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Official Report

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Wednesday 18 March 2015

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CONTENTS

	Col.
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	1
EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING	1
Commission on Widening Access	1
Schools for the Future	2
Foreign Language Courses (Schools).....	3
Universities (Increase in Students from Lanarkshire).....	4
Scottish Literature and Drama (Schools)	6
Occupational Segregation (Work with Educational Institutions).....	7
Career Advice and Subject Choice (Scottish Qualifications Authority and Local Authority Discussions)	9
Post-study Work Visa (Discussions with the United Kingdom Government)	10
Teacher Recruitment and Retention (Aberdeenshire).....	10
South Lanarkshire Council Education Department (Meetings)	11
Early Years Education	12
Educational Attainment (Impact of Severe Deprivation)	13
Non-teaching Staff (Schools).....	14
Primary School Week Reduction (Falkirk).....	15
College Students (Support)	16
IN-WORK POVERTY	18
<i>Motion moved—[Alison Johnstone].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Roseanna Cunningham].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Neil Findlay].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Annabel Goldie].</i>	
Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green).....	18
The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham).....	22
Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab)	25
Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con)	27
Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)	29
Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab).....	31
Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)	33
Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP)	34
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)	36
Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab)	38
Roseanna Cunningham.....	39
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	42
DIVERSITY	45
<i>Motion moved—[Jean Urquhart].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[John Swinney].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Ken Macintosh].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Liz Smith].</i>	
Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)	45
The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil)	48
Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)	50
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	53
Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP)	55
Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab)	56
Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP).....	57
Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP).....	59
Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con)	60
Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)	62
Alex Neil.....	64
John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind).....	66
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	70
<i>Motions moved—[Joe FitzPatrick].</i>	
BUSINESS MOTIONS	71

Motions moved—[Joe FitzPatrick]—and agreed to.

DECISION TIME 73

OPENCAST COAL SITES (CARBON PRICE SUPPORT EXEMPTION) 84

Motion debated—[Alex Rowley].

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab) 84

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green) 86

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP) 88

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab) 89

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) 91

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing) 92

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 18 March 2015

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

Portfolio Question Time

Education and Lifelong Learning

Commission on Widening Access

1. Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress on establishing a commission on widening access as outlined in the programme for government 2014-15. (S4O-04124)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): I am pleased to advise Parliament that, yesterday, the Scottish Government announced the appointment of Dame Ruth Silver as chair of the commission on widening access. Dame Ruth is a distinguished figure in the world of education, with a long track record of supporting social inclusion. I am delighted that she has agreed to take on this important role. Other members of the commission will be announced shortly.

Bruce Crawford: I thank the cabinet secretary for her answer and I welcome the announcement.

I agreed with the First Minister when she said:

“A child born today in one of our most deprived communities should have no lesser chance of entering higher education than a child born in one of our least deprived.”

Can the cabinet secretary let me know how it is envisaged that the proposed attainment advisers, who will be crucial to the delivery of the Government's aims, will be recruited? What is the planned timescale for their recruitment?

Angela Constance: Mr Crawford touches on an important point that was made in the programme for government, which noted that

“the entire education system has a role to play”

in the widening access agenda. That agenda involves raising attainment in our schools for all children and, critically, closing the attainment gap between children from the least and the most deprived households.

The attainment advisers represent an important strand of that work. Initially, 12 attainment advisers will be recruited, but 32 will be in place by the end of the next financial year.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Last night, Dame Ruth said on television that the full remit of the commission on widening access was not entirely clear. Can the cabinet secretary tell Parliament when that will be known?

Angela Constance: The remit of the commission will be finalised and agreed at the commission's first meeting. It is proposed that the commission will synthesise existing evidence on the barriers to widening access. The commission will propose meaningful and clear milestones to drive further and faster progress; it will identify best practice on widening access among schools, colleges and universities; and it will make recommendations on how that can be scaled up and progressed.

I should have said in my reply to Mr Crawford that the commission will meet for the first time in April. There will be an interim report in the autumn and a final report in April 2016.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Scotland now has the lowest level of grant support for students from poorer families anywhere in western Europe apart from Iceland, where there are no grants at all. It is hard to imagine that that is not one of the barriers to widening access. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the commission's remit will allow it to examine that issue?

Angela Constance: The commission will consider a wide range of matters. It is important that the final membership of the commission is drawn from a broad range of people from various backgrounds, including universities, colleges, schools, trade unions, the early years sector and student bodies.

The commission will have to consider a number of factors. The minimum income guarantee was negotiated and discussed with people from the university sector, including students, and the priority was to put money into students' pockets. It is the best package in the United Kingdom for the most disadvantaged students who live at home. I think that I am correct in saying that, for students living away from home, it is the second-best or third-best package in the UK.

Schools for the Future

2. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the schools for the future programme can help improve the school estate and how many pupils it impacts on. (S4O-04125)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): All 32 local authorities will receive funding to improve their school estate through the £1.8 billion Scotland's schools for the future programme. The total capital value of the 18 schools that have

opened so far is £239 million. The Scottish Government's contribution to that is almost £120 million.

Those schools show that the programme's fantastic new, modern, state-of-the-art learning environments are something that whole communities can benefit from and be proud of for many years to come.

Once the programme is complete, more than 60,000 pupils will benefit from it.

Mike MacKenzie: The Highlands and Islands has received schools for the future funding, including funding for schools in Oban and Lerwick, which I very much welcome. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the number of pupils who are in poor or bad buildings has more than halved since 2007?

Angela Constance: Yes, I can confirm that the number of pupils who are educated in schools that are classed as being in a poor or bad condition has more than halved since 2007. The precise figures are that the proportion of pupils who are educated in such schools has fallen from around 257,000, which was 37 per cent of all pupils in 2007, to around 109,000, which is 16 per cent of all pupils in 2014. Of course, corresponding with that, the proportion of schools in good or satisfactory condition has increased from 61 per cent to 83 per cent.

Foreign Language Courses (Schools)

3. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to expand the range of foreign language courses available in schools. (S4O-04126)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): As a result of this Government's ambitious languages policy, schools all around Scotland are developing their languages provision to introduce a much earlier start and strong progression throughout a young person's broad general education. Deciding which languages to offer is a key part of that, and many schools are finding ways to offer a more diverse range of languages than they have done previously.

Since 2010, there has been an 8 per cent increase in higher language entries.

Murdo Fraser: The minister will know that there has been criticism from some quarters, not least the German consulate, about the reduction in the uptake of German in schools, with the number of pupils taking higher German falling by 20 per cent since 2009, and a 50 per cent drop in the number of specialist German teachers. Given that Germany is our second-largest export market and

that we have large numbers of German tourists who, along with Americans, are the biggest spenders when they come to Scotland, is the minister concerned, as I am, about the impact on our economic potential?

Dr Allan: I am glad that Mr Fraser has taken the opportunity to clarify the views that he seemed to take in a committee meeting recently, when he described French as "a very minor language."

Like Mr Fraser, I support the teaching of all modern languages in schools. I have had contact with the German consulate and the cross-party group on Germany about some of the legitimate concerns that they have about ensuring that German remains to the fore in our schools.

The point about language diversity is well made. We are trying to increase the number of people who have access to modern languages in schools and we want there to be a broad range of languages that they can access, which would certainly include German.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I call Christian Allard.

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): Merci, Presiding Officer.

Does the minister agree that we should be supporting people to learn as many languages as possible, rather than undermining the teaching of specific languages, as Murdo Fraser did in relation to French in the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee last month?

Dr Allan: I sympathise with those sentiments. I am sorry to return to this, but I think that it must have come as a shock to the 200 million or so people across much of Europe, north Africa and other places who speak French to be told by Murdo Fraser that it is a "minor language". All that I can say—although I can only just say it—is that, *pour moi, la langue française est très importante*.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): Very good!

Universities (Increase in Students from Lanarkshire)

4. Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it will increase the number of students from Lanarkshire attending university. (S4O-04127)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): The most recently published data from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council shows that participation in higher education increased in North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire between 2011-12 and 2012-13 by 1

per cent and 3 per cent respectively. However, this Government wants to drive up participation in higher education further, particularly among more disadvantaged students.

Across North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire, there are eight schools in the FOCUS—focus on college and university study—west schools for higher education programme. That programme, which is funded through the Scottish funding council, aims to support an increase in the number of pupils from low-progression schools who enter higher education.

This Government's ambition is that every child, whatever their background, should have not just a better chance but an equal chance of attending university. As I said in answer to an earlier question, widening access to higher education is one of our key priorities.

Michael McMahon: The commission on widening access that was announced in the programme for government is welcome, because we must ensure that all children have an equal chance to go to university. However, does the cabinet secretary recognise that, although financial support for students is a major factor in addressing the problem, the facilities that students study in are also a significant component of any university's ability to attract and retain students?

The cabinet secretary will be aware of the high drop-out rate of students from Lanarkshire. Does she recognise the concerns that many educationists in my area express that the Scottish funding council's failure to support the University of the West of Scotland's plan for a new Hamilton campus will do nothing to improve access to that university for poorer students from Lanarkshire but will, in fact, make it much more difficult for the UWS to reduce the drop-out rate?

Angela Constance: The non-continuation rate in Scotland is improving and has decreased from 9 per cent of 2006-07 entrants to 6.6 per cent for 2011-12. I appreciate that the University of the West of Scotland has the highest non-continuation rate, but the rate is, nonetheless, improving.

Along with other MSPs from Lanarkshire, Mr McMahon has taken a keen interest in the University of the West of Scotland's proposals and desire to develop the site in Hamilton. The funding council has said that that is one of its top priorities for its 10-year investment strategy and that it will continue to work with the UWS so that the university can continue to develop the most robust business case possible and explore alternative sources of funding.

Mr McMahon discussed the matter in detail with my predecessor; I am happy to pick up any conversations with him and other members who have expressed concern about it.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): The Open University's young applicants in schools scheme—YASS—enables secondary 6 students to study at a higher level of education in preparation for university. The cabinet secretary will be aware that that not only increases the choice of subjects that are available to the students, but builds their confidence and encourages independent learning. In view of that, what action is the Scottish Government taking to safeguard the future funding of the YASS for the academic year 2015-16?

Angela Constance: I am happy to write to Margaret Mitchell on the detail of that. It is important that as many routes as possible are open to young people to pursue higher education. Certainly, the courses that the Open University provides have a valuable place in that spectrum of opportunities that we need to safeguard and protect.

Scottish Literature and Drama (Schools)

5. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it encourages the study of Scottish literature and drama in schools. (S4O-04128)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): Curriculum national guidance encourages teachers to use Scottish literature and drama as a rich part of young people's learning. That can be done through whole-school events, such as theatre productions and poetry competitions, and through the books that pupils choose from their school libraries and study in class.

The study of Scottish literature in the senior phase of secondary schools is also encouraged by the inclusion of a specific question on Scottish literature in the new higher and national 5 English qualifications.

Graeme Dey: The minister will be aware of the controversy over the decision of the rector of Webster's high school in my constituency to stop the play "Black Watch" being studied there as part of the higher drama course because, in her judgment, some of the content was inappropriate for 15-year-olds. Does the minister believe that it is appropriate to leave such decisions in the hands of individual senior teachers when the decisions will inevitably be subjective and could expose the teachers to what some might consider to be unfair criticism? How can we ensure a consistent approach—at least throughout individual local authority areas—to pupils' access to contemporary material so that staff are not placed in the difficult position in which the rector of Webster's high school has been placed?

Dr Allan: Graeme Dey will appreciate that there is a long tradition of allowing teachers in schools to make decisions about how they teach individual classes and the texts that they use. It is obviously quite legitimate for authors, public figures or any of us to express a view about that, but I make it clear that ministers do not set the texts that are used daily in schools. To pick up on the member's point, anyone who has a reason to complain about any such matters obviously has recourse to the school or, failing that, to the local authority.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): The minister will be aware of the recent investigation that revealed that an average of 70p per month per head is being spent on books in Scotland's schools, with a clear postcode lottery across local authority areas. Scottish novelist Shari Low has said that those figures represent a

"misplacement of priorities at the ... heart of Government policy"

and the Educational Institute of Scotland has called on the Scottish Government to invest additional funding. Can the minister make a commitment to address that issue?

Dr Allan: Mark Griffin can certainly expect further announcements in the future about our commitments in that respect. It is important to say that the Government is clearly committed not just to literature but to literacy in schools. We regard the provision of books as one of our priorities in that area. I certainly see literacy, love of books and provision of books as being closely linked together.

Occupational Segregation (Work with Educational Institutions)

6. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what work it is undertaking with educational institutions to tackle occupational segregation. (S4O-04129)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): Occupational segregation is a complex and deep-rooted problem, but we are determined to make progress. Action is taking place on a number of fronts. For example, tackling gender imbalance on college courses is a strategic priority for the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council. To that end, it is working with Skills Development Scotland and key stakeholders on a gender action plan. Tackling gender imbalance is also a top priority of the developing the young workforce programme, which has targets to increase the minority gender share in the most imbalanced college subject courses and modern apprenticeship frameworks.

SDS is also working with education partners including schools on a number of pilots that are

seeking to understand and tackle the causes of educational and occupational segregation.

Jackie Baillie: I thank the cabinet secretary for her response. In 2008-09, there were 28 female engineering apprentices, compared with 1,312 male apprentices. Last year, the figure had risen to a staggering 68 female engineering apprentices compared with 1,401 male apprentices. The increase being only eight more women a year does not suggest that the measures are working very effectively.

I am sure that the cabinet secretary shares my view that the pace of change is far too slow, so I ask her, based on her previous reply, what target she thinks should be in place, which the Government will promote, so that we achieve better female representation among engineering apprentices?

Angela Constance: It is fair to say that progress has not been quick enough in that area. That is why the Government most certainly wants to pick up the pace. Although full-time equivalence in terms of engineering students has improved, we want nonetheless to improve the number of young women who pursue such careers—and who, of course, pursue those careers through choice. It is important that we view our education system in its entirety. We discussed earlier how our whole education system has a role in improving widening access. Similarly, the whole system has a role in tackling gender segregation.

The developing the young workforce programme has a range of performance indicators, 11 of which relate to equality, with stretching targets underpinning them. The aspiration is that some of those targets will be met by 2020. As I said in my original answer, there is a focus on the most imbalanced courses—the ones in which there is a 75:25 or worse gender imbalance. For the first time, the funding council and SDS have additional reporting requirements and monitoring arrangements in this area. I am very hopeful about the seven early-adopter regions that are part of the developing the young workforce programme, and there are some very important pilots.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that there should be no such thing as a male job or female job, and that any perception that such unhealthy boundaries still exist needs to be changed?

Angela Constance: Yes, I do. It is, however, also important that we value the work to which women have traditionally been attracted. We want to enable young men and young women to make informed choices about opportunities that best fit their talents and aspirations. I am on record as

saying that I want more young men to pursue careers in childcare.

Occupational segregation is an important issue that we need to unpick and unravel because it not only contributes to the pay gap but affects the overall career progression of women.

Career Advice and Subject Choice (Scottish Qualifications Authority and Local Authority Discussions)

7. Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions have taken place between the SQA and local authorities regarding pupils' career advice and subject choice. (S4O-04130)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): The Scottish Qualifications Authority has regular meetings with local authorities in its role as Scotland's national qualifications body.

Through that, and through engagement with employers, SQA seeks to ensure that all its qualifications help learners to develop skills for learning, life and work. It also provides a range of specific work-related qualifications. However, advice on careers and subject choices is a matter for Skills Development Scotland, local authorities and individual schools.

Nanette Milne: The commission for developing Scotland's young workforce, chaired by Sir Ian Wood, highlighted the area of subject choice. Areas for improvement include timetabling and subject choice columns, which many participants reported as being a barrier that prevents young people from choosing the subjects that are most relevant to their future career pathways.

What discussions have taken place with local authorities in that regard? Will the minister agree to investigate that particular aspect of career advice and subject choice to ensure that our young people are given the best career opportunities in school?

Dr Allan: Nanette Milne raises a valuable point about the advice that is provided to young people. The direction of travel at present is towards providing that advice at an earlier age. The broad general education from first to third year in secondary schools now provides a much more positive environment in which choices can be made. It provides an opportunity for people to get the depth in subjects that allows them to make choices later in school that relate to their careers.

Above all, we must ensure that young people understand the breadth of choices available to them in the world of work, which is what we provide.

Post-study Work Visa (Discussions with the United Kingdom Government)

8. Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the UK Government regarding reintroducing the post-study work visa in Scotland. (S4O-04131)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government is committed to working with the UK Government, as the Smith report recommended, to ensure that a post-study work route is put in place to allow talented international students to remain in Scotland after graduation to gain further experience and contribute to our economy and society.

Scottish Government and UK Government officials met on 23 January, and again on 13 March, to discuss a potential post-study work route that would allow international students to remain in Scotland for a defined period of time after graduation.

Chic Brodie: Recent evidence to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee suggested that Scotland has a significant global presence in the software games industry, but that its growth is hampered partly by an inability to retain foreign information technology students who have qualified here as a result of the current visa application regime.

On that basis, does the cabinet secretary agree that the sooner visa management and approval are devolved fully to Scotland, the better?

Angela Constance: Yes, I agree with Chic Brodie, and I agree that the immigration system needs to respond to Scotland's specific needs. That means supporting economic growth by enabling our industries to attract and retain the best and the brightest global talent. It is time that the UK immigration system delivered that for Scotland.

There is cross-sectoral support for the reintroduction of post-study work visas. As a country, our higher education sector and our economy need to be connected to new and emerging economies in particular.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 9, from Claudia Beamish, has been withdrawn and an explanation has been provided.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention (Aberdeenshire)

10. Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met Aberdeenshire Council to discuss the recruitment and retention of teachers. (S4O-04133)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): The recruitment and retention of teachers was one of a number of matters that were discussed when I met representatives from Aberdeenshire Council on Monday 16 February to discuss the commitment to teacher numbers. Specifically, I met Councillor Isobel Davidson, Maria Walker, who is the director of education, and Jim Savege, the chief executive officer. Aberdeenshire Council wrote to the Deputy First Minister on 20 February to confirm that it will maintain teacher numbers.

Dennis Robertson: I thank the cabinet secretary for that information. She is probably aware that many of the schools in my constituency of Aberdeenshire West are quite rural. There used to be a threat that some smaller schools would be closed because of a lack of pupils. Obviously, we want to ensure that we do not have any school closures because of a lack of teachers in rural schools. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that everything possible will be done to retain teacher numbers in rural communities, as schools are the heart of such communities?

