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Scottish Parliament

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[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

General Question Time

Orthopaedic Treatment (Waiting Times)

1. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce waiting times for orthopaedic treatment. (S5O-01375)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): We are taking significant action to reduce waiting times. I recognise that some patients are experiencing long waits, and that is why I have made £50 million available to NHS Scotland. I expect to see improvements between now and the end of March.

On 29 August, I announced the setting up of an expert group to reduce waiting times and improve the way in which elective care services are provided. The elective access collaborative programme will bring together experts from the Scottish Government, the national health service and the royal colleges to provide support to health boards. That approach has seen us deliver improvements in unscheduled care. I will make a further announcement on that shortly.

Miles Briggs: Is the cabinet secretary aware that patients in Lothian who require new hips or knees are being told by NHS Lothian that it cannot meet the target of 12 weeks for referral for a new out-patient appointment and that, instead, they will have to wait for up to 37 weeks—more than nine months—just for an initial appointment with a consultant? Will the cabinet secretary apologise to my constituents in Lothian who are suffering in pain for many months before being able to see a consultant and discuss the surgery? Is that not yet another indictment of the Scottish Government's shambolic NHS workforce planning?

Shona Robison: I do not want any patient to wait longer than they should, but NHS Lothian has done a lot of work in this area. Under this Government, the number of consultant staff in Lothian with a speciality in trauma and orthopaedic surgery has increased by more than 14 per cent, but demand has increased at the same time.

NHS Lothian has risk assessed the specialities for which there are long waits based on clinical priority and risk to the patient, and the board is undertaking a comprehensive review of its trauma and orthopaedic services, which will include the

provision of an integrated back pain service; a redesign of the foot and ankle pathway and the fracture pathway; investment in significant additional physiotherapy and advanced physiotherapy practitioners to support the new service models; the redesign of the hip fracture pathway to optimise care of frail and elderly older people; and the improvement of performance through the enhanced recovery after surgery programme, which seeks to optimise patient recovery after joint replacement. I believe that all those things will make a significant difference.

It is a bit rich of Miles Briggs to raise the issue of workforce planning, given that the Nursing and Midwifery Council has today published figures that show that the number of nurses from the European Economic Area who left the NMC register between October 2016 and September of this year represented an increase on the previous year of 67 per cent. In addition, the number of new initial registration nurses from the EEA who joined the register fell by 89 per cent compared with the previous year. Therefore, I will take no lectures from Miles Briggs on workforce planning when the Conservatives' ridiculous Brexit policy is having a huge impact on our nursing and midwifery workforce in the here and now.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The cabinet secretary will be aware from our correspondence of the lengthy delays that orthopaedic patients in Orkney are facing as a result of a lack of capacity in NHS Grampian. A constituent who was referred to a surgeon in May was told that she would have to wait six to eight months, only to receive the same letter in September, which informed her of a further delay of six to eight months.

This week, NHS Orkney has talked about plans to develop proposals with NHS Western Isles to address what it calls the "large backlog". What steps will the cabinet secretary take to ensure that orthopaedic patients in Orkney are treated within the 12-week timeframe set out by the Scottish Government?

Shona Robison: I appreciate the concerns that Liam McArthur has raised. Patients in Orkney rely on the services of NHS Grampian, as do others. NHS Grampian has had a significant share of the £50 million to address some of the longest waits, and we expect progress to be made on those by the end of March.

Going forward, there will be a lot of collaboration between the boards in the north of Scotland. A key plan of theirs is to work together to plan elective care far more efficiently and to ensure that all the capacity in the northern boards is used. I would be happy to keep Liam McArthur up to date on those developments as they progress.

Electric Vehicle Loan Scheme

2. Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to extend the electric vehicle loan scheme beyond 2018. (S5O-01376)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): Yes, low-carbon transport loans will be provided until at least 2020. They are one of a range of incentives to promote the adoption of electric vehicles.

Ivan McKee: The Scottish Government has set admirable and ambitious targets for phasing out the need for new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2032. What longer-term initiatives, such as advantageous loans and infrastructure investment, has the Government in mind to encourage the motoring public to embrace electric vehicles?

Fergus Ewing: During the coming months, we will make a number of announcements in this area. They will cover infrastructure and supporting the uptake of the vehicles in the public and private sectors. They will build on the strategy that is set out in the switched on Scotland action plan, which was launched by the Minister for Transport and the Islands in June 2017.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): So far, the electric vehicle loan scheme has been offered only for new vehicles. Will the Scottish Government consider extending the scheme to used vehicles?

Fergus Ewing: We are always happy to consider suggestions and we can consider that one. The loan scheme has been fairly successful thus far and we want to build on it. Funding has also enabled grants for 1,381 charging points and a free advice helpline. The existing scheme is therefore quite comprehensive but, of course, we want to build on it and, as I have said, we will make further announcements in due course.

Ferry Freight (Cost Increase)

3. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what impact the proposed cost increase for ferry freight from 1 January 2018 will have on the northern isles, in light of reports that it was believed that prices would remain frozen. (S5O-01377)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): I can confirm that the revisions to freight fares reflect the terms of the northern isles ferry services contract, which allows for increases based on the consumer prices index. The revisions follow two years during which freight fares have been frozen.

On 22 August, it was announced that passenger and car fares would be reduced on ferry services to the northern isles in the first half of 2018,

fulfilling a key manifesto pledge. In light of that planned reduction in fares, in the interim we have frozen passenger and car fares on the northern isles ferry services.

For freight, we are conducting a comprehensive freight fares review, as per the commitment that was made in the ferries plan for 2013 to 2022. The review will fully consider the impact of any freight fare changes on island economies. The process is complex, but the outcome of the review will be announced as soon as possible.

Rhoda Grant: Although I welcome the review, the cabinet secretary will be aware that an increase in freight costs, such as the increase that will come into being early next year, is tantamount to a tax on everything that is transported to the islands. We already have online retailers who will not deliver to the islands because of costs. If we are to grow the islands' economies, which is part of the reason behind the Islands (Scotland) Bill, surely the increase flies in the face of that ambition.

Fergus Ewing: The Government is proud of its achievement in introducing the road equivalent tariff, which has been a terrific success for individuals, especially those who are resident in the islands. It has also helped to promote the economy of the islands. I am pleased that Rhoda Grant has welcomed the proposed reduction in fares for the northern isles. I am sure that Ms Grant will appreciate that the freight fares review is an important and complex process and we shall announce it in due course.

As far as retailers in the United Kingdom and elsewhere not being willing to deliver or imposing additional charges is concerned, I and the Scottish Government have been working on that for a number of years. The postal delivery service is reserved to Westminster and it has utterly failed to take any action whatsoever for decades. As Rhoda Grant has said, many people in the Highlands and Islands have suffered through having to pay extra or not being able to receive goods as a result of that total inertia from the UK Government.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Council leaders from Orkney and Shetland will be meeting with the finance secretary later this month in relation to interisland ferries. In today's *Orcadian*, Orkney Islands Council has warned that the services may fall back to 1960s levels and have knock-on effects on council budgets unless action is taken. Is the minister content with that as a possible outcome and how does it possibly fit with the Scottish Government's commitment to fair ferry funding for the northern isles?

Fergus Ewing: If Mr Briggs had been listening, he would have heard that we are just about—

Members: It is the other one.

Fergus Ewing: It is the other one, sorry.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): It is Mr Halcro Johnson.

Fergus Ewing: If he had been listening, he would have heard that we are about to reduce fares to the northern isles. We are proud of that. I do not recall many occasions when previous Administrations have taken this action. We are the Administration that introduced road equivalent tariff.

If any members of the Conservative team, whoever they are, wanted to put forward any serious plan of any sort for any public service budget, that would be a precedent. All we hear week after week is the Conservatives calling for more public money and tax cuts at the same time. Perhaps Ms Davidson will get real and bring forward some grown-up policies in this Parliament.

Brexit (Impact on Scotland)

4. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what research it has carried out or commissioned on the likely impact on Scotland of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, and whether it will publish this. (S5O-01378)

The Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe (Michael Russell): The Scottish Government has published a number of papers, which include research and commissioned work, including "Scotland's Place in Europe" and, more recently, "Brexit: What's at Stake for Business", highlighting the impacts on Scotland of the UK leaving the EU. The dedicated Europe section on the Scottish Government website contains links to those, as well as to a number of other relevant publications, including the First Minister's letter to EU citizens in Scotland and the minutes of standing council meetings.

The Scottish Government believes in the need for transparency in the Brexit negotiations and will continue to press the UK Government to publish its own analysis of the likely impact on Scotland of leaving the EU.

Patrick Harvie: Since I lodged the question and since yesterday's debate at Westminster, the UK Government has been forced to accept that it must publish its sectoral impact analysis statements. I welcome that, although I wonder what other issues in the news it is trying to distract from by publishing information merely about the destructive impact it is going to unleash on the country's economy.

How long will it take the Scottish Government to take those sectoral impact analyses and turn them into a more robust impact assessment about Scotland geographically? Bizarrely, that work has not even been attempted by the UK Government.

Michael Russell: The UK Government has had several positions on that matter, including an assertion by the Secretary of State for Scotland that such an analysis existed and would be published and a denial from the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union that an overall analysis for Scotland existed.

Yesterday, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, the Rt Hon David Davis MP, asking for access to the 58 sectoral studies that have been referred to from time to time at meetings with the UK Government but have never been brought forward. Once we have those, we will look to see what we can do with them. I fear from some of the speculation yesterday that what will appear will be documents that are heavily redacted, if they have any substance at all. We have not seen them and we do not know the depth of the research or how the work has been undertaken. If we get the material, I will be happy to discuss it with members.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Does the minister share my concern that the uncertainty over Brexit is influencing businesses to delay decisions over capital investment, which could impact negatively on future productivity?

Michael Russell: I do agree. There is growing evidence that businesses are exceptionally worried about the lack of information and the uncertainty. Many are telling the UK and Scottish Governments that decisions that they have to make will have to be made by the end of the year. If there is no certainty and no information by the end of the year, they will have to work on the worst-case scenario.

German companies who are part of the German chambers of industry and commerce have already been told by the central organisation that if they have business interests in the UK, they should plan for a cliff-edge Brexit. That is very bad for those companies and their plans, and it is very bad for other companies that are based in Scotland.

We continue to say that the UK Government should be much more transparent and open and should be making progress on telling people what it intends. However, it is working both by hiding and not publishing information and by allowing other information to emerge that will cause only uncertainty. For example, today's Chatham House report on farming indicates very strongly that for many people who back Brexit, the best way forward is to abandon farming subsidies, the effect

of which on the constituencies of almost every member of the Scottish Parliament would be catastrophic, particularly for those of us who represent areas in the Highlands and Islands—it would mean the end of agriculture and much of the rural population in the Highlands and Islands. The UK Government must get a grip and recognise that Brexit remains a fool's errand.

Glasgow City Council (Budget Allocation)

5. Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities has held with Glasgow City Council regarding its budget allocation. (S5O-01379)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): Ministers and officials regularly meet representatives of all Scottish local authorities, including Glasgow City Council, to discuss a range of issues, as part of our commitment to working in partnership with local government to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland. I met the Glasgow City Council leader, Susan Aitken, on 8 August, and I have no doubt that the Scottish Government can continue to have a strong and productive relationship with Glasgow City Council, which will benefit the people of Glasgow and the rest of Scotland in the months and years to come.

Johann Lamont: I am not sure whether I can thank the cabinet secretary for that response. As a representative of Glasgow, I believe it to be entirely unacceptable that the Scottish National Party Government has cut Glasgow's budget every year since 2007, forcing savings of £377 million, which is a cut of 17.5 per cent. What assessment has the cabinet secretary made of the terrible impact on individuals, families and communities in Glasgow of those decisions, which have been made by a Government that claims to care about inequality?

What representations did the leader of Glasgow City Council make to the cabinet secretary about the budget allocation? Did she seek an increase in her budget? Is she willing to stand up for Glasgow and those vulnerable communities that are currently facing the cuts made as a result of the cabinet secretary's decisions?

Derek Mackay: Susan Aitken, the SNP leader of Glasgow City Council, is sorting out the mess that she inherited from the Labour Party—and doing a grand job. I have to correct Johann Lamont: Glasgow City Council's budget did not go down. The budget for local services has increased as a consequence of our decisions. The spending power for Glasgow's local services saw an increase—not a reduction—of some £45 million.

That is a 3.4 per cent increase on the previous year.

I look forward to the exciting plans around infrastructure, childcare and housing, where we are able to invest more in services right across Scotland. Glasgow City Council has a new, mature administration, which has taken Glasgow back into the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities so that we can work in partnership with local government to ensure that it continues to have a fair settlement from the Scottish Government.

Part-time College Students (Numbers)

6. Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address the reported decline in the number of part-time college students. (S5O-01380)

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville): As the First Minister stated at First Minister's questions last week, short courses for younger and older students alike continue to be available. Indeed, 72 per cent of the total enrolments at college in 2015-16 were on part-time courses.

Alison Harris: Does the minister acknowledge that for months the policy has been described as inflexible with a serious loss of part-time places, often for students who are furthest removed from the labour market? Particular difficulties have been created for students who are trying to balance a college course with other work and family commitments.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I said, enrolments in part-time courses are still 72 per cent. The majority of students in colleges are women.

The policy was included in my letter of guidance to colleges and universities in March. Today, I checked how widely distributed that letter was. As well as going to the Scottish funding council, it went to the Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee, college and university representatives, every single trade union that is involved and all the Government agencies.

The policy has been developed to ensure that all our colleges are responding to the needs of young people, returners-to-work and those in wider society, as well as to the needs of our economy. I am confident that our colleges will do just that.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): There has been a complete restructuring of colleges under the Scottish Government, which has meant that there are more full-time places than ever before in our colleges, which are preparing more of our younger people for work. In

fact, 79,000 of the part-time courses that have been reduced were a mere five hours—not five hours a week but five hours in total. Does the minister agree that reducing such minuscule courses has allowed colleges to invest much more in providing not only full-time courses but part-time courses that allow our young people to get the work that they require?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Mr Gibson is quite right to point out that a decision was made to ensure that colleges were asked to look at recognised qualifications leading to employment, which is something that I thought that the Conservatives would welcome rather than mock. We did that to ensure that youth unemployment came down. The rate of youth unemployment is now one of the lowest in the European Union, which should be welcomed across the chamber and which proves that the college policy has worked well for our young people and for the economy.

Point of Order

12:00

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Yesterday the United Kingdom Parliament voted unanimously to instruct the UK Government to release in full 58 sectoral papers on Brexit and the impact assessments that accompany them. It now appears that the Tory Government will either refuse to do that or will release the papers heavily redacted, thus holding Parliament in contempt.

It is my understanding that, in light of that, today Opposition parties, including the Scottish National Party, and some Tory MPs who believe in defending the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, are discussing laying a contempt motion because of the dismissive arrogance of the Prime Minister and her Government.

Given that, since May 2016, this Parliament has defeated the Scottish Government on national health service cuts, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, fracking, council funding, the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012 and failing educational policy, and that, just like the UK Government, the SNP Government has repeatedly ignored the will of Parliament—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Order. Let us hear the point of order.

Neil Findlay: Given all that, will you advise me and the chamber whether you would accept a similar contempt motion if and when the SNP Government replicates the arrogance of the Tories and ignores the democratic will of this Parliament?

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Findlay. I will consider any motion that is laid before the Parliament on its merits. The motions of this Parliament are not binding on the Government, but the Government is expected to pay attention to them. That is the point of order dealt with.

First Minister's Question Time

12:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Before I call Ruth Davidson to ask question 1, I inform members that I have been advised that Alex Rowley is unable to attend First Minister's question time today. I will therefore call Jackie Baillie to ask questions on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party.

Income Tax

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): Today I welcome the publication of the Scottish Government's paper on tax. We will take time to study it in detail and we are happy to engage on it, as the First Minister has requested. However, let me raise some initial questions. In the paper, the First Minister claims that the health of the economy will be front and centre of any tax changes that she makes. Will she grant the request that has been made by economists and trade bodies to conduct a full, independent and thorough economic assessment of any tax changes before they are undertaken? (S5F-01651)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We will consider any reasonable request that is made in the context of the discussions that we will have following the publication of today's paper. However, it is of course incumbent on the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution and the Government generally to put forward proposals that we consider to be in the best interests of the country as a whole.

In my view, the most important aspect of the paper that we have published today are the four key tests that should guide our decision making: we need to make sure that we protect the ability of this Parliament to fund our public services; we need to protect those on the lowest incomes; we need to make the tax system fair and tackle inequality; and, of course, we need to make sure that the interests of our economy are absolutely at the heart of all the decisions that we take.

One of the things that I said this morning, which I genuinely think that all of us in Parliament should try to embrace, is that often debates on tax are seen as the interests of the economy on the one hand versus the interests of public services on the other. That is the wrong way to look at it: our taxes pay for the infrastructure that our economy needs, the additional support for entrepreneurs that I announced just yesterday and the small business bonus, which removes from small businesses the burden of business rates. We need to look at this from the point of view of what kind of country we

want to be, what kind of economy we want to have, and what kind of society we want.

My final point is this, and I say it in the spirit of an open discussion. I hope that the Conservatives will reflect on the fact that their policy, which has been analysed in this paper along with the policies from all last year's party manifestos, would reduce public spending in Scotland by £140 million. Given that Ruth Davidson regularly asks me to increase public spending on a range of issues, that is something that the Tories have to seriously reflect upon.

Ruth Davidson: There was a reason why I asked specifically about the economic assessment that economists and trade bodies want. That is because—perhaps it has not been properly understood—under the new deal agreed between the UK and Scottish Governments, if Scotland's economy grows more quickly than the rest of the UK, the additional revenues will flow directly to Holyrood, whereas if Scotland's economy grows more slowly, revenue will drop, so we all need to know whether a tax rise will slow down growth in Scotland compared with the rest of the UK. Job creators, retailers and industry figures have stated their belief that that will happen if taxes rise. How does the First Minister answer their concerns?

The First Minister: Their concerns will be answered in the round of the decisions that we take. As I have said very clearly, those decisions must have the interests of public services, the lowest earners in our society, and the economy at heart. It is coming to balanced, responsible and progressive decisions that is the objective of this Government.

Of course, as Ruth Davidson is also aware, the Scottish Fiscal Commission now has the statutory responsibility for providing the tax forecast that the Scottish budget will be based on. The office of the chief economist has carried out the analysis in today's paper, but the analysis that will guide our budget is the analysis that is done by the Fiscal Commission, which will take into account a range of different factors.

I have two final points to make on this. First, on Ruth Davidson's point about tax generally, one of the points that I made this morning—I see that the Reform Scotland think tank has made the same point—is that it would be better for all of us if Scotland had a wider range of tax powers at its disposal. To simply have income tax to look at is not an ideal position to be in. However, that is the position that we are in and therefore we have to take balanced, progressive decisions on that basis.

Finally, the competitiveness and the attractiveness of our economy are not just about our tax rates, important though they are. It is also

about the quality of our public services; it is about the skills of our population; and it is about the infrastructure that we have as a country. Right now, Scotland has the highest quality public service provision anywhere in the UK; we have the most generous social contract anywhere in the UK; and, taking account of any of the potential options in the tax paper that we have published today, Scotland will remain the most cost-effective place to be in the UK.

That is a great position to be in, but because of Brexit and because of austerity—policies that have been imposed by Ruth Davidson's party—we have to ask ourselves how to protect all that matters to us as a country and that is what will drive the decisions that this Government takes.

Ruth Davidson: There is another principle that I would hope the Scottish Government would follow, which has not been mentioned so far, and that is simplicity.

The Fraser of Allander Institute has made it clear that there is a strong argument for keeping the tax system as straightforward and transparent as possible. As it points out,

“The more complex it becomes, the more inefficient it is.”

One of the proposals put forward this morning suggests as many as six tax bands. Will the First Minister take heed of warnings that a new, more complex tax system could create unintended consequences that detrimentally impact the amount of money raised?

The First Minister: There is an irony behind that question. It is commonly accepted that right now, the UK has the most complex tax system anywhere in the world. Of course, much of what lies behind that, even with income tax, remains outwith the power and responsibility of this Parliament. Let me look at the proposals that are in the paper for discussion to illustrate the options that are open to us. Some of them do propose a greater number of tax bands. One point that is commented on in the paper is that, by international standards, even the highest number that is proposed in the options, which is six tax bands, would not be unusual.

Another point made in the paper is that the more bands there are, the more progressive the tax system often is overall, because that allows tax to be more acutely aligned to the ability to pay. I know that progressive taxation and relating it to the ability to pay is not a principle that is particularly close to the hearts of the Conservatives, but it is a principle very close to the hearts of the Government.

I return to the central point. We have good-quality public services, albeit that they have challenges. We have a good social contract. We

have good support for business and for infrastructure. However, we face further austerity from the Tories. We face the impact of Brexit. We face an ageing population. If we want to protect the society and the economy that we want to have, these discussions are vital. That is why the point that I posed to Ruth Davidson earlier is important. The Tories' proposal, as analysed in the discussion paper, is to give a tax cut to the top 10 per cent of earners in the country, which would take £140 million out of the Scottish budget. Before they go any further in this tax debate, Ruth Davidson and the Conservatives have to explain how they would pay for that and who would bear the burden of that.

