



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Thursday 30 March 2017**

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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 30 March 2017

[The Convener opened the meeting at 11:40]

## General Question Time

### Public Transport (Child Fares)

1. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on extending child fares to the age of 18 for all forms of public transport. (S5O-00848)

**The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf):** The national concessionary travel scheme for young people already provides discounts on bus and rail travel within Scotland for all young people living in Scotland aged 16 to 18. Using the Young Scot smart card, the scheme offers a one-third discount off the adult single fare on any registered bus service in Scotland, one third off most rail journeys in Scotland and a 50 per cent discount on rail season tickets. Eligible island residents also receive vouchers for four free ferry journeys a year. In addition, the Scottish Government will introduce free bus travel for modern apprentices aged under 21 in 2018. We will also be providing three months' free bus travel for recipients of the job grant aged between 16 and 24 once that benefit comes into force.

**Pauline McNeill:** I thank the minister for that comprehensive answer. The minister will be aware that Naomi Eisenstadt, the Scottish Government's adviser on poverty, recently said that there needs to be a bit more focus on the 14 to 19 age group—the late teens. For example, those who are 16 or 17 are four and a half times less likely to be in employment than those in the 18 to 21 age group, the minimum wage for young people is half that for adults and apprentices earn even less than that. It is unfair with regard to the independence of 16-year-olds that, on their 16th birthday, they begin to pay the full fare on all public transport.

The minister has just told the chamber about the various discount schemes that are available, but to take advantage of them young people are required to travel at off-peak times or to spend more than £12 on their fare. I think that it is time to focus on a transport policy for young people up to the age of 18 that will enhance their independence. The Government needs to go further if it wants those young people to see that there is something in Government policy for them.

**Humza Yousaf:** I acknowledge the constructive approach that Pauline McNeill has taken with me on the issue. In fact, we are due to meet later today on the issue. I reiterate that there are

discount schemes for those aged 16 to 18 that offer a third off the adult single fare on any registered bus service; and there is a third off most rail journeys. However, I do not discount what Pauline McNeill says.

We are going through the process of the national transport strategy review at the moment and I think that it would be a wise move for us to look at what Pauline McNeill describes as a potential inequality. I am more than willing to work closely with her on the issue, on which the Scottish Youth Parliament has also approached me. Of course, she will understand that there are financial constraints, but I am willing to be as open-minded as possible and see what we can do at the moment. As I said, the discount schemes that we have are working well; notwithstanding that, I look forward to our meeting later today.

### NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Accident and Emergency Waiting Times)

2. **Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde meets its accident and emergency waiting times target. (S5O-00849)

**The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell):** The Scottish Government's national unscheduled care team has been working closely with the local teams across NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, especially with Queen Elizabeth university hospital and Glasgow royal Infirmary. The team are supporting implementation of the six essential actions and the implementation of an action plan, which was agreed with the chairman of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde in December 2016 for the Queen Elizabeth university hospital.

The action plan for that hospital focuses on priority actions that will minimise delays for patients in A and E and the immediate assessment unit, including enhanced staffing for extended periods throughout the day, evenings and weekends; a focus on enhanced discharges early in the day from all areas of the hospital; and enhanced escalation measures introduced into patient-flow meetings held three times per day. A number of those actions have been implemented so far and we have started to see results, especially in the IAU, where waiting times have been reduced by 7 percentage points and the number of appropriate discharges has increased.

Performance across NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde in January 2017 was 89.3 per cent, compared to 91.8 per cent for Scotland; and, in the year to January 2017, performance was 92.2 per cent. However, I recognise that more needs to be done to ensure a sustainable improvement in performance across NHS Greater Glasgow and

Clyde, including in the Queen Elizabeth university hospital. My officials meet the chairman and his senior management team regularly and continue to support progress against the action plans.

**Annie Wells:** The Queen Elizabeth has had the lowest level of compliance 13 times in the past 20 weeks. Despite the Scottish Government's target for 95 per cent of patients to be seen within four hours of arriving at a hospital, the Queen Elizabeth had the lowest compliance of any individual site, with only 81.7 per cent of patients being seen in the required time. The target has not been met for a single week since September last year. What will the minister do to improve access to emergency care in Glasgow?

**Aileen Campbell:** I have already said that a number of actions have been taken. Government officials continue to meet the chairman of the board regularly. We are working with the local team to support prompt recovery and sustainable improvements in A and E and the IAU. The support team is made up of people with clinical improvement expertise and is led by the Queen Elizabeth university hospital clinical director for medicine and supported by the national unscheduled care team. We are beginning to see improvements, but we concede that more needs to be done. That is why our Government officials are working hard and are working closely with professionals at the Queen Elizabeth.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Will the minister please advise the chamber how many A and E consultants were employed by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde in 2007, how many are in post now and what the impact has been on patient care?

**Aileen Campbell:** In September 2007, there were 25 whole-time-equivalent consultants specialising in emergency medicine in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. In December 2016 there were 75 whole-time-equivalent consultants specialising in emergency medicine in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. That is an increase of 50 whole-time-equivalent consultants, or 200 per cent, under this Scottish National Party Government.

### **Sustainable Rural Bus Services**

**3. John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what it is doing to support sustainable rural bus services. (S5O-00850)

**The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf):** The Scottish Government will provide bus subsidy of £53.5 million in 2017-18. The subsidy—the bus service operators grant—is paid directly to operators and its aim is to support

the overall bus network and help passengers with the cost of fares. In 2012, the basis of paying BSOG was changed to making payments on the distance that is run by vehicles, which particularly benefits rural areas, where bus service routes are longer. We have maintained the base rate of BSOG at 14.4p per kilometre, which shows a commitment to the Scottish network, particularly in rural areas. In addition, local authorities are funded through the block grant to subsidise bus services that they deem socially necessary. In 2015-16, the spend on that was £59 million.

**John Lamont:** The minister will be aware of the recent takeover of First Group's Borders operations by Borders Buses Ltd. Although it is encouraging to hear that some services are being expanded, the long-term future of some other lifeline bus routes in the Borders is still unclear. With council budgets being cut across Scotland, local authority subsidies are being withdrawn, which means that some rural routes are simply no longer commercially viable. In light of the comments by First Group that the impact of the Borders railway was the main reason for its decision to withdraw, is the minister confident that enough work is being done to understand the impact of the new rail line on rural bus routes?

**Humza Yousaf:** The first thing to say is that the Borders railway is a great success, which I think that members across the chamber recognise.

I spoke to Colin Craig of West Coast Motors—who, by the way, would be keen to talk to the member as well—and he gave me some key reassurances. The first was that jobs would be protected, which is important for the local economy. The second was around service continuity. He said that his company took over on Sunday morning and that services have not been affected and have been running smoothly since then. Of course it is for that private, commercial company to look at its long-term service provision in that area, but Colin Craig gave me strong reassurances that the first thing that it will do is look at making structural efficiencies within the company as opposed to tweaking or withdrawing certain routes. Through the block grant, the Government is providing money for local authorities to be able to subsidise socially necessary services, as John Lamont described. I encourage John Lamont to speak to Colin Craig at West Coast Motors, which is making an investment of £3 million in 30 new buses for the fleet for the Borders. I certainly got reassurances, and I am sure that John Lamont would get those reassurances, too.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** Notwithstanding John Lamont's scaremongering about Borders Buses—I take it that he does not

want the railway line to be extended through his constituency—my constituents and I are generally impressed by and cautiously optimistic about the takeover by West Coast Motors under the livery Borders Buses. I recently met Colin Craig. Like the minister, I was impressed by him. Is the minister happy to meet Colin Craig and me to discuss the future of the bus services throughout the Borders and Midlothian? Will he, as he has already done with me, welcome the success of the Borders railway?

**Humza Yousaf:** After her put-down of John Lamont, I will be happy to do whatever Christine Grahame wants me to do. I am more than happy to meet her and Colin Craig.

In fairness, I should say that people across the chamber have recognised and mentioned the success of the Borders railway, including Rachael Hamilton, who is in the chamber. Are there things that we can look at to improve the Borders railway in future years? We have committed to look at the feasibility of extensions to the railway line—and we will meet that commitment. We celebrate and welcome the success of the Borders railway, but we will also make sure that the provision of bus services continues, particularly in our rural areas.

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):** Only this morning, bus company representatives told me that they are being discouraged from promoting the use of the free bus pass. Doing that would be very helpful, especially for areas in rural Scotland, particularly in North East Scotland, which is the area that I represent. Is it Government policy to discourage the promotion of the free bus pass for rural bus services? If so, why? I would be happy to hear that it is not Government policy to do that.

**Humza Yousaf:** No, it is not.

#### **Nurseries (North East Scotland)**

**4. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what help it provides to nurseries in the North East Scotland region. (S5O-00851)

**The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald):** This Government has done more than any previous Administration—or, indeed, the United Kingdom Government—to expand and invest in early learning and childcare. We have provided an additional £10.9 million of revenue funding to Aberdeen City Council and £14.6 million to Aberdeenshire Council over 2014-15 to 2016-17 to support the expansion to 600 hours of free childcare through local authority nurseries and private and third sector providers. Over the same period, we have provided additional capital funding of £5.4 million to

Aberdeen City Council and £8.7 million to Aberdeenshire Council.

**Alexander Burnett:** Four weeks ago, I asked the First Minister to support a nursery that was facing closure due to hikes in business rates. With no help forthcoming from the Scottish Government or additional assistance being provided to Aberdeenshire Council, that nursery has closed its doors. Parents, including a newly qualified general practitioner, are unable to find nursery places or to return to work. Will the minister explain how that news addresses the issues that are faced by the nursery, the people in the north-east who want to return to work, or the well-publicised shortage of GPs?

**Mark McDonald:** Let us just deal with the facts about Bridges Pre-School Nurseries. It operates two facilities in Westhill in Mr Burnett's constituency—one in Lawsonsdales Avenue and one in Arnhall. The nursery at Lawsonsdales Avenue is closing, but it provides no places that are funded through the Scottish Government or the local authority. However, council officials have advised that the company's Arnhall nursery will continue to be open and that all the children who attend Lawsonsdales Avenue nursery will be offered a place there. Perhaps Mr Burnett will check his facts. While he is doing that, he might want to reflect on the fact that he voted against the £660 million that this Government has invested in business rates relief, and that his Tory colleagues in Aberdeenshire voted against the local business rates relief being put in place by Aberdeenshire Council. Perhaps, before he comes to the chamber and tries to spin a yarn, he should first check his facts.

#### **A75 (Planned Upgrades)**

**5. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what upgrades are planned for the A75. (S5O-00852)

**The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf):** Since 2008, the Scottish Government has invested more than £50 million in six road improvement projects along the A75.

As set out in the programme for government, the forthcoming review of the strategic transport projects review will assess recommendations for strategic transport infrastructure priorities in Dumfries and Galloway, including the A75 corridor, and in the rest of Scotland.

As Finlay Carson knows, I recently visited Springholm and Crocketford, where I held positive discussions with residents and businesses on further traffic management measures.

**Finlay Carson:** I thank the minister for that response, and I also thank him, on the record, for

taking the time last week to come to Springholm and Crocketford in my constituency to hear at first hand the concerns of the residents who face the daily nightmare of huge numbers of lorries travelling to and from the ferry port at Cairnryan. I also welcome his commitment to improving traffic-calming measures, although I am sure that having visited the route and recognised that action must be taken, he will see that traffic calming is simply not enough to solve the problem.

Given that the draft national transport strategy review is not expected until next year, with the strategic transport projects review unlikely to follow until some time in 2019, will the minister acknowledge the immediacy of the problem and commit to an accelerated process to bring forward the desperately needed bypasses for Springholm and Crocketford? Will he also explore how the Government can mitigate the huge burden of road upgrades on rural businesses that are adjacent to the A75 when seeking planning permission to expand?

**Humza Yousaf:** When I met residents and businesses, I found their views to be mixed. One or two of the shops said that they are not in favour of a bypass because it would take traffic away from them. However, we should bear it in mind that some residents are very much in favour of a bypass.

I have to point out that the measure is a long-term ambition. As Finlay Carson rightly pointed out, there is a process that we must go through, which includes the national transport strategy review and the review of the strategic transport projects review. For the time being, however, we will look to introduce as quickly as possible the reverse-discrimination lights that we want at Springholm, plus some measures that we have said we will explore at Crocketford. I hope that that gives the member some reassurance.

I should also say that we had a good Dumfries and Galloway transport summit, which had been called for and was organised by my colleague Joan McAlpine. There are on-going actions that Finlay Carson and the public can keep on top of and see progress on.

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** Does the Government agree that it is vital for appropriate projects for the A75 and other roads to be identified locally and put to the review of the STPR for consideration? Furthermore, does the minister acknowledge that prioritising the stretch of the A75 between Dumfries and Gretna would bring greatest economic benefit to the area?

**Humza Yousaf:** I will be brief. Joan McAlpine makes a very good point. I thank her again for calling for the transport summit, which the Deputy First Minister chaired and I attended, and I say to

her that we are open minded about suggestions that come through the review of the STPR. I also confirm that the stretch of road that she mentioned will be given consideration in the review of the STPR.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** With regard to projects being brought forward for the A75, the minister will be aware that when in 2009 the local transport agency, the south west of Scotland transport partnership, undertook an appraisal, under the Scottish transport appraisal guidance, of possible road improvements in Dumfries and Galloway, the option of dualling the A75 between Gretna and Dumfries was assessed but was deemed, at that time, not to be cost effective under the assessment criteria. Does the minister recognise the need to review those criteria to ensure that the significant economic benefits to Dumfries and Galloway of dualling the A75 are properly recognised? That is, of course, an issue that was raised at the transport summit to which the minister referred.

**Humza Yousaf:** I do not think that it is necessary to review the criteria, although I am more than happy to listen to Colin Smyth's suggestions in that respect. As he will understand, there are competing priorities across the country. Wherever I travel, there are people who—understandably—want improvements in their local area and constituencies, and we are always looking to be as accommodating as possible. However, all that must be seen within the financial constraints that we are under. If the member has specific suggestions that he would like me to look at again with regard to the STPR refresh, I am open minded.

#### **Residential Care for Older People (Rural Areas)**

**6. Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it supports residential care for older people in rural areas. (S5O-00853)

**The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell):** This Government's integration of our health and social care services is one of the most significant reforms since the establishment of the national health service, which is allowing health and social care partnerships to make decisions that are right for their local communities, including people who live in our rural areas. We have taken action to protect our social care services and to deliver on our shared priorities. In the coming year, there will be almost half a billion pounds of NHS investment in social care and integration, and part of that investment will provide for continued delivery of the living wage for care workers, support for adults, and sustainability within the sector.



The formula that is used in distribution of the Government's funding to local authorities takes into account a number of needs-based factors, including rurality and the additional cost of providing services to island communities. The Scottish Government will continue to work with NHS boards, local authorities and other stakeholders to drive up quality in all of our communities to ensure appropriate social care provision is available.

**Kate Forbes:** The minister will be aware of the news that the Haven care home in Uig on Skye has announced that it will close in a matter of weeks, which is clearly a matter of concern to current residents and their relatives. Will the minister assure me that the Scottish Government will provide what support it can to ensure continuity of care for residents?

**Aileen Campbell:** Yes. As with all care home closures, the safety and wellbeing of the residents are paramount. We absolutely recognise the concern that Kate Forbes has expressed on the issue, and we have discussed the matter with NHS Highland, which is working in partnership with the provider and the families to seek alternative provision for the current residents. We will provide whatever support we can to local agencies to help them to address the issue.

In all cases of closure, the Care Inspectorate will work closely with the provider, the residents and the individual health and social care partnerships concerned to ensure that the health and wellbeing of every resident are assured, and that any changes that are required are implemented with minimal disruption. If she wishes, I am happy to meet Kate Forbes to provide further reassurance.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** That concludes general question time. Before we turn to our next item of business, I am sure that members will join me in welcoming to the gallery His Excellency Mr Arkady Rzegocki, who is the ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the United Kingdom. [*Applause.*]

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Engagements

**1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-01106)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I have engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

**Ruth Davidson:** Does the First Minister believe that Scotland's schools are staffed with enough teachers?

**The First Minister:** The education secretary and I have been very open about the recruitment challenges that exist in parts of our education system. That is why we have focused on making sure that we attract the best and brightest people into the teaching profession and, in partnership with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, making it easier to get teachers into the classroom. We will continue to take that action. Over the past number of years, as part of our overall programme of reform in education, we have funded local authorities to maintain the numbers of teachers in our schools, which is the right thing to do to ensure that we drive up standards and close the gap in attainment.

**Ruth Davidson:** The simple and correct answer would have been, "No, they are not." Here are the figures: since the Scottish National Party came to power, the number of teachers has fallen by more than 4,000 from 55,000 to just under 51,000. When schools need supply teachers to fill in, they struggle more and more.

This week, we contacted councils right around Scotland to find out by how much the stock of supply teachers has fallen in recent years. Here are the facts: in the Scottish Borders, there has been a drop in the number of supply teachers of more than a third since 2011; in Edinburgh, it is even worse, as the number has halved; and in Glasgow alone we have lost 1,000 supply teachers over the same timeframe.

There are fewer teachers, more vacancies and fewer supply teachers to fill in when needed. How can the First Minister defend that?

**The First Minister:** As we have debated in this chamber many times in the past, the number of teachers fluctuates over a period of years in line with fluctuations in the number of pupils in our schools. In recent years—this is a statement of fact—we funded local authorities to maintain teacher numbers as pupil numbers started to rise,

so that we could broadly maintain the teacher to pupil ratio, as well.

In terms of teacher recruitment challenges, in recent times—in partnership with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, as I said earlier—we have opened up 11 new routes to get teachers into classrooms and to make it easier to get the best and brightest in our teaching profession into classrooms to do what they do best. We have also increased the future intake for teaching training to just short of 400—about 370—for this year. We have asked the General Teaching Council to look at what more can be done to motivate supply teachers.

We are taking a range of actions to make sure that we have the right number of teachers in our schools teaching our young people, which is part of the wider programme that I spoke about. As part of our budget this year, we have taken the decision to get £120 million directly into the hands of headteachers so that they can invest those resources in the things that they believe will have the biggest impact on raising attainment. Whether that is more teaching staff or specialist staff in particular areas is at the discretion of headteachers to decide.

We continue to take the action that is required to get standards up in our schools generally and to close the attainment gap. We will continue to focus on exactly that.

**Ruth Davidson:** The First Minister is standing there and asking for applause for cleaning up her own mess. It is not a fluctuation; we are down more than 4,000 teachers. This week, we have learned the cost of teacher shortages. It got rather drowned out by the First Minister's referendum plans, but Education Scotland made it clear that the recruitment crisis that we face is damaging the quality of education in Scotland not just in primary schools, but in secondary schools, too. According to the head of School Leaders Scotland, the shortage is such that headteachers are having to take on staff not because they are right for the job, but because they are the only ones available. Does the First Minister think that that is a decent return for 10 years of SNP Government?

**The First Minister:** We have plenty of evidence of improving standards in our schools. I can point to the record exam passes that young people are achieving in our schools. I can point to the record positive destinations of young people leaving our schools and going into employment, further education or training. I can point to the beginning of the closing of the attainment gap, although I readily recognise that there is much more work to do.

Yes, we have a challenge when it comes to the recruitment of teachers in particular areas, and

that is not unique to Scotland. As I set out in my previous answer, we are taking a range of actions to ensure that we meet that challenge.

We will continue to focus on exactly that: the programme of reform in education. I have already mentioned the additional funding that is going direct to headteachers; the attainment challenge that is focusing on literacy and numeracy; and the introduction—I know that not everybody in the chamber agrees with it—of national assessment so that we can publish robust information about the performance in our schools and measure the improvements that we are making. That is a comprehensive programme of reform and the Deputy First Minister and I will continue to be absolutely focused on delivering it.

**Ruth Davidson:** The First Minister is going through actions that are being taken that are necessary only because her Government has been asleep at the wheel for the last decade.

The real question here is about this Government's priorities. This week, Sir Tom Hunter wrote in a national newspaper, setting out some of the positive steps that are finally being taken, such as leadership development for headteachers to ensure that we get better leaders in our schools. He also talks of the work that is being done by Skills Development Scotland to help link up young people with employers.

However, Sir Tom finished his piece with this. Let me read it to you:

"Scotland faces challenges so I ask, 'Is independence our biggest priority?'"—[*Interruption.*]

Members can groan if they like, but Sir Tom is only asking the question that a lot of people want answered. Separation or education—which is it?

**The First Minister:** First, on education, I know that there are many things that Ruth Davidson does not like to acknowledge. For example, there is the increase of around 30 per cent in Higher passes since 2007, the 90 per cent of young people going into positive destinations, the improvement that we are seeing in closing the attainment gap, the increase in provision for early years and childcare, which is crucial to closing that attainment gap in schools, the additional resources going into the hands of headteachers and, as Ruth Davidson has just spoken about, the extra support to headteachers, which John Swinney talked about this week, making sure that we have the best leadership in our schools.