Angela Constance: Yes. The Government is particularly alert to the challenges for rural Scotland. For the past four consecutive years, student teacher intake targets for universities have been increased. The University of Aberdeen has received a disproportionate increase in the number of additional places for primary school teachers, taking its target intake up from 161 to 208. We are funding the University of Aberdeen to work more closely with local authorities to train existing employees, such as classroom assistants, through a part-time postgraduate diploma in education course that is done through distance learning. Those are employees who would not otherwise have given up their jobs to train full time as teachers. I know that Aberdeenshire Council has employees who are following that route into teaching.

South Lanarkshire Council Education Department (Meetings)

11. Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met South Lanarkshire Council's education department and what issues were discussed. (S4O-04134)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): Education Scotland and South Lanarkshire Council meet regularly to discuss a variety of issues related to education. The most recent meeting was on 23 February, when a number of issues were discussed, including inspection activity, activity to raise attainment and professional learning opportunities for senior

leaders. Scottish Government officials are due to meet South Lanarkshire Council on 14 April to discuss the monitoring of the council's commitment to maintain teacher numbers and the pupil teacher ratio.

Christina McKelvie: I commend the Scottish Government on securing the deal with South Lanarkshire Council to maintain teacher numbers and I welcome the forthcoming meeting in April. Is the minister aware that the council got round the issue of maintaining teacher numbers by cutting 16 teachers from nurseries and early learning centres, such as the excellent facility at Ferniegair in my constituency? Primary 1 class numbers will now rise above 18 and kids with the most pressing learning challenges are being left behind by the council leadership at policy level.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can I have a question, please?

Christina McKelvie: The leadership has a terrible track record on supporting the youngest and most vulnerable. Will the minister secure a meeting with the executive director—which he may have done—as it seems that the executive director feels that he should not have to meet me to discuss this important issue?

Dr Allan: I am aware that South Lanarkshire Council has agreed to cut a number of teachers from its early learning and childcare centres. It is for local authorities to take decisions on how best to deploy teachers. I understand the concerns that the member raises from a local point of view and I know that she will not be slow in making those concerns very well known.

Early Years Education

12. Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what value it places on early years education. (S4O-04135)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Fiona McLeod): The Scottish Government places a very high value on early years education and has made early learning and childcare a top priority. We have committed to developing high-quality flexible early learning and childcare that is affordable and accessible for all families, focusing initially on those who are most in need.

Since 2007, we have increased early learning and childcare to 600 hours for three and four-year-olds, which is more than anywhere else in the UK. We have extended the offer and will reach over a quarter of two-year-olds from August 2015. We have started planning towards our commitment to double the amount of early learning and childcare to 30 hours a week by the end of the next session of Parliament, if we are re-elected to government in 2016.

Gil Paterson: The minister will no doubt be aware that Labour-run West Dunbartonshire decided to cut the school week by 2.5 hours for primary 1 to primary 3 pupils and that it was only due to a massive campaign, powered by parents, that the decision was reversed. Will the minister outline what discussions she has had with local authorities to ensure that no other council will try to implement that devastating cut to our children's education?

Fiona McLeod: It is for individual local authorities to determine the length and structure of the school day. The statutory requirement is that schools must be open for 190 days, but best practice would be to consult pupils, parents and the community before making any changes to current structures.

Educational Attainment (Impact of Severe Deprivation)

13. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what the impact is of severe deprivation on a child's educational attainment. (S4O-04136)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): The impact of severe deprivation on attainment starts early. The growing up in Scotland study identified that by the age of five the gap in vocabulary development is already 13 months, and it grows throughout primary and secondary school. In the 10 per cent most deprived areas of Scotland, fewer than one in three pupils leave school with at least one higher; in the most affluent areas, more than four out of five do.

Until we close the attainment gap and ensure that all Scotland's children and young people get an equal chance in our schools, education will not fulfil its full potential as a societal good. That is why last month we launched the Scottish attainment challenge, backed up by the £100 million attainment Scotland fund, to bring a renewed focus and urgency to tackling the attainment gap, building on the progress that has been made in recent years.

Neil Bibby: The education secretary said that she wants to target her attainment fund at council areas with high levels of deprivation. She should be well aware that Renfrewshire has the most deprived area in the whole of Scotland, Ferguslie Park, yet, shockingly, Renfrewshire Council will not receive additional funding from the attainment fund. That is completely unjustifiable. Why does the education secretary believe that children from the poorest community in Scotland and other children in Renfrewshire should not benefit from the Scottish National Party Government's attainment fund, and will she reconsider her damaging decision?

Angela Constance: I understand local members' passion and their role in advocating for their local areas, and I am aware that there are deep pockets of deprivation in Paisley and Renfrewshire, as there are in other areas of Scotland, such as Fife. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Angela Constance: Perhaps if you could let me reply to your question with the courtesy that I afforded you, Mr Bibby, you might like the answer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, please speak through the chair. I have asked Neil Bibby to keep order.

Angela Constance: I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer. I take very seriously issues that members raise on local areas.

The member is right that we decided that seven councils—Glasgow, Dundee, Inverclyde, West Dunbartonshire, North Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire and North Lanarkshire—would benefit from the Scottish attainment challenge in the first year, focusing on those areas with the highest concentration of primary school children from households in the Scottish index of multiple deprivation deciles 1 and 2. We used a very clear methodology to work out how to use that resource in the first year. I am conscious that there are many areas in Scotland with deep pockets of deprivation. The Government and I will continue to work with local authorities to identify and respond to areas of concentrated need.

Non-teaching Staff (Schools)

14. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many non-teaching staff there are in schools and how this compares with 2013-14. (S4O-04137)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): In September 2014 there were 20,597 non-teaching staff in Scottish local authority schools, compared with 20,923 in September 2013.

Mark Griffin: The minister will recognise that science technicians play a vital role in preparing science equipment and lessons in schools across Scotland and that having access to practical science is essential for pupils. Is he concerned about the replies to a freedom of information request that I submitted showing that there has been a steady reduction in science technician numbers, and close to a 10 per cent reduction since this Government took office? Is he committed to reversing that trend and investing in the development of essential science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills?

Dr Allan: I understand the points that the member makes. In answer to his second point, I

would say that the Government is very committed to investing in STEM. That is why there are so many new school buildings going up with new science facilities in them. It is also why the Government recognises the central role of STEM in its curriculum. I am encouraged by the fact that more and more people are taking STEM subjects to the level of higher and that more people are getting STEM subject highers. Certainly additional staff in the schools play a role in that.

There has been an overall 1.6 per cent reduction in non-teaching staff in schools over the period that I mentioned, but I believe that the Scottish Government is deeply committed to science subjects.

Primary School Week Reduction (Falkirk)

15. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Falkirk Council regarding its proposal to reduce the primary school week from 25 to 22.5 hours in 2016-17. (S4O-04138)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): Falkirk Council wrote to the Deputy First Minister on 19 February 2015 to confirm its commitment to maintain teacher numbers. Falkirk Council has confirmed to us its 2016-17 provisional budget proposal to reduce the primary school week from 25 hours to 22.5 hours from August 2016, which will deliver a reduction in teacher costs. However, we understand that discussions are on-going locally regarding the implications of that change. As the member will be aware, statutory responsibility for the provision of education rests with individual local authorities, which includes the requirement that all schools must be open for 190 days.

Angus MacDonald: I am pleased to tell the cabinet secretary that, following my lodging of this question last week, Falkirk Council has quietly announced a U-turn on its ludicrous proposal to reduce primary school hours. I am sure that, like me, she welcomes the climb-down. Will she impress upon all local authorities that she meets that playing local politics with children's attainment, and creating anxiety among parents who want the best for their children, is not a clever tactic, even for the Labour-Tory coalition in Falkirk?

Angela Constance: Although statutory responsibility for the provision of education rests with local authorities, I do indeed welcome the change of heart. It is imperative that local authorities demonstrate to parents and to the wider community that any changes of this nature have an educational benefit and that their proposals are in the best interest of children. I have consistently made clear that the Government

would not support any steps taken by Falkirk Council or other councils to cut the length of the school week with a view to reducing teacher numbers. The Government has made it clear that we are committed to raising attainment and to closing the attainment gap. That is an aspiration that I believe we can all unite behind. I do not believe that reducing teacher numbers is the best way to achieve it.

College Students (Support)

16. James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to college students. (S4O-04139)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): College students are better supported than ever before. In the current academic year, we are investing a record £104 million in further education student support, with students getting bursaries of up to £93.03 per week. Unlike the United Kingdom Government, we have also retained the education maintenance allowance, which 35,515 school pupils and college students benefited from in 2012-13.

James Kelly: There is no doubt that getting young people into college and further education ultimately benefits them and has a knock-on effect for the Scottish economy. It is unfortunate that that has been undermined by the Scottish National Party's cuts to college places and this year's £7 million reduction in student support. Does the cabinet secretary therefore welcome Scottish Labour's policy announcement of support for higher education bursaries to the tune of £58 million, which will benefit communities and young people throughout Scotland and result in many more skilled people graduating from college?

Angela Constance: James Kelly's proposals very much depend on there being a Labour Government elected in May. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Angela Constance: We will wait and see. I am not one to speculate based on the polls, but my priority is to keep out a Tory Government. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. We must hear the cabinet secretary.

Angela Constance: It is interesting that, given Ed Miliband's announcement this week, he seems to be a little lacklustre on that commitment. We would put aside our party interests in the interests of the country to lock out a Tory Government. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. Cabinet secretary, can I hurry you along? We are well over time.

Angela Constance: Okay. Thank you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. I apologise to the members whose questions we did not reach and to all those who wanted to ask supplementary questions, but we must move to the next item of business.

In-work Poverty

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-12678, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on an end to in-work poverty.

14:41

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I am pleased to open our debate. The Scottish Green Party is campaigning for a £10 minimum wage for all by 2020, because no one should be expected to work for a wage that keeps them in poverty. That is the point of the debate; that is why we are campaigning.

During the referendum, we had plans for a more equal, jobs-rich and locally based economy, where work paid well. That principle is not divisive. I know that all MSPs agree that poverty is a bad thing, but do their parties' plans add up to putting an end to in-work poverty?

The Greens' £10 minimum wage will ensure that no one works for a wage that keeps them in poverty. We have for too long subsidised employers that pay poverty wages. Many of those employers are large multinationals that earn millions for shareholders, while their staff are paid poverty wages and kept off the breadline by public money. That corporate welfare must stop.

While the majority of children and working-age adults in relative poverty live in working households, at the other end of the pay scale, there are people earning millions of pounds. Chief executive officers in the FTSE 100 earn 400 times the average wage. Are those executives 400 times more entitled than the average worker? I do not think so. That inequality is profoundly damaging for society and wellbeing.

Ending poverty is inextricably linked to ending the vast gulf of inequality. Political scientist Susan George tells us to

"Study the rich ... not the poor".

The Greens' plans will link CEOs' pay to the wellbeing of their lowest-paid employees. A maximum wage ratio for companies would mean that any rise in CEO pay required a rise for people on the lowest pay. That is only fair.

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): Does the member accept that many board directors can enhance their pay in many ways, including through share options and all sorts of other, unquantifiable things, which might well scupper such a policy?

Alison Johnstone: That point is well made and should be taken into account. It means that

directors' wages are larger than they appear to be on their pay packet.

The Greens will introduce a wealth tax on the wealthiest 1 per cent—in other words, people who are worth more than £2.5 million.

Wage ratios and progressive taxation will tackle pay inequality, but vast differences in wealth need to be tackled, too. Recent Office for National Statistics data tells us that the richest 1 per cent of British households have the same amount of wealth as the poorest 55 per cent of the population. The amount of wealth that is held by the top 0.1 per cent has risen by 57 per cent over four years, whereas total UK household wealth has risen by only 12 per cent. Our wealth tax will tackle that drastic inequality and pay for public services.

The Green Party's plan for social security is based on the idea that, as a society, we should treat those who are in need with compassion, rather than sanction and punish the poor. The post-world war two generation who built the welfare state suffered together, fought fascism together and mourned together. Those people's collective will was that they should enjoy the benefits of peace together, but the welfare cuts have put people deeper into poverty.

It is a gendered austerity, too. Treasury data shows us that women have been hit hardest. Women are much more likely to be lone parents, they are the biggest users of public services and they are more likely to be affected by public sector job losses, pension changes and wage freezes. It is clear that any party that continues to talk about cuts has not been listening to Scotland's women.

We will make the case for rebuilding a universal system without a poverty trap for people in work. We want to have a welfare system that does not subsidise poverty wages, that removes the stigma of benefits and that promotes equality. Green plans for a citizens income are emblematic of that approach. The Scottish Government's expert working group on welfare recognised that a citizens income is one of the two main options for the future of welfare; it is the one that takes a universal approach and abandons means testing and complexity.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Would Alison Johnstone care to reflect on how full fiscal autonomy and the ripping out of £4 billion to £6 billion of public money would impact on her vision?

Alison Johnstone: It is fair to say that, as part of the United Kingdom—we find ourselves in that situation at the moment—we need a system that is fair and sustainable.

The introduction of a citizens income is not a change to be made lightly. It will require a reform

programme to replace almost all benefits apart from disability payments with a simple, regular payment to everyone—children, adults and pensioners. It will require consensus from a broad coalition of civic society, but it is a transformative idea, and the beginnings of such a system already exist with child benefit and state pensions.

This week, the Scottish Government published analysis of severe and extreme poverty that describes how people in the lowest income bands have been pushed deeper into poverty by coalition cuts. A little over an hour ago, George Osborne sat down after confirming the Tories' ideological obsession with pursuing their programme of austerity. The UK budget has just been announced. I doubt that many of us will have digested the whole lot, but the austerity ideology is clear.

I am pleased that the issue of apprenticeship wages has been raised. Some young people up to the age of 25 are working 30 hours a week for a monthly wage packet of £327.60. The UK Government plans to raise that hourly wage by 57p, to £3.30. Any rise is welcome, but not all sectors feel that way—even that small rise has disappointed the Confederation of British Industry. I recall that, during the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's inquiry into Scotland's financial future, the then boss of CBI Scotland said:

"Inequality is an abstract term".—[*Official Report, Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee*, 2 April 2014; c 4259.]

It also suggests that we are on the right track if the free-market think tank the Institute of Economic Affairs says that the Low Pay Commission is being used

"as a vehicle to reduce inequality".

In October, the national minimum wage will be increased by 20p, to £6.70. That, too, is welcome, but is it enough? That increase has already been criticised for not tackling in-work poverty. The minimum income standard aims to define what households need in order to have a

"minimum socially acceptable standard of living".

The reference rate that it suggests for the lowest socially acceptable standard of living is £9.20.

The Scottish Government analysis that I mentioned earlier is unequivocal. It says that, although employment remains a protection, it is

"no longer a guarantee against poverty".

Our plans for a £10 minimum wage by 2020 are designed to really make poverty wages history. Small businesses will need support, and all businesses deserve time to plan. The change will be introduced in steps, but the days of big

business paying poverty wages with the taxpayer making up the difference must stop.

Another aspect to consider is the picture across Scotland. My city of Edinburgh is at the top for paying at least the living wage but, in rural areas such as Angus and Dumfries and Galloway and in post-industrial areas such as Ayrshire, between a quarter and a third of people earn less than the living wage. We need to spread the creation of jobs throughout Scotland as well as improve public transport and childcare to ensure that people can get to work, education and training.

Of course, low wages are not the whole story, but successive Governments' actions have allowed—even promoted—the slide into a low-skill, low-wage economy. For example, the Scottish Government gave Amazon a £4.3 million grant, with a further offer of £6.3 million. Last year, Amazon paid just £4.2 million in United Kingdom taxes, despite selling goods worth £4.3 billion. The excuse that ministers have given is that Amazon creates jobs, but let us examine that claim carefully. How many jobs were promised, compared with what has been delivered? Are those jobs well paid, satisfying and secure? Moreover, what jobs have been lost as a result of such a big company being helped to dominate the marketplace, and how comfortable are we that its profits are not recirculating in the local economy? We need investment in sustainable industries that pay decent wages, such as great-quality food producers, clean chemical sciences, the digital and creative industries, medical and life sciences, construction, engineering and the low-carbon energy industry.

We have food banks in a country with no shortage of food and fuel poverty in one of the planet's most energy-rich countries. Let us take the steps that we need to take to redress the balance, pay all a fair wage and become the kind of Scotland that we aspire to be.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with deep concern that the majority of children and working-age adults in poverty live in working households; believes that in-work poverty has a profoundly damaging impact on Scottish society and its economy; recognises that poverty wages require to be subsidised through the welfare system in order to meet people's most basic needs; considers that the purpose of social security should be to maintain human wellbeing, not to subsidise cheap labour for the benefit of employers and multinational corporations, and considers that the level of poverty and inequality at work must be addressed by an incoming UK Government with a £10 minimum wage by 2020, maximum ratios between highest and lowest pay within organisations, a wealth tax on the assets of the top 1% and a move toward a citizens' income instead of the punitive and humiliating welfare system currently in place.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Many thanks. I remind members who wish to participate that they should press their request-to-speak button.

14:51

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham): In the programme for government, we set out a range of cross-portfolio policies that were aimed at reducing inequality, including actions on fair work such as our commitment as an employer to pay the living wage and, as a Government, increasing funding to the Poverty Alliance to grow the number of accredited living wage employers. The programme for government also emphasises our commitment to empowering communities by handing over decisions on key issues to them, and to making Government open and accessible through public participation in the decisions we make that affect people. That should also cover the issue that we are discussing this afternoon.

We have committed to poverty proofing all our new policies and legislation through poverty impact assessments whenever we make a change, and we will appoint an independent adviser on poverty and inequality, who will hold public events with the First Minister to raise awareness of the reality of living in poverty, make recommendations to the Government on how collectively we should respond and, indeed, hold the Government to account on its performance. We want the Scottish Government's work to be more open and accessible, and those measures will go some way towards achieving that. We also want to build on the momentum that has built up as a result of the debate that Scotland has been having over the past few years.

However, a lot needs to be done, and Alison Johnstone has already touched on a great many of the things that we will all no doubt wish to talk about while not necessarily agreeing on the specific ways forward. In 2012-13, 820,000 people in Scotland were living in poverty, and more than half a million of them were living in severe poverty. People tend to assume that those who are in work are okay, but although being in employment remains a protection against poverty, it is no longer a guarantee against it. Indeed, the last decade has seen a steady increase in working poverty.