Ruth Davidson: Despite the attempted distortions, the reason why we support a competitive tax regime is that we believe that it will develop Scotland's economy, boosting the income tax that we need for our schools and hospitals. We do not think that it is right that every Scot earning more than £24,000 should have to pay more. The bottom line is about getting growth, and we are lagging behind. Scotland's economy is currently growing at a third of the rate of the United Kingdom economy.

When we look to the Scottish Government this week, we discover a £500 million growth scheme, which was announced a year ago and is still to distribute a single penny; we see that it has failed to meet a pledge to set up a new strategic board to take forward its plans on enterprise and skills by the deadline that was set; and we have a First Minister who wants to start a debate about raising taxes. Does the First Minister not see that, first and foremost, we need to have a debate about boosting economic growth in Scotland to levels at least that of elsewhere in these islands?

The First Minister: I am not sure where Ruth Davidson has been in recent weeks, but Nora Senior, a very highly respected businesswoman in Scotland, has been appointed to chair the strategic board and is working hard to put it in place to ensure that we align the work of our enterprise and skills agencies.

It may have passed Ruth Davidson by, but one of the illustrative options in the paper would reduce tax for the very lowest-income earners in Scotland, making the system even more progressive.

We come back to this central point. I absolutely agree—and let us make this a point of consensus—that it is of central importance to support the growth of our economy. However, if we were to pursue, in the budget that we will set in a matter of weeks, Ruth Davidson's proposal for a tax cut for the very richest and highest earners in our society, that would involve finding £140 million to take out of that budget before we did anything

else. I say again to Ruth Davidson: that is an issue that she has to answer in this debate.

For our Government's part, we will put forward our proposals to protect our public services, to protect our ability to invest in the economy and to ensure that we are doing everything that we possibly can to protect the most vulnerable in our society. Those are our priorities, and they will guide the development of and the decisions in our budget.

Austerity

2. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome the discussion paper on tax and the focus on progressive taxation, but can the First Minister tell the Parliament how much she needs to raise to end austerity? (S5F-01652)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I encourage Labour to take part in the discussion in the spirit in which we are opening it. The analysis sets out very openly how much each of the proposals of the parties at the election last year would raise, and it sets out how much would be raised by the alternative proposals that we have put forward. That is a starting point for discussion.

We have to balance a budget. We have to take account of different things: we have to mitigate austerity and, as I have said before, we have to provide a fair pay increase for our public sector workers. Let us have that discussion, and let us try to come to a consensus that is in the best interests of everybody across our country.

Jackie Baillie: I will help the First Minister with an answer, because she needs to know the scale of the challenge that she faces. To end austerity, she needs to raise more than £800 million in revenue over the next two years. That is before we consider additional commitments. However, the Government proposals that have been published today in the tax paper would raise a maximum of £290 million. That does not even come close to closing the gap. There is a black hole in the budget, so more services will end up being cut.

On top of that, after months of Labour pressure, the First Minister has promised public sector workers a pay rise, which is very welcome indeed. However, public sector workers have not had a pay rise since 2010—not a proper and decent pay rise. We need to be clear about this and we need a specific answer from the First Minister. Will she keep her promise and deliver a cost-of-living real-terms pay rise to public sector workers, and will it be fully funded by the Scottish Government?

The First Minister: Labour seems to be mired in confusion in this debate. Jackie Baillie has put a figure of £800 million before us today, but Labour's proposals—or, at least, the latest Labour proposals, because there have been so many—

would not come close to raising that amount. Unless Labour is saying that it is going to pile more pressure on to the lowest-paid income tax payers, it has questions to answer.

I have been very clear about public sector pay: we will set out our public sector pay policy and its detail when we publish our budget. That is what happens in the normal course of events. I want fair pay increases for our public sector workers. Of course the increases have to be affordable, which is one of the reasons why the debate on tax is so important. We have set out in our tax paper a range of options; there might be other options that parties want to propose. However, let us go into the discussion in a spirit of trying to find a consensus that is in the interests of our society, our public services and our economy. That is what I encourage all parties to do.

Let us not forget—those of us in the Scottish National Party part of the chamber, at least, will not forget—that the impact of Tory austerity goes further than anything that this Parliament can do to mitigate it, which is why we should keep up the pressure on the Conservatives and on the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as we approach his budget, to stop austerity and to end it at source, rather than have it passed on to the shoulders of the most vulnerable people in our society.

Jackie Baillie: I will provide the First Minister with some detail. I refer to page 32 of her own tax document, where Labour's proposals are costed at about £700 million in one year. I talked about £800 million over two years. I think that even she will agree that there is more than enough in Labour's proposals to end austerity—something that she has so far refused to do.

For this Government promises are made to be broken. Her promise to parents and teachers to cut class sizes? Broken. Her promise to our young people to abolish student debt? Broken. And her promise to our elderly people to eradicate delayed discharge in our hospitals? Broken. She also made a promise to patients about a legal guarantee of treatment within 12 weeks. That, too, has been broken.

Now we have before us a tax plan that simply does not add up, and a list of commitments for which the First Minister knows she cannot pay. Who is the First Minister going to fail next?

The First Minister: On the basis of that performance, no wonder Labour is going through leaders, or people at the dispatch box, at such a rate. Maybe one of these days Labour will find someone who is capable of asking a decent question. [*Interruption.*] James Kelly is shouting at me, "What's the answer?" What was the question that Jackie Baillie asked me? [*Laughter.*] If

anybody can work it out, they are doing a lot better than I am.

Labour has just demonstrated that it is incapable of the kind of mature, serious and honest debate that our tax document opens the door to. I am not sure whether Jackie Baillie did this deliberately or just does not understand the figures in our paper, but when she was quoting figures about Labour policy, she deliberately excluded the behaviour change element. However, when she quoted the figures about SNP policy, she included that element. Labour can do it one way or the other, but it has to be consistent.

Let us get back to the central point at issue here. We have opened the door today to a serious, mature and grown-up discussion about how we fund our public services and our economy. Let us see if any of the other parties in the chamber are capable of such maturity. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Will members please be a little quieter? They should listen to the question and then listen to the answer respectfully. I live in hope.

We will take some constituency questions now. The first is from Andy Wightman.

Centres of Excellence (Funding)

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): The First Minister will be aware of proposals by the City of Edinburgh Council to close one of Scotland's national centres of excellence—the City of Edinburgh Music School. I declare a personal interest as my daughter is an alumna of the school.

Can the First Minister confirm that funding for Scotland's national centres of excellence across the country continues to be provided by the Scottish Government? Does she agree that the City of Edinburgh Council does not have unfettered discretion to close the school? Importantly, will she consider how, in the near future, the financial arrangements that are in place to support all Scotland's national centres of excellence can be restated and made clear, in order to ensure that staff, parents, pupils and future pupils have clarity and certainty about the future of those world-class facilities?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, I agree that the national centres of excellence are world-class facilities. In answer to the specifics of Andy Wightman's question, there is specific funding for the school, although it is now rolled up within the total local government settlement. We value highly the role of all six centres of excellence, including the City of Edinburgh Music School.

The Scottish Government has been engaging with the City of Edinburgh Council on the matter. Of course, the closure is only a proposal that the council is considering at this stage in its budget consultation, but the council will want to reflect on the fact that the centres of excellence, including the music school, allow children and young people across Scotland the opportunity to receive expert tuition in their specialisms—in this case, music. That is very valuable. There is plenty of evidence of that, and I am sure that its importance is something that the City of Edinburgh Council is reflecting on carefully.

Children's Waiting Times (NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde)

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): Molly is 18 months old. She suffers from reflux and will not eat solid food. While facing a 12-week wait to see a specialist, Molly's parents were extremely concerned about the physical and psychological impact of the condition. Molly's parents were then told by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde that her wait had increased to 21 weeks. The development and wellbeing of a baby is on the line. Will the First Minister agree to meet Molly's parents and to look into the case urgently?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, based on what I have heard from Maurice Golden, I say that I absolutely understand the anxiety of Molly's parents. The situation will be of huge concern to them. The wellbeing and development of all babies is absolutely paramount.

I will certainly urgently look into the case and avail myself of the detail, and I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport to write to Maurice Golden and certainly, if necessary, to engage with Molly's parents. I am sure that we all want to wish them and Molly the very best.

Gourock to Kilcreggan Ferry

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Technical issues and staffing problems are severely disrupting the Gourock to Kilcreggan ferry service. The service is regularly off for weeks on end, and has been suspended again this week. The current situation is untenable and unacceptable. The Minister for Transport and the Islands has promised to get a grip on the situation, but local patience is wearing extremely thin. What assurance can the First Minister provide today that a solution is in sight and that users of the ferry will finally get the service that they deserve?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): It is hugely important that people who rely on our ferry services have reliable services to use. That is the case on this route, as it is on all routes. We invest heavily in our ferry services, and many new routes are now available.

On the Gourrock to Kilcreggan ferry and the issues that Jamie Greene raises, I will speak directly to the Minister for Transport and the Islands and ask him to reply to the member. It is vital, if problems are being experienced, that everything possible is done to rectify and resolve them.

Income Tax

3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I, too, welcome the very interesting discussion paper on income tax that the Government has published today.

Last year, in the election campaign, political parties put forward three basic ideas on tax. The first was no change, with or without a little tweaking of the thresholds, which would have benefited only the wealthiest. The second was an increase in the basic rate, which would have increased tax for low earners. The final one was the Green proposition, which showed that we can raise revenue for our public services while protecting low earners and reducing inequalities with a fairer range of rates and bands. Is it not clear now that the no-change option that the Scottish National Party put forward is off the table, that an increase in the basic rate is off the table, and that the Green option of a fairer range of rates and bands is the only serious option left standing? (S5F-01653)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I give Patrick Harvie 10 out of 10 for effort and for claiming credit for everything in the paper.

In point of fact, the SNP's manifesto proposal last year was not for no change, and that is borne out in the paper, in terms of the revenue forecast for that. Patrick Harvie is right to say, however, that we were not in agreement with proposals that would increase tax for the lowest earners, and I still do not favour such proposals.

I recognise in the programme for government that, given the pressures that we face and our desire and determination to protect what really matters to people across Scotland, we must have an open and honest discussion about whether those on the highest incomes should pay a modest amount more, to try to enable us to protect services. We look forward to engaging in those discussions, which I hope that all parties will engage in constructively.

I come to the other point, and, to be fair to him, Patrick Harvie has made this point previously. I am frequently told in this chamber that we are a minority Administration. If all parties simply stick to their manifesto positions we will not pass a budget, and if this Parliament does not pass a budget, it fails in its duty to the Scottish people. We have an opportunity not to stick doggedly to

previous positions but to come into a discussion with the best interests of the country at heart. If we all do that, we will pass a budget; more important, we will pass the right budget.

Patrick Harvie: My first question was not meant as a criticism. I congratulate the First Minister on seeing the strength in what the Greens have been advocating for the past couple of years.

It is very clear that the only way that the Scottish Government can pass a budget this year is by raising enough revenue for public priorities such as an inflation-based increase in public sector pay, but to do that fairly, in a way that reduces inequality. Is it not also clear that if we do that, there must then be an equally open and creative discussion about the other side of the tax picture, which is local tax? The SNP has stalled on local tax reform for far too long. It is overdue and the project must be put back on the agenda.

The First Minister: Last year, we made reforms to the local taxation system. Those reforms are right now providing additional revenue that is helping to support public services across the country.

I know Patrick Harvie's position on wider reforms to local tax, and no doubt that is a discussion that we will all continue to have in the years to come. However, this Parliament has a job ahead of it over the next few weeks, and that is to come to a position on tax and pass a budget that protects our public services and protects investment in our economy. The document that we published today gives us a really good foundation on which to try to do that.

This will not just be a test of the Government's ability to be open, honest, realistic and mature in our approach but a test of every party in this Parliament. Let us see whether all of us collectively can live up to that test. The next few weeks will answer that question for us.

British Transport Police (Merger)

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): Papers released this week by the joint programme board that is overseeing the British Transport Police merger show that work is still required to assess the merger's cost. Does the First Minister agree that progressing the merger of the BTP and Police Scotland without doing a full cost analysis in the first instance demonstrates a shocking lack of financial prudence on the part of the Scottish Government? What comments does the First Minister have on the petition against the merger that was handed in this week and which has more than 11,500 signatures?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): No, I do not agree with Mary Fee. The merger of the British Transport Police, which has now been devolved to

the Scottish Government—something that Labour supported in the context of the Smith commission—is being taken forward for three main reasons: to improve accountability; to ensure that the transport police have access to Police Scotland’s wider range of resources; and to future proof the transport police’s future governance. As we know, the Conservatives’ manifesto for the last United Kingdom election said that they were going to create a bigger infrastructure police force and absorb the British Transport Police into it. As a result, if we do not take actions here, we risk leaving the British Transport Police isolated within that governance structure.

We will take forward the proposals sensibly and responsibly. Indeed, the joint programme board is there precisely to do the detailed work to ensure that this is a success, and we will continue to work with those employed in the British Transport Police to ensure that we take account of all their concerns as we go forward.

Winnie Ewing

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): Fifty years ago today, the people of Hamilton and Blantyre elected Winnie Ewing to Parliament. In many ways, 2 November 1967 was the start of modern Scottish politics, in which this nation aspires to being outward looking, gender balanced and European. Does the First Minister agree that now, as in 1967, the message that should ring out is, “Stop the world—Scotland wants to get on”?

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, First Minister.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Of course, it was on this day in 1967 that Winnie Ewing won the Hamilton by-election. I do not think that it is an exaggeration to say that that by-election changed the course of Scottish political history. Winnie Ewing has been a trailblazer in so many ways: as a champion of Scottish independence; as a woman in a man’s world; and as the person who famously reconvened this Parliament in 1999. Winnie Ewing is, quite simply, a legend in her own lifetime. Winnie, if you are watching, we send you our love and we thank you. [*Applause.*]

Deaths in Custody (Inquiry)

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): This week, the United Kingdom Government published both the report of the independent inquiry chaired by Dame Elish Angiolini into deaths in custody and its response to that report. I have previously called for an inquiry into deaths in custody in Scotland, because I strongly believe that improvements could be made in the interests of families and the police, particularly following the death of Sheku Bayoh while in police custody in Fife. Will the First Minister today commit to holding

an inquiry? What is her response to Dame Elish’s report and the relevance of its recommendations to Scotland?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Government—and, I am sure, the Crown Office—will, of course, carefully consider Dame Elish Angiolini’s report. It is important to remind members that custody arrangements in Scotland are distinct from those in England and Wales. Under the Inquiries into Fatal Accidents and Sudden Deaths etc (Scotland) Act 2016, a fatal accident inquiry must be held into any death in police custody, unless the Lord Advocate is satisfied that the circumstances have already been clearly established in other proceedings. However, we recognise that improvements could be made, so we will study the report carefully and determine whether there are any actions that the Scottish Government can take. The Crown Office, too, will decide whether there are any actions that it is required to take.

Although I understand members’ concerns about the circumstances surrounding Sheku Bayoh’s death, the member will appreciate that I am not able to comment more directly on that right now as the matter is still under consideration by the Crown Office. However, these are important issues that the Government will pay serious attention to.

Online Medical Information

4. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the First Minister, in light of reports that Macmillan Cancer Support is acting to combat so-called fake news regarding health conditions, what action the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that people are not misled by fake medical information online. (S5F-01674)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): This is an important question. I think that Macmillan’s appointment of a digital nurse is really welcome and will be a very useful resource for patients. Accessible, robust and accurate medical information is vital, which is why NHS 24 has produced the nhsinform.scot website. NHS inform follows strict on-going clinical quality assurance processes in partnership with a range of organisations, including Macmillan Cancer Support, to verify the accuracy and quality of content, and I urge anyone who wants to go online to look into any medical condition to use nhsinform.scot, because they can be assured of getting reliable and accurate information there.

Stuart McMillan: As the services on NHS inform, such as information on treatments and test and guidance on finding the right local services, can be of use to many people across Scotland, can the First Minister outline what steps have

been taken to promote the website to make it better used in Scotland?

The First Minister: NHS inform provides a range of information, not only on procedures but on healthy living, on various illnesses and conditions and on health rights, among other subjects.

In April this year, NHS 24 launched a publicity campaign, including social media activity and advertisements on buses and trains, that has significantly raised awareness of NHS inform. The number of visits to the website has almost quadrupled since the launch of that campaign, going from 116,000 visits in April 2017 to 463,000 visits in September. The NHS will continue to take steps to make people aware of the service and, as MSPs, all of us have a role to play in ensuring that our constituents are aware of it, too.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Macmillan Cancer Support is also greatly concerned about cancer waiting times. It points to the fact that NHS Lanarkshire seems to be the only health board that is achieving its targets in this area. That is due in part to the fact that NHS Lanarkshire published not only details of its delays but the reasons for those delays and the steps that it is taking to mitigate them. Does the First Minister agree that it is now time to roll out that practice across all of our health boards, so that we can reduce cancer waiting times in the same way that NHS Lanarkshire has done?

The Presiding Officer: That question is a little wide, but I call the First Minister.

The First Minister: The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport is already chairing a group to consider what more needs to be done to further reduce cancer waiting times. One of the key objectives of that group is to consider the learning from NHS Lanarkshire, which is to be applauded for the work that it has done, and to see how that can better be rolled out across the Scotland. I will ask the health secretary to keep the member up to date as that work progresses.

Pupil Equity Funding (Outcomes)

5. **Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what criteria will be used to assess the outcomes of pupil equity funding. (S5F-01657)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Nationally, we are currently consulting on the criteria that will be used to measure progress towards closing the attainment gap, and we will confirm our approach in the 2018 national improvement plan, which was published in December. Locally, we expect schools and authorities to make use of the data that they already have and to incorporate details of the pupil

equity funding in existing planning and reporting processes, including in their annual school improvement plans and standards and quality reports. School inspection and other review processes will also be used where necessary to ensure that schools are using their funding properly.

Liz Smith: The First Minister will be aware of the recent reports that indicate that the pupil equity fund is being used in some councils to plug gaps in other areas of local education budgets, for example in relation to janitors' overtime. Does the First Minister agree that some of those decisions do not have the necessary focus on literacy and numeracy that the Scottish Government has stated? To help restore that focus, will the First Minister agree to reverse the Government's decision to remove Scotland from well-respected international measurements on literacy and numeracy?

The First Minister: Given the discussion that we regularly have in the Parliament about the programme for international student assessment—PISA—results, I think that there is a fair amount of international scrutiny on the performance of the Scottish education system. Part of the purpose of the national improvement framework is to ensure that we have much more rigorous and detailed information in Scotland on the performance of our schools and the education system more generally.

The pupil equity fund is there to provide additionality in our schools, particularly targeted at closing the attainment gap. Liz Smith will be aware that claims that Glasgow City Council, for example, plans to use PEF money to part-fund the settlement of the janitors' pay dispute are simply wrong—they are factually inaccurate. That settlement is funded without a single penny of PEF money being used.

Obviously, it is for headteachers to determine how they use that money, but the money should be for new services, in line with the criteria for the PEF, that are about improving standards in our schools and closing the attainment gap. The work that I spoke about in my initial answer will help us to monitor that as the pupil equity fund scheme continues.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): The pupil equity fund is indeed a good thing, but that money must be additional. It is just a matter of common sense that there will be pressure to use the fund to plug gaps in core funding as long as core council and school budgets are being cut year on year alongside PEF being made available. Therefore, will the First Minister promise to end those cuts to councils and schools in the budget, so that the equity fund can indeed do the job that it is designed to do?

The First Minister: I am glad to hear Iain Gray say that the pupil equity fund is a good thing. He might want to try to explain why Labour voted against it in the budget if he thinks that it is such a good thing. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order, please.

The First Minister: It is amazing how Labour members do not like having basic facts pointed out to them. They get very uncomfortable.

To go back to the serious issue at hand, local budgets and the spending power of councils—which we heard the finance secretary talk about before First Minister's questions—increased in this financial year. How we continue to protect local services is part of the discussion that we have opened today on tax.

My third and final point is that councils had the opportunity to increase their council tax by up to 3 per cent in this financial year. Strangely, the only councils across Scotland that did not use that power were Labour councils. Labour members come here asking for more money from the Scottish Government while their own councils will not exercise the powers that they have to increase the funding available.

Interest Rates (Financial Hardship)

6. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government plans to take to help families faced with financial hardship should interest rates rise. (S5F-01671)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): In November 2014, we launched Scotland's financial health service. That is a one-stop web-based service that provides impartial information for anyone who has concern about debt, borrowing, managing money or general financial concerns. The service can signpost people to the most appropriate area of support, and they can find the help that they need in one place.

In addition, we are committed to establishing a financial health check guarantee that provides advice on how people can maximise their income and access the best deals on utility and financial products, and we also support families in need through the Scottish welfare fund.

Pauline McNeill: Ten years of wage stagnation, low wages and the rising cost of living mean that more households could be tipped over the edge into serious financial difficulty, should there be even a small rise in interest rates today. I wonder whether the First Minister shares my concern.

A third of Scots are worried about the amount of money that they owe, and many are turning to credit to pay for essentials including gas, electricity and other basic things. The Office for Budget

Responsibility—this is a very serious point, Presiding Officer—has said that household debt could in four years be as high as 47 per cent. I realise that it is difficult to respond to a question of that magnitude, but in view of the First Minister's previous answer and the importance of affordable credit, is it time for the Government to invest more seriously in affordable credit and to promote credit unions more seriously? They have a crucial role to play in increasing financial inclusion.

