and that, in many cases, it has got worse. The latest PISA study shows that we have slipped further on international performance, and the poverty-related attainment gap is, bluntly, stuck although it was supposed to have been closed in just two years. I know that there is debate about whether it was to be substantially closed or closed completely, but we have not really made much progress in that time.

I accept that a lot has happened. The pandemic has had a significant impact, but young people today do not want excuses; they just want the decent education that they were promised, and they are not seeing that. Pam Duncan-Glancy is right with the list of problems that she has identified in relation to temporary teachers, additional support for learning, class contact time and behaviour. I will not rehearse all those issues. However, the evidence is that the education reforms that were set out in year 1 of the 10-year programme just have not worked. I believe that that is simply because the Government did not really know at that time what the cause of the decline was. It did not really understand what the problems were.

I make no apology for making a speech that focuses on what I think the problems are, because our job in this place is to try to make things better. Of course, I will celebrate the work that is done in schools and by teachers, but our job is to make things better, so let us focus on the things that we need to improve.

This morning, in the Education, Children and Young People Committee, I asked the cabinet secretary about the issue. She could come up with

only one thing that was wrong with Scottish education, which was the transition from the broad general education into the senior phase. That is important, but we cannot really claim that that is the reason why we have had such poor poverty-related attainment gap and PISA figures over the time of the Government's reform programme, whether they have gone up or down relative to the figures in other countries. We cannot really believe that that is the root cause, especially when PISA is for 15-year-olds, many of whom have not gone through the transition from the BGE to the senior phase.

When I asked Shirley-Anne Somerville, the cabinet secretary's predecessor, what she thought the problem was, she cited the lack of regional improvement collaboratives. They were scrapped almost before they were established, so I do not think that we can say that they were the reason. We do not have a substitute explanation for what has gone wrong. As a result, we have had a rag-tag bunch of reforms that have little focus and little cohesion. I will make a few suggestions as to what the problem is.

The role of knowledge is important, and there was a dilution of knowledge and concepts even before curriculum for excellence accelerated it.

The systems of accountability within Education Scotland have also been weak. The agency does not have the heft to effectively challenge local and central Government to drive improvement. It did not even pick up on the decline in performance in the PISA figures and the poverty-related attainment gap.

Another factor is the lack of support for classroom materials. Curriculum for excellence turned teacher empowerment into teacher isolation. Teachers were left to create classroom content from woolly principles that were difficult to decipher.

There is also the issue of resources, which many others have talked about, as well as the BGE senior phase transition.

That is my analysis of what has gone wrong with Scottish education. The Government needs to be able simply to set out what the problems are, even if it does not agree with me. If it cannot do that, it cannot fix them and we will end up with an incoherent set of random changes.

We have a debate coming up soon in which we will be able to explore what the solutions are. I will make an equally constructive contribution to that. However, we need to get a focus on what the problems are before we move forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

15:17

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank my colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy for bringing the motion to the chamber on behalf of Scottish Labour. She was right to begin by highlighting the PISA statistics. The scores for maths and science are at an all-time low, reading scores are at their joint lowest level and Scottish pupils are now a full year behind their English counterparts in maths.

The cabinet secretary has rightly acknowledged—as has the First Minister—the challenge that those statistics present for this country. As other members have highlighted, they are central to any chance of recovery in our economy, social infrastructure and communities across Scotland.

There are clearly questions of resourcing. We have already discussed issues around the budget settlement and the challenges that will emerge from that relating to local government finance, which flows through into our schools, and the cuts that have been made to university places and to college provision across Scotland, none of which will serve our country well in years to come. However, I will focus on the issue that Willie Rennie just highlighted: the programme of reform that the Government was supposed to follow.

Those reforms have variously been botched or have stalled and, to be frank, are now non-existent. It emerged this morning that international expert Dr Naomi Stanford, whom the SNP Government asked to help implement the recommendations of the Muir report, resigned in despair at the glacial pace of change under the Government. She had asked for some significant and substantial changes that would justify her continued involvement with the Government's work. No evidence of such changes was forthcoming, and she removed herself from the process. That was a year ago. We are a year further on but have seen no further progress.

All of that speaks to a reform agenda that has ground to a halt. We must have great sympathy for people such as Ken Muir, who put in a huge amount of work, and the many people around the country who were asked questions and gave their experiences of the education system over a long period. That was at the behest of this Government. They were told that their opinions would count and that they would result in changes—and they have resulted in nothing. Whether through Government incompetence or intransigence, there are real consequences of that lack of reform, which we see in the PISA figures.

The evidence from our teachers is also clear. Member surveys through the EIS revealed that 71 per cent of teachers are unhappy with their

workload, which is, crucially, highlighted in our motion today. We must do the best that we can to improve the situation that our teachers find themselves in.

I will take a moment to highlight a situation that I have raised with the cabinet secretary before: the lack of a primary school in my constituency. Back in 2015, in the Western Gateway area of Dundee, home owners were promised a school by the SNP council and they were paying an extra £5,000 per house on a roof tax to help pay for it. Last year, SNP councillors failed to secure funding from the Government to pay for it. In response, I have had warm words from the cabinet secretary and from the First Minister in November; however, frankly, those have amounted to nothing.

More than 130 people attended a community meeting in Dundee in December, at which SNP councillors were completely unable to provide any assurances about the delivery of that school. Residents are outraged that this saga is now dragging on into a ninth year. When will the school ever be built? When can the people who live in my constituency get the school that they were promised and that they have paid for?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Marra, you need to conclude.

Michael Marra: The solution that is coming forward from this Government will result in all the money that they have paid being lost.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Kate Forbes, who joins us remotely.

15:21

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Forgive me for not being present, although it might be timely to spare a thought for the many young Highland pupils who are off school today due to the snow and ice.

I will start my remarks with an observation that I think we can all agree with: there is probably no service as critical as education. When it comes to our duties to the public, we have an enormous weight on our shoulders to ensure that our young people, who are growing up through the school system right now, get the education system that they need to prepare them for the future.

I agree with Pam Duncan-Glancy that it is time for action, not debate, but that is precisely what the Scottish Government is doing, with Jenny Gilruth's leadership on education making clear what is not working right now and the solutions to resolve it. All of Labour's asks in the motion are difficult to argue with, but they are also all captured in the comprehensive plan that the cabinet secretary set out in December.

One of my biggest hopes for the debates that we have on education is that we move away from inane discussions about inputs and start talking about success as measured in outcomes, skills, knowledge and the ability to thrive. Education Scotland says that it aims to

"equip young people with knowledge, confidence and skills, giving them a competitive edge in a global job market."

That is precisely why PISA is so important—because it is a global perspective. PISA matters because international comparisons matter. As I said in a previous debate, they probably matter more than comparisons with previous so-called golden ages, which I do not think actually existed.

In December, the cabinet secretary accepted unequivocally that the Government wants to disrupt the trajectory, whether based on attendance, behaviour or PISA figures. She stated that the Government has high ambitions, that being average is not good enough and that we need to pursue excellence. She also made some points in that statement that remain more relevant than ever. She agreed that knee-jerk political responses are not going to help our young people, that we are at an educational juncture, and that we need substantive responses. In the brief time that I have left, I will talk about what that requires.

The first thing is to ensure that our young people are able to read, write and count at a level that is comparable to that of their international peers. To do that, the cabinet secretary has previously promised to improve our curriculum in a planned and systematic way, so that it is relevant and forward looking, with high-quality teaching and learning. She set out the need to focus on maths education and make it a primary area for improvement—it was to be the first area to be improved. That would involve maths specialists, with a full-scale update to the maths curriculum beginning this year, which would then be tested with teachers next year. It would be accompanied by a thematic inspection of literacy and English, to ensure that the English curriculum is meeting those standards.

It is worth observing that we need to ensure that the gaps between Scotland and England and between Scotland and the rest of the world are closed when it comes to the best 10 per cent of pupils, so that we push our brightest as hard as possible.

Secondly, all of that will be in vain without ensuring that we deal with a poverty-related attainment gap—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Forbes, you need to bring your remarks to a close, please.

Kate Forbes: I will close there.

15:26

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

The cabinet secretary talked about the number of issues that are in the Labour motion. I know that she is busy talking just now, but I suggest to her that we use Government time. Why does the Government not bring forward some of these debates in its time so that we can discuss what I think is the most important issue in Scotland—the failings in our education system and the pressure on teachers, pupils and all staff in our schools?

The cabinet secretary said that she has previously set out a comprehensive plan, but I do not believe that it was a comprehensive plan. If I remember correctly, point 1 of that plan was to come up with a plan.

The cabinet secretary has also talked about the commitment to teachers and pupils and said that she has met many teachers. I think that I have said before that I met a lot of teachers during the teachers' industrial action dispute, when I went on picket lines because I believed that teachers needed a better deal. I have to say that nothing prepared me for the discussions that I had with them about the kind of issues and problems in schools that put massive pressure on them. Teachers are leaving the profession in droves and their sickness levels from stress are going up and up because we are not tackling those issues.

I do not doubt for a second the cabinet secretary's sincerity when she called for the three emergency summits to talk about the issues and what we can do about them. The problem for the cabinet secretary is that she does not control the budget. We need more resources going into our primary and secondary schools, and, as Pam Duncan-Glancy says, we particularly need to look at additional support needs.

A month or so ago, I met a group of parents, all of whom have children with additional support needs. They were very critical. They pointed out that their children were being failed when they were put into mainstream schooling and the additional support teachers were not there to support them. Not only are those parents' children not being supported but, because teachers are struggling to support them, they are not able to support the rest of the children in the class. The point that the parents made to me was that the Government's policies mean that we are not getting it right for many children, never mind getting it right for every child.

Kate Forbes spoke about kids being able to read, write and count. Numerous secondary school teachers have told me that cohorts of kids are coming up from primary school who are not equipped with the basic numeracy and literacy skills to proceed into the secondary education

system. They are doomed to failure as they come from primary school into secondary school. That must be addressed.

The cabinet secretary has to recognise that we need to put in more resources for additional support needs so that every child is given the right chance and we can truly look up.

Finally, mention has been made of the Scottish child payment. The child payment is great—it is tackling poverty—but we need to tackle the root causes of poverty. The best tools that we have for doing that are the education, training and skills that will equip children for the future. That is where our focus must be. We need more resources, and I hope that the cabinet secretary will bring forward more debates in Government time so that we can spend more time on the issue.

15:30

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I welcome the chance to speak in the debate, and I thank Pam Duncan-Glancy for securing it. I echo Liam Kerr's comment that education is the foundation of a successful Scotland, which Alex Rowley also echoed.

At this morning's meeting of the Education, Children and Young People Committee, the cabinet secretary said that she accepted that it will be a challenge to get it right for Scotland's teachers and that, in last year's pay negotiations, there was not enough action on teachers' working conditions. We know that reduced contact time, pupils' behaviour and violence in the classroom are all issues that need to be dealt with and which impact on teachers' working conditions.

Arguably, the most pressing issue is the need to address the deterioration in pupils' behaviour since the pandemic, which has been raised over and over by teachers and parents. Violent and disruptive behaviour in our classrooms has been getting worse.

Back in June last year, the committee held a round-table discussion with parent groups, teachers, educational psychologists and children's right organisations. As Alex Rowley mentioned, the cabinet secretary hosted summits in June, August and November of last year, but, to be frank, I do not have a sense that any substantive recommendations, actions or changes have come from those summits.

The Scottish Government's "Behaviour in Scottish Schools 2023" report found that levels of disruption have increased across all surveyed categories. Low-level disruptive behaviour, disengagement and serious disruptive behaviours have all increased since 2016. That has been accompanied by a decline in most reported

positive behaviours. Instances of verbal abuse and physical aggression towards pupils and staff have risen in number.

The proportion of secondary school support staff who have experienced violence between pupils has risen from less than one in five to almost one in two. Most teachers and school staff are witnessing and being subjected to considerable instances of negative behaviour. The Government's report found that two thirds of staff had encountered general verbal abuse, almost three in five had encountered physical aggression and more than two in five had experienced physical violence between pupils in the classroom in the past week. I know that I would not want to work in such conditions. Why are we subjecting our teachers to that?

The report stated:

"In secondary schools, the behaviour most commonly reported as having the greatest negative impact was pupils using/looking at mobile phones or tablets when they should not. More than half of secondary school staff ... said this was one of the three behaviours that had the greatest negative impact".

Therefore, it will come as no surprise to members that I again want to discuss that issue. Of course, most pupils are well behaved, but all suffer from the consequences of disruption in their classrooms and are vulnerable to distraction. Experts recognise the addictive nature of constant access to social media. I am sure that many of us could look in the mirror in that respect.

Mobile phones are not the only cause of the growing school discipline problems—the report also cites the rising incidence of drug and alcohol consumption—but, if mobile phones are a significant contributor to those problems, their removal must surely be part of the solution. Banning mobile phones from schools will not solve the deep-rooted problems that exist, but it will help.

Across the country, we also face the problem of "ghost pupils", which I want to briefly discuss. Hundreds of pupils in Scotland failed to attend a single day of school last year. The number of those under 16 who recorded zero attendance rose to a record high of more than 600, which included more than 300 primary 1 to 7 children. While the reasons for those absences vary, one senior teaching union official said that they included rising violence in classrooms and cuts to education budgets.

Those startling numbers come in the wake of last month's analysis by the programme for international student assessment, which reported a long-term—

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is about to conclude; she is over her time.

Sue Webber: Given the pressure on my final statement, I will conclude my remarks there. It is important that we address violence in the classroom.

15:34

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate, having spoken in the previous debate on education in the chamber just last month, and as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. During the debate in December, I, along with other members, highlighted the fact that the latest PISA report came on the back of the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw unprecedented disruption across society, including to the provision of education.

Back then, I was pressed to answer the question whether I would

"at least accept that Scottish performance in PISA during the Covid years dropped remarkably quicker than that of the rest of the United Kingdom, under the same circumstances?"—[*Official Report*, 13 December 2023; c 54.]