While the risk of severe poverty increases significantly as household work intensity decreases, even full-time employment is not necessarily a protection against severe poverty. In 2012-13, nearly a third of working-age adults and four in 10 children in severe poverty lived in households with at least one person in full-time employment. Although a higher statutory minimum wage would certainly contribute to reducing in-work poverty, it is important to consider other issues beyond wage levels that drive such poverty.

Tackling in-work poverty is not just about increasing pay levels, although that is clearly one of the most important ways of addressing the issue; it is about ensuring that those in low-skilled work have the opportunity to develop their skills and to progress in employment. Unfortunately, that is not happening in a lot of places.

The First Minister has already called on the UK Government to increase the work allowance on the basis that

“if you receive universal credit, and pay income tax, a £600 increase to the personal allowance in the coming budget”—

she was not arguing against that—

“would boost your income by £42. But the same increase to the work allowance would boost your income by £390.”

That would clearly make a significantly greater difference.

I welcome the increases to the national minimum wage that the United Kingdom Government announced yesterday, of course, particularly the larger-than-recommended increase to the apprentice rate, which will be widely welcomed. However, I am not sure that that goes far enough; it should go a lot further than that. I have written to Vince Cable to reaffirm the Scottish Government’s view that there is no justification for continuing to support the apprenticeship rate of the national minimum wage at £2.73 and to highlight that no one, no matter their age, should be working for less than £3 an hour, which is what has happened. I have also called on the public sector in Scotland to ensure that all modern apprentices are paid at least the UK adult minimum wage or, where affordable, the living wage if they are doing an equivalent job to that of someone on that level of pay. I will continue to press the UK Government to scrap the apprenticeship rate and to address the inequality and unfairness in young people’s pay.

We cannot, of course, ignore the effects of changes to the employment landscape over the past few years. There has been an increase in the use of exploitative zero-hours contracts. Not all zero-hours contracts are unwelcome to the individuals who sign up to them, but there has been a massive increase in the exploitative use of them. We need to look at that and address how we can deal with it.

The qualifying period for making an unfair dismissal claim has been increased from one year to two years, and the introduction of fees for employment tribunals has resulted in a dramatic fall of 65 per cent in the number of cases in Scotland.

A combination of factors is contributing to a culture of fear in too many workplaces. People

fear to speak up in case they revert to zero hours that week.

Neil Findlay: One of the issues that I have raised with the minister before is the use of umbrella contracts. Last week, the Welsh Assembly issued a policy advice note on that issue for its public procurement process. Will the minister be in a position to do that very soon?

Roseanna Cunningham: We saw what the Welsh Government issued, and officials are currently looking at that very carefully. We are always open to the possibility that good practice elsewhere can be copied here, but in the past, once we have looked very carefully at things that have been claimed, they have turned out not be quite as has been advertised. If Neil Findlay will allow me and the officials just a little time to scrutinise that note carefully, I will come back to him, as I promised when we had our meeting on the issue.

We fully recognise that the promotion of good-quality, well-rewarded jobs that foster greater innovation, co-operation and workplace democracy is central to eradicating in-work poverty. That is why we committed in the programme for government to establishing a fair work convention that will provide us with independent advice on how to develop, promote and sustain a fair employment and workplace framework for Scotland. An announcement on the membership of that convention is coming very soon. It will be at the forefront of ensuring that there are more well-paid jobs at all levels throughout the public, private and third sectors.

When we talk about issues to do with wages and fair work, as I did this morning at the national economic forum, we should realise that a huge number of employers out there really are on board with the discussion and conversation. We need to engage with them on those issues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you must draw to a close.

Roseanna Cunningham: It is very important to engage across the board.

It is clear that there is a great deal that can be done. By working together, we can have an impact. As a Government, we have already taken action to tackle in-work poverty, but, as always, we can do more.

I move amendment S4M-12678.2, to leave out from “with a £10” to end and insert:

“; is further concerned regarding the damaging impact that £6 billion of welfare cuts will have on some of the most vulnerable people in society; recognises the Scottish Government’s commitment to tackling inequalities and promoting fair work practices through its establishment of the Fair Work Convention and the Scottish Business Pledge; believes that the minimum wage has been eroded

by the last two UK governments and should be increased in real terms and demands an increase for apprentices to the same as the national minimum wage for under-18s, and calls for a significant increase in the work allowance to help ensure that those in work have a better chance of lifting themselves and their families out of poverty.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that we are tight for time this afternoon.

14:58

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): The low-pay and insecure job culture that we see at present is like a cancer in our society. It damages people. It eats away at their pride, relationships, morale, and health and wellbeing. It is not just bad for individuals; it is bad for society and our economy.

That is no accident. Over the past 30 or so years, the share of wages from gross domestic product for working people has reduced at the same time as massive concentrations of wealth have gone to the rich and the super-rich. That inequality is what is supposed to happen when the market is left unchallenged. In a recent lecture, Professor Prem Sikka of the University of Essex rejected the term “austerity”. He called it the organised humiliation of working people. It is characterised by underemployment, low pay and insecurity, with temporary and zero-hours contracts a key feature.

We see 414,000 of our fellow Scots living on less than the living wage of £7.85 an hour and 90,000 working on zero-hours contracts, many of whom are young people just setting out on their working lives. At the same time, eye-watering profits are being made by some of the world’s biggest and most wealthy companies, such as Google, Amazon, Starbucks and Apple. Those companies practise tax avoidance on an industrial scale, sucking vast sums of money out of the wage packets of the poor and the budgets of the services that we rely on.

That organised humiliation proves again that this is not a moral economy. It is not a just or remotely fair economic system; it is a thoroughly immoral, unjust and exploitative economic model. As politicians, either we can do something about it, take our responsibility seriously and act to challenge and change that system, or we can shrug our shoulders, blame someone else—anyone else—and look the other way.

Throughout our history, the organised labour movement has led with action on the big issues for people in the workplace. Holiday pay, sick pay, pensions, health and safety legislation, equal pay, trade union rights and the national minimum wage were all won, not because of the generosity of the rich and powerful but because working people campaigned for change with their industrial and

political representatives, and that change was delivered. We need the same now.

The Scottish Government can no longer hide on some of those issues. Yes, of course, significant elements of welfare and the setting of the national minimum wage are reserved but, as we have seen with previous Administrations, change can occur if there is the political will.

At our low-pay summit yesterday, we heard Mark Macmillan, the leader of Renfrewshire Council, explain how his council addressed low pay in the social care sector. Now every one of the council’s care staff, whether they are employed directly or contracted, is paid the living wage. They all get travelling time and their uniforms are all supplied by their employer; the workers no longer have to pay for them.

If that Labour council can do it, there is no reason—no excuse whatsoever—for the Scottish Government not to do the same through negotiation and contract drafting across the public sector. That would give an increase of up to £2,500 a year to around 50,000 workers who are working on contracts that were issued by the public sector but who are being paid less than £7.85 an hour.

The Scottish Government must act. It can act and it can do better than ministers just rolling their eyes and pointing the finger at somebody else. Last year, the Government rejected our amendment to the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill that would have ensured that all those who are working on public contracts would be paid at least the living wage. It also rejected our amendment to prevent companies from hiring people on exploitative zero-hours contracts. How does that fit with the Government’s stated objective of making work fairer?

The reality is that if we are to see change, it will again come through the organised labour movement. Labour will redistribute through raising the top rate of tax and ending millionaires’ tax breaks. Labour will introduce a mansion tax and a bankers’ bonus tax and clamp down on tax avoidance; it will close off the loopholes that allow the exploitation of agency workers, which the Scottish Government actually uses when employing its own people. Labour will tackle zero-hours contracts and use procurement legislation and the tax system to see workers paid the living wage.

The Scottish Government can act on those issues. Unfortunately, it chooses not to.

I move amendment S4M-12678.3, to leave out from “recognises” to end and insert

“notes that the Scottish Government’s own statistics show that, under the last Labour administration, the number of people in in-work poverty fell by 30,000 and the number

in absolute poverty fell by over half a million; recognises that, since 2006-07, the number of people in in-work poverty has increased by 50,000; notes that 414,000 people across Scotland would benefit from Scottish Labour's plans to extend the payment of the living wage, incentivising more businesses to pay the living wage by using Make Work Pay contracts and increasing the national minimum wage to £8; believes that these actions, alongside the banning of exploitative zero-hours contracts, will improve the lives of working people across Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to amend the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 to extend the payment of the living wage to public sector contracts."

15:04

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con):

People who work hard for their families, try to put some money aside and make the right choices deserve reward and the security of a decent standard of living. Creating the conditions for hard-working people to enjoy what they earn is one of our most important duties. I acknowledge that in-work poverty is a concern, but poverty for those who are not in work at all is also a concern.

I will first say something on the link between poverty and work. I have little doubt that work remains the most sustainable route out of poverty for most people. That is well reflected in the Scottish Government's most recent publication on poverty, which was released earlier this week. It recognises that those who are most severely hit by poverty are likely to be those who are

"furthest from the labour market",

with workless households tending towards the lowest income deciles. Although it acknowledges that, as the cabinet secretary said, employment is not "a guarantee against poverty", it concedes that it is "a protection". It also identifies, starkly:

"For families not in employment, there is little opportunity to increase income."

Supporting people back to work must therefore be central to any plan to reduce poverty overall. To me, it is a deeply disturbing poverty of ambition that says that all that we can do for the worst-off in our society is to modestly boost benefits.

Let us put aside the notion in the Greens' motion that our welfare system is "punitive". It is a system that makes 258,000 payments to people in Scotland every day, spending more than £22 billion to help the poorest in our society in the past year.

Alison Johnstone: I have a constituent who was asked to be both at the jobcentre and at an interview for a training course at the same time, which resulted in him having his benefits stopped instantly. He had to apply for a hardship loan and was placed in truly dire straits. Surely that is punitive.

Annabel Goldie: That is certainly illustrative of an element of very bad practice in the system. I do not dispute that, but that is not to say that the system as a whole is not a workable and welcome source of support.

I believe that a strong and growing economy that provides more jobs gives opportunity to those who are seeking work and greater choice to those who are in work. However, let us look at some of the specific suggestions to address in-work poverty. The motion asks us to consider a £10 minimum wage by 2020. As the cabinet secretary said, it was announced yesterday that the minimum wage is to rise in line with the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission. Indeed, the chancellor said today that the objective is an £8 minimum wage by the end of the decade, and that is to be welcomed.

The system that we have is one of progressive rises linked to what the economy can reasonably afford, based on recommendations not by Government but by an independent body. With now-visible economic growth, it is reasonable to anticipate that the minimum wage will rise. It is not reasonable to pluck a figure out of the air without the slightest attempt to model its economic impact.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the member give way?

Annabel Goldie: No. I am pushed for time. I am sorry.

Of course it is right to challenge businesses, where they are able to do so, to pay their employees fairly. The living wage is a positive concept that we encourage where it is affordable. Businesses that can pay the living wage should pay the living wage.

However, we can also provide a model of childcare that works better than the current one—a model that is flexible in location and in times of provision and which meets parents' actual needs. We do not have that model in Scotland, and we should have it.

We can also help people who are in work to get more of their earnings back. Someone who is working full time on the minimum wage has already had their income tax bill cut in half. I want to see as much of working people's pay as possible go into their pockets. In Scotland, the increases in the personal tax allowance have cut taxes for 2.3 million people and taken 261,000 out of tax altogether.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Annabel Goldie: I am sorry. I am pushed for time.

The further increases announced by the chancellor today will mean even more money being kept by the earner. That is real help.

The UK Government has reduced the cost of energy bills. That is also real help. The cost of transport, which is a major area of spend for working people on low incomes, has been lowered, with fuel duty 20p a litre lower than it would have been under the previous Government's plans, and a further fuel duty cut has been announced today.

We can do more in this Parliament. We can make social housing work better to support people; we can support further education, which has been so drastically cut in recent years, to improve skills and enhance job opportunities and choice; and we can provide help and advice to people who are underemployed. Those are sustainable ways of reducing poverty.

All of that depends on the framework of a productive economic plan that supports growth and investment and creates jobs. I am delighted to say that that is exactly what we have at present in the UK.

I move amendment S4M-12678.1, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"acknowledges that increasing employment, growing the economy and creating opportunity remains the most sustainable way of moving people out of poverty; recognises the opportunities and positive outcomes associated with regular employment for those who can work; welcomes the drop in unemployment and rise in employment under the UK Government; believes that the additional 187,000 new jobs created in Scotland since 2010 have been effective in providing more families with the security of a regular wage; notes the phased increases in the income tax personal allowance since 2010, which by next year will have enhanced incomes by reducing the tax bills for 2.32 million people in Scotland and will have taken 261,000 of the lowest paid out of paying income tax altogether; appreciates the increase in the national minimum wage that was recently announced by the UK Government in line with the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission, which is likely to be the largest real-terms increase since 2007, and acknowledges that such improvements can only be sustained by a responsible macroeconomic policy."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We turn to the open debate. I ask for speeches of four minutes, please.

15:09

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I very much identify with the tenor of the independent and Green motion. It is ironic that we are having this debate on budget day. Members can call me cynical, but I suspect that the gap between the rich and the poor will get even greater. I say to Neil Findlay that it is regrettable that, under Labour

Governments over the years, I have also seen the gap between rich and poor getting greater.

No one in work should need to apply to the benefits system to enable them to meet the level of the living wage. In principle that is wrong, and in practice it means that the state—you and I—are subsidising employers, which is just plain wrong. I congratulate the SNP Government, which is paying all Scottish Government employees across central Government, its agencies and the national health service the living wage—the living wage, not the statutory minimum wage. Of course, our powers in this Parliament are so limited that we can apply only elastoplast and not the invasive surgery that is needed, as Neil Findlay said, to deal with the cancer of poverty, both in work and out of work.

In the Midlothian part of my constituency, 15.6 per cent of those who are in work earn less than £7 an hour. That figure comes from "Addressing Child Poverty in Midlothian: Action Plan 2012–17". Average weekly earnings for Midlothian residents, both male and female, are currently significantly less than both the Scottish and British averages, and for women the picture is worse.

The picture in the Borders is even worse than in Midlothian. In the Borders, 19.7 per cent of workers earn less than £7 per hour, because although employment rates are high in the Borders, there is a lack of well-paid work, both historically and currently—and, even then, as we all know, work is not a route out of poverty. There are even more barriers for people entering employment—for example, if they have a disability or are carers. Indeed, in terms of the lowest pay, Scottish Borders Council ranks 28th out of the 32 local authorities.

Those are the facts and statistics, but people are more than statistics. They are individuals trapped in low-paid jobs and zero-hours contracts, driven to apply to the state for financial assistance.

As for the benefits system, people must almost have a degree in mathematics to make a claim. There are 42 pages on the HM Revenue & Customs website as a guide to the working tax credit and the child tax credit. Applicants certainly need stamina—or perhaps desperation will get them there. Even if they do claim and receive payment, it can all go skew-whiff, and months or years later the tax man could come knocking at their door looking to claw back some so-called overpayment.

Added to the stress of being underpaid, and hence undervalued—which is key—people's problems are compounded by a benefits system that will grind them down even further. I take issue with Annabel Goldie's claim that the example

given by Alison Johnstone is only one illustration. Such instances are too commonplace.

Still, people can always be referred to the local food bank, although having to get provisions has nothing to do with poverty and benefits cuts, according to David Mundell, our only Tory MP in Scotland. He refutes the evidence from MSPs, academics, charities and religious organisations of a link between welfare reform and the use of food banks, as brought out in a report by Holyrood's Welfare Reform Committee. There we have it: in Scotland, poverty, both in work and out of work, has nothing to do with Westminster's policies. We have David Mundell's word for that.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Will Christine Grahame take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: I am in the last 30 seconds of my speech.

As for the Labour amendment, I have a lot in common with Neil Findlay's sentiments, but Labour hitched itself to the Tory political wagon during the referendum campaign, when this Parliament had the opportunity to have macroeconomic power, to move towards equality and to try to eradicate poverty.

Neil Findlay: Full fiscal autonomy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Christine Grahame: Labour blocked that and kept the Tories in power.

Neil Findlay: Four billion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Christine Grahame: The Scots have not forgotten and they have not forgiven.

Neil Findlay: Cuts, cuts, cuts—£4 billion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

15:13

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): If Christine Grahame is looking for evidence that Government can act to reduce poverty, it is the previous Labour Government that she needs to look to. Under that Administration, 200,000 children in Scotland were lifted out of poverty as a direct result of Government policies—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Alex Rowley: More than 1 million pensioners were lifted out of poverty as a direct result of Government policies. The sad thing is that, between 2011 and 2013, the number of Scots living in poverty has gone up by some 15 per cent because of policies that come directly from a Tory Government in Westminster and, sadly, the

inaction of an SNP Government in Scotland. That is a fact. What we do not have in Scotland is an anti-poverty strategy that is driven by Government through all departments and into local government and local communities. That is what is lacking, and that is what is needed if we want to go forward.

I was struck by the briefing from NHS Health Scotland, which said:

"Reducing in-work poverty is likely to have direct and indirect positive consequences for population health and health inequalities. For example:

Increasing the National Minimum Wage to ... £7.20 per hour is estimated to result in 77,000 years of life gained and prevent 56,000 hospitalisations among the Scottish population ... Low income is associated with poorer mental health for adults ... in Scotland."

The briefing goes on to say:

"Childhood poverty is associated with poorer social, emotional and educational development".

If we are serious about it, an anti-poverty strategy has to involve tackling inequalities in our communities.

The briefing from Citizens Advice Scotland emphasised the fact that we are talking about real people experiencing real difficulties day in, day out. Let me give one example. Neil Findlay's amendment mentions procurement, and I will refer to procurement that is linked to local authorities, and in particular to the home care and care home sectors. Across Scotland, there are 916 care homes, which provide 38,645 beds to 33,636 residents. Seventy per cent of care home workers work in the private and independent sectors. I remember being very proud, as the leader of Fife Council, when we introduced the living wage, although I realised that the majority of care home workers in Fife did not work in the council sector. The workers who worked in the council sector caring for people were being paid well above the living wage, but the majority of care workers across Scotland in the private sector are being paid the minimum wage.

That is an area where we could act. We could focus on it, and we could act now if the Government was willing to do so. We should do that. We should work together with local government.

I ask members to imagine achieving a living wage in Scotland. It would be a major achievement to lead the rest of the UK by bringing about a living wage. We have to start some place, and we could do that if the Scottish Government had the political will to work with local government and to look at procurement.

