



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Wednesday 3 May 2017**

**Session 5**



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 3 May 2017

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 13:30]

## First Minister's Question Time

### Engagements

#### 1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):

To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-01217)

#### The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):

Engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

**Ruth Davidson:** At the weekend, the First Minister's predecessor was asked on television why one in five children leaves primary school functionally illiterate, and he replied that that was "just one statistic". No, it is not; it is thousands of lives. Ten years to the day since the Scottish National Party Government took charge, and with councils across Scotland being asked to run our schools tomorrow, perhaps it is worth asking the current First Minister about some more statistics. Here is one: why is it that, between 2011 and 2015, the proportion of children performing well in numeracy fell in both primary 4 and primary 7?

**The First Minister:** I have made no bones about my determination to raise performance in literacy and numeracy and in attainment across the board. That is why we have established the new national improvement framework, the attainment challenge and the attainment fund, which—as we have talked about many times in the chamber—is now channelling additional resources directly to headteachers in order that they can decide the best ways in which to raise attainment. We will see the latest figures in the same vein as those that Ruth Davidson cites shortly. They are sample surveys. I am not dismissing them, but they are one of the reasons why we have taken the decision to start publishing comprehensive school-by-school, local authority-by-local authority data so that we know how our schools are performing and, crucially, so that we know what is working and can drive up attainment. We will continue to remain focused on an issue that is vital for young people and parents right across the country.

**Ruth Davidson:** The First Minister talks about her intention to improve, but there was no acknowledgement that the failures have been on her watch.

Let us take another statistic. In science, the Sutton Trust has this year reported on the "pronounced and sustained" decline in able pupils' performance under the SNP. Indeed, it says that that decline over the past decade, since the SNP came to power, is equivalent to around an entire year of schooling. I know that, in answer to every question, the First Minister is going to stand there and tell me that everything is going to be sorted soon. However, can she tell me why that drop in standards has happened on her watch?

**The First Minister:** Although I do not dismiss any of the statistics that Ruth Davidson cites, I think that she does a disservice to young people and teachers across the country. As we have set out before, we now see record numbers of higher and advanced higher passes in our schools and record numbers of positive destinations, which is more young people than ever before going into employment, further education or training. We are seeing far fewer pupils from our deprived communities leaving school with no qualifications, and we are starting to see—although I want to see this go much further—a narrowing of the gap between the least and most deprived areas in terms of access to university.

It is not simply a case of my standing here and saying what my intentions are, although my intention is solidly to continue to make improvement; I can—as I have just done—point to the improvements that we have already made. We will get on with investing the money, conducting the reforms and supporting teachers and headteachers to make sure that we see continued improvement for young people right across the country.

**Ruth Davidson:** I stand next to no one in my admiration of the hard work that our teachers do, but the guidance that they are given to work under is described by education experts as "self-evident lunacy". That is what is coming out of the Government and its arms.

Here is what parents think: the SNP Government has presided over falling standards and has failed utterly to ensure that we have enough teachers in our classrooms to turn that situation around. Here is yet another statistic: there are 4,000 fewer teachers in Scotland's schools than there were in 2007. We know that 16 per cent of training places for English teachers are unfilled and that more than a quarter of training places for maths teachers are vacant. There are possible solutions to that. Councils in some of our rural communities in the north-east and the Highlands are saying that they want more flexibility to tackle the crisis themselves in a way that suits their circumstances. However, they are having to hang around for an answer because John Swinney's promised review of governance has

been delayed and delayed again. It is a problem of the SNP's making. We have councils saying, "Let us fix this now," and an education secretary saying, "No, let me chew on this some more." Again I ask—why?

**The First Minister:** First, the recommendations from the governance review will be published shortly, once we have properly analysed—as it is right and proper to do—all the submissions that have been made to that review.

One thing is certain if past experience is anything to go by. As soon as we set out the direction of travel over the governance review, the other parties in the chamber, which have been calling on us to do that for months, will suddenly decide that they oppose everything that we have decided to do—I would lay bets on that.

As Ruth Davidson well knows, the governance review is one part of a wider package of reforms: the national improvement framework, the attainment challenge, the attainment fund, the introduction of standardised assessments—which I remember Labour used to support but, as soon as we decided to introduce them, decided to oppose—and the publication of school-by-school, local authority-by-local authority figures so that we can track exactly how—

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** League tables!

**The First Minister:** There we go—the Liberal Democrats oppose those reforms. Time and again in the chamber, we see Opposition parties calling for things to be done but opposing them as soon as they are done.

We will get on and take the action, backed by investment, that is delivering improvements in our schools and which will continue to deliver improvements in our schools.

**Ruth Davidson:** I am sorry, but jam tomorrow just does not cut it because, with this SNP Government, it is not just one statistic or two or three—it is a 10-year record of failure, which is leaving us in a situation where, according to the architect of curriculum for excellence, our schools can no longer be classed as world leading.

Tomorrow, we elect the councillors whose job will be to support our schools on the ground. The SNP says that education is its top priority, but does its 10 years of failure not tell an entirely different story?

**The First Minister:** We will go into the local elections tomorrow pointing to the improvements that are being made in our schools and, crucially, pointing to the £120 million of additional resource that is now in the hands of headteachers to drive further improvement.

I am standing here wondering why, if education is of any priority to the Conservatives, they are putting out around the country leaflets such as the one that I have here, which I got through my door. It mentions me or the SNP or independence a grand total of 43 times. It mentions Ruth Davidson or the Tories just nine times, and one of those times is her signature. It mentions Ruth Davidson's policies on education zero times. In this election, the Tories have not put forward a single policy on our schools, on social care, on roads, on transport, or on anything. They have a constitutional obsession; I will get on with raising standards in our schools.

### Engagements

**2. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the week. (S5F-01212)

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

**Kezia Dugdale:** In 2015, the First Minister said that she supported a 50p top rate of tax for those earning more than £150,000 a year. In 2016, she changed her mind and said that she did not support it, when she had the power to deliver it. Now, in 2017, without any sense of irony, the First Minister claims to support it again. Does she really expect people to believe her this time around?

**The First Minister:** Kezia Dugdale should maybe listen a bit carefully. In 2015, I said that I supported that across the United Kingdom. In 2016, I said that the advice that we had taken was that, if we did it only in Scotland without the powers to tackle tax avoidance—which we do not have because they lie at Westminster—that could potentially lose revenue. I do not think that anybody in the chamber would seriously stand up and argue that we should put up a tax if the advice said that it would actually lead to a reduction in the revenue. We are going into a UK-wide election in a few weeks' time and we will publish our manifesto in due course.

Of course, this is Kezia Dugdale, the leader of the Labour Party, which, just a few weeks ago, published a local government manifesto saying that the council tax freeze had "crippled local government", yet she is leading eight Labour-led authorities into the election promising to freeze the council tax. Perhaps Kezia Dugdale will comment on that before she comes here and asks me about taxation.

**Kezia Dugdale:** The First Minister has spent 10 years and two elections promising to scrap the council tax. I have just heard her say that we should not bother to try to tax the rich because they will just find a way around it, which is the

same argument that the Tories have been making, week in and week out, for years. The truth is that the SNP has, in this chamber, voted against a 50p top rate of tax no less than eight times—so much for stronger for Scotland.

There is a pattern developing here. Nicola Sturgeon has spent her entire career campaigning for more powers to stop cuts to public services, but now that she has the power to do so, she refuses to use it. We have the ridiculous situation where a nationalist First Minister says that she wants to tax the rich, but only if England does it first. Is it not the case that Nicola Sturgeon has plenty of principles when she is campaigning and nothing but a list of excuses when she is in power?

**The First Minister:** Let me get to the nub of the matter. As I said, the problem is that we do not have the powers in this Parliament to stop the wealthiest potentially trying to avoid a higher rate of tax. I want those powers; Kezia Dugdale argues to keep them in the hands of a Tory Government at Westminster—that is the difference between me and Kezia Dugdale. She cannot really expect to be taken seriously on the issue of tax, because she has come here week after week saying that I should raise taxes not just on the rich but on ordinary working people as well. She has come here week after week saying that the council tax freeze is wrong, yet we are going into an election tomorrow with eight local authorities across the country promising to continue to freeze the council tax, and each and every one of those councils is a Labour-led council. How can Kezia Dugdale have a single shred of credibility on tax? I think that, tomorrow, voters will make their own judgment on Labour right across this country.

**Kezia Dugdale:** The council tax is unfair and regressive. How do we know that? Because the Scottish National Party has been telling us that for 10 years. We have just had another excuse for why the First Minister will not ask the richest people in society to pay a bit more tax—what a shame that it is the same one that the Tories have been using for years.

She claims to back a 50p tax rate, but she will not implement one here in Scotland when she has the power to do so. She claims to be protecting the national health service, but local services across the country face cuts and closure on her watch. She claims that education is her number 1 priority, but she spends every waking minute plotting how to force another independence referendum. Does Nicola Sturgeon feel any guilt at all as she tours the country warning against austerity, when it is her Government that has cut £1.5 billion from council services?