Let us come back to the point about who is concentrating on those matters and who, at every opportunity, tries to shoehorn in the reference to the constitution.

I do not know how Ruth Davidson spends her week when she is not appearing in comedy shows

or talking about independence. Here are some of the things that I do in an average week: committing £10 million to support our food and drink sector; signing an economic partnership agreement with Bavaria—this is just in the last few days; chairing a cabinet meeting that decides the content of our social security bill, continues work on our 2018 budget plans, and talks about what we are doing to reduce cancer waiting times; finalising the mental health strategy, which will be published today; convening a meeting with the Minister for Social Security to talk about our new social security agency; announcing 300 new jobs in the city of Glasgow; talking to manufacturing companies about how we boost that sector of our economy; reviewing with the Deputy First Minister our education reform programme; and talking to Transport Scotland and the Minister for Transport and the Islands about the Queensferry crossing. I could go on, but I know that I am running out of time.

Let me focus on some of the things that other ministers have been doing while the Opposition has talked about its priorities. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport has provided funding to widen access to medical schools and funding to increase cervical cancer screening, and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills has provided funding for support for headteachers. The Minister for Public Health and Sport is extending family nurse partnerships, and the Minister for Childcare and Early Years has been setting out plans to double childcare. Last but not least, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities is providing support for young homeless people who are having their housing benefit removed by the Conservative Government at Westminster.

I will take no lectures about the day job. It is just a pity that so much of our day job is spent cleaning up the mess that has been made by a Tory Government.

**Ruth Davidson:** The First Minister talks about priorities. I know that she has had a tough week and that it is getting worse, but is she going to stand there after forcing a two-day debate on independence, forcing through a referendum against the wishes of the people of Scotland, and forcing through a vote on that and still say that education is her priority? Her Government has not debated education in Government time in the chamber since October. How does she answer that? There has been no education debate since October, but there has been independence every single day.

**The First Minister:** The difference between the Government and the Tories is that they debate and we deliver. Let me tell Ruth Davidson what we have delivered in Government time and with

Government money: £120 million for headteachers to improve standards in our schools. I will continue to allow Ruth Davidson and the Tories to debate with each other, but I will get on with delivering for the people of Scotland.

### Engagements

**2. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the week. (S5F-01108)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** More engagements to deliver for the people of Scotland.

**Kezia Dugdale:** One thing that the First Minister has not done is deliver justice for the Scottish mesh survivors. I met that group of women just a few days ago. Their lives have been destroyed by a medical procedure that was supposed to help them to get better. I spoke to one woman who cannot sit down without being in excruciating pain. Others have been paralysed. Those women feared that the review of the use of mesh products would be a whitewash, and that is exactly what it is. In their own words, they have been left “dismayed, disgusted and betrayed”. Will the First Minister apologise to the women who have been so badly let down?

**The First Minister:** I am, of course, deeply sorry for the suffering of the women who Kezia Dugdale mentioned and many others who have suffered complications because of treatment with mesh. As Kezia Dugdale knows, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport will make a statement on the issue in the chamber this afternoon.

The independent review that the Government instructed to look into those very issues was published on Monday this week, and it contains eight important conclusions that health boards across the country will now be expected to take forward. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport recently met two of the women who have, understandably, been quoted in the media—Olive McIlroy and Elaine Holmes—to hear their views directly in person. She met them to make clear that the Scottish mesh survivors group’s views have been heard and that, more than that, we want to ensure that their views remain at the centre of the work as we take it forward.

The chair of the review ensured that all the evidence that informed the review was made publicly available alongside the report when it was published. I am very grateful to all the members of the review group for the considerable time and effort that they have dedicated to that really important piece of work over the past number of years.

The health secretary will set out in further detail this afternoon the actions that will now be taken to

ensure that the recommendations are implemented in full. I hope that members will welcome the health secretary's statement when she makes it later.

**Kezia Dugdale:** That is a welcome apology but, make no mistake, there has been a cover-up and this is a national scandal. Whatever the cabinet secretary says this afternoon, the report has been compromised. We know that the original draft report was supported by all members of the review group, but the final report has lost the faith of those involved, and that is why the chair, the clinical expert and the patients' representatives have all resigned. Even the First Minister's successor as health secretary, Alex Neil, said that it was "totally unacceptable". Most important of all, countless women whose lives have been destroyed by the procedure think that the report is a whitewash. If those women do not have any faith in the report, how possibly can the First Minister?

**The First Minister:** There are extremely important issues involved here. I say as a matter of fact and not to underplay any of the issues involved that, as far as I am aware, the chair resigned for personal reasons and not for any reasons associated with concern about the report.

As we move forward from the statement that Shona Robison will give this afternoon to implement the recommendations, I take very seriously—and I know that the health secretary does, too—the responsibility to work really hard to ensure that we build the faith of those who have been affected. That is one of our most important responsibilities. As I said earlier, all the evidence that informed the review has been made publicly available alongside the report—it is available for anybody to read. The health secretary was clear in establishing with the chair of the review that that should be the case. The recommendations in the report must now be taken forward in a way that has the confidence of the women who have been affected.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** It does not have their confidence.

**The First Minister:** I ask members to wait to hear the statement that Shona Robison will make this afternoon. They will have the opportunity, rightly and properly, to ask questions about that statement. Shona Robison will set out clearly the steps that will be taken to ensure that all the right action is taken in a way that restores the confidence and faith of the women who have been affected. That is a responsibility that the health secretary and I take seriously. I hope that, when the statement is made to Parliament this afternoon, although members will ask searching questions, as they are right to do, there will be support for the actions that the health secretary will set out.

**Kezia Dugdale:** The women want to have faith in the process, but they also want action. I have an email from Sophie, who is 18 and a mesh survivor's daughter. Sophie emailed Shona Robison at half past 2 this morning, as she cared for her mother. Her email said:

"I'm struggling to remember my mum before mesh took her from me.

No, she's not dead, but she is a shell of the woman I'd previously loved, adored and been inspired by.

You should live a day in our life. On the days when the pain is so bad my fiercely independent mum can't even brush her own teeth."

Given what the First Minister knows about the issue, if a doctor told her or someone she loves that they should have the procedure, would she go ahead with it? If her answer is no, or even that she is not sure, surely she must ban this devastating and dangerous practice once and for all.

**The First Minister:** My heart goes out to the woman who Kezia Dugdale has just referred to in reading that email from her daughter. Kezia Dugdale rightly calls for action, and that is exactly what the independent review was set up to recommend. The health secretary will set out to Parliament this afternoon exactly that—the action that is now being taken.

One of the issues is that of genuinely informed consent.

**Kezia Dugdale:** Ban it.

**The First Minister:** There has been a suspension of routine procedures of this nature, although if women have the information, are in pain and choose to go ahead, they have the ability to do so.

The issues of safety, informed consent and ensuring that absolutely the right guidance is in place are all at the heart of the recommendations that the health secretary will talk about this afternoon.

One thing to say is that, with some exceptions—even in the history of this Parliament—health secretaries are rarely clinicians; we have to rely on expert clinical advice, as I know from the years that I spent as health secretary. Sometimes that advice can be contradictory, and sometimes it can be difficult to find the right way forward on the basis of that advice. We use our best endeavours to do so.

That is why the independent review was set up and it is why all the evidence that has informed the outcome of the review has been published. I and the health secretary recognise that some of the women who were involved in the review have lost faith with it. Therefore, it is a crucial part of our responsibility to restore that faith. The statement that the health secretary will make this afternoon,

in which she will outline the action that we will take, is a key part of that.

I do not expect members of this Parliament to stop asking searching, important questions on behalf of their constituents. I absolutely accept the importance of that. I hope that we can also build some consensus around the actions that will be outlined in the chamber later this afternoon.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** There are two supplementary questions.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** This week, the Marchmont & Sciennes Development Trust made a formal submission for a community interest bid for the Royal hospital for sick children site, in my constituency. The sick kids is not just a hospital but a beloved institution for many people who live in Edinburgh and beyond. It has touched the lives of thousands of patients and parents, including my family.

Will the First Minister give me and my whole community the assurance that the submission, which must be approved by ministers in the coming weeks, will be treated carefully and seriously by the Government? It is clear that there are competing interests in the process, given that the Government has an interest in the sale of the site and must approve the bid as a valid community interest bid. Will the First Minister spell out the criteria and approach that her Government will use to assess the submission?

**The First Minister:** I know how important the issues are when a much-loved hospital is no longer to be used as a hospital. In this case, of course, that is because a new sick kids hospital is being built in Edinburgh. The use of the site and what happens to it is important to the community.

The member asked whether ministers will make sure that careful and thorough consideration is given to the application to which he referred. We absolutely will. Obviously, I cannot pre-empt that consideration or the decision.

Not just in cases such as this one but in general, as we see from legislation such as the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, part of what we want to do is ensure that communities are at the heart of plans for the regeneration and redevelopment of their own areas. Those principles and criteria will very much be used to judge the application to which the member referred.

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** This week, the transport minister confirmed that there have been more than 700 separate deployments of temporary traffic lights on the A76 trunk road over the past 1,000 days. Does the First Minister agree that that is unacceptable? Can she tell my constituents what action the Scottish Government

will take to bring that strategically important route back up to standard?

**The First Minister:** We do not want the use of temporary traffic lights where that can be avoided, but I am sure that all members and everyone who is listening will know that in instances where there are road works or when there have been landslips or problems caused by weather, the use of temporary traffic lights is often unavoidable as roads are repaired.

I will be happy to come back to the member on the detail, particularly on the number of times when temporary traffic lights have been used on the A76. I absolutely agree with him that we want to keep such instances to a minimum. However, sometimes repair work on our road system is unavoidable and necessary to ensure that we have an efficient and effective road system across our country.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

3. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S5F-01113)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** On Tuesday 18 April.

**Patrick Harvie:** Just a day after the United Kingdom Government signalled its formal intention for the UK to withdraw not only from the European Union but from the single market, which even leave campaigners promised would not happen and which will rip away our freedom of movement and undermine recruitment in education, health, social care and throughout our economy, I found it astonishing to hear the Conservatives raise the issue of recruitment in public services.

Today, the UK Government is publishing its absurd repeal bill, which will cover huge areas of power that UK ministers should have no place in exercising. What is the First Minister's view on the scope of that bill? Does she agree that it must not be allowed to change legislation in areas that are not specifically reserved under the Scotland Act 1998?

**The First Minister:** Patrick Harvie raises a number of important points. First, he is right to point out that the biggest risk to recruitment in our public services right now is the one posed by the Conservatives in the form of Brexit. It is quite breathtaking hypocrisy for any Conservative to stand up and talk about those issues without recognising the responsibility that they bear.

Secondly, the great repeal bill is hugely important for the Government and for Parliament. One of the things that should concern everybody is the way in which Conservative ministers at Westminster, echoed by Conservative Party

members in this chamber, choose their words so carefully. They talk about not taking away any decisions that we already make here as if we are somehow supposed to be grateful for that.

The issue with the great repeal bill is that, if powers that are currently with the European Union in areas that are wholly devolved—agriculture and fishing, for example—are to be repatriated, where should they go? Under the Scotland Act 1998, those powers should automatically come to the Scottish Parliament. Nobody in the UK Government—I discussed this with the Prime Minister on Monday—and nobody in the Conservative Party will give that guarantee.

That leads me to suspect that the Tories are planning a power grab on Parliament. That will be absolutely unacceptable. When that happens, I do not expect the Tories to back us up, but I will be looking carefully at the Labour members. Surely, in those circumstances, not even Labour members could stay subservient to the Tories. Surely even they would have to stand up for Scotland's interests.

**Patrick Harvie:** It is not only the Scottish Government that should recognise the contempt that is being shown by the UK; all in this Parliament should recognise it. The UK Government has not only refused to discuss with ministers the timing of the triggering of article 50 and any other details of its plans but refused to come and answer questions from our parliamentary committees, which would give us all, whatever our view of the issues, the ability to ask it serious questions.

In the face of the contempt that the UK Government has shown Scotland, we want to put the power over Scotland's future back into the hands of the voters who live here. UK ministers want that power for themselves. They want the ability to rewrite laws by fiat without the normal checks and balances. We should remember that this is the same UK Government that promised to write into law the permanence of the Scottish Parliament, which 74 per cent of the people in Scotland voted to create, and it abandoned that promise.

While UK ministers wish to seek for themselves the power to rewrite laws by abusing antique powers to bypass Parliament, will the First Minister commit to ensuring that there will be full parliamentary scrutiny? That is not only about one Parliament; all Parliaments need the ability to hold all ministers to account.

**The First Minister:** I absolutely agree with Patrick Harvie. Before we get the usual arrogant sniggering from Tory members, everybody in this chamber who wants Parliament to be respected should agree with him. All the devolved

Administrations—not just that in Scotland—have been treated with contempt by the UK Government so far during the process.

Patrick Harvie rightly said that we did not see the article 50 letter before it was published, and we did not know when it would be published until we read about it on the BBC. We did not know what it was going to say but, to be fair, the Prime Minister did give me an insight into its contents on Monday this week. This is a direct quote. She told me that the article 50 letter would be, “Not detailed. Not short, but not lengthy either.” I am grateful to her for that insight into the UK Government's thinking.

In case anybody thinks that this is just me as a Scottish National Party First Minister complaining about the UK Government, people should also listen to Carwyn Jones, the First Minister of Wales, who said yesterday that, in his view, the devolved Administrations had been treated with contempt and that the behaviour of the UK Government was doing more than anything else to undermine the United Kingdom. It is therefore really important for everybody across the chamber to stand up for the rights of this Parliament before we go any further in the process.

I am sure that the Conservatives in particular will be interested in my final point. This morning, Ruth Davidson, Adam Tomkins and Murdo Fraser were tweeting furiously about research that John Curtice has published. I will point to a finding in that research. When respondents were asked what they thought of the statement,

“Scotland is a nation and so should not have to leave the EU when a majority of Scots voted to stay”,

a majority of people agreed with it. The fact of the matter is that people do not want Tory Brexit. The question is: what will we do to protect people from the impact of Tory Brexit?

**The Presiding Officer:** We will now have supplementary questions.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** This morning, a damning report on the forensic medical services that are provided to victims of sexual crime was published. It described the service that some receive as “unacceptable”. There are significant gaps in provision around the country, and we have fallen behind best practice and services elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The report confirmed that victims who are in the islands have to make what are often traumatic trips to the mainland for examination. I know that the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice feel that that compounds the trauma that they have suffered.

Will the First Minister give a commitment to update the Parliament as soon as we return from

recess on the actions that her Government plans to take on the back of this morning's report?

**The First Minister:** Yes—I am happy to ensure that a full ministerial statement is made on the issue. I think that all of us agree that the consequences and the impact of rape and sexual assault are devastating and that we must do all that we can to support victims when they suffer those heinous crimes.

In response to the report, the Government has today announced that the chief medical officer for Scotland will chair a group of experts from health and justice services to ensure that health boards improve the provision of appropriate healthcare facilities for any victim who requires a forensic examination. That will complement work that Healthcare Improvement Scotland is already doing to develop new national standards for use by health boards. There will be a consultation on those standards, which will be published by the end of this year.

Many people talk about the importance of the sexual assault referral centre model, which is certainly one way of delivering such care. We do not think that it will necessarily work for all parts of Scotland, but it is vital that in all parts of Scotland victims of sexual offences get the support that they require.

Liam McArthur rightly raises the particular issues that island communities face. Although he is the MSP for Orkney Islands, I know that he will be interested to learn—as will Tavish Scott—that NHS Shetland has made a public commitment to providing a holistic approach for victims of rape and sexual assault and that it is working to put in place the necessary equipment, accommodation and appropriately trained staff to deliver on that. We will work with other health boards—and other island health boards, in particular—to make sure that the same approach is taken.

I have a final, important point to make. When victims of such crimes have to undergo a forensic examination, many of them want that to be done by a female doctor, for reasons that all of us can absolutely understand. One issue that we have been trying to understand better is why more female doctors do not come forward to work in this area. We have been working with NHS Education for Scotland to understand that. It carried out a survey that closed at the end of February, and we are working to analyse the responses.

I recognise that the situation that today's report identifies is not good enough, and I have no hesitation in saying that. Work is under way to address the challenges, and the group that has been announced today, which the chief medical officer will chair, will make sure that we take whatever further action is required.

**Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green):** The First Minister will be aware of the excellent investigative reporting by Richard Smith, David Leask, Ian Fraser and others in *The Herald* on the havoc that is caused by criminal enterprises that are conducted around the world by Scottish limited partnerships. Following a report on Monday that SLPs were involved in the £16 billion Laundromat money-laundering scheme, is the Scottish Government considering any reforms to the criminal law of Scotland that could be deployed to crack down on the litany of crime that is being perpetrated under the cover of these secretive and unaccountable legal vehicles?

In particular, does the First Minister agree that a new offence of vicarious liability could be one way of holding to account the individuals and firms that incorporate SLPs that are involved in criminal activity in cases in which they take no steps to undertake due diligence on the identity, motives or purposes of the partnerships that they are responsible for creating?

**The First Minister:** I thank Andy Wightman for raising the issue and I pay tribute to David Leask and his colleagues at *The Herald* for the excellent work that they have done to shine a light on such practices. We will continue to look at whether we can take action within our devolved powers to better tackle those issues.

Andy Wightman raised the issue of a particular offence of vicarious liability. For reasons that he will understand, I will not give him an answer on that today, but I will ask the justice secretary to consider that option as part of an overall look at the matter.

As Andy Wightman and other members know, we are talking about the conduct of limited partnerships, and many of the solutions to the problems that have been identified lie in the hands of the Westminster Government. We have been pressing it to act—SNP members of Parliament have been particularly vociferous in the Commons in doing so and we will continue to press for action there. We will not shy away from taking action using our own powers if we have the ability to do that.

I will ask the justice secretary to respond to Andy Wightman in detail in due course.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** Scotland has a great record in attracting investment—second only to London in recent years. Can the First Minister provide an update on inward investment and plans to reach out beyond our borders to attract jobs and growth to Scotland?

**The First Minister:** It is really important, particularly now, that we give a message that Scotland is open for business. We continue to be considered as a prime business location for global

companies looking for a foothold in and access to Europe. Just yesterday I was able to visit Genpact in Glasgow to announce its growth and expansion plans, which involve more than 300 new jobs for the city of Glasgow. I hope that everyone across the chamber will welcome that.

The Ernst & Young attractiveness survey is published regularly and in the most recent one it highlighted the fact that we have a record level of investment projects in Scotland. For some years now we have seen that Scotland is the most successful part of the UK for inward investment outside of London and the south east. We have to work ever harder to continue that success, given the implications of Brexit. That is why we have been taking action, for example, by establishing investment hubs in Dublin, London and Berlin.

Next week I will undertake a series of engagements in the United States, focused on creating jobs, opportunities and economic links for Scotland. Notwithstanding all the challenges that we face that are not of our making, we will continue to focus on doing everything that we can to bring jobs and investment to Scotland.

### Tourism

**4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what further initiatives the Scottish Government will take to boost tourism, in light of a 15.6 per cent increase in attendance at Scotland's visitor attractions in 2016. (S5F-01131)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** As those figures illustrate, it has been a record year for Scotland's leading visitor attractions, as they once again outperform the rest of the UK in terms of the growth in visitor numbers. The success of our leading visitor attractions will continue to play a vital role in making Scotland a destination of first choice for visitors from the UK and across the world.

We will continue to work with VisitScotland and other stakeholders to explore how we can achieve the aims of our tourism Scotland 2020 strategy, delivering a greater degree of connectivity than ever before through new direct air routes and maximising the economic impact of that key growth sector of our economy.

**Kenneth Gibson:** Last year was indeed a bumper year for Scottish tourism, with visitor numbers growing more than twice as fast as those in the rest of the UK. Leading attractions are vital in attracting to Scotland visitors whose expenditure will serve to grow employment in our thriving tourism and hospitality sectors. However, the 10 most popular UK attractions were all in London, with the National Museum of Scotland the most visited attraction in Scotland with 1.8 million

visitors. In Ayrshire, our top attraction, Culzean castle and country park, was only 133rd on the list.

Although a wide range of attractions and excellent heritage and museum collections continue to provide high quality and exciting experiences, what more can be done to encourage people, not just to make Scotland a destination of first choice, but to visit areas such as Ayrshire when they are in Scotland?

**The First Minister:** I absolutely share Kenny Gibson's focus on the importance of getting the benefits of tourism to all parts of our country and not just our cities or our most famous attractions. As somebody who was born and brought up in Ayrshire, I know that there are many excellent visitor attractions in Ayrshire, including, of course, the fantastic Culzean castle.