I reiterate, for anyone who is looking to draw a direct comparison between Scotland's and England's PISA results and link educational standards with compliance with OECD standards, that the UK Government's report found that England did not meet the PISA standards of reporting in its sampling. The sample was found to be biased because more higher-achieving pupils participated than lower-achieving pupils. Ultimately, the OECD estimated that that likely resulted in an upward bias in the reported results, of approximately seven or eight points.

Those are important points to be aware of when we speak today, but I do not say them to lessen the challenges that are faced, and I welcome today's debate.

The Labour Party's motion focuses, quite rightly, on the need to identify a potential timeframe for education reform. The Government amendment seeks to address that issue by stating that it

"welcomes the sector-wide agreement on the need for a holistic package of education reforms, which it agrees should be taken forward in partnership with Scotland's teachers and young people."

I believe that that is a reasonable approach to take. It is essential that we consult those at the heart of the system, which means asking those who use, shape and deliver our education system to allow their voices to be heard—namely, the voices of young people, parents, carers and, crucially, teachers. I encourage all those groups to participate in the consultation, to ensure that their

voices are heard. I know that the education committee, in scrutinising any proposals, will ensure that they are.

On the specific issues of potential teacher conditions, as highlighted in today's motion, I was reassured by the cabinet secretary's comments when she gave evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee this morning. In response to questioning in which she was pressed on a specific timetable for reform, the cabinet secretary indicated that the Government is expecting a commissioned report to be published later this month. I believe that that will provide much-needed clarity on both the type of reform that is envisaged and the timetable for achieving such reform, and I look forward to scrutinising the report.

I understand the heartfelt commitment to seeking reforms and delivering an education system that works for all, and I welcome it. I also welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to identify and implement reforms that will, I hope, advance those aims. I believe that the Government's amendment, which sets out the steps that it has taken and is taking, coupled with assurances from the cabinet secretary regarding potential timetables, means that we are moving in the right direction. I encourage members to support the Government amendment.

15:38

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I thank the Labour Party for keeping the SNP-Green Government's mismanagement of the Scottish education system at the forefront of debate in the chamber. Today's debate follows on from the Scottish Conservatives' debate last month on the very same topic.

Once again, we have obfuscation, diversion and increasing attempts to lay the blame elsewhere—anything but accept that the responsibility for outcomes over the tenure of what was the SNP Government and is now the SNP-Green Government lies squarely with it. After all, education is totally devolved to Scotland, as is health. Both portfolios are directly linked, as I will discuss later.

As I highlighted in my discussion with my friend Martin Whitfield during the Conservative education debate last month, education is the cornerstone of every portfolio, although cross-portfolio issues are most definitely not the fault of our educators. Solutions to just about every challenge that our country faces are rooted in a flourishing education system that gives pupils every opportunity to develop their talents and be all that they can be.

When the Government gets education wrong, we see that reflected in all other portfolios—hence

Scotland's continuing poor health record, which is the worst in Europe; the level of drug and alcohol deaths, which is the worst in Europe; and obesity levels, which are the highest in Europe. Levels of heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, musculoskeletal and arthritis conditions, and mental ill health, especially in our schools, are at epidemic levels.

We need to tackle poor physical and mental health, poor behaviour, poor attainment and poor nutrition in our schools. The two topics for debate this afternoon—health and education—are intrinsically linked, which in turn links directly to the fact that Scotland's economy is underperforming that of the rest of the United Kingdom. Our poor health record is a significant drag on the economy—a fact that the Scottish Government cannot seem to get its collective head round.

The solution is to create a different teaching and learning environment that empowers, supports and frees teachers to do the job that they are trained for and are passionate about—the job that enthuses our school pupils and aligns them to the huge opportunities that should be available to them as we transition towards a greener economy. It is about developing our youth to be the confident, resilient, aspirational risk takers and innovators that Scotland has such a world reputation for.

There has been a marked decline in physical activity, music, art, drama and many of the other extracurricular activities that our school pupils enjoy. Those activities draw in active minds, give an outlet for enthusiasm, deliver aspiration and self-discipline and provide an appreciation for application. They help to create an environment where learning is varied and exciting.

Weaving those activities into the daily life of school pupils, along with extolling the exciting world that a transition to a greener economy should bring, is an education system that we should all be able to get behind. Unfortunately, that is lost on the cabinet secretary and her Government, who leave our education system mired in bureaucracy and red tape.

The Parliament should be able to come together on such an important issue as education, but the SNP amendment tries to ignore the real issues with its education policies. The Scottish Government's response to the PISA results highlights that it is unable to respond to its failures in education and that it is managing its decline, along with many other portfolios. Curriculum for excellence was voted in by members from across the chamber, but the Scottish Government has once again failed in its implementation. When will it recognise that only outcomes matter? I will not hold my breath.

15:42

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): It is fair to lay out challenges in a system as important as the education system, and it is fair to challenge Governments. It is also fair to point out that the picture could not be more different between Scotland and the rest of the UK when it comes to investing in education. Scotland has introduced and funded groundbreaking policy to support and protect our young people from Westminster's ruinous financial policies of austerity and public sector funding cuts. *[Interruption.]* I hear Mr Whittle shouting "outcomes" from a sedentary position. An outcome of austerity is a child who is hungry and unable to concentrate in school or who is uncomfortable walking to school in the rain because they do not have a coat to wear. That is an outcome of austerity. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Whittle, not from a sedentary position.

Ruth Maguire: The Opposition motion focuses on the EIS's stand up for quality education campaign. It is about three key areas—workload, ASN and pupil behaviour—which are all very important topics.

I will focus my remarks on behaviour, and specifically on gender inequality and violence against women and girls in Scottish schools. Recently, the Education, Children and Young People Committee undertook a very short but valuable piece of work on the equally safe strategy and the experiences of young women and girls in education. I am grateful to all who participated, and I thank them. The first-hand testimony and generous sharing of their experiences and ideas was very helpful. It is regrettable that the committee does not have the capacity at present to prioritise further work in that area.

However, the briefing from Zero Tolerance Scotland is a useful prompt in reminding us that caring about tackling such issues is not just for white ribbon day and the 16 days of action but for all year round. I thank Zero Tolerance Scotland and will share some of the facts from its briefing with the chamber. I hope that colleagues will recognise that, in looking to address poor behaviour in schools, we need to be cognisant of gender inequality. Addressing gender inequality in education will tackle issues with violence, bullying, attendance and attainment.

Zero Tolerance Scotland has pointed out that

"Almost 70% of pupils in Scotland experienced sexual harassment in the 3 months prior to being asked ... 34% experienced unwanted sexual touching ... Six times as many women have experienced serious sexual assault compared to men ... 55% of survivors experienced their first sexual assault between ages 16 and 20 ... Around 1 in 5

girls and young women don't feel safe in school ... Girls of colour are less likely than white girls to feel safe at school."

Teachers also experienced that violence, with one in four female secondary school teachers reporting that they were sexually harassed or abused during the previous 12 months.

The report also found that

"Boys' violence makes girls feel unsafe and affects their school attendance and learning"

and

"Fear of violence impacts girls' ability to participate fully in education. Fear of sexual harassment prevents a quarter of girls from speaking out in class."

Horribly, the report shares that

"Fear of being raped, followed home and/or kidnapped affects girls' sleep, concentration and ability to participate fully in learning."

and that

"Girls living in deprived areas are more likely to say that fear of sexual harassment holds them back."

I see that I am running out of time, so I cannot share much more of the girls' and young women's testimony. However, I support Zero Tolerance Scotland in its ask that the Scottish Government should recognise and prioritise violence against women and girls in all discussions about behaviour and violence in schools.

15:46

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. I thank Pam Duncan-Glancy, Martin Whitfield and Labour for allowing us the opportunity to discuss Scottish education.

We can all agree with the Scottish Government's international council for education advisers, but the irony is not lost on me that, when a reviewing body states that the time for commissioning reviews is now over, it certainly focuses the issue. I believe that education, childcare, wraparound care and all forms of lifelong learning need to be thoroughly debated. It is disappointing to me that Opposition parties have so often had to use their allocated time to ensure that that is done. I thank Bill Kidd for highlighting that he spoke in the previous debate, which was the Scottish Conservatives' debate on PISA. As many have done during today's debate, I highlight to the Government that we would appreciate a good chance to debate it during Government time.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): This morning, during the meeting of the Education, Children and Young People Committee, I heard our colleague Liam Kerr referencing the Conservatives' new deal for teachers. Is that publicly available or on the Conservatives'

website? Perhaps the member could get a copy to me.

Roz McCall: I have just been informed that the member will be sent a copy—so there you go.

I will take a few moments to highlight some of the contributions that have come up today. Behaviour in the classroom is important to highlight; Ruth Maguire and Sue Webber have both raised that issue. It is important that we accept that there is a behaviour problem in our classrooms and that we are expecting our teachers to go above and beyond to cope with that. It is also right that Ruth Maguire highlighted concerns regarding gender-based violence towards women and girls. It is harrowing to hear that one in four female secondary school teachers are affected by that.

It would be wrong of me to go past this point without also highlighting that Sue Webber quite rightly mentioned concerns about mobile phone use in classrooms and how distracting that can be. Willie Rennie and Michael Marra mentioned that we are eight years into 10 years of reform. It is worrying that we are so far into that process, but we do not have reform in classrooms to back it up. Teaching conditions are the crux of the matter; I will talk about that a little later, but it is important to say that—as highlighted by Pam Duncan-Glancy, Liam Kerr and Alex Rowley—teacher conditions in our classrooms are not acceptable.

I also want to highlight that breakfast and lunch provision is paramount. It has been promised. Pam Duncan-Glancy and Liam Kerr brought it up, and I will do so as well. It is important that our pupils get access to proper nourishment so that they can achieve all that they are able to in the classroom.

I will make a final point. I accept that the PISA results matter, as Kate Forbes highlighted. We are trying to build a nation of students who can go on to achieve in a global job market, so it is important that we look at what is happening across the world and ensure that our young people are able to achieve globally.

The main content of the motion and the Scottish Conservative amendment highlight the role of our teachers and the need for action when it comes to the work that is expected of them and the lack of follow-through on the promises that the Scottish Government has made. As has been stated, at our conference last year, the Scottish Conservatives announced our new deal for teachers, which will include providing headteachers with more powers over their schools, more budgetary autonomy, with recruitment of their staff—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms McCall, you need to conclude.

Roz McCall: We can pass round information on our new deal for teachers for anyone who wants to look at it.

15:51

Jenny Gilruth: I had forgotten that it is a snow day in Ms Forbes's constituency and in other parts of the country. It is always the most exciting and perhaps the most stressful time of the year for teachers when it starts to snow while they are delivering a lesson, so my thoughts are with my former colleagues at this time.

I agree with Pam Duncan-Glancy on the power of education to elevate and open doors. Willie Rennie described today's motion as a "list of problems", so let me attempt to respond to some of the points that have been made in a constructive way. Liam Kerr assured us that the Conservatives were keen to engage in that way, although I am not necessarily sure that Mr Whittle received that memo.

Pam Duncan-Glancy spoke about the EIS's campaign to stand up for education. I look forward to engaging with my former trade union on the substantive issues that have been highlighted by the campaign.

Ms Duncan-Glancy and a number of other members specifically talked about support for pupils with additional support needs. It is important to say that the Government has invested record levels—£830 million in 2021-22 alone—in support of those with additional support needs. We also provide additional investment of £15 million a year to support local authorities to employ support assistants.

I accept the challenge relating to the increase in the number of pupils with additional support needs in our classrooms. Figures that were published at the end of last year show that that number has increased again. The increase has been driven, in part, by changes to measurements some years ago. Through the additional support for learning action plan that we are working on with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, we have identified a number of actions, and I am keen to update members on those in the coming weeks.

As we have heard from other members, there will be a debate on education in Government time. I intend to use that to respond fully to some of the proposals relating to the Hayward review.

As we heard from Ms Forbes, I set out a plan at the end of last term to reverse some of the concerning patterns that we have seen in our schools following Covid. We must not suggest that Covid did not disrupt education—it did, and it continues to have an impact. The latest edition of the PISA results was referred to by the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as the Covid edition.

Mr Marra asked a specific question about Western Gateway primary school in his region. We have exchanged correspondence on the issue, so he will know that the Government had to take some really difficult decisions as part of the third round of funding for the learning estate investment programme. However, as a result of investment from the Government, the quality of Scotland's school estate has improved. In 2007, about 60 per cent of schools were in good or satisfactory condition, and that figure is now more than 90 per cent. However, I accept that a number of schools are not yet there. Local authorities have statutory responsibility for schools, but I have committed to ensuring that the Scottish Futures Trust works with COSLA and the Scottish Government to identify action that we can take.

Michael Marra: The central risk is that, if the school has not begun to be built by 2025, all the money that has been committed by residents—£2.5 million to date—will be lost. It is imperative that the Government drives that pace, if it can, to ensure that we make use of that money and that there is less of an impact on the public purse. I implore the cabinet secretary to take on board that urgency.

Jenny Gilruth: I hear what Mr Marra has said about the urgency. I encourage him to engage with Dundee City Council on the matter. I point out that the council was awarded nearly £50 million for priority projects through the schools for the future programme. We have prioritised local authorities that did not receive funding from the learning estate investment programme, but I accept the challenge here.

The challenge that I face, which I talked to the Education, Children and Young People Committee about this morning, is where in the education and skills budget or the Scottish Government's budget that additionality should come from. As we move forward with stage 1 of the budget, I would be more than happy to hear any ideas from Mr Marra about where that might be drawn from.

Alex Rowley spoke about resources. This year, the Scottish Government's education and skills portfolio budget has increased by 4.3 per cent in terms of resource. That is despite there being only a 1 per cent uplift in real terms across the Scottish Government from our UK Government settlement.

It is important to say that we have prioritised education spend. I hope that the Opposition recognises that in relation to the choices that we have had to make.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary is about to conclude her remarks.