**The First Minister:** I will continue to do what I have done for the past few years, which is to

argue against austerity at source. That is what I will campaign for in this election. The difference between me and Kezia Dugdale is that she does not want to scrap austerity; she wants to transfer the burden of austerity on to the shoulders of low-paid people right across this country. Why is that? It is because she prefers to allow a Tory Government at Westminster to take the big decisions about our economy rather than have them made here.

Kezia Dugdale is wrong in what she says about the NHS and council services. The NHS budget is more than £3 billion higher today than it was when this Government took office, and the number of NHS staff is almost 10 per cent higher than it was when we took office. We have the best-performing accident and emergency departments anywhere in the United Kingdom and we have £120 million going into the hands of headteachers.

I come back to the central question. If Kezia Dugdale is accusing this Government, albeit wrongly, of short-changing local authorities, this question remains: why are only Labour councils going into this election promising to freeze the council tax? Why are they not doing what SNP councils are doing: choosing to raise revenue for schools and social care? Kezia Dugdale has no credibility on this issue, and, from looking at her, I think that she knows it.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** There is one constituency supplementary, from Jackie Baillie.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** Can the First Minister offer any hope to my constituents who are having to endure very lengthy orthopaedic waiting lists, in contrast to what she just said about the NHS?

I will give her an example. Mr Howie was told that he was to have a knee operation at the Golden Jubilee, only for funding to be withdrawn by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. He is virtually unable to walk and is in constant pain.

At the start of the financial year, when patients are in severe pain and their waiting time targets have been badly breached, why is NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde rationing treatment and denying people the opportunity to have operations at another NHS hospital, the Golden Jubilee? What action will the First Minister take to ensure that Mr Howie and many others like him get the treatment that they need and deserve, and that we put patient care first?

**The First Minister:** NHS boards across the country are investing to ensure that we have short waiting times, and waiting times today are much shorter than they were when this Government took office. Health boards are also focusing on

ensuring that those waiting longest get priority in terms of treatment.

I want to know the detail of what Jackie Baillie outlined—I do not have all the details of the patient's case. However, the health secretary has told me that this morning she spoke to the chief executive of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde about the particular case, which is being looked into. Once we have the detail of that I will ask Shona Robison to write to Jackie Baillie with the full details of the case, and I hope that that will be welcomed.

### **Cabinet (Meetings)**

**3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S5F-01215)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The Cabinet will next meet on Tuesday.

**Patrick Harvie:** The First Minister accuses Opposition parties of demanding changes in education and then complaining when the Scottish Government implements those changes. The Greens have never argued that a lack of standardised testing or reviews of governance structures are the root of the problem, and the Greens have never supported the stripping of local authorities' power to make decisions about such matters.

We have consistently argued that resources are at the core of the question. If we want to recognise the thousands of teachers who have been lost in Scotland, the hundreds of additional support needs teachers, school librarians and classroom assistants who are needed, and the lack of resources that are available to our local authorities, is it not clear that resources have to be at the core of the solution, if that is what has been causing the problem?

The Greens forcing the Scottish Government to reverse £160 million of cuts to councils was an important and essential first start, but is it not clear that that must be the beginning of a change that puts resources back into our local authorities, so that they can support the professionals who are doing the job around the country?

**The First Minister:** Patrick Harvie and I have something of a disagreement when it comes to education reform; I certainly concede that. It is important that we do not strip local authorities of their responsibilities—that is not our intention—but that we give schools greater flexibility, autonomy and control. Much of the evidence says that, along with the capacity of teachers, the quality of learning and the involvement of parents, ensuring that is how we drive improvements in education. That is why we are taking forward the reforms.

It is vital that we have more rigour in how pupils' performance is assessed and how that is reported publicly. That is why we are introducing standardised assessments—not to replace teacher judgment but to inform teacher judgment and have more rigour about such things.

We want to ensure that there is transparency about the performance of schools so—for the first time ever—we are going down the road of publishing not sample surveys based on a couple of pupils per school but comprehensive school-by-school data so that we can properly assess how we are performing. Those are the right reforms and I will continue with them because they are essential to improving attainment in our schools, which everyone in the chamber says that they want to happen.

I agree with Patrick Harvie on resources. We have always said that putting resources in the hands of headteachers is a vital part of our attainment drive, which is why—as I have said on a couple of occasions today—the £120 million that is going directly to headteachers is crucial. Headteachers are free to decide how that money is invested and, if they want to invest it in additional staff or additional support for learning staff, that will be up to them. The £120 million fund is part of the wider attainment fund, which totals £750 million over this parliamentary session.

Resources and investment are crucial, but we need to couple that with the reforms that will allow us to drive improvements faster. I make absolutely zero apology for that.

**Patrick Harvie:** I still do not believe that the Scottish Government has countered the concern that standardised testing—whatever its motivation—will end up being used for the same purposes as league tables, if they were called that. I also do not accept that teachers want to be managers or that headteachers want to be the chief executives or the chief financial officers of their schools. They want to focus on what they are passionate about and what they are talented at, which is teaching, education and developing the life chances of young people.

Four thousand teachers have been lost and, if we want to reverse the decline in the numbers of other important professionals, such as additional support needs teachers, librarians and classroom assistants, the overall level of resource needs to be higher. Over successive years, we need to resource local councils to make those decisions. At the national level, the Scottish Government is willing to cap council tax rates without legislation, and it is willing to tell England and Wales what income tax rates there should be, but it is not willing to change rates in Scotland by more than an inch. Is it not very clear that we need to reject the Tory notion of Scotland as a higher-taxed part



of the United Kingdom and make sure that people such as the First Minister and me pay a bit more tax into the pot to produce the resources that will go into education to make a difference to the life chances of every child in this country?

**The First Minister:** Because of decisions that we have taken, higher-rate taxpayers in Scotland—who account for the top 10 per cent of income earners here—are paying a bit more than higher-rate taxpayers elsewhere in the UK. It is appropriate to take those tax decisions, which are right and balanced. When inflation is rising and living standards are under a lot of pressure, it is not right to increase income tax for those who are on the basic rate. People are free to take a different view, but that is mine.

On education and local government funding more generally, £400 million in additional spending power is available to local services in the current financial year and, as Patrick Harvie rightly said, some of that is down to the discussions that his party and my party had in the lead-up to the agreement of the budget. There is more resource in local government to support local services and, in education specifically, more resource is going directly to headteachers.

I assure Patrick Harvie that we have no intention of headteachers becoming bureaucrats. The point is to allow them to be the leaders of learning that they need to be to drive improvement, and to put into their hands the resources that they need to do that.

The reforms are sensible and will lead to improvement in our schools. It is right that we vigorously and rigorously debate the issues, but I am determined that we will take forward the reforms, which we will be held to account on. Other people like to dismiss the data as league tables, but parents have access to that information so that they know how their local school is performing. The public, including other members in the Parliament, have access to the information in order to hold me and the Government to account. It is absolutely right and proper that we publish that information and we will continue to ensure that it is available.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Last night on STV, Ruth Davidson repeated the fiction that, under the new two-child limit for tax credits, a woman only has to write her name and tick a box to prove that she has had a subsequent child as a result of rape. Is that true?

**The First Minister:** No—it is not true, and Ruth Davidson knows that it is not true. Just a couple of weeks ago, we had a powerful and, at times, emotional and emotive debate on the two-child tax credit cap and the rape clause. I find it hard to believe that Ruth Davidson could have sat through

that debate as she did and listened to the testimony—particularly the letter from a constituent that Kezia Dugdale read out—and could still say on television last night that the process was just about ticking a box. That is disgraceful.

More important, that demonstrates, or at least gives the impression of—I choose my words carefully, as I hope that this is not the reality—a complete lack of empathy for the emotional trauma that any woman in such circumstances would go through in having to declare to a third party that her child had been conceived as a result of rape. Such a woman would probably be determined to do everything in her power to protect her child from ever being aware of those facts.

It beggars belief that anybody can defend the rape clause, which falls into the category of a policy that is indefensible, and that is why the Tories are struggling so badly to defend it. However, whatever disagreements we have about such policies—for goodness' sake—when it comes to support for those who are often the most vulnerable people in our society, a bit of empathy and compassion and a bit less of the dismissive approach of saying “It’s just ticking a box” from the Tories would go down well.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The BBC has reported a response, through a freedom of information request, from Police Scotland, which shows that the number of serious assaults, murders and robberies is increasing. What is the First Minister’s response?

**The First Minister:** First, the information that the BBC is reporting today is management information. It is important to stress that. They are not official figures. It may turn out to be the case that the official figures reflect the information that has been reported today, but it is important to point out that sometimes that is not the case.