One area that is worth looking at—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Your question, Ms McNeill, please

Pauline McNeill: I am genuinely surprised by the reaction to the question. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Ask a question, please, Ms McNeill.

Pauline McNeill: Will the First Minister consider not-for-profit lending schemes such as Conduit Scotland in Fife, because there is a significant and serious role that credit unions and such schemes can play—

The Presiding Officer: A question, please, Ms McNeill.

Pauline McNeill: Let us not forget the many Scots who will face financial hardship. Would the First Minister be prepared to take a personal interest in taking that forward?

The First Minister: There is a big area of consensus here. I agree with the thrust of Pauline McNeill's question. I am a massive supporter of the credit union movement; it does fantastic work and this Government has supported it and will continue to do so. We will look at what more we can do for it.

I understand that the Bank of England has just announced the first rise in interest rates since, I think, July 2007—a 0.25 per cent increase—which I know will be of concern to families across the country. We will continue to look at how we support people who are on the lowest incomes.

I go back to one of the central issues that we have been discussing at First Minister's Questions today—it is one of the genuine points of disagreement between the SNP and Labour in our approach to income tax. We do not think that we should, for many of the reasons that Pauline McNeill has talked about, increase income tax for the lowest-income families. Such issues have to be at the heart of all the decisions that we take; they will continue to there, from the perspective of this Government.

Scottish Welfare Fund

7. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To ask the First Minister how many households have received support from the Scottish welfare fund. (S5F-01670)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Since the creation of the Scottish welfare fund in April 2013, more than 265,000 households in Scotland have received grants totalling £140 million. One third of those households are families with children.

It is not acceptable that such support, which covers the basic costs of living including the costs of food and heating, is needed by so many people, but we know the impact that the United Kingdom Government's harsh welfare cuts are having on people. We have repeatedly warned that the chaotic roll-out of universal credit—particularly the six-week delay for the first payment—is pushing more households into crisis.

We will continue to do all that we can to support hard-pressed families, and we remain absolutely committed to a welfare system that treats people with respect and dignity.

George Adam: Is the First Minister aware that a report that was published this week warns that disabled people and their families are being left hungry, cold and homeless by Tory welfare cuts, with some people being driven to thoughts of suicide? Given that 30,000 people in Scotland could lose out once the UK Government's personal independence payment roll-out is complete, does the First Minister foresee demand for the Scottish welfare fund growing more, as the Tory obsession with austerity continues?

The First Minister: Yes, I do. I was very concerned—as many people will have been—to read the findings of the report, which also highlights that 44 per cent of disabled people could see their disability benefits being reduced or completely removed. That is an example of the continued onslaught of welfare cuts from the Tory Government hitting the most vulnerable people in our society, which is putting immense financial and, at times, emotional pressure on them.

When there is still a lot of month left at the end of the money, people need somewhere to turn. Therefore, although I wish that it was not necessary, I am glad that we provide the safety net of the Scottish welfare fund. However, people need more than just that: they need the UK Government to pay attention to the catalogue of evidence of the damage that it is causing to the most vulnerable people, and to act now to reverse the cuts.

Diabulimia

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The Parliament is still meeting, so I ask members of the public to leave the public gallery quietly.

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-08003, in the name of Annie Wells, on raising awareness of diabulimia. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the work being carried out to raise public awareness of diabulimia, which is a little known, but extremely dangerous, eating disorder among people with Type 1 diabetes (T1D), who avoid taking their insulin in an attempt to lose weight; understands that, due to its unique nature, it is not officially recognised as a medical condition and that, consequently, many people do not receive the support that they need; notes that it impacts on men and women in Glasgow and across the country; understands that, in the UK, an estimated 40% of young women aged 15-30 with T1D have the condition, and notes the calls for a greater understanding of diabulimia and the provision of new and improved specialist support.

12:48

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I thank everyone who is going to speak in the debate. The reason for the debate is to raise much-needed awareness of diabulimia, an eating disorder that, although it is estimated to affect around 40 per cent of young women with type 1 diabetes who are aged between 15 and 30 and 11 per cent of teenage boys who have type 1 diabetes, is still relatively unknown.

The condition, which involves a person with type 1 diabetes omitting to take insulin in order to lose weight, has only recently gathered media attention; therefore, we are only just beginning to see the term "diabulimia" used in everyday language. The condition is not officially medically recognised, but it poses a very serious and real threat to its victims and has been called the world's most dangerous eating disorder.

As it is an eating disorder combined with a chronic illness, diabulimia is often more complex to explain than more commonly known eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, which is why I will give full and due attention to explaining exactly what diabulimia is. In understanding what the condition is and sharing that knowledge with the people around us, we can go some way towards spreading awareness about it.

What is diabulimia? It is a condition that can affect people with type 1 diabetes, a lifetime autoimmune condition thought to affect about 30,000 people in Scotland. When people have type 1

diabetes, the cells in their pancreas are attacked, making it unable to produce insulin, a vital hormone that takes the glucose from our food into our bloodstream and delivers it to all the different cells in our bodies. Without insulin, our bodies cannot get the nutrients that they need. Consequently, when people are first diagnosed with diabetes, they have usually lost a lot of weight and often feel irritable and low.

On diagnosis, sufferers will begin to inject doses of insulin calculated to match what they eat. Significantly, after taking insulin, sufferers often regain the weight that they had lost when they were ill, with their weight normally stabilising slightly above that of the healthy non-diabetic population. That is important to understanding diabulimia. It is owing to that weight gain that people who need insulin are often faced with a terrible choice: they can lose weight without having to diet by restricting their insulin or by not taking it at all. The signs that they have done that may not be obvious. With diabulimia, there is no need for food restriction, purging or exercise; there are none of the classic symptoms that are often related to eating disorders, so the condition can go unnoticed. Sufferers will also show no signs of weight loss—they can retain their normal eating habits and appear absolutely fine to their friends and family around them.

On a recent BBC Three documentary about diabulimia, a young woman with the condition sat down with her parents and told them that there had been periods where she had not taken insulin for up to two weeks at a time—something that they were, understandably, oblivious to, despite living in the same house.

The effects of not taking insulin are huge. Without insulin, the body is unable to take the nutrition that it needs from food and patients can suffer from premature loss of eyesight, pains and loss of sensation in their feet and hands and kidney damage. Eventually, they become blind, need dialysis or transplants, or suffer amputations.

The damage is cumulative rather than reversible—unlike ordinary starvation, which is mostly reversible over time if a person takes enough nutrition—so diabulimia has come to be known as the world's most dangerous eating disorder. Statistics have shown that the 10-year mortality rate is 2 per 1,000 for people with diabetes and 7 per 1,000 for those with anorexia, but diabulimics face a much higher mortality rate of 35 per 1,000 people affected.

Speaking in the same documentary, Becky Rudkin, a woman from Aberdeen, spoke of her 10-year battle with diabulimia—a condition that resulted in her suffering three diabetic comas and from which she was eventually saved only after being sectioned.

Raising awareness of diabulimia is key to prevention. Work is being done. We are hearing about the condition more and more in the media and there are examples of good practice up and down the country. In Glasgow last year, Diabetes UK held a professional conference featuring a discussion on diabulimia. For many of the 3,000 people in attendance, that was the first time that they had ever heard of the condition.

The Eden unit is a specialist eating disorder service in Aberdeen. In the north of Scotland, diabetes clinicians and eating disorder clinicians are holding workshops together and establishing good permanent working links to support patients together. We should be building on that work.

As ever, there is always more to be done. Good practice exists. Health professionals and clinicians are fairly familiar with the symptoms of the condition and diagnosis occurs through the use of a specialist questionnaire and blood testing. However, once diagnosis is made, there is no official diagnosis code for diabulimia in the national health service framework and sufferers can be classified as having an eating disorder not otherwise specified or an atypical eating disorder. As a result, there are no NHS guidelines on how to deal with the issue and patients are not always treated with the interdisciplinary approach that is needed. That issue was raised by a family that has been personally affected and that I have been in contact with.

The treatment needed for a diabetic with an eating disorder is quite different from that for a person without diabetes. I therefore use this opportunity to urge there to be integrated thinking across the country when it comes to covering the two elements of care.

I thank members who have stayed to speak in this debate and who have shown their support for raising awareness of diabulimia. I am proud to bring the subject to the Parliament and I hope that the debate generates more interest in a condition that deserves greater publicity.

We require to tackle the issue head on, which is why I am pleased that sufferers are feeling more comfortable about coming forward to share their often harrowing stories.

Although diabetes is a condition that most if not all people are acutely aware of, diabulimia is a condition that might well exist in families in which relatives are completely unaware of the suffering of their loved ones.

Official medical recognition of diabulimia would be a major step forward in helping to raise awareness of the disorder and in securing better support for people who are living with the condition.

This is an important debate. I hope that we can talk about the subject again in the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Emma Harper. She will be followed by Mr Whittle—I would like to call him, but he has not pressed his request-to-speak button. [*Interruption.*] There you go.

12:55

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Annie Wells on securing this important debate.

As someone who has type 1 diabetes, and as a registered nurse, I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak in today's debate. It is important to emphasise that the debate is about raising awareness of a condition that has not been officially recognised. As co-convenor, with Dave Stewart, of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on diabetes, I appreciate that raising awareness of this eating disorder is crucial.

It is estimated that almost 35,000 people in Scotland are living with type 1 diabetes. Diabulimia is sometimes referred to as eating disorder diabetes mellitus type 1, or ED-DMT1. It is difficult to diagnose. It is an extremely complex condition, in which, over time, a person with type 1 diabetes either stops injecting insulin or restricts the amount that they inject, in an attempt to control their weight.

Why do people do that? The Diabetes UK website has the following list of factors:

- “obsession with food labels
- negative attention to weight
- hypo bingeing
- constant awareness of numbers
- parent attitude towards Type 1 diabetes
- shame over management
- negative relationships with healthcare providers
- difficulty losing weight due to insulin.”

As Annie Wells said, insulin is the protein that acts as a bridge to allow energy-supplying glucose in the blood to transfer into the cells, to support metabolism. When someone misses their insulin, blood sugar levels get really high, resulting in the metabolism of fat and then protein in the muscle, as the body needs an energy source. That is what leads to weight loss.

People who suffer from diabulimia do not just have physical health needs. They require mental health support, as they can experience a range of emotional effects, including depression and feelings of shame, guilt and low self-esteem, in

addition to the everyday stress of life, which involves closely monitoring their diet.

This morning I spoke to one of the nurse specialists in the diabetes team in NHS Dumfries and Galloway, to find out how the board supports people who are suspected of having diabulimia. I was informed that NHS Dumfries and Galloway has a new dietician, who specialises in weight management and eating disorders. His remit will include referrals, assessment and support for type 1s with diabulimia. That is good news for folks in south-west Scotland.

We ask health professionals to look out for type 1s who are focusing on weight control, rather than blood glucose control. That is a sign that weight is the more important issue for the person.

Research suggests that women are at a higher risk of developing diabulimia. I was surprised to find out that an estimated 60 per cent of women with type 1 diabetes will have experienced a clinically diagnosable eating disorder by the age of 25. That is a profound statistic. The same research suggests that men with type 1 have a much higher drive to lose weight than their non-diabetic counterparts.

When I was doing research ahead of today's debate, I found the BBC Three documentary, “Diabulimia: The World's Most Dangerous Eating Disorder”. It is interesting, and anyone can Google it and watch it, to raise their awareness of the condition. Becky Rudkin, a young lady in the documentary, said that

“You don't get a day off when you've got diabetes”,

and that there are

“a lot of numbers dictating your life, from calorie counting to watching the scales.”

I can identify with focusing on those numbers. There are carb numbers, blood glucose numbers and insulin unit numbers, and do not get me started on ketones. Becky Rudkin was correct to say that there are a lot of numbers dictating how one should manage one's auto-immune disease to prevent complications and stay well.

I congratulate Annie Wells on providing a comprehensive overview of the causes and effects of the condition of diabulimia—great job; thank you.

13:00

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to be able to speak in the debate, and I congratulate my colleague Annie Wells on securing time in the chamber to highlight and discuss diabulimia. I thank Diabetes Scotland for the briefing papers that it provided for the debate.

Although I am a member of the cross-party group on diabetes and am continually being educated on the disease by Emma Harper, diabulimia is not a condition that I was familiar with until fairly recently. I am of course aware of other eating disorders, such as bulimia and anorexia. Members might be surprised to hear that I have some experience of those conditions—nearly always in women—from the world of sport. I know of distance runners who, in their drive for excellence in track and field, have taken their dietary habits too far and have crossed into the realm of eating disorders. I have also had to help a person close to me for whom bulimia became a problem. That person, too, was immersed in sport. We would not necessarily imagine that such people would fall into that unhealthy cycle. I mention that because such conditions can easily be hidden.

Diabulimia is a condition that could have even more dangerous outcomes, because it is associated with a condition that, if not properly treated, can itself lead to life-threatening situations. People who suffer from type 1 diabetes have a constant need to control their blood sugar levels by injecting insulin. With proper monitoring, people with type 1 diabetes can live a very normal life in just about every way. I have mentioned previously that I am lucky enough to coach an athlete with type 1 diabetes who has medalled at Scottish level in the 1,500m.

The idea of controlling weight loss by reducing insulin intake is quite shocking. Especially shocking is the fact that, although the condition can affect men, 60 per cent of females with type 1 diabetes will have experienced a clinically diagnosable eating disorder by the age of 25, as Emma Harper mentioned.

As with most eating disorders, the foundation for diabulimia lies in a psychological issue—that of how one sees oneself and how one would want to look. Self-deprecation and a lack of confidence underlie it. That opens up a whole can of worms on the public perception of what look is desirable, which is predominantly driven by the media. Perhaps that is a debate for another day.

The holding of today's debate gives the Parliament an opportunity to raise the issue of diabulimia and shine a light on it, which, we hope, will go some way to bringing it to the attention of the greater public. More important, the debate might enable us to reach out to those who are suffering from the condition and let them know that there is help out there for them and that they do not need to suffer alone.

The diabetes improvement plan indicated that the deployment of psychologists has made significant inroads into the issue in the areas of deployment. The extra support and training that

have been made available to staff to increase the level of psychological assessment skills must be highlighted and their roll-out must be continued. Healthcare professionals, family and friends need to be aware of the tell-tale signs that could indicate the existence of diabulimia. I will not go into them, as they have already been mentioned. I recognise that Diabetes Scotland is calling for action to improve the recognition and management of the condition, and I hope that the debate contributes to that process of awareness raising.

I again congratulate Annie Wells on securing the debate, and I urge anyone who has questions about or needs advice on diabulimia to contact the Diabetes Scotland helpline, because the condition is one that no one should have to live with.

13:04

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I echo other members' thanks to Annie Wells for her motion, which has allowed the debate to take place today. The debate gives MSPs the opportunity to play our small part in raising awareness of diabulimia—a condition that, as we have heard, is incredibly dangerous and poorly understood. Although I am my party's spokesperson on public health and a member of the Health and Sport Committee, I confess that, until recently, my own understanding—like that of many others—was limited. I commend Diabetes UK and other charities for the work that they do to tackle the lack of awareness of the condition.

I also thank the BBC for the recent BBC Three documentary "Diabulimia: The World's Most Dangerous Eating Disorder", which was mentioned by Annie Wells and Emma Harper. It brought home the real-life human impact of diabulimia on three young sufferers and their families. If members have not watched the documentary, they should do so on the BBC iPlayer.

The lack of awareness of diabulimia makes identification and treatment more difficult and contributes to the stigma associated with the condition. Until we improve recognition and understanding, it will be hard to improve early intervention and provide better treatment.

Those who have diabulimia are faced with the dual burden of type 1 diabetes and an eating disorder. Serious physical and psychological symptoms are associated with both, and the interrelation between the two makes it a particularly high-risk condition. The potential physical complications of diabetes, such as diabetic ketoacidosis or damage to eyesight, kidneys and nerve endings, are significantly heightened by taking less insulin than required, and the possibility of doing lasting damage is high.

Likewise, the hyperawareness of food and diet necessitated by diabetes can entrench and perpetuate the unhealthy relationship with food that underpins eating disorders.

In addition to the severe risks associated with diabulimia, its prevalence is also cause for serious concern. As the motion notes, research has found that up to 40 per cent of women aged 15 to 30 with type 1 diabetes have the condition. Although it is thought to be less common among men, men with type 1 diabetes have been found to exhibit a higher drive for thinness than their non-diabetic counterparts, putting them at risk of diabulimia. Indeed, a recent study in Germany found that 11.2 per cent of boys between 11 and 19 omit insulin to lose weight.

However, as diabulimia is not a recognised medical condition, it is all but impossible to gather accurate information about its prevalence and the risks that it poses. There are no reliable statistics for exactly how many people suffer from diabulimia, and deaths that are caused as a result of diabulimia are recorded as resulting from diabetes complications. That masks the scope of the problem and limits analysis of its impact and relevant trends.

If we are to improve the awareness, prevention and treatment of diabulimia, we need a better understanding of the condition. Recognising it as a specific medical condition is crucial to building a comprehensive view of who is affected by diabulimia and how it affects them. The complex nature of diabulimia can make it difficult to secure the right treatment. Too often, diabetes experts lack an adequate understanding of eating disorders, and mental health professionals may not be familiar with the challenges of diabetes. It is a unique condition that requires specialist treatment and a multifaceted approach.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on diabetes highlight the heightened risk of eating disorders that are faced by those who have diabetes; likewise, the guidance on eating disorders now has a sub-section on diabetes for all categories of eating disorder. Crucially, it includes a specific treatment plan for those who are taking the appropriate dose of insulin. It is encouraging to see the clinical guidelines beginning to reflect the reality of the condition, and I welcome the progress that is being made.

However, with many patients still struggling to get suitable treatment, there is still a great deal more to do. The Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network guidelines are yet to be brought into line with those from NICE on the matter, and there is still insufficient knowledge among healthcare professionals on how to identify and support people with diabulimia. That needs to improve.

To deliver informed and evidence-led treatment of diabulimia across Scotland, we must do more to facilitate collaboration between the two fields and develop expertise in the condition. By making that happen, and by raising awareness of the condition, we can play our part in ensuring that those who suffer from diabulimia get the treatment and the support that they need.

13:08

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, particularly to the fact that I am a registered mental health nurse, holding a current registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council, and to my honorary contract with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

I add my thanks to Annie Wells for bringing this important issue to the chamber for debate today. Most people will not have heard of diabulimia. It is not classified as an illness in either "The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders", DSM-5, or the "International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems", ICD-10, which are the internationally recognised classifications of disease and health-related problems. It is therefore not really surprising that most healthcare professionals might not have heard of diabulimia.

In preparing for today's debate, I even found it difficult to find published research on diabulimia. However, I note that insulin omission should now be considered to be a clinical feature in the diagnosis of anorexia and bulimia. I sincerely hope that members are able to use today's debate to increase recognition of the condition among not only the healthcare and research communities, but the public.

As we have heard from other members, the word "diabulimia" merges the words "diabetes" and "bulimia". Type 1 diabetes is treated by regular injections of insulin to control blood glucose levels, and diabulimia is the term that describes the situation when someone regularly and deliberately reduces the amount of insulin that they take to control their weight and alter their body shape.

Diabulimia is not a household name, but it is a condition that might possibly affect a large proportion of our population. As we have heard, there are around 30,000 people who are diagnosed with type 1 diabetes in Scotland and the little research that exists on diabulimia suggests that a significant percentage of those people could be susceptible to being affected by it. Although Diabetes Scotland warns us to treat those figures with caution, one study has estimated that insulin omission has been reported

in up to 40 per cent of people with diabetes. Other research from Germany suggests that more than 10 per cent of males between the ages of 11 and 19 omitted insulin to lose weight. I am sure that we all agree that those figures are alarming, and that could just be the tip of the iceberg with regard to the number of people who are affected.

What happens when someone with type 1 diabetes omits their insulin? Their blood glucose levels increase and hyperglycemia leads to polyuria—passing an increased amount of urine—which means that calories are excreted and not used, so the body is starved of energy. If hyperglycemia is untreated, it becomes life-threatening diabetic ketoacidosis, which, if left untreated, is fatal.

The longer-term effects of diabulimia are equally dangerous. Not taking enough insulin over a long period can shorten life expectancy. Other complications that are linked to diabetes such as retinopathy, neuropathy and nephropathy can occur earlier in life, and it can also lead to infertility. In cases in which diabulimia leads to severe diabetic ketoacidosis that is not treated, heart and organ failure occurs.

To anyone who is struggling with the illness, I make an impassioned plea that they reach out and talk to someone who they trust. There is help available and, with that help, they can get better.

I pay tribute to my Scottish National Party colleague Dennis Robertson, who served the Aberdeenshire West constituency with distinction between 2011 and 2016. Councillor Robertson is a true champion of raising awareness of eating disorders. During his time in this Parliament, he spoke on many occasions about his family's experience of an eating disorder leading to the tragic death of his daughter. Despite Dennis no longer sitting in this Parliament, I am pleased that there are still members who will carry the torch to raise awareness of such devastating conditions.

I thank Annie Wells again for securing today's debate on diabulimia, and I hope that, as a Parliament, we have been able to raise awareness of the condition so that many more people can come forward to get the help that they need to recover.

