



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 1 September 2015

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 1 September 2015

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Stuart MacQuarrie, the chaplain to the University of Glasgow and to Glasgow Warriors rugby team and formerly chaplain to the 2014 Commonwealth games.

The Rev Stuart D MacQuarrie: Presiding Officer, I would like to thank you and the former First Minister, Mr Salmond, for inviting me to deliver this reflection. The invitation was extended last summer when the then First Minister visited the Commonwealth games village, and its religion and belief centre at the very heart of the village. There people from all faiths, and those of none, found a place where they could reflect on their successes, their disappointments, their achievements and their challenges.

We used the interfaith model that we have at Glasgow university chaplaincy, where what matters is inclusivity, not mere respect or tolerance but an active appreciation of the wonderfully diverse range of human beings who contribute to our community.

For the first time, the Commonwealth games had a secular humanist chaplain, alongside Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh and Hindu chaplains. Prior to the start of the games, we held a service in the university chapel with Interfaith Scotland, bringing together the people of Glasgow with those who were here for the games as visitors. Each faith or belief community presented a reflection that was a reading, a song or music.

Our Muslim chaplain, Shoket Aksi, brought a recitation from the holy Qur'an, which he chanted in that wonderful way that I find evocative of Highland churches when people sing the Psalms in Gaelic. Shoket, was followed by Rabbi Rubin, an orthodox Jewish rabbi. As they passed each other, they paused and shook hands. That was at a time when the conflict in Gaza had escalated, and in many ways that handshake represented a key moment in the friendliness and warmth of Glasgow's Commonwealth games.

Earlier this summer, our nation sadly lost Charles Kennedy, former rector of the university and notable politician. One distinctive aspect that

Charles brought to public life was his humanity and his concern for others, expressed in an ethos of public service. In the university we intend, perhaps with your help, to commemorate Charles's life with a fitting and lasting tribute.

Shortly, you, as members of the Scottish Parliament, begin your parliamentary programme and will start campaigning for re-election of yourself and your party. You offer your political programme and yourselves not only as candidates but as human beings. In doing so, you have an opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to public service that is able to see and value each person as a human being and through this Parliament and its work is able to overcome that which divides our communities, able to appreciate what each person can bring to our common life together and able to offer a warm, welcoming handshake, not for what people are or whether they might or might not vote for you but for who they are.

Business Motion

14:03

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-14107, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 1 September 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by First Minister's Statement on the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2015-16

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2015-16

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 2 September 2015

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Portfolio Questions
Fair Work, Skills and Training;
Social Justice, Communities and
Pensioners' Rights

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2015-16 (continuation of debate)

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 3 September 2015

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.15 pm Ministerial Statement: Policing

followed by Ministerial Statement: Scottish Government's response to the planned closure of Longannet Power Station

followed by Economy, Energy and Tourism
Committee Debate: Economic Impact of

the Film, TV and Video Games Industries

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 8 September 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 9 September 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 10 September 2015

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 15 September 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 16 September 2015

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Justice and the Law Officers;

	Rural Affairs, Food and Environment
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Thursday 17 September 2015	
11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
12.30 pm	Members' Business
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Stage 3 Proceedings: British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time—[<i>Joe FitzPatrick.</i>]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:04

HM Naval Base Clyde (Investment)

1. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government how it would invest the £500 million that the United Kingdom Government has announced to build nuclear-armed submarine infrastructure to benefit the Scottish economy and create jobs. (S4T-01095)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The United Kingdom Government is implementing swingeing cuts to both public services and the benefits received by the most vulnerable in society. The chancellor's announcement, therefore, and his commitment to invest a further £100 billion in a new generation of nuclear weapons clearly demonstrate that the UK Government has its priorities all wrong. The Scottish Government has set out the infrastructure priorities that we pursue through the infrastructure investment plan, which covers areas such as housing, transport, energy efficiency, schools and hospitals. Those are the priorities of the people of Scotland.

Alison Johnstone: It is indeed pre-emptive and wrong-headed to spend half a billion pounds on paving the way for new nuclear weapons while people suffer hardship through welfare cuts and have to rely on food banks.

Faslane is strategically important. It is a vital naval base that can play a much more effective role in our defence without nuclear weapons. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, if the point of the money is to create jobs and improve people's lives, the UK Government's return on this investment will be very poor?

John Swinney: I agree with the approach and the line of argument advanced by Alison Johnstone. There is a long-term role for Faslane as a conventional naval base. It has always formed part of the Scottish Government's and my party's plans but, at a time when public expenditure is under such pressure and support for ensuring that our conventional defences are effective and properly funded is broad if not universal in this country, the decision to invest £500 million in, essentially, as the chancellor said yesterday, the foundations of the next generation of nuclear weapons is, in the Scottish Government's view, the wrong decision. If it was spent on a capital investment programme, there is a variety of other ways in which the expenditure of £500 million could have a much greater, more

profound and more long-lasting and beneficial effect on the lives of the people of Scotland.

Alison Johnstone: On 6 August last year, the Scottish Parliament voted with the Greens for a constitutional ban on Trident and a global ban on nuclear weapons. However, George Osborne is still going ahead, and Labour continues to say that it is anti-nuclear but pro new weapons. Does the cabinet secretary agree that this investment does not respect the will of the Scottish people and will only undermine global disarmament efforts? Does he welcome the opportunity for Scottish Labour to finally get firmly behind unilateral disarmament?

John Swinney: It is beyond doubt that the decision that the chancellor announced yesterday completely ignores the question of respect for the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government. One of the points that the Prime Minister made to the First Minister immediately after the general election was that he intended to govern on the basis of respect but, unfortunately, there was no respect in Monday's announcement. There was no respect whatsoever—no respect for the Scottish Parliament and, frankly, no respect for the Westminster Parliament either. Apparently, the Westminster Parliament is going to have a debate to decide whether to proceed with the next generation of nuclear weapons. The principle of respect has been entirely ignored by the Conservative Government.

As for the points that Alison Johnstone made about the Labour Party, I shall leave the Labour Party to speak for itself, but I think that the overwhelming majority of Labour-supporting individuals in Scotland are hostile to the new generation of Trident nuclear missiles that the UK Government proposes, and it would be good if their voices were expressed by the Labour Party in Scotland.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Does the Deputy First Minister agree with me and many eminent experts that Trident nuclear weapons are obsolete and play no part in addressing the terrorism that happens now, and that spending this kind of money when we are supposed to be in austerity, according to Mr Osborne, is disgraceful and terrible for the people who are suffering just now with the cuts that are coming from Westminster?

John Swinney: I agree with Sandra White's point about the United Kingdom Government's wrong priorities, given the pressure on the public finances and the fact that conventional defence forces are not receiving the support that they require to enable them to safely do the job that we expect of them.

Sandra White made a strategic point. We live in a very troubled world. There are various conflicts

around the world, and nuclear weapons are not protecting us or contributing towards the stabilisation of those conditions. That is one of the many reasons why the Scottish Government believes that there is no place for nuclear weapons in our society.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Is the cabinet secretary aware that the UK Government's £500 million investment in Faslane is also for jetties and ship lifts to accommodate additional submarines? That flows from Gordon Brown's decision to consolidate all the UK's submarine fleet at Faslane. Surely, given the Scottish National Party's plans to make Faslane home to the Scottish navy—whatever size that would be—that investment in infrastructure would be welcome. Does the cabinet secretary agree with his own words when he said that he would use the money to invest in conventional defence or those of Nicola Sturgeon when she said that the money would be invested in education? Who should we believe?

John Swinney: I might have known that Gordon Brown would be responsible for all this. He seems to be responsible for everything disastrous that has happened around us over many years.

It says it all that Jackie Baillie is coming here as the cheerleader for an announcement that the Conservative Government made on Monday. Of course, she is just continuing the role that she has occupied for some years as the Conservatives' cheerleader in this Parliament. It is nice that, after the summer break, some things are back to normal. It took only 11 minutes after Parliament reconvened to have that confirmed.

Jackie Baillie knows that this Government's priorities are to invest in our housing infrastructure to create homes for our people, in the transport infrastructure to connect our communities, in our population's energy efficiency needs to reduce energy costs and in our schools and hospitals, and to ensure that we meet at every turn the needs and expectations of the people of Scotland.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Given that the population of Argyll and Bute is projected to decline sharply over the next few years, a subject that we debated recently in the Parliament, does the minister accept that many people there are delighted with yesterday's announcement by the chancellor, which will help to create and secure many thousands of valuable jobs, including many construction jobs? The new infrastructure will allow the number of staff based at Faslane to rise to 8,200 by 2022. Is that not a good thing?

John Swinney: I think that Mr McGrigor is utterly out of touch with the people of Argyll and Bute.

Jamie McGrigor: I am not.

John Swinney: I have spent a good proportion of the summer in Argyll and Bute, both on my personal holidays and on Government business.

Jamie McGrigor: You were in a canoe in Tiree.

The Presiding Officer: Order.

John Swinney: The issue that the people of Argyll and Bute raised with me was digital connectivity. Would it not be better if we spent £500 million on that, on ferry infrastructure or on improving the Rest and Be Thankful road, which Mr Russell has championed so effectively? Perhaps those are the priorities of the people of Argyll and Bute priorities, and not our society wasting money on the next generation of nuclear missiles.

Work Capability Assessments

2. Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what information it has on how many people in Scotland died between December 2011 and February 2014 shortly after a work capability assessment found them fit for work. (S4T-01090)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government does not hold information on the number of deaths in Scotland relating to the United Kingdom Government's work capability assessment. However, I have today written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions asking for a breakdown of the figures in Scotland. Clearly, any causality between the assessment and anyone taking their own life would be a very disturbing and serious situation. It would be intolerable.

Clare Adamson: Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is time that Iain Duncan Smith adhered to the so-called respect agenda between the Governments and came to this Parliament's Welfare Reform Committee to answer our many questions on the sanctions regime, cuts to tax credits and disability payments, and the shocking deaths of those found fit for work by his Government?

Alex Neil: I absolutely agree. The lack of respect not just from Iain Duncan Smith but from other ministers in his department and the UK Government generally entirely undercuts and undermines its claim to treat this Parliament and the people of Scotland with respect. I would have thought that it would be highly appropriate for the secretary of state to come and explain the reasons for his policies to the Welfare Reform Committee. I

am absolutely sure that, if he were to listen to some of the evidence received by the committee, it would persuade him to change course completely.

Clare Adamson: Does the cabinet secretary share my concern, given Iain Duncan Smith's recent announcement of his plans, that there are likely to be cuts to disability payments for 43 per cent of the people who are currently in receipt of employment and support allowance?

Alex Neil: When we consider the welfare cuts in their totality, I think that it is generally accepted that the people who suffer the most are families and disabled people. On the impact on Scotland generally, the United Kingdom Government's package of welfare cuts will reduce welfare spending by just under £2.5 billion in 2015-16 alone, which by any standard is a major attack on the living standards of the most vulnerable members of our community.

National Museums Scotland (Pay Dispute)

3. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with National Museums Scotland regarding the ongoing pay dispute. (S4T-01096)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): National Museums Scotland held talks with the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service and unions on 21 August. National Museums Scotland has kept the Scottish Government informed of the outcome of the talks and the impact of the industrial action the following week. As the employer, NMS is keen to maintain dialogue through ACAS, with a view to resolving the pay dispute; I strongly encourage that course of action.

Sarah Boyack: Is the cabinet secretary concerned that the dispute has been running for more than 18 months and that the NMS agreed to call in ACAS only on the eve of the strike last week? Surely there should have been intervention far earlier. There is now a huge turnover of staff in the department and there is a two-tier wage structure, which must surely be unacceptable to the Scottish Government.

Fiona Hyslop: Sarah Boyack is right to say that the issue has a long history. The new contracts for new employees were implemented almost five years ago, and I think that it took a further three years for the Public and Commercial Services Union to take up the issue of industrial action.

On attempts to resolve the issue, proposals have been put forward on tackling issues to do with low pay. I make it clear that NMS complies with the Government's pay policy and implements the living wage.

I encourage NMS and the unions to engage with ACAS. It is unfortunate that, with talks with ACAS scheduled, there was industrial action. The matter must be taken seriously; I have asked NMS to take it seriously, and I hope that the proposals that have been put forward constructively are engaged with. It is unfortunate, but I do not think that PCS members are yet aware of those offers.

Sarah Boyack: My understanding, having talked to some of the staff on the picket line last week, is that some low-paid members have been asked to donate some of their salary to other low-paid members. How can that be acceptable? If affordability is the issue, how can the cabinet secretary think it acceptable for the Government to spend £150,000 on a commercially viable, profit-making enterprise such as T in the Park, rather than sorting out a long-term and debilitating dispute that is doing reputational damage?

Fiona Hyslop: To introduce a new weekend allowance for staff would cost £1.2 million over the next spending review. I point out that, although the previous spending review period began at the time of the changes back in 2010-11, there has been no request since then, from any member of this Parliament, to implement a change and provide the £1.2 million that would be required to do what PCS is asking for.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for agreeing to meet me to discuss the on-going dispute at National Museums Scotland. However, the mood of the workforce who I met on the picket line last week is steadfast in opposing the two-tier workforce structure that has been imposed by the management without appropriate consultation.

Will the cabinet secretary take further steps to encourage parties to come to a resolution that ensures fairness in the workplace and brings to an end a dispute that is damaging the reputation of the national museums of Scotland and which has gone on for far too long?

Fiona Hyslop: The member will be aware that I have met PCS, FDA and Prospect, and also National Museums Scotland. Indeed, a number of the issues that the unions raised with me have been dealt with, including the Scottish living wage for National Museums Scotland Enterprises. It is not part of the Government's pay policy, but it now has the living wage. The issue around no compulsory redundancies has also been addressed.

Low pay is an important issue for all areas. We should also consider that the bill for the fixed costs of NMS, including staffing, is 76 per cent of the grant in aid. Given the reductions in the Scottish Government's budgets, it has been very difficult for many cultural organisations to meet their

responsibilities, including providing uplift when required under the pay policy, despite pay freezes.

We must resolve this issue. I want it to be resolved, but I think that the best way of doing that is to bring people together and continue the on-going ACAS discussions.

The Presiding Officer: I ask Neil Findlay to be brief.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Why is it okay for the cabinet secretary to find £150,000 for T in the Park but nothing to settle this two-year-long dispute? Will she answer that directly, please?