The more substantive point to make is that although figures fluctuate, we are seeing—and have been seeing for quite some time—a long-term-trend reduction in non-sexual violent crime. There has been a 52 per cent reduction in non-sexual violent crime between 2006-07 and 2015-16. In 2015-16, which is the most recent year for which statistics are available, the number of homicide victims was at its lowest level since comparable records began in 1976.

Of course, we have always to ensure that we support our police to keep all forms of crime low, but we are seeing a long-term reduction in violent crime, and we must continue to do everything possible to ensure that that continues. That is one of the reasons why, over the past number of years, we have supported the police to recruit additional officers—a time when 20,000 police

officers have been lost south of the border—and it is why we will continue to support our police to do the excellent job that they do right across the country.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** Does the First Minister support the 10,000 people—probably more—who have signed a petition against the imposition of a £2 drop-off fee at Glasgow airport? Does the First Minister agree that that will not reduce congestion and that, given that there are not great public transport links to Glasgow airport, a rail link might have made a difference, although the reality is that families going on the holidays to which they are entitled will be forced to pay? The measure will not reduce congestion one bit, because the area is smaller, and drivers will be locked in and forced to pay. Will the First Minister condemn that? It is a money-making venture that has nothing to do with congestion. I am raising the matter quite genuinely. There is public fury at the measure, so the public would appreciate the First Minister's at least understanding that they do not think that it is justified.

**The First Minister:** I, of course, absolutely understand the concern of members of the public whenever such a change happens. Many of my constituents, in common with constituents of MSPs from across the chamber, use Glasgow airport regularly. My constituency is one of the closest geographically to Glasgow airport, so I understand that many people have concerns.

The measure is a matter for Glasgow Airport. It is incumbent on it to make the case for why it is necessary, and to allow that case to be scrutinised.

Pauline McNeill mentioned the issue of an airport rail link. In the parliamentary session before last we had debates about the Glasgow airport rail link, and decided for very good reasons not to proceed with it at the time. Pauline McNeill should be aware that, through the Glasgow and Clyde Valley city deal, which is being funded jointly by the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government, the councils in the area now have the ability, if they so choose, to undertake projects related to access to Glasgow airport. Let us wait to see who is in charge of those councils after tomorrow: whoever it is, they have the wherewithal to prioritise access to Glasgow airport.

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):** Does the First Minister understand that her plans for publication of school league tables could result in teachers teaching to the test rather than concentrating on teaching our children in the round, and that that might have the opposite effect to that which she intends?

**The First Minister:** I say in all sincerity that if Mike Rumbles understood properly what we intend

to publish, he would not have asked that question, because he would have known that its premise was wrong. It is not test scores that will be published, but the performance of young people against the required levels for curriculum for excellence, judged by teachers and informed by tests. Why is that important? It is because it makes teachers' judgment more rigorous and avoids the narrowing of teaching to the test, because not only the standardised test score is taken into account: the teacher will also look at homework and the performance of the child in school.

I say in all sincerity to members across the chamber, let us have such debates, but members should come to them informed by the facts of what we are doing, rather than by their own prejudices about what we are doing. That way, perhaps, we would have meaningful debates on that very important issue.

## Population

**4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to Scotland's population rising to an all-time high of 5.4 million. (S5F-01229)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We welcome the news that Scotland's population is growing, because we know that stimulating population growth is a key driver of sustainable economic growth.

The figures that were published by National Records of Scotland last week also underline the key role that migration has to play in our work to grow the population. There is robust evidence that confirms our longstanding view that migrants from outside the United Kingdom positively contribute to our society. They are mostly young, economically active and highly qualified. Scotland benefits significantly from the contribution that is made by people from across the world who have chosen to live, work and study here, bringing new skills and expertise and helping to underpin future economic growth, so we should take every opportunity to tell them that they are very welcome here.

**Kenneth Gibson:** In the half century before the millennium, more than 2 million Scots emigrated, and in the 20th century Scotland had the lowest rate of population growth of any nation on earth. Such was the much-vaunted union dividend that left us with an economy that was swiftly overtaken by so many others. Does the First Minister agree that while Scotland's population is slowly increasing, the number of excess deaths over births—despite the best efforts of the Presiding Officer—is of concern, and that a hard Brexit that stops free movement of people will not only end

Scotland's population growth but lead to real skills shortages and damage our economy?

**The First Minister:** I feel as though I should start by thanking the Presiding Officer for his contribution, but I had better not.

The latest estimates that have been published show that our population increase is driven by migration. I make the serious point—which I know can be controversial and unpopular in places—that continued inward migration is critical to maintaining our population growth, which in turn is critical to driving economic growth. If current trends continue, net inward migration is projected to be the main contributor to our population growth over the next 25 years.

That is why—among all the things that should concern us all about Brexit and the outcome of the Brexit negotiations—any serious restrictions to the ability of European Union nationals to come and live in Scotland would be deeply damaging to our economy. It is important that all of us across the chamber and, I think, all of us in mainstream politics, have the courage to make that argument. If we allow the immigration and migration debate to be distorted, we will damage our economy and our society, as a result. The latest statistics are a stark reminder of that fact.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Relative to its population share, Scotland has consistently attracted fewer migrants to live here than have other parts of the United Kingdom. Why does the First Minister think that, after 10 years of Scottish National Party Government, Scotland is a relatively unattractive place for immigrants to come to?

**The First Minister:** What an utterly disgraceful thing it is for a member of the Parliament to stand up in the chamber and describe his own country as an “unattractive place” to live. Murdo Fraser should hang his head in shame. As I have said before in the chamber, I remember the days—they are becoming dark and distant days—when he used to be a serious politician. Now, it seems that he aspires just to be a figure of fun in the chamber.

The serious point to make is that we have to encourage people to come here. That more migrants settle in London and the south-east of England is partly down to geography, which anybody who applies a bit of common sense will see. However, we have just had figures that show the contribution that inward migration is making to Scotland's population growth. Therefore, the real question is not the one that Murdo Fraser posed; it is whether we will ensure over the next few years that we continue to attract people to live in Scotland, or allow narrow-minded Tories to put barriers in the way of that. That is the big question

and the big decision for Scotland in the next few years.

### Pupil Equity Fund

**5. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the First Minister whether headteachers will require the agreement of the relevant local authority before a decision is made about how the pupil equity fund will be spent in their schools. (S5F-01216)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I have made it clear—the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills has been equally clear—that £120 million of the pupil equity funding scheme will be used at the discretion of headteachers. The national operational guidance on use of the funding sets out clear principles to support headteachers in their decision making. Headteachers should work in partnership with one another and their local authority to share good practice, pool their knowledge and consider use of the funding. However, the discretion of headteachers will be the central factor in deciding how the money is spent.

**Liz Smith:** The First Minister is correct to say that John Swinney stated categorically on 13 September 2016 that, under Scottish Government reforms, there would be a

“presumption that decisions would taken at the school level.”—[*Official Report*, 16 September 2017; c 11.]

Why, then, is it clear from Scottish Government documents that there will be national and local authority guidance compelling headteachers to agree use of the pupil equity funding with the local authority, and to be accountable to the local authority for how the money is deployed? Will the First Minister tell Parliament whether headteachers will ever have real autonomy, or is it just spin?

**The First Minister:** The money is to be used at the discretion of headteachers. Liz Smith is misrepresenting—not intentionally, I am sure—the guidance and its purpose. I will point to some of the content of the guidance, which the commission on school reform wrongly claimed is highly prescriptive.

The directions in that guidance refer to the key principles, which set out that the activities that are funded by the pupil equity fund must, first, be additional to current spend. Who can possibly disagree with that? Secondly, they set out that the activities must be targeted at closing the attainment gap. Who could possibly disagree with that? That is what the money is for. Thirdly, they set out that the activities should be based on the evidence of what works. Again, that seems to be fairly sensible guidance. Next, they set out that

parents, children and young people should be involved in planning the use of the pupil equity funding. Again, that is common sense because, as I said in response to Patrick Harvie, there is evidence that the involvement of parents and young people in initiatives to drive improvement is key.

Of course headteachers will share best practice with one another. Of course, as with any use of public money, there will be accountability—no least through the figures that are published about the performance of schools. However, the money is to be spent at the discretion of headteachers. I would have thought that, having called for that, members across the chamber would now support it and get behind it.

### Sanitary Products

**6. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government has taken to improve access to sanitary products. (S5F-01234)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The Scottish Government is considering what support we can provide for women and girls on a low income to have access to sanitary production in a dignified way. Our fairer Scotland action plan sets out our commitment to tackling poverty. However, in the face of Tory welfare cuts and continued austerity, which are pushing more and more people into poverty, it seems that we do so with one hand tied behind our back.

Whether through the mitigation of the bedroom tax, the fair food fund, the Scottish welfare fund or the independent living fund—to name just a few of the Scottish Government's policies—we spend hundreds of millions of pounds a year protecting the poorest and most vulnerable in our society from the worst excesses of a Tory Government. Of course, those are resources that we would rather invest in further anti-poverty measures, not in mitigating or putting a sticking plaster on Tory cuts.