Scotland has got so much to offer tourists. Not only are we steeped in history and heritage, but we have the best landscapes in the world and a huge opportunity to capture interest in marine tourism. We will continue to work with partners, including in Ayrshire, to implement, for example, our marine and coastal strategy—the first of its kind in the United Kingdom—which will have particular relevance to Kenny Gibson's constituency.

We will work with everybody across Scotland to ensure that we attract more people to come to Scotland, to spend money here and enjoy everything that our country has to offer. Tourism is one of our most important and successful economic sectors and we have to do everything possible to ensure that it continues to be so.

### Police Scotland (Armed Officers)

**5. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the First Minister whether Police Scotland plans to increase the number of armed officers. (S5F-01107)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The number of armed police officers is principally an operational decision for the chief constable, who takes account of a range of factors, including intelligence reports and threat and risk assessments. As I said in the chamber at last week's First Minister's question time, I spoke to the chief constable after the tragic events at Westminster and he assured me that he had the resources that he required to respond appropriately to that incident. That included the uplift in armed officers that was announced last year.

Following the incident in London last week, we saw a substantial increase in the number of armed officers on duty here in Scotland, and a configuration of resources to ensure that there



was a high-profile, non-armed police presence across the country, too.

**Jamie Greene:** This is indeed an operational matter for the police, but we had very mixed messages yesterday. Police chiefs have said that they are already match fit and do not see the need for more firearms officers, but the Scottish Police Federation, which represents rank and file, has said that it does not have the capability right now to use armed police if required. Who does the First Minister think is right?

**The First Minister:** We will always work to ensure that the police have the resources that they need. That is why, in June last year, we agreed with the police—although this was driven by the judgment of the chief constable—that there should be an increase of 124 in the number of armed officers in Scotland, taking the total to 479 officers.

In the wake of last week's incident, it was possible immediately for the chief constable to substantially increase—in fact almost double, I think—the number of armed officers who were on duty. The justice secretary and I regularly have discussions with the chief constable and his colleagues, not just about policing in general but, given the threats that we face right now, about the capacity and capability of the police to deal with the increased risk from terrorist attacks. We will continue to do so and, as part of those discussions, we will continue to listen carefully to what rank-and-file officers, through the Scottish Police Federation, tell us.

### School Inspections

**6. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to reports that only one in 18 schools were inspected last year. (S5F-01132)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Education Scotland is committed to increasing the number and frequency of inspections in future years. That is one of the reasons why it has been undertaking a review of inspection approaches, in consultation with schools and key stakeholders. Those new approaches will help to support the achievement of the twin aims of closing the attainment gap and raising the bar for all in Scottish education.

It is important to add that, in addition to inspections, Education Scotland provides support to schools. In 2015-16, it carried out a review of every local authority and a specific inspection of Argyll and Bute's education functions.

**Iain Gray:** The fact is that Education Scotland has been reducing, not increasing, the number of inspections. In fact, the rate is less than half the rate of inspections in 2007, when the Scottish National Party came to power. Does the First

Minister not see that the problem here is that Education Scotland is inspecting its own delivery of educational policy and has clearly decided to do less of it? Will she accept that the merging of the inspectorate into Education Scotland was a mistake that should be reversed?

**The First Minister:** On the last point, those are matters that we are considering in the context of the education and governance review, on which we will report to Parliament in due course.

On the trend in inspections in the past couple of years, in 2014-15 there were 138; in 2015-16 there were 143 and I think that in 2016-17 there were the same number. As I said, Education Scotland is reviewing its approach to inspection with a view to increasing the number of inspections.

I am quite perplexed by Iain Gray's question. He seems to be saying, fairly legitimately in some respects, that there are not enough inspections in our schools. The reason why I am perplexed is that I remember very well the speech that his party leader made in this chamber in September 2015, in response to my speech outlining the programme for Government. Kezia Dugdale said:

"the First Minister should immediately suspend all school inspections for one year".—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2015; c 26.]

Had Labour been in power, there would not have been 143 inspections in our schools; there would have been zero inspections in our schools. That is why I am slightly perplexed by Iain Gray's question.

### Junior Doctors (Working Hours)

**7. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what progress the Scottish Government has made on its commitment to reduce the number of working hours for junior doctors. (S5F-01126)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The passionate campaigning of Brian Connelly following the tragic death of his daughter Lauren has already led to real improvements in the hours that junior doctors work. Working with the British Medical Association and the national health service, we have already ended the practice of junior doctors being rostered to work for seven nights in a row. That is a major advance and is a tribute to Mr Connelly's campaign.

As a result of that and other steps, the number of hours worked by junior doctors has fallen from an average of 58 hours a week in 2004 to an average of 48 hours a week now. However, we are determined—as the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport has said previously—to go further. Right now, we are working with the BMA

Scottish junior doctors committee to ensure minimum rest periods following night shifts and improvements to rest facilities, while we work towards what remains our goal of a 48-hour maximum week for junior doctors.

**Anas Sarwar:** I am pleased that the First Minister raises the heroic efforts of Brian Connelly, who lost his daughter Lauren just before she turned 24 years old, as she was driving home after working as a junior doctor.

I want to read directly from Mr Connelly's letter to the health secretary this week. He stated:

"You have broken your commitment to implement an actual working week of 48 hours with no averaging as you promised to me in writing. Doctors are still being scheduled to work 12 days in a row, with some working over 117 hours between days off. Your quote to *The Times* in response is yet further evidence of your failure to treat this issue with the seriousness and urgency it deserves."

Mr Connelly goes on:

"You blithely confirm that 'all junior doctor rotas in Scotland fully comply with the Working Time Directive' knowing full well that any compliance with the letter of the Directive is only being achieved by a combination of averaging and the continuing failure to record actual working hours."

He adds:

"Sound bites for the press are no substitute for action and are a poor camouflage for the leadership which is required to tackle this national scandal. Their excessive working hours cannot be justified, they are inherently dangerous and they must change and change soon before there are even more deaths. The responsibility for effecting the necessary change rests firmly upon your Government's shoulders".

I ask the First Minister directly—will she instruct the health secretary to apologise to Mr Connelly and to get to grips with this scandal?

**The First Minister:** Nothing that I can say in the chamber will ever satisfy Anas Sarwar, but I hope that I can reassure Mr Connelly—

**Anas Sarwar:** Not me—Mr Connelly.

**The First Minister:** I hope that I can reassure Mr Connelly, because he has campaigned on this issue and I think can take great credit for some of the improvements that we have already made.

When the health secretary wrote to Mr Connelly in 2015 after she met him, she said:

"I believe that we can commit to"

the 48-hour maximum working week

"as the longer-term aim, but as I said, I wish to be in a position to be able to make this commitment with a firm and achievable timescale."

That remains our position. The later letter simply recognised that, in order to deliver that, we have to work with the BMA and the junior doctors committee.

Anas Sarwar mentioned *The Times*. It would be worth Anas Sarwar reading a letter that appeared in *The Times* two days ago from the junior doctors committee, which said:

"It is vital for patient safety that rotas are well-designed and adequately staffed."

"However, rather than just focusing on the number of working hours in one week, a more effective way of doing this is to address specific risk areas as a priority."

All we are saying is that we are working with the junior doctors committee to work out how best to deliver the commitment that we have made. That commitment—to put it beyond any doubt—is to work towards a maximum 48-hour week. That is what Mr Connelly, rightly, wants us to do.

I will say again that along the way, thanks in great part to Mr Connelly, we have already made a number of improvements—the end of junior doctors being rostered to work for seven nights in a row, which was one of the early demands that was made; and we have been reducing the average number of hours from 58 to 48. Therefore, progress has been made—thanks in large part, as I said, to Mr Connelly. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport will be very happy to meet him again, and I assure him that we remain committed, working with doctors, to delivering a maximum 48-hour week for junior doctors.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes First Minister's questions.

**Anas Sarwar:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The First Minister just said that the practice of working seven days in a row has ended in the national health service. Freedom of information requests have confirmed that that is not the case, as Mr Connelly confirms in his letter to the health secretary, which says that people are still working for 12 days in a row without a day off. I ask the First Minister to withdraw that false statement, please, as it is incorrect and disrespectful to doctors the length and breadth of Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Sarwar—that is not a point of order. You may pursue the issue in questions or in the chamber, or through any means possible.

## Elmwood Campus

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** As the Parliament is still sitting, I ask members of the public to leave quietly, please.

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-04703, in the name of Willie Rennie, on the future of Elmwood campus. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament understands that Elmwood College in Cupar was the first regional farm centre to be established in Scotland; recognises its work in rural education including its worldwide expertise in golf education and training; understands that the college functions were divided between the Scottish Rural University College and Fife College in November 2013, before Fife College vacated the Elmwood Campus in summer 2016; notes with concern that there are now fewer students studying at Elmwood and fewer courses available; welcomes the discussions between Fife College, SRUC and the Scottish Funding Council on a plan for the future, and notes the hope that this will result in a sustainable partnership delivering more courses for more students.

12:52

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Presiding Officer, you encouraged members of the public to leave the gallery quietly, but they can, of course, stay if they wish to listen to the debate.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes—members of the public may stay if they wish to be entertained by Mr Rennie.

**Willie Rennie:** I am grateful for the opportunity to debate Elmwood campus—formerly Elmwood College—in Cupar, in my constituency. It is a great seat of learning that is open for business, with great staff, students and courses. The bad news is this: according to the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council,

“Following the transfer of Fife College's offer at Elmwood Campus to other campuses in the area, provision at the Elmwood Campus of Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) is no longer viable.”

The good news is that I know that the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science will be keen to assist, and she will want to provide sufficient guarantees to ensure that there is a vibrant centre of education in the heart of north-east Fife for years to come. I want her to broker an agreement between Fife College and Scotland's Rural College; to find the revenue for student activity to ensure that there is a critical mass of activity; and to provide a new building to replace the existing ageing buildings.

Elmwood began its life back in the 1950s, with around 100 students, and it acquired a new purpose-built building in the 1960s before

becoming, in 1972, Elmwood Agricultural and Technical College—the first regional farm centre in Scotland—with around 2,000 students. Stratheden hospital farm was purchased in 1971 to offer hill farming and shepherding courses.

In 1997, the college became the first educational establishment in Britain to have its own 18-hole working golf course, only 9 miles from St Andrews. The golf there is recognised globally. Students of the higher national certificate and higher national diploma courses in professional golf have found careers as Professional Golfers Association assistants at world-famous clubs such as Gullane, North Berwick, Ladybank and Royal Troon, as well as at numerous clubs across Europe and in Dubai.

Elmwood became part of SRUC on 1 October 2012. Today, the SRUC Elmwood campus offers courses in animal care, sport, golf, greenkeeping, horticulture, hospitality and rural skills.

What is the problem? It is that the settlement that followed the Government's decision to split Elmwood between Fife College and SRUC was inherently unstable. SRUC had well-publicised leadership issues and there were clear financial issues, too, with significant cuts imposed by the Scottish Government to the further education budget. Elmwood was left rudderless. SRUC was uncommunicative and unresponsive to the concerns of Fife College and its own staff in Cupar. The sale of the farm and courses moving to other centres such as the Oatridge campus compounded the problem.

The division of the campus between Fife College and SRUC created instability, with Fife College claiming that it was unsustainable for it as it had none of the assets but was expected to pay a share of the costs. Fife College subsequently, and rather hastily, pulled out, promising to provide entry-level courses in local schools such as Bell Baxter high school, but that has not happened. The combination of the withdrawal of Fife College and the removal of some courses by SRUC left the Elmwood campus underutilised. That is why the current set-up has been judged by the Scottish funding council as being not viable.

North-east Fife has a long agricultural heritage, which was the reason for the college being located there in the first place. In addition, with the home of golf at St Andrews on its doorstep, the golf provision, in terms of both greenkeeping and sport, is a clear draw for students. North-east Fife is also a rural and remote area that needs further education provision locally, and we have a centre of learning with excellent staff operating there right now. Those are the reasons why the college in Cupar is essential.

We will need a new building that is fit for purpose and combines the needs of rural education from SRUC and further education from Fife College. The current building has a significant maintenance cost attached to it, so it needs to be replaced. I say gently to the minister that those problems really began only when the regionalisation of colleges was introduced by the Scottish Government. I therefore equally gently suggest that the Government has a responsibility to secure a longer-term future for the college in Cupar.

The Scottish funding council has issued a tender for a study that is entitled “North East Fife FE curriculum study” and which starts as follows:

“Following the transfer of Fife College’s offer at Elmwood Campus to other campuses in the area, provision at the Elmwood Campus of Scotland’s Rural College ... is no longer viable. As a consequence, there is a need, through an evidence based study, to identify the curriculum needs for the area and develop a viable model for its delivery.”

The remit of the study is to identify an appropriate curriculum offer for north-east Fife that meets the economic needs and student demand for the area; to consider and identify speciality courses, aligned with the economic development strategy in north-east Fife, that would attract students from outside the area; and to identify a viable delivery model for the area, including shared and co-location options. That sounds promising, but the trouble is that the work is to be carried out through March and April, although we need decisions to be made now in order to be ready for the academic year 2018-19. We need the combination of rural education and further education, including both entry-level and full-time FE courses, to be provided in the Cupar area in a new building.

We need a joint plan, funding for more student places and a new building. That is the challenge for the minister today and I look forward to her response.

12:59

**Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** I thank Willie Rennie for lodging the motion on the Elmwood campus in Cupar. When I was growing up, it was known as Elmwood College, and we could go there to get our hair cut. Indeed, my friends and I regularly got haircuts for the bargain price of £10. As you might know, Presiding Officer, I have a little more hair than Willie Rennie, so I am sure that you will agree that that was quite a bargain in 2001. In our last year at school, we could go to Elmwood and study for a higher in psychology, which allowed many of my friends to pick up the extra credits that they needed to get into university. Every May, my mum and others from all over north-east Fife would descend upon the college at the summer open day

to locate the perfect hanging baskets, beautifully planted and prepared by the students.

The college is of vital importance for the rural economy in the northern part of the kingdom. For many future gamekeepers and farmers, it continues to provide a stepping stone from school to employment.

When I met the former principal of Fife College, Hugh Logan, he was of the view that there were issues with regard to the maintenance of college buildings, and that that issue with estates was not specific to the Cupar campus. Last year, I visited the new Levenmouth campus, to which full-time programmes were transferred from Elmwood. My colleague David Torrance MSP and I met lecturers and students to discuss their experiences in the new building. Beauty students now have access to state-of-the-art facilities, with treatment rooms. Hair students have access to a modern salon. Childcare students have spacious tutorial rooms and wi-fi access across the building.

The campus has been supported by £25 million of investment from the Scottish Government, and it sits alongside the new Levenmouth academy. However, a lot of the staff at the new building have to travel from north-east Fife to their new workplace in Buckhaven and, although the facilities are excellent and the staff were positive about their surroundings, transport links to the new campus are still in their infancy. Many of my constituents in the Glenrothes area have spoken of the difficulties that they have had in accessing the buses, with some having to catch two or three buses, and they have pointed out the infrequency of the service. That issue is perhaps even more pressing, given the rurality of north-east Fife and the distances that people travel from places such as Tayport or Anstruther and the east neuk.

On a specific point relating to my constituency, I would be remiss in my duty as the member for Mid Fife and Glenrothes if I did not emphasise to the minister the importance of infrastructure, particularly the need for the reinstatement of the Levenmouth rail link. Education and closing the poverty-related attainment gap are the number 1 priority for the Scottish Government, but we need the transport links to join up aspiration and ambition in the next generation, to enable young people to access vital learning and job opportunities.

That is of particular importance when we consider that, in 2015-16, the college delivered 8.4 per cent of activity to students from the country’s 10 per cent most deprived areas—an increase from 8.2 per cent 2014-15 and 7.9 per cent in 2013-14 respectively.

Since last summer, Elmwood campus has been run completely by Scotland’s Rural College, as

Willie Rennie said. The land-based courses, for which Elmwood has always had a good reputation, continue to run. Those include gamekeeping, wildlife management, horticulture and a selection of golf and greenkeeping-related qualifications. Notwithstanding that fact, the Government has recognised the need to review curriculum provision and, since the end of last month, Rocket Science consultants have been commissioned to do exactly that. Although I am the member for the neighbouring constituency, I very much hope that the Rocket Science consultants will reconsider curriculum provision at Elmwood.

For young people like me who grew up in the wee towns and villages of north-east Fife, where the buses are not regular and there is no rail service, let us look again at Elmwood to ensure that all students and would-be students get equal access to further education opportunities wherever they live in Fife.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** To clarify, did you say Rocket Science consultants?

**Jenny Gilruth:** That is correct.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** My goodness, there is a name.

13:03

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Presiding Officer, I hope that you are not thinking of changing your profession.

I thank Willie Rennie for lodging the motion for today's debate and for giving us the opportunity to discuss the future of the SRUC Elmwood campus in Cupar. I also take the opportunity to thank all the staff and students for the outstanding work they do, particularly in an area of north-east Fife that some consider to be a little more isolated in terms of accessing further and higher education, and which has the access problems that Jenny Gilruth has referred to.

Along with St Andrews, Cupar is a town that I know well and I admire its proud agricultural heritage and its role as an important market town for the surrounding area. Its economy reflects that heritage, with major employers in the area including agri-businesses such as Kettle Produce Ltd, Scotsfruit Ltd, Quaker Oats Ltd and Fisher and Donaldson. One of the other large employers in the town is the Elmwood campus itself. It is part of the agricultural heritage of the area, and that is just one of the strong reasons for ensuring that everything possible is done to secure its future.

Willie Rennie is right to point to the challenges facing the college at a time of financial stringency, of changing roles for colleges, of the widening access programme, of colleges being asked to deliver more in terms of higher education courses,

and of the on-going challenges that colleges face in the post-merger era, which, as Audit Scotland noted in its most recent report, has brought additional pressures.

The three parts to Elmwood campus—Carslogie Road, the golf course facility at Stratheden, which was added in 1997, and Cupar Muir farm—all have distinctive courses on offer, such as animal care, sport, horticulture and cookery.

As the motion notes, the college has been especially well known for its golf and greenkeeping courses, in which it has world-leading expertise and which have produced a number of distinguished golfing alumni. The facilities at the college's Stratheden campus are excellent and it is the only educational facility in the country with its own 18-hole golf course. Where better to have such expertise than a short hop away from St Andrews, the home of golf?

Clearly, there has been a recent history of difficult issues at the college, such as the weakness in collaboration between Fife College and SRUC, the tough financial cuts that colleges have faced and the concerns about future job cuts. Naturally, with the funding council questioning the viability of Elmwood against that economic background, staff and students have a right to feel somewhat threatened when it comes to the educational opportunities available, with obvious implications for staff and student morale.

I add my support to what Willie Rennie has said about the splitting of Elmwood between Fife College and SRUC and the inherent instability of that arrangement. Although I recognise that there is a funding issue here—and it is quite a big funding issue—he is right to call for measures that would put the college on a sustainable footing.

College education is vital because it has the best chance of responding quickly to the needs of the local economy, whether that be in terms of apprenticeships and part-time and more flexible courses—which, sadly, have suffered in so many of the recent cuts—or responding to a more diverse and fast-changing labour market, both of which could hardly be more important in an area where the access to further education is more limited than it is in some other areas. Indeed, that diversity of provision in order to respond to the needs of local economies is one of the most powerful arguments in favour of college education.

The call for the minister to broker an agreement between Fife College and SRUC is an important one. We can do a lot to try to move that process forward—and I hope that the minister will take up that point. I understand that this difficult situation is against the backdrop of the difficult challenges in the college sector, but I support Willie Rennie in

wanting to move forward matters, and I am happy to support the motion.

13:07

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I, too, will speak—briefly—in support of Willie Rennie’s motion. I acknowledge the campaign that he has been running over a period to get recognition of the difficulties that the college faces. It is important to make that point to the minister. Mr Rennie is calling on the minister to give a guarantee that the Government will take the necessary steps to ensure the college’s future viability. That campaign would be supported not only in north-east Fife, but across Fife.

Over many years, Elmwood College has played an important part in Fife. It is not only important to the agricultural industry that predominates in north-east Fife, but has created jobs across Fife. I was aware of Elmwood College from an early age, because when I was little boy one of my cousins decided to have a gardening career and attended the college to learn his trade. He recently retired after a lifelong career as a very successful gardener.

I also have many friends who work on golf courses and who had college experience at Elmwood as apprentice gardeners. I started off my working life as gardener for the local authority, so I have always been familiar with Elmwood College.

A few years ago, I attended an event that was organised by the Fife Society for the Blind when it opened facilities at Elmwood College through investment that had been gifted through a local trust. I remember meeting a number of pupils and teachers from a specialist support unit in the college, which supported people on the autistic spectrum. The provision and support were second to none.

Elmwood College has played an important part in Fife, and I think that its being split between Fife College and SRUC has not worked out, for the reasons that Mr Rennie has set out. One reason is the actual building; if we are serious about continuing with Elmwood College, part of the ask must be that we examine the facilities.