Fiona Hyslop: Many jobs are dependent on a successful, on-going T in the Park. Many people across the country would think that to provide £150,000 for that event to ensure its viability is the right decision, and people have said that to me. In order to address the issue that Neil Findlay has raised a number of times—Jim Eadie has also raised it and asked to meet me, and I have personally addressed it with the unions—we would have to find £394,000 a year to address an increase and provide an additional allowance.

Proposals are on the table to address the issue of low pay in the sector. I hope that every employer—whether they are in the public sector, a charity, as is the case with National Museums Scotland, or in another sector—is seeking to resolve that. However, it is a real task. An offer has been provided to PCS. I encourage it to get round the table to discuss the matter with ACAS and address it.

Programme for Government 2015-16

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a statement by Nicola Sturgeon on the Scottish Government's programme for government 2015-16. The First Minister's statement will be followed by a debate, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:21

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): This programme for government sets out a range of actions for the coming year. It also sets out a vision for the coming decade.

This Government has a record to be proud of. We have delivered better services with reduced resources; school leaver destinations are the best on record; a fifth of all school buildings have been rebuilt or refurbished; crime is at a 40-year low; we have higher employment than the rest of the United Kingdom; and national health service waiting times are among the lowest ever recorded. We have also made necessary and radical long-term reforms to police, colleges, health and social care services and our school curriculum.

The foundations are strong. This programme for government sets out how we will build on them. It outlines the legislation that the Government will introduce between now and the end of March, and also the key policies that we will pursue for the remainder of the current session of Parliament to support our economy, create a fairer society and improve our public services.

However, it does more than that. This programme for government looks beyond the current parliamentary year to the long term. It sets out how we intend to address the challenges of the future. It provides a policy platform that will inform our decisions in the spending review and budget bill and shape our agenda for the next session of Parliament. It also begins to set out how we will use—creatively and ambitiously—the limited new powers that are proposed in the Scotland Bill.

The success of our economy is essential to all our aims, so I am today setting out a bold ambition. We intend to make Scotland the best place in the UK to do business. We intend to become the real northern powerhouse—the UK location of choice for businesses that are looking to locate, expand or invest. We will do that not by a race to the bottom on costs but by a determined focus on the four pillars of our economic strategy: investment in people and infrastructure,

innovation, internationalisation and inclusive growth.

We will continue to support our oil and gas industry. Our energy jobs task force has been extended for a further six months and we will prioritise key sectors where we have a competitive advantage: food and drink, life sciences, financial services, creative industries, low carbon and renewable energy industries.

The following key measures that I am announcing today will support sustainable economic growth. We will continue to provide the most competitive business rates package in the UK and, for the duration of the next session of Parliament, we will fund the small business bonus, which already supports 100,000 business premises across the country.

We will extend the operation of our four enterprise areas, which operate across 15 sites, for three years until 2020. We will also establish a fifth enterprise area at BioCity in North Lanarkshire. Companies locating in those sites will be eligible for rates relief, enhanced capital allowances, streamlined planning processes, skills and training support and help to access international markets.

We will work to strengthen Scotland's manufacturing base, with a new manufacturing action plan to be published this autumn, and we will undertake a root-and-branch review of the planning system, with particular emphasis on increasing the delivery of high-quality housing developments. Over the next year, our enterprise agencies will work with an additional 1,000 companies to help them to grow through innovation, and we will support our innovation centres with a £1 million challenge fund.

We will intensify our support for internationalisation. The value of our international exports increased by 20 per cent in the three years from 2010. A new trade and investment strategy, to be published later this year, will set out how we will build on that success. We will establish new innovation and investment hubs, the first of which will be located in London, Brussels and Dublin. They will be up and running by summer next year and will provide places for Government, our agencies and public partners and the private sector to make international connections that will boost exports and inward investment, promote the research and innovation excellence of our businesses and universities and enhance international collaboration.

We will continue to invest in skills. We will spend £16 million this year to support the implementation of our youth employment strategy. Priorities include better careers advice in schools, higher-quality work placements, a closer relationship

between schools and business and an expansion of foundation apprenticeships. We will also continue to increase the overall number of apprenticeships from 25,000 to 30,000 a year by 2020.

We will make major investments in infrastructure. Next week, the new Borders railway will be opened by the Queen. It is the longest new domestic railway line to be constructed in Britain in more than a century. Construction will also begin on dualling the A9—one of the biggest road projects of this generation. Yesterday, I announced that Ferguson's shipyard on the Clyde is the preferred bidder for a £100 million contract for two new ferries. Over the next year, we will complete and open the new Queensferry crossing, make progress on the Aberdeen bypass and invest in rail improvements between Edinburgh and Glasgow and between Aberdeen and Inverness. We will also continue the transformation of our digital infrastructure. In every part of the country, we will deliver major projects that will provide the 21st-century infrastructure that our businesses rely on to grow, innovate and become more productive. However, as the big projects of this Parliament reach completion, we must determine our new priorities. So, alongside our draft budget for 2016-17, we will publish an updated infrastructure investment plan that will set out our plans for the next 10 years and beyond.

For many of our businesses, a real restriction on growth is a lack of access to finance, which is why we are setting up a business development bank. By the end of this year, we will have published the timetable for establishing it. However, I can announce today an additional significant initiative to provide practical assistance to businesses with the greatest potential to fuel our growth. This autumn, we will establish a new £40 million growth fund for small and medium-sized enterprises that will provide microcredit finance of up to £25,000, loans of up to £100,000 and equity investment of up to £2 million. We will also use our limited new powers to support business growth. In doing that, we will subject our devolved tax forecasts to the scrutiny of the independent Scottish Fiscal Commission. In the coming year, that body will be put on a statutory footing by the Scottish Fiscal Commission bill.

We are already consulting business and others about the new tax powers in the Scotland Bill, and we will set out our intentions in the budget bill. This autumn, we will receive the report of the independent commission on local government finance. However, I can confirm today one early commitment. The reduction of air passenger duty, which we plan to cut by 50 per cent by the end of the next session of Parliament, will begin in April 2018, when we will introduce a replacement Scottish tax—an early indication of how we will

use our new powers to encourage growth and jobs.

We are also promoting inclusive growth. We agree with the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and others that greater equality is good for economic growth. Society benefits from a strong business community and businesses benefit from a fairer society. That is why we will continue to place a strong and growing emphasis on fair work. As part of that, I can announce that, as soon as we have the power to do so, we will abolish fees for employment tribunals. That is another early indication of how we will use our new powers.

I can also announce that in the coming year we will extend the duty on public authorities to publish information about the gender pay gap. That duty currently applies to public bodies with more than 150 employees. We will reduce the threshold to 20 employees.

We will also continue to promote the real living wage. The living wage makes work pay and reduces poverty. It also helps businesses to increase productivity, reduce absenteeism and improve staff retention. Last year, I set a target of having 150 living wage accredited employers by the end of 2015. There are already more than 300 such employers, so we are now working to a target of 500 by the dissolution of this Parliament and I fully expect it to be met.

Over the next six months, the fair work convention will create a new framework for the relationship between employers, employees and trade unions, public bodies and government. In particular, it will propose and promote employment practices that benefit workers and enhance productivity. Improving productivity—and ensuring that the benefits of better productivity are widely shared—is one of the key economic challenges that we face in the next decade. Fair work founded on partnership between employers, employees and government is a central part of the solution. That is why my Government will vigorously oppose the United Kingdom Government's proposed trade union legislation, which seeks to undermine the rights of unions to fairly and reasonably represent their members. We will oppose it for a simple reason—we see trade unions as partners, not as opponents.

Fair work is just one of the ways in which we will tackle inequality. Good-quality, affordable housing is essential for people to live happy, healthy and fulfilling lives. Over the past decade, the rate of new house completions has been higher in Scotland than it has in England. Much of that is due to our investment. I can confirm that, by the end of March, we will not just meet but exceed our target for the present session of Parliament of

delivering 30,000 affordable homes, but we intend to do more. Over the next year, we will establish a rural housing fund to better meet the needs of rural communities. The help-to-buy scheme has helped 6,500 people to buy homes and has provided support for the construction sector, including the 211 small companies that are registered for the small developers fund. I am announcing that we will invest an additional £195 million over the next three years to extend the scheme. We will set out more detail following the spending review in November.

Alongside our continued investment in affordable housing and help for home owners, we will improve conditions in the private rented sector. Our private tenancies bill will modernise a law that affects hundreds of thousands of tenants and landlords across Scotland. The bill will improve security for tenants and provide clear rights and safeguards for landlords. I can also announce that the bill will include provisions for rent controls in rent pressure areas.

Alongside action on housing, we will invest more than £100 million this year to mitigate the impact of UK Government welfare cuts. Make no mistake—we will continue to stand against a UK Government that imposes austerity on the vulnerable while preparing to spend billions renewing Trident.

We are also preparing to use our new, albeit limited, welfare powers. The new powers that are proposed in the Scotland Bill fall far short of what we would need to fully mitigate the harm caused by UK Government policies. For example, cuts to tax credits alone will reduce the incomes of more than 200,000 households in Scotland by an average of £3,000 a year.

However, we will use the new powers to help those who need it most. We will set out our detailed proposals by the end of this year, but I can give an early indication of our priorities today. I can confirm that it is our intention to introduce a Scottish social security bill in the first year of the new session of Parliament. The bill will begin to put in place the essential delivery infrastructure for a new Scottish social security system. It will also make provision for the early policy changes that we will wish to make as soon as we have the powers to do so. Those will include improvements to how the system works for disabled people and carers, and changes to universal credit to help people manage their money better. I can also confirm that the bill will make provision for the earliest possible abolition of the bedroom tax. We are also working on a replacement for the Department for Work and Pensions discredited work programme, and I can confirm that that replacement will be in place by 1 April 2017.

We will do everything that we can to mitigate welfare cuts and restore dignity to our social security system, but real and long-term progress on tackling inequality has to start in the early years of life. This new school term is the first in which two-year-olds from low income families have been eligible for 600 hours of childcare and early learning. Last year, all three and four-year-olds became eligible for 600 hours. That is an increase from 412 hours eight years ago. We are now working to improve the flexibility of that provision. We are also planning the next stage of expansion: our aim is to provide more than 1,100 hours a year by 2020. That will be a huge investment in our economy and society. It will support parents back into work and ensure that children get the best start in life.

That support in the early years will also help to improve attainment in schools. Improving school attainment is arguably the single most important objective in this programme for government. Improving it overall and closing the gap between children in our most and least deprived areas is fundamental to our aim of making Scotland fairer and more prosperous. Education in Scotland is already good and getting better. Last month, young people achieved a record number of passes at higher and advanced higher. However, despite some encouraging evidence that it might be narrowing slightly, the attainment gap is still too large. To address it, we need to be open to innovation and new practice; that is the purpose of our £100 million attainment fund.

However, we also need to have better information about attainment so that we measure progress consistently and drive change. We need to be able to see what is working and where we still need to improve. I can confirm that we will establish a new national improvement framework—a draft of it is being published today. We will introduce new national standardised assessments for pupils in primaries 1, 4 and 7, and in the third year of secondary school. The new assessments will focus on literacy and numeracy. They will be piloted next year in schools participating in the attainment challenge and then introduced in all schools in 2017.

The new national assessments, which we will develop in partnership with local government, teachers and parents, will replace the variety of different assessments already used by local authorities. They will not increase teacher workload; indeed, as a Government, we are mindful of the need to reduce bureaucracy so that teachers can focus on what they do best: helping children to learn.

The new assessments will introduce greater consistency to curriculum for excellence. They will provide reliable evidence of a child's performance

or progress, but they will not be the sole measurement. This is not about narrowing the curriculum or forcing teachers to teach to a test. It is not a return to the national testing of old. The assessments will inform, not replace, teacher judgment. They will provide robust and consistent evidence to help teachers judge whether a child is achieving the required level of curriculum for excellence.

We will publish more information about children's progress at different levels of curriculum for excellence in primary and lower secondary school, to match the level of information available in the senior years of secondary school. We will consult on the detail and format of publication to ensure that we provide it in the appropriate context. I have no desire to see crude league tables that distort rather than enhance our understanding of children's attainment and performance, but I am determined that we make available much more information about performance in primary and lower secondary school.

Parents need meaningful information about the progress of their children. Teachers need to know which pupils are doing well and which ones need more support; governments—local and national—need to have reliable data to inform policy; and all of us need to know whether the twin aims of raising attainment overall and closing the attainment gap are being met. That is the key. Assessing and measuring attainment is not an end in itself: the purpose is to drive improvement.

To that end, I can announce today that our funded commitment to maintain teacher numbers will continue next year. We will work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to address challenges in teacher recruitment and ensure that we get teachers to areas of greatest need. Of course, the Scottish attainment challenge—backed by the £100 million fund—is already ensuring that additional staff and resources are directed at more than 300 schools in our most deprived areas. Through the attainment challenge we will continue to identify, implement and fund best practice of what works in improving performance. I want to leave no one in any doubt. I am determined that we will demonstrate, year on year, that Scottish education is improving for all our young people and that the attainment gap is narrowing.

Raising attainment in schools is all about ensuring that our young people get the chance to reach their full potential in life. To that end, let me mention three further initiatives. First, as I set out last week, we will invest an additional £16 million a year to extend eligibility for the education maintenance allowances that allow young people from our poorest backgrounds to stay on in

education. The numbers eligible will increase from 35,000 to 57,000. Secondly, in the autumn we will receive the interim report of the commission on widening access to university. That will allow us to consider what needs to be done to ensure that a child born today in one of our most deprived communities has no less a chance of going to university than a child born in one of our least deprived communities. Thirdly, as part of our drive to improve outcomes for children in care, we will right a long-standing wrong for kinship care families. I can announce today that we will fund local authorities to increase financial support for kinship carers to the same level as foster carers. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning and COSLA will announce further details of that policy shortly.

Our focus on improvement in education is matched by our ambition for the national health service. Since 2007, we have employed an additional 10,000 staff in our NHS. That investment has delivered improvements. For example, 95 per cent of in-patients and day cases are now treated within 12 weeks. In 2007, the waiting time target was longer, at 18 weeks, and only 85 per cent of patients were seen within it. Hospital care is also safer today as a result of our patient safety programme, and hospital infections have been reduced by more than 80 per cent.

We are also well advanced with the integration of health and social care—perhaps the biggest reform to how care is delivered since the establishment of the NHS. I can confirm today that the process of integration will be complete by next April. Integration is already delivering improvements. Last year, in the programme for government, I identified delayed discharges as a key priority. Today, I can report that delayed discharges have fallen by almost a fifth in the past 12 months.