13:13

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): I join other members in thanking Annie Wells for bringing this important debate to Parliament. I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Scottish Government.

We want to continue to drive improvements in mental health services and we are committed to ensuring that everyone, including people with

diabetes, who needs access to high-quality mental health services has access to that care when and where they need it. In that respect, it is right that we recognise the efforts of all the people and organisations around Scotland who are involved in raising awareness about and treating eating disorders. We also want the best for people who are living with diabetes.

Raising public awareness about using insulin to control weight is important. I can assure members that the behaviours and risks that are involved are well known to clinicians, particularly those who work in diabetes and mental health services. However, I accept that there is always scope for greater awareness and understanding among professionals, and for the development of improved specialist support in response to that behaviour. We are working with NHS Scotland and partners to do just that, and to ensure that services are in place to meet the needs of people who are at risk, and who use insulin to control their weight.

Type 1 diabetes is more than simply a physical condition and, as with any serious chronic condition, there is often a psychological impact on those who suffer from it. Anyone who needs support should get it. Growing up with diabetes is challenging enough without the pressures and expectations of modern life, which is why we need to support young people with diabetes in particular and think about their health and social wellbeing. Young people need good support to manage their condition from childhood to adulthood.

As members have said, diabulimia is not a diagnostic term. However, it is important to recognise the behaviour of using insulin to control weight. Misusing insulin to reduce weight is clearly unhealthy and dangerous. It is important that people are equipped to better manage their own health.

In the long term, the dangers of underusing insulin to lose weight can be severe. As other members have said, chronic poor diabetic control can lead to loss of limbs, kidney damage, blindness, heart damage and other serious complications.

I recognise that determining the prevalence is difficult: it is hard to quantify the problem because people tend to hide it from family, friends, carers and clinicians. No matter how the behaviour of using insulin to control weight is officially recognised, what is important is that people who are demonstrating such concerning behaviour receive the care, help and support that they need, when and where they need it.

Our new mental health strategy aims to do just that. The guiding ambition of the strategy is very simple. We must prevent and treat mental health

problems with the same commitment, passion and drive that we apply to physical health problems. The strategy also has a focus on improving the quality of care and ensuring equal access to the most effective and safest care and treatment. That is as important for people who are living with diabetes and those with eating disorders as for anyone else. Through delivery of the strategy we seek to improve access to psychological therapies and to treatments for children and young people. We are supporting the development of a digital tool to support young people with eating disorders.

We want to highlight the important role of liaison psychiatry in providing a specialist mental health service across a wide range of acute services and physical illnesses. We look to NHS Scotland and partners to improve liaison psychiatry services and mental health provision for acute patients. In line with best practice, NHS services should have local mental health support for people with type 1 diabetes. The SIGN guidelines for the management of diabetes recognise how common mental disorders are and give information on mental health assessment and treatment. The third sector, primary care and specialist services all have an important role to play in providing support and advice to people who misuse insulin in order to lose weight.

There are good practice examples in specialist services. For example, the NHS Lothian diabetes mental health service currently has a dedicated liaison psychiatrist and psychiatric nurse resource specifically for diabetes. I know that the service is highly valued by clinicians and patients and has demonstrated good clinical and financial outcomes. Among others, the service sees patients who have an eating disorder and who use insulin to control weight and those patients, when referred on, are seen as a priority by the eating disorder service at the Royal Edinburgh's Cullen centre.

Individuals who are referred to eating disorder services can expect to receive the highest quality of care and support from the NHS. A wide range of community, hospital and specialist in-patient services are in place across Scotland to meet the needs of people living with an eating disorder. In 2009, I had the pleasure of formally opening the Eden unit in Aberdeen, which is a specialist NHS eating disorder in-patient unit serving the north of Scotland. The unit continues to provide valuable care and specialist support.

Emma Harper mentioned the work in NHS Dumfries and Galloway with the new dietician appointment, which will help to improve services for weight management and eating disorders in the south of Scotland. That is very important. Brian Whittle mentioned the Diabetes Scotland helpline and the involvement of Diabetes Scotland is

hugely important. Brian Whittle also made an important point about the wider societal pressures that drive people of any age, but particularly young women, to want to look a certain way. That is a difficult issue to tackle.

Colin Smyth referred to the BBC Three documentary "Diabulimia: The Most Dangerous Eating Disorder", which is very powerful and well worth a watch. Clare Haughey outlined the consequences of omitting insulin and paid tribute to former MSP, Councillor Dennis Robertson, who continues to champion the cause of tackling eating disorders.

We are very ambitious for continued improvement. I repeat my thanks to Annie Wells for raising an issue that many people know little about. That is one of the really powerful things about members' business debates—they offer the opportunity to raise awareness. I hope that some of the media attention on this important issue will both raise awareness and encourage people who might have concerns or a problem in this area to seek help, because help is there and we want people to get the support that they need. I hope that I have been able to show the Scottish Government's support for the work that is going on in this area. I thank everyone for their contributions to this important debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have spent 18 years in the Parliament and I had never heard of diabulimia before, so it was important to raise the issue in a members' business debate.

13:20

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Inclusive Education

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-08558, in the name of John Swinney, on the presumption of mainstreaming.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): A commitment to and belief in inclusive education have underpinned the approach to education policy and legislation in the Scottish Parliament since 2000. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 was one of the first pieces of legislation to be passed by Parliament, and it features a requirement that education for all children be provided in mainstream schools, except in prescribed exceptional circumstances.

Those provisions commenced in 2002; their importance cannot be overstated. They created an entitlement for children and young people whose parents would previously often have had to fight for the right of their children simply to be educated. The presumption of mainstreaming, as it has become known, firmly closed the door on institutionalisation of pupils who need support, and it recognised the value to society, communities and families of pupils learning in their communities, wherever possible, while allowing those who need specialist support to receive it.

We now have the first generation of young people who have experienced mainstream education as a consequence of the rights that were established under the 2000 act, and we have seen the fruits of the involvement of those young people in our society and in our communities, where they have been able to obtain their education.

In 2004, Parliament went even further and created a truly inclusive approach to education through the groundbreaking Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. That act fundamentally changed how children and young people are supported in schools. It moved away from a model of medical deficit to a legislative framework that focuses on barriers to children's and young people's learning. It recognises that children and young people experience barriers for a range of reasons, including disability and health needs, but it also recognises that family circumstances, learning environment and social and emotional factors can play a part in creating barriers—not all of them long term—to a child's learning effectively in school.

The key point of the legislation is that children and young people have the right to have their needs identified and assessed, and to receive the support that they need, when they need it, in order that they can overcome anything that gets in the way of their learning.

It is worth recalling that both the 2000 act and the 2004 act were put in place by our predecessors in Government. Since coming to power in 2007, the SNP Government has continued to embed in policy and legislation its commitment to inclusive education. We have updated and revised—first in 2009 and again last year—the additional support for learning legislation and associated guidance to ensure that the 2004 act is effectively implemented.

The wider policies that underpin school education in Scotland—curriculum for excellence, getting it right for every child, and our more recent developments in raising attainment for all, the Scottish attainment challenge and our education reforms—all focus on the need to tackle inequality in order to create a fairer Scotland, and to put each and every child's needs and interests at the heart of the education system.

That demonstrates the difference that Parliament has made through its dialogue about those subjects, and it demonstrates the difference that Parliament can continue to make when it comes together around shared values, and works together to make change happen in a relatively short time. We should not forget the difference that we can and do make to the people of Scotland as a consequence of that concerted all-party action.

At its heart, inclusive education does not just tolerate diversity but, importantly, promotes and celebrates the diversity in our society. It allows all children and young people to develop an understanding and recognition of differences. That contributes to the development of an increasingly inclusive, empathetic and more just society. It also affords children and young people the opportunity to be part of a community, thereby boosting their emotional wellbeing and aiding the development of social skills.

However, inclusive education also needs diversity in provision: a range of educational settings being available is necessary to ensure that children learn in the environment that best meets their needs. In practice, that means having mainstream schools, special schools, units within mainstream schools and flexible placements.

I want to be clear that there will be no change to the legislation on mainstreaming. This Government will commit neither to a system in which all children must learn in mainstream schools nor to a system in which all children with additional support needs must learn in special

schools. We will continue to have legislation that maintains the presumption to mainstream education, and which allows children whose needs are best met in specialist provision or through a mix to have that objective fulfilled.

There are a wide range of positive examples of support provision across Scotland. At the opening of the new Carrongrange high school in Grangemouth yesterday, I saw for myself an absolutely fantastic facility that provides special needs education for young people across a range of different circumstances and experiences. What is striking to me about the development there—which has been taken forward through partnership between the Scottish Government and Falkirk Council—is the creation of a learning environment that reflects the needs and requirements of young people with special educational needs, and deploys its services within a world-class education facility that creates tremendous opportunities for those young people. It was also very clear to me that education is being delivered there in the context of there being very strong staff commitment and staff provision to ensure that adequate resources are in place to meet the needs of individual young people.

The settings of education will vary but, fundamentally, the Government operates on the principle that we should deliver mainstream education where we can, although exceptional provision has to be made available within our society as part of that proposition.

We have a clear agenda for education that is focused on creating a world-class education system that delivers excellence and equity for all children and young people. That does not mean that everything has to be the same and has to be experienced in the same way, but that children and young people should have equal opportunities to reach their full potential.

The approach that we are taking is making a difference. We have more children who have been identified as needing, and who are receiving, additional support in schools. Children and young people who need support for any reason in the short or long terms are being recognised and supported in schools across Scotland: we are supporting children and young people who, until a few years ago, would not have received support, including support for the bereaved, for those from armed forces families and for those whose parents are imprisoned. In addition, it is now commonplace for able pupils to be educated alongside pupils who would traditionally have received support for autism, dyslexia or sensory impairment and, of course, pupils with disabilities.

The outcomes for children and young people with additional support needs have been improving and continue to improve. Here are some

of the data. Since 2010-11, attendance of pupils with additional support needs has continued to improve in primary, secondary and special schools, with a total percentage improvement of 1.1 per cent. The overall rate of exclusion for all pupils has more than halved since 2006-07 due to the continued focus by schools and education authorities on building on and improving their relationships with the children and young people who are most at risk of exclusion from their learning communities. However, more needs to be done for pupils who have additional support needs, because they continue to experience a higher rate of exclusion from school. That is unacceptable: more needs to be done to reduce the number.

Children and young people with additional support needs are gaining more and better qualifications than ever. In 2014-15, 60.7 per cent of school leavers with additional support needs left school with one qualification or more at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 5 or better, and 84.6 per cent left school with one qualification or more at SCQF level 4 or better.

That is all leading to positive outcomes. More young people with additional support needs are reaching positive destinations than ever before: 86.9 per cent of pupils with additional support needs have reached a positive destination, of whom 19 per cent went on to higher education, 38.6 per cent went on to further education and 28.6 per cent went on to employment, training or volunteering. Those achievements are testament to the role that is played by the professional teaching workforce and the wide range of practitioners and professionals who provide the support that children need in their learning.

We should not forget the role that is played by parents and families in supporting their children's learning, and the role that they often need to play in order to ensure that their children's rights are respected and that they get the education to which they are entitled, in a setting that best meets their needs. We all know of constituents, and some of us know family members and friends, who are those parents.

Although we can and should reflect on all that we have done in the past to create and maintain inclusive education and how that has contributed to a real shift in attitudes and achievement today, we must also acknowledge that more needs to be done. Recent evidence to Parliament's Education and Skills Committee demonstrates that the right decisions are not being made for all children and young people and that, for some, inclusive education is still but a policy, rather than their everyday experience. We remain committed to mainstreaming as a central pillar of our inclusive approach to education. The Scottish approach to

inclusion is already world leading; our legislative and policy commitments are among the most extensive in the world.

However, we must improve the experience of inclusion for all pupils if we are to deliver on the promise of such an ambitious framework. That is why today I am announcing that the Government will consult on draft guidance on the presumption of mainstreaming. The draft guidance aims to bridge the gap between legislation, policy and day-to-day experience, in order to ensure that local authorities have the information and support that they need to guide their decision making in applying the presumption of mainstream education. It also seeks to encourage a child-centred approach to making decisions on placement.

The implementation of the presumption of mainstreaming requires a commitment to inclusive practice, and it requires approaches to be effective, so the guidance throughout clearly links inclusive practice with the presumption. It includes key features of inclusion and guidance on how to improve inclusive practice in schools. The consultation offers an opportunity to shape the guidance before it is finalised. We will listen very carefully, so I encourage all those who have a contribution to make to express their views in the consultation exercise.

In response to the Education and Skills Committee report “How is Additional Support for Learning working in practice?” I acknowledged that the committee wished to act on the evidence that it had heard. I therefore committed to commissioning independent research into the experiences of children, young people, parents, school staff—including support staff—and education authorities and their partners in relation to additional support for learning. I can now announce that the research process will start and will run concurrently with the consultation on the draft guidance. The intention is to conduct the research in early 2018 and to publish a final report by the end of the summer. Its findings will be used to inform policy development and reporting so that we continue to renew and refresh our commitment to inclusive education in the future, as we have done throughout this session of Parliament.

There is also work that we can do now to improve the experience of inclusive education for children and young people. I have already highlighted the crucial role that is played by teachers, support staff and other staff in mainstream primary and secondary schools, and in units and special schools all over Scotland. They are the key to ensuring that children’s and young people’s experience of education—in the classroom and in the whole school—is truly inclusive. They need to know that they have

access to resources that support their professional practice and give them confidence to support children’s learning successfully. We therefore intend to work with Education Scotland to develop inclusive education resources to support headteachers, teachers and support staff in their work, which will be available early next year.

An inclusive approach to education also requires that every child and young person be involved in their own education, and have a voice in shaping their experience. They should be provided with the support that they need to reach their learning potential. One of the aims of the draft guidance will be to give children, parents and carers their place in the decision-making process. From January 2018, children from 12 to 15 will be empowered by the extension of their rights in respect of additional support for learning in school education. We will continue to listen to the voices of young people. Our inclusion ambassadors provide a great way for us to do that, and responses from the consultation on the draft guidance and the research will help to shape our future actions further.

I have set out how far we have come since the Parliament’s establishment—from the recent past when children were treated in a way that often separated them from their peers and their communities, to the present day and our understanding of the importance of inclusion not only for the children themselves but for the wider community. I have been and continue to be clear that this Government’s ambition is for all children and young people, including those who experience barriers to their learning, to be able to reach their full potential, and I have restated our commitment to inclusive education.

However, I know that that commitment is shared across the chamber. We should not lose sight of the fact that none of what we have achieved for children and young people with additional support needs has been achieved without our listening to each other and, indeed, learning from each other’s perspectives in the debate. I hope that the next steps that I have set out today will help to take us further in our journey towards delivering inclusive education in practice for all children and young people.

The education of our children and young people is of paramount importance to us all. We all want all children and young people to have equitable access to a good-quality education that meets their needs and helps them to achieve their full potential.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that mainstreaming has featured at the heart of its commitment to inclusive education since 2000; welcomes that successive administrations have created and strengthened this

commitment through the development of legislative and policy frameworks to support the additional needs of children in their learning; acknowledges the need to learn from current practice to support additional needs and, in particular, the experiences of children, young people and parents in order to improve their experience of inclusive education; welcomes therefore the forthcoming research on this and its findings, which will inform future practice, and notes the launch of the consultation on Excellence and Equity for All: Guidance on the Presumption of Mainstreaming, which seeks to bridge the gap between legislation, policy and the practical experience of children, young people and their families, so that pupils have equitable access to a quality education that meets their needs and helps them to achieve their full potential.

14:46

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I very much welcome the opportunity to debate this issue, and I warmly welcome the Scottish Government initiatives that have been announced this afternoon. We would all acknowledge that this is not an easy debate, but nonetheless the issue is of huge significance to families across Scotland, and not just those with vulnerable children.

As the cabinet secretary rightly pointed out, there is a historical context to this issue. Those of us of a certain age remember very well a time when many pupils with very special needs found it very difficult indeed to be seen as deserving of any special focus in their own school, their own local authority or any national Government policy. I am happy to say that we have come a long way since that time, and I take this opportunity to note that supportive inclusion was one of the key attributes of Scottish education flagged up in a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. It is important that we remember that. I think that we can all agree that inclusion is important for exactly the reasons that the cabinet secretary set out, and we must do all that we can to ensure that inclusion continues to mean pupils having meaningful engagement and experiences in their schools and not just simply being on the roll in a mainstream school. That is a very important difference.

Although a lot of good progress has been made, complexity is increasing, and it is that complexity that is challenging us to revisit the policy. I would argue that the situation has been somewhat complicated by a number of issues. First—the cabinet secretary referred to this himself—especially over the past decade, there has been much better detection of pupils with specific problems and a huge increase in the number of pupils identified as having ASN, including those whose needs are very complex. When the current definition was first used, 98,500 pupils were identified with ASN, but in the past five years, that figure has risen 73 per cent to 170,300. The news about the level of detection is good, but clearly the situation puts additional pressure on our schools.

That said, there are also key issues to address with regard to how effectively accurate data is being collected and then used in the relevant manner. We are very conscious of the widespread variation in the count across different local authorities; for example, in North Lanarkshire, only 6 per cent of the mainstream school population was identified as having ASN while the figure for Aberdeenshire was 35 per cent. What that flags up to me is possible differences in approach, and we might have to look at the issue in much greater detail. After all, the data is obviously crucial to informing policy.

John Swinney: Just for completeness, on Liz Smith's analysis of the statistics, does she accept that, within the much expanded number of young people identified with special needs, the range of requirements and support is very broad and runs from very minor to very significant and acute interventions to support children's needs?

Liz Smith: Yes, I absolutely accept that, and I hope that we can make progress exactly on the accuracy of the data and its relevant application. When the Education and Skills Committee considered the issue, we found slightly disturbing differences in interpretation across local authorities.

There is good news on that front, but I note that the Scottish children's services coalition pointed to the importance of identifying additional support needs and said that, sometimes, those needs demand the greater diversity that the cabinet secretary is looking for but which is not always deliverable under the current local authority structures. It made the point that the average local authority spend on ASN pupils has fallen by 11 per cent in the same time that there has been a percentage increase in the numbers with identified needs.

I had a good conversation with Mark McDonald, the Minister for Childcare and Early Years, about level 9 qualifications in relation to those who look after some of our vulnerable children. He was responsive to some issues that I raised back in February about the appropriateness of certain aspects of staffing and whether it is always necessary for additional support for learning teachers to be at SCQF level 9 or above. I hope that we can continue that discussion, because I think that that has an effect on the number of people who qualify and on the costs that some of our special schools incur.

The financial constraints on councils, especially when combined with teacher shortages, are a huge issue, and we should be in no doubt that those have forced some pupils who should be in special schools—for very genuine reasons—to be mainstreamed perhaps for too long a period. We can all point to constituents who have encountered

difficulties in that regard. It worries me that some constituents who have come to me have spoken about schools possibly making judgments on a financial basis rather than an educational one. We have to do something to reverse that, because, as the cabinet secretary has rightly said, what matters is the educational interests of each child, not just the financial circumstances.

We have some fantastic special schools that deal with children who have the greatest and most complex needs. This point is perhaps for Derek Mackay rather than for the education ministers, but we have to be careful that we do not penalise those schools as a result of the discussions that we are having around business rates, because the impact on some special schools of changes in that regard could be serious. I make a plea on behalf of small, independent schools—the cabinet secretary knows some of the schools in Mid Scotland and Fife that I am talking about—that have pointed out that they might face closure if they have to deal with increasing costs.

The key issue is that we must weigh up the overall benefits to a child's education and personal development. The current legislation—which all parties have supported—makes plain that there should be a presumption to mainstream. We are supportive of that, obviously, but we have spelled out three categories in which that might not be appropriate.

Generally speaking, I think that most stakeholders are content. The problem—so the argument goes—lies not so much with the legislation as with how it is interpreted within and across local authorities. We should take advice from many people in this sector, such as Kenny Graham, the head of education at Falkland House school, who has flagged up his firm belief that the way forward is to consider the interpretation of the legislation and the guidance.

In this policy area, the central dilemma is how we balance the very strong social reasons for keeping a child in mainstream schooling with the best educational interests of the child. Those two factors do not always fit neatly together, and there is the further complication of what is in the best educational interests of other children in the peer group, especially in situations in which there is a pressure on teaching resources—as a former teacher, I know exactly what some of those pressures can be and about some of the emotions that surround the decisions that have to be made.

This is not an easy area of policy, as I said at the beginning of my speech, but it is critical when it comes to supporting our young people and ensuring that every one of them is given the support that they need. We should not be misled by the false premise that equity is necessarily complemented by mainstreaming—I was pleased

to hear the cabinet secretary endorsing that position—because it is patently clear that we can do a grave disservice to some of our most vulnerable young people if we come to that conclusion. The challenge is to structure our resources accordingly. To that end, I am happy to support the Government motion and the Labour amendment.

I move amendment S5M-08558.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises the significant pressure that has been placed on local authorities by the commitment to mainstreaming as a result of the diminished number of teachers, especially on those who are trained to support pupils with additional support needs (ASN), given the large increase in the number of pupils identified with ASN, and the continued use of specialist educational provision outwith their own local authority area; notes with concern the comments of trainee teachers at the meeting of the Education and Skills Committee on 10 May 2017 that some aspects of teacher training courses do not adequately equip them to cope with the plurality of needs and behaviours of ASN pupils, and calls on the Scottish Government to address these concerns which have, inevitably, meant that some young people are not currently receiving the best support possible.”