There is no better place to start than with care homes. How much is a care worker worth? I am talking about people who care for our elderly when they need support and care. Right now, the

majority of care workers are worth no more than the minimum wage. We have to address that. As a minimum, we should seek the living wage. We could achieve that.

That is the point of having debates such as this one. If we are to have such debates, we need to consider what action we can take to bring government together and generate the political will to drive a strategy that will move us from talking about the issues to actually doing something about them. Let us work together. Let us aim for a living wage across Scotland and unite on that.

15:18

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I am very grateful to the Greens for the motion. It covers far too many things to deal with in one afternoon, so I will have to pick just two or three.

I will start with the idea that Tory policy is doing something to reduce inequalities. Of course, the Tory policy that we are living with at the moment is doing absolutely nothing to reduce inequalities. However, I have just heard Alex Rowley telling me that he has finally understood why reducing inequalities is what it is all about: there are huge benefits to it, well beyond financial ones. I welcome one more to the fold of people who understand that.

Evidence that Tory policy is not doing anything to reduce inequality comes from a report that the Welfare Reform Committee discussed only last week. Its authors, Christina Beatty and Steve Fothergill, turned up from Sheffield Hallam University. Their report states:

“Families with dependent children are one of the biggest losers ... In all, families with children lose an estimated £960m a year—approaching two-thirds of the overall financial loss in Scotland.”

Crucially for this debate, the report also said that

“Nearly half the reduction in benefits might be expected to fall on in-work households.”

Alex Johnstone: Will Nigel Don acknowledge that that statistic includes families in which there is a member earning a wage of over £60,000 a year and which will have lost their child benefit?

Nigel Don: I accept that there are all manner of complications; I am about to tell Alex Johnstone about some of them. However, before I get to that, I want to deal with the issue of the Scottish Government and the living wage. Let us be absolutely clear: the Scottish Government is doing what it can on the living wage, and I hope that others will talk about that. I want to put on the record the words of former European Union Commissioner Michel Barnier. I cannot give the entire context, but he said:

“the Court held in the Laval case that requirements regarding the level of wage payable to posted workers may not go beyond the mandatory rules for minimum protection provided for by the Directive. A ‘living wage’ set at a higher level than the UK’s minimum wage is unlikely to meet this requirement.”

Neil Findlay: Will Nigel Don give way?

Nigel Don: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

Before I turn to the other issue that I want to address, I note that, with regard to inequality, on the Gini index—which is well worth looking up—Scotland does better than the rest of the UK, principally because of things that the Scottish Government is doing.

On marginal tax rates—or what appears to be the marginal tax rate—the rich seem to have a lot of difficulty in realising that they should perhaps pay 50 per cent in tax at the top end. I am grateful to the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, which came up with an entirely credible example in which someone on a low wage pays a 73 per cent marginal tax rate. I would like to draw members’ attention to it. The example concerns a single person with no children who works 40 hours a week and earned £10,000 during 2013-14. He is entitled to maximum working tax credit—the ACCA gives the figures for that—as his income exceeds the threshold of £6,420. The ACCA then provides a calculation that shows that if he receives a pay increase of £1,000, he will pay an extra £730 in tax and national insurance, which is a marginal tax rate of 73 per cent for someone who is earning not very much at all.

I accept Alex Johnstone’s point that there are complications in such calculations—tax credits, child benefits and so on—but could we please sort out the system? A marginal tax rate of 73 per cent on an income of £10,000 is simply not acceptable.

15:22

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): As Nigel Don did, I thank the Greens and the independent members of the Parliament for committing what for them is limited and therefore precious debating time to the subject matter. We might not all agree on how in-work poverty has reached the scale that it has reached or how it should be tackled, but across much of the chamber—if we set aside the usual tribalism—there is on this issue more that unites us than divides us.

Therefore, it is good to have the opportunity to shine a light on the disgrace that is in-work poverty—and what a disgrace it is. Some 53 per cent of adults and 110,000 children who live in poverty reside in households in which at least one person works; 18 per cent of employees—more than 400,000 people—in Scotland are paid less

than the living wage; and as Alison Johnstone highlighted, the situation is worse in rural areas, where the costs of transport, heating and so on are higher.

It is incumbent on all of us to push the issue of the living wage as far as we can, and to be seen to push it. The Scottish Government has taken a lead by ensuring that all staff who are covered by public sector pay policy receive at least the living wage, and it has brought influence to bear beyond that where it can—most notably in the new ScotRail franchise. Parliament has followed by becoming an accredited living-wage employer, joining more than 140 others.

A number of MSPs—including me, Linda Fabiani, Christina McKelvie, Drew Smith, Willie Rennie, Jim Hume and Neil Findlay—have gone down that road as individual parliamentarians who employ people within this institution. I urge colleagues who have not already done so to join those of us who have and to reinforce the message that paying at least the living wage—which is currently 21 per cent higher than the minimum wage, although the latter is, of course, to increase by 20p an hour come October—should become the norm. I suspect that the vast majority of MSPs, if not all of us, would qualify to become accredited, so why not make it official? It might be only a relatively small gesture, but it is one that plays its part.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (Ind): What does Graeme Dey have to say about use in this Parliament of interns who do not get paid?

Graeme Dey: All I can say is that that is not a practice that I support.

The Scottish living wage accreditation scheme—which will soon celebrate its first birthday—not only ensures a fairer wage for employees, but promotes to employers the benefits of paying the living wage. I did not need to be told of the benefits that might be in it for me as an employer: as the other participants in the scheme have no doubt done, I simply viewed it as being not only the right thing to do, but as supporting a message that is worthy of endorsement.

However, human nature being what it is, especially in tough economic times large-scale employers will want to know that there is something in it for them if they do the right thing: there is. Research indicates that 80 per cent of employers that have introduced the living wage believe that it has enhanced the quality of their employees' work. Employers also report a quarter less absenteeism than there was before they introduced the living wage, and 66 per cent of employers think that it makes a difference to recruiting and retaining staff. That message needs

to be spread, because there are too many employers paying the minimum wage or employing—if that is the right word—people on zero-hours contracts.

As other members no doubt were, I was struck by two examples of the impact of zero-hours contracts that Citizens Advice Scotland offered ahead of the debate: the laundry worker who was laid off for three weeks due to a mechanical breakdown and had to be referred for food-parcel support, and the individual who had only three days' work in a month, which earned him only £150, and who was also directed to the local food bank. How can that be considered acceptable in this day and age?

15:26

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate, but it is one of the debates to which—I was going to say “sadly” but I suppose that I should say “in reality”—we each bring different experiences, backgrounds and understanding of the situation that we are describing.

It is ironic that we have again heard Labour take the year-zero approach in a debate. That approach suggests that everything in the garden was rosy under the previous Labour Government. Perhaps it was in 2005 or 2006, but Labour's refusal to understand its part in what happened between 2008 and 2010 puts it on thin ice. I will continue suspension of my disbelief when I talk about some of the other speeches.

I am proud of the record of the Conservative Government. I genuinely believe that the Government that we have in Westminster and the many Conservative Governments that went before it have done all that they could to further the objectives of the welfare state and the national health service.

Christine Grahame: Will Alex Johnstone take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: No thank you.

We must remember that, when the national health service celebrated its 50th year, 35 of those years were under Conservative Governments and that the 15 years during which the Labour Party had responsibility were not distinguished in any way. I knew one 17-year-old student nurse who, in 1978, tore up her union card and had to fight her way across the picket line to fulfil her responsibility to look after her patients in Aberdeen royal infirmary. She later joined the Conservatives and, sadly, married me.

Christine Grahame: That is the only true thing that Alex Johnstone has said.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Alex Johnstone: That circumstance demonstrates that the Conservative Party has a great deal to be proud of.

Even before today's budget announcement, 2.3 million working people in Scotland had had a tax cut.

Chic Brodie: Will Alex Johnstone take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: No, thank you.

Before the budget announcement, 261,000 people had taken out of tax altogether and 187,000 jobs, three quarters of which are full time, had been created.

I have spoken about the living wage before, but we need to address it: we Conservatives believe that it is worthy of pursuit. The UK Government has increased the minimum wage, but the living wage is significant and we must acknowledge that for many employers paying it is an impossible dream. Vast numbers of people in the Scottish economy are self-employed and many of them have family businesses to support. Many of those businesses fall within what we can loosely describe as our immigrant communities. If they employ anyone at all, many of those individuals are struggling to do so and to maintain a decent standard of living for themselves. Whether in the self-employed sector or the public sector, where money is also tight—we all know that—if we increase the payments that are made to achieve a higher living wage, there is a significant danger that the number of jobs that are available might reduce.

Neil Findlay: Alex Johnstone says that money is tight. Money is only tight for some people; Mr Osborne gave every millionaire a £43,000 tax cut, so money is tight only for the people at the bottom end of the scale, not those at the top end of the scale.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please begin to conclude.

Alex Johnstone: As was also pointed out in today's budget speech, the wealthiest 1 per cent in the United Kingdom today pay a significantly higher and increasing proportion of the total tax take.

Let me address universal credit once and for all—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you will need to address it very quickly.

Alex Johnstone: It is very much the case that the imposition of universal credit will support those who are in work and will minimise the marginal tax rates that have been described. Frank Field, who

was its author under a previous Labour Government—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but you really must close.

Alex Johnstone: Frank Field has made a significant contribution by being the architect of the system. It works, it will work when it is introduced, and it will support people who are in low-paid jobs to ensure that they get a reasonable return.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you.

15:31

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab):

Like most members, I am disheartened by the figures that we have been discussing today. We heard from Graeme Dey that in Scotland there are now 370,000 people in poverty who are living in households where at least one person works. That is 45 per cent of the people who are living in poverty in Scotland. In addition, 110,000 children in poverty live in households in which at least one adult is in employment. Furthermore, it is estimated that 940,000 households are living in fuel poverty in Scotland, which is equivalent to 39 per cent of all households. One further dismal statistic is that in 2014, 10 per cent of all employees in Scotland earned £6.79 an hour or less and 20 per cent earned £7.85 an hour or less.

Those are thoroughly depressing figures. However, we know that with the right policies and ambitions those figures can change. For instance, under the last Labour Government, the number of people who were in in-work poverty fell by 30,000—nearly 10 per cent. I do not believe that that figure is good enough, but it demonstrates that we can do something other than just talk about this life-destroying issue.

The Scottish Government report on in-work poverty says that we require action in three main areas: low pay, the number of hours worked, and the link between earned income and the rate at which benefits are withdrawn.

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will Siobhan McMahon take an intervention?

Siobhan McMahon: I will not, at the moment.

The cabinet secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, said that full-time employment is not in itself a barrier to poverty. That is why we need a more joined-up approach to tackle the problem. I hope that the cabinet secretary will examine her policies on the issue and undertake socioeconomic impact assessments on them to assess the real impact of legislative changes. That might be the start of the anti-poverty strategy that Alex Rowley spoke so passionately about.

Alison Johnstone spoke about the welfare state and, in particular, the benefits system, and made an important point. Many people in Scotland today have to claim benefits to top up their salaries; we need to make work pay, but we also have to ensure that benefit payments for people who are unfit for work are fit for purpose, as Christine Grahame pointed out. People who are in that position should not be subjected to a life of poverty. Incidentally, I say to Alex Johnstone that I do not see that as the advancement of the welfare state.

All the issues that have been spoken about are issues that affect people across Scotland daily. Labour members do not want to just talk about the matter anymore: we want action, which is why we have put forward our own plans to tackle the matter head on. As Neil Findlay stated earlier, 414,000 people across Scotland would benefit from the living wage, which is promoted by Scottish Labour's plans. Given that 14 per cent of men and 20 per cent of women earned less than the living wage last year, I believe that that would be a step in the right direction for those workers, but it is not a magic bullet.

We know that there are a number of contributors to in-work poverty. One cause that is not often discussed is underemployment, which is a huge problem for many people in Scotland. Annabel Goldie spoke about that in her speech. According to a Scottish Parliament information centre briefing,

"an estimated 58,600 people aged 16-24 ... were regarded as underemployed. This equates to around 19% of 16-24 year olds".

I believe that we need to do more to utilise our workforce and I hope that the Scottish Government will produce a report on how that can be achieved. One simple way of doing that would be to introduce more flexible working practices across our public sector. We could be doing that now; I hope that the cabinet secretary will listen to that suggestion.

In conclusion, I say that we can tackle in-work poverty by increasing the minimum wage, extending the living wage, banning exploitative zero-hours contracts and taxing bankers' bonuses, all in order that we can guarantee jobs and training opportunities. Those policies would make a difference to people's lives, so I urge members to vote in favour of our proposals tonight.

15:35

Roseanna Cunningham: To give members a fuller picture, I should state at the outset that just over 80 per cent of Scottish workers are currently paid the living wage or more. We need to remember that—in fact, we should celebrate it. We

should commend those employers who already pay the living wage; the 80 per cent figure suggests that a great number of employers do so. The figure for Scotland is higher than the figure for the UK as a whole, and higher than anywhere else in the UK outwith the south-east of England. We should therefore, at the very least, acknowledge in this context that we are, in many places, pushing at an open door.

However, that raises the question of why those employers are not gaining accreditation. I have pursued that conversation with many employers who hold themselves up as paying the living wage, to establish exactly what the basis is for that.

Siobhan McMahon: The price of accreditation was among the issues that were raised at the low-pay summit yesterday. If a charity or third sector organisation wants to gain accreditation, the cost of £200 is a barrier for them.

Roseanna Cunningham: Yes, there is a cost for accreditation. That may be a barrier for some people, but it is not a barrier for some of the much bigger employers that we know are paying the living wage but are not accredited. It is part of my job to ensure that the accreditation process works.

I wanted to set out the situation to ensure that members understand the global context. We are talking about the people in the 19 per cent who are earning less—in some cases, considerably less—than the living wage and are therefore in difficult circumstances all round. That is contributing to in-work poverty.

Alex Johnstone somewhat stretched the bounds of credulity with his congratulations for the Conservatives' care of the welfare state. The hollow laughter in the chamber at that point rather said it all. However, his comments boil down to the argument that it is okay to pay wages that do not allow people to live properly. It is not. The state simply ends up subsidising those low wage rates and low-paying employers. That is the crazy cycle that we are in, and we need to intervene to break it.

That is the import of the Conservative position today, and it does not make sense. It makes no logical sense, nor does it make sense for the people who are currently living—or trying to live—on poverty wages.

Alex Johnstone: The cabinet secretary's interpretation of our position is wrong. Does she factor in the increased cost of public services in Scotland if we were to elevate the pay of the least well-paid to the level that is suggested in the Green motion?

Roseanna Cunningham: Alex Johnstone still falls into the trap of justifying a situation, and an economic model, that is predicated on the basis of

paying people less money than they need to live on. At a basic level, that is what needs to be challenged across the board.

Neil Findlay was, as always, passionate in his contribution, but he was somewhat careless about recognising the constraints that exist. He knows that there is an on-going consultation on procurement guidance right now, which includes fair employment practices and the question of how to promote the living wage in the public sector. A very current conversation is taking place on procurement.

I highlight to Neil Findlay that Labour-controlled Glasgow City Council, in its response to a freedom of information request last April, stated:

“at present the EU regulations do not allow the living wage as a mandatory requirement within our contracts”.

Earlier, Glasgow City Council’s operational delivery scrutiny committee said:

“it would be considered anti-competitive by the European Union to require the bidders to pay the Glasgow Living Wage rate”.

Labour-controlled Renfrewshire Council, West Lothian Council and Inverclyde Council have all responded to FOI requests stating that their contracts do not include a mandatory requirement that suppliers pay the living wage.

Neil Findlay: That is because those councils were given advice by the Scottish Government that that is the case. However, is it not the case that they can individually negotiate on that, as Renfrewshire Council has done? Why is the Scottish Government not doing that?

Roseanna Cunningham: What on earth makes the member think that we are not having those negotiations? Of course we are, but the issues have to be individually negotiated and looked at carefully. We are doing that right now. I suggest that the member considers the work that the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport is doing in relation to the issues that Alex Rowley raised about the care sector. It is not the case that the Government is ignoring the issues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but you must draw to a close.

Roseanna Cunningham: Alex Rowley spent quite a lot of his allotted time talking about the low wage rates in the care sector. I hope that he asks Shona Robison for a conversation about that, so that he understands what is happening.

I am sorry that I have run out of time, as I would have liked to have said a lot more. The problem is complicated and has no simple answer that will work immediately—not even bringing in the living wage immediately. I notice that not even the Labour Party suggests for a single minute that we

do that. We need to work together. The Government is committed to that and I know that Labour is committed to it, although I am less certain about the Conservatives. I know that the Greens are on board. I hope that we can have the conversation constructively.

15:41

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am grateful for the opportunity to wind up the debate, and I thank members for their contributions to it.

I am reminded of a much earlier debate—it might have been one of the first that the Greens brought in the 2003 to 2007 session—which was one of the first in which we tried to explore the notion, which is core to the purpose of the Green Party, that growth is not the same as wellbeing and that economic activity alone does not create quality of life. One thing that we were told bluntly and which has stuck with me was that earning a wage gives people dignity and having a job gives them quality of life. That very simplistic argument was put to us almost as though we should go away and talk about trees, fluffy animals or something else that we were expected to talk about in those days. I wonder whether today anybody would seriously make the argument that earning a wage gives people dignity and having a job gives them quality of life, when we know the lived reality of too many jobs and too many people on poverty wages.

I heard a couple of people interviewed on the radio this morning. One of them, who is on a zero-hours contract, can get a text message anything up to 20 minutes before his shift is due to start saying, “Please take another rest day.” Very often, he is already at the door of his employer and has gone into work. He said that he has a work ethic and he wants to work, but he turns up at the door of his employer only to find that he has just been sent a message saying that he is not required. After his basic living costs have been met, he can end up with £40 a week, and that is on a good week; some weeks, he has a disposable income of £8. He never knows on the Monday morning what his income will be by the end of the week. That job does not give that man quality of life. That poverty wage does not give him dignity.

Bizarrely, the Conservative amendment comes close to repeating that simplistic argument, in asking us to acknowledge that

“increasing employment, growing the economy and creating opportunity remains the most sustainable way of moving people out of poverty”.

Maybe in some circumstances, it can be. Increasing well-paid, secure and dignified employment can lift people out of poverty. Growing the economy might lift people out of

poverty if we ensure that the wealth that is generated is shared fairly across society rather than hoarded by the lucky few. That can lift people out of poverty but, all too often, as history has shown, it has just not been the case.