The next step is to ensure that our NHS develops as a genuine community health service. We know that the ageing population—to be welcomed, of course—is nevertheless increasing pressure on our hospitals and will continue to do so. We also know that delivering care at home or as close to home as possible delivers better outcomes, so we must ensure that people are admitted to hospital only when they need to be. That means we must support and transform primary care. I can announce today that, over the next year, backed by our £60 million primary care fund, we will test new models of primary care in at least 10 sites across urban and rural Scotland. We will support general practitioners to work in clusters and develop new ways of working with district nurses, health visitors, community rehabilitation teams and health improvement services, using different services such as intermediate care beds.

We intend that the good practice learned from that will be implemented across Scotland over the course of the next session of Parliament, supported by a renegotiated and fit-for-the-future GP contract. We will also develop plans over the next year to extend the Golden Jubilee model of care, which separates planned treatment from emergency care. We will also invest £100 million to improve mental health services, particularly for children and adolescents.

Lastly on health, I give a commitment that will benefit relatively small numbers of people but will do so in a life-enhancing way. Access to voice equipment is vital to anybody who is at risk of losing their voice as a result of conditions such as motor neurone disease. Gordon Aikman and MND Scotland have been campaigning for those who need voice equipment to have a statutory right to it, and I can announce today that we will bring forward an amendment to the Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc and Care) (Scotland) Bill that is currently before Parliament to provide it. We will also work with health boards over the next year to improve the quality of equipment and services available.

We will also continue to improve policing. The introduction of a single police service was the biggest public service reform for a generation. It delivered necessary efficiencies and gave all parts of Scotland access to specialist expertise and equipment, whenever and wherever it was needed. I thank all those who work in Police Scotland for their hard work in delivering that reform. I recognise, however, that the reform process presented challenges and raised concerns. We must therefore continue to learn from experience and make improvements where necessary.

Following the chief constable's announcement last week that he will step down on 1 December, the process of appointing a new chief constable is now under way. I take the opportunity to thank Sir Stephen House for his long years of dedicated service to policing. He provided leadership at a crucial time, he helped to reduce crime to a record low and he gave real priority to tackling domestic abuse and sexual violence, and I take the opportunity to thank him for all that.

I also confirm that, following an open public appointments process, a new chair of the Scottish Police Authority will be named later this week. I can announce today that we will use the opportunity of that appointment to undertake a review of police governance at national level to ensure that early experience from the operation of the SPA and Police Scotland is acted upon to strengthen the system for the future.

We will also take steps to enhance the accountability and scrutiny of policing at a local

level. For example, there will be a new requirement on the chief constable to attend local public scrutiny sessions. A local scrutiny summit, to be held later this month, will identify further ways to enhance local accountability. Local scrutiny committees, together with members of the public and the Parliament, will also have an important role to play in updating our national policing priorities.

We will also ensure implementation of any recommendations from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland's review of call handling. I can also confirm that we will introduce a statutory code of practice on stop and search. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice will provide more detail on those matters in a statement to Parliament later this week, but my comments today underline our determination to ensure that our police service is efficient and effective and that it also commands the trust and confidence of the public.

We will strengthen the law against domestic abuse. We will introduce an abusive behaviour and sexual harm bill, which will introduce a statutory aggravation for offences that occur against a background of domestic abuse. It will also create a new offence of sharing private intimate images, which is often known as revenge porn. During the next year, we will also take the next step in our work to create a new and specific offence of domestic abuse.

We will also introduce a bill that I am sure will receive support from right across the chamber. Following widespread concern about practices at Mortonhall crematorium, Lord Bonyon's commission made important recommendations on procedures for the cremation of infants and children. Those recommendations will be implemented as part of a burial and cremation bill, which will introduce new regulation and inspection arrangements. We believe that such measures will prevent the recurrence of practices that caused so much anguish to many parents and relatives.

In the coming year, we will also take some practical steps to improve democratic processes. Our lobbying bill will introduce a public register of lobbying activity. I also confirm that the Scottish elections (dates) bill will propose a five-year term for the Scottish Parliament after next year's election, to prevent a clash with the United Kingdom general election in May 2020.

We also hope to secure agreement with the UK Government on a Scotland Bill that, although nowhere near as ambitious as we would like it to be, will give us some additional powers to benefit individuals, businesses, and local communities. We hope that Parliament will be able to consent to that bill by March 2016. However, let me make it clear that we will recommend consent only if the

accompanying fiscal framework is also fair to Scotland.

In addition to securing more powers for the Parliament, we will transfer more power to local communities. The passing of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 was a significant step on that journey but we will go further. We will consult on legislation to give more power to our island communities. We will enact and then implement the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill. We will secure devolution of the Crown estate in Scotland, and work with local communities to ensure that they benefit from that. We will invest £20 million each year in the empowering communities fund, to give community groups the investment that they need to drive local change.

I have chosen to end with the issue of community empowerment because it is an important signal of how we want to govern—now and in the future. It is almost exactly one year since the referendum, when we saw the benefits—and the sense of engagement that occurs—when people have a real say on issues that matter to them. I am determined that we harness the passion and energy that were shown in the referendum and use them to tackle the big social and economic issues of our times.

The referendum debate also revealed a deep yearning on both sides for a fairer society, as well as a more prosperous economy. This ambitious and reforming programme for government speaks to those aspirations. It sets out how this Government will work—now and in the long term—to achieve our vision for Scotland's future. It demonstrates how enduring values—a belief in enterprise, a faith in the value of education, a commitment to fairness and solidarity, and a passion for democratic engagement—can be applied to make Scotland a fairer and more prosperous country.

I am proud to commend this programme for government to the chamber.

Programme for Government 2015-16

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on the statement by the First Minister. I call Kezia Dugdale to speak—Ms Dugdale, you have 18 minutes.

14:51

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I thank the First Minister for advance sight of the statement. I expect that she remembers what it is like to be leading her party from the Opposition benches; indeed, I remember as a student watching her opposite a Labour First Minister debating the programme for government back in 2006.

It is a privilege to be here—it is a privilege to serve and it is a privilege that I will never take for granted. I promise the First Minister and her Government this: where the Government shares our ambition for the people of Scotland; where the Government shares our determination that where a person comes from matters less than where they want to go; where the station that a person was born into matters less than their talents; and where the Government recognises its responsibility to nurture talent, to support aspiration, and to help those who find themselves in need, the Labour Party is ready and willing to stand with it. Where the Government lacks ambition or shows timidity, and where it fails to meet the aspirations of a new generation, it will find us equal to the task of opposition.

The Scottish Labour Party that I lead will not exist to face off against Scottish National Party ministers here in the chamber; rather, it will turn to face the country. We will work for a Scotland where everyone gets the opportunity to unlock their talents and to know the dignity and satisfaction of work, for an environment that is protected for all and enjoyed by all, and for a dynamic economy in which entrepreneurs are supported to create the jobs, opportunities and wealth that Scotland needs in order to thrive.

The First Minister has placed educational inequality at the heart of her statement. I welcome that; she knows that I am passionate about ensuring that every child gets a fair chance in life. The First Minister has asked us to look at her Government's record. She says that it is a strong foundation for the future, but if we look at children who are in their final year of primary school, who have so far spent every day of their school years under this Government, we do not see a record of which to be proud. We see that 93 per cent of children in primary 7 who come from the least-deprived backgrounds are performing well at reading, compared with just 81 per cent of the

children from the most-deprived backgrounds—a 12 per cent gap in reading. When it comes to writing, the figures are 77 per cent of children from the least-deprived backgrounds compared with just 56 per cent from the most-deprived backgrounds—a 21 per cent gap. In numeracy, 77 per cent of kids from the least-deprived areas are reaching the appropriate levels, compared with just 53 per cent from the most-deprived areas, so there is a 24 per cent gap in numeracy between the richest and poorest pupils.

Almost half the poorest kids are unable to write or to count properly on leaving primary school. That should shame us, as a nation. We in this chamber are not just responsible for caring for those children during the hours when they are at school, but for preparing them for the opportunities of the years to come. By any measure, we are failing them.

I started the day this morning by joining the breakfast club at the Royal High primary school here in Edinburgh. For 30p pupils can have some toast and juice and start the day well, but the City of Edinburgh Council is under increasing financial pressure and faces the choice of either scrapping that breakfast club or charging £2 a day so that it can meet its costs. That is a Labour and Scottish National Party council, so the First Minister and I share the responsibility for keeping that breakfast club open.

In fact, we share the desire to tackle educational inequality as the number 1 priority. After months of debating inequality in this chamber, we can now see real action. That is great. We have seen money being invested in education advisers: let us now see money being invested in the teachers who work with the pupils who face the biggest barriers to educational achievement. We know who those teachers are and where they work, and we know that so many of them already defy the odds daily and help their pupils to shine. We can reward those teachers and give them more classroom assistants. We can bring in a new enhanced teacher grade to raise the skills of, and rewards for, those who teach in the most challenging classrooms. The SNP has already led the way on that with the programme for headteachers. It can do it again, should it wish for that support for teachers on the front line.

There is so much more that we can do now. We can recognise that to improve literacy among children we have to improve literacy for mums, dads and primary carers. We can scrap fees for exam appeals, so that all young people who want one can have a fresh look taken at their grades. We should move mountains to help looked-after children, for they are our kids and their future lies in our hands.

We can take a fresh look at school inspections. Today, 90 per cent of schools that are inspected are assessed as “satisfactory” or better. However, “satisfactory” means that the strengths only just outweigh the weaknesses, which is why I believe that the First Minister should immediately suspend all school inspections for one year and use the time to redesign the inspection regime. I would like to see more unannounced inspections. Inspections must be used to drive excellence for all. No parent wants a “satisfactory” education for their child. Parents want the best possible education for their child, and it is my mission to ensure that our children have the best possible start in life.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Will Kezia Dugdale give way?

Kezia Dugdale: No, thank you.

After educational inequality, inequality between the genders should be the top of the First Minister's list for the year ahead. Much has been said over the summer about how having three female leaders in this chamber is good for Scotland. I agree with that, but it is not enough for us to just stand here. I feel that I have now a greater responsibility than ever before to deliver material change and equality for women, as I lead my party.

We welcome the moves to introduce an offence for revenge porn, and hope that we will quickly follow the rest of the United Kingdom, where individuals are already being convicted for such offences. Putting into the public domain material of the most private and personal nature is not simply an abuse of trust; it leaves the victim feeling humiliated and ashamed. I believe that there is more that we can do to protect women from other forms of domestic abuse and assault, so I welcome the bill that has been announced today.

The number of rapes that are reported to the police has increased over the past year. A fifth of those are reports of being raped while asleep. We need to do more to tackle not just those crimes but the culture that means that such offences persist in modern Scotland. I urge the First Minister to give proper consideration in the year ahead to how we can use the education system to teach young men and women about sexual consent.

Today, a young woman—no matter how hard she works—will experience institutionalised barriers to success. For some young women it will not matter how hard they work; they will not make it unless Government eradicates the injustices that are in their way. It is our duty, in this chamber, to break down those barriers, whether they are issues of access to science and technology skills; the gendered violence that one in four women will face; the culture of low-paid, low-skilled and part-

time work; or the motherhood penalties that result in women losing positions or promotions through going on maternity leave. Having women leaders talk about those issues is a start, but it is only a start. We will be known by our deeds, not just our words.

I welcome the First Minister's focus on growing the economy, and the recognition that the strategy that was set out last year needed more detail and a plan for implementation. The single most important issue that we can get right is childcare. I believe that we now have a consensus across the chamber that childcare is not just a social policy but a hard-nosed economic policy that strikes right at the heart of labour-market participation. Together, we accept that high-quality affordable and accessible childcare can transform lives and open up opportunities.

As in previous years, the First Minister spoke about increasing the number of hours of childcare that will be available. However, she knows that the MacLean commission on childcare made it clear this summer that not only do the hours that are available matter, but whether they are affordable and accessible to working parents matters, too. That report highlighted the fact that although we in Scotland spend as much on childcare as Denmark and Sweden do, we get nothing like the same return for our money. I urge the First Minister to use the year ahead to take a fresh look at our approach to childcare and to ensure that the policy is designed to fit around parents' lives rather than into an election leaflet.

Any economic plan must also acknowledge the problems that our oil industry faces. The problems in relation to jobs and the sustained low oil price have not gone away. The First Minister some months ago launched an apprenticeship scheme in response to those issues, but since its launch the scheme has helped only 12 people, against a backdrop of thousands of job losses. In the medium term, we need to find and support action in the industry. In the long term, we need a serious national effort to prepare for a post-oil economy and to take advantage of the economic opportunities of decommissioning that will otherwise go to other parts of the UK and Europe.

We must also recognise that a serious economic plan needs analysis, and that data that we can trust must be free from political interference. Therefore, although we welcome the proposed Scottish Fiscal Commission bill, we renew our call for an independent fiscal watchdog.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): What functions does Kezia Dugdale believe the Scottish Fiscal Commission will undertake if it does not undertake

independent scrutiny of the Government's financial actions and projections?

Kezia Dugdale: Absolutely no one has been impressed by the plans that the Government has put forward for the Fiscal Commission. People want independent knowledge and advice on which they can rely.

Growing our economy means improving productivity. We can achieve that only with investment in skills that gives everyone a chance to change their lives and to have the opportunity of a second chance. The Government has cut colleges to pay for universities, so the solution cannot now be to cut universities or schools in order to invest in colleges. We need a real debate about why we view education as a lesser spending priority in Scotland.

I will turn to that in detail in a second, but first I will say something about the Tory Government's Trade Union Bill. None of us in the Scottish Parliament should be in any doubt about the intentions behind that Tory bill, which Ruth Davidson supports. It has one intention only, which is to undermine the rights and ability of working people to organise for better wages, terms and conditions in the workplace.

The withdrawal of their labour is the most basic right that working people have, and its effective use over time has resulted in better wages, better health and safety standards, and better pensions and, as a result, better public services and a better society. That ideologically driven bill is an attack on those hard-won rights and must be resisted: it must be stopped. Therefore, I make it clear to the Scottish Government that it will have the full support of the Labour Party in order that we do everything that we can to stop the bill.

Over the summer, I heard Roseanna Cunningham say that it is the prerogative of the Scottish ministers to decide on issues such as check-off and facility time. She is right. The Tories' arguments against check-off and facility time are rooted in logistics, practicalities and costs. They are issues of public administration, not industrial relations, and are therefore clearly devolved, so the Government will have our full support in saying no to the Trade Union Bill.