14:55

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): The cabinet secretary is absolutely right to place today's consultation in the context of the development of the policy and legislative framework on disability issues, generally, and additional needs education, specifically, across almost 20 years and across different Administrations. I am honestly not sure how world leading we are on this, but we have certainly come a long way. When the Scottish Parliament began in 1999, far too many of Scotland's disabled people still lived in long-stay hospital accommodation, excluded not just from mainstream education but from the community altogether. It is hard to imagine that that was considered the norm. The ability to live, participate and learn in the community is now a right that is supported across the chamber and, indeed, across wider society.

One key early moment in that regard was the first learning disability strategy in the Scottish Parliament, and its title, “The same as you?”, encapsulates the principle that we strive for. We must disabuse ourselves of the idea that people with particular needs, physical or otherwise, are asking for something special and extra. The truth is that they want the same things as we all do: to live freely and to have every possible chance to make the most of their lives; and their right to a home, to healthcare and—yes—to an education is no less valid than anyone else's.

No matter how well we think we have done, we have to acknowledge that we have much further to go, especially in areas such as employment and—

yes—education. A presumption of mainstreaming in schools is exactly where the principle of being the same as you takes us in education, but, as the education secretary said—to his credit—in his introduction to the guidance, the measure of that cannot simply be children's presence in a mainstream school; it is the opportunities in our schools, not just the desks in the classroom, that we are obliged to open up to all.

I have used this example before in debate, but it encapsulates the issue that we are discussing. Many years ago, I taught science in this city at Gracemount secondary school, which in those days shared a campus with Kaimes school for the partially sighted. Kaimes pupils attended some mainstream classes as well as specialist provision, which is one of the models that Mr Swinney talked about and that is in the document.

In my science class, I had one or two pupils with particular needs. In recognition of those circumstances, class sizes were low—14 or so—so I was able to ensure that I gave the extra support required. Quite often, I was supported in my classroom by a specialist teacher from Kaimes school. It was mainstreaming and it worked. As a young teacher starting out, I felt a professional pride in our success.

In the early 1980s, I spent a couple of years working abroad and, when I returned, things had changed. As now, it was a time of cuts and, instead of one or two, there were three, four or sometimes five partially sighted pupils in my classes, all of which were at the maximum class size of 21. There was no specialist support. The truth was that there was no space to give additional needs pupils any additional support at all—they were at a desk in my classroom but not included in my class. I felt guilty about that, but needs must. There was pressure on us—curricular change, new exams, bigger classes all round. Plus ça change.

Mainstreaming may be a much more mainstream idea today, but resources are still at a premium. Since 2010, we have seen a 153 per cent increase in the number of pupils who are identified as having additional support needs, which cannot all be explained by the inclusion of those with temporary or low-level needs. At the same time, the number of ASN support staff is down by 8 per cent and the number of learning support teachers has dropped by 13 per cent. The Scottish children's services coalition has calculated that spend per pupil on additional support for learning was £4,276 in 2012-13 but only £3,817 in 2015-16. There is more need but less provision.

Clearly, more responsibility for ASL will fall squarely on teachers in general, yet Enable's surveys tell us that 98 per cent of the education

workforce do not feel that teacher training adequately prepares teachers for that role. It is 30 years since I failed those partially sighted pupils at Gracemount high school, but we still seem to be making some of the same mistakes.

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald): I hear the point that Mr Gray is making, but he will have heard the Deputy First Minister highlight the significant improvement that there has been in outcomes for children with additional support needs. How does he reconcile his characterisation of those pupils as being failed with the clear improvement that there has been in outcomes for the children whom he is describing?

Iain Gray: That is very much to the credit of our teachers and additional support needs workers who remain in the system. However, we cannot ignore the fact that, as Enable tells us, 52 per cent of pupils with learning disabilities do not feel that they are getting the right support at school. How they feel about the support that they are receiving is pretty critical.

We cannot, in all conscience, properly rededicate ourselves to the principle of a presumption of mainstreaming or properly endorse the legal and administrative framework for delivering inclusion if we are not prepared to acknowledge and face up to the reality of the resources that are required to make that happen properly. To do so is to disrespect the everyday, lived experience of teachers, parents and—above all—those pupils who say that they do not feel that they are receiving the support that they need.

I do not pretend that the resource challenge is easy—not at all—but we cannot pretend that it does not exist. It is not, in the end, a party-political point that I am trying to make; it is almost a moral point about the obligation that we all have. If we do not acknowledge the problems, we are deceiving ourselves about the virtue of our commitment to inclusiveness. If we will the noble end of the principle of being the same as you but are not prepared to will the mundane means to achieve it, we are simply meeting our own need to feel that we are doing the right thing, while failing thousands of families and children who are looking to us to do the right thing for them—simply to really include them.

I move amendment S5M-08558.3, to insert at end:

“; further notes that the number of children with additional support needs (ASN) in Scotland has increased by 153% since 2010, that one-in-seven ASN teaching posts have been cut since 2010 and that evidence to the Education and Skills Committee from unions and parents shows a lack of resources and funding cuts to schools having a negative impact on the level of education that they can provide to children with ASN, and believes that, if mainstreaming in education is to be fully effective, the

Scottish Government must ensure that schools have the funding and staff to deliver it.”

15:03

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I remind members that I am the parliamentary liaison officer for the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

As we have heard, the presumption of mainstreaming is now well enshrined in Scottish educational discourse, but it was not always like that. We have talked about putting the child at the centre, but the political culture and, conversely, the educational culture were not always like that. In my lifetime, teachers were still legally able to belt pupils. In fact, at the last school in which I taught, a framed tawse adorned the staffroom wall. “In Emergency Break Glass” read the instruction below it.

When we talk about inclusive education and meeting the needs of all, we should be cognisant of the importance of school culture. The downward trajectory of exclusion rates is good news but, to my knowledge, the Government does not currently gather records of internal exclusions, which take place under the radar, as it were. Those exclusions involve sending a pupil out of the classroom to the cooler or the sin bin, as I have heard it called. I hope that the Government will consider directly collecting that data, particularly from our secondary schools, as part of its consultation.

I will give members an example of a pupil whom I taught. In first year, Jamie was the class clown: he mucked about, he got the laughs and he was often sent out. Jamie also had a pretty complex range of additional support needs, but he loved the debating part of modern studies. He was bright and he was switched on. On the writing part, however, Jamie was not convinced. He struggled and struggled, and he would then give up.

Jamie’s writing capabilities as a secondary 1 pupil were where we would expect a primary 1 pupil’s writing abilities to be. I did my best as a teacher in a class with 30 12-year-olds in front of me, but it was not easy. The class had a learning support assistant, but a number of other children in the class had additional support needs, too.

I often passed Jamie sitting outside the deputy head’s office with a textbook and a jotter in front of him, doodling away. When I asked him why he was out of class, I was invariably told that he had had a run-in with a teacher. For Jamie, it was a kick to get sent out of class and to see his classmates’ faces light up with glee when he challenged the natural power and balance that existed in the classroom, but he got bored quickly. He would swing on the plastic chair, which, in turn,

incurred the wrath of teachers, such as me, because he might—heaven forbid—snap the plastic.

I did not know much about Jamie’s home life—that information was not regularly shared with classroom teachers, and it was certainly never shared by email due to its confidential nature. Instead, the gatekeepers of confidential information—the guidance department—would hurriedly ask the staff who taught Jamie to gather around at the end of break to get an update.

It transpired that Jamie’s parents had separated. The nature of what had happened meant that he and his siblings could not stay at home anymore, so they were all farmed out—some went to grandparents miles away, and some went into care. Teachers were only told about what had happened to him four weeks later.

That 12-year-old boy, who was managing to get himself to class, was kicking off to get the attention in school that he was not getting at home. Despite the school knowing that, Jamie would sit—sometimes for weeks on end—outside the deputy head’s office with his jotter and his textbook, doodling away, deprived of his right to education and not having his additional support needs met. There was not a belt, a tawse or a set of lines in sight; nevertheless, Jamie was being punished. The chaos that he experienced at home contrasted with his teachers’ never-ending desire for order. Jamie, true to his lived experience, kicked back in the only way that he knew how.

In revisiting the key features of inclusion, it is difficult to see how Jamie was present in his education. Yes, he attended, but he was not present in any meaningful sense. He did not come to the Halloween disco or take part in the sponsored run. He opted out wherever he could and, more often than not, the school supported his doing so.

On Friday last week, I was privileged to meet Fraser and Jack, pupils at Star primary school, which is just outside Markinch in my constituency. Star primary school is a beautiful Victorian building, but the boys showed me the leaking window ledges, which they asked me to raise directly with the cabinet secretary; I have now done so.

The boys proudly took me around their school. They showed me where the P1s were taught, and they explained to me their models of spaghetti stuck together with marshmallows, emulating the engineering of the new Queensferry crossing. They took me to the back field and explained all the different shrubs that they had planted. Jack and Fraser were totally engaged in their learning.

I ask members to contrast the experience of Jack and Fraser with that of Jamie. Jamie had lots

of different needs. He needed additional support in class; he needed a safe environment to learn in; he needed to be nurtured in a way that secondary schools often do not do; and he needed his teachers to have ready access to his confidential information, allowing them to plan lessons and differentiate accordingly. Without that information, Jamie's teachers could not meet his needs; without it, his teachers came face to face with an angry little boy and, sure enough, he was out the door of most classrooms before he had even sat down.

I hope that the Government's consultation on the presumption of mainstreaming will look outside our educational bubble. We need to look at the health and social work sectors. They need to work smarter with their schools, particularly in the case of children who are at risk.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 placed a legal obligation on our education authorities to identify, provide and review the additional support needs of their pupils. There is a need for our local authorities, which deliver education, to revisit how they meet that requirement. Do they share the information with all staff? Is it available electronically, or do they print it out in a document that is available only to the head of department? Inclusion works only if every part of the system is prepared to talk to and trust the other parts.

15:08

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I apologise to you, Presiding Officer, and to members in the chamber, because I must leave early tonight to catch the evening plane home.

Tomorrow, one of the things that I will do is visit Sandwick junior high school, which is at the south end of Shetland, with the two members of the Scottish Youth Parliament for our islands. An issue on which we want to reflect is the one that Jenny Gilruth has just elegantly described. In addition to doing one of our normal—for want of a better word—surgeries with the senior pupils, I know that they want to talk to us about mainstreaming because of today's debate.

Occasionally I wonder whether this place is relevant to what goes on in the wider world, but two things have happened this week that, in the context of this debate, have made me think that it absolutely is relevant. One was the school getting in touch to ask me to bone up on the issue, so that I know what I am talking about in the debate. The second was that a teacher—a very old friend, with whom I went to school—who has taught down here in the mainland of Scotland for years, phoned me up last night to say, "I think there's a debate on mainstreaming in Parliament tomorrow", and to

give me a list of observations to make. I thought that I had better make them before the next class reunion.

I recognised a lot of my friend's observations in Iain Gray's remarks about the reality of teaching. I took on board a lot of what John Swinney said about the international context and the manner in which this Parliament addressed mainstreaming in those early years—Iain Gray and Liz Smith mentioned that, too—but as my very old friend said, "You've got to remember the reality of what happens in the classroom now."

My friend talked about the difficulty of finding staff who are available, experienced and able to hit the ground running in tackling the challenges of mainstreaming. She talked about the difficulty of finding time to train staff adequately. A vast majority of support workers are attached to individuals; that has consequences for the possibilities of sharing support across classrooms, which in my friend's school are very limited. I know that that is the reality in many schools, and it affects teachers and support for other pupils.

My friend observed that teachers and learning support workers in schools have never worked harder, but we have a reactive system, in which there is no effective management of ASN in the mainstream. She also said that accommodation has to be right; there needs to be enough space across the school estate or within classes for pupils to have the right access to nurturing and quiet time, should they require it, as many pupils do.

Those are the practical observations of a classroom teacher who has worked in education for a long, long time and who absolutely believes in the principles of mainstreaming and wants the system to work but thinks that more needs to be done. I think that her observations are quite telling.

I welcome the guidance, consultation and research that the cabinet secretary mentioned in his speech, but as part of the consultation, logic requires that the Government adopt the recommendation of the Education and Skills Committee in its report, "How is Additional Support for Learning working in practice?", which was published in May. The committee said in paragraph 7:

"The Scottish Government must also assess the extent to which a lack of resources is impacting on mainstreaming in practice and more generally on the provision of additional support for learning in mainstream education."

I will be grateful if the Government confirms that it will do that.

I am with Iain Gray. This is not a political point; it is better than that, because it is much wider. It is about the children and young people for whom we need to do so much more, as I think that

everyone, from John Swinney onwards, recognises. That was the point of many of the Education and Skills Committee's recommendations in May on the area. We said:

"Resource limitations that are impacting on these processes include: the number of trained ASN teachers and ASN assistants, the availability of specialists including mental health specialists and educational psychologists, the level of resources supporting the ASN Tribunal process and other appeal processes, and the availability of spaces in special schools."

Liz Smith made the point about spaces in special schools.

Those factors are increasingly important in the context of class sizes across Scotland. The Government's own statistics point out fairly that class sizes in primary schools are rising, that by 2015 only 12 per cent of schools had classes of 18 or fewer, that since 2010 there has been a 153 per cent increase in the number of students with additional support needs, and that some 1,800 fewer support staff work in our schools than did in 2010.

That context—class sizes, teacher workload, teacher shortages in some areas, and resources more generally—has to be part of the consultation that the Scottish Government announced today, so that an assessment can be made of what money could do to change a system that is not working as well as we all wish it to do. When the exercise concludes, there needs to be a recognition of the importance of not just the guidance that John Swinney talked about but the practicalities in the classroom that the guidance will support. I hope that John Swinney will undertake to include those matters in the exercise. The exercise is very welcome, but it must address the financial issues.

I have two final points. I think that the Enable report that was produced last month, which other members have highlighted, makes an important contribution to this area of policy, not least because Enable is Scotland's largest charity for people with disabilities. Significant attention should be paid to the comments of its executive director in relation to what is happening on a practical level. In addition, the report says that 80 per cent of the education workforce say that we are not getting it right for every child. If nothing else, that is the clarion call that should be addressed by the work in this area.

15:15

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I have a very strong constituency interest in this area, because I am working with a number of families with children of primary school age who are on the autistic

spectrum. It is in the context of the challenges that they face that many of my comments will be made.

I am delighted that the Deputy First Minister says at the start of the ministerial foreword to the draft guidance that

"we must improve the *experience* of inclusion for all pupils if we are to deliver on the promise of such an ambitious framework. Being present in a mainstream school should not be the primary marker of successful inclusion."

Some parents in Glasgow would say that, over the years, Glasgow City Council has shoehorned children into a mainstream setting rather than finding them the most appropriate setting, so I think that that is a reasonable thing to say.

At the start of the draft guidance, the Deputy First Minister says:

"This non-statutory guidance will present a vision for mainstreaming, building on the best available evidence on inclusive approaches to education."

The fact that the guidance, which will be shaped during the consultation process, will not be statutory is fine, but how it is adopted must be monitored. Depending on the outcome of that monitoring process, consideration will be given to putting some of the guidance on a statutory footing, and I think that that is reasonable.

Four key principles underpin the guidance, one of which is that it should

"outline an inclusive approach which identifies and addresses barriers to learning for all children."

It is reasonable to say that, if the four principles cannot be lived up to in a mainstream setting, the situation must be reassessed. Consideration must be given to whether a mainstream setting is the appropriate setting for a young person, or whether, through the provision of additional appropriate supports, it could be the appropriate setting for them. We must identify when that reassessment will be done, who will do it and what criteria should be used. In Glasgow, we are told anecdotally—but not officially—that the approach is to see how a kid gets on in their first year in primary school and to reassess at that point, but a great deal of damage can be done to young people's development if that is the approach that is adopted, and I hope that that is not the case elsewhere.

A number of key features are meant to signify the delivery of the key principles that are outlined in the guidance. Two of the expectations with regard to how young people should be supported are that

"All children and young people should be supported to overcome barriers to learning and achieve their full potential"

and that

“All children and young people should be given the right help, at the right time, from the right people, to support their wellbeing in the right place”.

In Glasgow, a lot of young people and their parents will say that that does not always happen. I am delighted that the Government’s motion says that a survey, an audit and a consultation will be carried out in relation to the lived experience of young people with additional support needs and their families. Hearing from people at the coalface about their real-life experiences will be vital in matching what the guidance says with what is happening on the ground.

We must look at the types of provision that are appropriate. The appropriate provision might involve a mainstream setting, co-location—that option is taken up quite frequently—or a standalone specialist unit. The guidance gives local authorities some support on how they should come to that decision. It takes the form of reflective questions. In relation to the support on offer, local authorities should ask questions such as

“What steps have been taken to make sure the needs of each child or young person have been correctly identified? How are those identified needs being adequately catered for? Would a different provision provide a better outcome for this child or young person? How?”

A variety of reflective questions are provided. I wonder to what extent such questions are asked, not just in Glasgow but right across Scotland. If the guidance and the reflective questioning technique are to be meaningful, they must be applied consistently across the country.

I have mentioned a number of issues in my constituency and I thank the families who have shared their stories with me. I have tried to help them along the way, where I can, and I hope that I have done so. I also thank Colin Crawford, the head of inclusion at Glasgow City Council, and Andrea Reid from his team, who have been helpful in engaging on the matter.

Glasgow has 53 units, two assessment centres and a young parents support base at Whitehill, and two new provisions coming online at Lochend and Govan. The figure fluctuates, but 1,700 to 1,800 people are in additional support needs provision in Glasgow. I was concerned about whether the planning for that provision—for the estate, the workforce and the assessment processes—was fit for purpose. I had a meeting with Colin Crawford and Andrea Reid to discuss those issues, and I again thank them for the open and frank conversation that we had. It is reasonable to say that they have identified some issues and have put processes in place to improve things, which is a good-news story.

Colin Crawford and Andrea Reid mentioned estate management, support for learning, work on

allocations and an inclusion group modelling process for the city. They also mentioned psychological services, which I will come back to, and placement management. That begs a question: how can we get consistent modelling work done across all 32 local authorities to show what the special educational needs estate should look like?

I want to make my next point first in case I am timed out by the Presiding Officer—I have something else to say after it. The experience of my constituents is that young people often end up in standalone specialist units. The proper support is not put in place in the mainstream setting, so my constituents demand more and the young people go to an attached unit. If the proper support is not put in place there, they eventually end up in a standalone specialist setting. I am never sure whether, if the right support had been put into the mainstream setting in the first place, those young people could have been retained in that setting.

Finally, I want to run through a list of things that the guidance must have. It must have some beef in it in relation to the transition from nursery to primary school and from primary school to secondary school. It must look at the following: the assessment process; assessing support in the classroom; reviewing placements; forward planning; estate management; and the evidence base. I promise that this is my final point, Presiding Officer. Glasgow City Council looks at an evidence base that includes referrals to educational psychologists and speech and language therapists, but if a referral cannot be obtained, that does not show up in the data. That is also a significant issue.

Those are big issues but huge opportunities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): On that final, final, final point, I call Oliver Mundell.

15:22

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): On this occasion, I would have been quite happy to give Bob Doris my six minutes because he is making the same points that I hear about in my constituency mailbag, and they are problems that most members see across all our local authorities in Scotland.

Today, we are all united by a common goal of meeting the educational needs of every child in Scotland as best we can, regardless of their ability or whatever additional support they might need. The intention behind the presumption of mainstreaming is a noble one, which is meant to establish inclusivity as a default.

However, inclusivity is far greater than just physically including children with additional support needs in a mainstream classroom setting. Perhaps it is because I am not of an age where I can remember things being all that much different from how they are now, but I look at this area and I see constituents at my surgeries, week in and week out, and I hear about the battles that their families are facing. I do not look at the situation as it is now as being entirely positive.

It is not a political point to say that we must remember that this is a huge challenge, because it is a huge challenge around the world and no one has all the answers. It is difficult to work out exactly what is best when we are balancing up some of the different considerations. We must not forget that many children do not know what mainstream education is. In the parts of my constituency that are covered by the Dumfries and Galloway Council area, I see young people being farmed out across Scotland because adequate resources are not in place that would allow them to go to mainstream or even special schools in the region. Those young people are being separated from their peers and their communities. I do not have all the answers or know what to say, but I see the struggles that their families face and the social and economic cost of that for everyone in our society.

When I reflected on my feelings after reading Enable Scotland's "#IncludED in the Main?!" report, I was sad and surprised to find that I was not shocked. It is very frustrating to be sitting in this Parliament in 2017 reading the report and to have to accept that all that information is out there and that so many teachers, parents and pupils are facing those experiences, yet we have not found the answers. It shows that there is still a long road ahead to ensure full inclusivity for children with additional support needs and that they can benefit from mainstreaming.

The report found that more than half of the education staff who were surveyed felt that children with learning disabilities were not involved in as many extracurricular activities, trips and opportunities outside the classroom as their peers. It said that two thirds of children with additional support needs were still being bullied in mainstream schools. Additionally, it said that children with additional support needs might not be officially excluded from their classrooms, but informal exclusion was very common, and that parents felt unable to work due to the fear that they would be asked to collect their children during the working day.