Jenny Gilruth: My apologies, Deputy Presiding Officer.

I am disappointed that we have not heard about some of the positives about Scotland's education system in the debate. We have the lowest pupil teacher ratio in the UK and the best-paid teachers in the UK.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary.

Jenny Gilruth: I accept the challenge, but I am keen to work with the Opposition moving forward.

15:55

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to close this interesting debate.

Before I address some of the contributions, I thank those outside the Parliament who submitted briefings, particularly the General Teaching Council for Scotland, which has not been mentioned. Its independent role as a safeguard and gateway to teachers' professionalism is truly important. Magic Breakfast has been talked about. I also pay tribute to Ruth Maguire and my colleague Pauline McNeill with regard to the Zero Tolerance Scotland briefing, which makes for salutary reading. Ruth Maguire's contribution on the reasons why girls cannot go to school was a truly tragic insight into the challenges that girls as well as many other young people face with regard to how they engage with education and our schools.

I was disappointed by the tone of the cabinet secretary's opening statement. It is the Opposition's role to hold the Government to account. There have been offers to work with members across the chamber—

Jenny Gilruth: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Martin Whitfield: I will, if it is very short.

Jenny Gilruth: I say to Martin Whitfield that the Labour Party's motion does not recognise a single positive in Scottish education. As a member of the Opposition, he should accept that I am looking to work with the Opposition, but that is rather difficult when there is no recognition of the good work that is happening in Scotland's schools with our pupils and teachers.

Martin Whitfield: I am very grateful for that contribution. Similarly, I could look to the proposed amendment and ask where the apology is. Where is the recognition? Where is the Scottish Government's responsibility towards our young people, our parents, our families and our

teachers? If we are going to have cross-party understanding, and if we are going to do what the people who watch the Parliament from outside it continually ask us to do, which is to work together, there needs to be a recognition of the challenges. However, there is no recognition of the challenges in the amendment that was moved by the SNP-Green Government.

It is interesting that members sitting behind the cabinet secretary, including Ruth Maguire and Bill Kidd, and Kate Forbes, who contributed remotely, have said that we have quite rightly addressed education's problems.

There are challenges in our education system. As a number of members have said, acknowledging that is not to turn the fire on our teachers, and certainly not to turn the fire on our families or young people; it is about holding responsible those who have the treasured responsibility of guiding and supporting our young people through their childhood as they transition to adulthood. That is where the responsibility lies. The years of lack and neglect, the years of reports, committees and round tables, and the years of failure to produce a plan that can survive more than a couple of years before it is given up have led us to a position of being in dire straits.

In Edinburgh this morning, I had the great pleasure of meeting groups that work with young people who cannot engage in education because of homelessness and other challenges.

Deputy Presiding Officer, I am conscious of the time.

Those people spoke about the fact that there needs to be a relationship before we can get to the point of being able to understand their challenges and start to make things better.

When the current cabinet secretary came into post, she brought with her one of the most valuable assets, which is a deep and proper understanding of teaching and a real empathy for teachers. I urge her to go back to that, to seek out advice and ideas, and then to come back here and give us a timetable for when we will actually see changes, so that children who are now 16 years of age and entering the final years of their education, even if they cannot benefit from those changes themselves, can perhaps see light at the end of the tunnel for their younger siblings.

We have discussed the challenge of Covid, and we admit that there was a Covid pandemic. That was enormously challenging in our education system, and the young people who lived through that period and who are still at school or further education may carry the harm of Covid long into the future. However, the challenges existed beforehand. We should not deny that, and we should admit that there were problems coming,

including way back in 2016, when the PISA results led to the departure from PISA. We are again starting to hear language that indicates that confidence in PISA is perhaps not there.

There is an opportunity here, and there is a feeling across the chamber that assistance will be given, but that requires engagement, rather than just throwing ideas from trench to trench. Some good ideas have been raised by many people today. I urge the cabinet secretary and her colleagues to consider them and to engage.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on stand up for quality education. Before we move to the next item of business, there will be a short pause to allow front-bench teams to change position should they so wish.

National Health Service Waiting Times

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-11874, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on ending long waits in the national health service.

16:01

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Scotland saw in the new year with accident and emergency departments in utter disarray as thousands of people—the sick and the injured—experienced long and dangerous waits. Only yesterday, we learned that, in the first week of 2024, only 59.4 per cent of patients were seen within four hours. Indeed, in Glasgow's Queen Elizabeth university hospital, the figure was 31.1 per cent, with more than 1,200 people waiting longer.

It may be a new year, but nothing has changed. The crisis in the NHS and social care continues, and the response of the Scottish National Party is that there is nothing to see here. It is business as usual from the SNP, and the NHS and its hard-working staff remain at breaking point. Almost one in six Scots are stuck on a waiting list. That is 860,000 people, and 80,000 are waiting for over a year.

We all remember Humza Yousaf's pledge in July 2022 to eliminate completely the longest waits in planned care. Let us have a look at how that is going. Two-year waits for out-patients were to be ended by August 2022. That failed. Eighteen-month waits for out-patients were to be eliminated by December 2022. That failed. One-year waits for out-patients were to be eliminated by March 2023. That failed.

In-patient activity is not much better. Two-year waits for in-patients were to be eliminated by September 2022. Guess what—that failed. Eighteen-month waits for in-patients were to be eliminated by September 2023. That failed, too. One-year waits for in-patients are to be ended by September 2024. On the basis of current delivery, I suspect that that will be a fail, too.

I know that SNP members do not like hearing it, but the facts are plain for everybody to see. The SNP promised to end long waits and it failed utterly. I repeat that almost one in six Scots are waiting for tests and treatment, which has real consequences. I have a constituent who works in theatre at the Golden Jubilee hospital. She has been on the waiting list for three years, but NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde will not let her have her operation at the Jubilee. She is assisting people from other health board areas who have been waiting for as long as a year, but that is still

two years less than her. She is no further forward, and her knee is now bone on bone. Should she take sick leave from the NHS, or will the cabinet secretary ensure that she has her operation? Successive SNP health secretaries—Nicola Sturgeon, Humza Yousaf and Michael Matheson—have simply failed to tackle the workforce pressures, and we have 6,700 medical vacancies in our NHS.

The current health secretary is distracted by personal scandals and has failed miserably to deliver for the NHS. Let us take, for example, the flagship national treatment centres—the cornerstone of the SNP's NHS recovery plan. Many of those new centres were supposed to clear the waiting list backlog by 2026, but they have been delayed. Some might not proceed at all. Officials advised Humza Yousaf against citing figures on the additional capacity that national treatment centres would deliver because

“projections included in the NHS recovery plan have dropped significantly”.

The promise of 1,500 additional staff by 2026 is unlikely to be met, and some boards are experiencing recruitment challenges in relation to staffing. A cabinet secretary briefing from 8 March 2023 revealed that there was no revenue funding source for the national treatment centres that are not yet in construction and that the remaining programme is “not affordable” on the basis of the current capital spending review. National treatment centres have been delayed in NHS Grampian and NHS Tayside, and NHS Lanarkshire and NHS Ayrshire and Arran do not even have the full business case that is required to get the process started. In addition, what about the Edinburgh eye pavilion?

The SNP will not tell us what will be ditched until March—or possibly May—because it does not want scrutiny of the capital programme alongside the budget. The truth is that those centres will not be delivered on time, and some might not be delivered at all. The SNP's recovery plan is simply not worth the paper that it is written on. All that we have are yet more broken promises from a party that has run out of ideas.

The Scottish Government is always keen to blame the pandemic. Of course, the pandemic happened, but the truth is that the NHS was in crisis long before Covid-19.

Finally, I will address the SNP's latest promise on extra investment. We heard from the cabinet secretary that the Government is going to reduce waiting lists by 100,000 in two years' time. First, what happens to the other 700,000 people who are waiting? Many patients and NHS staff will also rightly ask why they should have any faith left in

this Government, after all its previous broken promises.

Secondly, let me tell members how it is being paid for. The SNP assumes that there will be a Labour Government in Westminster that delivers extra NHS funding to Scotland. Yes, that is right—even the SNP Government knows that we need a UK Labour Government for its plans to come to fruition.

The people of Scotland have been left high and dry by an SNP Government that is mired in scandal after scandal and that is more interested in playing fantasy politics than in dealing with the crisis in our NHS. Enough is enough—the SNP Government must prioritise tackling the NHS crisis before more lives are lost.

I move,

That the Parliament is alarmed that almost one in six people in Scotland are languishing on NHS waiting lists for tests or treatment; notes that the Scottish Government has failed to meet its own target, set out in July 2022 by the current First Minister, to eliminate the longest waits in planned care, with a staggering 80,000 people currently waiting over a year to be seen; recognises that the Scottish National Party's flagship network of National Treatment Centres has been beset by delays; is concerned that the NHS is facing a workforce crisis, with 6,800 NHS vacancies that are unfilled, while agency costs have rocketed in recent years, and calls on the Scottish Ministers to set out a clear plan and timetable for when all long waits for planned care will be eradicated, and provide an update on the timescales and final costs for all the promised National Treatment Centres.

16:08

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): As a Government, we remain focused on ensuring that our health service continues to recover from the long-term effects of the pandemic. Scotland is not unique in facing those challenges, as services across the UK continue to be challenged. Too many people are waiting too long for treatment, and I am committed to delivering sustained improvements and reducing waiting times, year on year, across our NHS.

That is why, in our draft budget, we have provided funding of more than £19.5 billion for health and social care, which gives our NHS a real-terms uplift that is in stark contrast to the UK Government's autumn statement, which shows a real-terms cut to NHS England.

Even in the face of unprecedented pressures, we continue to see progress following the introduction of our long waits targets. Since the targets were announced, we have seen a substantive reduction in new out-patient waits of more than two years, with 85 per cent of specialties having fewer than 10 waits.

Jackie Baillie: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Michael Matheson: I will if the member allows me to make progress first.

The number of waits of more than 78 weeks reduced by 30.1 per cent as of September last year, and 34 per cent of specialties had fewer than 10 patients waiting for more than 52 weeks. Waits of more than two years for in-patient or day-case treatment have also reduced by 26 per cent since the target was introduced. Thanks to the hard-working staff in our NHS boards, we have seen a further increase in activity, with the latest statistics showing activity for in-patient and day cases at the highest level since the start of the pandemic.

Jackie Baillie: Is it not the case that you promised to end those waits, not simply reduce them, and that, by your own measure, you have failed?

The Presiding Officer: Please always speak through the chair.

Michael Matheson: As I have set out, the reality is that we are making substantial progress, but, clearly, more needs to be done and we are determined to do that.

I know that challenges remain and that there are still unacceptable waits in some specialties. That is why we are committed to enhancing both regional and national working to develop national solutions to create a sustainable service and reduce the backlogs, focusing on those specialties where there are significant pressures. That work is supported by our national treatment centre programme. We opened two NTCs last year—one in Fife and the other in NHS Highland—with two further centres opening in the coming months, in Forth Valley and at the Golden Jubilee university national hospital.

Central to all of that is our £1 billion NHS recovery plan. Our second annual progress update, published on 6 December, demonstrates the improvements made as a result of our significant investment, which is delivering targeted reform and dedicated innovation.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Michael Matheson: I need to make progress, given the limited time, I am afraid.

For example, since 2021, we have invested £8.6 million in programmes through the Centre for Sustainable Delivery to support transformation and the roll-out of new techniques, innovations and safe, fast and efficient pathways for Scotland's patients.

It is crucial that we secure best value wherever we are delivering services in NHS Scotland, to

allow us to maximise the impact of our investment and the delivery of quality services to patients. Of course, none of that would be possible without the dedicated staff in NHS Scotland. NHS staffing levels are historically high under this Government, with more than 24 per cent more staff in post, and we remain committed to implementing our national workforce strategy.

Due to our constructive engagement with trade unions, Scotland is the only part of the UK that is not experiencing strike action in our NHS. I was somewhat surprised that Labour is bringing forward this debate in the same week that junior doctors are striking in Labour-run Wales, which has resulted in the cancellation of 6,500 outpatient appointments and 400 planned operations and will undoubtedly impact on its waiting times. Of course, that is dwarfed by the situation in NHS England, where a total of 1.3 million acute inpatient and outpatient appointments have been cancelled due to strike action since December 2022.

As a Government, we will continue to make progress, and I am determined to see continued improvements over the coming year. I am committed to making sure that we take forward the changes in order to deliver our recovery and to reform the way in which we provide services within NHS Scotland, so that we have a sustainable healthcare system that continues to deliver high-quality services to the patients of Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-11874.2, to leave out from “is alarmed” to end and insert:

“recognises that health services across the UK are dealing with the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on waiting times; further recognises that too many people are waiting too long for treatment, and welcomes the reductions in the longest waits, including a 69% reduction in patients waiting over two years for a new outpatient appointment from the end of June 2022 and a 26% reduction in patients waiting longer than two years for inpatient or day case treatment over the same period; highlights the launch of the Waiting Well Hub, to give people the information and tools that they need to look at their own health and wellbeing during the waiting period, think about what matters to them and what health improvements they could make in the meantime; welcomes that constructive engagement with trade unions has meant that Scotland is the only part of the UK not experiencing strike action and the associated unprecedented level of disruption for patients and families; further welcomes the Scottish Government’s draft Budget, which gives the NHS a real-terms uplift, in stark contrast to the UK Government Autumn Statement figures, which show a real-terms cut to NHS England; notes that, due to the deteriorating medium-term fiscal outlook, a revised Infrastructure Investment Plan Pipeline is expected to be published alongside the Medium-term Financial Strategy in May 2024; appreciates that the workforce is at the heart of all that the NHS does, and thanks all of Scotland’s highly skilled and committed NHS staff for their hard work and dedication, and believes that the NHS must be kept true to its founding principles of being publicly owned, publicly operated, and free at the point of need, and further believes that the only way to

protect the NHS from the creeping privatisation imposed by UK administrations is through independence.”