Likewise, the Government would have our support for demanding a legislative consent motion on the matter. That way, the Tories would need approval from the Scottish Parliament to act—approval that they will not get from Labour members. We do not want just to support the Scottish Government's rhetoric on the Trade Union Bill; we want to support some real action now to stop that bill.

Today, as is always the case when the Government sets out its programme for the year,

we have seen many eye-catching and worthy announcements, such as the one on the education maintenance allowance, which in reality will simply reinstate a cut that the SNP Government made a few years ago. Furthermore, on issues such as kinship care, the announcements were promised a long time ago by this Government, but only now is it delivering on them.

However, I am delighted with the announcement about motor neurone disease and communication aids for people who suffer from the condition. I am also delighted that Gordon Aikman is in the gallery today to hear that announcement. Last week, the First Minister and I visited the Anne Rowling regenerative neurology clinic—in fact, we both donated our voices to the nation, as if people had not heard enough from us already. I am sure that the First Minister will have been persuaded—indeed, blown away—by the incredible technological advances at the centre. Through the science and innovation of academics in our universities here in the UK, we can now give people their voices back. When we take that breathtaking innovation and combine it with the beauty of our national health service, we see that wonderful things are happening for people in the most incredible circumstances, and that must be welcomed.

Likewise, I welcome the announcement of a burial and cremation bill, which will bring a sense of peace and justice to the families who were affected by what happened at Mortonhall crematorium, many of whom I know well and have worked with over the past few years. I know that that issue goes beyond Edinburgh and that the bill will be welcomed across the country.

I also welcome the proposed private tenancies bill. The First Minister knows that we have been arguing for months for action to control rent rises; indeed, we tried to that end to amend the First Minister's previous housing bill, which became the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, but she voted against the proposals several times. It is great that action will finally be taken on the issue. However, while the Government has prevaricated, rents have risen again. Had the SNP Government acted in 2013, when its previous private rented sector review took place, the average Scottish renter in the private sector would already have saved £150 a year, so this is slow progress.

However, what overrides all those individual spending announcements is the overall balance of spending in Scotland. It was Joe Biden who said:

"Don't tell me what you value. Show me your budget and I'll tell you what you value."

Scotland's public spending is currently £1,300 higher per person than the UK average. How successive budgets have chosen to invest that

money reveals our real national priorities. Today, the First Minister has again said that education and health are priorities. However, her Government's budgets have told a very different story. When the Labour Government established this Parliament, we spent a higher proportion of our budget on health and education than England did. Today, we spend a smaller proportion of our budget on those priorities than England does—points that are well made in the editorial of today's Financial Times.

At the start of devolution, spending on health was 16.5 per cent higher than the UK average. Today, we spend just 6.5 per cent more on health than the rest of the UK.

The First Minister: In 2006-07, the share of the Scottish Government budget that was taken up by health was 37.4 per cent. Today, it is 41.2 per cent. Would Kezia Dugdale care to comment on those statistics?

Kezia Dugdale: The facts stand for themselves. *[Laughter.]* No—they do. Let me give the First Minister another one. Education, too, has become less of a priority over successive budgets. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Order.

Kezia Dugdale: I am happy to put the figures in the Scottish Parliament information centre immediately after today's debate.

In 1999, we spent £204 per person more than the UK average on education. Today, that has fallen to £18. Those budget decisions reflect huge issues about the future of our country, so we are disappointed that the budget process has been truncated.

This First Minister is the most powerful person who has ever sat in that chair. Not only does she have a majority in this Parliament, she has swept aside her opponents in our other Parliament. She has more powers than ever before, and more are coming. Her party and her supporters dominate many aspects of Scottish public life. Therefore, I say to her today: "You have the power, and if you have the political will, you have the money. If you have the courage to take the radical action that we need to reform and to redistribute resources, you will have our support."

It is time that all of us raised our ambitions for our country, for our politics and for ourselves. Last week, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives committed to using the new tax powers to ensure lower taxes, and they will have to set out what that means in terms of cuts. The other parties in this chamber will have to set out our priorities, too. I welcome that, because it shows that Scottish politics is moving from a

debate about what we cannot do to talking about what we can do and what we will do.

We are not powerless to act. Nothing is inevitable. We are the masters—and, in this chamber, the mistresses—of our own destiny, so let us build that fairer and more equal country together.

15:10

Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): I thank the First Minister for early sight of her speech and welcome her and all MSPs back to the chamber after the summer break.

Of course, Scottish politics did not stop in Parliament's absence; indeed, it seems almost to have gathered pace. As the First Minister pointed out, the Scotland Bill is being pushed through at Westminster. I am pleased that the new tax and welfare powers—the devolution of which we all support—are being advanced in line with the agreed timetable.

I put on record my whole-hearted backing for the introduction of a new living wage of £9 an hour across the United Kingdom, as announced by the chancellor in his summer budget.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Ruth Davidson: I am in my first minute.

No doubt the omission of a welcome for the new living wage in the First Minister's speech was simply accidental.

However, we in this Parliament must turn our attention to the powers over which we exercise full control—from the education of our children to the laws under which our justice system is run and the state of our national health service. Those powers are huge in scope. Over the next year, they must become the clear centre of our politics in Scotland. In short, it is time that this Government focused 100 per cent on the day job.

Let me start with the parts of today's statement that we welcome. On issues such as the baby ashes scandal and domestic abuse—both of which I have raised repeatedly in the chamber—we see welcome forward movement, which will have Scottish Conservative support.

I am pleased that our repeated and sustained calls for standardised assessments to be introduced in schools have been heeded. It is a massive U-turn but a welcome one. It is simply wrong that parents across Scotland can see their child go all the way through primary school and halfway into high school without having any independent measure of how well they are doing. That failure of critical assessment cannot continue; we need to change and we need to go further still.

The SNP Government has already withdrawn Scotland from two international tests on literacy and maths. The First Minister has said that we need reliable data to inform policy. I agree. That is why she should pull another U-turn and re-enter those international tests. We need to measure ourselves against the rest of the world so that our children have the very best chance of success.

The First Minister has made it clear that she wants her Administration to be judged on its educational record. I only wish that that single-minded purpose had come about a little earlier than eight long years after the SNP took sole control of the Scottish Government, because this is a Government that has presided over a fall in literacy standards. It is a Government that oversaw a real-terms cut in education funding of 5 per cent between 2010 and 2013 and one that has cut college places by 140,000 at the altar of a university tuition fee policy that favours the better off.

Although Conservative members will take time to assess the ideas that the First Minister put forward in her statement, we will do so with no little scepticism that this eight-year-old Government has the ideas and focus necessary to do the job. We will also propose a better alternative.

As we see families continuing to move house to secure the golden ticket of a good catchment area, we will press the Scottish Government to free up headteachers to innovate so that every local school is one that people want to live near. There is nothing stopping schools in deprived areas from becoming beacons of excellence. That begins with giving teachers, headteachers and communities the power to do it.

In the meantime, it is clear that we need a renewed focus on reading and writing by ensuring that teacher training institutions prioritise literacy training. It is astonishing that some courses are allocating just 20 hours of a four-year course to literacy teaching. That needs genuine change. We also need to ensure that schools work with parents so that reading is at the centre of school life and of family life.

I turn to the Government's other legislative priorities. This party's view is that we continue to see a worrying trend towards centralisation and political control freakery. The Government's Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill, which is already in progress, is quite simply an attack on academic freedom. It will enforce political control of academic institutions whose reputations have been built precisely because of their political independence. Quite why the SNP has decided to fight the very institutions that deliver massive added value to Scotland is beyond

me. I ask the First Minister today to reconsider those plans.

Similarly, we will contest the Government's Land Reform (Scotland) Bill as it is another move towards an illiberal and centralising Government.

We will campaign for a genuine fix for our failing police service. Armed officers; stop and search; the M9 tragedy—Police Scotland is struggling. Now, just two years after creating Police Scotland, the SNP Government is forced to concede today that it needs reform. The creation of a few new committees simply will not cut it. We need local accountability restored to a service that, to much of the country, now feels utterly remote.

I turn to health. This party will support all moves to ensure that the national health service is properly funded, but it is also time to accept that money alone will not solve the NHS's problems. Doctors and nurses are telling us that politically driven targets are hampering their attempts to provide patient care. We must listen to them before more nurses and doctors decide to leave NHS Scotland and pursue their careers elsewhere.

We also need clarity of thinking. We need to free up more money to recruit more nurses. If that means that the better off—such as those of us here in the chamber—should pay a contribution for our prescriptions, so be it.

As we prepare for more powers being devolved to this Parliament, I welcome the fact that the First Minister has turned her attention to the substantial welfare powers that she will soon be responsible for, but I would like to know how developed those preparations are. The First Minister used her speech, unjustly in my view, to attack the current work programme, which is the largest welfare to work programme in our nation's history and which, in point of fact, has helped 38,510 long-term unemployed Scots—those who are furthest from the job market—back into a long-term job. She says that she is working on a replacement. What evidence can she provide to show us that her replacement will be ready by April 2017?

For our part, my party will promote our own proposals on welfare over the coming months. Our guiding principle will be to ensure that the welfare system helps people back into work. In that we will be helped by the sound economic foundations provided by the UK which, since we came into government in 2010, have seen employment levels rise in Scotland by 174,000 and unemployment levels fall by 64,000. That shows just one benefit of our continued membership of the United Kingdom—the fastest-growing economy of the G7 last year.

Over the next year, I will ensure that this party stays committed to what I believe are the priorities

of most Scots: speaking up for those of us who want Scotland to thrive in the United Kingdom; standing up for family finances, which face ever-greater pressure from the cost of living; and insisting that the huge powers that this Parliament has are used to ensure that we have better schools, a secure NHS and an enterprise culture that makes us the best place to do business in western Europe.

It is time for a Scottish alternative to the SNP and we are determined to provide it.

15:18

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

Since we last met in the chamber, the chairman of the Scottish Police Authority has resigned, the chief constable of Police Scotland has resigned and we have witnessed the unfolding terrible aftermath of the tragic incident on the M9 motorway.

A police officer told the BBC last week that Police Scotland is “on its knees”. I know that to be true from almost daily contact from police officers and civilian staff. They cite low morale and serious problems such as the backfilling of civilian jobs by experienced but inappropriately trained police officers; excessive waiting times in call centres and control rooms; industrial-scale stop and search; top-down targets and controls; and more near misses because of errors at Bilston Glen.

The list goes on. One person told me just yesterday that the reforms that the Government is putting through are putting the police and the public in danger. However, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice still thinks that it is appropriate to praise the soon-to-depart chief constable and tells us that he will leave a “lasting positive legacy”.

The First Minister's programme, which was published only today, says:

“The successful transition to the new single police service”

on 1 April 2013 has placed

“Scotland at the forefront of UK policing.”

I warned ministers before about the dangers of their plans, and I am warning them now that what they have announced today is simply not enough.

The Government is denying reality. The reality is that Police Scotland is not

“at the forefront of UK policing”;

it is “on its knees”. We need an independent inquiry into the operations of Police Scotland, which needs to change before it gets any worse.

We have put forward proposals to reform the democratic architecture of the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland. As part of the First

Minister's review of accountability and scrutiny, I will—if she is prepared to listen this time—take her through our plans, which are reasonable and pragmatic and will inject local accountability back into the police.

The code of conduct on stop and search is a step in the right direction, but all stop and searches must be put on a statutory footing to bring an end to their industrial use. The review of the police as a whole is essential to restore the morale of staff and officers and the confidence of the public.

We have other proposals, which combine economic discipline with social justice. We want to create opportunity for everyone, no matter what their background.

We propose a pupil premium to help children who need a helping hand at school. It would target financial support to individual children across Scotland, not just in limited council areas, to provide support for extra tuition and resources. It is that personalised support that makes the difference to inequality.

We propose an expansion of nursery education and childcare. That is the best educational investment that we could make. Last month, 15,000 two-year-olds skipped through the doors of their nursery for the first time—but only after Liberal Democrat members pressed the Scottish Government to deliver that. That figure should be doubled. The support in England is outstripping that which is available in Scotland, and that needs to change.

We propose a recruitment plan for general practitioners. Our survey of GPs in the summer found that one in three would not choose that career now if they had an opportunity to revisit the decision. Many are retiring early or going part time, and potential new recruits are going elsewhere. Of the GPs who knew about the Government's plan, 99 per cent thought that it was inadequate. The Royal College of General Practitioners has a blueprint, and the Government should take it seriously.

We propose parity for mental health treatment. One in four of us will have a mental health condition in our lifetime, but the treatment options are inadequate and involve long waits. Yesterday, I visited Urban Therapy in Crosshill in Fife. It is overwhelmed by people who are seeking counselling from as far afield as Glasgow. We all need parity for that service.

On pupil testing and league tables, the document that was published today says:

"The clear purpose of this reporting and use of assessment data is to drive ... accountability throughout"

the Scottish education system. That includes school-level data. That will lead to teaching to the test, with every child put under unacceptable pressure to make the numbers look good. Despite what the First Minister says, it is clear that we are returning to the type of testing and tables that the previous Liberal Democrat-Labour Administration abolished.

The problems with the police, the NHS and the schools are not just problems of which the First Minister is a passive observer. This Parliament has been responsible for more than 15 years. Nicola Sturgeon has been in government for more than eight years, and she is responsible now. She repeatedly mentioned the future in her statement. Perhaps the First Minister prefers to talk about the future because she cannot face up to her Government's past.

15:25

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank the First Minister for an advance copy of her statement. I assure her that the Greens will also look forward to working constructively with her on a number of the areas that she has outlined. The focus on inequality is an issue on which she has spoken on a number of occasions. If that continues to be an element of her Government's programme, we would certainly welcome that. We probably do not frame it in terms of economic growth as she does. We believe, as I am sure that she does as well, that inequality is bad in its own right and not just detrimental to what we regard as a short-term notion of economic growth.

The First Minister has in the past asserted the need for a living wage. More could be done to promote it. There is a wide range of business support services that the Scottish Government makes available that are not currently contingent on applicants qualifying as living wage employers. A different approach could drive uptake. However, there will have to be recognition that, as a result of UK Government changes and not least those on tax credits, the wage will have to increase in order to be meaningful and ensure that people do not still live in poverty.