In my time as an MSP, one of the saddest things that I have come across was a family in Annan who told me at a support group that the best day of their child's education was when they

were formally excluded from school, because that was the very first time that the local authority took seriously their request for additional support. It was the first time that the family felt listened to by education professionals. I do not think that that was through any malice; it was through a lack of resource and individuals in the education department at the council being overworked. Further, it was through the pressures that teachers were facing in school that they did not find the time to give that child the attention that was needed.

A situation such as that adds so much stress for families and is very unpleasant for them. They have to fight the system every step of the way for their children's right to a basic level of education. If we do not do something about that, it will only compound the problems that are caused by the attainment gap in the long run, as all children in mainstream schools suffer when support is not there for those who need it the most.

On a more positive note, I welcome the reference that was made to combining special schools with mainstream schools on a single site. In my Dumfriesshire constituency, I am pleased that that is happening with Langlands primary school, which is getting a new building as part of the new learning campus in the town, as that will make a difference to the pupils. I recognise that progress has been made, but there is far more to be done.

We are very lucky that Enable Scotland has done that great piece of work, and I pay a brief tribute to the Annan and Kirkcubrecht ACE—active community of empowered people—groups in my constituency, who made such an effort to bring it to my attention.

I hope that we are all ready to read the findings of the survey that the Government has proposed, because I think that they will be truly shocking and disappointing, and that they will demand that we redouble our efforts on a cross-party basis to ensure that we get things right for every child in Scotland.

15:24

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I warmly welcome the opportunity to discuss mainstreaming in education in the chamber this afternoon. It was of course a Labour Scottish Government that introduced the commitment to inclusive education in 2000, which was supported by all parties across the chamber.

I declare an interest as I am proud to be the convener of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on learning disability, which is supported by Enable Scotland. I pay tribute to Enable Scotland for its report, "#IncludED in the Main?!", and for all the work that it does to

advance the rights of people with learning disabilities.

I welcome the consultation on guidance that has been launched by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. That is a result of one of the recommendations arising from Enable's report. I welcome Mr Swinney's recognition that simply sitting in a classroom does not count as inclusion.

The report is a national conversation about life at school. There is no doubt that education for young people with learning disabilities has improved immensely. It is now 17 years since the presumption to mainstream young people with learning disabilities in education, so we have seen a whole generation go through every stage of education, and the report, which reflects on their lived experience and that of their parents, carers and teachers, is invaluable. However, their stories and experience, and what we have heard in the Parliament, tell us that there is much more to do. We know that for too many young people in our country, inclusive education is still not a reality. Many are still being excluded from classrooms and from opportunities that would enrich their everyday lives. Enable Scotland's report sets out 22 steps that we can take to make inclusion in education the standard for all Scotland's young people.

I want to focus on a couple of areas. First, there is a need for specialist staff. The research shows us that 98 per cent of teachers feel that they are not adequately prepared. That is a stunning total. Furthermore, 86 per cent said that there are not enough additional support for learning staff in their schools to support young people with learning disabilities. A substantial 80 per cent of education staff say that they are not getting it right for every child.

I will always welcome new strategies and good intentions, but we need to recognise that the guidance will struggle to make an impact if we are faced with cuts to education budgets. I have had many cases of parents and teachers complaining about the real lack of support in the classroom, which has an impact on their children. That is their lived experience.

There have been cuts. The number of children with additional support needs has increased by 153 per cent since 2010. Many of those pupils come from lower-income households and areas of deprivation. Since 2010, one in seven ASN teaching posts has been cut. The number of children with ASN is increasing, but teaching posts are decreasing. In the past decade, there have been 4,000 fewer teachers, 1,000 fewer support staff and more than 500 fewer additional support needs specialists. Spending per pupil in Scotland has fallen cumulatively by over £1 billion, which is

a real-terms reduction of £489 per head at primary level and £152 per head at secondary level.

Let me say this as gently as I can. We all want mainstreaming to work, but it will not work unless there are more resources. I am not talking about resources in general. We need specific, targeted resources that go hand in hand with the guidance, which will be good and can make a difference. The education workforce is central to that success. Enable Scotland has called for renewed investment in the role of additional support for learning teachers. That is essential. We need to ensure that that specialist resource is regularly available to all education staff.

I want inclusive education embedded into every part of the curriculum. The guidance will help, but we must ensure that the specialist teaching resource is in place to support that, too. Having training and employment for specialist support teachers matters. That will benefit not only the pupils who rely on that support at school, but the teachers and education staff who are routinely put under pressure at work, with many of them feeling stressed and anxious due to not having the right support to meet the needs of children and young people with learning disabilities.

The need for additional support for learning teachers was highlighted by people in my constituency as part of Enable Scotland's national conversation. I want to draw attention to two particular responses, one from a parent in West Dunbartonshire and the other from a teacher in Argyll and Bute. From different perspectives, they both stated that they did not believe that proper support was in place for children and young people with learning disabilities. The teacher highlighted that in Argyll and Bute all the training for additional support needs had been organised privately and that the local authority had provided no support whatsoever, which is clearly disappointing. I whole-heartedly agree with many of the points that Bob Doris made. It might surprise him to hear that, but I thought that he made an excellent speech.

At the end of the day, we can and must do better, because we owe it to future generations of young people with learning disabilities to do so. The guidance will be a good start, but we need additional specialist staff to support its implementation.

I commend to the Scottish Government all the recommendations in Enable's report and I promise that the cross-party group on learning disability will continue to be a critical but encouraging friend on this journey towards genuine inclusion in our schools.

15:35

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I am glad to be part of this debate for a number of reasons that will become clear as my speech progresses.

I was pleased to hear from the Deputy First Minister that outcomes for those with learning difficulties have improved. I agree with Iain Gray, who said that we have been on a long journey in this Parliament and that this is an issue on which we can always look for improvement.

It was interesting to hear from Jenny Gilruth, who spoke from a professional point of view about what is happening in our schools.

I know that this is an emotional issue for families whose children are affected by learning difficulties. In my constituency, I hear constantly about families whose children have either not been diagnosed and are not going through the process or who are going through the process but are not getting the support that they need. It looks like the guidance will help with that.

I am aware, for a number of reasons, that the presumption of mainstreaming has been at the core of the Parliament's inclusive approach to education since 2000. I have been involved in politics for a long time, but my awareness of this issue comes from the fact that my son James went through the education system before this Parliament was reconvened. I say to Oliver Mundell that I am that old and I remember what the system was like before.

My son James struggled with primary school right from the beginning. It took a while for his teachers and everyone else to find out what the issue was. He was a bright wee boy; he was talented and asked lots of questions. When he found out what "Why" meant, that became difficult for us, as it does for every other parent, because we got asked all the questions, such as "Why are we St Mirren supporters?", "Why do we do this?" and "Why do we do that?"—[*Interruption.*] The first question was a difficult one for me to answer.

No one knew what was wrong with James and at some points some of the teachers treated and assessed him with a less-than-professional attitude. He was thought of as a child who would never be able to catch on and move forward in school. By the time that James had headed into primary 3, he had been diagnosed with dyspraxia and the education authority had decided that it would be a good idea to have him in the local special school. My whole argument then—as now—was that I did not believe that that was the best way forward for my son. We made that argument at the time, but we did not have the processes that are available to parents now and local authorities did not have the guidance that is available to them now. James ended up with no

confidence and no faith in the educational establishment.

I am glad that we all now agree that mainstreaming is the way forward and that we just have to make sure that we get it right.

When James went to a boys football club, for example, and anyone asked what school he was at, he had the embarrassment of saying that he went to a different school, which was a special school. That caused him all kinds of problems. He will probably kill me if he ever reads this speech and sees that I have mentioned this, but if he was honest with himself he would say that that has affected him to this day.

The Scottish Government's policy is that children and young people should learn in the environment that best suits their needs. If my son had had the right support, it could have made a difference. The problem was that he had low self-esteem and when it came to his achievements he did not feel as if he was doing anything of any value to anyone, no matter what love, affection and support his family and friends gave him—even with all that, he still had difficulties.

We must remain focused on what is good about the presumption of mainstreaming. I know that it is challenging, but I do not want anyone else's child to go through what my son went through.

I am particularly pleased about some of the new guidance that the Scottish Government will introduce and the fact that education authorities must identify, provide and review the additional support that their pupils need to overcome barriers to learning. The guidance aims to bridge the gap between legislation, policy and day-to-day experience to ensure that local authorities have the support that they require to help them make decisions and apply the policy on the presumption of mainstreaming.

I am aware of the difficulties, but we need to ensure that young men and women get that support at the time when they need it. Currently, 95 per cent of children with additional support needs are educated in mainstream schools. If only we had had that approach back in the day. I believe that all our teachers offer the kind of support that our children and young people need. They are the ones who can be that person for the young person to go to. They are the ones who offer that way forward for our young people, helping them to be ambitious and to try to achieve all they can. They provide that support and they should help all our children and young people to reach their full potential.

One of the many things that we found was that even when James went to the special school—which was a fantastic school and it offered so much—it was not right for him; it was not the right

place for him. We now have a system in which we try to ensure that we get our children to the right place at the right time.

Many young people, my son James being one of them, went through a system that did not take into account their needs. Since the Parliament came into being, the presumption of mainstreaming has been a key part of our education policy. We must ensure that we continue to develop that policy further and, as Iain Gray said, constantly improve it and ensure that we do better so that all our children and young people get the start that every one of them deserves.

15:41

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Presiding Officer, you will find this hard to believe, but I started school in 1972—and yes, the years have been kind. I am very fortunate that where we lived, here in Edinburgh, became the centre for many people from Scotland and the north of England who had upper and lower limb deficiencies. The Princess Margaret Rose orthopaedic hospital set up a special centre so, over the holiday period, many of us got together to get the extra help that was required. Looking back, I think that I was the only child of that age there who went to a mainstream school. Everyone else went to a special needs school. I was very fortunate that my parents chose to mainstream me and I was fortunate to go to an independent school here in Edinburgh.

I think that we have to set this debate in that historical context and recognise how far we have come—as a civic society, as politicians, and as educationists. There are many lessons that we need to learn and many of them have been highlighted by others today, but we have come a long way. We need to be encouraged by that. We are on a journey—the journey has taken us this far and we need to go further.

In the time that I have this afternoon, I would like to make two points about this. I think that the Deputy First Minister picked up this point in his speech and I was grateful that he did. When we talk about mainstreaming and education, we are not simply talking about what happens in lessons in the classroom.

Too often, we concentrate on whether we have the right provision when a child is in English or maths or whatever. That is vitally important and we should not play that down but if we see it as inclusion when somebody is isolated for the rest of their school experience, we are missing the point. What happens in the playground is probably as important, if not more important, as what happens in a primary school lesson. What happens and

how a child is treated in the dining room is as important as what happens in the classroom. How we treat children in relation to physical education and other activities is also really important. We have lots of teachers who are able to think outside the box when it comes to such activities.

Speaking from my own experience, I was unable to participate in football, rugby or cricket as a player, but the school realised that I would be able to umpire, touch judge, or score the cricket matches. I was included in a way that I was able to benefit from and to build friendships on. Sometimes I think that we need to give headteachers and teachers the room to be able to think outside what they normally do so that a child always feels included. I fully agree with the comments made by Jackie Baillie and Tavish Scott regarding the support that we need to give our teachers and support teachers in that regard.

My other point is about the postcode lottery—or, to put it another way, the parentcode lottery. Although we can see that the presumption is for mainstreaming, we also know—and I think that the Scottish Government agrees—that the best interests of some children will be served not in a mainstream setting but in a school that meets their needs in certain ways.

What has surprised me, both from when I was a councillor on the City of Edinburgh Council and from my postbag as a regional MSP, is that, if those who want to choose for their children not to be mainstreamed but to go to a different type of school shout loudest—and, let us be honest, if they are middle class—they are far more likely to get a place in that school than others from the rest of our society. There is a challenge for local authorities and for us as politicians here to ensure that those who come from vulnerable backgrounds, whether that is economic, educational or family related, have the same opportunities as those like me who come from a privileged, middle-class background.

We have to be careful to treat every child as an individual. We have a presumption of mainstreaming, which I support fully and from which I benefited, but there will be times when it is not right for a child to be mainstreamed. As my colleague Liz Smith said, we must protect those schools that are providing those excellent services, both financially and in the way in which we speak about them, in the right way.

I, too, thank Enable for its report and the work that it is doing in this area. This has been a positive debate, and there is agreement. I would encourage us all: we are on a journey, we are perhaps halfway there, and we need to keep going in a cross-party spirit.

15:47

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): In March, I led a members' business debate on the subject of the presumption of mainstreaming, as addressed in the excellent Enable Scotland report "#IncludED in the Main?!" It is a measure of the importance that is placed on this subject by members of the Parliament that, by the time seven MSPs had signed my motion, every party in the Parliament was accounted for. I therefore warmly welcome this further opportunity to debate mainstreaming and, more important, the release of the "Consultation on Excellence and Equity for All", which moves the discussion on. I am sure that Enable Scotland will be heartened to see the new guidance, which acknowledges, in a general sense, the validity of its concerns.

As the introduction to the draft guidance states,

"At present, despite the strength of the legislative and policy basis and the ambitious vision for all children and young people, more needs to be done, and more can be done, to get it right for every child and to ensure that they are all experiencing equity and excellence."

As I did in March, let me declare an interest. My wife is a member of a hard-pressed additional support needs team in a secondary school. I know that I am not alone among MSP colleagues on this, but my passion for this subject is fired more by experience of constituency casework.

I entirely support the presumption in favour of mainstreaming, but the way in which it has been interpreted and implemented by some local authorities absolutely needs to be looked at. The document, the consultation and the accompanying research open the door to doing just that.

Let me focus on two specific points that are covered in the guidance, which have one thing in common: the fact that, in some instances, they are currently being approached in anything but the way in which the guidance anticipates.

Paragraph 32 addresses a situation in which it may be necessary to look to alternatives to mainstream settings for a child or young person, for example because their behavioural issues are such that they would not benefit from being in that environment and/or the education of other children would be impacted.

I suggest that, in reality, other than in the most extreme circumstances, pupils who are disruptive are being placed into mainstream environments, albeit some of the time they are perhaps being catered for in learning support bases, with little real regard for their impact on others. It is left to already hard-pressed staff to manage the situation as best they can.

Paragraph 33 covers the issue of unreasonable public expenditure and states:

"Each local authority ... has to consider what a reasonable level of public expenditure is within the context of their commitments."

It focuses on a situation in which

"the cost of adapting a school environment to support ... one young person"

is prohibitive and accepts that, in such a case, perhaps alternative provision can be considered. Again, though, does that reflect how things are playing out currently, especially where an authority has few, if any, special schools at its disposal? Is it not all too often the case that, rather than sourcing or funding a relatively expensive specialist placement, some councils will persuade parents that they can accommodate their child within supported mainstream provision? However, in practice, that is very often done without providing the additional resources that are required to meet that pupil's needs, while risking diminishing support for others. The draft guidance and the consultation on it have the potential to challenge and change that approach, where it exists.

As Liz Smith indicated, this is not an easy subject to consider with complete candour. For example, medical advances that have been made since 2000 mean that we have children with very complex needs being catered for in mainstream school settings in a way that almost certainly was not envisaged 17 years ago, with all the impact that that has on resources and, indeed, on the support that is being afforded to other ASN youngsters. Sitting alongside that are the expectation levels of some parents. When we look at matters dispassionately, we can find that there are unreasonable expectations in some cases. However, they are understandable if we put ourselves in those parents' shoes. I have come across such situations in casework, but I have been struck far more by instances where the system as delivered is letting families down. That happens so often for avoidable reasons that have less to do with finances and more to do with lack of service cohesion or, sadly, the grasp of need.

To illustrate that latter point, I will highlight a case that I noted in the member's business debate in March concerning a teenage constituent with complex needs who had been unable to attend the local secondary school base for some months. Ahead of an effort to try to reintegrate her, her mum was invited to visit the newly refurbished base facilities, which she had been told would be an asset in catering for her daughter, who is, among other things, autistic. However, the mum told me that the brand-new sensory room's colour scheme was not autism friendly, that the room was tiny and that the soundproofing was so inadequate that, sitting in it, she could hear the kids passing in the adjoining corridor.

Ultimately, that case had a welcome outcome, as have others that I have been involved in. However, the stress for all concerned, over many months, was entirely avoidable. As the Enable report laid bare, that is not a unique experience. When parents and carers were asked to describe their experience of the school system, 67 per cent used the word “battle”, 77 per cent used the word “stressful” and 44 per cent used the word “alone”.

I will finish on a couple of optimistic notes. First, as we are hearing in the debate, the publication of the “Consultation on Excellence and Equity for All” has reignited the debate around what the presumption in favour of mainstreaming is. That is a good thing, and I hope that the measured, constructive tone that is being taken in the debate is the shape of things to come. Secondly, I have—admittedly with mixed success—sought to engage with secondary schools in my constituency on how they intend to deploy the pupil equity fund moneys that are coming their way. To be honest, I was a bit worried that, when schools were spending that money, many ASN pupils would be forgotten or their interests would be pushed to the bottom, but what I have found is the reverse of that. Those schools are working with cluster primaries in a way that, among other things, gives rise to the hope that the needs of all youngsters will be identified early and met as they progress through their educational journey. Pupil equity funding has the potential to change things for the better; so, too, does this guidance and its accompanying research.

15:53

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Delivering an inclusive educational environment for all speaks directly to the kind of society that we aspire to be. As other members, including Jenny Gilruth and Iain Gray, have said, for far too long young people with additional needs have suffered exclusion from education and from society as a whole. Ensuring access to mainstream schools has been a central demand of the movement for equality for disabled people in the United Kingdom, and, indeed, globally for some time. The right to participate in mainstream education is now enshrined in article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which sets out that individuals must not be excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability and that they must be able to access inclusive and quality education on an equal basis with others.

The Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc Act 2000, which was mentioned earlier, sought to put that right into domestic law by introducing the presumption to mainstream. It means that the default option for all is a mainstream school,

ensuring that young people with disabilities and other additional needs have access to a mainstream education. However, it does not mean that the education is automatically inclusive. Mainstream education is not the same as inclusive education. It can and should be a gateway to an inclusive education, but the reality for young people with additional needs in mainstream schools is often far from inclusive.

Since 2010, education spending in Scotland has dropped by about 4.3 per cent in real terms. That means that, each year, about £490 less is being spent per primary school pupil, and £150 less per secondary pupil. It has led to there being over 500 fewer specialist additional support needs teachers and to a loss of about one in 10 additional support needs support staff, and that is at a time when we are identifying more additional support needs among pupils. One pupil in four has such needs—although, as Liz Smith noted, there are issues with the consistency of identification that we certainly need to address. For example, North Lanarkshire, which was mentioned earlier, has an identification rate of about 6 or 7 per cent, whereas West Dunbartonshire has a rate of over one in three children. Those are demographically similar areas and the children come from similar backgrounds, yet there is quite a significant difference.

That has heaped significant additional pressures on teachers, leading to a decline in their working conditions. A recent report by Bath Spa University that has been mentioned in the chamber a number of times in recent weeks describes working conditions in Scottish schools as being “extremely poor” at present. Teachers have less time to spend with each pupil and, with the loss of specialist ASN teachers, the expertise that is necessary to help some pupils is being lost.

Enable Scotland, which has quite rightly been praised by almost every speaker in the debate so far, found that the vast majority of the education workforce—teachers and support staff—do not feel that teacher training and other training have adequately prepared them to teach and support young people with learning disabilities and that there is a lack of support for staff to do that. That has left more than half of our children and young people with learning disabilities feeling that they do not get the right support in school. Pupils are attending mainstream schools, but they are excluded. Whether that involves informal exclusion from class or pupils not being able to take part in school trips or participate in sporting activities, that exclusion is real.

Like other members, I spend a significant amount of my time speaking to teachers. They are working incredibly hard under very difficult conditions to provide an inclusive learning environment, but they are being let down as

austerity takes hold in Scottish schools. The challenges here are significant. It is already difficult to provide high-quality training to new teachers who are undergoing their initial teacher education. One year, which is the time for most teachers, is not enough to become an expert on such a vast range of additional needs. In speaking to trainee teachers, I have heard how education on additional support needs can vary significantly between different university courses. Some are excellent and comprehensive and prepare trainee teachers well for the classroom, but others, unfortunately, fall short. Many are somewhere in the middle.

A lot of training on additional support needs takes place in schools, but it is significantly dependent on the trainee teacher being placed with a teacher who has both the relevant experience and knowledge and the necessary capacity. If a trainee teacher is placed with a teacher who is already overburdened, who is struggling with poor working conditions or who does not have the relevant experience or knowledge, the skills are not passed on, and young people are suffering as a result.

I very much welcome the Government's commitment to work with the General Teaching Council for Scotland and Education Scotland on additional needs in teacher training, further research on the experiences of pupils with additional needs and the development of further resources for staff. I look forward to receiving further details of the actions that the Government intends to take in that regard.

With many new teachers undergoing the one-year course, it is vital that further training opportunities are available. As I said, initial teacher education can often provide only a baseline of experience on additional needs. It is through continuing professional development that teachers have the opportunity to enhance their ability to support pupils. However, with such high workload pressures as a result of staff shortages, teachers often do not have the time that they need to engage in that further training, and austerity has led directly to the erosion of CPD budgets.