I welcomed much of what the Scottish Government had to say, but there has not been enough follow-through on some elements. Roseanna Cunningham said that one of our priorities should be ensuring that there are more well-paid jobs, but doing that will not necessarily mean that there are no poorly paid jobs. We need to end the situation in which any jobs in our society are paid such poverty rates. There was a focus on skills and progression, to ensure that a person can move through employment and find a better job. That will still leave the poverty-pay job behind for somebody else to endure. We need to eradicate this kind of undignified, exploitative employment practice and ensure that everybody has enough to live with dignity.

As for the Labour contributions, Neil Findlay was spot on with one argument. He said that in-work poverty is no accident. Quite right—this is our current economic system working as it is supposed to. It is working as it is designed to, which is why we must challenge its basis and ensure that something better happens.

Our generation has such an opportunity. Our generation of politicians can see the failure of that economic system. Over the past few years, that failure has been manifest, not just in this country but around the world. We need to take the opportunity to say, “Enough is enough.” Let us stop digging ourselves deeper into that hole and build a fairer system.

Neil Findlay and Alex Rowley focused on many aspects of their party’s contribution to progress, and I understand the passion with which they claim those achievements. I suspect that both Neil Findlay and Alex Rowley, in private moments, would be as willing as I am to acknowledge the bad, as well as the good, of what happened during Labour’s last tenure in office. Yes, the creation of the minimum wage was an important step, but it was allowed to stay static and fall behind living costs for far too long, and the purpose of the welfare state was turned from one of basic wellbeing into one of bullying people into low-paid work and subsidising that work. That created the situation that is being fulfilled by the current UK Government’s disastrous welfare policies.

Neil Findlay: Patrick Harvie acknowledges good stuff that Labour has done and he criticises things that we have not done. Will he name one thing that his party has delivered?

Patrick Harvie: Even from the position of opposition we have managed to persuade the

Scottish Government to spend a great deal more on measures that will reduce people’s living costs, for example on energy. However, I will welcome the day when Neil Findlay can quiz us on our record in government, and I am sure that he will relish the opportunity to do that.

There is a need to begin a debate about repurposing these systems. Work and welfare must be based on the idea that everyone’s dignity matters. I regret that all three amendments that have been moved would delete the specific measures that the Green and Independent group have brought to the debate, such as a £10 minimum wage. Annabel Goldie asks us to consider minimum wages only if the economy can afford them, and suggests that there has been no attempt to model the impact. I wonder who assiduously modelled the impact of the systematic hoarding of the majority of the country’s wealth in the hands of the smallest number. That is the change that has been happening since the beginning of the 1980s—the incredible accumulation of high incomes and wealth in the hands of the minority. Did anyone model that? Did anyone ask whether the economy could afford that lavish remuneration at the top? I do not think so. They just went in for what they could get, frankly.

Christine Grahame: They just did it.

Patrick Harvie: Quite right. That is the situation that we must turn around.

Wage ratios were mentioned and we will not solve the problem by talking about safety nets at the bottom. We will address inequality only if we address high pay as well as low pay. We mentioned a wealth tax in our motion, and the Government briefing, which is at the back of the chamber, makes it very clear that Scotland is doing very poorly on wealth inequality, with the wealthiest 10 per cent of households more than five times wealthier than the bottom 50 per cent of households combined. Finally, we mentioned moves towards a citizen’s income, because what matters is the dignity of everybody, not just hard-working families.

I commend the Green motion to the chamber and I will be voting against all the amendments today.

Diversity

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-12677, in the name of Jean Urquhart, on celebrating Scotland's diverse communities.

15:50

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):

In a world that is more interconnected than ever and in which historically our societies have developed as a result of the transnational mobilisation of cultures and peoples, it is intellectually moribund that we rarely hear politicians or the media make the positive case for immigration. It is with alarm that we are witnessing the development of increasing hostility, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance towards immigrants. I am gravely concerned that the tone of public discussion about immigration is contributing to a climate of hostility and fear. In this regard, we risk facing a race to the bottom. It is, it seems, politically fashionable to oppose immigration and, increasingly, the whole concept of multiculturalism.

I am proud today to be one of those who are making the positive case for immigration, and who are highlighting not just the economic benefits but the cultural enrichment that flows from embracing it, rather than proposing an agenda that is set on creating resentment and division. I stand as an advocate for multiculturalism who recognises the benefits of viewing integration as a two-way process, in which we learn and develop from our fellow citizens who hail from other countries and who bring with them their own heritage and traditions. The world is a more interesting place and our communities are made more vibrant and outward looking if we encourage understanding and tolerance and adopt a welcoming attitude to immigrants as citizens in equal partnership.

We barely hear such arguments. Instead we are faced, on a daily basis, with a toxic barrage of headlines demonising immigrants and an increasingly xenophobic politics that stems from the UK Independence Party but now, it seems, is infecting the mainstream parties, particularly in Westminster. The whole debate has been shifted rightwards, as it becomes increasingly popular to make opposing immigration a political principle. Even those who might have stood up for multiculturalism in the past find it difficult to do so now. That tide must turn, and we must challenge ourselves to testify for a modern, inclusive and humanitarian approach to immigration.

Of course, Presiding Officer, the scapegoating of immigrants at times of economic crisis is nothing new. Throughout history, immigrants have

been a useful section of society for powerful interests to blame in order to rationalise their own failures. Far better that our attention is focused on blaming immigrants for the lack of job opportunities and deteriorating living standards than on our unbalanced economy or corruption in the banking sector—or indeed the political establishment. The economic facts, which are rarely exposed, show that, rather than representing a drain on Britain's finances, European migrants made a net contribution of £20 billion to the Exchequer between 2000 and 2011.

However, it is in these circumstances that organisations such as UKIP thrive. They build on the fears that emerge as a result of economic precariousness and on the anti-immigrant sentiment popularised by sections of the media. The two have a near-symbiotic relationship, all set within a policy framework that has been shifting away from embracing multiculturalism and immigration for many years, under successive Westminster Governments.

UKIP now advocates the scrapping of the racial equality laws, a move that would regress race relations by decades. Unless partisans of diversity and racial equality make the positive case for immigration—challenging though that may seem—we risk sliding down the slippery slope of an inward-looking xenophobia. That is a xenophobia that detracts from our culture, economy and the important sense of human solidarity that has always been the bedrock for making progress in society. I believe that the majority of our population can be won to such a perspective if only we unite our voices to amplify our case beyond the parameters of the current stale, stultified and one-sided debate.

We so often hear the tiresome mantra, repeated throughout the decades, that immigrants are “stealing our jobs”. We should ask why the jobs market is so poor, how it came to be that our society is so unequal and why access to well-paid jobs is so privileged. We hear of immigrants “taking our houses”, but we must ask why our housing stock is so inadequate and underfunded, and why we do not put the necessary investment into building more high-quality, affordable homes. Why not inquire further, with a critical mind, to unearth beneath the waves of anti-immigrant headlines just how much of a contribution they make to our country?

Let us talk about how much our communities have gained from immigration—all the doctors, nurses and public servants who help us in our time of need, and without whom we would be much worse off. Let us talk about the music scene or our constantly renewing creative culture and the extension of our palate into the world as each period of immigration—if embraced—emboldens

our human need to experience more than ourselves, and to explore the things that we do not yet know about, in the pursuit of knowledge. Immigration, far from being a burden, is a gateway.

We in Scotland should know that. Surely it is part of our DNA. Scots are immigrants. They are dispersed around the globe, where they have found and created work and shared their culture and made their home in another country. We should be among the first to recognise that the flow of immigration adds momentum to the progressive aspects of human history, and excites the potential in all of us, regardless of where we were born. Thus, I share the Scottish Refugee Council's concerns at the recent poll conducted by BBC Scotland on Scottish attitudes to immigration, and I have signed Christina McKelvie's motion questioning the methodology, outcome and timing of the poll.

I was taken aback, listening to BBC Radio Scotland's morning news programme a few days ago, to hear the Spanish immigrants in Inverness referred to as an "invasion". For many, that confirms that the BBC is not acting impartially.

It is time for a wholesale change in approach to how we discuss immigration and realise its benefits. I do not just want our Polish friends to be able to learn English—I want Scots to be able to take advantage of the diversity in our population to learn Polish. Imagine how our nation might develop were we to cut through the headlines of the *Daily Express* and Nigel Farage's false narrative and recognise the potential that exists.

Is it not time to move on as a society? We must stop repeating time and again the age-old fallacies around immigration, and move to a period of enlightenment where, rather than creating fear and division around difference and the scramble for resources, we work together to solve the economic problems we face and, at the same time, enjoy our distinctive and valuable cultural identities.

UKIP is said to be making a "bold stand" on immigration. The truth is the opposite. It is those who stand up for the rights of immigrants and champion the benefits that they bring to a multicultural society based on social progress that are the 21st century's trailblazers.

Many members would have joined with Sheena Wellington at the formal opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 in singing the words of Burns:

"That Man to Man the world o'er,
Shall brothers be for a' that."

It is time to show that there is a difference between the Scottish Parliament and the Westminster Parliament, by making and profiling

the positive case for immigration and celebrating Scotland's diverse communities. Please support the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that Scotland's diversity should be celebrated and rejects the negative attitudes expressed in the media and politics toward immigration and immigrants; also notes with concern the impact of these attitudes in the context of the approaching general election; believes that there should be recognition of the very real and positive contribution made by immigrants from all over the world to Scottish society, culture and history; also notes that the Scottish population is comprised of a rich mix of peoples and cultures from all over the world and believes that all immigrants and their descendants are an integral part of the Scottish identity; calls on politicians and the media to stop the demonisation of immigrants, and calls on media outlets to take a more responsible approach toward their reporting of immigration to Scotland and the UK.

15:59

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil): I am delighted to be able to speak in this important debate. I thank Jean Urquhart for lodging the motion and, if I may say so, for delivering an eloquent speech in introducing it. The Scottish Government will support her motion and all the amendments.

It is important that, from all sides of the chamber, we send a loud and clear message from this Parliament about the need for diversity, the need to treat immigrants properly and the need to treat one another fairly. As Jean Urquhart finished up by saying, at the end of the day we all live together on this planet. Scotland has been described by Tom Devine, our most eminent historian, as a mongrel nation, and that is the kind of spirit in which we are conducting the debate.

I start by emphasising the Scottish Government's view that diversity is a strength and something that should be celebrated and welcomed. Scotland is becoming a more ethnically diverse country. The emergence of an increasingly multi-ethnic population has been warmly welcomed by the Scottish Government for a number of reasons. It helps with the growth and prosperity of our country and gives rise to a younger workforce, many members of which have international connections, which in turn boosts innovation and enterprise. More important, it enriches our culture, creates a more diverse Scotland and helps to ensure that our dynamic, progressive country continues to evolve.

Our work to create an equal Scotland reflects that diversity. We want to ensure that all people who live here can flourish, regardless of race, religion or any other differentiating characteristic. Despite the cuts that we have suffered in recent years, between 2012 and 2015 we have provided

more than £60 million of funding from the equality budget to help tackle inequality and discrimination. More than £8 million of that money supports initiatives that address issues of racial equality.

Celebratory events such as last year's multicultural homecoming programme and this week's Islam awareness week provide us all with fantastic opportunities to meet and learn about one another and, even more important—as Jean Urquhart said—to learn from one another. They help to dispel ignorance, to break down stereotypes and to challenge and change attitudes by celebrating equality and diversity.

Scotland is a multifaith and multicultural country. There is no place for prejudice or discrimination, either in Scotland or in any other part of the world. Everyone without exception deserves to be treated fairly and to be able to achieve their potential in the place where they live. Like Jean Urquhart, we challenge the claims that were made in last week's BBC Scotland poll that suggested that attitudes to immigration are similar on both sides of the border. I think that there is clear evidence that a much more tolerant approach is taken in Scotland than in other parts of the UK.

Scotland needs immigrants because of our ageing population and to fill skills gaps. It is not simply a case of welcoming immigrants; we need them. We were able temporarily—as an exception to reserved work permit rules—to allow people who graduated from Scottish universities to remain in Scotland for a short period to get work experience. That highlights the importance of the Scottish Government being able to set a different policy on immigration to meet the needs of Scotland. We would like a similar plan to be instated by the UK Government.

We will always welcome people who want to come and live in Scotland. We know that minority ethnic people still experience barriers or negative attitudes that result in unequal opportunities, and that racism and discrimination come in many shapes and forms. None of us can afford to be complacent about the outstanding challenges that we face, given that such backward attitudes still exist to some degree. Racial discrimination and harassment are still too common an experience for minority ethnic people in Scotland today. That treatment can range from verbal abuse to sickening acts of extreme violence.

David Coburn MEP's shameful comparing of Humza Yousaf to the convicted terrorist Abu Hamza is nothing short of disgraceful. [*Applause.*] His totally unacceptable smear cannot be excused as UKIP banter or a joke. It is racist, it is Islamophobic, it is just plain wrong and it has rightly been condemned by all parties in the Parliament. I therefore hope that the amendment in my name about David Coburn will be agreed to

unanimously. David Coburn does not represent the views of the Scottish people, and I think that, as an MEP for Scotland, he should seriously consider his position. There is no place in Scotland or elsewhere for the depiction of Muslim people as terrorists.

I also very much welcome Jean Urquhart's comments about xenophobia and particularly the launch of her not my xenophobia campaign. It is too easy for the media and politicians to make xenophobic and deeply offensive comments without being called to account for them, and this campaign can make a great contribution to tackling the issue by highlighting such comments and forcing those who make them to face up to what they have done. I very much hope that that will make them think about the consequences of their actions and make them change their future behaviour.

In our work to develop a new strategic approach to race equality in Scotland, one of our priorities will be to tackle discrimination and hate crime to ensure that everyone is free to fulfil their potential. We will focus on shifting negative attitudes, celebrating the different contributions that people make in Scotland, fostering good relations and tackling discrimination, racism and hate crime.

I hope that my opening remarks have made clear the central importance of race equality and Scotland's diverse communities to the Scottish Government. However, although we have made some good progress, there is much more that needs to be done. I welcome opportunities such as this to progress this important work, and I look forward to continuing to work in partnership with our key stakeholders, including all parties in this chamber, and communities over the coming year.

I move amendment S4M-12677.2, to insert at end:

“, and unites in condemning the recent comments by David Coburn MEP”.

16:06

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I thank Jean Urquhart and John Finnie for bringing this important debate to the chamber and for the launch yesterday of the not my xenophobia campaign, which I am happy to support. It is important that we address immigration and diversity issues with more positive language, and it is a real worry that we should find ourselves today having to defend the very idea of taking a liberal approach to immigration and immigrants.

Immigration is not a new topic; the subject has sparked political debate and provoked forthright views on all sides for decades, if not centuries. Although we have made huge strides in tackling overt racism in our society over the course of my

lifetime, it feels that, over the past five to 10 years, we have gone backwards, certainly when it comes to discussing immigration.

We should at least acknowledge some of the reasons for that. Populations are ever more geographically mobile, while at the same time—in our country, at least—they are less socially mobile. The world is shrinking before our eyes, and successive generations think nothing of upping sticks and making a new home for themselves on the other side of the globe.

Most of that movement is to be celebrated. Indeed, various studies have shown the economic benefits that immigration has brought to the United Kingdom. For example, research from University College London that was published four months ago by the Royal Economic Society demonstrates that European immigrants to the UK have paid far more in taxes than they have ever received in benefits. According to the report's authors, such migrants help to relieve the fiscal burden on UK-born workers and positively contribute to the financing of public services.

Change in any community can also bring tensions and pressures, and it is important that they are addressed for what they are. If people express concern about being priced out of the labour market and about their wages and conditions being undercut, that has to be addressed in economic terms, not in terms of people's nationality. Poverty wages are unacceptable whether they are paid to immigrants or native citizens, and exploitation by unscrupulous employers is unacceptable whether the employee is from this country or not.

Others' complaints about the pressure on public services should be addressed in terms of our public service, not in terms of someone's country of origin. The health service is under pressure but, as we all know, we are more likely to be treated by a doctor from a different country than we are to wait behind someone from another country in the doctor's surgery. One think tank recently estimated that 11 per cent of national health service staff and 26 per cent of NHS doctors are non-British. Our national health service—this country's pride and joy—could not begin to operate without immigration.

The difficulty is that for some in politics and some in the media—and at this point I make it clear that I do not believe that Jean Urquhart's motion is condemning all involved in both; indeed, like the Government, we will be supporting all the motions and amendments before us today—the impact of immigration on our society is a fear and an anxiety that they can play to instead of addressing directly. Where things get complicated is how we react in turn.

If we overreact and condemn as racist every person who expresses their worries, we will provoke the very backlash that we are trying to address. People need to have and to hear the political language that expresses their anxieties, not be told that they are wrong. The real test of our political leadership is to give people the opportunity to discuss their vulnerability and highlight our common humanity rather than pander to any sense of otherness.

Quite simply, diversity makes Britain stronger. We are richer, stronger and a better country because we have welcomed people from across the world. In Scotland, we are fortunate to live in a vibrant society that has, for the most part, a welcoming approach to immigration.

Outside our two biggest cities—Glasgow and Edinburgh—the East Renfrewshire Council area, which is my local authority area, is Scotland's most ethnically diverse area. I am proud of the fact that I live in such a tolerant and multicultural community, but I am not blind to the hostility and negativity that can lurk in the very same neighbourhoods.

In 2013, more than 4,500 racist incidents were recorded by Police Scotland. That equates to around 90 recorded racial incidents per week.

I was reminded how far we have come at a dinner earlier this week, when the Rt Hon Peter Hain spoke about his family's efforts during apartheid and the role that Scotland played at that time. However, in 2013, the employment rate for people from minority ethnicity groups in Scotland sat at 56 per cent compared with an overall employment rate of 71 per cent. That is not right.

Scotland's national ethnic minorities organisation, BEMIS, recently concluded:

"we should be striving for a Scotland where ethnic minorities are not only passively recognised, but where they are actively incorporated into the way Scotland is imagined to be now and in the future."

We should be tackling overt racism and the dog-whistle politics of the immigration debate, but we must also do much more to ensure that our society reflects those who live in it. Our neighbourhoods have changed and our communities are the better for it, but we need to tackle poverty, close the employment gap and reduce inequality for those from an ethnic minority background. There is a long struggle still ahead.

I move amendment S4M-12677.3, to insert after "Scottish identity":

"; believes that more can be done to prevent immigrants being exploited or treated unfairly".

16:11

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): We are very happy to support the motion and the other amendments.

The American author, poet and civil rights campaigner Maya Angelou famously noted:

“in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.”