I found it rather galling that Ruth Davidson seemed to have expected congratulation from the First Minister for the announcement by the Tory Government's George Osborne. Perhaps the answer is that the First Minister, just like the rest of us, can notice a con when she sees one, and that any worker who has successfully campaigned for a living wage in their own workplace has a right to feel insulted by the proposal to replace it with a so-called living wage that is lower than the one that exists today. This Government should see through such con artistry, as I think that most of this Parliament does, too.

I particularly welcome the proposal to abolish the fees for employment tribunals. That will be a very positive step. I also welcome the reversal of the Scottish Government's opposition to rent controls. That is long overdue. We have made the case for rent controls for well over a year, as have the National Union of Students Scotland, Shelter and other organisations. I look forward to seeing the details of that proposal.

There are areas in the programme where we may simply need to wait and see what the detail has to say. For example, the commission on local tax reform is due to report soon. We have engaged constructively with it. However, we will have to wait and see what the Scottish Government has to say about its intentions for the way forward. Local democratic freedom—the ability of councils to decide for themselves how much revenue is right for them to raise and on what terms—will be an important measure that we take forward.

As for the mitigation of the welfare cuts, which is an agenda that I think we will again share, the devil will be in the detail. It will be for this Parliament, with its increased range of powers, to decide whether it is willing to raise the additional revenue necessary if we are to be successful in that agenda.

The emphasis on education, which has come from the Government and the Labour benches, is important. My only concern here is that the issue simply becomes another political football, where the Government and the main Opposition party's shared intentions fall down the crack between a political division about whose statistics are correct and whose are most meaningful. Instead of using or relying on its inbuilt majority, the Government will have to make a case for the specific proposition that it has in this area, and all Opposition parties should listen to that case with an open mind.

The Government's review of policing will be a welcome step. However, as I think that Willie Rennie said, there is a need to recognise a wider culture in Police Scotland, which has been too controlling from the centre. There is a need to recognise that a deficit of local accountability is inherent in the push towards a single police force to replace the forces that previously existed in Scotland. That is a circle that it will be difficult to square.

In addition, we in this Parliament need to have no patience in future with ministers who respond to questions by saying that we are raising merely operational matters, for example when we are talking about the presence of weapons on our streets or the covert use of surveillance, whether in the context of journalism or in the context of peaceful political activism. Those are not merely

operational matters; they are deeply political. If the Government wants to get to grips with that issue, I will welcome that. However, that remains to be seen.

I must mention one or two negatives. I was disappointed that there was not a single mention of climate change, or even the wider environmental agenda, in the First Minister's statement, despite the serious challenge that exists not just globally, in getting agreement between Governments in Paris this year, but here in Scotland, where the Scottish Government is yet to meet even one—I repeat “even one”—of its annual climate change targets, more than five years after the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 was passed.

“Tackling climate change” is mentioned in the full document, “A Stronger Scotland: the Government's Programme for Scotland 2015-16”, but I need turn only one page to see a section that is headed, “Investing in the Oil and Gas Industry”. That brings us to the long-standing contradiction between the Scottish Government's high-carbon and low-carbon economic and energy strategies. We cannot have it both ways. Kezia Dugdale mentioned the concept of a post-oil economy and the need to prepare for the transition; I am happy to let Ms Dugdale know that Scottish Greens are well ahead of her. I will happily send the Labour office a copy of our report, “Jobs in Scotland's New Economy”.

Finally, there was nothing in the statement or in the programme for government document that gives clarity on the Scottish Government's position on fracking and other environmental threats from the fossil fuel industry. The moratorium must become a permanent ban, and its scope must be extended to include underground coal gasification. The First Minister said that she is setting out a long-term vision—an agenda for the next parliamentary session. The SNP cannot go into the next election without giving voters clarity on its intentions in that most contentious area.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Speeches should be up to six minutes, please, because we are very tight for time.

15:32

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): I am very positive about the programme that Nicola Sturgeon put forward, because it clearly builds on the achievements of the past four years—and prior to that—and because, as always, it takes a holistic approach. It looks at the big picture, considering all the elements for which our Government is responsible and which this Parliament is responsible for scrutinising, to ensure that we can

make Scotland the country that we want it to be, by fighting for more powers for Scotland so that we can be more ambitious for Scotland's people and deliver more powers for Scotland's communities.

The main strands as outlined in the statement—I look forward to reading more of the programme—are the economy, employment and fair work, welfare and housing, education and health and, of course, democracy. On democracy, I really took offence when Kezia Dugdale said that the Labour Government established this Parliament. No, it did not. The people of Scotland established this Parliament. That is at the root of democracy. Let us hear no more of that rewriting of history.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member say how democratic it is of the Scottish Government to impose on local government its position on local taxes? Should it not be up to local government to make those decisions?

Linda Fabiani: It is clear that Mr Findlay has not listened to anything that has been said about getting more powers for Scotland's communities and people, so that they can take decisions about what affects them in their daily lives. That is what this Government is about. If he paid more attention to looking at the legislative programme and the government that has gone on for the past eight years, he would realise that. He should start getting a bit positive about how the Opposition can actually help to deliver for Scotland, instead of trying to pull Scotland down at every available opportunity.

While we are at it, let me mention education, which is the big thing that is getting talked about just now. Kezia Dugdale talked about education, the attainment gap and how Nicola Sturgeon has failed over the past eight years in making differences in deprived communities, but let me tell members that there have been decades of Labour control in deprived communities right across our country, and we inherited an attainment gap. We inherited areas of multiple deprivation that people in the Labour Party should be absolutely ashamed of presiding over for all that time. They should help us to make it better, admit the mistakes of the past, look at history and move forward to the future, because together we can actually make changes.

Ruth Davidson outlined how she thought education could be done in deprived areas, with headteachers having more responsibility. I would say to her, "How about eradicating poverty instead of embedding it?" That would make a difference. How about ensuring that people have enough to eat rather than normalising food banks? That would make a difference, too, because there is a fundamental fact here: hungry children find it more difficult to learn. I think that we can all agree on

that. I ask Ruth Davidson to look down at what her Government is doing at Westminster and join the rest of us in condemning what is happening there.

We need to look at the big picture of Scotland and the country that it can be, and we need to be ambitious for all its people. I believe that Nicola Sturgeon and her Government are anxious to deliver on that.

I have been looking at the programme for government in terms of what is being done for business with the small business bonus and more for small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the bedrock of business in our communities right across Scotland. I am looking at how the programme can benefit my community of East Kilbride. The town that I represent—and the biggest town in Scotland—has been suffering because of economic changes, because of austerity and because things have changed in terms of what kinds of businesses are there.

I am glad that there is going to be a new initiative about manufacturing, and I hope that I will be able to speak to the business team in the Scottish Government about how East Kilbride, through its task force, can start to capitalise on that.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I wonder whether the member thinks that the introduction of the empty property tax has helped businesses in East Kilbride. I contend that it most certainly has not.

Linda Fabiani: Yet again, we have people who will not look at the big picture and how we actually look at business as a whole—at how it contributes and what is fair. One thing that this Government does is to look at what is fair, whether in relation to helping employers or fair work for employees. I am absolutely delighted that there is going to be strong opposition to the terrible things that Margaret Mitchell's Government is trying to do to workers' rights through the Trade Union Bill.

I see that I am quickly running out of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are.

Linda Fabiani: I have so much more to say.

I hope that the Labour Party in opposition at Westminster will be totally opposed to what the Conservatives are trying to do with that bill. I hope that Labour will join Scotland's main Opposition party, the SNP, in fighting what is going on down there. Let us look at the bigger picture of how the Conservative Government is damaging Scotland, and at how we can work with the SNP Government in Scotland to mitigate that and be positive for the future.

15:39

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): The next eight months will see crucial decisions taken about our future—decisions about how we protect and make the best sustainable use of our land and seas, how we enable communities in urban and rural Scotland to tackle the environmental and social injustice that scars people's lives, and how we play our part in tackling the climate challenges that will destroy the livelihoods of millions across the globe.

The Scottish Parliament should be proud of its record on land reform. Our Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 enabled communities in some of the remotest parts of Scotland to make better use of the land and to create jobs and opportunities. Scottish Labour supported the new powers in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, because we believed that the act built on those achievements. It included urban areas and gave communities the chance of having a greater say in the use of abandoned and neglected buildings and land. How that works in practice is critical; therefore, we will monitor the new processes to ensure that they deliver for communities.

There remain key areas of unfinished business, particularly in relation to sustainable development, which we will debate this autumn, when the recommendations of the land reform policy group and the many submissions that we have had from representatives across the country will be crucial. There are key things that, I hope, we will all agree need to be delivered, such as clarity about the ownership of land. How can land be owned when there is no paper trail to show who the owner is? The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill gives us the opportunity to deliver greater transparency, and, in committee, Scottish Labour will test the principles and the detail of the bill, working to ensure that it secures a decent deal for tenant farmers.

The Scottish Government could do much more to tackle the challenges of climate change. I was disappointed and genuinely surprised that the issue did not feature once in the First Minister's statement. With the Paris talks due to take place in December, we need radical action now. Yesterday's cross-party initiative by WWF saw all party leaders sign up for action. The SNP Government, with its clear majority, can move ahead with radical action now and needs to do so without delay.

The Scottish Government is failing on European Union air quality targets and has now missed four annual climate change targets. Although we have made progress on renewables, much more can be done. For example, the Scottish Government's budget needs to reflect new investment in the greening of our infrastructure, our buildings and

our transport networks. The proposed national energy infrastructure plan is long overdue, and we need to see new investment in community heat and power to provide robust solutions for communities and co-operative ways to move forward.

Crucially, we need to retrofit homes to tackle the scandal of fuel poverty. It is not enough to build new affordable homes; we need to support the 39 per cent of Scottish households who live in fuel poverty and the thousands of people in our rural communities who live in extreme fuel poverty. That is not a future challenge; it is a challenge now.

Iain Gray's proposed bus bill is one practical way in which we could invest to deliver sustainable public transport, support demand-led and community transport initiatives and move the agenda forward. Will the Scottish Government now sign up to the provisions of that proposed bill? Across the rest of the UK, local authorities are beginning to work together on franchising and supporting bus regulation across local authority boundaries, so why can we not do that here in Scotland, too?

I would like to know what the Scottish Government's view is on the new raft of city deals that are being agreed across the country. Will it be possible for new bus options to appear in them? That could be a practical way of tackling the problem and delivering sustainable transport.

On Thursday, we will hear a statement from ministers on the future for people at Longannet. That highlights the need for a practical transition now to a greener energy future. We are losing jobs and expertise across the country, particularly down the east coast from Aberdeen to Fife, and we need to hear more from ministers about practical solutions and a practical transition before more jobs are lost. We must work with energy companies and communities now to ensure that vital skills and supply industries are not lost for the future.

Throughout the summer, we have seen the dairy crisis continue, and we have now reached the point at which costs are being cut but the pressure on payments continues so that they are still below what is necessary for farmers to produce milk viably. When water is more expensive than milk, surely something is seriously out of kilter. I welcome the Scottish Government's dairy action plan, but farmers need to see it delivered with much greater urgency. There must be more transparency in the whole supply chain, investment in product diversification and support for the public and private sectors to actively source produce of Scottish provenance. We need that now more than ever.

It has been a horrendous summer for our farming communities and the rural jobs that depend on them, and the autumn will bring yet more challenges. Can the Scottish Government confirm today that single farm payments will be processed and paid on time? Our producers and the rural jobs and industries that they support need that certainty.

We need to know that the Scottish Government is focused on protecting and creating new jobs, whether in energy, transport, farming or food production, and that it will use its budget to green our infrastructure, to tackle fuel poverty now and to enable it to deliver on our climate targets and deliver environmental justice for all.

15:45

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):

Before we came back to Parliament, I ran the emotional gauntlet of sending my daughter off for her first day at primary school. The tears were not flowing; she has been keeping me up to date with all the things that she has been learning. That has helped me put into focus and context my aspirations for her and, from that, my aspirations as a politician for the children of Scotland.

Both my children are now in the education system, and I want to ensure that we have an education system that works for all the children in it. That is why I welcomed the extension of the attainment fund that took place over the summer, from which two schools in my constituency—Manor Park and Bramble Brae—will benefit. Manor Park and Bramble Brae schools are doing a tremendous amount of work in communities of deprivation in Aberdeen, but, as has been highlighted, and as I have said previously in the chamber, there is a world outside the school gates that affects children's chances. We often find that the schools that children attend are working against external factors instead of being able to maximise those children's educational outcomes. The work that is being done in our schools is vital, but the wraparound provision outside school is important too, and many of the factors involved in that lie outwith the Scottish Government's control. I will come on to say a bit more about some of those things.

The expansion of childcare and early years provision is important and welcome, and the plans to go further will benefit not just children but parents, who will be able to take the opportunity, should they choose to do so, to get back into the workforce earlier than might otherwise have been the case.

I welcome the announcement that the energy jobs task force will be extended for six months, although that is obviously bittersweet, given that

pressures are still faced by those who work in the energy sector, many of whom are my constituents. Indeed, just recently there were some regrettable announcements about helicopter pilot jobs. An issue that has been raised with me is the difficulty that helicopter pilots have in finding alternative employment, because there are not many helicopter pilot jobs available. I hope that, as part of its work, the energy jobs task force will consider the options and opportunities for reskilling those who find themselves being made redundant.

That is an example of support for a key sector in the north-east of Scotland, but there are other key sectors. An issue that has often been raised with me is that we do not always hear enough about the other sectors in the north-east of Scotland, one of which is life sciences. I welcome the fact that it will continue to be a focus of the Government's economic strategy. Over the summer, along with the Minister for Sport, Health Improvement and Mental Health, Jamie Hepburn, I visited NovaBiotics in my constituency, which is doing fantastic work on the development of a treatment for cystic fibrosis. It is a spin-out company from the Rowett institute of nutrition and health. Such spin-out life sciences companies are the kind of companies that we want to be fostered and supported, and I know that NovaBiotics is grateful for the support that the Scottish Government is giving the life sciences sector.

One of the decisions on the energy sector that needs to be probed quite seriously is the UK Government's bizarre decision to apply the climate change levy to the renewable energy sector. That seems absolutely and utterly without rhyme or reason and will do significant harm to our attempts to diversify the energy sector in Scotland.

As far as the health sector is concerned, I believe that there have been improvements in the health of our nation and in the experience of people in accessing our NHS. As the First Minister highlighted, we now have a greater number of people in the health service waiting for a shorter period, which by any measure is improvement. I also welcome the moves that have been made in the primary care sector. I have had a number of discussions with the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport on the issues that primary care and general practice are facing, and in particular on some of the pressures that are being experienced in my constituency.