16:13

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I draw members’ attention to my entry in the register of members’ interests as a practising NHS general practitioner.

There we have it: everything is fine here—there is no problem. The cabinet secretary says that our health service is rosy. In December 2023, only 66 per cent of patients at A and E were seen within four hours. Between July and September 2023, only 72 per cent of cancer patients began treatment within the statutory 62 days of an urgent referral. Another month, another set of dismal data. Another quarter, more failure.

We are sounding like a broken record, but the SNP just does not seem to care. It takes no responsibility, safe in the knowledge that the Scottish Greens have its back for the price of two ministerial limos.

Maybe we should stop talking about statistics and percentages and instead highlight what really matters: people’s lives. According to the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, an extra 1,400 avoidable deaths were linked to long A and E wait times in 2023. Those are 1,400 people, not numbers on a spreadsheet.

I want to be crystal clear that nobody is criticising our front-line staff—they go far beyond the call of duty. However, this incompetent SNP Government has left healthcare on its knees. Humza Yousaf, Michael Matheson and one health minister after another have offered no solutions. Scotland needs and deserves a fresh approach to deliver a modern, efficient and local NHS that is accessible to all, but instead the SNP has dithered and watched Scotland’s GP workforce shrink.

Scotland has had enough of the SNP playbook in which the First Minister or the cabinet secretary comes to the chamber, makes an announcement, fails to deliver on it, and then defends their record by tripping out spin and promising that lessons will be learned.

Let us take access to child and adolescent mental health services. Humza Yousaf promised to clear CAMHS waiting lists by March 2023, yet by September 2023 more than 5,000 children were still waiting to start treatment. One child has been waiting 37 weeks in Glasgow; some people have waited a year in Lothian. That matters, because poor mental health robs our kids of their childhood.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): In the Borders, people are having to wait 39 weeks for their first appointment

for CAMHS treatment. The Government should apologise for the appalling lack of support to young people.

Sandesh Gulhane: I could not agree more. Our kids are suffering and our SNP Government is not looking after them.

Let us look at the NHS estate. The SNP's manifesto pledged to invest £10 billion over a decade to renew our NHS estate, yet today we hear that all NHS projects have been halted for at least two years. That applies even to the national treatment centres, so it is affecting the SNP's solution to waiting lists.

I will close with another SNP failure: Scotland has the highest number of drug-related deaths in Europe. I will leave the matter of hunting down those who profit from the criminal trade in this misery to Police Scotland—drug dealers are criminals and gangsters—but we can bring the SNP to book for cutting the funding to drug and alcohol recovery services by £19 million. People addicted to drugs and alcohol deserve and desperately need our help. They should have a right to recovery.

It is only our front-line NHS workers who are preventing Scotland's health service from keeling over. The SNP has been in charge of health since 2007. The party has failed to pass on £18 billion in health consequentials in that time and we are seeing the results of that. The SNP is responsible—no ifs, no buts.

I move amendment S6M-11874.1, to insert at end:

“; regrets that over one million people have had to wait more than four hours at A&E in this parliamentary session alone; stresses the need to bring down long waits for mental health services, and condemns the decision of the Scottish Ministers to introduce a real-terms cut to the budget for alcohol and drug services while drug deaths in Scotland remain disturbingly high.”

16:18

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am very grateful to Jackie Baillie for bringing the motion to Parliament. Before I begin my remarks, I congratulate her on her investiture as a dame at the palace of Holyroodhouse this afternoon—her getting an honour for politics got up all the right people's noses, I think.

Here we are again. The facts that are laid out in the motion for debate make grim reading. However, they are no surprise to any of us in the chamber, and we often see related matters in our casework postbags. Almost one in six people in Scotland are currently on NHS waiting lists for either tests or treatment, and 80,000 people are currently waiting over a year—365 days—to be seen. People are dying because they are waiting

too long for emergency care. Just yesterday, A and E waiting times figures were released, and they are equal to the record-breaking figures of last year.

Things just are not getting any better. Whether people are being forced to wait hours for an ambulance or to be seen in A and E, or are being left abandoned on trolleys or languishing on wards, they are being let down. These problems are manifesting not just on the front line but across our health service in its entirety.

Let us take diabetes as an example. Currently, only 18 per cent of people who are living with diabetes in Scotland receive the essential regular health checks that they need. That is down from 40 per cent pre-pandemic, which was still well behind where it should have been.

I have lost count of the number of times that we have had debates like this in the chamber, and we keep having them—usually just in Opposition time. I fear that we have become inured to that. We have got used to our health service languishing and struggling in the way that it has, and we have become dangerously comfortable with crisis. Every time that we raise it in this place, ministers refer to the pandemic. Every time that they do so, they insult the intelligence of all of us here and the people who are watching us, and they seriously test the patience of the hard-working staff on whom we rely. The issues in our NHS were there long before anyone had heard of Covid-19, and people are tired of those excuses. They are tired of the ministerial lack of interest and mismanagement that have defined the SNP-Green Administration's approach to health.

I want it to be crystal clear that none of that is the fault of our hard-working staff. They have worked their fingers to the bone. They have worked miracles and spun gold out of straw. They work long hours under the most stressful circumstances imaginable and deserve our utmost thanks, but they are being let down as well. There are currently almost 6,800 NHS workforce vacancies unfilled. That puts enormous, untold strain on the staff who are there. The chair of BMA Scotland has said that doctors and other healthcare workers are exhausted and facing burnout under those increasing workloads.

SNP-Green Government decisions have compounded the pressures on nursing staff, and that problem stretches all the way back to Nicola Sturgeon cutting nursing and midwifery training places and claiming at the time that it was the sensible thing to do.

The health secretary has shown zero sign of the innovative thinking that is necessary to resolve the issue. When Humza Yousaf was in his previous position, he repeatedly ignored my party's call for

a plan to address staff burnout and to set up a health and social care staff assembly. The Government has shown a pig-headed contempt for a strategy that would guarantee annual leave, ensure safe staffing levels and champion the expertise of those who know our health service best.

It is little wonder, then, that we are now finding it harder than ever to attract and retain new staff. On this Government's watch, costs for temporary staff have risen to more than £0.5 billion in recent years. Instead of making the meaningful investment that our health service needs, the Government is relying on short-term fixes to plug the gaps.

To put it plainly, the Government is failing. It is failing Scotland's NHS—both the hard-working staff who run it and the patients who depend on it. Staff and patients alike need long-term solutions. They need new hope.

The health secretary needs to do three things—I will close with these. He needs to urgently redraft his failing recovery plan, give hard-working staff the fair pay and conditions that they deserve, and fix the issues in social care so that people can be treated in the community, rather than being left to languish on hospital wards when they are well enough to go home but too frail to do so without a viable care package.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): We move to the open debate.

16:22

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): This issue is perhaps the one that I hear most about from constituents across South Scotland, and that is why it is essential that it is given fair hearing here today. Whether people live in rural or urban areas, are young or old, have a long-term condition or are seeking new advice, worries about NHS waiting times are a constant. It is described to me as not just waiting but languishing on NHS waiting lists. That is not my description but that of patients and constituents in all our communities. I expect that every one of us here has or knows someone who is waiting and experiencing that.

Put simply, our constituents want to know what can be done to stop our NHS being put under such constant pressure. Although they are sympathetic to the fact that waiting times are a reality of any health service, some of the extended waits that people are having to put up with are simply unheard of. There are 7,000 Scots waiting for more than two years. I was not going to bring this up, but in the cabinet secretary's contribution he kept referring to other nations. In Scotland there are 7,000 people waiting for more than two years, and in England there are 227. It is not

helpful to continue to go over those figures. People want to know what is happening.

In Scotland, it is at the point where it has become commonly accepted that there are certain operations and treatments that people might have to wait years for. In some cases, that wait can shorten lives and cause unmanageable stress.

Is that really what we came to this place to do? As lawmakers and elected representatives of our communities, we have to understand that the people who are telling us this are not just statistics moving from one column to another; they are real people with complex lives who are in constant limbo because they simply do not know when they will receive the treatment that they require.

As we have heard, under the SNP Government, 80,000 people and their loved ones are living with anxiety and, in many cases, pain for more than a year while waiting for planned care, because the Government is not getting it right. Those people view commitments that the Government has made as a personal promise, and time and again, they are seeing that those commitments amount to just words. That is not acceptable, and I implore those who have the power to change the trajectory not to say, "Look over there—it's someone else's fault," or, "We're not as bad as someone else." That does not do justice to our constituents.

The Government should look at the NHS's long-term investment and infrastructure needs in Scotland, be honest about delays on national treatment centres and reset the programme clearly. The cabinet secretary mentioned only a couple of the national treatment centres and did not speak about some of the other projected centres. We need to ensure that our workforce is secure and that we move away from the damaging and expensive reliance on agency workforce. That has been a thing under the SNP Government, and it needs to address the issue. Our job is to hold the Government to account, and I ask it to address that.

I have sympathy for any Government that has to put up with the constant undercutting of public services that is led by the Conservative Government in Westminster, but our job in this place is to deal with what we can do, and the Scottish Government can do things. Therefore, on behalf of my constituents, I say: let us be clear about what can be done. The Government has been in power for 17 years and should deliver its promises on staffing and national treatment centres. The staffing crisis is making commitments such as the one on the national treatment centres impossible to deliver.

We must do what we can. I make a genuine request to the cabinet secretary to feed back appropriately on the issue, so that we can feed

that back to our communities and our constituents. Cabinet secretary, let us push forward into the new year with a serious plan and not even more empty promises.

16:27

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I hold a bank nurse contract with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

As someone who proudly continues to work in our NHS, I am under no illusions about the challenges that it currently faces. In the years ahead, those challenges will become more pronounced as a result of demographic changes and the expected increase in disease burden. It is therefore abundantly clear that significant investment in our NHS and, indeed, reform of the delivery of care are of paramount importance.

In the face of Tory austerity, the Tories' shameful autumn statement and their mishandling of the economy, which has caused inflation to run rampant, the SNP Scottish Government is taking the necessary decisions to ensure that there is continued investment in health and social care services. In the draft budget, the Deputy First Minister announced an increase of more than £550 million to front-line NHS boards, which is a 4.3 per cent uplift that takes the total investment to more than £13.2 billion. Scottish Government funding of the NHS has ensured record high staffing levels. The funding will drive forward work to increase health service capacity, including through a network of national treatment centres, and it will reduce backlogs, delivering year-on-year reductions in waiting lists.

On that point, yes, of course too many people have waited too long for treatment. However, I welcome the fact that we have seen a significant reduction in the longest waits since the targets were announced, last July. That includes a 69 per cent reduction in patients waiting over two years for a new out-patient appointment from the end of June 2022. There has also been a 26 per cent reduction in patients waiting longer than two years for in-patient or day-case treatment since the targets were announced. That is welcome progress, but we know that there is still more to be done.

Scottish Labour never wants to talk about the significant and on-going impact that Covid has on our health service, notably in the area of planned care, as well as other external factors. It should listen to the Welsh Government's Minister for Health and Social Services, who said only in the past week:

"The pressures on the NHS are unrelenting in every part of the UK."

Over the past 13 years, the NHS, like other public services, has had to contend with austerity, the impact of a botched Brexit, the pandemic, record levels of inflation and rising demand. It is not difficult to work out why it is so challenged across the whole UK.

It is also worth noting that, while we are sitting in the chamber, junior doctors are striking in Wales, where Labour is in power. The NHS is nothing without its dedicated workforce, and I am proud that, due to the value that the SNP Government places on our health staff, Scotland remains the only country in the UK to have been successful in averting NHS strikes. In doing so, we have avoided the knock-on effect that that would have had on capacity, through postponed operations and on out-patient appointments.

That was looking at Wales, where Labour is in power. Even at Westminster, where it is in opposition, it is clear that Labour does not have the plans or ambition to tackle the challenges that health services across the UK face. Labour's shadow health secretary has said that a UK Labour Government would

"hold the door wide open"

to private sector involvement in the NHS. He has also stated that he does not think that it is good enough that the NHS uses every winter crisis and every challenge that it faces as an excuse to ask for more money. That is hardly supportive of the hard-working staff for whom we hear faint praise from Opposition members.

Labour's only plan for our NHS seems to be opening it up to the private sector's involvement, starving it of much-needed investment, supporting a Brexit that impacts on the recruitment of health and social care staff, and undervaluing NHS staff, which leads to strikes. The Scottish Government remains committed to driving down waiting times, particularly for the people who wait the longest for treatment. We are resolute in doing what we can to support our workforce through ensuring record levels of staff, promoting their wellbeing and protecting and providing proper pay increases. We are absolutely committed to keeping our NHS publicly owned, with no private sector involvement, and free at the point of need.

16:31

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Once again, it was the pandemic that did it. That is the sole reason that we have heard from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care for the crisis that is engulfing our health and social care services. It is a damning admission that, two years on, Humza Yousaf's plan is failing, but it also defies the reality that the seeds for the crisis were sown well before 2020.

Pre-pandemic, the Scottish Government received warning after warning, and alarm after alarm was sounded, about the risk to patients of the systematic underfunding, the absence of proper workforce planning and the lack of any clear plan for our health and social care services. As far back as 2017, the British Medical Association warned that the national health service was at breaking point, but there was a failure to listen to those warnings and to act. That incompetence has consequences for patients and staff.

A day rarely goes by when constituents do not share heartbreaking stories that show just how broken services are. A year ago, in the chamber, I told the story of Pat, who was receiving palliative care after a cancer diagnosis. Pat's wish was to spend what time she had left at home. Her care needs were, of course, increasing, but that wish was not too much to ask. An assessment was made and a care package agreed, but there were no carers to deliver it. Marie Curie did what it could, as did the family, but the growing burden on Pat's husband became too much. He was admitted to hospital and, tragically, that is where he remains. There were still no carers to take over, so Pat was also admitted to hospital, even though she was not receiving any medical treatment and could and should have been cared for at home. Sadly, Pat died in hospital.