I do not think that the vast numbers of people who walked the streets of Glasgow during the Commonwealth games and Scotland’s festivals last year could possibly disagree with that, such was the rich display of cultural and social diversity.

In particular, I was struck by what was happening in many of Glasgow’s schools, in which pupils speak a multitude of different languages nowadays. They celebrated diversity and worked towards improving cultural awareness. Indeed, some adults have much to learn from those children, who intuitively reject insularity, prejudice and intolerance of the way that others choose to live their lives.

I note exactly what Jean Urquhart’s motion says and I have every sympathy with her sentiments, especially about the repugnant comments—as the minister has said, they are repugnant—from David Coburn, which have absolutely no place in any democratic society. However, we have to be very careful not to imply that it is all the sections of the media and politicians who are making the inflammatory remarks about immigration and immigrants, because that is not true. Indeed, in recent weeks there have been some measured debates about immigration, which is clearly a very difficult issue. We need to respect that. It is true that there has been some completely unacceptable media sensationalism and a very small minority of politicians have undoubtedly made completely unacceptable remarks over the years, but they are not the majority by any means. That is demonstrated in the Scottish Parliament. We lodged our amendment to provide that balance.

Ken Macintosh rightly said that immigration is a sensitive topic. Anything that we can do to ensure that our debate is based on fact and good-quality evidence is helpful.

The analysis of the 2013 British social attitudes survey showed that the lowest level of racial prejudice in the country was in London, which is the most culturally diverse city in the UK. Furthermore, the survey highlighted that the largest rises in racial prejudice over the previous decade occurred in Scotland and north-east England, which are the areas with the lowest levels of diversity. Indeed, London was the only area with falling racial prejudice over the previous decade. Perhaps that tells us something, but it

hides substantial regional variations. We have to be very careful about how we temper the debate.

The main message of the pupils I met in Glasgow was that they were clear that it is usually ignorance about other cultures that leads to intolerance. They were in no doubt whatsoever about the importance of education when it comes to a better understanding and to dismissing the stereotypes that can be so harmful and become the nourishment of the bigots and the racists.

I had the privilege to be in Parliament on Saturday morning to witness the model United Nations, and I was very impressed by the young people who were debating what to do about the current issues in Islam. They spoke with tremendous affection for Islam and their understanding was far greater than that of many who have taken to the newspapers and social media in recent times. There was a genuine understanding about the cohesive society that we are all seeking.

How diverse are our communities in Scotland? The short answer across the board is that they are not particularly diverse. The 2011 census showed a doubling since 2001 of Scotland’s minority ethnic population to 4 per cent, which is less than one third of England and Wales’s ethnic minority population. Of course, that hides the regional disparities.

One of the things that we can do is lead by example. I am absolutely convinced that the reason for bringing the motion to Parliament and the reason why we have had such an unnecessarily inflamed debate about the topic is because people have not been careful about the language that they have used. They have been guilty of an intolerance that has no place in a democratic society.

We have to be mindful of what we are seeking to do. This is perhaps one of the most complicated and complex political issues that we have to deal with. That makes it even more important that, rather than being carried along on a tide of emotion, we speak with tolerance, understanding and the ability to seek out the facts.

We are happy to support the motion and the other amendments.

I move amendment S4M-12677.1, to leave out from “in the media” to end and insert:

“within some quarters of the media and politics toward immigration and immigrants; is concerned about the divisive impact of such attitudes, especially during election campaigns; notes that the Scottish population is comprised of a rich mix of peoples and cultures from all over the world who are an integral part of the Scottish identity, and therefore believes that there should be recognition of the very real and positive contribution made by immigrants from all over the world to Scottish society, culture and history.”

16:17

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): First, I thank Jean Urquhart for bringing the motion to Parliament today and for the tone that she set for the debate. I very much welcomed that.

Diversity of the peoples who make up the population of Scotland is for me one of the reasons why our country is such a wonderful and exciting place to live and work. How boring the world would be if we were all the same. Diversity gives us all, as individuals, the chance to gain a new perspective on the lives of others in our own society, as well as on other cultures and societies around the world.

Every one of us in this chamber is different and has had different life experiences; those experiences make us the people we are. Celebrating our differences as well as our common interests helps to unite us all as the people of Scotland.

Within my constituency of Stirling, we have interesting, diverse and thriving Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, African and Polish communities. All those communities have managed to keep their traditions alive while integrating into the increasingly diverse community of Stirling. One of the privileges of being an MSP is being able to meet people from all sorts of backgrounds. On the whole, that has proved to be a pretty positive and nourishing experience for me, but I have had darker and much more negative experiences.

Following Friday prayers recently, I was standing on the pavement outside the Islamic centre in Stirling, chewing the cud with some of my Muslim friends, when a car full of young white males drove by. The obscenities and racist taunts that spewed from the mouths of those young white males made me at once angry and deeply ashamed. Although obviously disturbed by the incident, my Muslim friends shrugged it off because it was not an unusual experience for them, but their reaction served to make me feel even more ashamed.

I have no doubt that the attitudes of those young men will have sprung from ignorance or a lack of education, but that is no excuse for them and their behaviour. Equally I have no doubt that their attitude and behaviours will have been coloured by some media output—I stress the word “some”, as other members have done—that has portrayed Muslim immigrants in particular in a negative fashion.

Of course, the reality is that the Muslim community are as much a part of the rich mosaic of people that makes up Scotland as any other people living among us. The same goes for the people from eastern Europe and, increasingly, Spain who have recently come to Scotland in

order to make a new and better life for themselves and their families while, at the same time, contributing significantly to the economic and social wellbeing of Scotland. As Jean Urquhart said, many of our forebears left Scotland to go to the ends of the globe in order to improve their and their families' lot.

I say to those who want to be involved in racist taunts that those who have chosen to live in Scotland and make it their new home are now our ain folk and we must stand with them as we would with any others. It is our job as politicians, parents, brothers and sisters to ensure that we fight back against prejudice and racism from whichever source it comes.

Liz Smith quoted Dr Maya Angelou, the celebrated American poet and civil right activist, but the full quote is interesting. She said:

“It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.”

What she was saying is that education and learning are the tools that we need in order to root out our own prejudices and the racism that exists in our society, from whichever poisoned well it draws its strength—and that includes David Coburn, in the context of this debate.

Many organisations do fabulous work across Scotland, particularly with young people, to address preconceptions and mistruths that are often spread in relation to diversity. Much great work is being done, but much more still requires to be done. Let us get on with that, united and together.

16:21

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Good afternoon, Presiding Officer. It is an honour to talk about celebrating Scotland's diverse communities. As many members know, I have been involved in equality and diversity for more than 40 years, so I have some experience in the field.

I find the motion interesting, as it discusses

“negative attitudes ... toward immigration and immigrants”,

no doubt in response to UKIP and the negative media stories. However, as the UKIP MEP's shameful comments about my fellow Glaswegian—that is the important bit: Glaswegian—Humza Yousaf showed, we also have to deal with the plainer issue of downright racism.

Sadly, there are still major issues for people from ethnic minority communities who are born and brought up in Scotland. The most recent figures showed an increase of 3 per cent in the number of racist incidents recorded by Police

Scotland. There are about 90 per week, which is far too many.

Despite forming more than 4 per cent of the Scottish population, people from minority ethnic backgrounds make up only 1.1 per cent of local authority staff. Similarly, in 2013-14, only 1.1 per cent of modern apprenticeship starts were from the minority communities. One of the poorest performers is our fire service. Performance had been improving during the Strathclyde Fire and Rescue days but, now that the service is Scotland wide, only 0.8 per cent of our fire service staff are from the minority communities.

Let us talk about poverty. Figures show that people from minority communities are significantly more likely to live in relative poverty. In 2013-14, the figure was 25 per cent, compared with only 14 per cent for the white British group. The Scottish Government's recent report on severe poverty states that people from ethnic minorities are at greater risk of severe poverty and deprivation. It is shameful to think how poorly minority communities are being served today.

As this week is Islam awareness week, it is a good time to embrace diversity, but Scotland still has a long way to go. I want change in education and employment outcomes for minority communities—not just poster campaigns that say that we should be nice to each other, but delivery on the ground, which is more important.

I appreciate any campaign that aims to challenge anti-immigrant attitudes. I call on all my colleagues in all the parties to look again at the public sector equality duties. Scotland has the potential to lead the UK in putting an emphasis on requiring public authorities to take action to tackle inequalities, instead of simply reporting to us on them year in, year out.

Before I demand equality in service, let me truly wish all of us the best of luck in working across Scotland to achieve equality and to defeat inequality, not only in race but in education, employment and all aspects that affect our citizens in Scotland. We are a nation and we need to be strong, and the only way that we will be strong is if we protect, love, support and look after one another. Let us do that together.

16:25

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I am proud to say that, back in the 1990s, one of the SNP branches in my constituency put forward an amendment to recognise not the people of Scotland but the peoples of Scotland. That is a starting point from which members across the parties take our bearings in the debate. Having said that, I believe

that we now understand how difficult it has been over Scotland's history to live up to that potential.

Professor Tom Devine's view about Scotland being a mongrel nation has been mentioned, and that was our thought when that amendment was proposed. His history of Scotland describes how the integration of Irish people, Lithuanians, Italians, Poles and Chinese, through to the present day, with the small Jewish population and now many people from African countries, has to some extent been prefigured by the difficulties that we have in celebrating diversity and promoting a living-together approach. I do not want to use the word "integration", because we are talking about something more profound than that, but that is how the issue was thought of in the 19th century. Tom Devine points out that those people came from deprived and distressed communities that were brought low by corruption, discrimination and economic problems. They came to Scotland, a land of economic possibilities, and then they met the problems of becoming part of this multicultural nation, and some of them had difficulty in doing so.

I will mention particularly the recent coverage of the Spanish people in the Highlands. The slip of a word by the BBC is one thing, but the poll that it conducted earlier than that on immigration was flawed indeed. The coverage of Spanish migration to Inverness and of the migrants learning English was quite interesting. On the morning radio programme, Philomena de Lima, who is the director of the centre for remote and rural studies at the University of the Highlands and Islands in Inverness, said that we have to have a lot more research into the host community, how it sees such things and how it is attuned to thinking about the adaptation of people from many places, but that was not included in the television version of the same story.

One of the keys to talking about ways in which we can break down barriers and allow people a better chance to integrate is to recognise that many of the people who come here—European Union citizens coming here through free movement—are prepared to work hard and to earn regular pay in places such as fish-processing factories. That work might not be particularly well paid, but they will work regularly because they want to send money home or they want to bring their families here. That part of what they do for Scotland is a vital ingredient of our diversity. The fact that other Scots will not do those jobs is something for the host community to think about carefully. It needs to adapt to the fact that there will always be jobs at various levels. It is too much to say that it is easy for us to promote living together and integration.

Education is the key. It has helped many groups of people to move forward. If we are to move forward from where we are now, we must learn from some of the things that have happened in the past. There is plenty of space in Scotland for unity and diversity and for all the peoples of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Christian Allard, after which we will move to the closing speeches.

16:30

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. That is not the last thank you that I will say—I have to say a lot of thank yous in my four minutes. First, I thank the Scottish Green Party and the independent members for bringing the debate to the chamber. It is timely, and it is important that we debate the issue.

We must debate immigration. We must debate it regularly and not just at election time. We have to see the two sides. We have to consider immigration, which is people coming in, and emigration, which is people going out. It is important that we do not debate just one of those in a vacuum.

Many members have spoken about the BBC. I perhaps have to dampen my views about the BBC a bit. I heard the programme that Jean Urquhart spoke about, which was on Monday morning. It was absolutely appalling. I am not talking about the contributions—it was a phone-in, so a lot of people were calling and airing their views. They have to air their views—it is important that they do so—but what was appalling was the presenter, Kaye Adams. The way in which she portrayed and related things was appalling—she agreed with some comments that nobody with any sense would agree with.

I am annoyed about that, because the BBC is a fantastic organisation. When the BBC was mentioned in the previous speech, I could have intervened to say that BBC Alba is a fantastic channel, and I will be on it this week or next week, speaking in French. BBC Alba loves languages; it discusses them a lot and it wants to have people participating who live in Scotland and who speak different languages. There is good and there is bad. I would say to Kaye Adams, “No, thanks—not any more.”

However, I would like to thank “Scotland 2015”. We had an important debate on immigration on Tuesday last week. Even if the opinion poll was perhaps not as good as it should have been—Christina McKelvie was absolutely right about that—we had a good debate.

I was sitting next to this UKIP MEP. Members would be surprised to know how quiet he was. There was consensus among members of the panel, and the audience was good and diverse, but there was something that I was shocked about: he did not expect me to be there. He expected our Minister for Europe and International Development to be there.

I think that what happened in the rest of the week was this. The UKIP MEP could not develop his argument live on television because he had the wrong SNP MSP next to him. He had a Frenchman there—a migrant—but he did not want to talk about migration. He wanted to talk about Islamophobia and about what is happening today and to blame a particular religion all over the world. My skin was too white, and I did not have the right religion, so he did not engage. That might explain what happened afterwards.

I want to say thank you to the press. The press thereafter has been fantastic. I wish to mention one particular journalist, Alan Roden of the *Scottish Daily Mail*, who took the phone call from this MEP and who could not have been clearer when he came on television. He was extremely clear that the phone call, which was only a 15-minute chat, was not a joke. Nobody was laughing. He was not laughing and David Coburn was not laughing—it was not a laughing matter. Mr Roden said:

“It was not banter in a pub ... it was a chat between a journalist and a politician.”

We have to remember that some of our Scottish press are just fantastic, with very much the same spirit as the Parliament today. We should be proud that the Parliament and our Scottish press have produced a fantastic reaction to what happened this week.

16:34

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): Today’s discussion about celebrating Scotland’s diverse communities is a welcome opportunity to highlight in the chamber the importance of a vibrant community life. In the Lothian region, which I represent, there are many active local communities working inclusively that set an example to us all. In addition, we should celebrate the fact that immigrants of various nationalities continue to make a wonderfully diverse cultural contribution to Scotland.

However, the debate also provides an opportunity to discuss how we can enable local services to be more flexible in the face of rising populations. I express my support for Liz Smith’s amendment, because the media should act responsibly and truthfully, but we should also

ensure that the Parliament does not direct blame in a generalised, blanket fashion.

When I visited the Broomhouse centre in Edinburgh, with its cafe, kitchen, teaching room and various other facilities, it was clear to me that I was seeing community spirit at its best, with people of many nationalities in training. Whether they wanted a cup of tea, a hot lunch or an embroidery class, all comers were offered the warmest of welcomes at the centre, which is situated at the heart of the local community. Most important, the centre provides in-work training to many locals and other people who would otherwise struggle to gain extensive work experience. That inspiring and inclusive example of providing for and giving back to all members of the community is exactly what we should be celebrating today.

It is welcome to have the chance to celebrate the contributions that immigrants have made to Scotland's culture, whether they arrived last century, last month or last week, from around the world or from closer to home. As a former consul for Iceland, I have expansive knowledge of the fantastic expertise that Icelandic people have brought to these shores in culinary matters and music, among other areas. There are numerous other examples that we could reference, such as unique shops that have been opened by Scandinavian immigrants, South African chefs at popular restaurants, Spanish classes held by teachers from across the Spanish-speaking world and, of course, all the brilliant international contributions to Edinburgh's arts scene during the festival and throughout the year.

I could go on with many more examples, but the point is that there is much that we should celebrate. After all, the Italians were about the first race to come here, and the cafés, restaurants and fish and chip shops that were all started by them some 100 years ago are welcome. Of course, they are not considered immigrants any more.

I will touch on the issue of increasing local populations and how Scotland's communities are impacted by and respond to that. Whether it is caused by immigration, internal migration, new housing developments or demographic changes, that increase can present local services across Scotland with significantly increased demand. However, the causes and the results of increased demand can vary significantly between different cities, towns and villages. As a result, it is apparent that the best way to respond is to grant local areas and their councils the flexibility to adapt and respond to each demand in the way that they think is most suitable.

It is important that the media report on immigration accurately and responsibly while ensuring that they do not casually stray into the

forementioned xenophobia. However, we must not seek to demonise the entire media. As Liz Smith's amendment states, it is only some quarters of the media that we need to be wary of.

I reiterate my conviction that inspiring examples of community spirit, such as the Broomhouse centre, should be celebrated in the chamber and across Scotland. I hope that we can all share in celebrating the diverse cultural contributions that are made by immigrants across Scotland. We should also consider that local authorities and local services need to be allowed the flexibility to assess local needs, set local priorities and deliver local improvements. I agree with the sentiments that are expressed in every amendment and urge all members to vote for them.

16:39

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I suspect that when Jean Urquhart decided on the topic for today's debate, she had little idea just how topical it would be. However, I thank her for lodging the motion and for launching her campaign. As she knows, I was unable to be at the launch yesterday, but she has my whole-hearted support.

This has been a consensual debate and one that has been very much worth having in order to demonstrate that Scotland's Parliament is united in its view that new Scots enrich our country, and that the increasing diversification of our country and, indeed, our Parliament are most welcome.

Of course, that view stands in stark contrast to the views of David Coburn MEP—or, as I like to call him, that ignorant racist—which should have no place in modern Scotland. Sadly, however, they are held by a minority of the population, as Mr Coburn's election demonstrated. As elected representatives, we have a duty to challenge those views whenever we can; the debate has given us an opportunity to do that.

Members who know my constituency and my affection for it know that it is enormously diverse—and all the more joyful, creative and dynamic for that. I draw Parliament's attention once again to the excellent work of the Maryhill Integration Network, which has since 2001 worked with the local population and new Scots to help with integration and support. It does that by bringing people together to celebrate what they have in common, rather than focusing on what might make them different. It recognises that language can be a barrier, so it encourages sharing of food, dance, music and culture in order to bring people together. Over the years, I have had the privilege and pleasure of attending many of the network's events and celebrations. It is wonderful to see people who do not share a spoken language

finding that they share the language of food, dance or music and that they can work and learn together. We need more organisations like that and we need to ensure that we support them and resource them properly.

I am also proud that my home city, Glasgow, is the only local authority area to which asylum seekers and refugees are dispersed—but that, of course, brings with it its own challenges.

On Monday, I met a group of wonderful women from a selection of countries. One of the difficulties that they identified was the shortage of ESOL—English for speakers of other languages—classes. They were, in the main, educated women who want to work here and make new lives for their families, but their first hurdle is to acquire the language. That difficulty is brought into focus by looking at some of the numbers. There are now 130 different languages spoken by the children in Glasgow's schools, and some schools have as many as 40 languages. Every year, 1,500 foreign nationals arrive in Glasgow and need to be integrated into the school system, which is the equivalent of more than one additional classroom per week.