Recently, I met again local GPs who are looking at how primary care will be shaped and delivered at a local level. When the Minister for Sport, Health Improvement and Mental Health was in my constituency, we visited the Middlefield healthy hoose, which is a nurse practitioner-led service that is delivering strong support for a deprived community in my constituency. I believe that there

are a number of ways in which the primary care sector can complement other disciplines to reduce workload and improve patient experience and outcomes. The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport and I have spoken about that, and I know that she is very keen to explore the issue.

On social justice and the improvement of living standards, I referred earlier to the factors that exist outside the school gates that affect children's life chances and educational outcomes. One of those factors involves the difficulties faced by many people in sustaining their income without tax credits, for example, which we know are about to come under significant attack from the UK Government. The living wage is crucial—it is called the real living wage because it meets the living wage standards and is not just a repackaging of the minimum wage, unlike the phoney living wage that the Conservatives put forward. We know that the £9 an hour that the Conservatives trumpet will not be a living wage by the time that it comes into force.

Work in those areas is important to ensure that living standards increase and that families have the best possible opportunities in our society. I welcome the programme for government because it is ambitious for and about Scotland.

15:51

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

With the election on the horizon, this is a shorter parliamentary year than normal but it is important that we use the time that we have to make progress in a number of key areas. The First Minister has come forward today with a number of proposals. At the close of her speech, she talked about transferring power to local communities—about community empowerment. That will be a challenge given the finance, capacity and sustainability of some communities, but the prize will be great. We could see people engage much more in their communities, making decisions every day rather than just at the ballot box.

I will touch briefly on land reform. It was recently revealed in *Private Eye* that title to 750,000 acres of land in Scotland—an area larger than the First Minister's home region of Ayrshire—is held in tax havens. In last year's programme for government, the First Minister said that her

"ambition for radical reform remains undiminished".

However, there have been areas where campaigners have been disappointed, including the lack of plans to tackle land that is held in tax havens. Land reform is an opportunity to change who holds power in Scotland. This should be a Parliament that challenges the old consensus. Land reform is one of the great success stories of

this young Parliament, but we can be more ambitious still.

The Government was forced to redesign the land reform review group after it had a weak start. The group produced a final report with a host of recommendations that were designed to take the land reform process forward, and the Government has adopted a number of them in legislation. However, I hope that it will take another look at the plan to bar companies in offshore tax havens from holding title to land and property in Scotland. We need greater transparency on land ownership. Unless action is taken on that, we will start to see a ridiculous situation whereby Scotland will fall behind the rest of the UK on the issue, given that the Conservative Prime Minister has announced plans to publish a central public land registry of foreign companies that own land in England and Wales. There is a real need and desire to see the Scottish Government at least match that level of transparency.

Educational attainment is an issue that Kezia Dugdale has championed in the Parliament. Too many young people are still leaving school not having achieved as much as they should have. Kezia Dugdale outlined some of the stark figures that we must address in that regard. Last year, I visited Kirkland high school in Methil for its end-of-year show. Kirkland was part of the schools of ambition scheme that, along with cultural co-ordinators, was introduced by the last Labour-led Executive. Both those initiatives were brought to an end by the current Government, but in 2014 I could still see their impact on that school—on the pupils, their teachers and parents and the community as a whole.

What I saw was engagement with arts and culture by pupils who might otherwise have struggled to have those experiences. They showed confidence and team work, and were a great argument for why arts and creativity are so important. However, when we look at who is reaching the attainment levels needed for art college acceptance or entry to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, we see that for groups of young people a career in the arts is just not possible because of a combination of financial constraints and lack of opportunity.

The actor James McAvoy recently stepped into the debate, saying that, although no one detracts from the talent and success of actors who come from privileged backgrounds,

"we are real worried about a society that doesn't give opportunities to everybody from every walk of life to be able to get into the arts, and that is happening."

There should be no profession that a talented child or young person, regardless of their family income or circumstances, should be excluded from.

In looking forward to the coming months in the Parliament, I would like to consider two further areas of the programme for government. An EU referendum is coming and we must be fully engaged in that debate. So far, the focus has been on the process, but we need to move on to the meat and substance of the debate. We cannot take the result in Scotland for granted. Many people in Scotland will not have made up their mind about the issue. We cannot yet see the shape of the campaign, although it will be another yes/no type of campaign, and across the political and social spectrum strong arguments will be put that the EU does not work in Scotland's interests. People will argue about the EU's political direction, and the campaign against the transatlantic trade and investment partnership will be highlighted, as will concerns about business regulation.

Those of us in the chamber who support continued EU membership must be ready to engage with those arguments and to meet the criticisms if we are to remain in the EU. The EU needs to change but reform must be achieved from within. Membership is important to our economy. The First Minister talked about international exports, and continuing membership is crucial in that regard.

I will close with some comments on the BBC. The First Minister talked about additional powers for Scotland. The Scottish Parliament and the Government have greater power in the charter renewal process, but with power comes responsibility. The debate cannot be driven by political ideology, nor must it be about settling old scores. We must choose our words carefully, refrain from threats and ultimatums and work towards securing a deal that works for the BBC and licence fee payers.

It is important that we use the correct facts. I was disappointed by the motion that Bill Kidd lodged last week, in which he said that the BBC Scotland budget was between £30 million and £35 million—despite its budget being almost seven times that. It is not conducive to having an honest debate about the future of the BBC to have misinformation around. The BBC has some great talent working here in Scotland and it is a vital partner in developing the sector and the skills that are needed in it. We will have fuller discussion about that on Thursday, but we must not lose sight of the issue during the charter renewal process, and that is why Scottish Labour wants increased investment from within the licence fee settlement and why we want the retention of the quota systems for commissioning from the nations and regions.

On the BBC and the EU referendum, we must ensure that in the months ahead we work together where we agree and debate constructively where

we do not. We should positively engage on the future of the EU and the BBC and take an inclusive approach that puts people, not politics, at the centre of those decisions.

15:57

Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I welcome the programme for government. There is so much in it that is impressive, and I echo Linda Fabiani's comments about its positivity. It has been good to hear that in a number of the contributions—if not all of them—this afternoon.

The First Minister said much in her statement about attainment, and it is on that, and on literacy specifically, that I wish to concentrate. Many members in the chamber will probably expect that the librarian in me would want to take part in a debate on literacy, but the debate on literacy and closing the attainment gap is actually about equality. It is a debate about equality in access to education and in access to health, because health literacy is proven to play a part in people having better health, and it is also a debate about equality in employment and therefore in breaking down poverty.

When we talk about literacy, we should talk about it from the earliest years all the way through to adulthood. The standing literacy commission, which the Scottish Government set up, published its report earlier in 2015. It was initially chaired by Sir Harry Burns, when he was the chief medical officer. That raised eyebrows at the time, but he could tell us absolutely clearly that literacy is part of education, health and breaking down poverty.

The standing literacy commission makes it quite clear in some of the statistics that it gives that, in the world rankings, Scotland has a 99 per cent literacy level. That sounds marvellous, does it not? It puts us in something like the top 20 countries in the world but, as the commission also highlighted, it is the gap between those with high-functioning literacy and those with poor-functioning literacy that is the biggest problem that faces us.

The most recent Scottish index of multiple deprivation surveys show that the literacy gap is narrowing. That is to be welcomed, but we must not stop there, as the First Minister said. We have heard the First Minister talk today about the SNP Government's ambition to close the literacy gap, which is so important.

The First Minister told us about the attainment challenge and the £100 million attainment challenge fund. She also talked about how we have moved to providing 600 hours per annum of early learning and childcare for all three and four-year-olds and, if we are elected to form the Government next year, our ambition is to move to

1,140 hours. Opposition party leaders spoke about that in quite disparaging terms. To Ms Dugdale especially, I say that I spent the summer travelling the length of the country from Dumfries to Inverness and from east to west to look at the challenges of delivering those 600 hours and how we have met those challenges. I also looked at how our local authorities, in partnership with private and third sector nurseries, are already planning—and, in many cases, implementing—the flexibility that our working parents need. I know that Ms Dugdale was otherwise involved in an election this summer while I was out touring the country, but we need to look at the facts before we disparage the work.

I will highlight quickly a couple of areas in which the Government has already been evaluated as working well in narrowing the literacy gap. I do not know how many members know about this initiative, but one of the delights for me is bookbug: four times in a child's life from birth to primary 1, they receive a bag filled with books. However, we are not just talking about books and reading. When we work with our youngest children, we are working on attachment, relationships and emotional literacy. We are not just working with those young children; we are encouraging their parents and carers to be part of their learning journey.

I have to highlight a couple of other issues because they are so exciting. The first is the play, talk, read strategy for older children. Members who have not been on one of the three play, talk, read buses should do so when one comes to their constituency and see the delight of the children—and of their parents or carers—when they are playing, talking and reading. If a bus does not come to members' constituencies, they should get in touch and find out how to get it to come.

An allied initiative is the NHS play@home programme, which was evaluated highly by Queen Margaret University in 2011. There is also the recently announced read write count initiative. Members who have not seen the videos on the Government's website that show parents or carers how going for the messages can be used to raise children's literacy levels while increasing attachment really need to look at them—they are amazing.

I have only a few seconds left, although I could have brought many other things to members' attention. In the bookbug bag, I came across a quote from Albert Einstein:

"If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales."

I recommend doing that, but I am not talking about the fairy tales that we heard from Ruth Davidson this afternoon.

Such programmes are fun, creative and academically evaluated. We need to infect everyone across Scotland with enthusiasm.

16:03

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Two weeks ago, when the First Minister told us—boldly, it has to be said—that her neck is on the line when it comes to the attainment gap, it showed a welcome acceptance that it is one of the major education challenges that face the Government. The First Minister spoke about the successes that she saw; that 500 new schools have been built or refurbished since 2007, that the number of people who are staying on in S6 or who have meaningful school-leaver destinations is increasing, and that there has—notwithstanding the controversy around the Scottish Qualifications Authority this summer—been a record number of passes at higher and advanced higher levels.

When the First Minister talks about success in education, it is noticeable that most of the national measures that she uses to support that assertion are quantitative and do not tell us much, if anything at all, about the overall qualitative changes in pupils' learning. There are and always will be beacons of success, with qualitative improvement in individual schools, but quite frankly, no one believes the First Minister when either she, or her education secretary, tells us that "standards have risen and are continuing to rise".

Why does no one believe that? It is because every education expert in the land tells us that between one in five and one in six pupils is still leaving school functionally illiterate. It is because the most recent statistics show that in many aspects of literacy and numeracy Scotland has gone backwards, and it is because of what is for me a very telling statistic, which was used by the First Minister herself when she said that 69 per cent of schools are classified in inspections as being good, very good or excellent, but which means that 31 per cent of schools—or approximately 210,000 pupils—are not in that category. That is a damning indictment.

The First Minister has said on several occasions that she will listen to good ideas from other parties. Maybe today's U-turn on testing is one example of that, but there are others on which we have met a brick wall. If she will not listen to the politicians, perhaps she will listen to the experts in education—for example, Keir Bloomer, when he analyses the issues in literacy, numeracy and the attainment gap. While praising the First Minister for at last being prepared to grasp the large and difficult nettle, he comments that when change is mooted by opposition parties, it is rejected because it is not seen to promote egalitarianism. If

new policies involve different organisation in schools, greater devolution to headteachers and more choice to parents, they are dismissed because of the mistaken belief that egalitarianism and uniformity are the same.

The First Minister could also listen to Sue Ellis, who argues very convincingly that there is not only a significant lack of meaningful data in Scotland—which the First Minister has addressed this afternoon—but the absence of a consistent approach to following the child through school, which my colleague Mary Scanlon pointed out at the time of the Audit Scotland inquiry.

Those experts make it clear that advice to teachers is very weak, so Ruth Davidson is quite right when she focuses on teacher training and on the fact that in Scotland fewer hours are devoted to literacy and numeracy training than in England.

The Scottish Government is rightly keen to stress the importance of the early years, and it can take some credit for some pioneering work that is being done across Scotland. However, that effort will be compromised while too many families find it difficult to access—some are actually prevented from accessing it—good-quality flexible childcare. Twice in this chamber we have debated the evidence that was provided by the fair funding for our kids campaign group, which has argued that

“for many children and working parents ... the system is not delivering a model of childcare that matches the needs of the modern working family”,

and the evidence that was provided by Reform Scotland, which flagged up the inherent unfairness within the nursery system, which prevents approximately half of children in Scotland from receiving the same entitlement just because they happen to have been born in the wrong month. The First Minister made a welcome announcement about the discrimination that affects kinship carers, so perhaps she could turn her attention to the discrimination within nursery provision.

At the other end of the scale, we know exactly what is happening to colleges despite their extraordinary collective efforts to provide a top-class education, greater accessibility and more support for people who are often furthest from the labour market. They have seen their real-terms funding cut, they have seen substantial cuts in college places, they have seen lecturer numbers decrease and they have had to suffer serious financial pressures on their reserves because of Office for National Statistics reclassification.

However, we know that the further education sector is not alone; the higher education sector is now facing exactly the same threat—all because the Scottish Government wants to exert more control over the running of our universities. It proclaims that it wants to do so because, it

alleges, there is insufficient transparency within university governance and therefore insufficient accountability for the public money that underpins what they spend. I have tried several times before, and I will try again this afternoon, to ask the Scottish Government for one shred of evidence to prove that the existing system of university governance is in some way undermining the education experience or holding back our universities in competing internationally.

The fact of the matter is that the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill is a mess. It is politically driven and it has so many technical problems in it that it will need radical change. If it does not get that, it will have to be abolished altogether.

Ruth Davidson made it plain earlier this afternoon that this party will strongly support anything that can reduce the attainment gap and provide effective testing. What we cannot accept—and what the public is struggling to understand—is why the SNP has become obsessed with university governance when no problem exists; with forcing named persons on all children under 18, when it is quite clear that the vast majority of parents do not want or need a named person; with attacking colleges; and with refusing to budge when parents demand that the date of a child's birthday should not determine the level of provision of nursery education.

I know that the First Minister is not in the chamber, but I hope that she will listen to what is being said. Is it not time to do more U-turns, so that we really deliver on what matters?

16:10

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): We are debating an exciting programme for government today, in the final year of this parliamentary session. Regarding my responsibilities, I see that land reform is central to the quest for fairness and equality and that building a sustainable Scotland is one of our core purposes.