Since then, things have got worse. I could share more tragic cases from my inbox. Constituents are being placed in care homes from hospital to fiddle the delayed discharge figures. Often, they are there for months and are miles from their families, waiting to go home, where they should be. Operations are routinely cancelled because beds are unnecessarily full due to delayed discharge.

Jackie Baillie listed many of the Government's broken promises on health. Here is another one. Nine years ago, the SNP pledged to eradicate delayed discharge within a year. Today, delayed discharge has spiralled out of control and has drained £1.2 billion from our NHS over the past decade. In Dumfries and Galloway alone, between 2015 and 2023, the bill for it was a staggering £40 million, which is money that we could have used to pay carers a proper wage.

No service or constituent in my region has been left untouched by the crisis that is engulfing health and social care. Care homes have closed, community hospitals have closed, GP surgeries have closed and dentists have closed. Indeed, more than 20,000 patients in Dumfries and Galloway alone have been de-registered from the NHS recently. People cannot register with an NHS dentist in that region; there is no waiting list because there is nobody to register with in order to join a waiting list.

We have heard increasing concerns that the NHS is unsustainable in its current form, but the reality is that it is this Scottish Government's negligence that is unsustainable. Its failure to take responsibility and to act decisively is a real threat to the future of our national health service. We need the Government to stop ignoring the warnings and to finally make good on its promise to eradicate delayed discharge. We need a long-term plan to tackle the low level of sheltered housing and the loss of care homes locally, and we need the Government to pay our care workers properly.

At a time when the national minimum wage will rise to £11.45 per hour from April, the Government's pledge to pay carers just 56p more will make little difference to filling vacancies. However, listening to the calls from unions and from Labour to pay care workers a fair wage, with a clear timescale for moving towards £15 per hour and proper career progression, would help with the recruitment crisis. That would free up hospital beds and, ultimately, reduce the long waits for treatment. That is the least that patients and our dedicated, hard-working staff deserve.

16:36

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): We all admire the dedication and hard work of NHS staff. Whatever help we need, they go to incredible lengths to keep us healthy, and we owe them our thanks for the work that they do. However, despite the amazing efforts of NHS staff, Scotland's health service is in crisis.

Staff have been let down by the lack of support from the SNP Government. Systemic problems in our NHS have driven excellent nurses and doctors to breaking point. No matter how hard they work, they cannot give every patient the care that they deserve any more. That is the grim reality of Scotland's NHS under the SNP's leadership.

There is a crisis at practically every level of the NHS. Years of sub-par plans from the SNP, including Humza Yousaf's flimsy NHS recovery plan, have seen the situation in our NHS spiral out of control. The SNP will blame the pandemic, but the reality is that most of these problems were already apparent before Covid; the pandemic only made them worse.

The situation in the NHS right now is that waiting times in A and E have hit record worst-ever levels. The treatment time target for A and E is four hours. However, since this session of Parliament began, that target has been missed more than 1 million times. That does not just inconvenience people, it costs lives. Last year, the Royal College of Emergency Medicine said that one extra death occurs for every 72 patients who

wait more than eight hours in A and E. Based on those figures, more than 1,400 people lost their lives because of A and E waiting times just to the end of September last year.

The problems at A and E have sent the ambulance service into crisis, too. Ambulances are regularly forced to queue for hours outside hospitals before they can admit a patient and get back out on the road. The consequence is people waiting absurdly long times for ambulances—even up to 15 hours.

And the issues do not end there. People are often leaving treatment until it becomes an emergency and they need to attend A and E or get an ambulance because they have not been able to get a GP appointment. They cannot get an appointment quickly because there are simply not enough GPs. The SNP's poor workforce planning has left GPs struggling to meet demand. The British Medical Association says that we need another 1,000 GPs to plug gaps. The SNP promised to increase GP numbers, but it is going in the wrong direction.

That is not the only broken promise from the SNP on Scotland's NHS. Perhaps most damaging has been its failure to end delayed discharge, which the Deputy First Minister said it would do nine years ago. The consequences of failing to meet that promise have been huge. Almost 2,000 beds are occupied every day due to delayed discharge.

Neither is the SNP's failure to recruit more GPs the only serious workforce issue in Scotland's NHS. Spending on agency staff has quadrupled in two years, there are more than 5,000 nursing vacancies in NHS Scotland, and staff turnover is at its highest rate in a decade.

Clare Haughey: Will the member give way?

Annie Wells: I do not have time. I have a lot to say and I am in my final minute.

The consequences of those systemic problems are that our excellent NHS staff cannot deliver the care that they want to deliver, and patients are left waiting days, weeks, months and sometimes even years for the treatment that they need. One thing is certain: the crisis in our NHS cannot go on like this. Our vision is for a modern, efficient and local Scottish health service that is accessible to all.

16:40

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in this very short debate on Scotland's health service. It is important to recognise at the outset the challenges that we face and the successes that have been delivered in the on-going work that the cabinet secretary has outlined, including the fact that Scotland is the only

part of the UK that has avoided strikes in our NHS. The service faces challenges, not least the ageing population, inflation in the health sector and the impact of Brexit on workforce availability, but also many others.

It is important to use the short time that we have available, not to, as the Opposition does, throw random talking points into the debate but to make clear proposals for specific improvements in addition to the work that is already being done. In the short time that I have available, I want to focus on a few of those.

First, I want to talk about the adoption of technology, including process improvement, and the leverage of the great work of Scotland's fabulous life science sector. For example, only 1.5 per cent of operations across Scotland's NHS are being delivered by robotics, which can deliver higher quality and increased efficiency. I ask the cabinet secretary to look more thoroughly at that, as well as at, for example, the use of artificial intelligence in radiography, sensor technology in falls monitoring and prevention and increased digitisation, not to mention Scotland's great expertise in booking systems, digital dentistry and many other areas. I pay tribute to the great work that has been done by the accelerated national innovation adoption pathway—ANIA—but so much more can be done in that space.

Secondly, there is the roll-out of that technology and best practice across the health service and health boards across the country, and the once-for-Scotland approach. I know that work is being done there, but I ask the Government to evaluate the potential savings and improvements that could be made so that best practice in each health board is adopted across all health boards.

Thirdly, it was good to have a conversation on shifting resources in yesterday's evidence session with the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care at the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. We know that prevention is significantly cheaper than cure, working on the Christie principles, and it would be great to see more happening in that space.

We know that there has to be a shift from management layers towards the front line and from high-cost to lower-cost interventions. I ask the Government to take forward some detailed work to help us to understand how we can better measure the resources that are applied in each of those areas and get under the skin of the health budget, so that we know what the potential savings would be and what improvements could be made by moving towards a more front-line service that focuses on prevention rather than on a downstream cure.

The next area is structures. A big-bang solution would be time consuming and expensive, but I do not doubt that there are many opportunities for the duplication of services by health boards in back-office management, administration and bureaucracy to be removed and for health boards to work closer together. We are looking for opportunities for consolidation where it makes sense to take out costs from the back office and reapply them to front-line services.

I also ask that the single-authority model be given more serious attention in certain areas of the country. I know that that is favoured particularly by smaller local authorities, and that it allows for a much more efficient service delivery model. We are looking to join the dots where possible and make delivery easier. There was an example of that in my constituency of Glasgow recently, concerning funding for community link workers. Different parts of the system were unable to agree to continue to fund that cost-effective intervention until the cabinet secretary stepped in to make it happen.

Finally, it is important to recognise the Government's absolute commitment to the fundamental principles of the health service. This publicly provided service is free at the point of use, and we must resist all efforts towards its privatisation, as has unfortunately happened in other parts of the UK.

16:44

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Dame Jackie Baillie on the honours that she received today. I am disappointed that she did not wear the hat to the chamber.

When Opposition parties debate those great pillars of devolved government, health and education, as we have done so well today, I think that they generally do so for good reason. The points that are made in such debates are often backed up with statistics and facts and informed by stakeholder evidence. I say gently to Mr McKee that they are not talking points; they are about facts, and they are worth debating in the chamber.

The Government's response to such debates is predictable. There is little sign of contrition or acceptance of any of the criticism that is directed towards it; there is denial of the scale or extent of the problems that we face; and there is a huge amount of whataboutery, of the kind that we heard from the cabinet secretary. Today's debate is a fine example of that.

Labour rightly pointed out that 80,000 people have waited for more than a year for planned care. It rightly raised the years of missed targets and the growing workforce problems that are faced. In our amendment, we highlighted the worrying cuts to

drug and alcohol services and raised the plight of the 1 million people who have waited for more than four hours at A and E since 2020-21.

The Lib Dems raised issues around NHS staff, who are at the core of such debates, and the Greens did not even bother to turn up this afternoon. That says so much.

Immediately, in its opening line, the Government's feeble amendment—it is a feeble amendment—seeks to remove the phrase “is alarmed” from the motion, because it is clearly not as alarmed as we or, indeed, our constituents are. The Government goes as far as to congratulate itself on the fact that fewer patients are waiting more than two years for an appointment to be seen. Its amendment seeks to remove all references to the drug and alcohol deaths, to A and E waiting times, to mental health waiting times and, frankly, to anything else that seems to embarrass it. In fact, the only defence in the Government's amendment is that all devolved policy makers seem to be doing a terrible job at managing health. In other words, it is all relative. That is mediocrity at its very worst.

All too often, the bad news is buried away rather than being publicly available. For example, in doing research for the debate, audiology waiting times could not be found. From a response to a freedom of information request, we learned that that data is not published,

“following agreement with the Scottish Government”.

What a surprise.

Yesterday, speech therapy figures were released not by the Government but by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. It, too, had to FOI the data. From that data, we discovered that 6,500 children in Scotland are currently on a waiting list for their first appointment. That is shocking. I have raised the issue because, in my area, the waiting list was closed because it was more than two years long. That is despicable.

What about mental health waiting times? One patient in Ayrshire and Arran waited 91 weeks for their first CAMHS appointment. Can members imagine that? We know that only because we FOI-ed it. We know such things only because we submit FOIs and ask written questions. We never hear such information from the Government, and we certainly never hear it in its debates.

I am afraid that the Government's amendment is sheer brass neck. It has been parroted repeatedly today that the NHS in Scotland is free at the point of need. Well, here is a reality check. Someone who wants to see a dentist this week in Greenock will get an appointment only if they offer to pay for one. That is the reality of the NHS in Scotland.

The same goes for people who want a hearing aid or who are desperate for a knee or hip replacement. They will have to borrow the money, cash in their savings and go abroad or go private. That is the reality of the health service today, in 2024.

With the Government's amendment, the only people that it is fooling are themselves. Fixing the problem requires admitting that there is a problem. It is not creeping privatisation that we need to worry about—it is creeping ineptitude in Government, and there is plenty of that going around.

16:48

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): With regard to this afternoon's debate on the NHS in Scotland, it is worth observing that the substantive motion before us from the Labour Party offers not a single new idea or initiative on what Labour in Scotland would do differently to improve Scotland's NHS, nor does it identify a single additional penny for Scotland's NHS.

I acknowledge the Scottish Government's amendment's recognition of the fact that health services across the UK are dealing with the long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on waiting times, and its recognition of the fact that too many people are waiting too long for treatment. Of course—despite some improvements—that includes people right here in Scotland. I readily acknowledge that we all wish to see those improvements gather pace.

The Labour motion refers to long-term waits in the NHS. In 2023, Stephanie Howarth, the chief statistician to the Welsh Government, sought to analyse long-term waits across all UK nations. Ms Howarth indicated that, in March 2023, the number of people in Wales waiting for more than one year for treatment pathways was 133,000. The figure in Scotland was 74,000. The number of people in Wales waiting two years was 28,000. In Scotland, it was 8,000. I acknowledge that Ms Howarth says:

“Although we know these figures aren't entirely equivalent to each other and should not be directly compared”—

that is not what I am doing—

“the methodological differences cannot account for the scale of some of the differences in the numbers waiting longer than one and two years.”

On this occasion, that suggests more impactful progress in Scotland than has been made elsewhere. That will not always be the case, so I ask the Scottish Government how we share such best practice across the UK and how we receive it from elsewhere.

I commend health and social care workers not only in Scotland but across the UK. We need to set the challenges that are faced by Scotland in a pan-UK context, even where that is uncomfortable for Labour, as it includes NHS performance in Wales. Given that the UK Government's spending plans—which the UK Labour Party has not said that it would deviate from—would see only an additional £10 million increase to Scotland's budget, thank heavens that our Scottish Government will increase the spend on our NHS by more than £0.5 billion.

I acknowledge that vacancy levels and recruitment remain significant challenges. Again, such challenges are faced right across the UK, which is understandable, given that the impact of Brexit has undermined workforce planning right across the UK. Indeed, Nuffield Trust research indicated that there are 4,000 fewer European doctors working in the NHS because of Brexit. The Nursing and Midwifery Council estimated that, in 2022, there were up to 58,000 fewer European nurses working across the UK compared with pre-Brexit trends.

That is a reality, but the Labour motion, which mentions recruitment challenges, makes no reference to Brexit. It does not have credibility. Of course it makes no reference to Brexit, because that does not suit its agenda. After all, Labour is a pro-Brexit party, which is something that Labour does not like to draw attention to here in Scotland.

I suspect that what will help Scotland's NHS with its recruitment challenges is the fact that NHS workers in Scotland are the best paid and best supported in the UK. I am aware of the various recruitment initiatives that the Scottish Government is taking to tackle staff vacancies—there are very real challenges. However, I ask whether that includes attracting—unfortunately within the confines of Brexit Britain—many of those EU healthcare professionals who have chosen not to work in Britain as a direct consequence of Brexit.

I absolutely acknowledge the significant and enduring challenges that are faced by Scotland's NHS—indeed, by healthcare systems right across the UK. Unfortunately, Labour set the terms of reference of today's debate, and it has pursued cynical political opportunism rather than constructive dialogue. I look forward to the next debate, and I hope that the Labour Party will do much better in that.