**Monica Lennon:** I welcome some of the steps that the Government has outlined. Last year, when I asked about improved access to sanitary products, I was told that the Government had not done any work to assess the issue and that women could use food banks to access them. We have moved on since then.

Last year, we had our first debate in the Scottish Parliament on period poverty. Since then, I have announced my intention to introduce a member's bill on the issue. There has been an outpouring of interest and support for addressing this gendered inequality in Scotland. The Scottish Trades Union Congress, the National Union of Students, the Scottish Youth Parliament, the Educational

Institute of Scotland, Engender and the Trussell Trust—I could go on—all support the proposal.

No woman or girl in 2017 should face the indignity of not having access to sanitary products during menstruation. There is simply no excuse why that should be the case in a progressive, wealthy country such as Scotland. Does the First Minister agree with me that sanitary products are a necessity, not a luxury, and that the Scottish Parliament should, accordingly, take all necessary action to enshrine that right of access into law?

**The First Minister:** I commend Monica Lennon for taking forward this important issue, and I look forward to seeing the contents of her member's bill. The Government is certainly open to working in partnership as we explore the ways in which we can deal with the issue.

I agree with Monica Lennon. Any woman—and, I hope, a lot of men—would agree that sanitary products are not a luxury but a necessity. We should not have a situation in which women are forced into situations of indignity because they are on incomes that cannot support the purchase of the products.

As Monica Lennon has acknowledged, the Scottish Government, led by Angela Constance, is exploring a number of ways in which we can help with period poverty. I know that Angela Constance would be happy to talk further with Monica Lennon as our consideration of the issues develops.

I hope that the Parliament can come to a consensus on ways in which the Scottish Government can—in a meaningful way—help. We are certainly keen to do that. It would make a welcome change to talk about how we help women in vulnerable positions, rather than debating the ways in which certain others in certain other places are trying to penalise women in vulnerable positions.

### Air Pollution

**7. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** To ask the First Minister how the High Court of Justice decision to order the United Kingdom Government to publish its air pollution strategy impacts on Scotland. (S5F-01235)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The decision relates to the timing of the strategy's publication, rather than to its content. I understand that the United Kingdom Government has decided not to appeal the High Court decision and will consult on the updated action plan.

The Scottish Government is committed to promoting air quality. The UK action plan will include a contribution from the Scottish Government, setting out how we intend to deliver further air quality improvement in Scotland through

the actions that we set out in our air quality strategy, “Cleaner air for Scotland: the road to a healthier future”, and by establishing Scotland’s first low-emission zone.

**Mark Ruskell:** I am not prepared to put my family at risk any more on Scotland’s polluted streets. This is a public health crisis. Every year, 2,000 people die from pollution—not just in the First Minister’s city but across Scotland from Perth to Aberdeen. The UK Government’s plans were slated by the High Court. They rely on dodgy emissions data from car companies while putting off action to save lives today. The Scottish Government has made the same errors; it is captured by the same ruling. When will the First Minister step out of the shadow of these toxic Tory plans, urgently review Scotland’s clean air strategy and fund more than just a solitary low-emission zone?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I am not responsible for the UK Government’s plans; I am responsible for those that the Scottish Government puts forward. On that issue, and any others, we are happy to discuss with other parties in the how we improve the plans that we have in place.

It is important to point out that, in Scotland, we are meeting both domestic and European air quality targets across much of the country, although there are still hotspots of poorer air quality in a number of areas, particularly urban areas. That is an issue that interests me hugely, not just as First Minister but as a member who represents an urban constituency. All local authorities with air quality management areas now have action plans in place. The Scottish Government is working with those authorities, including Glasgow City Council, to help implement such plans and deliver air quality improvements.

Another point that it is important to stress is that we have set more stringent air quality targets than the rest of the UK has. Scotland is the first country in Europe to legislate for particulate matter 2.5, which is a pollutant that is of special concern for human health.

We are providing practical and financial support to local authorities. We will continue to take action to address what I agree with the member is an issue of the utmost importance. I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform will be happy to speak to the member in order to take his views about how we strengthen those plans further.

**Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** Will the First Minister provide further details on the work that is under way to deliver Scotland’s first low-emission zone?

**The First Minister:** We are working with local authorities and other partners to develop the first low-emission zone, which will improve health and help to create better places in which to live and work and for people to visit. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency has already developed the national modelling framework that provides the evidence base in designing the zone and informs the specific vehicle restrictions needed to deliver air quality improvements. The designation of low-emission zones is a matter for individual local authorities, but we look forward to agreeing with them the location of the first zone once the new local administrations are in place following tomorrow’s election.

## Point of Order

14:17

**Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con):**

On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Yesterday, the Scottish Government issued a press release announcing a regeneration project in Glasgow, which everyone knows is a Scottish National Party target. I have written to the permanent secretary to the Scottish Government to complain about the clear possibility that purdah guidance was ignored. Will you advise whether there are any grounds for bringing the minister in question before the Parliament next week to explain how on earth a Government announcement with the clear possibility of influencing party politics was allowed to go out?

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):**

I thank Mr Thomson for his point of order. Such questions are matters for the ministerial code and should be pursued directly with the Scottish Government.

## General Question Time

14:18

**Waiting Times (Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh)**

1. **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce waiting times at the Royal infirmary of Edinburgh. (S5O-00939)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison):**

The Scottish Government is actively working to provide support to ensure that significant progress is made to help all boards, including NHS Lothian, to deliver better capacity planning to meet demand and to ensure that all patients are seen and treated as quickly as possible.

The baseline allocation of NHS Lothian has increased to a total of £1.3 billion in 2017-18. In addition to that increase, the board will receive an increase of £19 million in NHS Scotland resource allocation committee parity funding, which is the largest increase of any NHS board in Scotland.

We have also already committed to investing £200 million over the next three years to create a network of five new elective diagnostic and treatment centres across Scotland, including in Edinburgh and Livingston. The centres will enable people to be treated more quickly and will help to meet increasing demand, while easing pressures on unplanned and emergency treatment.

**Daniel Johnson:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, but the reality on the ground, as reported in the press, is that doctors at the Royal infirmary have been told to send patients home in order to avert a crisis there. Patients are having to wait 17 hours in accident and emergency—Presiding Officer, can you imagine waiting in a waiting room for 17 hours to get your injury seen? Does the cabinet secretary agree with Scotland's former leading clinician, Dr Anna Gregor, that under the Scottish National Party the national health service in Scotland is "hurtling over a precipice" and has been starved of cash? That is a direct quote. What assurances can the cabinet secretary give me and my constituents that the waiting list crisis at the Royal infirmary and across Scotland will end?

**Shona Robison:** First, I say to Daniel Johnson that the NHS, including NHS Lothian, has record levels of resources. However, demand is also increasing, which is why the reforms that we are putting in place are so important.

Daniel Johnson conflated a number of issues in his question, but let me address the issue of A and E waits, which it is quite right to say were not

acceptable. We do not want any long waits in whatever hospital we are talking about, and the board has offered assurance that it quickly recovered its A and E performance following higher-than-average attendances at the infirmary on Thursday 20 April after the Easter break.

What I can say to Daniel Johnson—I hope that this will reassure him—is that the latest published weekly performance for the Royal infirmary was 95.4 per cent for the week ending 16 April and 93.9 per cent for the week ending 23 April. I hope that he will accept that performance in a general sense at the Royal infirmary's A and E department is actually very good. Yes, it had a surge in demand after the Easter break, but those figures speak for themselves and I hope that Mr Johnson supports the action that the board has taken.

Daniel Johnson raised the issue of delayed discharge. When there is a surge in demand, it is the responsibility of the whole hospital and its social care partners to ensure that people who are ready to be discharged are discharged in a timely manner so that that does not lead to unnecessary waits in the A and E department. We expect everyone in the hospital and the social care partners to get behind and address issues with any surge in demand. I am very happy to provide Daniel Johnson, if he so wishes, with more detail on the action that NHS Lothian is taking to address these matters.

### **Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Revenue)**

**2. Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government why its land and buildings transaction tax will generate £800 million less than its original estimate. (S5O-00940)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay):** The £800 million figure is deliberately misleading. The latest published data shows that land and buildings transaction tax revenues across 2015-16 and 2016-17 were close to forecast. The Scottish Government has used the Scotland reserve to manage volatility in receipts across years, reflecting prudent financial management.

The Scottish Government's forecasts were based on the best information available at the time of the forecast and have been endorsed as reasonable by the independent Scottish Fiscal Commission. When the information changes due to changes in the economy, or due to changes to the forecast methodology developed in the light of feedback from the Scottish Fiscal Commission, the tax forecasts will be revised to reflect that.