In “Small Is Beautiful”, Eric Schumacher said:

“Among material resources, the greatest, unquestionably, is the land. Study how a society uses its land, and you can come to a pretty reliable conclusion as to what its future will be.”

That is exactly what the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee will be doing. We will be building on the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, which was passed in June.

I have read most of the 200 submissions to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment

Committee on the current Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, which cover many different points from different aspects. I hope that over the next three months we will hear them and come to our conclusions about the best ways forward for land reform. We are trying to ensure that encouraging and supporting diverse land ownership is one of the key issues, as is addressing the fairness, equality and social justice that are connected to ownership of, access to and use of land in Scotland.

I want to comment on two issues that have been raised by members and the public, and which follow on from issues in the land reform review group report: ownership of land in Scotland by non-EU entities and human rights.

I am surprised that the Opposition has not seen the explanation of why the bill does not include banning of land ownership by non-EU-based legal entities. NFU Scotland has told its members that the Scottish Government considers that such a ban

“would not achieve the policy objective, as it would still allow the use of complex structures and trusts to obscure how land is owned and managed in Scotland. The Scottish Government intends to bring forward regulation making powers to require disclosure of certain information on a proprietor or tenant in Scotland. That will be done on a case by case basis, where it can be demonstrated that lack of information can be shown to have an adverse effect.”

That being so, we will look at those things in great detail in the RACCE Committee.

The European convention on human rights is included in the Scotland Act 1998. I turn to Kirsteen Shields’s final words on the matter in the “Green Scottish Human Rights Journal”, in which she says:

“If the body of ECHR law is incorporated appropriately, the land reform debate offers an opportunity to rescue rights from their misrepresentation and to re-establish the ECHR as an institution which responds to the prevailing needs of societies and aligns State power to address those needs.”

ECHR is not about property rights and landlords’ rights. It is about human rights, and we intend to investigate that in great detail.

I turn to a wider issue that is encompassed by Europe—and which goes much further than that. The approaching Paris climate change conference requires us to reflect on the bigger picture and how it affects the way in which the Scottish Government can act. In July, the French Government announced a package of measures that will turn around its energy production; in short, there will in France be greater emphasis on and investment in renewable energy, and a cut in reliance on nuclear power. Contrast that with the approach of the UK Conservative Government, which is now clearly waging an all-out war on

renewables. What we are seeing develop is a tale of two Governments—not just of the French Government and the UK Government, but of the Government in London and the Government in Scotland. The communities, businesses and parts of the environment that should benefit from renewable energy are certainly going to be hit most by the changes from London.

Patrick Harvie: I agree with Rob Gibson’s criticism of the UK Government’s recent energy announcements, but we are examining the Scottish Government’s programme for government in the final year of the session. Does he know why, after four missed climate change targets, we have today had no new policy announcements that are intended to get us back on track?

Rob Gibson: Targets are one thing, but the trajectory of change towards achieving our goals is on target. The First Minister and Fergus Ewing, the Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism, have pointed out that it is anti-business to stop us developing one of the things—renewable energy—that most helps us to achieve our climate change targets, as the Conservatives are doing to us at the moment. They will potentially cost about £3 billion of investment and risk perhaps 5,000 jobs. The trajectory is right; we have proved that.

Neil Findlay: Will Rob Gibson give way?

Rob Gibson: No, thank you. I do not want interventions from people who have only just found out that climate change exists.

Last June, the UK Committee on Climate Change published a sobering report that warned of the realities that climate change will bring. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Mr Findlay!

Rob Gibson: Those realities include increases in flooding and rising temperatures. They would cause dangers to our way of life and the loss of some of our best farmland.

We are up against an attack on renewable energy and we have to fight against it. This December, delegates at the climate change summit in Paris will wonder why the British Government is going there and arguing exactly the opposite, and why the Scottish Government’s hands are too tied on energy policy and climate change policy for it to succeed.

Sarah Boyack: Will Rob Gibson give way on that point?

The Presiding Officer: The member has literally just finished.

16:16

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I hope that you, Presiding Officer, and colleagues enjoyed a slightly more relaxing and successful summer than perhaps some of us in the chamber did.

If I can put this as objectively as I can, without meaning to sound envious in any way, it is fair to say that the SNP—

Members: Microphone!

The Presiding Officer: One moment. Can we—
[*Interruption.*] That's better.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): No, it's not. [*Laughter.*]

Ken Macintosh: Mr Paterson will change his mind shortly.

It is fair to say that the SNP Government is in a strong position at the moment. It has an absolute majority in the Scottish Parliament and is riding high in the polls, with the First Minister on her political honeymoon. If ever there was a time for the Government to do something different—to push for real change or to be bold and radical—this is it. Such moments do not come along often.

The last time my party enjoyed such a position of political strength was probably 1999. That term in office was marked by notable successes and achievements: a huge expansion of nursery and higher education, the restoration of public services, investment in teachers' and health workers' pay, the school-building programme and the introduction of free personal care. Even if we acknowledge that there was then a different political climate, we must acknowledge that it was also marked by landmark legislative successes, including the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, the abolition of feudal tenure, the smoking ban, the abolition of section 28 and the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000. I could go on.

If I am entirely honest, I am not sure that today's announcement of a vision for the next decade stands comparison with that record. I notice that the First Minister used the word "bold" in trailing the programme for government, but although there are several announcements that we welcome, the programme feels more worthy than inspired. I welcome the announcements on tackling educational attainment and housing, for example, but they feel like an attempt to correct past mistakes and to put right some of the poorer decisions that have been taken over the past eight years, rather than a step out in a new direction.

I am also unsure how the Government's stated plans for the next few years sit alongside day-to-day reality for most Scots. If we ask people in my area about public services, for example, they will give a list of issues with which they are wrestling:

the selling off of the last publicly owned care home in the area; trying to find ways to prevent the local dementia support service from being reduced; school librarians being got rid of; the closing of a centre for people with additional needs; fighting for an even semi-decent public transport connection to our hospital; and fighting against long waits for hospital treatment.

As colleagues will recognise, in the majority of the examples that I listed, local government is at the sharp end of the political decisions. However, there is little in today's programme for government that offers much in the way of comfort. When we ask colleagues from local government what they want the Administration to address—what they wanted to hear from the programme for government—the overwhelming response identifies local government finance. It is unsustainable to continue to cut central Government grants to our local authorities while also underfunding a centrally imposed council-tax freeze. Scottish Labour has been working with the commission on local tax reform to come up with a sustainable long-term solution. We await with interest the report that will be published in the autumn.

However, none of that stops the Scottish Government from sending out a strong and clear message now about its direction of travel—or its "trajectory", if I may put it that way for Mr Gibson.

It is directly contradictory to talk about transferring more powers to our communities while emasculating our local authorities when it comes to their exercising any kind of fiscal responsibility. Yes—there was reference to the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, which Labour fully supports, and we are looking forward to the possibility of similar legislation for our islands, but those are quite specific examples that stand out almost because they are exceptions.

I know that the First Minister and her colleagues are sensitive to the accusation that this is a centralising and overly controlling Administration, and that we are in danger of living in a one-party state. Surely, therefore, this is the perfect opportunity to rebut that charge. Council colleagues are willing to stand up and take the tough decisions that need to be taken, but they need to feel that they have the support of Government ministers, rather than worrying that they are to be blamed by them.

Alongside my worries about local government and the future of public services, of all the areas in which I was looking for a bold and ambitious plan from this Government, housing was probably top of my list. Scarcely a week has gone by this summer without further evidence or a new report highlighting the housing problems that face many Scots. Just last month, the proportion of Scots

who own their own home hit a 15-year low, while the number who rent privately hit a 15-year high. In fact, the amount that is paid in rent by tenants in private lets is at an all-time high. People are either paying too much, are living in inadequate accommodation, or both. We urgently need to build more homes—for social rent, in particular.

There are announcements in today's programme that are to be welcomed, but again they lack detail and, in fact, it is difficult to describe the sum total as "bold" or "ambitious". I welcome the announcement of a root-and-branch review of planning, but the First Minister has stated that the intention of the review is to help to deliver more homes. That scarcely does justice to the complexity of the issue, so I would welcome further information on that. At the moment, the number of local planning decisions that are being overruled by the Scottish Government has, unfortunately, had the effect of undermining confidence in the whole system.

There will be many who, like me, warm to the idea of a housing fund to address the specific needs of rural communities.

The Presiding Officer: You are in your last 30 seconds.

Ken Macintosh: I ask for even an idea of how much that fund will amount to. Furthermore, will the fund be solely for new-build homes, or will people be able to access it to address the pressing needs of fuel poverty?

The help-to-buy scheme should continue. I am glad about the announcement with regard to the next three years.

I can tell Parliament that Scottish Labour will have housing as its first subject for debate in the new session. I hope that we can agree on the genuine ambition that all Scots should be able to enjoy the benefit of a warm, secure and affordable home, wherever they live in this country.

16:23

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I put on record my regard for Chief Constable Sir Stephen House's service, particularly in the two years since Police Scotland's inception. I do not underestimate his commitment to the police service. He will not always have known that, because sometimes—rightly—he had a rough ride from the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing, which I chair, as did Vic Emery. However, transforming eight constabularies, with eight cultures, into one, as well as delivering substantial savings because of cuts to the budget was a tough task, which was delivered to a tight timescale.

There is a spotlight on Police Scotland as never before, with Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing, Audit Scotland, the Opposition—rightly—and the press focusing on the service. However, sadly, that has gone too far to some extent and policing has been politicised.

Willie Rennie does a disservice to his party as well as to the police by overegging the pudding. In chairing the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing, I have received a handful of emails concerning the establishment of Police Scotland and only one complaining about the delivery of the service, which was from someone in my constituency. It is not that I am not looking for issues that are raised; it is that those are the only ones that have been raised with me.

Police Scotland is not the talk of the steamie. The doom and gloom that Willie Rennie has expressed today and on previous occasions does a disservice in particular to our front-line officers, who have delivered drops in levels of knife crime and the fear of crime, with the perception of crime at an all-time low. Yes, there have been mistakes with Police Scotland and, more particularly, with the SPA. Yes, we need rebalancing. However, to say that Police Scotland is on its knees is complete nonsense.

Necessity is the mother of invention. There have been swingeing cuts to our budget and, rather than lose 17,000 front-line officers as had to happen in England, we are maintaining police numbers. The sum of £11 million still requires to be culled from the budget. I know that Opposition parties have only one member each at Westminster, but I say to Opposition members that more than £40 million in VAT receipts from Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is retained. That money could come back here and cover those cuts. The Police Service of Northern Ireland is exempt from VAT, and exemption has been extended to the London Legacy Development Corporation, although it started out as a London charity. I ask Opposition members to say to their colleagues at Westminster that that is an injustice to the Police Service and the Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland.

Issues remain for Police Scotland, though. I think that the Government has recognised that, because one man—or two—was not the fault. It is a matter of scrutiny. The SPA had no doubt lost its way and did not seem to know what it should be doing. I welcome the fact that that will be reviewed.

It is essential that there is a rebalancing between national and local priorities and in the perception of those priorities. Accountability appears to have shifted too far to the centre; I welcome the fact that it will come back, although,

as the First Minister has said, access to major facilities is nationwide now. If somebody goes missing in the Borders or the Highlands and Islands and a helicopter is needed, that helicopter will be sent as a matter of necessity and not because someone has put in a bit of paper and made a request. The facilities that are available are much better.

I am glad that Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary is reviewing call handling. I regret the fact that, to some extent, that has been prompted by the recent tragic events on the M9. However, we must not pre-empt that review. We do not know what went wrong there. I am loth to comment until we have the facts before us.

I am glad that there will be a statutory code of practice on stop and search. Perhaps there will be clarity on that issue, as young people are sometimes stopped and searched because there is a child protection issue. They may be carrying drugs or alcohol, and the police stop and search them for their own safety. If the police are searching a buggy, pushchair or pram, it may be because an adult has secreted an offensive item there. The issue is not black and white, which is why we require statutory guidance.

The Justice Committee today began its scrutiny of the Community Justice (Scotland) Bill. The focus on community justice is important. It sounds like a strange and drab thing, but it is to do with stopping reoffending, which is bad for society, for victims and for the people who are involved and their families, and it costs an arm and a leg. I am glad that we are considering that issue.

The proposed abusive behaviour and sexual harm bill is important and will bring us into line with developments in technology. People can be unaware that they can be blackmailed or humiliated by private images and what we might call revenge porn. We must put a stop to that. That is something that everybody in the chamber would welcome.

16:28

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I unequivocally support our public services. I have worked in housing and education and was a councillor for nine years, and I have seen the way in which high-quality services change people's lives for the better.

However, our public services are under pressure like never before. In the NHS, problems pile higher and higher each day. More GPs are closing their doors to new patients. Hospitals rely on bank, agency and private sector staff. Over the summer, the children's ward at St John's hospital had to close its 24/7 in-patient service again. I am glad that the local constituency member and the

Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport are here. In Lothian, one in seven hospital beds are taken up by people who are well enough to go home and who could go home if the social care system could cope with them.

In local government, which is the front line in the fight against poverty and inequality, budgets are not being cut to the bone—we are way past the bone and are now deep into the marrow. The impact of that is all too evident in our communities. Jobs have been lost. Roads and the environment are in decline. There have been cuts to community education, to support for the elderly and to disabled services. We see bus fares rising, schools with fewer materials and fewer support staff, and cuts to housing budgets. My council in West Lothian—UK council of the year in 2006—has had to cut £89 million from its budget.

At the same time as that has happened, we are supposed to go on and cheer as a centralised Government dictates that councils have to reward the well-off most with a freeze on local taxes. The Government cannot claim to oppose austerity and its consequences with such a regressive approach to local government.

In education, it appears that after eight years the Scottish Government has realised that there is an attainment gap. Of course, if the Government removes classroom assistants and cuts teaching equipment budgets; if people cannot get an appointment with an educational psychologist; if a child returns home and their mum, dad, brother or sister cannot access mental health support or drug or alcohol counselling; or if someone is a young carer or is in care when social work and education budgets are slashed, is it any wonder that the education attainment gap widens?

For many young people who want to bridge the attainment gap after leaving school, college is their destination, and yet here we see fewer staff, reduced teaching time, student support cut and more than 100,000 places lost. That is not the way to reduce the attainment gap.