The Presiding Officer: We move to winding-up speeches.

16:53

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): The complacency of the SNP Government as the NHS

spirals is staggering. As we have heard in the debate, from waiting times to workforce planning the NHS is in crisis. National treatment centres were touted by Humza Yousaf as the cure-all for capacity problems, but now the SNP has hit the brakes on NHS capital projects. You just could not make it up.

Almost 830,000 patients are on NHS waiting lists—a figure that is barely believable. A patient in Tayside waited almost four and a half years for orthopaedic surgery. Another in Grampian waited three years and 179 days for cataract surgery. The impact on patient treatment and staff morale is profound, and there is no end in sight.

The beleaguered health secretary has been distracted and has been more preoccupied with saving his own job than he has with plugging the gaps in NHS vacancies. Jackie Baillie highlighted promises that have been made by the SNP-Green Government, such as its promise to eliminate completely the longest waits in planned care. She gave it a “Fail, fail, fail, fail,” and she said that Michael Matheson has been distracted by personal scandals.

Michael Matheson apologised for the unacceptable waits. He gave us more spin about £1 billion for NHS recovery and the national strategy. He talked about transformation, but those are just words—they are not worth the paper that they are written on. It is statistical spin yet again, but people see the reality on the ground. He deflects, whether to Wales, Westminster or the pandemic. Why do we not believe what the cabinet secretary says any more?

Sandesh Gulhane said that the First Minister and cabinet secretary come to the chamber, make an announcement then fail to deliver, and then defend their record by tripping out spin and promising that lessons will be learned. Just look at CAMHS. As Sandesh Gulhane said, Humza Yousaf promised to clear CAMHS waiting times by March 2023. That matters, because poor mental health robs children of their childhood. Jamie Greene talked about the shocking and despicable lack of action on CAMHS waiting times. He described waits in his constituency of 91 weeks for a first appointment. He also asked where the Greens are. I notice that two Greens miraculously just turned up near the end of the debate, but did not listen to any of it.

Jamie Greene also talked about “creeping ineptitude in Government”, and Bob Doris said that

“not a single new idea”

is coming forward from anyone else. You’ve had 17 years, Bob Doris.

The Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair, please.

Tess White: The SNP says that the NHS has record staffing levels, but the SNP does not like to hear the truth. The reality is that the NHS has massive vacancies and high staff turnover. Annie Wells described the failure to recruit more GPs and said that spending on agency staff has quadrupled in two years. She also said that there are more than 5,000 nursing vacancies in NHS Scotland and that staff turnover is at its highest rate in a decade.

Clare Haughey: Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: The member must conclude.

Tess White: Scotland deserves a fresh approach to deliver a modern, efficient and local NHS, but the stark reality is that, although winter for the NHS is especially difficult, it is now “Condition: critical” for the health service all year round. Seventeen years of SNP mismanagement means that the system is at breaking point. The buck stops at Bute house, and there is no one else to blame.

16:57

The Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health (Jenni Minto): I thank those who are at the heart of our NHS for their commitment, hard work and dedication. Without them, we would not be able to talk about building on recovery and delivering on our promises.

We remain committed to driving down waiting times. We have, in the draft budget, increased investment in front-line NHS boards by more than £500 million, and we will continue to target resources at reducing waiting times, particularly for those who are waiting longest for treatment, through maximising productivity and providing additional resources.

The centre for sustainable delivery is working closely with boards to accelerate implementation of high-impact changes, including active clinical referral treatment and patient-initiated review, thereby freeing up additional capacity in the NHS system and providing sustainable solutions for the future.

With regard to delayed discharges, the winter plan for the NHS and social care for this year was published jointly by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and it sets out a whole-system approach to responding to the surge in demand for health and social care services that is experienced in the winter. It includes significant new funding measures to support the health and social care system this winter, including £50 million to recruit 317 additional staff to the Scottish Ambulance Service and additional funding for hospital at home.

With regard to the Scottish Ambulance Service, I accept that there have been delays but, despite the challenges, the service continues to maintain fast responses to the most critically unwell patients and to divert cases away from accident and emergency departments by safely triaging patients in their community, whenever possible.

I absolutely recognise that too many people are waiting too long for treatment. The launch of our waiting well hub gives people more information on the tools that they need to look after their health and wellbeing, and it gives them help in thinking about what matters to them and what health improvements they could make while they wait.

Mental health was mentioned by a couple of members. It is important to note that one in two children—50 per cent of children—is seen within 10 weeks, and that 13 out of 14 of our regional health boards have effectively eliminated their long waits in CAMHS.

I also want to make it clear that, under the Scottish Government, Scotland's NHS will always remain in the hands of the public and be free at the point of use. However, make no mistake: privatisation by Westminster Governments poses a threat to Scotland's NHS. The Tories have always wanted to privatise the NHS, but now we have a Labour Party that is following suit. Unbelievably, Labour's shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, said that a Labour Government would

“hold the door wide open”

for the private sector in the NHS. That matters for Scotland's NHS—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the minister.

Jenni Minto: By ramping up privatisation in England, the UK Government is starving our NHS of investment. If members need proof of that, they need look no further than the autumn statement, which shows a real-terms cut to NHS England funding for 2024-25 and does not provide even a single penny to go towards next year's NHS budget to pay for this year's pay deal.

Even with the ongoing pressures, we have seen continued progress being made here. During the past three years, there was an 11 per cent increase in the number of planned operations from the figure for the previous 12 months. That demonstrates the continued post-pandemic recovery of Scotland's NHS.

I was very pleased to hear Ivan McKee specifically reference the fantastic research work on AI and ANIA that is going on in Scotland. Those innovations will provide us with other ways forward.

The progress that we have made comes from our commitment to ensuring that Scotland has a sustainable and appropriately skilled workforce. Work is well under way to ensure that we have sustainable workforce pipelines now and in the future. Nursing and midwifery staffing is at a record high: we have 8.4 qualified nurses and midwives per 1,000 of the population. Allied health professional numbers are at a record high, and are up by 34.1 per cent.

Our NHS is our most cherished public—

The Presiding Officer: Minister, you must conclude. I call on Paul Sweeney to wind up.

17:01

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The reason why Labour brought the motion to the Parliament today is that the waiting times scandal is unprecedented and comes up daily in our casework. We have all heard that in the speeches today and we all have skin in the game, because even if our own families are not affected, we will know someone who is languishing on an NHS waiting list. Colin Smyth raised the tragic case of his constituent, but that is only one horrendous example; I could rehearse several, if I had more time.

As we know, prevention and getting in early is better—otherwise families spiral out of control and much greater harm is caused. That is what is compounding the problem that we face. One in six Scots—more than 860,000 of us, or what would be the biggest city in Scotland's worth of people—are languishing on an NHS waiting list, as my friend the member for Dumbarton, who is newly invested as Dame Jackie Baillie, mentioned earlier.

The warm words from the Scottish Government cut little ice on this side of the chamber. In 2022, the First Minister said that the Government would seek to eliminate the longest waits in planned care, but around 80,000 people are still waiting more than a year to be seen. That has consequences. As Annie Wells, a member for Glasgow, said, it is estimated that there are 1,600 excess deaths in A and E alone. The problem is severe and it is having a serious effect on our population. That is why this is a matter for debate.

With 7,000 Scots waiting more than two years for treatment—as opposed to only 227 people in England—it is disingenuous in the extreme for members to claim that Covid is the common denominator behind these matters. Covid has certainly had an effect, but it does not account for the extent to which the NHS in Scotland is not performing well enough. It is completely unacceptable for the Government not to take responsibility for that; it should stand by that record.

Clare Haughey: I ask the member to please clarify some things relating to a couple of points that I raised in my speech. The Welsh health minister said that Covid has had an impact on NHS waiting times. Does the member disagree with that? Does Scottish Labour support Wes Streeting—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the member.

Clare Haughey: Does Scottish Labour support Wes Streeting in his calls to privatise the NHS?

Paul Sweeney: We seem to be in violent agreement: I accept that Covid has had an effect, but it does not account for the extent to which the NHS is in disarray in Scotland. As for privatisation, Clare Haughey has grossly misrepresented the Labour Party's position.

We should consider the reality of what our constituents are telling us. After all, we are here today not to moan about other parts of the UK but to represent our constituents in this Parliament and to hold this Government to account for its actions.

I am afraid that it is simply not acceptable for people on more than one waiting list to have to prioritise one over another, for people to wait multiple years for surgery or for young people to wait more than a year for a mental health assessment, as happens in countless cases.

Some members of the SNP made constructive points. I refer to the member for Glasgow Provan, who raised the issue of digital spines for patient journeys. There are huge interventions that we could make to improve productivity in our NHS, but capital budgets are being cut in efforts to improve efficiency. Constrained GPs tell us that they simply do not have the headspace to even look at service reforms.

Members have raised serious concerns about mental health. The Scottish Government has failed to ever meet its target on waiting times for CAMHS, and the psychological therapies target has never been routinely met. Dr Gulhane, a member for Glasgow, mentioned that, as did Mr Greene, a member for West Scotland. Those are critical points that have to be continually made to the Government. The Government says that it takes the issue of those waits seriously, but the mental health budget has been frozen and subsequently cut in-year for two years running.

The Government is failing to meet its target of 10 per cent of NHS spend being allocated to mental health. Only this week, the cabinet secretary admitted to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee that it is unlikely that the target will be met by the end of this session of Parliament. That is simply not acceptable,

because if the 10 per cent commitment had been fulfilled over the past three years, almost £550 million more would have been invested in mental health services. Instead, we have a recruitment crisis that is costing us £567 million on bank and agency staffing. The Government has the cheek to talk about privatisation when it is ploughing £0.5 billion into private recruitment agencies. It is a sham and unacceptable.

As colleagues have referenced, the waiting times for cancer diagnostic tests are costing lives. I am afraid that people who are waiting for a cancer diagnosis are not waiting well but are dying while they wait for treatment. That is what is happening in our midst, and it is unacceptable for it to happen on the Government's watch.

That is why we have brought the motion to the chamber today, and it is why we commend it to members. I hope that all parties will support it for the sake of Scotland's health and to ensure that we provide the best possible outcomes for our constituents.

Business Motions

17:07

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-11887, 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 23 January 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Celebrating and Supporting Breastfeeding in Scotland
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 24 January 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Investing in Scotland's Green Economy
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 25 January 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Social Justice
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scotland as a Technology Nation
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 30 January 2024

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 31 January 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: External Affairs and Culture; Justice and Home Affairs
followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.10 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 1 February 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills
followed by Finance and Public Administration Committee Debate: Scottish Budget 2024-25
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.15 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 22 January 2024, 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-11888, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the stage 1 timetable for a bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 1 March 2024.—[George Adam]

17:08

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I am a practising national health service general practitioner.

The Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee has discussed the Scottish National Party's befuddled plan to create a national care service in 21 meetings since June 2022. In May last year, at meeting number 15, the perplexed minister, Maree Todd, told us that it was hard for her to get her "head around" the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill. The SNP's flagship £2 billion policy has been completely changed by Humza Yousaf—it is being rewritten as we speak—but the SNP will not let us see the actual wording of the policy before the stage 1 vote, almost certainly due to time pressure.

We agree that the bill needs to be further delayed, but why not decide when the changes to the bill can realistically be completed and then create a realistic timetable? That would allow us to vote on a bill that we can read, not one that we need to guess at. Today, just as Maree Todd said in May, nobody can get their head around the bill. The Government should create a realistic and fair timetable for the Parliament.

17:09

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): I am wondering whether the Conservatives are really suggesting that we should not proceed with the change that is so urgently needed in the sector. We all know that the case for change has been made unequivocally through the independent review of adult social care, through our on-going co-design discussions with people who have lived experience, and through almost every exchange that I have had with those who work in and those who receive services from the social work and social care sector. The case for change in social care is unassailable, and everyone agrees that it is necessary.

The bill is milestone legislation. It represents the most ambitious reform of public services in Scotland since devolution. The change is necessary to deliver the consistency and quality of care and support across Scotland that people deserve. It is also necessary to reinforce our commitment to Scotland's people to take long-term action to change our society and make Scotland a fairer place to live in.

We remain committed to delivering a national care service to improve quality, fairness and consistency of provision that meets individuals' needs. We know that the social care system in Scotland needs to change and that our partners across the public sector, including local government and the national health service, agree. We are working with people with lived experience and people who work in social care to provide what is needed. That is essential for a task of such a magnitude.

We revisited our approach last year to further engage with people who have lived experience, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the NHS. We worked really hard in discussion with numerous stakeholders through numerous regional events and meetings over the second half of 2023.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Given that the Scottish Government is delaying the process, will it seek the opportunity to put in place an external advisory board to help to shape the revised legislation?

Maree Todd: I think that we have a clear idea of the legislation going forward, and I am more than happy to articulate that case to the Parliament right now.

There has been weekly engagement between the Scottish Government, COSLA and the NHS since last summer. Those weekly talks have been built on the shared accountability consensus that was reached on 30 June last year, and they have created a collaborative proposal for a revised version of the national care service.

Subject to the will of the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government proposes to make amendments to the bill at stage 2 in response to evidence that was taken at stage 1 and on-going feedback from stakeholders. I believe that our proposals for changing the bill at stage 2 are a highly reasonable and balanced proposition. As far as possible, they accommodate the various stakeholders' positions while ensuring that we can still effect the real change and improvements that people who use social care services today require and deserve.

The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and the Finance and Public Administration Committee asked for further information, which I provided in early December, before Christmas. I also provided a substantial and robust package of material, including an updated financial memorandum and an updated business case. We are committed to working with the parliamentary committees. I have already committed to the lead committee to provide information on the Scottish Government's proposed amendments in a

timescale that enables it to consider that information to the level that is needed.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Maree Todd: I am just closing.