**Alison Harris:** A recent study by Alma Economics commissioned by the Scottish Government described its LBTT modelling as

“ill-suited for scenario analysis and fiscal impact costing”

and “poor”. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that its tax modelling is fit for purpose?

**Derek Mackay:** I am sorry to say that, again, Alison Harris has not fairly characterised the information that we have. I am sure that, prudent as she is, she has checked the report, as I have done; it analyses the range of forecast methodologies and goes through the various determinants. It actually concluded that our system is “good”; that was the overall assessment of that particular type of methodology.

I say again that the £800 million figure is totally inaccurate. I said that our forecasts were very close and within range; the actual figures for both financial years were £919 million as the forecast and £906 million as the outturn—or 1 per cent of a difference over both years. As an accountant, Alison Harris will know that it is easier to count up what has already been collected and much more difficult to forecast ahead, but I think that in anyone's book that range of forecasting is somewhat impressive.

Let us face it: there has been turbulence in the economy, including the downturn in oil and gas, and there have been the Brexit impacts. Therefore, forecasts will, of course, change and we will, of course, take that into account, including when the responsibility for forecasting transfers to the Scottish Fiscal Commission, which can, of course, determine its own methodology. That is why the report that was commissioned in light of recommendations will be so helpful.

To further reassure Alison Harris and other members, when the Government received more from devolved taxes than we had projected, we put that in the cash reserve to ensure that it was there in the event of our receiving less than had been forecast.

All those actions show that the Scottish Government is managing Scotland's public finances very well.

**Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):** What percentage of purchasers have paid the same or less in LBTT since its introduction compared with under stamp duty land tax?

**Derek Mackay:** For the first two years of LBTT, almost 93 per cent of those who bought a house for £40,000 or more paid either less tax compared with under United Kingdom SDLT or no tax whatsoever.

### **Superfast Broadband Coverage**

**3. Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the cost of delivering 100 per cent broadband coverage by 2021, and how

much it has invested in this programme to date. (S5O-00941)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing):** It is not yet possible to determine the cost to the public sector of delivering our 100 per cent superfast broadband commitment. That will be determined through the procurement process, which will start later this year. A key driver is to maximise investment from suppliers, which will reduce the cost to the public purse.

We are currently pre-procurement, so there has been no capital investment in the reaching 100 per cent programme to date, but we have provision to invest up to £112 million during 2017-18 to improve digital infrastructure throughout Scotland. That funding will support the final phases of the £400 million digital Scotland superfast broadband programme, which will deliver 95 per cent fibre broadband coverage across Scotland and enable new activity to begin on the delivery of our 100 per cent superfast broadband commitment and our mobile infill plans. That funding is in addition to the £18 million that is being reinvested through the two DSSB contracts as a result of gainshare.

**Mike Rumbles:** Ofcom believes that it will cost up to another £250 million to reach everyone with superfast broadband by 2021. By what date will Parliament be told how much of the Scottish Government's budget is contributing to that programme? Does the cabinet secretary have confidence that his colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution will be forthcoming with all the necessary funds?

**Fergus Ewing:** I have supreme confidence in my colleague, whose ability was evidenced by his forecast in a very difficult matter to an accuracy of 1 per cent. That was quite an outstanding success; it is just a shame that others are so churlish that they cannot recognise that.

Ofcom, which Mr Rumbles mentioned, recognised that the success in Scotland in the delivery of broadband has exceeded by some measure the performance of our friends down south.

When will we deliver the coverage? We will make progress over the summer and proceed with procurement at the end of this year or the beginning of next year. As I informed Mr Rumbles in a 90-minute evidence session just this morning, we will keep him fully informed.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** Given that telecommunications are a reserved matter, when did the cabinet secretary last meet United Kingdom Government ministers to discuss their role in achieving 100 per cent superfast broadband in Scotland?

**Fergus Ewing:** I first sought a meeting with the relevant UK minister, Matt Hancock, by letter in October, then by letter in January, and then by letter in February. To date, he has not agreed to a meeting, so we have not yet had Hancock's half hour, if that is what it is to be called.

To be serious, it is disrespectful that the UK minister will not meet us to discuss serious matters that are of real importance to Scotland. That does not really suggest that the UK Government cares for Scotland a great deal, does it?

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** Contrary to what the cabinet secretary has just said, is it not the case that, of the £412 million being invested in broadband in Scotland, only 15 per cent of that funding came from the Scottish Government and over £100 million came from the UK Government? Will the cabinet secretary join me in cheerily welcoming that UK Government investment in Scotland's digital infrastructure?

**Fergus Ewing:** I struggle always to be cheerful, despite the provocation that we have in this place. However, as a lawyer, I remind the member that schedule 5, part II, section C10 to the Scotland Act 1998 states quite clearly that responsibility for investment in broadband, internet and mobile telephony rests entirely—100 per cent—with the UK Government. The member asking me to be grateful that the UK Government is contributing about a quarter of the total funding suggests to me that the Tories are not fit to stand up for Scotland.

#### **Impact of Leaving the European Union (Third Sector Funding)**

4. **Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how leaving the European Union will impact on third sector funding in the West Scotland region. (S5O-00942)

**The Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe (Michael Russell):** EU funding benefits the third sector across Scotland significantly, including in the member's region. Although we have been assured that funding contracts for structural funds projects that are entered into before the United Kingdom leaves the EU will be paid in full, there are no guarantees on European funding streams after the UK leaves the EU. In order to address that uncertainty, the Scottish Government has confirmed that it will be passing on the current UK Government guarantees in full to Scottish stakeholders to provide stability and certainty for key sectors of the Scottish economy. The Scottish Government will continue to do all that it can to protect Scotland's interests in Europe during the UK's negotiations to leave the European Union.



**Mary Fee:** Despite the minister's reassurances, third sector organisations across West Scotland and the rest of Scotland continue to be worried about the impact of funding being withdrawn. When the UK leaves the EU, it is clear that new funding streams and mechanisms for delivery will have to be developed. Post-Brexit, does the Government support a UK-wide cohesion programme or a distinct Scottish system? Does the Government envisage that a Scottish system will be subject to the Barnett formula? Will the minister give a commitment to ensuring that the third sector is closely involved in establishing any new funding programme?

**Michael Russell:** I can not only give that commitment, I can demonstrate it. I met the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations yesterday for the second time in recent months to discuss issues to do with the funding of the third sector. I will be working with the SCVO on an event in Brussels in June and I have given a commitment to ensure that there is further engagement with the SCVO and others to look at the situation not just in Scotland but, interestingly, as the member indicated, across the UK. The constant complaint from the third sector is that it can get no information from the UK Government and cannot even get meetings with that Government, much as Fergus Ewing has experienced difficulty in trying to get meetings with it.

I can give a commitment to the member that we will continue to engage with the third sector nationally and locally and that we will engage with the third sector outside Scotland to discuss how funding should be developed, because there are serious risks, as the member has indicated. We will also make those representations to the UK Government and in Brussels.

**Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con):** What proportion of the Scottish Government's expenditure for the third sector is now being delivered in a three-year, rolling funding structure?

**Michael Russell:** I am happy to write to the member with that information, but none of the expenditure will be delivered in a three-year funding structure if the EU is not involved in funding key third sector projects. I therefore recommend that Mr Corry and other Conservatives focus on ensuring that money continues to flow from the European Union, rather than on the ideological nonsense that they are presently engaged in.

### Local Taxation

5. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what it considers to be the fairest system for councils to raise local revenue. (S5O-00943)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay):** We are committed to ensuring fairness in all taxes. As the First Minister reiterated to the chamber on 20 April, the Government is willing to discuss, across the political spectrum and with council administrations the length and breadth of the country, matters relating to local taxation.

**Patrick Harvie:** There was no chance, I am relieved to say, that the cabinet secretary was going to say, "council tax".

At election after election after election, the Scottish National Party has stood on a commitment to scrap the unfair, hated council tax. Now that the Government is consulting on its Scottish approach to taxation, which is based on four key principles, it seems abundantly clear that council tax as it stands is not only broken and antique, but out of step with the Government's own taxation principles.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the councillors who are elected later this week to councils up and down Scotland should not be consigned to seeing their revenue come from a broken system of taxation, and that they should instead have available to them a new, modern replacement system of local taxation that will be legislated for during the current session of Parliament?

**Derek Mackay:** I wish all candidates the very best of luck in the council elections. I look forward to working with local authorities and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities leadership on those matters, and with all parties in Parliament in the spirit of our debate on 22 September 2016, in which I spoke to a motion that said:

"the Parliament ... supports continued discussion by all parties, with local government and wider society, of measures to improve progressivity and local financial accountability over the current parliamentary session."

The Government has been delivering on the commitments in its 2016 manifesto that relate to taxation. We will continue to do so, and to engage with other parties and local government to make progress in this area.