At First Minister’s question time, Kenneth Gibson talked about

“a bumper year for ... tourism”.

Last night, I spoke at an event in Dunfermline at which we launched an ambitious programme for our national artworks to be shown at junction 4 of the M90 at Kelty, and I made the point that far too often tourists come to Edinburgh then cross the Forth road bridge or the rail bridge—of course, we now have the wonderful new bridge—and go up through, and out the other side of Fife, to get into

the Highlands. We need to do more to get people to stay in Fife. For example, we have some of the country’s best and most famous golf courses, and we have outdoor facilities such as Lochore meadows country park. There is a lot of ambition in Fife to develop outdoor activities, and outdoor tourism is a major contributor to the Fife economy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Can I ask you to wind up this tourism plug for Fife? I am a bit lost as to where Elmwood College comes into this.

**Alex Rowley:** Elmwood College can play a crucial role in providing the support, the training and the skills to develop tourism in Fife. We need investment in Elmwood.

I am happy to support Mr Rennie this afternoon.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I should not try to teach an old dog new tricks. You got me there, Mr Rowley.

13:12

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I thank Willie Rennie for bringing the debate to the chamber on this lunch time, and for his wider efforts in championing a sustainable future for Elmwood College. I know that he has worked on the issue for many years.

It is clear, however, that for a number of years arrangements at Elmwood have not been living up to the needs of the communities that it serves, so it is regrettable that we have now reached crisis point. I want briefly to consider the wider context of Elmwood’s situation and to highlight some points that I hope will be taken into account in the funding council study that is under way.

Willie Rennie raised college regionalisation. Although it is fair to say that the regionalisation process that the Scottish National Party Government instigated in the previous session has had its troubles, it is also important to acknowledge that regionalisation is not the sole reason for the situation at Elmwood. The University of the Highlands and Islands provides a world-leading example of how, when it is done well, regionalisation of education provision brings huge benefits to our most rural areas, and creates opportunities for study, work and specialist training right in the heart of communities that need them.

The initial partnership between SRUC and Fife College at Elmwood was an acknowledgement that the campus delivered specialist rural training and education that Fife College was not able to provide. With proper support and willingness on all sides, that partnership could have been fruitful, so I urge the funding council and ministers to learn from the example that has been set by UHI and its partnerships with specialist institutions including the North Atlantic fisheries college marine centre

and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to see how this sort of thing can be done successfully.

However, we should also recognise the wider challenges that face both the further education sector and our rural communities more generally, and which have contributed to making college provision at Elmwood untenable. The lack of clear and accessible financial support for college students continues to make further education an unattractive prospect for many young people. In our manifesto last year, the Greens called for funding parity between college and university students to ensure that those who study at institutions such as Elmwood have the same certainty of financial support as their friends who study at university. Implementing such a measure could have a major impact on college admissions not just at Elmwood but across the further education sector.

As Jenny Gilruth highlighted, the patchy and increasingly expensive public transport service in north-east Fife is also a contributing factor, with many people finding that they might as well travel to Perth, Dundee or St Andrews for education as battle their way on a slow local bus service to Cupar.

I encourage the funding council to consider the wider problems of our rural communities when designing a suitable model for further education in north-east Fife. If we are to provide funding to create more college places, we need to ensure that they are for courses that people want to study and which are delivered in a way that suits their lifestyles. On average, the area has an older population than the rest of Scotland and, in reality, many prospective students are not school leavers, but are working-age or older people who want to return to employment after a break, to fit in study around caring responsibilities or to learn a new skill later in life. The pattern that we have seen in recent years of cutting part-time and flexible learning courses to focus on full-time vocational training does not always suit the needs of that demographic and might be a major contributor to the fall in student numbers at Elmwood, which had been in decline for some time before Fife College withdrew from the campus.

I commend the work of the supported accommodation service at Elmwood—Alex Rowley already mentioned it—which provides safe and supported living for seven SRUC students who have additional needs. That kind of provision is all too rare, and it faces its own financial challenges and often relies on additional funding from third-party organisations and families. I strongly advise the funding council to maintain and enhance that service.

13:16

**Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**

I thank Willie Rennie for bringing the motion to the chamber and I congratulate him on securing this important debate on the future for Elmwood campus.

As we have heard, Elmwood campus is located in Cupar, which is the historical county town of Fife. It has a strong history in agriculture and it is still regarded as an important market town. The area around Cupar is well known for its world-famous golf courses and the campus is only nine miles from St Andrews.

Given the agricultural and golfing background, it is not surprising that Elmwood is well known for offering a range of agricultural and golf-related courses. Before looking at some of the challenges that the campus faces, it is worth considering the benefits and potential of the diverse range of courses that are on offer. The agricultural courses help to provide rural businesses around Scotland with a well-skilled workforce. Scotland's rural industry is constantly changing, so we should, in order to meet the needs of the industry and to provide students with the necessary skills base, support colleges such as Elmwood to develop its growing range of specialist education.

The golfing education that is available at Elmwood has gained global recognition for the college as the premier training provider to the golf industry in Scotland. It is also increasingly involved in activities beyond the United Kingdom and attracts many students from overseas. The golf programmes lead to degree and masters degree awards. The campus is—rightly—positioning itself as the home of golf education. There is a huge market that it can potentially serve: the United Kingdom golf industry is expanding and employs more than 75,000 people. Golfers in the UK spent more than £4 billion on the sport last year and golf tourism is a major part of the Scottish tourist sector.

Given the unique offering of the Elmwood campus, I urge the minister to have a conversation with her colleagues under the economy brief to see what Scottish Development International can do to promote the various golf-related courses to students overseas—especially in Asia, where the market for golf and golf knowledge is experiencing significant growth—because an increase in the number of overseas students would help to create a critical mass of students. I am not a golf expert, but I can see the attraction of studying golf a mere 10 minutes away from the home of golf. On a less positive note, there are, as Willie Rennie highlighted, challenges in relation to achieving that critical mass of students and the resources that should be available at Elmwood. Other members

have explained the detailed issues: I will highlight a few.

There is a local economy dimension to the debate. It is important to recognise the valuable contribution that the campus brings to north-east Fife and the surrounding economy through its employment opportunities, the provision of skilled graduates and its overall economic contribution. In addition, further education options in the area are limited, which makes the debate all the more important. To lose Elmwood campus would be a further blow when there has already been a reduction in availability of college courses to people who live in the Cupar area and the surrounding towns.

There is also a consideration of timing, as Willie Rennie noted. The outcome of the study into possible alternative options that is being undertaken by the funding council will be available only in time for the academic year 2018-19, which is not ideal. Students and staff are looking for clarity sooner rather than later, so I encourage the minister to consider that timetable.

As other members have done, I want to praise the staff and students who work and study at Elmwood campus, who remain committed to providing high-quality education and training in north-east Fife.

Colleges play a critical role in our education system. However, there are now 150,000 fewer students in colleges than there were 10 years ago. Further cuts, especially in rural areas such as around Cupar, would be unwelcome and damaging. I add my support to the calls on the minister to encourage an agreement between Fife College and SRUC on securing a viable future for the Elmwood campus. I thank Willie Rennie for bringing the debate to the chamber.

13:20

**The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** I thank Willie Rennie for bringing this debate to the chamber. I hope that we can all agree that we are effectively seeking the same thing for the people of Cupar, and north-east Fife more generally, which is to have the right learning opportunities to meet the economic needs of the area.

The kingdom of Fife is a part of Scotland that is very close to my heart. It is not, therefore, only from my position as Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science that I appreciate and understand the sentiment of Willie Rennie's motion, which I broadly welcome.

I, and I hope the rest of the chamber, fully understand the role that Elmwood has played in

rural education in this country and the issues associated with Fife College vacating the campus from last summer. I am pleased to be closing today's debate in order to outline how both institutions are being supported to ensure that the right solution is found for the residents of Cupar and north-east Fife.

I begin with some of the aspects that members have raised. One of the concerns has been about the split of courses between Fife College and SRUC. That was done to ensure that SRUC can continue to focus and specialise on the land-based education that is its remit. That is why the decision was taken to make the split: it was not done arbitrarily and it was not, as a member suggested, done by the Government. It was done with a mind to the focus of what SRUC is about.

Other members have discussed regionalisation, usually in a negative way. I suggest that they talk to Hugh Hall—I know that Willie Rennie has already met him and done that—who is the new principal of Fife College. He sees that regionalisation has allowed him to take the helm of a strong, strategic institution. It has its challenges, but regionalisation is seen by the college not as something that is holding it back but as something that can take it forward to a much stronger position.

As Willie Rennie rightly pointed out, following the transfer of Fife College's offer at Elmwood to other campuses in the region, and concerns about the viability of the Elmwood campus, the Scottish funding council is supporting a curriculum review of north-east Fife. I will not go into the detail of the remit, as Willie Rennie has already put that on the record. The Scottish funding council appointed Rocket Science consultants at the end of February to take forward that work. As well as having a wide range of relevant experience, Rocket Science has a good knowledge of the area, having worked with Fife College in the past on its curriculum offer.

As well as speaking to SRUC and Fife College, the consultants are ensuring that they speak to key stakeholders in north-east Fife, including Fife Council, schools, employers, third sector groups and universities. A comprehensive set of the area's existing data will also be interrogated as part of that work. That will include the Scottish index of multiple deprivation, labour market intelligence, skills investment plans and regional skills assessments; I give a commitment that transport issues will be considered in that process, too. The study is due to be completed in the first week of May. I look forward to it identifying a model for the area that works best for SRUC and Fife College, and, most important, for the region and the people of north-east Fife.

It is my understanding that SRUC is in the process of developing a new strategic plan, which



will include a thorough review of its estates strategy. It is important that SRUC continues to have a dialogue with the Scottish funding council during that process. However, we have to recognise that SRUC, as a higher education institution, is an autonomous body—it is not a college—and therefore has responsibility for its own strategic decision making.

The Scottish Government and the Scottish ministers are ultimately unable to intervene in SRUC's internal institutional matters, such as those that relate to estates—after all, we hold dear the autonomy of our higher education institutions—but we would expect that decisions that would have a wider impact on Fife would be made following full consultation with staff and students, and that consideration would always be given to minimising the impact on the student experience.

It is therefore encouraging that SRUC has stated that it has no plans to withdraw from the Elmwood campus and that it is actively recruiting students for the start of the 2017-18 academic year. Students will still have the opportunity to study on a wide range of exciting courses, many of which members have already mentioned. They include courses for gamekeeping, wildlife management, horticulture and a selection of excellent golf and greenkeeping-related qualifications.

In 2014, SRUC was designated as the national provider for land-based education, and the Scottish funding council asked it to take a lead on the development of a national strategy for land-based education and training for the whole of Scotland. That is a dynamic strategy, and SRUC has been proactive in identifying the current and future needs of the land-based industries. It works closely with its college and university partners to deliver a coherent land-based curriculum strategy for the sector that meets the needs of students, employers and the rural economy.

The local presence of SRUC and its geographical reach are vital components of the delivery of the national strategy. We fully recognise the overall contribution that it makes to the rural economy and the value that it brings to north-east Fife.

At a time when both SRUC and Fife College are taking stock of their estates and the provision that they offer, it is worth noting that both institutions are under relatively new leadership. Both have the right people at the helm to steer them through this challenging period. Professor Wayne Powell was appointed principal and chief executive of SRUC in July last year. He has already overseen an additional five new senior management and 10 new academic appointments, who add to the

wealth of experience that there already is at SRUC.

It was announced recently that Sandy Cumming will take up the position of SRUC chairman in October. I have already mentioned Hugh Hall, who became principal and chief executive of Fife College on 1 March this year. Those men have proven track records at the forefront of further and higher education. We welcome them, and we look forward to their energy and vision benefiting not just SRUC and Fife College, but the people of north-east Fife as they find the right solution with stakeholders in the area.

Members have highlighted a variety of other points, which I will try to pick up on. Alex Rowley was quite right to point to the wealth of tourism opportunities in the Fife area. I am sorry that I missed him when he was at Fire Station Creative last night; I heard that the event went very well. However, there are other places for the citizen spire. It could perhaps be in the Dunfermline constituency, but we will leave that for another conversation.

Jenny Gilruth pointed to the importance of the Levenmouth rail link. I appreciate that that is one of the rail links in Fife that is being considered. The Minister for Transport and the Islands is encouraging all the campaign groups in the area to bring forward their business cases. Such investment would be a welcome development in Fife, and I know that the Minister for Transport and the Islands is very keen to ensure that all the community campaigns for rail links develop and bring forward their business cases.

On wider student issues, Mark Ruskell mentioned student support. He will no doubt be aware of the on-going student support review, which is looking at how we can have a system that benefits those in FE and HE and ensures that we value students in both.

On encouraging students from overseas, I gently say to Dean Lockhart that it would really help us if the UK Government could clarify the status of European Union nationals after Brexit and if it perhaps had an immigration policy that would allow us to bring more international students into the country. He has my full support on that. He made a very important point, and I hope that he makes it to the UK Government and his Conservative colleagues at the same time as he makes it to the Scottish Government.

**Willie Rennie:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Willie Rennie may make an intervention, although the minister is coming close to overtime.

**Willie Rennie:** I welcome what the minister has said, but can she address the point about timing? If we are going to have a format and viable option for the future and we want that to be in place for the 2018-19 academic year, we need decisions to be made quite soon.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** As the Presiding Officer has reminded me about my timing, I simply refer the member to what I have already said about SRUC's commitment to encourage new students for this academic year.

I hope that members have been reassured about the Government's continued support for further and higher education provision in north-east Fife. I am more than happy to continue to work with members and other local representatives to ensure that we find the right solution for the people in north-east Fife and that the economic realities that we want to bring to the area come to fruition with a very well-supported further education institution remaining in the area.

13:30

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Mental Health Strategy

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is a statement by Maureen Watt on the mental health strategy. The minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

**The Minister for Mental Health (Maureen Watt):** As the Scottish Government's first dedicated Minister for Mental Health, I have been driven by a simple principle: we must prevent and treat mental health problems with the same commitment, passion and drive as we do physical health problems. That principle is shared across this chamber and beyond, which is why it is at the heart of our new strategy.

Everyone has mental health: for all of us, our health has both mental and physical aspects, but they are not always thought of in the same way. We want to create a Scotland where stigma related to poor mental health is eradicated and where prevention and early intervention are central. We want to be a nation where mental health care is person-centred, recognising the life-changing benefits of fast, evidence-based treatment.

In the past decade, mental health services have changed dramatically. There has been excellent work from the national health service, local authorities and third sector organisations. Staff in all those organisations, at all levels, make life-changing and life-saving interventions every day. However, we all have a mutual ambition to go further. Today's strategy and its 40 actions set out our starting point.

The strategy has been fundamentally shaped by views and feedback from organisations and service users across Scotland. We received almost 600 responses to our engagement paper and we held public events and meetings. The volume and the content of the responses and discussion demonstrated passion and commitment for change.

In late 2016, the Health and Sport Committee carried out an inquiry into mental health. The committee's findings were thoughtful and constructive and gave added impetus to the issues that we were developing. The committee raised the importance of child and adolescent mental health, including rejected referrals, early intervention, treatment, and the need for multiple services, such as health, education and local authorities, to work together. The overarching

message to us from the engagement was simple: be more ambitious and recognise mental health as an essential part of all health and social wellbeing.

As this is the first national strategy since the integration of health and social care, we have worked closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in developing it. We will continue to work closely with COSLA as we implement the strategy nationally and locally.

Intrinsic to the strategy—and to implementing the actions and the vision—is a human rights-based approach. A concrete way to do this is to use the principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, empowerment and legality—PANEL. The reality of implementing the actions and the development of future actions must continue to keep human rights at the core.

I suspect that we all share the Scottish mental health partnership's vision of

“a Scotland where people can get the right help at the right time, expect recovery, and fully enjoy their rights, free from discrimination and stigma.”

I want mental and physical health to have parity of esteem in practice. It is there in law already, but people's lived experience and our data suggest that there is a way to go. Achieving parity will not be easy, but it is vital. We estimate that only one in three people who would benefit from treatment for a mental illness currently receive that treatment. We also know that people with lifelong mental illness can die 15 to 20 years prematurely. That is a major health inequality and I cannot accept it.

To achieve parity of esteem over the 10 years of the strategy we must see and be able to measure: equal access to the most effective and safest care and treatment; equal efforts to improve the quality of care; allocation of time, effort and resources on a basis commensurate with need; equal status within healthcare education and practice; equally high aspirations for service users; and equal status in the measurement of health outcomes.

Improving mental health services and care is not solely the preserve of the health portfolio or the NHS. To tackle the causes of poor mental health, action is required across Government, including in the education, housing, justice, environment and economy portfolios. That is also true of agencies and organisations outwith the Scottish Government. There must be work across all public services to harness the widest range of opportunities to improve the population's mental health. Without doubt, poverty is the single biggest driver of poor mental health. The fairer Scotland action plan sets out how we will help to tackle poverty, reduce inequality and build a fairer and more inclusive Scotland.

The broader implementation of mental health law must promote a human rights-based

approach. We will ensure that that is made clear in statutory guidance. We will also commission a review of current legislation to see whether—and what—further reforms are necessary so that the needs of people with learning disabilities and autism are properly taken into account.

That is not the only legislation that we propose to consider. We will reform the adults with incapacity legislation so that it fully reflects the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In that reform, we propose a particular emphasis on the provision of supported decision making.

We will ensure that improving mental health and wellbeing is central in all new public health priorities. We will challenge the NHS to prioritise the physical health of people with mental health problems and remove barriers to people accessing services. I visited Maryhill health and care centre in Glasgow this Tuesday, and the mental health information station in Edinburgh this morning, and heard first-hand about those challenges. We will focus on prevention and early intervention for children, young people and adults, to help to prevent the development of mental health problems and to step in promptly where they develop. We have already agreed to fund a managed clinical network for perinatal mental health. It is the first MCN in Scotland for mental health and is a significant step forward in achieving parity.

We have made considerable progress in improving access to specialist child and adolescent mental health services, but demand continues to increase. We have listened to concerns about rejected referrals to CAMHS and will commission an audit of those services. Sometimes CAMHS is the right route for young people and, at other times, an alternative would be better. We will look at the whole system—we recognise the importance of not only specialist services but early interventions at tiers 1 and 2. That could be of particular importance to looked-after children.

We will complete the roll-out of targeted parenting programmes to ensure availability across Scotland. We will commission the development of a matrix of evidence-based interventions that can improve the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. We will also develop a new, separate, 10-year child and adolescent health and wellbeing strategy, which will cover physical and mental wellbeing.

Schools are one of the key places to ensure that the children of Scotland have the care and support they need. That is why we will soon commission a review of personal and social education, the role of pastoral guidance, and counselling services in Scotland. Our aim in that review is simple: to

ensure that every child has appropriate access to emotional and mental wellbeing support in school.

We will facilitate work with Police Scotland to ensure that people who have mental health problems who are in contact with the police, or who are in distress, get the help and support that they need. That will include work through our refreshed justice strategy and our distress brief intervention programme. We will also work with the Scottish Prison Service and partners to improve the mental health of prisoners, including young offenders.

We aim to create a social security system in Scotland that is based on dignity, fairness, and respect, and which supports people with mental health problems. Not securing employment is the biggest inequality that people with mental health problems can face. Utilising our new employability powers, we will work across services to support people to stay in, or return to, work. That includes being committed to working with employers to support the mental wellbeing of their employees.

As I mentioned earlier, the physical wellbeing of people with mental illness is of major concern to me. I am committed to ensuring that services such as screening and smoking cessation are supported to help to improve participation rates for those with mental health problems. That will be the start of tackling the 15 to 20-year premature mortality. Other work will be needed and I believe that I can count on the support of many in taking the right steps to address this significant health inequality.

Through our twin programme of investment and reform, we are working to shift the balance of care across health and social care. In the coming year, we project that NHS spending on mental health will exceed £1 billion for the first time. In each year of this parliamentary session, we are committed to increasing that investment, with mental health receiving an increasing share of front-line NHS investment.

None of the improvements to mental health services will be realised without having the right staff in the right place. We will work to give access to dedicated mental health professionals in all accident and emergency departments, all general practices, every police station custody suite, and all our prisons. Over the next five years, that will mean making an additional investment of £35 million for 800 additional mental health workers in those key settings. That increased investment through the NHS for that workforce will be in addition to the £150 million already set out for improvement and innovation. I can therefore confirm today that over the next five years, the total Scottish Government direct investment in mental health will be more than £300 million, which will support implementation of the strategy.

In primary care, we are developing new multidisciplinary models of supporting mental health. That will help to achieve the “ask once, get help fast” principle and better equip people to manage their own health and encourage recovery.

Presiding Officer, as I hope I have made clear, the strategy is not the end of the process—it is just the beginning. The voices of stakeholders and service users have been key to the development of the strategy, and I am determined that they will also be key to its implementation. That is why, to help me to steer the strategy, I will be convening a biannual forum of stakeholders. In that forum, I want to hear stakeholders’ views and get their help—now, and in the future.