The updating of the guidance on the presumption of mainstreaming is a welcome step. The guidance was issued some time ago—I think that I was still at the infant end of my primary school at the time. The situation, as well as our understanding, has moved on considerably since then, so the updating is a welcome and necessary step. However, we must not pretend that new guidance or even the policy in itself will be enough to create an inclusive learning environment for all pupils in Scotland. From today's debate, I am reassured that we clearly, on a cross-party basis, do not kid ourselves in that regard.

The Government is committed to the principle of inclusive education—of that, I have no doubt—but it must get to grips with the issues that are preventing that in practice. For example, it is not enough to provide targeted pupil equity funding, although Graeme Dey made the point very well that that is absolutely welcome and it is making a difference. What is required is action to reverse the damage of the past decade and allow councils and schools to deliver the support that young people with additional needs require. That means a fair funding package for our local councils. The Government must also explore other levers to ensure that the right priority is being given to additional support needs provision in mainstream schools.

The inspection regime, for example, does not place sufficient emphasis on assessing that. With some adjustment, it could be a powerful tool in ensuring that correct priority is given to the inclusion agenda.

If we are to really, in the words of the Scottish Government,

“bridge the gap between legislation, policy and the practical experience of children, young people and their families”,

we must address the funding issue with some urgency. Only then can we ensure that all young people in Scotland, whatever their needs, can reach their full potential.

16:00

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I am pleased to be able to take part in the debate, as the presumption of mainstreaming has been a topic that has come up a fair number of times with my constituents, particularly in relation to children who are on the autism spectrum. I have had quite a number of cases in which parents and nursery schools have felt that mainstream primary 1 would not work for a child, but Glasgow City Council insisted on mainstreaming. Bob Doris talked about that issue.

The draft guidance is, broadly, good. It weighs up various factors that have been raised with me. For example, paragraph 4 lists the four key features of inclusion, which are that the child is present, participating, achieving and supported.

When I was younger, many young people with additional needs were hidden away in places such as Lennox Castle hospital near Glasgow, and some of the rest of us used to visit them once in a while. The fact that we now have a more mixed cohort in mainstream schools is a major improvement, but sometimes we have to ask—as members have asked this afternoon—how well some kids are participating.

There is certainly concern among some parents that their children are not getting the individual support that they need in a mainstream school, perhaps because of lack of staff. However, I accept that some parents can be overly protective of their kids. Paragraph 48 of the draft guidance makes the point that we need to retain high expectations for all our children and young people, which will sometimes mean pushing them out of their comfort zones. The example that is given in the guidance is Cardinal Winning secondary school in my constituency, of which I and the community think very highly.

The process of taking kids out of their comfort zones can be expensive in terms of staff time and, therefore, money. I saw a good example of that a few years ago, when I visited Falkland House school in Fife, which Liz Smith spoke about. It focuses on boys with autism. One thing that it did was to have youngsters apply for a real job cutting grass around the school. Of course, some of them did not get a job and, being autistic, they were, to be frank, distraught. However, it was a learning experience for those young people to enable them to handle setbacks in the future. Not many schools could have done such an exercise, because it was so resource intensive.

It is also apparently the case at Falkland that virtually all the boys were from families with well-educated and better-off parents who had pushed and pushed for that provision. Jeremy Balfour spoke about such parents. Only one child from Glasgow was at the school, but I do not believe that only one child in Glasgow needed that provision. I have had the same experience with friends of mine: parents who have been more able to challenge their council have achieved better outcomes for their children.

The draft guidance is open about that issue, which is good. The example at paragraph 59 is New Stevenston primary, where apparently

“Some parents feel they ‘had to fight’ to get a placement”.

If I have a question for the cabinet secretary, it is the one that Jeremy Balfour asked. How do we ensure that youngsters whose parents are less able—or less combative—get the most suitable provision for them?

If any of that sounds a bit critical of local authorities, especially Glasgow City Council, I also want to say how much good I have seen in the Glasgow system. One of the big advantages of having schools that are run by the council is that expertise and support on specialist issues can be shared across them, and in Glasgow the system is of the scale to provide special schools and support to mainstream schools.

To change tack, I will mention the Islands (Scotland) Bill, which might seem to be a little bit

off the immediate subject for debate. I am a member of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, which has been doing a fairly thorough job on the bill, having visited a number of islands. One of the proposals in the bill is for an islands impact assessment to ensure that the impact of any policy or guidance, such as that which we are discussing, on island communities is considered. When I looked at the draft guidance to see whether it includes an islands perspective, I was interested to see the suggestion in paragraph 21 that pupils might attend two separate schools. That might be fairly easy in a city, but would certainly be much more challenging on an island.

That said, I thought that paragraph 26 was extremely good in its acceptance that

“Local circumstances can be very different”

and that the draft guidance itself does not overprescribe. That is the kind of flexibility that people on the islands are looking for. We will, no doubt, hear from them if it is not.

I was glad to see in the Conservative and Labour amendments recognition that the number of children with additional support needs is increasing, and that it would be a challenge to cope with that situation at any time, and especially when finances are tight. I am very open to some tax increases, assuming that we get more money from them and that such moves do not lead to widespread tax avoidance. However, even with increased revenue through taxation, resources will be tight, and we will not be able to do all that we want to do. I hope, therefore, that it will be recognised across the chamber that we all need to prioritise and that no one will get everything they want.

Finally, I think it worth my while to emphasise the point that is made in paragraph 29. We want our young people to meet learning targets and to have

“a full experience of school life”.

Jeremy Balfour mentioned that, too. Gone are the days of academic results being the be-all and end-all. When I met Universities Scotland representatives this morning, they made the point that employers are looking for graduates who are rounded and ready to start work, and not just the people who are most academically able.

For all our children, we want the best possible outcomes. To that end, I am happy to commend the draft guidance and the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Thank you very much, Mr Mason. I call Monica Lennon, to be followed by Ruth Maguire. You can have an extra 30 or 40 seconds. Isn't that exciting?

16:06

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): You have made my day, Presiding Officer.

As many MSPs from across Parliament have, I have been raising concerns with the Scottish Government about the declining numbers of additional support needs teaching posts at a time when the number of pupils who are being identified as having additional support needs has rocketed. Each time I have raised the issue, the Scottish Government has provided explanations for why that has happened—one of the reasons being that the way in which additional support needs are defined and recorded has broadened over the years. I am not dismissing that explanation for the dramatic rise in the number of ASN pupils in our schools since 2010, but I hope that we can all agree that it does not answer the question why one in seven ASN posts has been cut from Scotland's schools since that year. I also hope that we all recognise that that is no comfort to families who are struggling daily to access the necessary support.

It has been reassuring to hear colleagues from across the chamber reiterate their support for the presumption of mainstreaming and for inclusion in the education system. On the principles, there is no disagreement. Three teachers who have spoken—Liz Smith, Iain Gray and Jenny Gilruth—might come from different parties, but they have all brought the reality of the classroom into the chamber. From all the speeches, which have been thoughtful, it is clear that we all want a significant improvement in outcomes and less stress on the shoulders of hard-working staff.

However, our words, nice though they are, will not make the difference. What we need is action. Like others, I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has today published its consultation on updated guidance on the presumption of mainstreaming, but I remain to be convinced that the content of that guidance will bring about the change that we need right across Scotland, and all the improvements that we want. For example, not a single extra penny has been identified for providing more support to our young people. Without resources to back up the sentiments, it is difficult to see how progress can begin.

That said, I am encouraged by the cabinet secretary's commitment in the consultation document that

“we must improve the *experience* of inclusion for all pupils if we are to deliver on the promise of such an ambitious framework. Being present in a mainstream school should not be the primary marker of successful inclusion.”

I whole-heartedly agree with that sentiment, and believe that it strikes at the roots of the concerns

of many parents and carers whose children with additional needs are in mainstream education.

As has already been pointed out during the debate, the Education and Skills Committee report into ASN is clear in its analysis. It says that

“the evidence points at a number of ways in which resources are not currently sufficient to support those with additional support needs in mainstream schools. The most notable factors are the reduction in the number of specialist staff in classrooms, the reduction in specialist support services and the reduction in special school places.”

The experts are clear that improving the experience of inclusion will therefore require a significant investment in resources, alongside revision of the guidance. The general secretary of the Educational Institute of Scotland, Larry Flanagan, said that cutbacks mean that some ASN teachers fear that inclusive education is being done on the cheap.

Mainstreaming, as it currently stands, is failing too many of our young people. I was particularly struck by the briefings for today's debate by Inclusion Scotland and Enable Scotland, which powerfully demonstrate the reality for our ASN young people. For example, when deaf or disabled pupils in mainstream schools cannot fully participate in extracurricular events such as school trips, or break-time activities, because of inadequate provision of support, we have not created adequate inclusion but further segregation and isolation.

On the substance of what action should be taken to improve the guidance and practice around the presumption of mainstreaming, I want to highlight two points that have been raised by members, and which I hope will be taken on board as part of the process.

First, as has been highlighted by Enable, there is a need to take urgent action to stop the practice of exclusion. A consequence of strained budgets and classroom resources is that types of informal exclusion, in particular for children with learning difficulties, whereby young people are removed from the classroom, can be used as an inappropriate way of resolving problems. I am sure that the cabinet secretary and the minister will take away the story that Jenny Gilruth shared about her pupil, Jamie. It is vital that the updated guidance address that point explicitly and that it makes clear that exclusions from school that are not properly recorded and justified are unlawful, and that that practice cannot be allowed to continue.

Secondly, there is a wider point that needs to be addressed around prejudice-based bullying. It is currently the case that there is no statutory duty for schools or local authorities to record incidents of bullying. Oliver Mundell made the point that disabled children are twice as likely as their peers

are to be subjected to long-term bullying at school, but we have no adequate mechanisms for identifying and recording that type of prejudice-based harassment.

I am pleased to have had the chance to contribute some thoughts on an important subject. We all agree that the presumption of mainstreaming must be supported. However, it is time to match words with actions and to give all our additional support needs young people access to the resources and the support that they need for an inclusive education.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ruth Maguire also has a little extra time.

16:13

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): The commitment of Parliament to delivering inclusive education is not in doubt. However, as MSPs—and as parents, friends and family members—we are all aware of the challenges of delivering truly inclusive education in practice. I am aware of local concerns around things such as Education Scotland guidance not making reference to additional support needs, and we are all familiar with Enable Scotland's "#IncludED in the Main?!" report, as well as the report by the Education and Skills Committee from earlier this year, both of which set out the many concerns that need to be addressed if we are to improve the experience of inclusive education for pupils, families, and teachers. We have rightly heard many of those concerns reiterated and underlined in today's debate.

The Scottish Government is clearly listening and taking those concerns seriously. I welcome the forthcoming research that it has commissioned, as well as the revised draft guidance that has just been published and will be consulted on. Together with the results of the research, the consultation responses will feed into the final revised guidance, which I trust will address many of the current concerns.

I use this opportunity to provide my feedback on the draft revised guidance by focusing on the importance of inclusive play and nurture to the experience of children with additional needs at school. The draft guidance, under the heading "Participating", states that

"All children and young people will have the opportunity to participate and engage as fully as possible in all aspects of school life, including school trips and extracurricular activity".

That, of course, includes a child's right to play, which is crucial to all aspects of the child's development—social, emotional, intellectual and physical. The right of a child to play is unequivocally recognised in the UN Convention on

the Rights of the Child, which forms the legal basis for provision of inclusive education in general. It is also recognised in "Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Action Plan", which was published by the Government in 2013 and affirms the commitment to enabling all children to realise their right to play.

In that context, it should concern us all that nearly half the children and young people with learning disabilities who took part in the Enable Scotland research reported that they do not get the same chances to take part in games in the playground as everyone else in their school. Similarly, a key finding of "Scotland's Play Strategy: Playing with quality and equality: a review of inclusive play in Scotland" was that disabled children face multiple barriers to being able to play at school.

In order to enable all children to exercise their right to play, and to ensure that all children are included in all aspects of school life, it is clear that the provision of inclusive play must be improved. Where there are financial pressures, the good news is that inclusive play can be provided through simple low-cost and low-key measures. For example, one of the main barriers to inclusive play that has been cited is inflexible playground rules, including upper age limits on activities or areas, which exclude children who might still benefit from activities that are aimed at younger children or who have friends in younger classes. Changes to rules like those could be made sensibly and sensitively in order to facilitate more inclusive play. Others have reported adapting games, for example, by having basketball posts at different levels within a game, so that all children can play together—a straightforward and uncostly way to remove barriers.

Another significant issue for inclusive play is that there is a lack of general awareness and confidence among teachers about the value of play and how to provide play opportunities. I note that improved initial teacher training and continuing professional development relating to children with additional support needs are key recommendations of the Education and Skills Committee report and the Enable report. I hope that education on the importance of play provision—in particular, inclusive play—can be introduced to the discussion to ensure that teachers are aware of the many high quality and free resources that exist to support them.

For example, "Getting it Right for Play: A toolkit to assess and improve local play opportunities", which was recently published by Play Scotland, is an invaluable resource that clearly delineates the 16 recognised types of play, the different benefits that they bring and how to facilitate them. Given the importance of play to all children, as well as the concerns that have been raised about

inclusive play provision, it would be good to see some reference to play in the “Delivering Inclusion” section of the final guidance.

Many members, not least those of us who spoke in the Barnardo’s Scotland nurture week debate in February, will be aware of the positive and tangible effects of nurture groups on attainment and inclusion. Nurture is about having spaces where we support children to develop healthy and supportive relationships and attachments, where we make them feel valued by others and confident in themselves, and where we teach them how to communicate constructively and positively. That is important for all children, but it is particularly so for children who are more vulnerable to experiencing difficulties and exclusion.

Nurture groups offer the benefit of enabling children to remain part of their mainstream class, and they work at both primary and secondary school levels. They are an eminently sensible and feasible way to tackle in a meaningful and sustainable manner some of the most complex issues that children face from a very early stage. There is an important role for nurture groups as we focus on closing the attainment gap and creating a more truly inclusive educational experience for all our children. As with inclusive play, I would be pleased to see some reference to the contribution that could be made by nurture groups, as the final guidance is developed.

I echo the cabinet secretary’s encouragement to all interested parties to contribute to the consultation, so that we can continue to improve, and so that we can ensure that the policy intention of mainstreaming becomes a reality for all our children and young people.

16:19

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): Deciding the best route for any child through education will always be tough. For every change in educational thought there will always be a question mark over its impact on some children, and never has that been truer than when it comes to children with additional support needs.

The context of the debate is key. In the 1970s and early 1980s, we rightly saw changes in thought with regard to the rights of children to be educated irrespective of their level of disability. In the early noughties, with the introduction of section 15 of the Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc Act 2000, it became an expectation that all children would attend mainstream school unless certain exceptional circumstances applied to them. Of course, I welcome the principle of mainstreaming where appropriate and where the correct support is provided, and that is why we will support the Scottish Government’s motion.

As Liz Smith pointed out, the issue is not with the legislation itself but with how it is interpreted by local authorities and how support is provided. If the legislation is intended to be in the best interests of the child, adhering to principles of social cohesion and integration that we all agree on, how do we ensure that the well-meaning policy is executed on a case-by-case basis so that the needs of individual children are always duly considered?

As members have highlighted, there are concerns about the support that pupils are getting. I have dealt with cases in my region in which parents have raised concerns about the support that their children have been getting at school. In one case, a child’s additional learning support outside the classroom was cut from around seven hours to one and a half hours.

Charities, too, have raised their concerns, as many members have mentioned. Last year, Enable Scotland reported that seven in 10 pupils with learning disabilities were not getting enough time or attention from teachers to meet their needs. In an Enable survey, a huge 85 per cent of young people with learning disabilities reported that they did not get the same chances to take part in games as everyone else in school. As Enable points out, those figures highlight that mainstreaming does not always mean inclusion. Simply being present at school does not mean that a child becomes, by default, a part of the spectrum of school life, and we must address that.

We need to look again at the context to understand the concerns that have been raised by charities. What support is there in mainstream schools? How consistent is that support across the 32 local authorities, and is the support at the level that it needs to be at? We know that there is disparity between local authorities’ definitions of additional support needs and what constitutes mainstreaming. Although the 2004 act established a broad definition of additional support needs, it falls to individual councils to define what constitutes additional support needs within those very loose boundaries, meaning that the occurrence of additional support needs across local authorities can range from just 6 per cent of pupils in North Lanarkshire to 35 per cent of pupils in Aberdeenshire.

Since 2012, the average local authority spend per additional support needs pupil has fallen by 11 per cent. Even if the spending decisions are being taken at the local level, we still need to take them into full consideration when discussing national legislation. The number of learning support staff in primary schools has been cut by 19 per cent over the past four years and in secondary schools there has been a 20 per cent reduction in the number of learning support staff. Over the same period, the

number of behavioural support staff in primary schools has been cut by 58 per cent.

The country's largest teaching union, the Educational Institute of Scotland, has raised concerns over cuts to special school assistance provisions, highlighting that the cuts in numbers have left the teachers who are available to deal with children with learning disabilities stretched and unable to cope. The EIS has noted that teachers not being able to meet the pupils' needs has damaged teacher morale and made teachers and their pupils feel undervalued and stressed.

On top of that, we know that 98 per cent of the education workforce feel that teacher training does not adequately prepare them for teaching young people who have learning disabilities and that 70 per cent of pupils with learning disabilities do not get the time or attention from teachers that is required to meet their needs. The pressures on teachers are rising, and many members who are in the chamber today would like to hear what is being done to reassure staff in mainstream education that they will begin to feel better equipped to support children with special educational needs.

It is correct to say that we have made significant strides in recent decades in ensuring that our children have been educated regardless of their disability, and I am pleased that the Government motion acknowledges the need to bridge the gap between legislation, policy and the practical experience of children.

Now, more than ever, it is important that we continue to make positive progress on this front, which is why local authorities and organisations must be given proper support. In recent years, we have seen a worrying trend in the budgets for pupils with additional support needs and that will only halt progress.

We need to look at the bigger picture and work closely across all our local authorities—and across this chamber, no matter which area we represent—to ensure that pupils with additional support needs continue to get the best opportunities when starting out in life.

16:25

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I support the motion and congratulate the Parliament and all Administrations on the presumption of mainstreaming.

All children and young people are entitled to and deserve to receive adequate and ample support in order to reach their full potential. That sentiment stands regardless of the child's needs or individual requirements, whether they complete their

education at a mainstream school or at an additional support school, as everyone in the chamber has reflected.

We must be mindful that children and young people with learning disabilities should not experience exclusion by their peers or from the curriculum; they should also not be excluded from opportunities, activities and social experiences that are an integral part of school life.

It is clear that aspects of the delivery of inclusive education have been a challenge, but it is one that is well worth taking on. A child-centred approach that includes input from the family and the school staff is vital. We must also look at the successes of that policy.

I am pleased that the achievement for pupils with additional support needs continues to rise—63.2 per cent of 2014-15 leavers with ASN left school with one or more qualifications at SCQF level 5 or better, which is an increase of 13.1 percentage points since 2011-12. It is also heartening that 88.6 per cent of pupils with ASN had a positive destination, which is an increase of 6.3 percentage points since 2011-12.

I will use my time to set out some examples from my constituency. Yesterday, I gave an example of mainstreaming in action. A case recently came to my attention of a young person in my constituency who is looked after by the local authority and has been placed in foster care. He is doing really well, despite an extremely difficult early life. Despite many discussions prior to his going into foster care querying whether he would be able to manage in a mainstream school, the young person has been placed in the local primary, where he is thriving. He is integrated in the community of his peers and friends and is part of the various things that go on in that community. He does not have to travel miles or get transport; neither is he stigmatised by the community.

For reasons of anonymity—I do not know how many foster kids are at the school—I will not be able to mention the school in question and give its staff the praise they are due, which is a shame. Needless to say, that school has worked extremely hard to make all that possible, which shows what can happen when decisions to support young people are made locally by teachers—primarily by headteachers—who best know their school communities and the networks around them.

Drumpark primary and nursery school is a fantastic additional support needs school in my constituency. Its vision is

“To put the care and welfare of each individual at the heart of a unique learning experience.”

This morning, children from Drumpark were singing at the launch of North Lanarkshire Council's safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included indicators. I hope that the minister, Mark McDonald, enjoyed their performance.

On 15 November, Drumpark primary and nursery school and Greenhill primary school, which share a campus, are participating in a children's march in Coatbridge to raise awareness of children's rights in the community. They are bringing together all partnership agencies in order to do that. I hope to attend that event. That is an example of two schools—one a mainstream school and the other an additional support needs school—working together. There is a lot of overlap work, which is fantastic to see.

I must highlight that the success of mainstreaming is entirely dependent on how it is implemented. I, probably like every other MSP in here, receive a volume of different types of referrals relating to pupils with additional support needs. Some parents might think that the child should be educated elsewhere; other parents look for more support in the mainstream environment.

Unfortunately, I have experienced a sharp rise in referrals following North Lanarkshire Council's decision to cut the hours of ASN support and the widely publicised further cuts to classroom assistants, which were also implemented recently. Although classroom assistants are perhaps not traditionally in place to assist children with additional support needs, we know that they have an overall effect in class. I have heard countless reports of children who were flourishing in mainstream education previously but are now struggling. Many teaching staff in my local authority area simply do not have the time to dedicate to children that they used to have.