## Portfolio Question Time

### Education and Skills

14:36

#### University Medical Courses (Applicants from Islands)

**1. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it offers to people from island communities who want to access university medical courses. (S5O-00919)

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** I call the minister, Shirley-Anne Somerville. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, minister—I should have given you a few more minutes to get ready.

**The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The Scottish Government supports a number of initiatives to encourage those from island communities to access high-demand professions such as medicine. In March this year, we announced funding of £330,000 to deliver pre-entry courses in medicine, with the remoteness and rurality criterion being a key component in the University of Aberdeen programme's target group.

The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council provides additional funding to universities to improve access to high-demand professions. There is also a reach programme linked to each medical school in Scotland to assist pupils from low-progression schools who wish to access medical courses.

**The Presiding Officer:** My apologies—I thought that the cabinet secretary was about to answer.

**Liam McArthur:** The minister will recognise that recruiting and training staff for island health services presents specific challenges. All the evidence shows, however, that students with an island connection are more likely to work in island areas. Getting to medical school is difficult, and school pupils need to believe that they can achieve it, otherwise they will not apply. Work experience is essential but not easy to access. Students may know many of the patients, which gives rise to confidentiality issues. Travelling for work experience and interviews can cost £1,000 or more, and can take students out of school for two or three days at a time when they need to focus on getting the five grade As that they need.

Does the minister accept that island students face specific disadvantage? Does she believe that further steps can be taken to level the playing field, to ensure that island students have the same opportunities to access medical courses and, in

turn, to improve the likelihood that island health boards will be able to recruit and retain the staff that they need?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I readily agree with the premise of Liam McArthur's question. When I recently visited the University of Glasgow, I discussed that very challenge and the university's efforts to encourage those from rural, remote and island communities to access courses such as medicine.

As I mentioned in my original answer, the pre-medical entry programme looks specifically at rurality and remote communities. We also have a graduate entry medical programme that—again—ensures that there is a remote and rural focus with regard to the people going through that course.

I am also aware of continuing collaborations with the national health service to ensure that important careers events and other events take place in schools so that those in rural, remote and island communities can access all the information and encouragement that we would expect to be available in any of our schools. I am happy to carry on a dialogue with Liam McArthur if there are particular aspects in his constituency that he thinks the Government ought to look at.

**Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** How does the campus model of the University of the Highlands and Islands help islanders and people from the rural west coast, which shares characteristics with the islands, to train as healthcare professionals? We know that making it easier to train healthcare professionals from the Highlands and Islands will make it easier to bring them back.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** With UHI as a key partner, we are taking action to enhance access to medical education and training for people in remote and rural areas. I mentioned to Liam McArthur the Scottish graduate entry medicine programme—ScotGEM—which was announced in June 2016 and will be delivered by the schools of medicine at the University of St Andrews and the University of Dundee, in collaboration with the University of the Highlands and Islands. The programme will expose students to careers in primary care in remote and rural areas and will help to deliver a more sustainable health workforce for Scotland and its communities.

On nursing and midwifery, the University of Stirling will transfer 100 pre-registration nursing places to UHI from the 2017-18 academic year. I look forward to visiting the campus in Inverness in October to see that work.

### School Meals (Guidance)

2. **Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when the 2014 guidance on school meals will be reviewed. (S5O-00920)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** There are currently no plans to review the 2014 guidance, “Better Eating, Better Learning—A New Context for School Food”. However, the 2008 guidance, “Healthy Eating in Schools: A Guide to Implementing the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2008”, which provides guidance on food standards in schools, will be updated following any changes that come out of a review of the 2008 regulations.

“Better Eating, Better Learning”, which supports local authorities in driving further improvement to school food provision and food education more broadly, is unlikely to require to be updated in light of the review of nutritional standards.

**Linda Fabiani:** I welcome the cabinet secretary’s news. I am concerned that when parents complain about the nutritional standard of school meals in my area, Government guidance is very often quoted to them almost as if it were regulation and the local authority were hidebound in what it is able to offer. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that the guidance is indeed guidance and not regulation?

**John Swinney:** The guidance that we provide in “Healthy Eating in Schools” and “Better Eating, Better Learning” is designed to support local authorities as they deliver catering services and food education in schools, but local authorities have flexibility to provide food and drink services as they deem appropriate to meet local needs and local priorities, provided that they have first fulfilled their statutory obligations in that respect.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** We legislate for our farmers to produce the highest-quality produce under the highest animal welfare protocols, we ensure that they pay the living wage and we give them custodianship of the countryside. However, when it comes to produce for schools, we find that, under central Government Scotland excel procurement contracts, foodstuffs are imported from all over the world that can be and are being produced to a higher standard by our local farmers.

With that in mind, will the cabinet secretary commit to ensuring that food that can be produced locally in Scotland makes it on to our schoolchildren’s plates, for the sake of their health and to support the rural economy?

**John Swinney:** This is an area in which my colleague Richard Lochhead, when he was rural

affairs secretary, invested a significant amount of time and energy, working with me, when I had responsibilities in procurement, to ensure that there was as much opportunity as possible for the farming community in Scotland to access procurement contracts in Scotland in general. Of course, school food contracts account for a substantial proportion of public procurement.

In principle, I agree with Mr Whittle on the importance of ensuring that high-quality agricultural produce in Scotland can find its way into the procurement contracts in the public sector and particularly into our schools. I am also keen that, as part of their learning experience, young people gain a better understanding of the origins of their food and the routes by which it is produced, as part of the health and wellbeing aspect of the curriculum in our schools.

### Teacher Vacancies

3. **Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is taking to ensure that schools can fill teacher vacancies. (S5O-00921)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government is taking a number of actions to help to recruit teachers. We are spending £88 million this year to make sure that every school has access to the right number of teachers; we have increased student teacher intake targets for the sixth year in a row; and we are setting targets for training teachers in the subjects in which they are needed most. We are also supporting innovative new routes into teaching, including work with the University of the Highlands and Islands. We launched a new teacher recruitment campaign on 8 February under the title “Teaching Makes People”. That builds on the success of last year’s inspiring teachers campaign, which helped to drive an increase in professional graduate diploma in education applications to Scottish universities.

**Rhoda Grant:** It is clear that none of that is working. The cabinet secretary will be aware that there are currently 700 teacher vacancies, which is having a direct impact on children’s education. Along with that, there is a marked increase in headteachers being asked to lead more than one school—indeed, that is becoming the norm in some areas. How on earth can someone lead a school when they are not there on a daily basis? How far will our once-excellent education service fall before the Government acts? Children do not get a second chance at their education.

**John Swinney:** I will address a number of the points that Rhoda Grant made. First, I recognise that there are shortages in available teachers in certain parts of the country and in certain subjects.

I have set out to Rhoda Grant a number of the steps that the Government is taking to rectify the situation. We have increased the number of places that are available for teacher training by 370 in 2017-18 to begin to address the issue. Workforce planning is a complex and difficult process, and shortages clearly arise out of that.

I assure Rhoda Grant that I have had discussions with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, which regulates who teaches in our schools, to ensure that registered teachers who are not active in teaching are contacted and that efforts are made to motivate them to become active in teaching. I want to ensure that the GTCS takes an efficient approach to considering registration applications from teachers who are trained to teach in other jurisdictions, so that it assesses and evaluates the contribution that they could make to Scottish education if they wish to do so.

The second issue that Rhoda Grant raised was that some headteachers may operate across more than one school. I fundamentally disagree with her point. With the right support models in place, it is perfectly possible and tangible for exceptional headteachers to deploy their skills across more than one school.

For example, one headteacher of a large secondary school—Gerry Lyons of St Andrew's secondary school in the east end of Glasgow—who is regarded as one of the most experienced and effective headteachers in the country, has been invited by the director of education of Glasgow City Council not only to continue to provide leadership at St Andrew's but to provide it at Holyrood secondary school, which is a slightly smaller but still significant secondary school. My response to that is that it is advantageous for pupils in as many parts of our country as possible to experience distinguished and effective leadership for the enhancement of their education. I accept that the initiative must be properly supported, but I fully support and endorse the arrangements that Glasgow City Council has put in place, because they are beneficial for young people in Scotland.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** Will the cabinet secretary outline what progress is being made to develop new routes into teaching?

**John Swinney:** At my instigation, a number of new projects were identified to encourage people to enter the teaching profession, and the General Teaching Council for Scotland has been assessing 11 of those routes. Some of that assessment is complete and we are able to recruit teachers on the basis of those new routes into teaching. That is an example of how the Government has responded positively to the demand for innovative

approaches, and I welcome the input that we have had from the colleges of education in responding to the challenge that the Government has set.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** The cabinet secretary acknowledges that it takes time to fill teacher vacancies. Supply teachers are often used when a teacher is absent, but the number of supply teachers is falling. In Angus, the number has fallen from 430 to 331 since 2011. What urgent action is the Scottish Government taking to deal with the falling number of supply teachers?