To ensure that we learn from what the actions laid out so far have achieved, we will carry out a full review at the halfway point of the strategy. I hope that members across the chamber will be able to see reflected in the strategy the ambitions that they and others have promoted. I believe that the strategy can be built on and developed in the years to come. I believe that, together, we can deliver the mental health support, care and services that the people of Scotland deserve.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, minister.

The minister will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I can allow around 30 minutes for questions and then we will have to move on. I remind everyone that there is a lot of business to get through this afternoon so brevity would be very much appreciated.

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement.

I begin by expressing my concern, which I know is shared across the chamber, that the Scottish Government has allocated only 45 minutes for Parliament to question the Government on the new mental health strategy.

That said, there are a number of areas within the new 10-year strategy that I welcome and, indeed, that the Scottish Conservatives called for in our mental wellbeing policy statement, which we published at the beginning of December.

The key message from all stakeholders who will be tasked with delivery of the strategy over the next decade in communities across Scotland is this: all the words in the world in a Government strategy will not make the difference if they are not backed up by real reforms and resources.

The previous mental health strategy contained 36 actions. Given that no report card on how those were delivered was ever compiled, will the minister tell Parliament how many of them were achieved?

The new mental health strategy aims to transform services and treatments over the next decade for those who have mental health problems. Will the minister outline to Parliament how progress will be monitored? Will the minister chair an advisory group to drive the strategy's implementation forward? Will she commit today to provide an annual progress report to Parliament?

When I was elected to Parliament, I said in my maiden speech that mental health was the most pressing issue that our country faces. I am sorry to say that today feels like a missed opportunity. I welcome the fact that the minister said, in the last part of her statement, that the strategy is not the end of the process but just the beginning, because that has to be the case, and I hope that she will consider listening to organisations in the coming weeks and months as we hear concerns about the strategy.

**Maureen Watt:** As Miles Briggs will know, it is the Parliamentary Bureau, and not the Government, that determines the work programme in the chamber. The Health and Sport Committee will be able to scrutinise the strategy, which I am sure that it will want to do.

I am pleased that Miles Briggs recognises that the many asks in his party's manifesto for last year's election have been met in the strategy. As I said in my statement, we will be putting in place a governance structure to look at how the strategy is taken forward.

Updates on specific actions were, in fact, published online at various times throughout the previous strategy's duration.

I am happy to give an annual report to Parliament if it wishes me to do so, but—as I said—I am sure that the Health and Sport Committee will want to scrutinise the strategy as it is set out further.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I, too, thank the minister for early sight of her statement. There are actions in the strategy that are to be welcomed, such as the managed clinical network for perinatal mental health; additional mental health professionals for our A and E departments, GP practices, police stations and prisons; and a commitment to young carers.

The publication of the 10-year mental health strategy was an opportunity for us to be bold and ambitious. I was hopeful that, when the Scottish Government delayed the strategy last year, it would listen to concerns that were raised by stakeholders and by the Health and Sport Committee, and that the final strategy would contain the transformative action that is required.

I am, therefore, disappointed that the Government is ignoring Scottish Labour's plan for

investment in school-based counselling and wraparound early intervention support in schools—a plan that was backed by Barnardo's Scotland just last week—because we know that half of all mental health problems begin before the age of 15. Although it is welcome that the minister has committed to look at rejected referrals, the scope of that audit remains unclear. We are talking about 17,000 children over the past three years who have been referred to CAMHS and have waited for help, only to be turned away. Children and young people should have been at the very heart of the 10-year mental health strategy, but I see that we have to wait for a follow-up strategy on CAMHS.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must come to a close, please.

**Monica Lennon:** Without a solid commitment to investment and action to support early intervention, how can the minister give assurances that the strategy will adequately improve the wellbeing of our children and young people?

**Maureen Watt:** With 40 actions in the strategy, it is indeed transformative, and I think that the member will find that most of the asks in her party's manifesto have been met in full or partially. The audit of rejected referrals to CAMHS is precisely what Monica Lennon has been calling for.

On rejections of referrals to CAMHS, referrals to a range of physical services are also rejected for not being the appropriate action. That is why, in the strategy, we are beefing up the services available to young people and others at tiers 1 and 2. It is also precisely why I mentioned the real importance of education, with a review of personal and social education and of what education and schools can do. We all know that in the curriculum for excellence, all those involved in education are responsible for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, which includes mental wellbeing. We are undertaking the review to ensure that that is happening.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that the main Opposition spokespeople are given some leeway in the length of their questions, but I ask for brevity in future questions, please.

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** I refer members to my entry in the register of interests as a registered mental health nurse.

I want to say, first, how much I welcome the strategy and the opportunities that it offers for improved care in mental health. What measures will the strategy put in place to improve equity of access to perinatal mental health services across the country?

**Maureen Watt:** I thank Clare Haughey for her question; I recognise her experience in this area. As she said, I have already announced the new managed clinical network for perinatal mental health, which will bring together health professionals who work in the area of perinatal mental health. Expert leadership in that area will identify current gaps in perinatal care and pathways and develop and implement guidelines and best practice to ensure improved standards and that everyone gets the same high level of care, regardless of where they live.

Recruitment is under way for a lead clinician, who will be assisted by additional dedicated maternity nursing and infant mental health experts and managed support and should become operational later this year. The enthusiasm with which the announcement of the managed clinical network has been received is giving me great hope for that area.

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** The Scottish Government set a target for 90 per cent of adults and children whose GP refers them for treatment for mental health issues to begin treatment within 18 weeks. In December last year, national health service statistics revealed that 22.5 per cent—one in five—were not seen within that timeframe. In fact, the target has never been met since it was set by the Scottish Government in December 2014; between October and December last year, only two health boards were able to meet the 90 per cent target. The minister talked in her statement about getting the right help at the right time and about the ask once, get help fast approach. We welcome that, but what specific action will the Scottish Government take to make sure that those in need of mental health treatment are not subject to excessive waiting times?

**Maureen Watt:** Scotland was the first country to introduce waiting times for mental health services. I agree with Annie Wells. As I have said in the chamber many times, I am not content with too many health boards not meeting their targets, although we are seeing excellent progress in some areas—82.5 per cent of people do receive help within the 18 weeks and the median average waiting time across Scotland was nine weeks.

As the member will know, improvement teams have engaged with NHS Forth Valley, NHS Lothian, NHS Ayrshire and Arran and NHS Borders. In NHS Forth Valley, we have seen an over 40 per cent improvement in the health board meeting its waiting times.

Of course, there is so much more to do, which is why we are placing an emphasis on putting more workers into tiers 1 and 2, so that people can have help there and might not need to be referred to CAMHS or adult psychological services, so reducing the number of rejected referrals. The

member will see from our summary of actions in the strategy that we intend to take steps in that area.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** What provision will be made to ensure that in future young people who have exhibited suicidal tendencies or who have a history of suicide attempts are referred immediately for specialist treatment with no delay?

**Maureen Watt:** Every suicide is a tragedy. When a young person needs to be seen urgently by a clinician, that should happen—and it does happen on a daily basis. We are investing in access to CAMHS and we will engage with stakeholders later this year to publish a new suicide prevention action plan by early 2018, which will dovetail with the mental health strategy. It is unacceptable that people are not being seen as they require.

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I note that the minister thanked COSLA in her statement. The reality is that this was meant to be a joint strategy from COSLA and the Scottish Government, for the obvious reason that implementing it will require work by the Scottish Government, councils and the integration joint boards. I am sure that the minister is disappointed by Councillor Peter Johnston's note that was circulated to all councils last night, saying that COSLA was unable to endorse the mental health strategy that is being outlined by the Government today. I should say that Councillor Johnston is the health and wellbeing spokesperson for COSLA and the Scottish National Party group leader in West Lothian Council. Obviously, that is a disappointing start for the strategy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Can we have a question, please, Mr Sarwar? [*Interruption.*]

**Anas Sarwar:** Shona Robison is saying that we missed his welcome for the strategy, but the note says quite clearly that this was meant to be a joint strategy but COSLA is withholding its endorsement of it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Can we have a question, please, Mr Sarwar?

**Anas Sarwar:** What action will the Government take to alleviate the crisis that we have with COSLA, and how can we stop cuts to mental health budgets in IJBs?

**Maureen Watt:** We can sure rely on Anas Sarwar's negativity.

As I said in my statement, we have worked very closely with COSLA in developing this strategy—joint work has been going on for months. Peter Johnston welcomed the strategy. We have put further ambitions in it and, of course, we will be working with COSLA and the integration joint

boards, post their elections, on making sure that all this works.

**Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** How will the new mental health strategy support the development of positive mental health and wellbeing in schools and, in so doing, support young people's resilience?

**Maureen Watt:** I recognise Jenny Gilruth's experience in schools in this field. We will undertake a review of personal and social education in schools and make sure that all those involved with schoolchildren have the necessary qualifications and support structures to help children in schools. It is clear that upcoming problems with young children in schools are best identified along with parents. It is important that we give parents the tools to recognise that their children might be experiencing distress and to know precisely where to go, which might well be their GP. There is a great opportunity in schools to build our young people's resilience to enable them to deal with whatever life throws at them.

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** What provisions are in the strategy to tackle rising levels of self-harm among children and young people in Scotland, and how will we make sure that young people presenting with self-harm are never met with a stigmatising response?

**Maureen Watt:** Self-harm is clearly a demonstration of mental distress. I have visited services in Perth, where, in schools at lunch time, there is groupwork with children who have presented with self-harm. That is another area where schools can help. In addition, peer support can be of real benefit in helping children who demonstrate self-harm.

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** In the chamber, we have previously discussed concerns over children or young people with mental health problems being admitted to non-specialist wards, not least in relation to the issues that the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland raised last year. Will the minister outline how she intends to address the matter through the strategy?

I advise those in the chamber that I am the parliamentary liaison officer to the health secretary.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** With a sore throat.

**Fulton MacGregor:** Yes. [*Laughter.*]

**Maureen Watt:** We have seen improvements in 2016, as reported by the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland, with fewer incidents of young people being admitted to non-specialist wards. In 2015-16 there were 135 admissions involving 118 young people, but in the previous

year, there had been 207 admissions involving 175 young people.

The Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland's report made six recommendations, many of which were for NHS boards—and NHS boards should address the issues that were raised. One recommendation was for the Royal College of Psychiatrists to address. We are working on that recommendation with the RCP's representative and CAMHS lead clinicians to review standards and help adult mental health wards demonstrate their ability to provide safe and appropriate care for under-18s who require admission. That measure is set out in action 19 in our strategy. We are also taking action to scope highly specialist mental health in-patient services for young people, looking at forensic CAMHS.

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):** I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement. Despite what she said, there is no commitment to the scale of resources required to deliver the desperately needed step change in services. The Government statement is carefully worded. The minister said:

"We will work to give access to dedicated mental health professionals in all accident and emergency departments, all general practices, every police station custody suite, and all our prisons."

That is not the same as providing dedicated, trained professionals in all those locations. The Liberal Democrats proposed that measure in our budget negotiations; the Government is pretending to take it. Would it not be more honest to make the difference clear?

**Maureen Watt:** There will be 800 extra mental health workers—those are 800 real people, who will be available to be accessed. The Liberal Democrats seemed to imply when we started the budget negotiations that there is a pot of money and that we can have people sitting around doing nothing. We are not in that position. We are making sure that all those areas, including A and E units and policy custody suites, have access to a mental health support worker as quickly as possible.

**Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I welcome today's statement. The strategy sets out opportunities to pilot improved arrangements for dual diagnosis for people with problem substance misuse and mental health issues. Will the minister outline how the pilots will be identified and whether lessons from them will be implemented nationally?

**Maureen Watt:** I think that we all know that mental health problems and substance misuse commonly co-occur and that there are opportunities to optimise how specialist services work together. Those opportunities will be explored in discussion with the integration

authorities and NHS boards and by identifying examples and opportunities that can be used to inform national guidance and good practice.

Our pilot work on the distress brief intervention scheme and on transforming primary care also provide opportunities to improve the service response to people with mental health and substance misuse issues. The evaluation of the pilots will provide lessons about outcomes, which will inform future national models.

We also know that having a comorbidity policy in a service is a recognised protective factor in reducing suicide levels. Healthcare Improvement Scotland is working with NHS boards to implement a suicide prevention framework that allows teams to consider comorbidity policies, and to take action to create such policies if they do not have them.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** There is a mountain of expert evidence highlighting the importance of inclusivity and physical activity as major tools in the treatment and prevention of poor mental health. If members visit the Combat Stress stand that is currently in the members' lobby, the people there will tell them how they are using activity to tackle mental health issues. The minister's statement suggests that she will challenge the NHS to prioritise the physical health of people with mental health problems. However, as we know, the Government is withdrawing funding for jogscotland from 1 April, with the Scottish Association for Mental Health helping to pick up the Government's tab, so much does it believe in the importance of being active to the mental health agenda. Given the evidence, how can the Government possibly claim that the strategy tackles preventable poor mental health when its actions do exactly the opposite of what expert opinion says?

**Maureen Watt:** The Minister for Public Health and Sport and sportscotland are working together on a way forward for jogscotland.

The member makes the very valid point, which I highlighted in my statement, that it is really important for people with mental health problems to have good physical health. That is precisely what I said with regard to the actions in that respect. Those with mental health problems often have poor physical health, and it is important that they get the screening and the tools to improve their physical health. Many of the organisations that work in that space—particularly in relation to tiers 1 and 2—signpost people in that direction to ensure that they have a clear pathway to manage their mental health by improving their physical health.

I visited the Combat Stress stall today, and I note that the Government gives £200,000 a year to the Combat Stress Scotland community

outreach service, which aims to provide a better response to the mental health needs of veterans, their families and their carers. I think that most people in Scotland will recognise this Government's commitment to veterans.

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** Given that the United Kingdom has been heavily criticised for "grave and systematic" breaches of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, can the minister tell us whether steps will be taken to ensure that the review of the adults with incapacity legislation complies fully with that convention?

**Maureen Watt:** As I said in my statement, we intend to review the legislation in that field to ensure that it complies and is compatible with the UN convention, and that work will follow on from the conclusion of the consultation on the Scottish Law Commission's report on adults with incapacity. We will look at, for example, new models of graded guardianship, with a strong focus on supported decision making. If necessary, we will amend the power of attorney to help individuals make decisions for themselves and provide clarity in advance on deprivation of liberty and what exactly they would prefer to happen if they were detained.



## Transvaginal Mesh Implants

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is a statement by Shona Robison on the independent review of transvaginal mesh implants. As the cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:09

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison):** I am grateful for the opportunity today to make a statement about the independent review of transvaginal mesh implants. I thank all those who contributed to the review; I thank in particular Elaine Holmes and Olive McIlroy, whose efforts, along with those of other members of the Scottish mesh survivors campaign, helped to bring it about.

The review was established partly as a result of a petition that was lodged by the Scottish mesh survivors with the Public Petitions Committee in April 2014. The petition asked for several things, including suspension of mesh procedures, the establishment of an independent review, mandatory reporting of adverse events and the introduction of fully informed consent. Much of that has been, or will be, achieved as a result of that original petition. I will go into more detail shortly.

It cannot be denied that the independent review has been a very difficult and challenging process. In addition to the resignation of Elaine Holmes and Olive McIlroy, we also saw the resignation of a clinician member because of a disagreement with other clinicians about the clinical evidence. In any such review or inquiry there will be a wide range of views and experiences, and a myriad of evidence and other material to consider.

The review's terms of reference specified that it would determine the safety of vaginal mesh implants for stress urinary incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse, and it would determine the relative efficacy of surgery for those conditions. In doing so, it was expected to consider a wide range of material—from patient experiences to scientific and statistical information—while always bearing in mind that the patient should be put first. As a Government, we need to reflect further upon the difficulties and challenges of undertaking the independent review; that reflection will include formally examining how future reviews are undertaken and concluded. I will keep Parliament informed of details as that is taken forward.

The seriousness that the Government attaches to the issue is reflected in the fact that, back in 2014, my predecessor Alex Neil—as then Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing—established

the independent review of transvaginal mesh implants. Furthermore, the then cabinet secretary asked that health boards consider suspending use of mesh implants until the independent review had reported; I have given my continued support to that request for suspension. However, it must be noted that when women have experienced very distressing symptoms and have wanted procedures, they have, in those difficult circumstances, gone ahead, provided that the women were fully informed of the risks. It is also important to remember that only the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency—the United Kingdom regulatory body—has the power to ban the use of mesh implants, but has not done so.

My predecessor and I have been very mindful that the review should be independent, so to that end, all ministers and Government officials have taken great care to allow the review to develop a fully independent and comprehensive view on the matter, without interference from Government.

As we all know, and as I alluded to a moment ago, the review has been challenged in recent weeks through the resignation of three valuable members, amid concerns that evidence had been ignored, hidden or deleted. Those are very serious concerns, which I have raised directly with the chair. She has confirmed that all evidence that was considered by the review has been published, either in the final report or on the review's website. In addition to that, I asked the chief medical officer to review carefully the evidence that is contained in the report, in order to ensure that she considers that the evidence is the best that is available. She has given me her assurances and professional judgment that the evidence in the report is the best that is available at this time. The chief medical officer also made herself available to MSPs this morning to answer detailed clinical questions about the report.

On hearing of their resignations, I arranged to meet Elaine Holmes and Olive McIlroy and took note of all their concerns. I then met the review's chair to discuss those concerns in depth, and have sent a very detailed response to Elaine Holmes and Olive McIlroy based on those discussions.

I am sure that many members here today will now have had a chance to read the review's final report and will have noted the conclusions that are outlined in it. It is clear from the report that, in the past, there have been serious issues with mesh procedures. Members will note the report's two very clear recommendations on the circumstances in which such procedures can be offered in the future. The first recommendation is that when women are treated for stress urinary incontinence, all appropriate options—mesh and non-mesh—should be offered and, crucially, women must be

given full information in order that they can make an informed choice. The second recommendation is that mesh procedures must not be routinely offered in cases of pelvic organ prolapse. Those recommendations are clear, unambiguous and incredibly important.

We also see that the final conclusion makes it clear that reporting of adverse events must be made mandatory, and be in line with the General Medical Council guidance. That, too, is a very important recommendation that will contribute to much-improved monitoring of mesh procedures in the future. When I met the chair she explained that the word “mandatory” had been used as a direct result of a request from Elaine Holmes and Olive McIlroy. Although it is deeply unfortunate that we got to the stage at which those two very committed women felt that they had no choice but to resign, we can, nonetheless, see that they have had a direct impact on the report.

Indeed, their efforts, along with those of many women who have been affected, have led to other key achievements outside the independent review. A helpline has been established, where any woman who is affected by the issue can seek expert advice. A patient information and consent leaflet has been developed that is designed to help women who are suffering from stress urinary incontinence to make a careful and properly informed decision about their treatment. Of course, it was through Elaine Holmes’s and Olive McIlroy’s campaign that the Scottish Government initially requested that use of the procedures be suspended.

Looking to the future, I can today confirm that the chief medical officer has written to health boards drawing their attention to the review’s report. Health boards will be expected to implement fully the conclusions that have been set out by the review, and the chief medical officer has highlighted in particular the conclusions around the circumstances in which mesh procedures can and cannot be offered, which I mentioned a few moments ago. It is vital that all health boards ensure that the most up-to-date, detailed and patient-friendly information is available to all women. The information must be provided so that they can make careful and fully informed decisions on the best treatment in their case. The CMO will meet medical directors to ensure that those further safeguards are in place prior to any procedures using mesh being reintroduced routinely in individual health boards.

An oversight group will also be formed to work with health boards to ensure that the national aspects of the independent review’s conclusions are taken forward. To that end, the Scottish Government is in discussion with Healthcare Improvement Scotland, with a view to that body

assuming responsibility for the oversight group. Healthcare Improvement Scotland is well placed to develop and oversee the introduction of measures, in close partnership with health boards, to ensure that the independent review’s conclusions are implemented. I am also keen to ensure—I continue to stress this—that the patient must at all times be central to the oversight group’s work. I have asked Healthcare Improvement Scotland to build upon its existing processes to allow this to happen in a meaningful and purposeful way.

Finally, and in addition to the work that the oversight group will be expected to carry out, I also confirm that Scottish Government officials are exploring a pilot of a specific mesh registry, in collaboration with colleagues elsewhere in the UK. Again, that was requested by women who have been affected by mesh.

I hope that what I have said today helps to set out my position on the independent review of transvaginal mesh implants. The independent review’s report will play an important role in shaping the future approach that health boards will be expected to take.

The action that will be taken by the Scottish Government in response to the report’s publication gives a very clear message that all women must be offered high-quality options, information and support that will allow them to make informed decisions about the best treatment in their case. The safeguards that will be put in place will ensure that procedures that are undertaken by clinicians in Scotland are monitored with transparency, thereby assuring quality and safety.