We are providing as much information as we can, as is appropriate in the parliamentary process, and we will continue to do so.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S6M-11888, in the name of George Adam, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 1 March 2024.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motions S6M-11889, on a stage 1 timetable for a bill, and S6M-11890, on a stage 2 timetable for a bill.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 29 March 2024.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 9 February 2024.—[George Adam]

Motions agreed to.

Decision Time

17:14

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-11875.2, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11875, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, on stand up for quality education, 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.

17:15

Meeting suspended.

17:16

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment S6M-11875.2, in the name of Jenny Gilruth.

Members should cast their votes now.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (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)
 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)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstention

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-11875.2, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, is: For 67, Against 55, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-11875.1, in the name of Liam Kerr, which also seeks to amend motion S6M-11875, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, on stand up for quality education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (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)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (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, 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)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (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)
 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)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (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)

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)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstention

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-11875.1, in the name of Liam Kerr, is: For 31, Against 91, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-11875, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, on stand up for quality education, 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, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (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)
 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)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstention

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-11875, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, on stand up for quality education, as amended, is: For 67, Against 54, Abstention 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament acknowledges the recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, which highlight areas for improvement in Scottish education, particularly in mathematics; understands that the Scottish Government is taking forward a planned and systematic curriculum improvement cycle to enhance standards, which will focus initially on maths; welcomes the recent publication of the 2022-23 Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL), which it recognises is the most comprehensive and up-to-date national data set on attainment and which shows record levels of attainment across primary school level and improvements in secondary school level; agrees that these results by Scotland's pupils, teachers and school staff deserve commendation; notes that Scotland has the highest investment per pupil and lowest pupil/teacher ratio in the UK, and that, in addition to a record £830 million spend on additional support for learning (ASL), work is underway to update the Additional Support for Learning Action Plan and deliver a range of measures to improve the experiences and outcomes of pupils with additional needs; welcomes that Scotland has the most comprehensive free school meal offering of any nation in the UK, which will be further extended by investment in the 2024-25 Budget, and further welcomes the sector-wide agreement on the need for a holistic package of education reforms, which it agrees should be taken forward in partnership with Scotland's teachers and young people.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-11874.2, in the name of Michael Matheson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11874, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on ending long waits in the national health service, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow Southside) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not connect, but I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Sturgeon. 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, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (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)
 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)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)

Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstention

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-11874.2, in the name of Michael Matheson, is: For 67, Against 55, Abstention 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-11874.1, in the name of Sandesh Gulhane, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11874, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on ending long waits in the NHS, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Dr Gulhane. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (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)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 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)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-11874.1, in the name of Sandesh Gulhane, is: For 56, Against 66, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-11874, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on ending long waits in the NHS, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

I call Christina McKelvie for a point of order. I am just going to ask for your microphone to be turned on.

Ms McKelvie, as it is not working, can I ask you to footer about with your card?

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie): Some would say that I am an expert footer.

On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. 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, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (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)
 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)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-11874, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on ending long waits in the NHS, as amended, is: For 67, Against 55, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises that health services across the UK are dealing with the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on waiting times; further recognises that too many people are waiting too long for treatment, and welcomes the reductions in the longest waits, including a 69% reduction in patients waiting over two years for a new outpatient appointment from the end of June 2022 and a 26% reduction in patients waiting longer than two years for inpatient or day case treatment over the same period; highlights the launch of the Waiting Well Hub, to give people the information and tools that they need to look at their own health and wellbeing during the waiting period, think about what matters to them and what health improvements they could make in the meantime; welcomes that constructive engagement with trade unions has meant

that Scotland is the only part of the UK not experiencing strike action and the associated unprecedented level of disruption for patients and families; further welcomes the Scottish Government's draft Budget, which gives the NHS a real-terms uplift, in stark contrast to the UK Government Autumn Statement figures, which show a real-terms cut to NHS England; notes that, due to the deteriorating medium-term fiscal outlook, a revised Infrastructure Investment Plan Pipeline is expected to be published alongside the Medium-term Financial Strategy in May 2024; appreciates that the workforce is at the heart of all that the NHS does, and thanks all of Scotland's highly skilled and committed NHS staff for their hard work and dedication, and believes that the NHS must be kept true to its founding principles of being publicly owned, publicly operated, and free at the point of need, and further believes that the only way to protect the NHS from the creeping privatisation imposed by UK administrations is through independence.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

HMP Kilmarnock

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-11199, in the name of Brian Whittle, on recognising the success of HM Prison Kilmarnock. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the efforts of staff and volunteers working at HMP Kilmarnock to promote a strong culture of collaboration and rehabilitation throughout the prison, including through working with numerous local community groups over recent years with the aim of reducing reoffending; understands that this has included award-winning collaborations with local charity CentreStage to deliver employability and life skills training, as well as help with housing, health and welfare issues, and, more recently, with Recovery Enterprises Scotland, another local charity, on the creation of its Foundations Hub at the visitor centre within the prison; notes what it sees as the substantial contribution that these efforts make not only to reducing reoffending, but to improving the life chances of prisoners on their release by helping them to avoid returning to a pattern of harmful behaviour and offering them a different path; considers that the work done by HMP Kilmarnock's staff and all those who assist them is of great importance, and notes the hope that their approach not only continues in the years ahead, but that it can also be replicated more widely across the prison estate.

17:31

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to rise to celebrate the great work that HMP Kilmarnock does, and has been doing, to support the rehabilitation of offenders, and its work with third sector organisations in supporting prisoners' families and helping the transition of prisoners back into their communities.

I commend the work of third sector organisations such as Recovery Enterprises Scotland, which has a facility called the foundations hub just outside the prison, and CentreStage for the important work that they do. Between six and eight weeks before a prisoner's release, those organisations start to work with that prisoner to help them in their transition back into the community.

After all, many of those who are incarcerated at His Majesty's pleasure are not bad people; rather, they are people who have made bad choices. Whenever I have visited HMP Kilmarnock, as I have done several times, I am always impressed with the new skills and the education that it offers the prisoners. The first time that I was in there, being shown round, I was taken to the art class, where a gentleman was painting a quite magnificent painting. When I talked to him, he said that he had taken up art only when he was

incarcerated. I asked him why it took going to prison for him to take up art, and he answered, "I never got the opportunity before." In there lies a significant message.

The Parliament has really good links with HMP Kilmarnock. That is important, because it is about ensuring that, although prisoners have a debt to pay to society, we must always remind them that they are not forgotten.

To that end, I once offered to stage a football match between the Parliament's football team and the prisoners. I remember asking the Parliament's team if they would take part, as they all dived for cover, but we did take part. It was a tri-team tournament, as the prison guards also took part. I have to say that the prison guards were not all that au fait with our shouting "Mean Machine" while standing at the side watching the prisoners versus the guards; I am looking round the chamber to see which members recognise that reference.

We then decided to take the Parliament's rugby team down there and play a tournament of sevens, which—again—was a great occasion. I have to say that I got sent off to the sin bin—I know that you will not believe this, Presiding Officer, but apparently I was a bit mouthy.

I have also been to Kilmarnock prison to take circuit classes with the prisoners. The way in which we, as a Parliament, have engaged with the prison has been exemplary.

However, given the successes of Kilmarnock prison in its care and rehabilitation of prisoners, one has to ask why, in 2019, the then Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Humza Yousaf, made a throwaway comment, during a presentation to the Scottish Prison Service conference, that he was going to take Kilmarnock prison back into public ownership. There was no reasoning or forethought given as to why he had decided on that course of action. To this day, despite repeatedly being asked that question, the Scottish Government has yet to deliver any kind of coherent response. That smacks of a headline-grabbing decision, rather than a well-thought-out and reasoned one.

We have a prison that is successfully rehabilitating prisoners through its education and skills training; third sector integration that is supporting prisoners' families, and supporting prisoners as they approach release with all that they will need to reintegrate into society; an operator that is willing to build a new 240-bed wing at no cost to the taxpayer, creating an additional 100 jobs at a time when the prison population is increasing the pressure on the Scottish prison estate; and a Scottish Government that has made a decision, for what we can only deduce are ideologically driven reasons, to bring the prison

into public ownership—because, of course, the Government knows better.

My colleagues Russell Findlay and Sharon Dowey and I recently visited the prison to meet with the governor and representatives of the prison officers so that they could raise their serious concerns. Those concerns included the fact that, with only nine weeks to go, how the harmonisation process will occur at all levels still remains unclear, yet they were advised two years ago that this was happening.

A letter from the SPS that we were shown by those representatives suggested that transfer of staff under TUPE—the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006—will take about 12 months. They asked why, given that the prison staff will all be SPS public servants from 17 March 2024, operating and managing a public service prison. Although I accept that the TUPE process may take four months or less, with staff receiving respective terms and conditions in line with the public sector equivalent, backdated to 17 March, the letter states that the indications are that, under harmonisation and TUPE, public sector pay rates will not kick in until up to 12 months after the transition and might not be backdated. That is morally wrong.

Separately, the current SPS pay negotiations are now entering 2024. I know that there is an attempt at a two-year pay deal. HMP Kilmarnock agreed its 2023 pay deal with Serco last year. That is being brought forward to allow what is happening with Kilmarnock to coincide with the SPS pay review for 2024. Staff are entitled to a pay review. If a two-year pay deal between the SPS and the trade union side is finally accepted, how will the 2024 pay review be balanced with the position of HMP Kilmarnock staff, who will be public servants? Is there a suggestion that staff will fall further behind their public sector counterparts during 2024? That is potentially a greater injustice.

Given the state of the public finances, which is well documented; taking away the ideology of nationalism; and considering the current condition of public prisons in Scotland, with increasing overcrowding and dilapidation, is it too late to re-engage with the existing provider to reopen the offer of building a third house block, further enhancing the existing prison? The existing operator has experience and a history of quick builds, and continues to operate at a significantly reduced cost in comparison with public sector operations, and that approach would provide much-needed new prison space. The decision that has been made is a political one—I get that. However, is it the correct decision for the Scottish taxpayer?

The trade union Community, which represents the prison officers' position, fully expects its members to revert to SPS terms and conditions immediately following the transfer on 17 March. That is inclusive of all pay rates and bandings, and therefore, in the first month's salary deposited by SPS to all HMP Kilmarnock staff, Community's members will reasonably expect their salary and individual banding to reflect that of all colleagues across the Scottish Prison Service. It is Community's opinion that the SPS is withholding the imposition of full harmonisation as a result of public cost implications, both for industrial and political reasons.

In summary, Community has already given notice to the SPS that, if the union's members at HMP Kilmarnock are not reverted to complete parity with all SPS colleagues as of 17 March 2024, it will raise the appropriate claims on behalf of all its affected members immediately, and that, further, any failure to treat the members with complete parity is likely to cause industrial unrest.

That is where we are. A puzzling decision was made on the hoof by Humza Yousaf, which will cost the public purse more and will not result in the building of 240 more places by a successful operation that has delivered a service that supports prisoners and their families, and which works with the third sector to ensure successful integration into society and reduce reoffending.

Once again, I congratulate HMP Kilmarnock on all its successes. In doing so, however, I ask the Scottish Government to explain the decision to bring the prison into public ownership. Surely it is not too late to ensure that the best service is maintained and that staff are not disadvantaged when the takeover happens in just nine weeks' time.

17:39

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I thank Brian Whittle for bringing the debate to the chamber. I was happy to support his motion earlier today on the achievements of HMP Kilmarnock in my constituency—or Bowhouse, as we affectionately call the prison down there.

I recognise and applaud the tremendous work that has been done under the guidance of the redoubtable Craig Thomson, the director, over several years there. It always was, and still is, a pleasure to visit the prison and hear at first hand what the latest developments are. I say "hear", because if members know Craig, they will know that you have to be ready to listen, a lot, and it is always a pleasure to be in his company.

When we, as members, get the chance to visit a prison or any other facility that serves the public, we quickly gain an impression of the leadership. I

can say that, from the minute that I met Craig and his team, I got the clear impression that the prison and the management approach at Bowhouse were in very safe hands. I would be absolutely delighted if Craig chose to continue in post during—and, I would hope, long after—the transition to the SPS, to help to guide us through.

Covid was a huge challenge to us all, and in particular to our prisons, where we had a clear duty to keep staff and prisoners safe. The way that Kilmarnock prison dealt with difficult circumstances during that time was testament to the commitment of the entire Serco team, and they are to be commended for that in particular.

Brian Whittle mentioned a few of the local organisations that have close links with the prison, such as CentreStage and Recovery Enterprises Scotland, to name just two. Their support and link work has been nothing short of amazing. While some of the formal local support arrangements stopped during Covid, our colleagues at Recovery Enterprises kept going, providing essential support for prisoners on their release from prison; I say a huge thank you to them.

It is fair to say that the 25-year contract has had its ups and downs over the years. I recall that, shortly after my first election win in 2007, the union reps came to see me to complain about the contract conditions that had been imposed on the prison by the then Labour Executive, which set up the initial arrangements for the prison. One of the stand-out conditions in the contract was that Serco was fined every time that a mobile phone was discovered in the prison. That was a curious rule, as it meant that good policing and security in the prison led to a punishing fine.

Despite many attempts by me and others to review and modernise some of those conditions, they basically remained in place. However, looking forward, the transition arrangements are well under way and—as I understand it—the Serco team will transfer under their current terms and conditions and can look forward to some improvements in those as they progress. Overall, we are hoping to see more posts in the prison in the coming weeks and months.

My plea to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, and to the SPS, as we go forward is to build on the strengths and achievements that the Serco team have delivered for us in Kilmarnock; to continue to work closely with the local organisations and further that close working relationship; and to engage with the local businesses that support the prison, and which benefit from the support that the prison gives them, too.

As the contract comes to an end in March, although it might be the end of an auld sang for

Serco and Kilmarnock, I put on record my thanks to the entire Serco team, led by Craig Thomson, for the magnificent work that they have done for us over the past 25 years—and to their representatives, too, it has to be said. It has been a pleasure to work with them all. I look forward to the beginning of a new chapter for the future of the prison in Kilmarnock.