**John Swinney:** The measures that I set out—particularly the work that the GTCS can undertake on our behalf in contacting registered teachers who are not active in teaching but who could contribute in some way to the supply pool—form one of the most significant areas where we can take action. However, the question that Mr Kerr raises highlights the general challenge that exists.

Just before the Easter recess, I spent two days at the international summit on the teaching profession. My two predecessors took part in such summits in New Zealand and in Canada; I took part in Morrison Street in Edinburgh. Members will understand how attractive Morrison Street is compared with Wellington in New Zealand and Banff in Canada.

All the contributions from the countries that were represented at the international summit had a common theme. It was clear from my counterpart from England, Nick Gibb, and from my counterparts from Singapore, Finland, Canada and New Zealand—where the education systems are well regarded—that there is a systemic challenge in recruiting individuals to the teaching profession, which is not just a Scottish issue.

We have to think inventively and creatively about how we motivate more people to come into the teaching profession. It is part of my general work to raise the value, credibility and esteem of the teaching profession, because our young people need to have a good flow of individuals entering the teaching profession to deliver the education on which they depend.

### Anti-bullying Strategy

**4. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on when it will publish a new anti-bullying strategy for schools. (S5O-00922)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** The Government will issue its refreshed national anti-bullying guidance when the Scottish Parliament's Equalities and Human Rights Committee has concluded its investigation into bullying in schools. I am grateful to the committee for its offer to consider further evidence

on the matter. We will carefully consider its views and any further evidence that is gathered prior to the publication of our strategy.

**Richard Leonard:** Every good strategy needs a vision, but it also needs a plan of action and the allocation of appropriate resources. Although bullying is not confined to young people or even to schools alone, does the cabinet secretary consider that the cut by more than 1,000 in classroom assistants and the cut by more than 4,000 in teachers in Scotland's classrooms since his party took office will help or hinder the effective implementation of the delayed anti-bullying strategy?

**John Swinney:** Mr Leonard added the word "delayed" and, perhaps I am being sensitive this afternoon, but it sounded as though it was added in rather a pejorative way. The Government responded positively to a request from a parliamentary committee that wanted to take further evidence on the issue. I could have published the strategy months ago, but the committee asked whether I could delay publication until it had taken further evidence. I thought that the respectful thing for me to do was to delay publication and to hear what the committee had to say to me. I am grateful for the efforts of the committee's convener to engage on the subject and will give due consideration to the issues that get raised.

We recognise the necessity of appropriate resources being in place in all our schools to support young people. Mr Leonard can be assured that at the heart of the strategy will be an absolute intolerance of the bullying of any young people in our schools, in any aspect of our society or in any situation in our society. The Government will map out exactly how we intend to take forward the strategy as a consequence of our engagement with many stakeholders and the parliamentary committee.

### Basic Tools of Learning

**5. Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what requirements local authorities have to provide children with the basic tools of learning at school. (S5O-00923)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** Education authorities have a duty under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to provide

"books, writing materials, stationery, mathematical instruments, practice material and other articles which are necessary to enable"

pupils in their area who receive free education, whether in public schools or through other arrangements made by the education authority,

"to take full advantage of ... education".

**Kate Forbes:** The cabinet secretary may be aware that, due to decisions that have been taken by the independent-led Highland Council, Fortrose academy parent council has had to fund some basic school provisions. In the light of its being the council's statutory duty to provide pupils with the necessary books and materials, and in the light of the election tomorrow, what is the cabinet secretary's view on that situation and on how education can be the top priority for the next administration in the Highlands?

**John Swinney:** I reiterate my earlier answer to Kate Forbes, in which I said that it could not be clearer that education authorities have a statutory duty under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to provide

"books, writing materials, stationery, mathematical instruments, practice material and other articles which are necessary to enable pupils"

to receive free education.

In relation to the resources that are available, for 2017-18, Highland Council received an increase of more than £20 million in the resources that are available to it, which equates to a 4.4 per cent increase on its budget in 2016-17. Highland Council will have to make specific decisions about allocation of its resources, but that backdrop indicates that a very strong settlement has been delivered to Highland Council to enable it to fund education properly. Across Highland, £3,924,000 in pupil equity funding has been delivered to schools, of which Fortrose academy has received £30,000. Against the backdrop of a very strong settlement from the Government, I hope that the local authority, working in partnership with schools, will take the necessary resourcing decisions to fund education properly in the Highlands.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I refer the cabinet secretary to the report that was published in March by the Accounts Commission entitled "Local government in Scotland: Performance and challenges 2017", which set out spend-per-pupil figures. The figures show that, since 2010, spending per pupil in secondary schools has fallen by more than £150 and has fallen in primary schools by almost £500 per pupil, which is almost 10 per cent. Does the cabinet secretary recognise those numbers? Surely they reflect the overall funding from the Scottish Government to local government, which has been cut by £1.5 billion.

**John Swinney:** The key analysis that Mr Johnson needs to look for is one that the Accounts

Commission undertook—I think that it was published just before the turn of the year—in which it said that the funding settlement for local authorities has been largely on a par with the funding settlement that has been received by the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government has treated local government very fairly, within the resources that have been available to it.

As an example, as I just said in response to the question that Kate Forbes asked me, Highland Council received an additional 4.4 per cent in 2017-18, which in the current financial climate would be viewed as a strong boost to local authority funding. The Government is delighted to have been able to make such funding available to Highland Council and, of course, to other authorities around the country.

### Literacy Rates

**6. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what action it is taking to improve literacy rates. (S5O-00924)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government is taking a wide range of action to improve literacy rates across all age groups. That includes action in the early years, through the significant expansion of early learning and childcare; the relentless focus on literacy and numeracy in schools through the Scottish attainment challenge, supported by pupil equity funding; and the expansion of programmes such as the First Minister's reading challenge and the read, write, count campaign. The new literacy and English benchmarks and the introduction of national standardised assessments will support robust assessment of young people's progress.

**Monica Lennon:** I should at the start of my question have referred members to my entry in the register of interests, as I am still a councillor in South Lanarkshire Council.

**Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP):** Not for long.

**Monica Lennon:** I know. That is probably the last time that I will get to say that.

The cabinet secretary might be aware that a recent report in *The Times* revealed that pupils are facing a postcode lottery when it comes to accessing school library services, and that official Scottish Government statistics show that specialist school library staff have been cut by a third since 2010. I understand that the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals recently expressed concerns to the cabinet secretary. Given the decline in professionally staffed libraries, can the cabinet secretary explain how his stated aim of closing the shameful attainment gap

between the richest and the poorest children in Scotland will be achieved?

**John Swinney:** This is a very emotional afternoon for us all, because it is the last time that Monica Lennon will share with us the fact that she is a member of South Lanarkshire Council. I am sure that there will be weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth as a consequence of that auspicious moment passing.

On the substance of Monica Lennon's question, I say that I value enormously the role of school libraries. I was recently at the Public Petitions Committee when it was hearing a petition on concern about the diminution of school library services, and I committed to developing a national strategy for public libraries that will reinforce my view that school libraries are crucial to the development of the capability of young people.

A few months ago, the member for Moray, Richard Lochhead, invited me to visit Elgin academy. When I went there, the first place the headteacher took me to was the school library. It became apparent that that was because the school library, which had been configured and led by a distinguished and effective librarian, had been designed to be, in essence, the epicentre of the school, where many good things happened and where many contributions to young people's wellbeing were delivered by engagement between the academy's younger and older pupils. I cite that example because it is about choice: the school and the local authority decided to go down that route. I know that other authorities are taking a different route.

I want to come down very firmly on the side that says that the role of our school libraries is significant and valuable in enhancing the learning of young people and improving literacy, which is at the heart of the Government's efforts to close the attainment gap in Scottish education.

**Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con):** For the final time, I declare an interest as a councillor on Aberdeen City Council.

The Scottish Government's statistics show that in the city of Aberdeen, not even half of pupils reach the expected standard of writing by primary 7. Is it not about time that the Scottish Government got back to the day job, which is to make sure that our children can read and write properly, and that it admitted that under it, implementation of curriculum for excellence has resulted in children leaving primary school not properly equipped for secondary school?

**John Swinney:** In among the weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth in Aberdeen City Council at Ross Thomson's departure from the council tomorrow, there will be a lot of weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth about other issues that have

been handled by the council in a spectacularly unceremonious fashion, and which have been of public note in the past few days.

**Ross Thomson:** Will the cabinet secretary answer my question?

**John Swinney:** I am coming to the question, Mr Thomson—or Councillor Thomson, as I should perhaps say for the last time.

In her responses to Ruth Davidson today, the First Minister commented on some of the challenges that are experienced in Scottish education. The Government is focused entirely on addressing them.

To be blunt, I do not think that it is good enough for Ross Thomson to come here and try to absolve himself of having any responsibility for, or of making any contribution to, the process. Mr Thomson has been the vice-convenor of education in Aberdeen City Council, and statute says that our local authorities are the ones to deliver education. My question for Mr Thomson is this: what has he been doing about it? What has Mr Thomson, in his long service on Aberdeen City Council, done to improve educational performance? Maybe if he had concentrated on his day job and not tried to get other day jobs, he would have made a bit more progress.