Let me end by once again thanking all those who have been involved in the process for their efforts—especially the women who have been affected by mesh, who have worked incredibly hard in difficult circumstances to raise awareness of the issue and to bring about meaningful change.

I am happy to answer questions on my statement.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that have been raised in her statement, for which I intend to allow around 20 minutes.

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** It was my privilege to sit on Parliament’s Public Petitions Committee when Elaine Holmes and Olive McIlroy first presented their shocking, damning and harrowing evidence and testimony on behalf of the then dozens, and since then hundreds and indeed thousands, of women across the world regarding what so many people now openly regard as being one of the great health scandals—transvaginal mesh implants.

I can recall the women first being dismissed as delusional and as making connections and assertions that were not true. I recall the incredulity, tears and fury of women as the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency sat in front of more than 100 Scottish survivors claiming that barely a handful had been affected across the whole United Kingdom. It is important to remember and understand how heroic those women have been. They have had to discuss the most intimate and personal details relating to their anatomy with men whom, I imagine, they never expected to need to have such conversations with. That, in itself, must have been traumatic for them.

I remember the small measure of pride that I felt when the Scottish Parliament and, heroically, the then Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Alex Neil, announced a temporary ban and the review, the conclusions of which we are discussing. That was not only a response to the women concerned in Scotland; it drew the eyes of the world to the lead that Scotland had taken.

I do not want to dismiss the review out of hand, and I will not do so, but it is a final publication that bears little, if any, resemblance to the interim review that was published last year. It is not just an evolution; it is an alleged miracle based on new evidence that suddenly recasts mesh as an appropriate procedure for women. I am sorry to say this—I do so reluctantly—but it is a whitewash of damning evidence now traduced and downgraded, and of international reclassification of mesh as a high-risk procedure, not least by the European Union.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must come to your question.

**Jackson Carlaw:** That is not a basis for lifting the suspension. Will the cabinet secretary respond positively to my considered request that there be no lifting of the suspension on mesh procedures until either the Public Petitions Committee or the Health and Sport Committee, or both, have been able to consider the review and take more evidence from the most important people of all—the women who were affected and the expert clinician who together felt that they had no option but to resign from the review? There has been a whitewash; will the cabinet secretary confirm that it will not be followed by a betrayal?

**Shona Robison:** I acknowledge Jackson Carlaw's tenacity on the issue. He has pursued it for a long time with me and others, and the review and the suspension that was put in place are in no small part down to him and others.

Let me respond to some of Jackson Carlaw's questions. I very much recognise his description of the physical challenges that have been involved in

the women going about an enormous campaign and piece of work. I hope that I outlined in my statement some of their achievements over that period. I am not going to stand here and pretend that they are happy with the conclusions of the report, because I know that they are not, but I hope that they and Jackson Carlaw will recognise that the things that I outlined—the recommendations, conclusions and the mandatory reporting—have been achieved by their campaign.

Jackson Carlaw talked about the final publication and the interim report. The final publication built on the interim report, but it incorporates, of course, much of the evidence that was publicised between the interim report and it. There was such a gap in time because of the need to wait for reports including the Cochrane report, which has been built into the final report's recommendations.

On lifting the suspension, I outlined in my statement that the chief medical officer will have to be satisfied that all the safeguards that are laid out in the report and, indeed, all the safeguards in the COM's letter to boards that go beyond the report, are in place before any board starts routinely to offer the procedure, which can be done only with fully informed consent from the women concerned.

I hope that reassures Jackson Carlaw in some way.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** The Scottish mesh survivors and their families are furious at the report, and it is a scandal that we have only a few minutes to discuss it, after a statement at the end of the parliamentary term. Will the Government bring forward a debate on the issue in Government time, when members have returned from the recess?

Despite assurances from the chair that their submission would be withdrawn because of their complete lack of confidence in the final report, why have Elaine Holmes and Olive McIlroy been betrayed? Why was their evidence included in the final report? Why was the draft report that was agreed by all members of the review group in 2015 changed beyond all recognition by the time of publication? Why was research that was published in the medical journal *Nature* that suggested that one in seven of the women will suffer serious mesh risks in their lifetime omitted from the final report? Why are avoidable and unnecessary procedures that too often cause irreversible problems being continued when there are safer alternatives?

I have many, many more questions on the report. Lack of time will not allow me to ask them now, but they will be asked. The world has been watching Scotland in relation to mesh implants. What people will see is a cover-up, omission and a

medical establishment stitch-up, which is a tragedy and a disgrace. The Scottish mesh survivors group has been betrayed and misled. However, the cabinet secretary knows those women: they will not lie down and they most certainly will not accept this whitewash.

**Shona Robison:** I begin by paying tribute to Neil Findlay and the work that he has done in pursuing the issue and in supporting the women in doing so. He talked about other parliamentary opportunities to discuss the issues in more detail; I am sure that there will be more parliamentary opportunities to do that.

As Jackson Carlaw did, Neil Findlay compared the interim report with the final report. As I said to Jackson Carlaw, the reason why there was such a time gap between the interim and final reports is, as Neil Findlay will be aware, that studies were being published that were then considered and incorporated in the final report.

Neil Findlay asked a number of specific questions, many of which are answered in the response that I sent to Elaine Holmes and Olive McIlroy on the detail of changes to the chapters. I raised those issues with the chair and have given details on that in my response to them.

Given the expectations of many women who have written to me over the past few months, they would, understandably, have been disappointed with anything short of a complete ban on mesh implants resulting from the report. However, I have to point out that the Scottish Government and the independent review have never had the power to introduce a ban. As I said in my statement, that power lies only with the MHRA, which is the UK regulatory body, and it has decided not to introduce a ban. We have to be guided by that body. If its decision changes, clearly, the situation will be different. However, that is the MHRA's position. The independent review considered clinical evidence on circumstances in which the procedure should and should not go ahead. That is the evidence that has been brought forward and the chief medical officer has said that it is the best available evidence at this time.

If Neil Findlay wants it, I will be happy to send him a copy of the letter that I sent to the women outlining in great detail some of the chapter changes that he referred to.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We had long questions and answers for the openers, in order to allow important information to be given. I ask other members to recognise that. Can we please now have short questions and answers so that we can get through everyone?

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** The report says that mesh must not be

used in the case of pelvic organ prolapse. Does the Scottish Government support that recommendation and is it the cabinet secretary's expectation that it should be followed by all boards?

**Shona Robison:** Yes, that is absolutely the case. The report is clear that, with pelvic organ prolapse, mesh must not be used, and it goes into some detail on why the group came to that conclusion. As I said in my statement, it is really important that not just that conclusion but all the conclusions are now implemented by health boards, including the additional safeguards and the reporting. Boards need to ensure that all those measures are in place before they routinely reintroduce mesh procedures. The chief medical officer and I are very clear that that has to be the case, and the chief medical officer will keep me closely informed as we take that forward.

**Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** The eyes of women from across the world are on Scotland. Mesh-injured women, not just in Scotland or the rest of the United Kingdom but across the western world, were eagerly awaiting the independent review report and they will be rightly disappointed with its contents. Does the cabinet secretary share my disappointment with the removal from the final report of an entire chapter and its accompanying evidence that highlighted the dangers of transvaginal mesh surgery? Can the cabinet secretary explain why the report does not recommend that transvaginal mesh procedures be reclassified to the highest-possible risk category, as has happened in the United States and in accordance with the recently issued European Union guidelines?

**Shona Robison:** The chair has assured me that all the evidence that was received is either in the final report or on the website. Indeed, the clinician who resigned from the group provided an alternative commentary and chapter, based on his clinical view, and that has also been provided on the website for everyone to see.

Alison Harris talked about reclassification. The MHRA is the body that would reclassify mesh, and we would of course await any reclassification from the MHRA. It is the responsibility of the MHRA, not the Scottish Government, to determine the classification of mesh. Our responsibility is to give clear guidance to clinicians on the circumstances in which they should or should not undertake the procedure. That is what the independent review was set up to do, and it has made its recommendations.

I understand that many women wanted the review to ban mesh. I think and hope that I have explained that that was not within the gift of either the independent review or the Scottish Government. Only the MHRA could do that, and it

has not done so. I am happy to write to the member with more detail, if she wants me to do so.

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** I thank the chief medical officer for the informative meeting today.

I and other members have been contacted by many women who underwent the procedure and are still suffering greatly from its consequences. When women have been left in such pain, why are mesh implant procedures resuming? Surely women should have the choice.

**Shona Robison:** Sandra White's point about choice is critical. The report says clearly that there should be a fully informed choice.

Many women—I think that it is 43 per cent—will suffer from urinary incontinence problems at some point in their lives, and for some women the symptoms are devastating. It is very important that women have a full choice and that the clinical expertise and guidance are as good as they can be. That is why the independent review's recommendations are so important. The report lays out clearly in what circumstances the procedure should be used. For women who suffer from stress urinary incontinence, mesh and non-mesh procedures and their benefits, disbenefits and risks should be fully explained, so that the women can make a fully informed decision.

The report's recommendations will strengthen that approach and we will ensure that the guidance, particularly the guidance in patient information, is as good as it can be, so that women can make that informed choice.

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** The most important individuals in the entire situation are the survivors of the mesh scandal. It is a fact to say that they feel angry, let down and betrayed. Individuals who served on the review group asked for their submissions to be withdrawn and are asking why they were not withdrawn. Today, at First Minister's question time—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** May we have a question, please?

**Anas Sarwar:** I am coming to my question.

The First Minister rightly apologised for the consequences of the treatment. Will the health secretary apologise for the botched process that has let down so many individuals?

**Shona Robison:** Right at the beginning of the process, when the chief medical officer and I were in front of the Public Petitions Committee, I apologised to women for the hurt, damage and injury that they had suffered, and I undertook to ensure that, going forward, there would be clear, clinical guidance, that there would have to be fully

informed consent for procedures and that the suspension that Alex Neil had put in place would continue until all that work had been done.

Anas Sarwar referred to information that the women had asked to be removed. When I met the women, they asked me to remove the minority report that they had written, and I passed on that information to the chair of the independent review group, who agreed to do so. The women subsequently asked for further information to be removed and that again was passed on to the chair, but, at that point, the report had already been published. There was also a request to remove information from the interim report, which was published 18 months ago.

That information is still there but nobody is under any illusion on the women's views of the report, and I understand that. As I have said to other members, I say to Anas Sarwar that one of the issues was that the expectation for what the independent review group could achieve was expressed in the expectations of many of the women who wrote to me to say that there should be nothing less than a ban on mesh procedures. That was not something that the independent review or the Scottish Government could deliver. That responsibility and power lies only with the MHRA, and it has chosen not to ban the procedures in light of the evidence that it has seen. That is the fact.

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** Ninety-eight per cent of the women in the report said that their consent to mesh surgery was not informed, and 70 per cent said that their surgeon was not open to the idea that mesh was the cause of their symptoms. Those symptoms have resulted in active women losing their livelihoods and incomes. It has impacted on their relationships. They have experienced—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Can you come to a question please, Ms Johnstone?

**Alison Johnstone:** Yes. Women are unable to lift up their own children. I would like to understand what on-going support the Government is giving to the survivors, their partners and their families.

**Shona Robison:** Alison Johnstone makes an important point about fully informed consent. Many women have horrendous stress urinary incontinence symptoms. If they come forward for treatment, it is important that the clinician informs them fully of all the risks of any procedure. The report's recommendation is very clear that women should be taken through all the options, including non-mesh and mesh options, and all the risks associated with all that should be explained fully. Also, patient information leaflets should ensure that all that information is clearly set out for those

women so that they can make a fully informed decision.

We expect our services, whether it be the health service or other services, to support women who need on-going support. If Alison Johnstone wants more detail, I am happy to write to her.

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):** I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement. My question focuses on the precautionary principle. How many health boards ignored the request by the previous health secretary, Alex Neil, and the current health secretary for a suspension of this procedure until the independent review reported? Does the cabinet secretary know how many of these procedures have taken place across the country since the request was first made and ignored?

**Shona Robison:** As I have said a number of times, and as Alex Neil said previously, because the procedure is not banned, if, in light of all the risks having been explained to her, a woman wanted to go ahead with the procedure, nothing would stop that.

On the specific question about how many mesh procedures have been carried out, I can tell the member that, between June 2014 and September 2016, 148 transobturator tape procedures, 38 transvaginal mesh procedures for pelvic organ prolapse, and 327 transabdominal procedures for pelvic organ prolapse were carried out. On the transobturator tape procedures, the report now recommends retropubic tape and not transobturator tape procedures.

As I have said in answer to a number of questions, when it comes to pelvic organ prolapse, the report is extremely clear—it recommends that transvaginal mesh procedures and transabdominal procedures must not be routinely offered. We would not expect health boards to routinely offer those procedures in the light of that clinical guidance. The chief medical officer will take forward the detail of that with every health board, and we expect them to implement that before the suspension is lifted.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have used up the allocated time, but I am willing to allow two more questions.

**Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** Thank you very much for extending the time slightly, Presiding Officer.

I set up the inquiry when I was the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, and I am disturbed and disappointed that we have ended up where we have ended up. I say to the cabinet secretary that we cannot just leave things as they are. Therefore, I welcome the part of her statement in which she said that she was minded

to carry out a formal review of the process, because we need to look at how we got from a unanimous decision of the review group on the interim report to the position that we arrived at on the final report. Given all the unanswered questions of the women and the allegations of the consultant, who believed that this was a “betrayal”, I do not think that we can leave it there, for the sake of the credibility of the report and its recommendations and for the sake of future reviews of this kind. If we do not carry the confidence and trust of our patients, these reports will not be worth the paper that they are written on.

**Shona Robison:** I absolutely recognise the role that Alex Neil played as cabinet secretary in establishing much of the work on the issue.

As I said in my statement, I think that there is an issue with the process of the independent review that we must learn lessons from. However, I must make it absolutely clear that it will not be a case of opening up and reviewing the clinical evidence or the conclusions and recommendations of the report; we will look to learn lessons about the process.

When patients are involved in independent reviews, there can often be a power imbalance in the dynamics of the process. I think that it is really important that we learn lessons from the review of transvaginal mesh implants and that recommendations are made to ministers that inform not only the guidance that is provided to the chairs and members of future independent reviews, but the terms of reference of those reviews.

I am happy to keep Parliament informed of the detail of that process. I expect someone independent to take forward that work, and I will keep Alex Neil informed of progress.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I apologise for missing the very beginning of the cabinet secretary’s statement.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that the report discusses the use of a stand-alone database system. Given that the current British Society of Urogynaecology database can be used by only a relatively small proportion of surgeons and that it

“is not available to general practice”,

as the report notes, will the cabinet secretary consider using a comprehensive and independent database so that a much wider range of medical professionals can use it to report adverse incidents and concerns, and to track patient progress?

**Shona Robison:** As I said in my statement, data gathering and the monitoring of adverse incidents are extremely important and form a key

element of the recommendations. The oversight group that is being established will take forward much of the detail, and I am clear that we must ensure that there is transparency on all the data so that people can see the information for themselves.

I will be happy to keep Donald Cameron involved in the detail of that process as we proceed with it.

## Unconventional Oil and Gas

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a statement by Paul Wheelhouse on unconventional oil and gas. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:45

**The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse):** I welcome the opportunity to update Parliament on our consultation on unconventional oil and gas.

The Scottish Government has continually presented impartial, independent information on unconventional oil and gas in order to encourage informed public discussion and debate and our consultation is a continuation of that approach. Our consultation, "Talking 'Fracking'", which we launched on 31 January 2017, does not set out a specific policy proposal but instead presents evidence and gives the public, businesses and organisations across Scotland the opportunity to consider and express their views on the evidence. That is a unique and important approach that demonstrates our commitment to exploring both the evidence and the views of people across Scotland without bias or prejudice and I will maintain that neutral position today.

Unconventional oil and gas is a complex and controversial issue that has stimulated intense debate, motivated by deeply held and sincere views on all sides. Therefore, our approach remains one of caution while we gather and consider evidence and the views of the public on the issue.

Our cautious and evidence-led approach is the right approach. It has been widely supported by communities, industry and other interested parties. There are some who wish to pursue a gung-ho approach, either towards extraction or towards a ban, and who have put forward their own views without due concern for the differing interests and views of those who would be affected. It is the job of the Government—and one I take seriously—to base our decisions on evidence, while taking proper account of public opinions, and to seek a collective way forward. As I have stressed before to the Parliament, at each step towards reaching a final decision, we must take a careful, considered and evidence-led approach, and we must do that alongside an informed public debate.

Most of Scotland's unconventional oil and gas deposits occur in and around former coalfields and oil shale fields in Scotland's central belt, which are among the most densely populated parts of our country, as well as in the area around Canonbie in

Dumfriesshire. Scotland needs safe, clean, reliable and affordable energy to underpin the Scottish economy and to contribute to the wellbeing of our society. Scotland must also continue to demonstrate strong leadership on climate change, which is an issue in which everyone across Scotland has an interest. That is why it is so important not only that we consult local communities in the central belt and Dumfriesshire but that we give communities, business and interest groups from around Scotland an opportunity to put their views across.

It is also important to remember that this is not an issue that exists in isolation—the future of all potential energy sources must be viewed in the context of Scotland's wider energy strategy. The choices that Scotland makes about energy are among the most important decisions that we face. Our energy industry provides high-quality jobs and a vibrant climate for innovation. Affordable energy provision is a prerequisite for healthy, fulfilling living and productive, competitive business.

Achieving our vision for energy is also crucial to efforts to tackle fuel poverty and to prevent the damaging effects of climate change, as part of the global community's fight to limit global temperature increases to 2°C or less.

The Scottish Government is determined to support a stable, managed transition to a low-carbon economy in Scotland. However, our draft energy strategy also makes clear our commitment to the oil and gas industry throughout the energy transition. Oil and gas are a highly regulated and stable source of energy from an industry that provides an estimated 124,500 high-value jobs and the skills and expertise to meet the needs of the energy system of the future.

Our draft energy strategy for Scotland also sets out the Scottish Government's position on underground coal gasification. We took that position after a carefully considered period of evidence gathering. In my statement to Parliament on 6 October 2016, I confirmed that underground coal gasification poses numerous serious environmental risks and should have no place in Scotland's energy mix at this time. As a result, our energy strategy sets out an energy mix for the future that does not include underground coal gasification.

Our draft energy strategy is stimulating well-informed debate on the energy challenges in Scotland and policies needed to meet our aspirations to deliver a secure, sustainable energy future for all. I am very keen to ensure that our energy strategy is infused with the thoughts and views of people from right across Scotland and I strongly encourage everyone to participate prior to the consultation closing date of 30 May. The results of the consultation on unconventional oil

and gas will be a key consideration in finalising our energy strategy later this year.

I now wish to update the chamber on the Scottish Government's programme of evidence gathering and public consultation on unconventional oil and gas. To allow us to gather evidence and prepare for a full public consultation, the Scottish Government put in place a moratorium on unconventional oil and gas in January 2015. That means that no such projects can take place. For the avoidance of any doubt, the moratorium covers hydraulic fracturing—also known as fracking—and coal bed methane extraction technologies.

In support of our cautious, evidence-led approach towards unconventional oil and gas, the Scottish Government has taken steps to establish a comprehensive evidence base on which to consider the future of unconventional oil and gas in Scotland. In 2013, the Scottish Government asked an independent expert scientific panel to examine the scientific evidence on unconventional oil and gas in Scotland. When the panel reported in July 2014, it identified a number of key gaps in the evidence base.

On 8 October 2015, we set out details of the consultation timetable and the programme of gathering further evidence to address the gaps identified by the panel.

The Scottish Government reached a major milestone in November 2016 when we published a comprehensive suite of expert reports examining potential social, economic and environmental effects of unconventional oil and gas in more detail. The research was carried out by leading independent experts in their respective fields and the findings deepen our understanding of the issues. As we set out when we established the moratorium, the publication of the research has been followed by a period in which we and the public have had the opportunity to scrutinise and discuss the findings, prior to the launch of the public consultation.

I am confident that the reports that we have published deepen our knowledge of the evidence and shed light on the issues and choices that this industry presents. Now that the public and members have had time to examine the reports' conclusions in detail, I am sure that it is clear to all that no one study can give a conclusive view on the industry and whether it has a place in Scotland's energy mix. Some will say that the research shows that the economic impact is low and the environmental, health and climate change risks are too great; others will say that, with regulation, the risks can be managed and that the potential economic gain cannot be ignored. The reports rightly do not make recommendations on whether unconventional oil and gas should be



permitted. However, the science and evidence that are contained within them inform the debate and discussion.