To support that, Glasgow City Council employs 110 full-time-equivalent English as an additional language teachers at a cost of some £5 million per annum. That is estimated to be the same as the total number who are employed in the rest of Scotland, but it is still not enough because the women whom I met this week and the mums and dads of the school-age children need help too, and the organisations in my constituency that provide ESL—English as a second language—courses are inundated with people who need them in order to help them to find their way in Scottish life and in our communities. They need the courses so that they can play their parts in building the strong and diverse communities that we all want, but some organisations that have previously operated an open-door policy now have waiting lists.

The pattern of immigration has changed over the years—I recall when Chilean people came to Scotland because of the political difficulties in Chile—but the number of people who are coming to our country is not changing. People are fleeing Syria and others are escaping from Eritrea, where conscription to the army for more than 10 years is the norm and where young people see no future for themselves unless they can leave their country. It is clear that we have to do more to support those communities.

The motion is correct in identifying the importance of the context in which we have the debate: the general election. We all have a duty and responsibility to challenge the views of people who seek to drive a wedge between the

communities in this country. They must not be allowed to succeed.

16:44

Alex Neil: The tone of the debate has been excellent and has shown Parliament in its best light, especially as we are all united—right across the chamber—in the sentiments that we are trying to express through the motion and the amendments.

Patricia Ferguson's last point was important because—as we all know—seven weeks tomorrow, we all go to the polls for the Westminster general election. As Jean Urquhart's motion demonstrates, it is very important that in the heat of that election campaign we all stick together to promote exactly the values that we have all been sharing this afternoon, and that we conduct ourselves in a civilised manner that will do our nation proud.

I am very conscious of the other points that Patricia Ferguson raised in relation to the challenges and pressures that are sometimes put on public services when we have a high—and in some geographical areas, a concentrated—number of people coming in to Scotland. We have to face up to those challenges. They should in no way be seen as reasons for not encouraging people to come here and to emigrate to Scotland. Actually, the challenges represent a good opportunity for us to demonstrate our commitment not only to welcoming those people, but to ensuring that they have a chance of getting a decent job, a decent house and a share in the public services that they contribute to the cost of providing.

As was pointed out by a number of members, in all the work that has been done—quite a lot has been done in recent years—on the economic contribution of migrants to the UK and to Scotland, every single one of the studies has shown that migrants' contribution is very positive indeed. I think that we all know instinctively that that is the case.

Ken Macintosh mentioned the number of immigrants who work in the NHS—in particular, doctors. It is a very high percentage indeed. Of course, that goes back to a long tradition between countries including India and the UK, in which people come here for training and some go back to provide very high-quality medical services in their own country. This is what it is about: it is about being in a global economy, being a global people and being involved in the world. We benefit ourselves and others through such historical and future relationships.

There are two points to be made about the kind of prejudice that Bruce Crawford gave an example

of when he mentioned what he witnessed recently in Stirling. First, the reality is that there is still too much of that kind of behaviour happening in Scotland, on too regular a basis, so it behoves us all to do everything that we possibly can to stamp it out. It requires a multifaceted approach. It is partly about bringing some people to justice, partly about education, partly about changing culture and partly about adopting policies that will lead to greater integration and better understanding among the different communities. The work of organisations including Interfaith Scotland, BEMIS and the Scottish Refugee Council is absolutely crucial in relation to that. All those organisations make an enormous contribution to achieving that objective, but we must be determined to eliminate the kind of prejudice that Bruce Crawford witnessed in Stirling.

Secondly, we have to ensure that, in encouraging people to come to Scotland, we do so on the basis that they come here as full citizens—I use the word “citizens” in the fullest sense of the word—and that they play their full part in every aspect of Scottish culture, Scottish life and the Scottish economy, right across the board, which will mean that we have the kind of diversity that we have.

If we go back to the history of Scotland, we are all descendants of immigrants because, by definition, our ancestors had to emigrate to Scotland for us to be physically here today. That is what Tom Devine meant when he said that we are a mongrel nation. We are all descendants of immigrants, and that is to the benefit of Scotland. This country is not owned by us just because we happened to be here earlier, or because we are from an earlier generation of immigrants who arrived before the current generation.

We have an international reputation for being a very tolerant nation, a seafaring nation, an internationally aware and conscious nation, and a nation that punches above its weight in its international contributions in Africa, Asia and elsewhere. That is all part of the same fundamental philosophy in which we all, on all sides of the chamber and throughout Scotland, believe: in the words of Rabbie, “We’re a’ Jock Tamson’s bairns.”

In that spirit, the debate has been very good. It sends out a loud and clear message to the David Coburns of this world, and to people such as those in the example that Bruce Crawford mentioned, that the kind of ignorant prejudice that they have shown is not acceptable in modern Scotland and will not be tolerated. We want people to come to live and work here as immigrants, and we must treat those people as equals in every aspect of our lives.

16:50

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): On behalf of the independent and Green group, I thank members for their contributions to the debate, which has, as many have said, been consensual and constructive. I also thank the Scottish Refugee Council for the briefing that it provided, in which it referred to the

“politically and ideologically charged terrain of identity and immigration”

that we have been discussing.

My colleague Jean Urquhart opened the debate by talking about the

“transnational mobilisation of cultures and peoples”,

and the cabinet secretary picked up the same point in his closing speech. It was ever thus. There has always been movement, and the debate has been about the tone of public discussion on immigration and whether that has contributed to the hostility and fear that exist towards sections of our immigrant community.

Jean Urquhart and many other members made a very positive case for immigration. I do not think that that is a bold case. It should be the default position that we welcome people.

I am grateful that the cabinet secretary spoke in the debate. He talked about sending a loud and clear message, and I think that the Scottish Government has, by participating in the debate in the manner in which it has done, sent a very strong message that is welcomed by members in this part of the chamber and, I am sure, on all sides.

The cabinet secretary used the term “mongrel nation”, which has featured in a number of speeches in today’s debate, and he spoke about diversity as a strength. We certainly see diversity as a strength. It would, as one member said—I will come to his contribution in a moment—be a boring world if we were all the same.

The cabinet secretary also spoke about diversity continuing to evolve, which is correct. He name-checked the not my xenophobia campaign that my colleague Jean Urquhart launched yesterday. I thank everyone for their support for the campaign, which is very welcome.

Ken Macintosh represented the Scottish Labour Party at the campaign launch yesterday, and we are grateful to him for that. He spoke today about political leadership, which was displayed yesterday and today. He spoke about the use of language and how important that is, and about his concern that things are perhaps going backwards. He spoke about racist incidents but, significantly, he also brought some facts into the equation. I cannot remember the detail, but he spoke about

the amount of tax paid by immigrants relative to benefits claimed, the facts of which are very much contrary to the perception that is held by some and portrayed by others.

I am grateful to Liz Smith and the Scottish Conservative Party. She quoted a very nice phrase about the beauty and strength of diversity, which I think we would all recognise. She also spoke about the importance of education, which has been a recurring theme throughout the debate, and the requirement for us to understand the facts, which mean that we should be welcoming people.

We heard from Bruce Crawford—it was indeed he who said that it would be boring if we were all the same. We certainly sensed his pain when he related an unpleasant incident that he had been witness to in his constituency; that is the shameful face that we do not want to see.

We heard from Hanzala Malik, who spoke about his 40 years working in diversity. I loved his reference to Humza Yousaf as a fellow Glaswegian, because that is the obvious identity that he shares with his colleague. He spoke about real poverty, and finished by mentioning the need to protect, love and support. That is terribly important. People may be uncomfortable using those words, but they are precisely the terms that we should be using.

Rob Gibson spoke about the phrase “peoples of Scotland”, and how it had once featured in an amendment. The amendment was in fact lodged by a young Jean Urquhart, and that is indeed an important phrase. He also quoted Professor Tom Devine, as did other members, and he mentioned Philomena de Lima. I know Philomena, who is an academic at the University of the Highlands and Islands and who has done a lot of research. She has made important points about the “host community”.

I look forward to hearing Christian Allard speaking French on BBC Alba, which will be worth listening to. He talked about the need for regular debate, and there certainly is a need for that.

I will make passing mention of something that has not been mentioned in the debate so far, which is the reports of a hunger strike inside Dungavel. That is certainly alarming to me, and I hope that members will follow the Scottish Trades Union Congress and demand access to the centre to visit the detainees. That is of concern.

It is evident from what we have heard that the Parliament thinks that we should celebrate diversity. There has been wide recognition that negative attitudes are expressed. I wonder whether it is a chicken-and-egg situation and whether the media coverage has been driven by the politicians or the politicians are responding to

the media coverage. We know that those who demonise immigrants choose their words carefully and are wary of falling foul of the legislation that they would like to abolish.

We have all agreed that there has been a positive contribution. I believe that there is such a thing as society, and I think that Scotland is much the better because of its rich mix of peoples and cultures. The same cannot be said of some of the lurid headlines. I will not do them credit by repeating them, but it is important that we do not become complacent. The evidence on the way that communities treat the Gypsy Traveller community shows that there is no opportunity for us to be lax in how we react to the issue.

On the Government’s amendment, the EU process pretty much determines who five of the six Scottish members of the European Parliament will be. Scotland had the opportunity to elect a highly talented immigrant woman from Africa as the sixth representative: the Scottish Green Party’s Maggie Chapman. Instead, Scotland chose an ignorant individual, who has been mentioned. In the meantime at least, Scotland will have to live with the embarrassment of being represented in Brussels by a party that I am not alone in considering to be racist. The strapline for Maggie Chapman’s campaign was:

“For a just and welcoming Scotland”.

The contrast could not be starker.

I thank the Labour Party for its amendment. As I sit on the Justice Committee, which is dealing with the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Bill, I am aware of the levels of exploitation and of that fact that it applies equally to people who have not been trafficked. A recurring theme in the evidence to the committee has been the pre-eminence of immigration matters in the decision-making process. Again, I wonder whether that is being driven by the political agenda.

As has frequently been mentioned, language is terribly important. For example, many people who have been trafficked and involved in the production of drugs are referred to as “the accused”, when they are witnesses. The reporting of things is terribly important, which is why I raised with the UK Border Agency the way in which it portrayed its raids. I asked why, when it made high-profile raids but the people who were arrested were subsequently found to be innocent of the charges, it did not change its website. The UKBA told me that, because it did not release individuals’ names, there was no detriment and that it did not envisage a situation in which an update would be required. Of course, the detriment comes from the negative associations and stereotypes, which I think are very unfortunate.

I will finish by talking about the Highlands, which are a much richer place culturally than they were when I was young. As many members have said, our health and care services would collapse without immigrants. The concept of citizenship has been touched on, and rights and responsibilities go with that. Scotland's demographics show that we need immigration. The people and music of the Highlands are the way I like them—we have a very rich mix. To the Spanish people who I am told are invading Inverness, I say one thing: *fàilte a h-uile duine*—you are all very welcome. Scotland's landscape is beautiful. I looked up the term “belonging” and found the lovely quote that it is being

“part of the landscape, like a tree.”

I like trees and forests. Let us reject negative attitudes and celebrate our diversity. Let us be that just and welcoming Scotland.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of 11 Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move en bloc motions S4M-12685 to S4M-12694, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, and motion S4M-12695, on the designation of a lead committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Advice and Assistance (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2014 Amendment Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Charity Test (Specified Bodies) and the Protection of Charities Assets (Exemption) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Common Financial Tool etc. (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Care (Personal Care and Nursing Care) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Courts Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 (Consequential Provisions) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the General Medical Council (Fitness to Practise and Over-arching Objective) and the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care (References to Court) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Care and Associated Professions (Knowledge of English) Order 2015 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Landfill Tax (Administration) Amendment Regulations 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Landfill Tax (Exemption Certificates) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health and Sport Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Carers (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motions will be put at decision time.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-12683, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 24 March 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Post-study Work Visas

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 25 March 2015

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Fair Work, Skills and Training;
Social Justice, Communities and
Pensioners' Rights

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 26 March 2015

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Health and Sport Committee Debate:
Health Inequalities

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 31 March 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 1 April 2015

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Finance, Constitution and Economy

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 2 April 2015

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-12684, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out an extension to the stage 1 timetable for the Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be extended to 24 April 2015.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):
Before we move to decision time, I call Liz Smith.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):
Thank you, Presiding Officer. I seek the Parliament's permission to withdraw my amendment, which obviously has been moved and debated. I wish to withdraw it on account of some misinformation that was provided earlier about the admissibility of another amendment and the way in which my amendment would impact on it.

The Presiding Officer: Liz Smith is seeking leave to withdraw her amendment S4M-12677.1, on celebrating Scotland's diverse communities.

Amendment, by agreement, withdrawn.

The Presiding Officer: There are nine questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-12678.2, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12678, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on an end to in-work poverty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (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)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)

Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)

McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 54, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-12678.3, in the name of Neil Findlay, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12678, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on an end to in-work poverty, 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)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 33, Against 85, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-12678.1, in the name of Annabel Goldie, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12678, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on an end to in-work poverty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)

Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)

Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 14, Against 100, Abstentions 4.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-12678, in the name of Patrick Harvie, as amended, on in-work poverty, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (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)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)

Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 51, Abstentions 5.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes with deep concern that the majority of children and working-age adults in poverty live in working households; believes that in-work poverty has a profoundly damaging impact on Scottish society and its economy; recognises that poverty wages require to be subsidised through the welfare system in order to meet people's most basic needs; considers that the purpose of social security should be to maintain human wellbeing, not to subsidise cheap labour for the benefit of employers and multinational corporations, and considers that the level of poverty and inequality at work must be addressed by an incoming UK Government; is further concerned regarding the damaging impact that £6 billion of welfare cuts will have on some of the most vulnerable people in society; recognises the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling inequalities and promoting fair work practices through its establishment of the Fair Work Convention and the Scottish Business Pledge; believes that the minimum wage has been eroded by the last two UK governments and should be increased in real terms and demands an increase for apprentices to the same as the national minimum wage for under-18s, and calls for a significant increase in the work allowance to help ensure that those in work have a better chance of lifting themselves and their families out of poverty.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-12677.2, in the name of Alex Neil, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12677, in the name of Jean Urquhart, on celebrating Scotland's diverse communities, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-12677.3, in the name of Ken Macintosh, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12677, in the name of Jean Urquhart, on celebrating Scotland's diverse communities, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Amendment S4M-12677.1, in the name of Liz Smith, has been withdrawn.

The next question is, that motion S4M-12677, in the name of Jean Urquhart, as amended, on celebrating Scotland's diverse communities, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that Scotland's diversity should be celebrated and rejects the negative attitudes expressed in the media and politics toward immigration and immigrants; also notes with concern the impact of these attitudes in the context of the approaching general election; believes that there should be recognition of the very real and positive contribution made by immigrants from all over the world to Scottish society, culture and history; also notes that the Scottish population is comprised of a rich mix of peoples and cultures from all over the world and believes that all immigrants and their descendants are an integral part of the Scottish identity; believes that more can be done to prevent immigrants being exploited or treated unfairly; calls on politicians and the media to stop the demonisation of immigrants; calls on media outlets to take a more responsible approach toward their reporting of immigration to Scotland and the UK, and unites in condemning the recent comments by David Coburn MEP.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to put a single question on motions S4M-12685 to S4M-12694, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments. As no member objects to a single question being put, the question is, that motions S4M-12685 to S4M-12694, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of SSIs, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Advice and Assistance (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2014 Amendment Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Charity Test (Specified Bodies) and the Protection of Charities Assets (Exemption) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Common Financial Tool etc. (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Care (Personal Care and Nursing Care) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Courts Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 (Consequential Provisions) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the General Medical Council (Fitness to Practise and Over-arching Objective) and the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care (References to Court) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Care and Associated Professions (Knowledge of English) Order 2015 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Landfill Tax (Administration) Amendment Regulations 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Landfill Tax (Exemption Certificates) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S4M-12695, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Health and Sport Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Carers (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

Opencast Coal Sites (Carbon Price Support Exemption)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-12246, in the name of Alex Rowley, on United Kingdom Government carbon price support exemption for opencast coal sites. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes proposals put forward for the UK Government to introduce a carbon price support (CPS) exemption for opencast coal sites; acknowledges the recent difficulties in the coal industry in Scotland, which it considers were caused initially by the demise of Scottish Coal and ATH Resources, and the impact that this has had on subsequent opencast restoration projects; understands that, in 2013, the Scottish coal industry taskforce was set up to find solutions to these problems but has had limited success in doing so; recognises that the Cockburn CPS proposal aims to address some of these issues by suggesting an economically viable way of achieving more substantial restoration through a CPS exemption on restoration coal, and understands the substantial impact that this exemption could have on the restoration of some of Scotland's most scarred landscapes, including in the communities of Kelty and Crossgates, which it considers have been significantly affected by the St Ninian's and Muir Dean opencast sites respectively.

17:09

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I am grateful to those who supported my motion and enabled the debate tonight to take place. It is on an issue that, I believe, is of the utmost importance for my constituents and for communities across many of the former coalfield areas of Scotland.

I have opencast sites in my constituency. The Muir Dean site is in Crossgates, the St Ninian's site is in Kelty and the Blair house site is to the west, near Oakley. Thankfully, for the first two sites, a bond was in place when ATH Resources and Scottish Coal went into administration, which meant that at least a level of restoration would be carried out. However, there is scope for that level to be better, even where some restoration has taken place.

In Blair house's case, the drawing down of the existing bond is critical to funding a viable restoration. The council is advancing the matter. Initial claims for repayment have been rejected by the Royal & Sun Alliance. Further legal advice is being sought on the next steps, and actions, including possible court action, are being considered.

Fife Council, like many local authorities, supports the proposed carbon tax.

Although my focus is to raise awareness of the massive environmental nightmare that has been left to scar many parts of Scotland's countryside, I cannot understand why ATH Resources and Scottish Coal and their directors have not been under investigation and are not being brought to task for their role in this environmental disaster.

The point of the debate is to support the proposal for a carbon price support exemption. I am pleased that the chancellor has signalled his intention to work with the Scottish coal task force to deliver a solution for the restoration work.

The Scottish coal task force, under Fergus Ewing's leadership, has confirmed its backing for the CPS exemption and its willingness to work with the United Kingdom Government to design and deliver such a scheme. Although work is still to be done—many sites have either absolutely no solution or a very poor solution—that is a step in the right direction.