#### **Extra-curricular Activities (Participation)**

**7. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what action it is taking to ensure that all pupils can participate in extra-curricular activities irrespective of background or personal circumstances. (S5O-00925)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** We want all children and young people to be included fully in their learning. That means ensuring that those who are at risk of being marginalised in education, whether in the classroom or in the wider school experience, are as fully engaged in their learning as they can be. For example, our 2014 guidance “Planning improvements for disabled pupils’ access to education” clearly sets out school clubs and activities, school trips and school sports as learning activities that may carry duties under the Equality Act 2010.

**Brian Whittle:** A recent Reform Scotland report entitled “After school activities: Another opportunity gap” stated:

“Extracurricular activities are an important part of a child’s development. It can help them socialise outside the classroom; learn and develop new skills; exercise; and generally help in development of a well-rounded individual.”

It also stated:

“SportScotland works with councils to deliver Active Schools activities, which SportScotland believe should be free of charge ... However, many local authorities charge.”

Does the cabinet secretary agree that, when such activities are charged for, the pupils most in need of that type of opportunity are most likely to be excluded, thus making it more difficult to close the health inequality and attainment gaps? What can the Scottish Government do to ensure that access for all means exactly that?

**John Swinney:** Generally, I agree with Mr Whittle’s point and I agree fundamentally that out-of-school activities can have a very profound impact on the achievement of young people and on their overcoming the many difficulties that they face.

What the Government can do about that is territory that I have explored before with Mr Whittle and some of his colleagues. It is the territory of what the right level of direction for Government is with regard to what goes on in local government. If I start directing local authorities to do this or that, there might be complaints—I do not want to put words into the mouths of the Conservatives—that I am interfering in local government business. There is a sensitive balance to be struck about what the level of Government direction should be in that respect.

I have no difficulty in supporting the aspirations that Mr Whittle set out in his question and I encourage local authorities, working within the guidance that we issued in 2014, to ensure that those ambitions can be realised by young people in our schools.

**Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** I remind members that I am the parliamentary liaison officer to the cabinet secretary.

The contrast is stark. In Scotland, the Scottish National Party Government is putting more money into education and investing an additional £750 million to close the attainment gap but, in England, funding per pupil is shrinking in real terms. The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee warned that schools are having to cut spending by £3 billion by 2019-20, which is directly affecting extra-curricular opportunities, according to headteachers in England. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that, if people want to protect from Tory education cuts our children’s education in Scotland’s schools, they need to vote SNP in the local government elections tomorrow?

**John Swinney:** I agree.

### **Primary Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Number of Places)**

**8. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife)  
(Con):** Back in the real world.

To ask the Scottish Government for what reason there has been a 62 per cent reduction in the target number of primary postgraduate diploma in education places between 2017-18 and 2018-19. (S5O-00926)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** No such reduction has taken place.

**Murdo Fraser:** That is an interesting response. There are currently 274 vacant primary school teaching posts in Scotland and many councils and headteachers believe that additional teachers will be required on top of that number as a result of the new pupil equity funding that will potentially be spent on more teachers, especially those with a specialism in additional support needs. The universities say that they have difficulties in future planning because of a potential reduction in the number of training places. Can the cabinet secretary guarantee not only that there will be no reduction in the number of available training places, but that there will be an active increase to make up for the shortage in teachers?

**John Swinney:** The point that Mr Fraser made about the recruitment of teachers for a postgraduate diploma in education is an important contribution to establishing the strength of the teaching population in Scotland and I reiterate my earlier answer that there has been no 62 per cent reduction in the target number of primary postgraduate places between the two years that were quoted.

The Government has to go through an exercise with the teacher workforce planning advisory group, which looks at a range of factors such as the teacher census, local demand, the number of teachers leaving or returning to the profession and the number of students not completing their course, before making any decisions on teacher training intake targets for 2018-19. That is why the premise of Mr Fraser's question is wrong.

As I acknowledged in my answer to Rhoda Grant's question, I recognise the shortages that exist in the number of available teachers. That is why I increased the intake into teacher training this year by 370 places and we will continue to look at those issues as we plan for the years ahead. I am acutely aware that, as we deploy pupil equity funding around the country, there will be the possibility of more opportunities for teacher recruitment and the Government will bear that in mind as we set the target intake for postgraduate diploma in education places.

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):**

The cabinet secretary will be aware that the First Minister put Ruth Davidson in her place when she pointed out the fact that the Conservative Party's leaflets show just how much it cares about education, despite the fact that its members go on about it all the time. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that disregard for education shows that the Scottish Conservatives are probably not capable of running a menodge—as they would say in Glasgow—let alone a local authority?

**The Presiding Officer:** I urge members to be respectful to other members.

**John Swinney:** I thought that the First Minister made her point extremely well at First Minister's question time earlier today, and I reiterate that the Government is focused on taking the necessary steps to improve and strengthen the delivery of education in Scotland. That will be at the heart of our reform agenda.

### **School Leavers (North Ayrshire)**

**9. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what percentage of school leavers in North Ayrshire in 2016 continued in education, went on to training or entered employment. (S5O-00927)

**The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** In October 2016, 94.8 per cent of 2015-16 senior phase school leavers in North Ayrshire were in a positive initial destination.

**Ruth Maguire:** While Scottish National Party policies help young people in North Ayrshire into work, education and training and have delivered the lowest youth unemployment rate in the United Kingdom, planned Tory cuts will hurt young people further. Does the minister agree with me that voting SNP in the upcoming local and general elections is the only way to keep Theresa May in check and make the voice of Scotland's young people heard?

**The Presiding Officer:** Minister, I would recommend that you stick to education advice rather than voting advice.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Of course I will stick to education advice, Presiding Officer.

Ruth Maguire makes a very effective point. I heard Opposition members groan, but they will all have seen the figures, and they will know that we have made significant progress over the past five years on positive destinations across all socioeconomic quintiles. The greatest progress has been among the 20 per cent most deprived.

There has been a range of changes to social security provision by the UK Government, some of which we debated last week. We know that, by 2021, about 50,000 families in Scotland could be



affected by the policy of the two-child cap on tax credits, pushing more young people into poverty and directly deepening the attainment challenge that we have here in Scotland.

Of course we will continue to respond. The Administration has committed £750 million to an attainment fund over five years, including about £4.4 million for this financial year, through pupil equity funding, for North Ayrshire. We will do all that we can. Of course, we need a strong and effective voice in other places, too.

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** Could the minister confirm that, when the positive destination statistics, such as those that he just spoken about, are recorded, school leavers moving into a job on a zero-hours contract are counted as being in a positive destination?

**Jamie Hepburn:** We do not have control over employment law, although we in Scotland are fortunate in that the proportion of the workforce on zero-hours contracts here is lower than the UK level. Clearly, anyone entering employment is ending up in a positive destination, but Mr Gray will well understand our high ambitions for fair work here in Scotland. We have published our labour market strategy, and the jobs that we want to see in the future will be well remunerated and they will contribute to the fair work challenge. I look forward to Mr Gray signing up to that progress.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** For those leaving school who choose not to go into further education, there must be other opportunities available. In North Ayrshire, however, unemployment is significantly higher than in the rest of the UK, with recent figures putting it at 11.6 per cent. What confidence can the young people of North Ayrshire have that the Scottish Government and the SNP, after 10 years in government, really take the issue of unemployment seriously?

**Jamie Hepburn:** They can have a lot more confidence in our Administration than in the UK Government, which, in devolving the employment programme, which will support many people into work, cut the funding available to the Scottish Government by about 87 per cent, resulting in our Administration having to leverage in an additional £20 million. We are doing a lot more to support young people, in North Ayrshire and elsewhere, than the UK Government is.

## Business Motions

15:14

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of three business motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motion S5M-05428, setting out a business programme, and motions S5M-05429 and S5M-05430, setting out stage 2 timetables for two bills.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 9 May 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Forensic Examination

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Railway Policing (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 10 May 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
Health and Sport

*followed by* Scottish Labour Party Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 11 May 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: Keeping Children Safe Online

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 16 May 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 17 May 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
 Communities, Social Security and Equalities  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 18 May 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 11.40 am General Questions  
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions  
*followed by* Members' Business  
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.30 pm Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Air Departure Tax (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 26 May 2017.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Limitation (Childhood Abuse) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 2 June 2017.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

*Motions agreed to.*

## Point of Order

15:15

**Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Will you reflect on the length of time taken for questions and answers this afternoon? We only got to question 9. The cabinet secretary's answers were overly long and, at times, frivolous and prevented those asking questions, and those who had follow-up questions, from contributing.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** I note the point of order and will take it under consideration.

*Meeting closed at 15:15.*

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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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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