We need to look at the wider picture. We need to think about the decision makers at Government and local authority level and how their decisions can be joined up. We have talked about that in many education debates.

Oliver Mundell talked about bullying. We must continue to support schools throughout the country to tackle bullying, which can be a massive issue for children with additional support needs. Responsibility cannot fall to just one headteacher or key teacher in that regard; there must be a culture in which it is emphasised that bullying will not be tolerated and everyone must be respected. We need to get that message out to young people at as early an age as possible.

Just last week I talked to senior pupils at St Andrew's high school, in Coatbridge, who raised that issue. We talked about bullying in relation to young people's mental health, and I was

encouraged to hear young people talk about the issue so openly. We all agreed that a nurturing environment is very important. I think that all the schools in my constituency are working towards creating such an environment, but there is always more that we can do, at every level.

I welcome the new guidance and support, which aims to bridge the gap between legislation, policy and day-to-day experience. We must ensure that local authorities have the guidance that they require to help their decision making in applying the presumption of mainstreaming, so that they can implement policy efficiently and effectively.

16:31

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

There was much in the cabinet secretary's opening remarks with which we can all agree. He was absolutely right to emphasise the continuity of this Parliament's approach and ethos since it came into being and the Labour and Liberal Democrat Administration gave effect to the principle of mainstreaming.

The evidence is that mainstreaming is underpinned by an important approach, whereby education is viewed as being about inclusion and the fulfilment of potential. The cabinet secretary made those points well.

Indeed, the cabinet secretary was right to say that mainstreaming is part of a rights-based approach. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is clear. Article 23 talks about the right of a child with a disability to a

“decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity”,

article 28 is about

“the right of the child to education”,

and article 29 says that education is about developing

“the child's personality, talents and ... abilities”.

If we look beyond the presumption of mainstreaming to GIRFEC, curriculum for excellence and the overall child-centred approach to learning, we can see that such an approach is being taken.

There are two overarching and important ideas in that regard. First, the only things that should limit education are ability, talent and the child's ambition. Secondly, and importantly, support is needed if such an approach is to be achieved. The mainstreaming of children with additional support needs brings that into sharp focus, because it brings the most challenges. It requires understanding and it requires support and intervention, which must be resourced.

I welcome the revised guidance. At its heart is that continuing ethos, which we welcome. As many members said, it clarifies the application of policy and legislation. I admit that—for once—I am pleased by some of the diagrams in the documentation that has been provided, because they provide clarity about how legislation maps on to practice. I welcome that.

John Swinney: That is a big breakthrough. [*Laughter.*]

Daniel Johnson: I know. I thought that the cabinet secretary would think so.

Labour agrees with and supports much of what is before us today, and we will vote accordingly.

We must move beyond understanding, intent and terminology. As Monica Lennon said, we must have action. We need to measure what we seek to do through policy against the reality, and we must challenge and improve what is happening—and it is with improvement in mind that we make our case today.

Many members have referred to “#IncludED in the Main?!”, which is an excellent report. I could repeat many of the statistics that are set out in it, but Oliver Mundell put it well when he said that it is sad to see those numbers laid bare and to think about the reality that lies behind them. I will repeat just one statistic from the report, which is that 49 per cent of children with learning disabilities feel that they are not achieving what they might. That is the bar that we must measure ourselves against. We must look at the 22 recommendations in Enable’s report and identify what we can do to implement them. The Education and Skills Committee’s useful report on the subject has been mentioned by many, too. I highlight its finding that

“the additional support needs of a large number of children are not being fully met, and this impacts on their education”.

Between them, the reports identify three key issues: the first is about the consistency and quality of practice; the second is about the training of practitioners; and the third is about the resource that is needed for delivery. I will give a personal example to illustrate what I think should be done on practice. I was very lucky to be asked to sit in on a planning meeting for a child who was going into one of my local secondary schools. Obviously, I cannot go into any great detail, but I was struck by the fact that although the teachers were moving heaven and earth to deliver the support that the child required, when it came to the necessary resource being made available by the local authority, it could not deliver the support because the child did not meet the criteria. To my mind, that is entirely the wrong way round. The question that should be asked is, “What does this child need in order to survive and how can the local authority

best deliver that?” It cannot be right to put criteria in front of that delivery.

Bob Doris made some extremely good points on practice. The shopping list that he snuck in at the end of his speech was excellent. He mentioned the transition from early years to primary school and from primary school to secondary school; standalone units; the estate; and referrals. Graeme Dey made similar points. Jenny Gilruth said that policy cannot be something that a headteacher prints off and that is looked at by him or her alone.

Co-ordinated support plans are in place for only 1.4 per cent of children with additional support needs. The number of children who attend specialist schools has dropped by almost 20 per cent, so there is clearly a gap. It simply cannot be right that so few ASN children have co-ordinated support plans, which are meant to bring to bear the resources to support them in their learning. Those conclusions are supported by “#IncludED in the Main?!”, and they are certainly supported by the Education and Skills Committee’s recommendation that there should be full quality assurance on the implementation of the policies in this area. When the cabinet secretary listens to what people say in response to the consultation, I ask him to look at the quality assurance measures on implementation.

Ross Greer made good points about training. A number of teachers and practitioners told the Education and Skills Committee that too much training is ad hoc. One person might receive training and then pass it on. There has been a reduction in postgraduate training on additional support needs, and many additional support needs posts do not require an ASN qualification. That cannot be right. We need to make sure that we have qualified people who have received the necessary training so that the support can be delivered. The key points that “IncludED in the Main?!” made in that area were on initial teacher education, continuous professional development and the inclusion of such issues in the curriculum.

I turn to the issue of resource. Iain Gray put it very well when he talked about his experience of what resource means in the classroom and what it enables teachers to deliver when it comes to additional support needs. The number of ASN-trained teachers has gone down by 26 per cent and there has been a reduction in the number of educational psychologists. The result of that is that many children who have apparently been mainstreamed only receive their mainstream education in a limited way—for example, they might get only one hour of provision per day or substandard provision in the classroom.

I note that my time is at an end. If we are to honour the rights that I set out at the beginning of

my speech, which are set out in the UNCRC, we must back up understanding with practice, training and the necessary resources. If we do not, we will not honour the ambitions that have been set out with regard to those rights.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Michelle Ballantyne to close for the Conservatives. You have a generous nine minutes.

16:39

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests, as I am the former head of service of Stable Life, a charity that works with children and young people who have additional support needs.

I have listened closely to the contributions this afternoon. They have been thoughtful and informed and, most pleasingly, have shown cross-party commitment to recognising and addressing the challenges that mainstreaming can bring. This is, without doubt, a complex and multifaceted debate, but it is a debate that we must have, and we must be willing to listen to and address uncomfortable and difficult evidence, because it is a question that we must get right. We owe that to our children and young people, to their parents, and to all the teachers, support staff and partner organisations that strive day after day to deliver inclusive and supportive education for every child.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's announcement, particularly on the independent research into the experiences of teachers, pupils and parents.

Liz Smith and Iain Gray, who are former teachers themselves, captured the plurality of the issues and implications that arise from the presumption of mainstreaming. Iain Gray particularly reminded us that young people who have additional needs are not asking us for something special. They are merely asking for the same opportunities that every other child has. We need to bear that in mind as we go through the challenges that we are going to face.

Liz Smith drew our attention to the evidence of trainee teachers to the Education and Skills Committee in May this year. That evidence painted an alarming picture of inadequate provision at teacher training level and of new teachers feeling isolated and overwhelmed in the classroom. One young probationary teacher said:

"We had all these wonderful theories thrown at us, but there was no contextualisation and no specific training on autism, dyslexia or dyspraxia—there was absolutely nothing."—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 10 May 2017; c 13.]

One fully qualified teacher went further, saying:

"We are seeing NQTs coming out who are really quite frightened by some of the behaviours that they see in classrooms and are very unclear about how to begin approaching that, never mind planning a personal learning programme."—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 10 May 2017; c 40.]

That was an experienced teacher crying out for help from the Scottish Government, and I hope that such pleas will not fall on deaf ears.

We have heard many of our colleagues—Iain Gray, Jenny Gilruth, Bob Doris, Tavish Scott, Ross Greer, Graeme Dey and many others—recognise that issue in their speeches. As many teachers feel cast adrift as they endeavour to deliver a bespoke education to every child, Enable tells us that 98 per cent of the education workforce surveyed felt that teacher training does not adequately prepare them for teaching young people who have additional support needs. We have today heard a lot of praise for Enable's work and I add my voice to that, because Enable captured very well some of the challenges that we face. This is the reality on the ground. Without appropriate training and adequate resources, a teacher cannot meet the specific needs of ASN children, and their education will suffer as a result.

I recognise the words of the cabinet secretary and the minister when they talk about the increase in good results from ASN children, but the numbers have increased and some of the partners who work with them are often involved in delivering some of those good results. It takes a lot of people to get ASN children well supported and to get good results for them.

As Bob Doris identified in his excellent speech, the right support at the outset could mean that children could be retained in mainstream education. It is imperative that we do not put the criteria up as a barrier to addressing children's needs. That is the paradox that we face that is at the heart of the Government's support for mainstreaming.

The guidance talks about the importance of capacity building in mainstreaming, and the Government offers warm words about employed specialist support staff and a focus on the individual needs of the child. However, in the context of the recent cuts, such words sometimes seem hollow. As Annie Wells pointed out, the number of learning support staff in primary schools has been cut by 19 per cent over the past four years, and by 20 per cent in secondary schools in the same period. The number of behavioural support staff in primary schools has been cut by 58 per cent.

Bob Doris and Oliver Mundell powerfully evoked examples of informal exclusion and the troubling effect that that can have in isolating ASN children—in substance, if not in name. We need a

good support staff to prevent that. A presumption of mainstreaming should not be a device to cut off access to a range of opportunities, including in special schools, and it should not be a presumption against special provision. There is a danger that, in its enthusiasm to create equity, the Government's actions can give rise to an inequitable system that removes the rights of individual choice. There should be a choice, which must always be underpinned by the best interests of the child and their development.

That point was amplified by the comments of Jeremy Balfour, who rightly reinforced the fundamental need to ensure that inclusion is not just about what happens in the classroom and that we must keep the individual child at the centre of decision making. He also captured the issue about the background of the child not dictating their educational experiences and opportunities, and that point was reinforced in John Mason's speech.

I am going to be way too quick, because the Presiding Officer gave me lots of extra time. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let Mr Doris in; you have complimented him, so he is desperate.

Michelle Ballantyne: I am sorry; I did not hear him. He will have to shout louder.

Bob Doris: You have to choose your language very carefully, Presiding Officer.

I thank the member for being complimentary about my speech. I was supportively critical of Glasgow City Council, but there are some wonderful specialist units in my constituency. In my speech, I did not praise some wonderful practice there, so I will talk about the hearing unit in St Roch's school in Royston.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is an intervention, Mr Doris, not a second speech. *[Interruption.]* Speak through the chair, Ms Ballantyne; we are falling apart now.

Bob Doris: Finally—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A question, please, Mr Doris. Something like that would be handy.

Bob Doris: Thank you, Presiding Officer. You are so supportive.

Does the member agree that there are excellent examples of support in special needs education, including in my constituency at the hearing and visual unit at St Roch's primary school and the autism unit at High Park school in Ruchill?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is fine and that is enough, Mr Doris.

Michelle Ballantyne: My apologies, Mr Doris. Yes, there are many examples of good support in specialist units and of good mainstream support, which is down to some very dedicated staff.

I want to pick up on a conversation that took place during the debate on the need for partnership working and for the recognition that it takes a family to raise a child. That comment is often heard in social work and additional needs support circles, particularly in relation to children who are looked after and accommodated, as many additional needs children are also looked after and accommodated.

We must recognise that, when being mainstreamed, many of those young people also spend time with partner organisations, many of which are in the voluntary sector. Engagement with organisations for a period a day, a day a week or, in some cases, two or three days a week to ensure that children get the best development and best results can make the difference as to whether they survive in mainstream schools.

Further, partnership working between teachers and specialists outwith mainstream education can be really beneficial to young people. I hope that that will be recognised when the Government does its work and brings forward guidance on the issue, because teachers cannot do that job alone. That is part of the reason why many teachers feel extremely stressed, because so many things are now pushed back on to teachers. I used to head up a drugs and alcohol service, but much of that work has now been pushed to teachers, who are expected to become experts in that field.

Members on the Scottish Conservative benches welcome this afternoon's debate and the direction of travel that the Government is taking. The Scottish Government's ambition to place the presumption of mainstreaming as the cornerstone of an inclusive approach to education is understandable.

However, as the evidence from today's debate highlights, the presumption can also have manifest and detrimental effects on a child's education if we do not get the delivery right. Indeed, the Scottish Government's own guidance says:

"More needs to be done ... and more can be done ... to get it right for every child."

The cabinet secretary knows that I fully support GIRFEC. If the Scottish Government is serious about getting it right for every child, it must first commit to getting it right for every teacher.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude there. Your time has been used up magnificently, Ms Ballantyne.

Michelle Ballantyne: In good conscience, I ask members to support our amendment and our teachers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There we are.

Mark McDonald will close for the Government. You have until 5 o'clock, minister.

16:50

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald): I was grateful when Michelle Ballantyne ran out of things to say, because I have a lot to get through. Alas, it was not to be.

Michelle Ballantyne: Sorry.

Mark McDonald: It is okay—I shall crack on anyway.

Michelle Ballantyne spoke about the point raised by the cabinet secretary, which I reiterated in an intervention on Mr Gray, about the increase in positive outcomes. She said that it could be explained by the fact that the number of children with additional support needs has increased. However, we are talking about percentages. It is true that the global sum has increased, but so too has the percentage of children in that total who are achieving positive outcomes. Therefore, whether one looks at it as a global sum or as a percentage, the trajectory is positive.

The Government's approach to children and young people in general is underpinned by our commitment to the principles of getting it right for every child. The key word in that is "every". We should view every child in Scotland as a unique individual capable of achieving his or her full potential, whatever that may be. That is no different for children with additional support needs and disabilities. I will come back to that as I go through the discussion that has taken place over the debate. As members have rightly highlighted, there is still a journey for us to travel.

Liz Smith asked about what underpins decisions on mainstreaming and the factors that motivate some of those decisions. We have reiterated in the guidance that there are three clear exemptions from mainstream education: where mainstream education would not be suited to the ability or aptitude of the child; where it would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education for the children with whom the child would be educated; and where it would result in unreasonable public expenditure being incurred that would not ordinarily be incurred.

The interesting thing is that the resource question is not being framed in the way in which members have suggested. Several members have suggested that mainstreaming is being used as a means to save money. In fact, often in the

situations that members describe, that is not the outcome. It is not something that should be used as a motivation in such decisions, because the reverse is often true in relation to the support that is required for those pupils.

Iain Gray said that the positive outcomes that had been highlighted to him were a testament to the hard work of teachers and support staff, and that is absolutely the case. The Government recognises the hard work and dedication of those staff members. I hope that one of the messages to come from the Parliament—it has been loud and clear—is how much we value the work that those staff are doing in our schools.

Iain Gray: The minister's point is entirely fair, but he must also accept that those teachers need more support from us than simply warm words—they need the resources to do the job that they do so well.

Mark McDonald: Let me turn to the question of resource, which I was going to come to a little bit later. The local government financial statistics for 2015-16 show that the spend on education was £4.9 billion across Scotland. That is a 2.7 per cent increase on 2014-15 in cash terms and a 1.9 per cent increase in real terms. Of that total, £584 million was spent on additional support for learning, which is an increase of £5 million on the previous year's figure. We have seen increases in expenditure. I will come back to points around resources a little later on.

With Jamie's story, Jenny Gilruth highlighted some of the important questions that we need to face. Several members from across the chamber brought up the question of how the exclusion of children works. We are clear that exclusion must be viewed as a last resort. Other members referred to how we categorise and gather data on informal exclusion within the school building. There are issues about how easy it would be to capture such data without creating an additional burden, but we will consider that.

Bob Doris asked about guidance on transitions. Such guidance is included in the code of practice for ASL and there are duties on education authorities around planning for transitions. I am working to develop a framework for supporting children and young people who are affected by disability and their families. Part of that work will look at how we ensure that transitions are managed effectively and appropriately.

Jackie Baillie and a number of other members highlighted the work of Enable Scotland. We are pleased that we were able to work on the development of the guidance with Enable, which has been positive about the work that was done and about the guidance itself.

A number of members, including Jeremy Balfour, made the point that this needs to be about more than just children's presence in the classroom. Page 5 of the guidance, under the heading "participating", states that one of the key expectations is that

"All children and young people will have the opportunity to participate and engage as fully as possible in all aspects of school life including school trips and extracurricular activity".

We recognise that we must ensure that the entire experience for children is inclusive and that it is not simply about ensuring that they can gain access to the classroom and the educational opportunities that are contained within it.

Graeme Dey made a balanced speech, as did many other members, in which he highlighted local concerns that members across the chamber will recognise from their postbags. He highlighted examples of where things are not necessarily working in the best interests of children and families; he also highlighted positive examples of work that is being done to provide positive outcomes for children and young people. He gave an example of a positive use of pupil equity funding in his constituency, which I am sure that we could all echo with examples from our own communities and schools.

Monica Lennon highlighted the issues affecting deaf pupils. The Government recently launched the British Sign Language national plan, part of which will be about driving inclusion for BSL users and deaf pupils. We hope to see improvement on the back of the targets that have been set in the plan.

Monica Lennon also mentioned exclusion, which, as I said, must always be a last resort. She also spoke about bullying, as did a number of other members. The Government made clear commitments in relation to prejudice-based bullying in our evidence to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, and I am aware that the committee is seeking an opportunity to bring a debate on prejudice-based bullying to the chamber to allow all members to have their say on the issue. I look forward to those discussions continuing.

Fulton MacGregor cited a number of positive outcomes. He mentioned Drumpark primary, and I had the great pleasure of meeting Drumpark primary pupils today at the launch of the GIRFEC toolkit in Uddingston, where they put on a fantastic performance. He highlighted the important work being done at Drumpark primary and Greenhill primary, which, given the impact on the pupils from those schools, is a positive example of the co-location of mainstream and ASN facilities and of co-working.

I declare an interest as the parent of a child with additional support needs. The school that my son attends is a co-located mainstream and ASN facility. It is a fantastic example that shows how the benefits of co-location are delivered not just to the pupils with additional support needs but to the mainstream pupils, who get the opportunity to interact with pupils with additional support needs and thereby learn a great deal about the citizenship elements of the curriculum for excellence.

A number of points about resources have been made. John Mason highlighted the important point that we need to have a debate about not just resources but prioritisation. There is a debate to be had about the priorities that we attach to resources. The Government is willing to listen to such a debate and to consider members' asks.

A number of Conservative members focused on budgets and said that they want to see more spend. I say gently to them that they cannot come to the chamber and continually ask for additional spend across a range of areas, including education, when they are part of a party that at UK Government level is driving forward austerity, which is impacting on this Parliament's budget. Beyond that, the Conservatives in this Parliament are proposing a taxation policy that would see a £140 million reduction in public spending. I am willing to have a debate with members across the chamber about resources and prioritisation, but the Conservatives must start from a position of at least some self-awareness when they talk about the allocation of public resources.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We come to decision time. The first question is, that amendment S5M-08558.1, in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S5M-08558, in the name of John Swinney, on the presumption of mainstreaming, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 59, Against 55, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-08558.3, in the name of Iain Gray, which seeks to amend motion S5M-08558, in the name of John Swinney, on the presumption of mainstreaming, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 59, Against 53, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-08558, in the name of John Swinney, on the presumption of mainstreaming, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Abstentions

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)

Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 59, Against 0, Abstentions 55.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises that mainstreaming has featured at the heart of its commitment to inclusive education since 2000; welcomes that successive administrations have created and strengthened this commitment through the development of legislative and policy frameworks to support the additional needs of children in their learning; acknowledges the need to learn from current practice to support additional needs and, in particular, the experiences of children, young people and parents in order to improve their experience of inclusive education; welcomes therefore the forthcoming research on this and its findings, which will inform future practice; notes the launch of the consultation on Excellence and Equity for All: Guidance on the Presumption of Mainstreaming, which seeks to bridge the gap between legislation, policy and the practical experience of children, young people and their

families, so that pupils have equitable access to a quality education that meets their needs and helps them to achieve their full potential; recognises the significant pressure that has been placed on local authorities by the commitment to mainstreaming as a result of the diminished number of teachers, especially on those who are trained to support pupils with additional support needs (ASN), given the large increase in the number of pupils identified with ASN, and the continued use of specialist educational provision outwith their own local authority area; notes with concern the comments of trainee teachers at the meeting of the Education and Skills Committee on 10 May 2017 that some aspects of teacher training courses do not adequately equip them to cope with the plurality of needs and behaviours of ASN pupils; calls on the Scottish Government to address these concerns which have, inevitably, meant that some young people are not currently receiving the best support possible; further notes that the number of children with additional support needs (ASN) in Scotland has increased by 153% since 2010, that one-in-seven ASN teaching posts have been cut since 2010 and that evidence to the Education and Skills Committee from unions and parents shows a lack of resources and funding cuts to schools having a negative impact on the level of education that they can provide to children with ASN, and believes that, if mainstreaming in education is to be fully effective, the Scottish Government must ensure that schools have the funding and staff to deliver it.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:04.

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