Blair house is the clearest Fife example of a situation where, unless the bond funding position is resolved, there is no solution without the CPS exemption. There are a lot of sites like it across Scotland. Indeed, the problem's extent and seriousness cannot be overstated. The scale is unprecedented, with some 3,500 hectares of despoiled land and a backlog that represents years of neglect that will take years to sort out. There are multiple dangerous, unprofiled and uncontrolled water bodies, with the sites being too vast to fence, let alone secure. Beyond general flooding and site degradation issues, essential pumping, monitoring and basic security represent on-going costs that will most likely have to be met by local authorities.

There is an absolute need to look for a solution. The problem has been around since the ATH Resources and Scottish Coal failed two years ago, but communities have put up with the blight for even longer. The problem is worsening as sites flood and degrade. The dangers and risks are there for all to see, and they are becoming harder and harder to ignore.

The task force has met and has been supported by all the key departments and stakeholders. However, no potential solution has been found until now. We should be clear that the CPS exemption is the only solution on the table. The only way to fix a problem of this size is to take a large portion of the capacity that caused the problem and, using different operators, direct that capacity to solving it.

A problem of such a scale needs a game-changing solution. Whatever solution is found, it must result in a large part of industry capacity being applied to the problem. There is no shortcut or quick solution. The CPS exemption will be the

catalyst that focuses effort and attention away from greenfield sites and towards brownfield projects that deliver restoration.

There are two main benefits in finding a quick solution. First, industry capacity is ready to deal with the solution. Oil and gas price collapses have pulled down weak coal prices. Greenfield projects are reducing in number and operators will focus only on the small number that are profitable.

This is therefore the ideal time to focus effort on brownfield sites—not only is capacity available, but the brownfield sites offer the industry a lifeboat and give it the chance to see whether coal prices recover. Unless that lifeboat can be found, capacity will decline and disappear fast. Jobs and skills will disappear. More important, mining equipment will be sold abroad and the capability to restore the sites will decline. A huge amount of mining capacity will be required to deal with the problem, and that will take years, even if the capacity is made available.

Timing-wise, we have a perfect convergence of a need for restoration and jobs and the availability of huge capacity to deal with the problem. Therefore, current market conditions mean that the CPS exemption offers a rate and level of restoration that no one previously thought possible. Hargreaves Services has tackled some of the sites but, by its own admission, because of a shortage of funds it has only scratched the surface. The CPS exemption proposal has the backing of the industry and all the affected local authorities. We need to take action, and I hope that the Parliament will unite to push the UK Government to agree to sign up to the scheme.

17:16

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute, and I congratulate Alex Rowley on bringing the motion to the chamber. I do not for a moment doubt his commitment to the interests of his current constituents and the people he represented in his previous role in Fife Council, who are living with the environmental wreckage of a destructive and deeply irresponsible industry that has been allowed to thrive in this country for too long. However, I am bound to say that I do not agree with his conclusion about the carbon price support exemption. I will explain why.

We are talking about an industry that, like many others that are involved in the extraction of mineral resources, has behaved with breathtaking irresponsibility over many years. It has been happy to walk away with the proceeds of that economic activity while abandoning the environmental and social liabilities that have been built up. Sadly, all too often such assets come

back into active use to enrich some other company that comes along, but the liabilities fall on the public, who live with the results of the destructive activity and with the failure to carry out restoration, and on the public purse, from which the funding comes for the restoration that takes place.

Here we are again. Sadly, the Scottish and UK Governments both seem to want to continue this destructive activity. That is evident not just in the Scottish Government's decisions, but in areas in which functions are reserved, such as the approach to rail track access. If rail track access charges were priced fairly, the industry would pay a great deal more for coal to be taken by rail, which would bring an end to opencast extraction.

It is clear that some people would not welcome that. Some people look at any kind of economic activity that we are overreliant and overdependent on and say, "Jobs are involved, so we must sustain it." It is tiresome how often those who point out the fundamental unsustainability of certain industries, including fossil fuel extraction, are blamed for pointing out that unsustainability and arguing that a change is necessary. I am referring not only to the state of the opencast coal industry, but to the likely closure—whether next year or in a few years' time—of Longannet, which will deprive the industry of a great deal of its market.

We do not need the coal any more, because it is not economically, environmentally or socially beneficial to use it in energy generation. It fails every test of modern energy policy: the security of supply test, the low-carbon test and the affordability test.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): As I live in a former coalfield area, I have been involved in a range of major land use issues in my area and I have objected to opencast coal applications several times. Does Patrick Harvie accept that there are specific occasions when it is relevant and appropriate to engage in opencast activity in order to clean up former industrial sites, because that is almost the only option?

Patrick Harvie: I cannot agree that, to fund restoration, we have to carry on making the problem worse. I will wind up in just a moment, Presiding Officer, but I have to say that that is what I believe would happen—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you back your time for the intervention, Mr Harvie.

Patrick Harvie: That is what I believe would happen if we pursued the policy that has been suggested and which, it should not surprise us to hear, has come from an industry proposition and from the people who want the business to continue. It is Hargreaves Services that has suggested the CPS tax exemption. If we pursue

that policy, we will create even more incentives for otherwise marginal projects to be developed and for opencast extraction to be continued when we need it to end.

I know that saying this will not be popular in all parts of the country—particularly those that have been left dependent on a dying industry—but we need to recognise that the industry is dying if we are to begin to have the frame of mind that allows us to develop alternatives. We should be looking at alternative economic uses for the sites and alternative sustainable economic activities in the areas that have become overdependent on this unsustainable activity.

Simply digging ourselves ever deeper into our current hole will make the problem worse, not better. Like the RSPB, which has sent round a briefing on its concerns about the CPS exemption, I argue that there are alternative approaches that look towards the decline of the industry but which seek to use public funds for restoration instead of consent for additional opencast extraction. I welcome the opportunity to debate the issues, but I must part company on the conclusions that have been reached.

17:21

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I congratulate Alex Rowley on securing this evening's debate, and I very much support the general thrust of his argument and observations. That said, I take some issue with his motion—particularly the reference to the "limited success" of the Scottish coal industry task force. The phrase "damning with faint praise" comes to mind.

From my perspective, the task force has been a great success. It has brought together all the relevant stakeholders to ensure, first, that the employment crisis that was created after 700 people were thrown out of work was effectively tackled; secondly, that the failures in planning and regulatory regimes were addressed to prevent the mistakes of the past from being repeated; and finally, that solutions to restore abandoned opencast sites were found. The latter is still a work in progress but, without the task force, I doubt whether anything of substance would have emerged at all.

Given the scale of opencast coal operations in the Ayrshire coalfield, the subject of the debate is a vital constituency interest of mine. Because the coalfield has historically produced over 50 per cent of all opencast coal in Scotland, the adverse environmental impact of the collapse of the two coal companies, ATH Resources and the Scottish Resources Group, is of a similar scale. In financial terms, East Ayrshire Council has been left with a

notional bill of £161 million to restore former opencast sites to a state agreed with planning consent, but total restoration bond coverage amounts to only £29 million, and some of the bond providers are making life difficult for the council to call down the bonds' full value.

In physical terms, we have been left with 20km² of abandoned and derelict land pitted with huge sheer-sided voids, many of which have filled with water. As a result, public safety and on-going pollution threats are of real and immediate concern. In that context, Hargreaves's CPS exemption proposal provides the only financially viable plan that can deal with the problem comprehensively and in a manner that is acceptable to local communities. Iain Cockburn of Hargreaves, who has done an exceptional job in working up the details of that proposal, has made it clear that local communities as well as planning authorities must have a significant say in the approval of any scheme that emerges from the tendering process that is associated with delivering restoration projects.

Finally, I welcome the declaration in the United Kingdom budget documentation that was issued today that the UK Government will work closely with the Scottish coal industry task force to deliver a restoration solution. I hope and trust that the CPS exemption route in whatever form—Patrick Harvie should be aware that the RSPB favours a different CPS exemption scheme from the one that Hargreaves proposes—will be taken sooner rather than later. I do not know whether the minister has any more information that he will be able to share with us, but I would certainly welcome his response to that development.

17:25

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I did not particularly intend to speak in this debate, but I want to reflect on some of the local experience that I had in my area when I was a councillor.

The former Polkemmet colliery in my area is currently undergoing huge redevelopment with the heartlands project. That project is bringing hundreds—probably thousands—of homes, a school, retail and industrial units, and a major motorway junction on to the M8. It is beginning to make progress after a period of real difficulty during the recession.

In the middle of the opencast extraction process on the site, the contractor at the time, J Fenton and Sons, went bust. However, we did not suffer the catastrophic impact that we see in Fife, in Midlothian and elsewhere, because a new contractor came in immediately, and there was continuity in the excavation of the high-quality coal that was there.

Work went on largely without a blip. Had that not happened, we might have had the same problems that other areas have had. That was largely avoided by the skill, diligence and abilities of the local chief planning officer, Chris Norman, who is, I believe, advising the task force. He negotiated a very significant and tight bond that meant that, when the hole that was being excavated for coal was at its deepest, the bond was at its largest. Therefore, had no new contractor come in, the bond would have covered and fully restored the site.

The contractor squealed at that point. It squealed that it wanted to draw down cash from the bond in order to keep the company going, but that was refused. We were under a lot of pressure on the council at that time to give in, but we refused because we knew that, if the contractor went bust after taking down the bond, the consequence would have been exactly the scenario that we see in Ayrshire, Fife and Midlothian. There was a significant negotiation in order to ensure that the bond was very tight, and there are lessons to be learned from that.

I think that Mr Harvie may have misunderstood the point that I made to him. In order to remove a burning bing that had been on the site for decades and which was causing the silver in people's houses to tarnish—God knows what was happening to their lungs and their breathing—and to get rid of the contaminated land, the water, the flooding and all sorts of other problems, opencast was the only option. It was almost the only game in town. Mr Harvie can shake his head all he likes, but that was the reality of the situation.

Patrick Harvie: How on earth can the only solution to environmental destruction be more environmental destruction?

Neil Findlay: The method that was used to deal with the burning bing was to extract and fold the bing into the hole that was there to extinguish it—to put it out—and then restore the site. The process was very technical, but that was one of the few options that were available on the site. Had we not gone down that route, I think that we would have had a huge environmental disaster on our doorstep.

All I say in this debate is that we should learn from what has happened in West Lothian and the excellent practice of the local authority that avoided the disasters that have happened elsewhere.

I do not particularly want to comment on the issues in relation to the CPS exemption; I do not know enough about it. All I am saying is that, although we have had disasters in some areas of Scotland, we have also had very good experience of local authorities acting responsibly.

17:30

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

All those who represent areas in which mining has taken place are fully aware of the issues facing the opencast mining industry. Falling world prices for coal have put huge pressure on domestic providers. Moreover, as we move towards a low-carbon energy system, domestic demand for coal is going to reduce.

Just last week, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee took evidence about the future of Longannet power station in Fife. It may close as early as March next year, but in any event it is clear that the plant has no future beyond 2020, primarily as a result of European Union emissions directives and carbon pricing.

Longannet is still a major buyer of coal from Scottish producers. That creates a headache for our remaining coal producers, among them Hargreaves, which announced last week that 85 jobs are at risk at sites across Scotland. Hargreaves, which is based in Durham, has been operating at sites in Fife and Ayrshire, having taken them over following the collapse of mining companies Scottish Resources Group and ATH Aardvark in 2013.

Alex Rowley's motion highlights a related issue: the restoration of existing opencast mines. We are all familiar with the legacy of previous mining operations at sites in Fife and Ayrshire. Companies have gone into liquidation, having put aside insufficient sums to allow the sites to be properly restored, and leaving local communities with the dismal prospect of ugly unrestored sites on their doorstep, potentially for many years to come.

Hargreaves has estimated that the remediation of 35km² of land could take five years to complete. The work would involve the creation and safeguarding of 1,000 direct mining jobs and 1,500 indirect jobs. However, it can be done only if we continue to extract coal from the sites to pay the cost of restoration.

The problem is that the sums simply do not add up. That is why Hargreaves has submitted a proposal to the Department of Energy and Climate Change and the Treasury for a carbon price support exemption to free up the necessary resources. If successful, the CPS exemption would allow full restoration of the existing sites and an extra 1 million tonnes of coal to be extracted per annum. That could be done at no net cost to the taxpayer by generating additional fuel duty and protecting existing jobs.

The Hargreaves proposals have been submitted to the Scottish Government's coal industry task force, of which I am pleased to be a member. Last year, I wrote to DECC with my support for the

proposals that are currently under consideration by the United Kingdom Treasury. Hargreaves has worked hard to gain cross-party support for what it proposes.

Of course it is easy for us in Parliament to call on the UK Government to forgo tax revenue, but I hope that the Treasury and DECC look upon the proposals favourably. Today's announcement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer provides some encouragement.

I am aware that Hargreaves's proposals do not command unanimous support. There have been competing proposals, and there is some scepticism in some quarters as to whether the CPS exemption will deliver the benefits that Hargreaves sets out. Nevertheless, action needs to be taken. The danger is that, without some intervention, there will be no restoration of the sites, there will be a loss of jobs, we will lose the skills involved in the industry for good, and future generations will have to live with a legacy of inaction.

I hope that we will see progress on the issue, either along the lines of the Hargreaves proposal or in some other manner. I hope that the debate is helpful in advancing that agenda, and I close by commending Alex Rowley for bringing it to the chamber.

17:34

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): I also congratulate Alex Rowley on bringing the matter to debate. I recognise his strong constituency interest. In the same way as Mr Ingram, I find myself in agreement with most of what he said this evening.

As Alex Rowley set out, the coal industry task force was set up in the aftermath of the insolvency and administration of the Scottish Resources Group—Scottish Coal, as it was—and ATH. The purposes of the task force were twofold. The first purpose was to seek the re-engagement of as many as possible of the several hundred employees who lost their jobs, many of them in parts of Scotland where there are very few alternatives, if any, and none at the level of remuneration that the employees enjoyed. The second purpose was to find an approach to tackle the considerable problem of restoration of the coalled-out sites. Those were the two objectives.

Mr Ingram mentioned the work that the group has done. I have been pleased to be the co-chair, along with Russel Griggs, of the group. It has been the largest task force that I have ever chaired, and I have chaired quite a few. I have been grateful for the contributions of Mr Rowley; Mr Ingram; Sandra Osborne; Aileen Campbell, who is here this evening; Murdo Fraser; Willie Rennie, who is not

here this evening; Willie Coffey; and Cathy Jamieson. I hope that I have not inadvertently omitted anybody.

I mention those names because it has been a cross-party effort. We have largely put politics aside. I cannot think of any of the eight meetings of the task force where party politics has interposed or been relevant, and that has helped to drive forward some of the solutions and achievements that the task force has reached. One of them was to see the re-engagement of 500 people from Hargreaves in just under a year. That was a terrific achievement given the difficulties.

I also pay tribute to the other players. Companies such as Kier, Banks and others have played a part, as have service companies such as Caterpillar and Terex, which are to some extent dependent on the continuation of this work. Up to several thousand jobs are indirectly dependent on the sector, as Mr Findlay said, in coaling communities. There is a whole network of subcontractors and jobs that are dependent on the work continuing.

We had a heavy onus of responsibility, but we managed to play a part in seeing that progress happen, and £200,000 being devoted to ticketing issues. We persuaded the Office of Rail Regulation to cut its increase in freight charges from £4 to £1 a tonne—a great achievement—after we gave it a significant cross-examination at the task force.

Local authorities have made progress with calling up bonds. It is difficult work, but they have achieved successes by working together and leaving the politics aside.

Rather than fold, the task force continued because of the new, emerging series of problems that is caused by the low world coal price, which Murdo Fraser rightly referred to. It places considerable further economic pressure on the operators, and in my opinion, unless it is addressed by a solution such as is now on the table, it may lead to the termination of the opencast sector in perhaps two or three years' time.

The proposal that was put by the industry and adopted unanimously by the task force is that there should be an extension to the existing exemptions from the carbon price support mechanism—the carbon tax—and it should be very narrowly defined. Restoration projects would be subject to competitive tender and an open process. The proposal uses coal that remains on or adjacent to the sites to subsidise the costs of the restoration scheme. Extraction of coal would be considered where the extraction creates value and a net cost reduction for a restoration scheme.

The Coal Authority would have oversight and would provide ballast and an element of control mechanism, which is necessary for such a scheme. The proposal would cover all sites that were left with unfunded restoration liabilities. The definition of orphan sites needs to be carefully considered, but no sites that should not attract exemption support would be inadvertently supported. The starting premise for the objective of the scheme would be to deliver restoration to the level that was consented at the time of the failure of ATH and SRG.

I am pleased that, on page 97 of the red book associated with the budget announcement today by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the UK Government makes the following statement:

“The government will work closely with the Scottish Coal Task Force and industry stakeholders to explore alternative options for addressing the environmental liabilities associated with unrestored opencast mines in Scotland.”

That is a possible step forward and one that I welcome in the spirit in which it is offered and in the spirit that, as I said, has been followed in the opencast task force. The statement does not refer to the UK Government agreeing in principle that there should be the exemption that is sought but, be that as it may, let us hope that that is what is in the UK Government's mind.

Having become aware of that today, as the minister with responsibility for energy in the Scottish Government, I will therefore make immediate contact with the UK Government to seek a meeting with the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, Priti Patel, to press for adoption of the solution that has such cross-party support here in Scotland. When I do so, I will relay to her the broad-based support of all the main parties in Scotland, and I am pleased to be able to do so.

If the proposal, or some version of it, is not adopted, I will be very concerned for the future of all the people who are working in the coaling communities. I have met many of them. I have met their union representatives and discussed the issue with their union representatives, for whom I have the greatest respect. They are terrific people and it has been an honour to meet them. I want to do right by them. I, with the support of colleagues in the main parties in Scotland and working with party spokespeople, will do everything that I possibly can to see the exemption granted.

Coaling and restoring go together. Those voices on the fringes that say that we can have restoring without coaling do not, I am afraid to say, understand the reality of the situation, as has been set out by both Mr Rowley and Mr Fraser. Fortunately, that is a minority view. I am delighted that, in this debate, we have heard a clear and virtually unanimous view that we have managed—those of us who display some vestiges of common

sense and rationality—to work together to help those who deserve our help and who elect us here to help them, to stand up for their interests and not to regard their work as dispensable on the altar of some ideological view.

I will do everything in my power to further the very good work that those of us who have taken part positively in the debate have displayed this evening. I will put every possible effort into it, and I guarantee to every member in this chamber that that is what I will do.

Meeting closed at 17:43.

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