To support that dialogue and debate, on 31 January the Scottish Government published its consultation on unconventional oil and gas, “Talking ‘Fracking’”. To provide time for full and considered debate, and to give the public and stakeholders time to respond, the consultation will last for four months, closing on 31 May. We have created a number of innovative ways for the public to engage in the consultation. In addition to the consultation document, we have launched a temporary unconventional oil and gas website, which is also called “Talking ‘Fracking’”. The site has been designed to provide a user-friendly route to accessing all the materials and evidence that support the consultation. I encourage those who wish to explore the issues further to visit the site.

To help the consultation to reach a range of audiences, the consultation document is available in alternative formats, which can be requested from the Scottish Government, including easy read, large print, Braille, British Sign Language and other languages. We have also made provision to receive responses in alternative formats, for example spoken responses or languages other than English.

Importantly, we have prepared a discussion toolkit, which has been designed to help communities and stakeholders to explore and discuss the issues in groups. The results of those discussions can be submitted to the Scottish Government and will be treated as a formal response to the consultation. I am pleased to inform Parliament that my officials have received a high volume of requests for consultation materials, including the discussion packs. I assure Parliament of the robust steps that the Scottish Government took to ensure that the evidence that is presented in the consultation and supporting materials is accurate and impartial. That included using direct quotes from the research projects and seeking assurance from the research contractors that our summaries are accurate.

We have also undertaken a number of actions to promote the consultation via the local and national press. The consultation is being promoted through our digital and social media channels, and via direct correspondence with a range of stakeholders, including community councils. We are seeing a strong response to the consultation—into five figures so far—and are satisfied that that level of participation indicates that the consultation is being viewed as a valuable process by the public.

As I set out on 6 October 2016, we are adopting a carefully considered process for reaching a decision on the future of unconventional oil and

gas that ensures that the views of the public, the evidence base and the views of Parliament are fully considered. Once the consultation closes and the results have been independently analysed and published, I reiterate our previous commitment to present our recommendation to Parliament and provide an opportunity to vote on it. After that, the Scottish Government will come to a considered judgment on the future of unconventional oil and gas in Scotland. We will, of course, respect the will of the Parliament on the issue, while following the statutory assessments and procedures required. Our carefully considered approach to reaching a final position on unconventional oil and gas will ensure that we make the right choice for Scotland, founded on the best available evidence. Given the significance of the issue, I am confident that that is the right and proper way to proceed.

**Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** I thank the minister for advance notice of his statement. With such anticipation of his statement, I can only describe our disappointment with how little it says. While many of us would have been hoping for progress in exploring Scotland’s untapped riches, there was also a fear that an outright ban was the price of Green subservience on Tuesday. However, the statement is neither of those. Talking fracking, and no action, as usual. Given that communities such as Croy, Cumbernauld and Coatbridge are waiting to gain hundreds of millions of pounds through a share of the proceeds, will the minister, today, finally give us a date for when a decision will be made?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** True to form, Mr Burnett strikes again. Mr Burnett knows that our position on these emerging energy technologies has been consistent, credible and evidenced. It is also in line with our manifesto, on which we were overwhelmingly elected in May last year. Until recently, our steadfast evidence-led approach to underground coal gasification was indeed heavily criticised by Mr Burnett and others in the Scottish Conservatives, only for the United Kingdom Government to belatedly follow Scotland’s lead and move towards a position of not supporting the industry on climate change grounds.

I have noted, as I am sure have many in the chamber, that the Scottish Conservatives made no reference to their position on underground coal gasification in their recently published environment policy paper, and of course Mr Burnett and his colleagues have a history of flip-flopping on issues to do with oil and gas.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Oh, the irony!

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Last year, we were told—this is a serious point that Mr Fraser might want to listen to—that the Conservatives had secured a

deal for the oil and gas industry from George Osborne. Of course, he was out in the reshuffle. *[Interruption.]* Before the spring budget, the Conservatives told us that the oil and gas industry did not need any additional support in the budget. The chancellor then recognised that it was the Scottish Government that had been pressing for changes in the fiscal regime to help the oil and gas industry.

I will get on with doing the job that I am doing—I was elected on a mandate to do exactly what I am doing—and I will leave it to Mr Burnett to sit and scream from the sidelines.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** In May 2016, this Parliament voted to ban fracking. In November 2016, the minister came before Parliament with expert reports and told us that he was cautious and consulting. Now he is back here telling us again that he is consulting cautiously. What we have had, frankly, after 15 minutes of the minister talking, is a repeat of what we had in November—nothing but padding, nothing new, nothing that delivers on the promises of Scottish National Party candidates across the country to ban fracking, and nothing that delivers on the will of Parliament.

The minister tells us that we will get a vote in Parliament—that is kind of him—but then he says that the Scottish Government will decide anyway. You could not make it up. However, we have already had a vote in Parliament, so can the minister tell me whether this is a bit like the independence referendum? Will we just keep having vote after vote until he gets the answer that he wants?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Let us get some things straight. First, the Opposition asked for a statement in the middle of the consultation period and we are happy to provide a statement to update the chamber on progress. I would have thought that Ms Baillie would welcome that.

Ms Baillie also refers to the fact that we have not made a decision. We are within the consultation period. It is normal practice to wait until a consultation is over before reaching a conclusion, especially a consultation that involves listening to the views of the people of Scotland. I would have thought that Ms Baillie would want to hear what the people of Scotland have to say about fracking before reaching a position and that she would also be mindful of the fact that we need to be in an evidence-based position before making a decision.

I am keeping true to what I said when I launched the consultation and when I made a statement in November—that we will give Parliament a decision on the issue and that we will have to take account of other statutory procedures that then follow.

However, I assure Ms Baillie that we will be listening to the will of Parliament at that time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to questions from the rest of the chamber. Eleven members want to ask questions and we have 17 minutes, so I want questions not opening statements. I call Angus MacDonald and ask him to set an example.

**Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** The minister will be aware of the concerns in my constituency regarding the environmental risks of fracking in the Falkirk district and the wider Forth valley. He will also be aware of the 15-year contract signed by Ineos for the supply of shale gas from the US for its Grangemouth plant; it puts the future of the plant on a sure footing, which is extremely welcome.

Does the minister agree with me that as long as there is any prospect of environmental risk, there is no need for a dash for gas in Scotland, and can he reassure my constituents in Falkirk East, who are deeply concerned about the potential impact of the fracking industry on their lives?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I want to acknowledge first and foremost that Mr MacDonald has been consistent in his desire to express the views of his constituents in Falkirk East. He raises important points. He is indeed correct that Ineos has secured a long-term supply of shale gas for the Grangemouth plant and we continue to support the plant as a key employer for his constituency and neighbouring constituencies.

We are taking a very cautious approach here—we want to take account of the environmental impact, the economic impact and the impact on climate change and other factors before we reach a considered decision. I assure Mr MacDonald that we will very much take into account environmental considerations in reaching a decision.

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** KPMG's modelling, which was commissioned by the SNP Government, stated that community benefit payments could be almost as high as £1 billion. Parliament still requires a date for the decision, but if unconventional oil and gas extraction is permitted, would the SNP Government support a community benefit fund?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** As Mr Golden will know, community benefits are not taken into account in planning decisions in any case, and I do not want to prejudge the outcome of the consultation. We will have to look very carefully at the science around the environmental impact, at the economic impact and take into account public opinion before we reach a decision.

I am aware of suggestions in relation to community benefit, but we are focusing first and foremost on the questions that are raised in the consultation. I advise Mr Golden and all other members in the chamber to encourage their constituents to take part in the consultation so that we receive the broadest possible range of views from communities in Scotland. We will listen to the people and study the evidence that is submitted to us, and then we will come to a decision.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Can the minister assure us that he will hold his nerve and listen to the public, and that he will not be swayed by the extremists on either side?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I have to be careful here, as I do not want to upset any member in the chamber. We are listening to a range of views and doing all that we can to listen to all those who have an interest in the subject. One of the real merits of having a consultation is that it gives people an opportunity to have their say on the evidence—if they disagree with it, they can put counter-evidence—and we can ultimately come to a view that is based on that evidence.

We have an independent analysis of the responses, which will allow us to look at the breadth of views that have been submitted. I assure the member that I will stay true to our commitment to listen to the people of Scotland, who have a very important role in the process, and to consider seriously all the scientific evidence that has been presented to us. I will not be swayed by people at either end of the spectrum who are not prepared to listen to reason.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** I will be as reasonable as possible. The minister has just spent 10 minutes of Parliament's time telling us nothing new of substance. That comes after he has spent 10 months actively ignoring—to be frank—the will of Parliament. The Scottish Parliament has already voted for a ban on onshore fracking—I remember that, as it was in my amendment to the Government's motion. When will the minister finally accept that, on the basis of the irrefutable climate science alone, my proposal for a bill to ban fracking onshore in Scotland is the best way forward for a sustainable future for the people?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** First, I recognise that Claudia Beamish has a genuine interest in the issue, and I would not describe her in any way as an extremist.

As to ignoring the will of the Parliament, we gave a very important commitment to the people of Scotland in the manifesto on which we were elected, which was that we would have an extensive, evidence-based process to decide our position on fracking. That is the commitment that

we stood on, and that is what we, as a Government, are fulfilling. I believe that that is the right thing to do, because it will be fair to all sides—we will listen to the evidence from all sides and ultimately take a decision that is based on that evidence and on the views of the communities that would be most affected by fracking.

I know that Claudia Beamish has taken a great interest in the issue in preparing her bill proposal. As she knows, the areas that would be affected are largely in the most densely populated parts of our country, so there is huge interest in the issue among Scotland's communities, and we want to give people the chance to have a say. That is a very important part of the process to which we are committed.

On the point about irrefutable science, the very point of having a consultation exercise is to put the science out there and allow people to challenge it if it is inaccurate in any way, and to receive counter-evidence. That is a responsible thing to do, and it means that, when we reach a decision, it will be seen to be entirely fair and we can—I hope—all stand behind it in the Parliament.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** It seems that the minister has come to the chamber once again to say that now is not the time for a decision on fracking. I respect the fact that he has a timetable and that he has emphasised the importance of a legally binding and watertight decision, whatever that decision may be.

How important is the consultation and the response to it in delivering a legally binding decision? If the minister does not get the level of detail and the number of responses that he hopes to get, will that jeopardise the decision, whatever it is?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** First, I may have missed this out in my statement, as I did not go into the subject of consultation in great depth, but we have already received a five-figure number of responses, so it is clear that we are getting a very good response. I could not tell the member the composition of those answers, because they have been gathered independently and I do not want to interfere in the process, but I assure him that there is strong participation in the consultation exercise.

That is important, because the issue affects many communities across Scotland in the areas where the activity is proposed to take place. It is only right that those communities have a say as to whether they value their environment and the consideration of climate change impacts over the potential economic impacts to which the Conservatives and others have referred.

It is very important to hear what the people of Scotland have to say, feed that into the decision

making and then make a recommendation to the Parliament. Ultimately, the members in this chamber will have a very important role in the process, because we will put a recommendation to them and give them the chance to say where they think we should go on the issue of fracking.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. There is nothing new in it, but it reminds us that he continues to flout the will of Parliament. Has he had his ears boxed by the First Minister for doing so?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I do not know how things worked in the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive, but we work as a team in this Government. The one thing that I would say to Mr Rennie, in all seriousness—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, can you speak into the microphone, please?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Apologies, Presiding Officer.

It is Mr Rennie's view that there is nothing new in the statement. We are updating Parliament on the progress of our consultation; we are sticking to the deadlines that we have committed to and there is no change in them; and we are trying to respect Parliament by agreeing to requests from members to give a statement to the chamber, including one from Mr Rennie's colleague Liam McArthur. Mr Rennie would do well to recognise that.

We are certainly sticking to the process in our manifesto, on which we were elected. I believe that that process has been backed by a number of key stakeholders, who have said that it is exactly the right thing to do, including many in the media and the trade union movement and others. Mr Rennie might not like it, but we are doing what we promised to do and I think that we are doing it well.

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** What engagement has the Scottish Government had with stakeholders during its investigation into the impact of fracking?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Clare Haughey has raised a very important point. We have carefully listened to our stakeholders in shaping the consultation. They had a big part in designing the consultation, which is an important point to make. I have met key groups representing the full range of views on the issue of fracking and, indeed, my officials have held a series of workshops with stakeholders on how best to encourage participation, a report on which is publicly available on our website. Stakeholder interest has been crucial in forming our approach to the consultation. That just goes to show the importance of having a consultation and listening to people, because there is a range of

strongly held views on both sides of the debate. Of course, no consultation will ever be perfect, but we have done our best to ensure that we try to take on board all the different points.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Earlier this year, the Advertising Standards Authority ordered Friends of the Earth to stop publishing misleading claims about the impact of fracking on health and on the contamination of drinking water. How will the Scottish Government ensure that the public responses to its consultation are not influenced by irresponsible scaremongering and lies spread by so-called environmental groups seeking to slant unfairly the responses that are received?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am not keen on the word "lies" in your question, even though you are not accusing anybody in here.

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I will not make a judgment on any material from either side that has been put out there. We have taken a conscious decision to commission independent evidence, which we believe is objective. We have made it our business to ensure that the consultation documents are as neutrally worded as we can make them so that we can be fair to arguments from both sides. We have avoided promulgating material from various campaign groups in order to avoid being accused, perhaps by Mr Fraser or others in this chamber, of promoting incorrect information.

We have tried to stick to what was commissioned on a scientific basis. The chief scientific officer looked at the consultation documents and they were heavily scrutinised before they went out into the public domain in order to ensure that they were as neutrally worded as possible and that we did not provide leading or prejudicial information or responses. We can do only what we can do, and we have tried to make sure that that information is as accessible to the public as possible. Indeed, the members in this chamber can help with that.

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** My constituents will welcome the chance to participate in the consultation process. However, on another matter, can the minister tell us why unconventional oil and gas does not feature in the climate change plan?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** That is a good point. I know that it has been raised in the chamber previously, but Christina McKelvie is right to raise it now. Unconventional oil and gas is currently covered by a moratorium, so there is no unconventional oil and gas activity happening in Scotland. Thankfully, since we intervened, the UK Government has not issued any new licences for that activity in Scotland while our deliberations are continuing. I give a commitment that while we are considering

the issue, no fracking or unconventional gas activities will commence in Scotland. That is why, as the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform has stated previously, unconventional oil and gas is not reflected in the climate change plan. Of course, if there was a change in the policy position, she would have to look at the matter again, but as the position is that there is no fracking, it is not in the plan.

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Who did the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work meet this morning at the site of the biggest shale gas exploration licence holder in Scotland—Ineos in Grangemouth—in advance of the minister's statement to Parliament this afternoon? What was discussed at that meeting and will the Scottish Government publish the minutes of it?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** As I am sure that Mr Leonard knows, the cabinet secretary met representatives of Ineos this morning, at their request, to discuss issues raised by the trade unions. There was no discussion about our unconventional oil and gas consultation. As for publishing minutes, I am not sure that that is appropriate for a private meeting, but I will leave the member to raise that with the cabinet secretary.

**Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** The minister has spoken about what he is doing in regard to the consultation, but can he expand further on the other actions that he can take to encourage people to submit their views to the consultation on fracking?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** That is an important point. The clock is running down and we want to get as many responses to the consultation as we can, to ensure that we have as representative a view of the people of Scotland as possible. We will continue to use social media, the traditional media and other channels, and I urge MSPs and councillors and candidates throughout the country to encourage their constituents to take part in the consultation exercise and to give their views. It is important, because of the location of the sites, that we take full account of the views of the people of Scotland. There are also issues that affect communities the length and breadth of Scotland, such as the impact on climate change, so it is important for everybody in Scotland who wants to take part to do so. I thank the member for raising that point, and I encourage all members to continue to promote the consultation.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I thank everybody for rattling through their questions. We got through them all.

## Enterprise and Skills Review

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a statement by Keith Brown, on the enterprise and skills review. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there are to be no interventions or interruptions.

16:11

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown):** I wish to provide an update on the progress of the enterprise and skills review, which aims to align and improve our enterprise and skills system. In doing so, I am fulfilling the commitment that I made to Parliament in January to provide an update on the governance aspects of the review. Since January, there have been two debates in the chamber that have highlighted the Parliament's views on matters relating to the strategic board. On both occasions, Scottish ministers have been clear that we would listen to the views expressed. I have done that, and I am thankful for the opportunity to address the concerns that have been raised.

As well as talking about governance today, I also want to highlight our vision for a more productive and inclusive economy and the economic objectives that we want to achieve. I published phase 1 of the enterprise and skills review in October last year, when I set out the level of the challenge that the Scottish economy faces—in particular, the urgent action that is necessary as a result of the European Union referendum.

Despite those challenges, the Scottish economy continues to perform, and I am delighted to note that we have recently progressed to the second Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development quartile for productivity. That demonstrates that the fundamentals of the Scottish economy are strong and that progress is possible with sustained and concerted effort. We have substantial natural resources, one of the most highly educated workforces in Europe, a longstanding reputation for innovation and an internationally recognised brand. We are world leaders in key industries of the future, such as life sciences, financial services and financial technology, as well as in the creative industries and sustainable tourism.

However, the status quo will not deliver the economic step change that is necessary to realise our ambition to rank in the top quartile of OECD countries for productivity, equality, wellbeing and sustainability. Productivity drives the overall standard of living in our economy and the competitiveness of our businesses. A step change

in productivity will deliver an opportunity to see higher wages, greater competitiveness, and increased quality of life for everyone across Scotland. The review is exploring how our agencies can leverage the strong fundamentals of our economy to help individuals and businesses realise their ambition, taking advantage of the rich opportunities that exist in Scotland.

As just one example of our increasing effort, I will be committing £1 million in the next financial year, and for the following three years, to create a new Scottish public sector innovation challenge fund. I have asked Scottish Enterprise to lead on that and to work with partners to scale up the fund in 2017-18 and in future years. The fund will use the public sector's demand for improved services to stimulate and support the development and commercialisation of innovations from indigenous supply chain companies. The approach will benefit everyone by finding innovative private sector-led solutions for complex public sector issues, improving services for citizens across the whole of Scotland, saving money and increasing opportunities for business innovation.

The enterprise and skills system is fundamental to achieving our ambitions. Sharing a common purpose and strong leadership, our agencies can create the conditions to increase productivity and help deliver the skills that Scotland's people and economy need. That is why we put productivity growth at the centre of our vision for the enterprise and skills review.

We recognise and appreciate the vital contribution that the four agencies—Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council—make to creating a more successful country, delivering opportunities across Scotland that support inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Far from diminishing the role of the agencies, I want the review to set out how we can enhance the impact of the investment that we make on economic and skills development. We want our agencies to create the best conditions in the world for inclusive growth, so the review is exploring how our agencies can transform the services, the skills and the support necessary for business and individuals across Scotland to be successful. I want to create a system of enterprise and skills support that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Many of the responses, including the response from Audit Scotland, to phase 1 of the review highlighted the need for greater alignment in order to deliver greater economic impact. Our commitment to create a strategic board will deliver greater collaboration, innovation and common purpose across the agencies.

Although support for the strategic board has been considerable, it was clear that there were concerns about how it would impact on our agencies, particularly Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish funding council. I agree that any new arrangement has to balance carefully the different interests of the regions of Scotland and the full statutory functions and responsibilities of each agency.

I asked Professor Lorne Crerar, the chair of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, to lead discussions with his fellow chairs and others to scope potential structures and functions for the new board and to consider how that would align with arrangements at agency level.

I thank Professor Crerar for his considered and detailed paper. He has shown great personal commitment and objectivity in taking forward the work. I have reflected on his proposals and the views that have been expressed in the chamber—in the debates that I mentioned—and more widely in determining the strategic board's role, function and structure and its relationship to governance at agency level. Similarly, I have tested all that against what will best deliver our ambitions.

My intention is to build on Professor Crerar's proposals and to establish a strategic board with the aims that he identified, and with a further aim: to deliver wider collective leadership, based on common culture and values, and which inspires and empowers delivery. The final aim recognises the need for a step change in the culture across the system and with those that the agencies engage with. That must take the shape of fundamental, meaningful collaboration and be reflected in day-to-day joint working at every level.

The board, which will be led by an independent chair from the business community, will develop a strategic plan that is underpinned by common, evidenced performance measures on which the agencies can collaborate. Each agency will have a seat at the table through their chair, and will be joined by strong non-executive members drawn from wider economic and societal interests, including members with experience of business, local government, research and skills, and the trade unions.

We recognised the need for change following the phase 1 report, but I have listened to the views of the Parliament that more can be done in the existing structures to drive change. Professor Crerar also helpfully set out a way that he thinks we can achieve that and, on that basis, I do not intend to bring forward legislation to change the name, the functions or the structures of the agency boards.

I have listened to a wide range of voices over the past few months, including those of my

Highlands and Islands Scottish National Party parliamentary colleagues and MSPs from other parties. I have spoken to all Opposition party spokespeople for this area, too. I have also spoken to the business community, which asked that, across the parties, we should, if we can, and as far as we can, demonstrate consensus on the fundamental importance of business support and enterprise. That is of particular value to the business community. In particular, I have listened carefully to this Parliament.