17:44

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): I was going to write a speech, but then I found a memo that I wrote following a visit to Kilmarnock last October with my colleagues Brian Whittle and Sharon Dowey.

Let me read an abridged version of the memo. It begins:

“Memo: SNP transfer of HMP Kilmarnock from private to public ownership. Today we visited Serco-owned and operated HMP Kilmarnock which will transfer into public ownership at midnight on Saturday, March 16, 2024. Prison director Craig Thomson and his senior colleagues were critical of the SNP’s decision to transfer, the lack of explanation for doing so and a worrying lack of communication about how it will happen.

Mr Thomson says it will be more costly to taxpayers while delivering worse outcomes in relation to re-offending, to the detriment of everyone. He said the first anyone knew of it was in 2019 when then justice secretary Humza Yousaf appeared on the evening news to say that it was happening. The SNP’s sole motivation appears to be ideological—private is bad, public is good.”

I then listed various matters as bullet points:

• Serco offered to build a new block at no extra cost to taxpayers, and which would now probably be open. But this was rejected by”

Scottish Government, to quote,

“after 15 minutes”.

My memo continued:

• The annual cost to”

Scottish Government

“of Kilmarnock is £16m. A report found that it is the least expensive prison in the UK and that the annual cost will rise by up to £5m. No-one appears to know the transfer cost.

• Mr Thomson estimates that due to the difference between contracts, Kilmarnock may need to hire up to 100 more officers.

• The SPS will not retain the in-house psychology team, education staff and housekeepers who are on payroll. These will instead be sub-contracted.

• The same applies to Kilmarnock’s 4 drug detection dogs which have stopped £1m-plus of drugs from getting inside.

• There are 84 body worn cameras across all 17 Scottish prisons with 56 of these at Kilmarnock. The SPS say they don’t want them, so Serco plans to send them to an English prison.

- Kilmarnock installed in-cell phones many years ago. This meant they did not need to emulate Humza Yousaf's disastrous and costly mobile phone scheme.

- As a condition of contract, 10 per cent of Kilmarnock's revenue is spent in the local community. This will end."

The memo goes on to say:

"• A Serco senior executive flew from Australia to attend a meeting with"

the Scottish Government, and that

"Mr Thomson understands that the SNP justice secretary did not attend."

It goes on:

- Kilmarnock staff use an app for rotas, holidays etc. This will revert to paper and pencil under the"

SNP. It continues:

"• The SPS may not recognise Community trade union which represents Kilmarnock staff. The union believe this could result in an impasse between staff and SPS. Anas Sarwar is a member of this union. What's he saying about it?"

That brings me to the end of my memo, the end of my speech and, frankly, the end of my tether. The SNP's treatment of HMP Kilmarnock is a metaphor for the ideological incompetence of this sorry excuse for a Government.

17:48

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Brian Whittle for bringing the debate to the chamber as members' business. I always seek to offer recognition to workers and staff, so I join Brian and others in doing so.

The justice service is under enormous pressure, with increasing numbers of prisoners in the estate. Many prisons in Scotland are in a poor state, and much of our prison estate is extremely old, so it is nice, today, to be able to look at important examples of good practice that might help prisoners and their wider families.

I pay tribute to prison officers and staff in the prison service—the profession is often overlooked. Prison officers have a complex job, which their pay does not reflect, and yet, across the prison estate, we see them working with others to secure a positive future for the prisoners they support.

When researching for the debate, I found a comment that was made by Wendy Sinclair-Gieben, who is HM chief inspector of prisons for Scotland. She said:

"If we bring people into prison and do nothing with them, we will release them back into society angrier than they were when they came in. That is not appropriate. As a person in the community, I would like to think that the Prison Service is working with those people to reduce the risk when they leave."—[*Official Report, Criminal Justice Committee*, 9 November 2022; c 1.]

That statement, which was made during a pre-budget scrutiny meeting, stood out to me as someone who is not an expert in this area. We know that many in our prison population are there due to complex social issues, as has been mentioned by other members. Perhaps people are reoffending or are at risk of reoffending because, on the whole, we do not support them in the way that we should.

There is strong evidence that prison, when used as a vehicle to care, support and rehabilitate, helps to return individuals into the community with a purpose for their future, which is helpful for them and their families and communities.

In doing a little bit of research, I found an approach in which there are seven pathways for helping prisoners not to reoffend. The pathways are helping them with accommodation; helping them with their attitudes, thinking and behaviour; helping them with their relationships with their children and families; helping them to deal with things that are important issues in society currently, such as drugs and alcohol; assisting them in entering education—Brian Whittle mentioned art—training and employment; looking at finance, benefits and debt, and helping them with those aspects as they transition back into the community; and, very importantly, helping them with their health. In my reading of the good work that is going on at HMP Kilmarnock, the organisations that are mentioned in the motion and the prison staff are seeking to cover all those pathways.

However, overall, the reality is that, although we have progressive policy in Scotland, we tend to have a punitive culture, and, to some degree, the attitude that can come across is, "We've always done it that way." Sometimes, there is cultural reluctance to change, and all of us can be guilty of that. When we are changing such large organisations, doing so can be difficult.

The prison and justice services have been firefighting for some time—I think that even the Government recognises that. There is a backlog in the courts, and there has been overcrowding in the prisons, never mind the impact of the pandemic.

I do not have much time left, so I will mention the collaborative rehabilitative approach that is taking place at HMP Kilmarnock. We would all wish to support that and the work of the visitor centre, which liaises with local groups to ensure that prisoners, when they return to their communities, have the opportunity to make that work. Like Brian Whittle and others, I hope not only that that approach continues at Kilmarnock in the years ahead, but that it can be seen as the way forward and one that we can replicate more widely across the prison estate.

17:53

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): I thank my colleague Brian Whittle for bringing the debate to the chamber. HMP Kilmarnock is a success story. It is a well-run operation that supports local jobs and delivers good value for money for taxpayers. In those respects, it is something of a rarity in Scotland—in the Scottish National Party era, it is rare to see high performance and costs that do not spiral out of control.

The sensible decision would have been to continue the successful HMP Kilmarnock contract, and the smart move would be to model our other prisons on it. Instead, SNP ministers have chosen to end this success story and, for purely ideological reasons, to nationalise HMP Kilmarnock. It is an extraordinary, short-sighted and baffling move. This damaging decision will cost taxpayers money, hinder efforts to rehabilitate prisoners and leave staff in a worse spot.

The SNP Government could have let the prison continue running well, as it has been in recent years. Instead, as Brian Whittle outlined, SNP ministers have created all kinds of problems for themselves by not learning from this success story.

First, ministers have put at risk many effective things that HMP Kilmarnock does. It has many bespoke systems and programmes, which may not continue now, including a digital management tool to book medical appointments and family contact visits. Last year, it introduced a breakfast club for veterans in custody, which is a very worthwhile and commendable programme. I hope that that continues after nationalisation, but that remains to be seen.

Secondly, from speaking with the current director of HMP Kilmarnock, it is clear that staffing will be problematic for the nationalised prison. The many experienced staff, who do a great job at the moment, will need to change the way that they work. Staff contracts will be radically different. A lot of new recruitment will be necessary in the light of the change. Recruitment may become even more challenging if current staff leave because of worsening working conditions.

As my colleague Russell Findlay said, when the Scottish National Party nationalises HMP Kilmarnock, body-worn cameras will be taken away from the prison officers and may be sent south to English prisons. That makes no sense whatsoever. The provision of those devices to officers by HMP Kilmarnock was a positive thing and it should continue.

That is an example of cost cutting by the SNP, but, unbelievably, it looks as though nationalising HMP Kilmarnock will be far more expensive than

the current contract, under which HMP Kilmarnock provides great value for taxpayers. Perhaps even more shocking is the fact that we do not yet know how much more nationalisation will cost than the current approach. No estimates are available. That work really should have been done before any plans to end the contract were announced.

At the Scottish Parliament's Criminal Justice Committee in November, I asked the Scottish Prison Service whether a full assessment of budgetary requirements had been completed. Just a few months before the date of nationalisation, that had still not been done, and whether it has been completed now is unclear. Value for money does not appear to have been a consideration in the decision, and no studies appear to have been done on how much more the nationalisation will cost taxpayers. According to some estimates, it may cost £3 million to £5 million more—several million pounds that could have been spent on schools, hospitals or other essential public services.

It seems that the SNP was never interested in the positives of HMP Kilmarnock. It was not interested in the fact that it is good value for money and runs effectively. It was not interested in saving money that could be spent on schools and hospitals. For purely ideological reasons, SNP ministers will end the success story of HMP Kilmarnock, and Scottish taxpayers will suffer as a result.

17:57

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): I thank Brian Whittle for securing the debate, which is a timely one. I appreciate the fulsome account that Mr Whittle and others have given of the excellent work that goes on within the walls of HMP Kilmarnock. I am perhaps less impressed by Mr Whittle's endeavours in football and rugby.

On a more serious point, it is imperative that, as members of this Parliament, we engage with the prison service and the individual establishments in our regions and constituencies. Often, work in our prisons is hidden. We need to recognise that what happens in prisons matters. It is not the end of the line, because most people serve a determinate sentence and return to our communities. I am therefore pleased that Carol Mochan, Willie Coffey and Brian Whittle have acknowledged the importance of prisons as rehabilitative institutions and the fact that they have a role to play in improving community safety and changing lives.

Last August, I had the pleasure of visiting HMP Kilmarnock. From walking around the prison and spending time with its director, Craig Thomson, who is clearly a very experienced governor, and

from having the opportunity to speak to staff and prisoners, I got a really good sense of the significant efforts, skill and enthusiasm of the staff at the establishment.

I will touch on the issue of private prisons. I will give an account of the Government's position on the matter, but I also point to the fact that I have a private prison in my constituency, which is run by a different provider. I and this Government have always had fundamental objections to private prisons but, nonetheless, I have never sought to kick down that prison or the people who work in it just because of its model of ownership.

It is also the case that even although we have two private prisons in Scotland, when things are—as Willie Coffey said—a bit rocky or there are ups and downs, because the SPS has responsibility for the contract, it is incumbent on the SPS to step in or lean in, as is the case for any such institution in Scotland when there are issues.

When I visited Kilmarnock, I was very pleased to hear about the positive impact of the sustained early engagement of the SPS and Serco with staff in preparation for the transition of HMP Kilmarnock to public ownership in March. As has been noted, this is a significant transition and the first transfer to public ownership of a privately operated prison in Scotland.

As members might recall, that decision was taken in 2021. It is no secret that this Government, since its formation in 2007—

Russell Findlay: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angela Constance: I will in one moment.

The Government's position has always been that prisons, like other significant public services, should be managed as part of the public sector. At a fundamental or core level, that is because public safety and not private profit is paramount. Of course, the contracts and the decisions on them were legacy arrangements from previous Administrations.

Russell Findlay: On that specific point, in response to a written question, the cabinet secretary told me that the decision to transfer was made in 2021. However, Humza Yousaf made the announcement in 2019. Was that a sham announcement?

Angela Constance: We are trying to have a really serious debate about the quality of care and supervision in HMP Kilmarnock. In a moment, I will get on to talking about the successes of the organisation that must be maintained when it takes the significant step of coming back into public ownership.

The reality is that, with a 25-year contract coming to an end, there were really only two choices—the contract would either be retendered or the prison would be brought back into public ownership. For the reasons that I have outlined, the Government took the decision to bring the prison into public ownership.

In the time that I have left, I want to talk about the successes of HMP Kilmarnock. It is not only me who has noticed the professionalism and care of the staff. Independent prison monitors note in their annual report the extremely positive experiences of visiting the prison. They note that it is

“a well-run prison that feels safe and orderly”

with

“excellent provision of purposeful activity on a daily basis”.

That is something to be proud of.

Brian Whittle: Does the cabinet secretary not recognise that she is giving us the narrative of why the prison should remain as it is, given that it is a huge success? I understand that there is an idea that such a service should not be in private ownership, but surely it is about outcomes. The prison is being run very well, so why would we change that?

Angela Constance: As I said, the contract was coming to an end, so we had to either retender or bring the establishment into public ownership. I have outlined why the Government believes that public ownership of prisons is preferable. I am acknowledging that independent inspections and experts have acknowledged that HMP Kilmarnock is on a par—*[Interruption.]* No, I will not take another intervention, thank you.

Independent inspections and experts have acknowledged that HMP Kilmarnock is on a par with other SPS establishments.

In the very brief time that I have left, it is important that we, as others have done, acknowledge some of the successes of HMP Kilmarnock. I was particularly interested that, as Sharon Dowe mentioned, the prison introduced a monthly veterans in custody breakfast club. When I was first a member of the Parliament many years ago, due to my prison background, I had an interest in the prevalence of veterans in the justice system. It is great to see that initiative. HMP Kilmarnock also has strong community partnerships and excellent intelligence relationships. It works closely with the local police.

Brian Whittle, Willie Coffey and Carol Mochan have paid tribute to the organisation Recovery Enterprises Scotland, which I am familiar with, particularly from my previous role as Minister for Drugs Policy. The organisation has taken on the

delivery of the prison visitors centre at HMP Kilmarnock—*[Interruption.]* No, I will not take an intervention, thank you.

That work is supported by Scottish Government funding. The foundations hub visitors centre is a supportive and inclusive environment for people—*[Interruption.]* No, I will not take an intervention, thank you.

It is a supportive and inclusive environment for people in custody and their families.

Before you chastise me for overrunning my time, Presiding Officer, I will end by putting on record my thanks to HMP Kilmarnock. I take this opportunity to thank all the current and previous staff and management there for their important service to the justice system in Scotland. HMP Kilmarnock has been a well-managed and forward-thinking prison in Scotland for 25 years, and I assure members that the SPS will harness and build on that success after the transition.

I will end by reiterating the point that Willie Coffey made that it is important to build on the prison's strengths and achievements and support it in this new chapter.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate and I close the meeting.

Meeting closed at 18:06.

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