Consequently, I confirm today that the boards of HIE, the SFC and the other agencies will remain. However, there is an expectation that the agencies will work to align their delivery to maximise their positive impact on the economy. As I have previously promised, HIE will continue to be locally based, managed and directed, and the new arrangements will protect and enhance its unique service.

As recommended in Professor Crerar's report, I will obviously want to work with the boards to develop their functions, consistent with their existing statutory basis, to ensure that they can collaborate effectively to deliver the strategic board's purpose and achieve our overall vision.

I recognise the value in bringing together the agencies quickly to form an implementation board. That board will include some members of the ministerial review group and will develop the detailed work that is necessary to bring the strategic board into being.

Phase 2 of the review, which began in November 2016, is due to last six months, and in the coming weeks, I will publish a report that will demonstrate progress across all areas during that phase. For example, it will highlight work that VisitScotland is leading in collaboration with other agencies and which will result in powerful, consistent messaging and an identity that can be used collectively across different Government agencies, universities and businesses as well as individually, where and when appropriate. That narrative and campaign will use our natural and built assets, be it the renowned beauty of our landscapes and seascapes, our rich history and culture or the pioneering drive of Scotland across academia and industry, to show what a modern and progressive Scotland can offer the world. Such measures, which will support our international economic aims, will be crucial in helping us to deliver our collective ambitions.

I am setting out the principles of the governance architecture today to allow us to rapidly progress those progressive initiatives across the whole range of the review. I repeat, however, that the reform to the governance structure that I have set out, as well as the supporting initiatives that I have laid out, remain a means to an end. The review's

core purpose is to drive a step change in our economy's performance and deliver strong, vibrant and inclusive growth. I am confident that those ambitions are shared by everyone in the chamber, and I hope that members will endorse them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much. We will now have questions on the issues that were raised in the statement. I will allow 20 minutes for questions, and I have 16 members who want to speak.

As Dean Lockhart was not in the chamber for the opening of the statement, and as I have had no letter or note of excuse, he will slip to the bottom of my list of questioners. That is what I would do to anyone else. Have the courtesy to be here, as every other questioner was, when statements are read out.

I call Jackie Baillie.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement.

I must confess that I feel some sympathy for Keith Brown—it has been a bad week for him. On Tuesday, he announced the delays to the Queensferry crossing, and on Wednesday, he had to apologise for being conned by a Chinese investor. Today, he appears to have performed a series of spectacular U-turns.

The Parliament made it clear that it wanted to retain Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish funding council in their current form, and there was also support for Scottish Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland. I therefore welcome the cabinet secretary's apparent change of mind to abandon legislating for a new board. However, I must warn him that trying to exert control in another way does not respect the will of Parliament, and I would be grateful if he would confirm that the new board is not statutory.

I find it strange that Keith Brown is not chairing the board—and he knows that that is my view. After all, John Swinney used to chair the strategic forum, and the cabinet secretary's denial of chairing the board downgrades its importance and actually blurs the lines of accountability. Surely if the cabinet secretary thinks that the economy is so important, as I believe that he does, he should chair the strategic board.

**Keith Brown:** First, I thank Jackie Baillie for her genuine and sincere concern for my welfare. I think that the Labour Party said to me recently—it was at general question time—that, if we did as it had asked us to do, it would be a sign of strength, not weakness. However, that view did not seem to last too long.

On the strategic board, it is not just other members in the chamber but members from other

parties who have told me that, unlike Jackie Baillie, they would prefer the board not to be chaired by a minister. The decision has been taken not solely because of those representations; I have also had very strong representations from those in the ministerial review group and have heard very powerful arguments about what a chair with a strong business background could mean for the board's progress. Ministers will, of course, input to the board—indeed, that is bound to be the case.

As for the other points that Jackie Baillie made, it is not the case that this will be a statutory board. In fact, there is no reason why it cannot have as much—and possibly even more—effectiveness through its not being a statutory board. I think that that also meets concerns that were raised by other members in the chamber. Of course, there is no conceivable way that I can meet all the concerns expressed by every member and every party in the chamber. Instead, I have to take a balanced approach to all the representations that I have received. I promised to listen; I have listened; and I will continue to listen.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call James Dornan to be followed by Liz Smith—and I must ask for short questions and short answers, please.

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** Will the cabinet secretary confirm that the dedicated, locally based support managed and directed by HIE will remain in place alongside its role of working in close collaboration with the other agencies for the economy's benefit?

**Keith Brown:** As I have said repeatedly, Highlands and Islands Enterprise does great work in the Highlands, and this Government is determined to support it in continuing to do that work.

I have also previously promised that HIE will continue to be locally based, managed and directed, and that the new arrangements will protect and enhance its unique service. HIE will continue to have a board and its core functions, as set out in statute, will remain legislatively unchanged. The new arrangements will not only protect the service that HIE delivers for our Highlands and Islands economies, but—through the collaboration that we seek with other agencies—enhance the support that is available to businesses, employers and employees across the region.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I warmly welcome the very substantial U-turn on the original recommendation to scrap the individual boards. In the case of the Scottish funding council—as only part of its activities are directed at skills and enterprise—can the cabinet secretary confirm that any formal collaboration with the other

agencies via the new strategic board will be for skills and enterprise activities only? Can he also confirm that the statutory and legal basis of the current SFC board will not in any way be diminished and that it will still be for Parliament to determine its allocation of funding?

**Keith Brown:** There is no intention to change the functions and structures of the SFC—if I heard Liz Smith right.

**Liz Smith:** So the board will be left as it is.

**Keith Brown:** I said in my statement that we will work to develop the boards themselves. That has been part of the review and was recommended by Lorne Crerar, although it was not specifically mentioned in relation to the SFC. We will continue to have a dialogue—as we always do—about the nature of the boards, but the board will not be abolished and it will stay where it is. We will not go in and look at the structures of the boards.

In addition, we might see a strengthening of the boards, because the chair of the board of the funding council will also sit on the strategic board, as will the chairs of the boards of the other agencies.

I am not sure that I have picked up on all the points of concern that Liz Smith expressed; if I have missed one, I will be happy to respond to her in writing.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that there are no supplementary questions.

**Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP):** I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement and his confirmation that the HIE board will continue in its current form. Does he recognise the important role that was played by HIE Moray in attracting the company Kura to Forres, which has saved local jobs and has the potential to grow many more? Will he confirm that HIE Moray will continue its good work in the times ahead, particularly given the threat that is posed to the Moray economy by the Conservative Party's hard-Brexit policy?

**Keith Brown:** I can confirm that. On Richard Lochhead's final point, it was clear from phase 1 of the review and subsequent discussions that there is fear about Brexit, especially in the Highlands and Islands, and particularly in relation to European structural funds and other funds that have performed a function that the United Kingdom Government departed from in the 1980s. Those funds are crucial and there is an extreme level of worry about the nature of that support and whether it will continue post-Brexit. That is one of the major challenges that the review seeks to address.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Although the retention of the HIE board is welcome, a board with no power is useless. The



parts of the cabinet secretary's statement that worry me state that

"agencies will work to align their delivery"

and that they will

"deliver the strategic board's purpose and achieve our overall vision."

If HIE has to conform to a Scotland-wide delivery plan, purpose and vision, how will that allow for local accountability and decision making? Who will be boss: the strategic board or the HIE board?

**Keith Brown:** I do not think that there is anything further that I can say to answer the concerns that were expressed by Rhoda Grant, and I do not understand those concerns. I have said that the board will remain as it is and that it will have the powers that it currently has. It will not be second-guessed in terms of its strategic investments and it will continue to take the decisions that it has taken up until now.

I do not know why anybody would object to the idea that our main enterprise and skills agencies should collaborate and align for the greater purpose of improving economic performance around Scotland. It is my responsibility, and the responsibility of each of the agencies and their boards, to ensure that that happens. That is a perfectly proper and necessary ambition for us to have and I do not understand why the Labour Party as a whole—or it might just be Rhoda Grant—opposes that.

The short answer to the question is that HIE will have the powers that it currently has.

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** I thank the cabinet secretary for listening with regard to the HIE board. He will recognise the role that social enterprises play in economic growth, particularly in the Highlands and Islands. If the policy is to align the agencies, will the cabinet secretary broaden Scottish Enterprise's remit to encompass social enterprises, and will he agree to meet me and Green Party colleagues to discuss some continuing concerns?

**Keith Brown:** I thank John Finnie for his willingness to engage in the process. I have listened to him, as I have listened to many SNP Highlands and Islands MSPs and MPs who have made very strong representations on the matter.

As I just said to Rhoda Grant, it is our intention that the social function of Highlands and Islands Enterprise will remain. It is also my intention that that should be the same for the south of Scotland agency. It should have a similar power. Scottish Enterprise currently has the ability to do many of those things that John Finnie seeks. In order to ensure that we bottom that out, I am of course

more than willing to meet John Finnie and his colleagues.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement.

I would welcome the U-turn, but I am struggling to square it with the sentence in the cabinet secretary's statement, which he delivered very carefully, that says that the boards will

"collaborate effectively to deliver the strategic board's purpose and achieve our overall vision."

If collaboration and delivering that vision are the purpose of the strategic board, what are the boards of Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish funding council going to do?

**Keith Brown:** The boards of the funding council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise will do the things that they currently do. In fact, it may well be the case that they do substantially more. I mentioned that there is also a stream of work on regionalisation and I am grateful to Tavish Scott for the engagement that we have had on that. It may well result in local areas, whether at agency board or some other level, taking on additional powers that are currently exercised by agencies such as Skills Development Scotland.

There is potential for the boards to be more powerful than they currently are. It is right for us to set out an overarching vision about productivity, increasing exports and meeting challenges that apply not just to one part of Scotland but to the whole of Scotland.

The boards will continue to have the powers and the functions that they currently have. We can achieve a lot more if we can make sure that the boards come together. I have given the example previously of internationalisation, where sometimes there is not the collaboration that there should be. People in HIE told me during the consultation process that they had access to one person in SDI. HIE needs to have more resource and more collaboration with the other agencies than is currently taking place. That is the purpose of this. There is no sinister purpose to the review. It is to increase the benefits for everybody.

**Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that creating a strategic board will help to co-ordinate the activities of SE, HIE, SDS and the SFC and bring greater integration and focus to delivery of our enterprise and skills support?

**Keith Brown:** I absolutely agree—that takes up the point on which I responded to Tavish Scott. It is clear from the overwhelming evidence that we had in phase 1 of the review that there is a need to align better the services and the support that our agencies offer in order to deliver across Scotland

opportunities that support inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

The review aims to help agencies to transform collaboratively the services, skills and support that are necessary for businesses and individuals across Scotland to be successful. I want, as I said in my statement, to create an enterprise and skills system that is greater than the sum of its parts. A strategic board will assist the four agency boards—and the proposed south of Scotland agency board—to align their services to achieve greater collaboration, innovation and common purpose.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

I welcome the fact that SNP members have now found their voice on the issue—although sadly only after their ministers announced their U-turn.

As Rhoda Grant did in her question, I ask what assurances can be given that decisions that are taken locally in Moray and across the Highlands and Islands by the board of HIE will not be overruled by the new strategic board?

**Keith Brown:** I am glad that Douglas Ross was able to join us after the statement had begun. Well done on finding your way to the chamber.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will excuse Mr Ross. He was trying to locate a colleague.

**Keith Brown:** In addition to what I have said to other members, councils including Moray Council were involved in the consultation on the HIE board, and I have had a number of discussions with them. The statement meets many of their aims in defending the continued existence of the HIE board. They will be pleased to have that assurance.

The councils, including Moray Council, also expressed support for the strategic board. I am happy to check that, but I am fairly sure that it was a unanimous view among the Highlands and Islands local authorities. They also asked that further development take place in relation to the board because they have concerns about its current structure. I will do that only in conjunction and collaboration with the board. The reassurance that Douglas Ross seeks has been provided.

**Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Will HIE retain its much valued social responsibility role?

**Keith Brown:** That role has been one of its strongest points. I think that in a previous debate members on all sides quoted the words of Jim Hunter. When I met him, he expressed a number of concerns. I recognise that the statement will not satisfy all those concerns. Crucially, he pointed out that when Highlands and Islands Enterprise—then, the Highlands and Islands Development Board—was first established, it was necessary to

create the capacity to take up business and entrepreneurial opportunities, which meant taking social and, sometimes, cultural initiatives in order to build that capacity. HIE has a very strong track record of doing that, and I have always said that that function should remain. I hope that members welcome the fact that I intend to ensure that that facility and extended remit are also available to the south of Scotland agency.

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

I note that the cabinet secretary failed to answer Liz Smith's question about budgets. Will the Scottish Parliament continue to set the Scottish funding council budget, or will that be a responsibility of the new board? Will the new board be able to move money between the agencies? Will the chair of the Scottish funding council be a ministerial appointment, as is currently the case, or will that appointment fall to the new board?

**Keith Brown:** I am happy to reassure Daniel Johnson on both points. That appointment will not be by the strategic board; it will be by ministers, as is currently the case.

The current budgetary arrangements will apply. The strategic board will not allocate budgets to the agencies.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary guarantee that the board of HIE will retain

“all strategic, operational and budgetary decisions”,

given the motion that was passed by a majority vote in Parliament on 18 January?

**Keith Brown:** I have given that reassurance a number of times already, with the caveat that I expect collaboration and alignment among the agencies in respect of their activities. One or two members have mentioned that. That collaboration and alignment will benefit the agencies and Scotland as a whole.

HIE and some of the constituent councils in the Highlands and Islands area will tell members that they believe that further support is required from other agencies. It is important that that happens. I have given the example of SDI, but that is true for other areas, not least in relation to data. It is very important that, in addition to what the agencies currently do, we have a common function to create the right data to help to inform decisions. What Highlands and Islands Enterprise does will be strengthened and extended; I hope that Donald Cameron welcomes that.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** I refer members to my register of interests as a local councillor in Dumfries and Galloway Council.

The cabinet secretary will not be surprised that I am disappointed that he did not cover the south of Scotland in his statement. Will he accept the proposal that the new south of Scotland enterprise body—which was proposed during phase 1 of the review—be based on a boundary of the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway? When can we expect the new body to be up and running, given that the cabinet secretary has received a proposal from the local authorities for a body that could be established in just a matter of months? Can the cabinet secretary give a commitment that the governance arrangements for the new body will mean that decisions will be made in the south of Scotland for the south of Scotland? It would be disappointing if, like the Highlands and Islands, we needed a vote in Parliament to achieve that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Members should be quick, as I want to get everybody in.

**Keith Brown:** I think that there were three questions there. I hope to cover each of them.

Discussions about the boundaries are a key part of the current phase of work. I agree with Colin Smyth that there appears to be an emerging consensus that the body should be based on Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders, but there are other perspectives. It is very important that we take the temperature of the new councils once they have been elected to see whether they agree.

On when decisions about the new vehicle will be taken, phase 2 of the review began on 1 November, and we said that it would take six months. The final phase 2 decisions are likely to set out a programme of work that we will undertake.

I have covered the functions and powers of the board in previous responses. My intention is that they should be similar to those that Highlands and Islands Enterprise exercises.

I think that that answers the questions, but if Colin Smyth wants to get back to me on anything that is unclear, I will be happy to deal with that.

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** I am disappointed that there was no direct reference to the south of Scotland in the statement. There has been insufficient clarity on what that vehicle will look like. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the model will be similarly constituted to HIE in respect of its governance? How will the interests of our region be represented on the implementation board, given that there is not an existing structure?

**Keith Brown:** At least the last point is a reasonable one. I have covered the other points a number of times.

It is very important that there is representation on the implementation board, and I acknowledge the point that there is not currently a constituted board.

However, I am sure that Oliver Mundell will want to congratulate the Scottish Government on being the Government to have introduced a south of Scotland agency, when no previous Government has done so. That will be an achievement for the SNP Government.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** The review and the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee found that there is a certain amount of duplication and, perhaps, not the best use of resources among the agencies. Can the cabinet secretary assure us that there will be improvement in that respect and that there will be more co-ordination than there has been?

**Keith Brown:** The change has to be about collaboration and alignment. I do not think that any member or any member of the boards would say that there is no duplication. Every pound that is spent on duplication is a pound that does not need to be spent; we need every pound to work for the people of Scotland. John Mason is right that we want to ensure that we address issues of duplication; we will do that, especially in relation to some of the activities of the SFC and Skills Development Scotland, which would freely admit that there can be duplication. It is right that we get those organisations as lean, as effective and as efficient as possible and that we drive out duplication.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call Dean Lockhart, I thank him for his note and say that he has learned the hard way. Business in here follows on, so all members should watch out and not just think that an item will be taken at a certain time. Members have all learned a lesson—I learned it once myself, and it is a hard lesson.

I now call Mr Lockhart.

**Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I can assure you and the cabinet secretary that the reason why I was not here earlier was that I was busy reading his statement, if that makes any difference.

I welcome the U-turn that the cabinet secretary has made and I agree with him that we need a step change in the economy. However, that step change will not be delivered by tinkering with the organisation of the agencies: it needs leadership and clear policy direction and implementation by the Government. Does the cabinet secretary agree with Audit Scotland's conclusion, when it reviewed the enterprise agencies, that

"the enterprise agencies are performing well but the Scottish Government needs a clearer plan for delivering its economic strategy"?

**Keith Brown:** The answer to that is based on the very fact of the review. The review acknowledges that, on some things, especially in relation to competitiveness, exports and the international-facing nature of our businesses, we have more to do. I acknowledge that. We have discussed previously the Government's overarching economic strategy, which will be informed, as it must be, by pressures such as Brexit. That is a huge pressure and we are only now starting to see that. Just today, François Hollande phoned Angela Merkel and told her that there will not be a trade deal at the same time as the Brexit deal. That has huge implications, and we have to prepare ourselves for it.

That is the purpose of the review. There is nothing sinister in it. It is about making sure that we establish the right structures and infrastructure so that we can do what we need to do on business support, data collection, economic activity and skills. That is the whole purpose of the review. I am, of course, grateful to Dean Lockhart for his engagement in relation to that. I genuinely hope that we can come together, because the business community is asking that of us. I will continue to seek further common ground where possible, so that we can all face in the same direction when dealing with the challenges that confront Scotland.

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:43

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S5M-04783, on committee membership, motion S5M-04784, on substitution on committees, and motion S5M-04945, on acting conveners.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that—

Jenny Gilruth be appointed to replace Richard Lyle as a member of the Health and Sport Committee;

Richard Lyle be appointed to replace Jenny Gilruth on the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee;

Clare Haughey be appointed to replace Fulton MacGregor on the Education and Skills Committee;

Ruth Maguire be appointed to replace Richard Lochhead on the Education and Skills Committee;

Jenny Gilruth be appointed to replace Ruth Maguire on the Local Government and Communities Committee;

Fulton MacGregor be appointed to replace Mairi Evans on the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee;

Willie Coffey be appointed to replace Gail Ross on the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee;

Emma Harper be appointed to replace Clare Haughey on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee;

Mairi Evans be appointed to replace Emma Harper on the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee; and

Gail Ross be appointed to replace to replace Willie Coffey on the Equalities and Human Rights Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Christina McKelvie be appointed to replace George Adam as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee; and

George Adam be appointed to replace Christina McKelvie as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Justice Committee.

That, under rule 12.1A, the Parliament agrees that—

(a) Jackie Baillie be appointed as a member of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee; and

(b) an acting convener of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee shall be chosen for the period 16 April 2017 to 20 October 2017.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

**The Presiding Officer:** We will take the question on those motions at decision time, which will be at 16:45, so we will just wait a few seconds.

## Decision Time

16:45

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The question is, that Parliamentary Bureau motions S5M-04783, S5M-04784 and S5M-04945, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, be agreed to.

### *Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that—

Jenny Gilruth be appointed to replace Richard Lyle as a member of the Health and Sport Committee;

Richard Lyle be appointed to replace Jenny Gilruth on the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee;

Clare Haughey be appointed to replace Fulton MacGregor on the Education and Skills Committee;

Ruth Maguire be appointed to replace Richard Lochhead on the Education and Skills Committee;

Jenny Gilruth be appointed to replace Ruth Maguire on the Local Government and Communities Committee;

Fulton MacGregor be appointed to replace Mairi Evans on the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee;

Willie Coffey be appointed to replace Gail Ross on the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee;

Emma Harper be appointed to replace Clare Haughey on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee;

Mairi Evans be appointed to replace Emma Harper on the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee; and

Gail Ross be appointed to replace to replace Willie Coffey on the Equalities and Human Rights Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Christina McKelvie be appointed to replace George Adam as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee; and

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(a) Jackie Baillie be appointed as a member of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee; and

(b) an acting convener of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee shall be chosen for the period 16 April 2017 to 20 October 2017.

*Meeting closed at 16:45.*



This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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