If we are serious about addressing inequality, we have to be serious about redistributing wealth and power. If we fail to levy or collect taxes and if we provide tax cuts or freezes for the rich while the poor are forced to attend food banks, we will never address Scotland's real shame of inequality. The education attainment gap is a manifestation of that inequality.

We know that the Tory Government exists to make the country more unequal. The growing gulf between rich and poor is meant to happen under its system of austerity. It absolutely practises redistribution—of course it does—but it is redistribution from the poor to the rich, and it attacks anyone who challenges that agenda. That

is why it has brought forward the Trade Union Bill, which is an unprecedented attack on the right to organise in the workplace. Trade unions exist to fight for better wages, health and safety, pensions and gender equality. The bill wants us to return to the 18th century master and servant view of industrial relations, where corporate power is entrenched by a legal system that prevents collective organisation.

No worker ever goes on strike lightly. The staff at the national museum of Scotland who were out for a whole week last week because of inactivity to bring that dispute to an end did not take that option lightly, but of course there was no mention of that in the First Minister's speech.

I hope that the leader of the Conservative Party will join the First Minister and the leader of the Labour Party in agreeing to oppose the Trade Union Bill at Westminster. I will most certainly give way to her now if she wants to confirm that she will.

Ruth Davidson *indicated disagreement.*

Neil Findlay: Absolutely no chance—I did not think so.

I hope that we in this chamber will put aside our differences in order to defeat what is simply an offensive, bigoted, politically sectarian and nasty piece of legislation. I will work, and we will work, with anyone who is serious about opposing the bill and preventing its implementation across the UK.

I commend the Government for agreeing with us to end the charging of employment tribunal fees, which is a welcome announcement.

I am pleased to see that, two years after the Government took over my proposed lobbying transparency (Scotland) bill, we now have legislation coming forward, although I sense that it is done with little enthusiasm.

Recent cases involving Ineos, the Government's relations with Qatar—

The Presiding Officer: You are in your last 30 seconds.

Neil Findlay: —T in the Park, the First Minister's recent New York rendezvous with Mr Murdoch and the moves by a number of political operators with influential contact lists into the public affairs sector show why we need a robust lobbying register that shines a light on our democracy.

I look forward to discussing all those issues in the weeks and months ahead.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Findlay. I am afraid that I will have to cut the time for the next four speakers to five minutes each.

16:34

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): One of the things that I always do during debates on the programme for government is look at exactly how the programme is likely to affect the people of Aberdeen Central, who I represent. In Aberdeen at this moment, there is some worry about the downturn in the oil and gas sector.

One of the first things that the First Minister said today was that the Government

“will continue to support”

the

“oil and gas industry.”

I am really pleased that our energy jobs task force has been extended for a further six months.

I hope that the Government will continue to lobby the UK Government to ensure that we get an exploration tax credit. I am convinced that that will lead to more discoveries such as the Culzean discovery, which was given the go-ahead this week, and will continue to ensure job security for people in the oil and gas sector.

Another thing that jumps out at me from the programme for government is the establishment of the £48 million growth fund for small and medium-sized enterprises. As I went around my constituency during the recess, I visited a number of businesses, including Wool for Ewe in Rosemount, thanks to the Federation of Small Businesses. I have heard from folks that there is often still a difficulty in getting finance from banks. I think that the growth fund will be welcomed by businesses in Aberdeen and throughout Scotland.

I have asked the Government to look at housing. The private rented sector in Aberdeen is very expensive and I am pleased that the Government has put money into social housing. During the summer, the housing minister opened Spencer Court in my constituency, and money has been put into Craiginchies housing for key workers, which is extremely welcome. However, we need to look at rent controls. I am pleased that the Government has announced that the bill that it is bringing forward will include provisions for rent controls in rent-pressure areas. That will be welcome in my constituency and beyond.

For me, one of the First Minister's key statements was:

“We will do everything that we can to mitigate welfare cuts and restore dignity to our social security system”.

The dignity aspect is important, because we have seen Tory attacks on the most vulnerable and the poorest in our society. That is an absolute disgrace, as far as I am concerned. It is not only about folks on benefits; over the summer, since George Osborne's budget, we have seen an

attack on this country's working poor. We have seen the withdrawal of tax credits from 197,200 families in Scotland. A total of 346,000 children will be affected, which is absolutely shameful. Our children are paying a particularly heavy price for that right-wing Tory ideology. I am afraid that we will have to bear that, but we will continue to fight against it.

Many members have spoken about the attainment fund, which will benefit Riverbank school in my constituency. However, if we are truly serious about bridging the gulf in attainment, we will not only have to invest in education; we will have to change the way in which we deal with poverty in this country.

The Presiding Officer: You are in your last 30 seconds.

Kevin Stewart: The only way in which we can defeat poverty is by all powers over taxation and welfare coming to the Scottish Parliament so that we can ensure that our children have a brighter future.

16:39

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): The challenge for any Government in bringing forward its programme is to promote economic growth; ensure that we have a strong and secure health service; provide opportunities in education; and ensure that there is adequate local government funding so that we can protect communities. Although aspects of the programme are welcome, such as the proposed introduction of rent controls, the SNP Government's approach undermines its ability to tackle the fundamental issues that we must address in Scottish communities.

At times, the Government has a problem in taking responsibility for some of its actions in devolved areas. We saw that over the weekend, when an official was put up as a spokesman in response to NHS Lanarkshire's staff shortages and 130 unfilled positions. We also saw that with incidents relating to Police Scotland over the summer. The Government has not wanted to speak out on the issues. It is almost as though it wants to separate itself from them.

Patrick Harvie is correct. We have heard Government ministers answer questions numerous times by saying, "That's an operational matter." How many times have we heard that response at portfolio question time? It is almost as though they are saying, "I'm a Government minister. You don't expect me to answer questions about things that I'm responsible for."

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

James Kelly: No, I will not give way.

Over the four years in which this Government has been in power, there has been too much emphasis on the constitution and not enough on the issues that affect people in local areas. There has also been a tendency to blame others rather than to take responsibility. Unfortunately, as a consequence, some fundamental issues have not been addressed.

I agree with Kevin Stewart that, when members look at the programme, they look at how it affects their constituency. The issue of GP shortages came up over the summer in my constituency. The figures show that, in 1999, there was a GP practice to cover every 5,080 patients. That has gone up to 5,668 patients, so the position has deteriorated by almost 600 patients. Why has that happened? When people look at the figures, they look for the evidence. It shows that investment in GP funding has been cut by £1 billion since 2006. There has also been a 5 per cent cut in medical student support. Therefore, it is no wonder that we have a GP shortage.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Will the member give way?

James Kelly: No, I will not.

I agree with much of what Neil Findlay said about local government. Again, members see the impact on their areas. South Lanarkshire Council has a £23 million shortfall in its budget. Cuts have been made to third sector grants, and the cost of community alarms has doubled.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Perhaps James Kelly would like to explain to the Parliament why South Lanarkshire Council has to make such cuts to its budget. Maybe it has something to do with it having to pay out £72 million to the women it has consistently underpaid over 20 years.

James Kelly: The Government's allocation to South Lanarkshire Council over a three-year period has been reduced by £80 million. When it comes to the budget discussions in February, I invite MSPs such as Christina McKelvie, who spend much of their time criticising the local council, to introduce a proposal to fund local government properly.

I appeal to the Government that it is time to take responsibility. If it wants to deliver for Scotland, it should use the powers that are at its disposal to change people's lives and to stand up for people throughout Scotland.

16:44

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I, too, congratulate the First Minister and all the Government team on an excellent programme for a stronger Scotland and,

in particular, the support to tackle many of the social ills that are in our society.

There are a number of proposals in the First Minister's statement and the Government's programme that I want to touch on. Let me start with food and drink. The industry is an important source of employment in my constituency. We are the home of excellent beef and lamb, and fishing is a strong industry in the north-east of Scotland. We have seen oilseed rape move from being simply a commodity that puts nitrogen back into the soil to delivering first-class extra-virgin oil, which is used in the best kitchens in these islands and beyond. We have seen the north-east of Scotland become a centre for garlic production—we are exporting garlic to France. We are innovating and we are continuing to improve.

There are challenges for the food and drink industry, and I hope that the Government, in supporting the industry, particularly through funding for small and medium-sized enterprises, will look at how we can improve branding for SMEs. Some of the recent troubles in the fish-processing industry in my constituency are based on the inability of even quite large firms to control their own destiny to an adequate extent. Firms do not own the brands but are doing work for others, on short-term contracts, and when the contract moves the effects can be devastating. Firms also do not control the sources of supply of the raw materials for many of the products that they produce. I would like to think that the Government could give support, through the enterprise agencies, to enable companies to develop branding and more robust channels of supply of raw materials. We produce some of the best food and drink in the world, but we can do more and we need more support.

The Government said that it will look at the planning system, which can also touch on the subject of food and drink. When we grant planning consent, be that at local government level or at Government level, we are granting a privilege to the commercial companies that have applied for consent, so we should perhaps be more ambitious about what we seek to get in return. For example, when we are giving planning consent to supermarkets, which exercise heavy control in the food and drink sector, planning consent conditions that require local sourcing could be a part of national policy, which would be implemented by local councils and elsewhere. Under European law, "local" is likely to mean "within Europe", but we could say that produce must come from small and medium-sized enterprises. We can perhaps create the opportunity for such companies to grow by operating the planning system slightly differently.

The document "A Stronger Scotland: the Government's Programme for Scotland 2015-16" talks about digital infrastructure to some degree. During the recess, our week away was in Plockton, which was an absolute delight. The town has 6 Mbps broadband, an airport and a railway station—three things that I do not have at home. We even had a 2G phone signal, which I do not have at home. The UK Government's programme for new masts and phone coverage does not do terribly well; there is not a single new mast in Scotland. I hope that the excellent results that we are seeing in the delivery of better broadband across the Highlands will take us to near universality. For those rural dwellers on exchange-only lines, like me, who cannot be connected to superfast broadband, I hope that some priority will be given to the development and implementation of solutions.

We are making terrific progress and we are ahead of where we might have expected to be some time ago. The programme for Government is excellent, and I commend it to all members.

16:49

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): It has been mentioned a few times this afternoon that the Government has been going for eight to nine years. That is longer than the wartime coalition of Asquith and Lloyd George, the Administrations of MacDonald and Baldwin and the national Government that followed. It is longer than Chamberlain's Administration and the coalition that saw us through the second world war. It is longer than the great reforming Administration of Clement Attlee, Harold Wilson's Government and Edward Heath's Government. In fact, only the Administrations that were embarked upon by Churchill in the 1950s, by Thatcher and by Blair lasted longer, and yet we are told that this is a Government that has laid the foundations for the next decade and set out a bold vision for the next 10 years.

Is this a Government whose performance is matched by either its rhetoric or its longevity? "Yes", some will say, and in the speeches of Linda Fabiani, Mark McDonald, Fiona McLeod, Rob Gibson, Kevin Stewart and Stewart Stevenson we saw evidence of the 600-year-old monk's statement that it is possible to fool some of the people all of the time. At the moment, in electoral terms, it even seems possible to fool most of the people some of the time, but this Government will not fool all of the people all of the time. In its record on education, on policing and increasingly on health, it is an Administration that is failing Scotland and failing the very services that were devolved to this Parliament.

I am going to talk specifically about health and what is not in the programme that the First Minister announced this afternoon. First, on Thursday, the advocate general of the European Court of Justice will give his opinion on minimum unit pricing. I will not go any further, Presiding Officer—

The Presiding Officer: Very wise.

Jackson Carlaw: —other than to say that I hope that the Government will come to the chamber immediately to tell us how it intends to respond to that ruling.

Secondly, before we went into recess, the Government appointed an emergency team to restore credibility at the new Queen Elizabeth hospital. We do not know who is on that team, what it has done, what its remit is, what its recommendations are or what improvements have been implemented as a result. I hope that the Scottish Government will come to the chamber urgently and tell us exactly what has happened at the Queen Elizabeth hospital, because over the summer the performance of its accident and emergency unit has continued to lag behind that of accident and emergency units across the rest of Scotland.

Thirdly, more people are employed in the health service today than in 2007. I support and congratulate the Scottish Government on that, but today we learned that nursing and consultancy vacancies are up yet again. Each year, we have a remedial programme from the Scottish Government about how it is going to address the issue, and each year we come back and nursing and consultancy vacancies have increased further yet again. What is the Government's programme to address that? It is not in the document.

Fourthly, a constituent came to see me this week who is a long-term survivor of prostate cancer. He has been going to the Victoria hospital for his routine checks. This time, he was told that the checking of cancer has been privatised and he is to go to Ross Hall hospital in future. I have no particular objection to the independent sector having these services contracted out—it was Weight Watchers before; maybe it is now cancer services—but it goes against the Scottish Government's claims that it was going to freeze out the independent sector and that there was no role for it in the Scottish health service. Is it the case that routine cancer check services are now contracted out? Can the health secretary confirm that?

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): The answer is, "No, they are not." Of course, in individual cases where the person needs to be seen urgently, if there is a need to use the independent sector rather than the

person having to wait, that is what will happen, but unlike Jackson Carlaw's Government down south this Government will never privatise the NHS.

Jackson Carlaw: But that is just what the Government has done. This is not an emergency case; his routine annual check has now been contracted out to Ross Hall and the independent sector. The cabinet secretary needs to check her facts.

Fifthly, there is nothing in the programme about plans for the winter this year. We have gone through two relatively mild winters in which the NHS has been under enormous pressure. I have looked through the programme; the issue is not addressed.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Jackson Carlaw: I am running out of time. *[Interruption.]*

Shona Robison: It is on page 59.

The Presiding Officer: Continue, Mr Carlaw.

Jackson Carlaw: Sixthly, the Government says that it is going to invest in primary care. I welcome the increase of a further £41 million for the provision of health visitors, but the Government has now talked about an all-party, consensual approach to health for two years. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Jackson Carlaw: The Government's idea of an all-party consensus is that every member in the chamber agrees with what the SNP Government says. Time is running out. If we are going to have an all-party consensus on health, we need an all-party approach to it, and that is sadly lacking in the Scottish Government's programme for health.

16:54

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): For one moment, I thought that Jackson Carlaw was going to tell us that he was part of the national Government during the war. *[Interruption.]* I know—the old ones are the best.

In recognition of Patrick Harvie's appeal for education not to be used as a political football, I will start my remarks by making a considered effort in that regard. I thank Fiona McLeod for all the work that she has done, in her role as acting children's minister, in relation to kinship care. *[Applause.]* We will say more next Thursday about how the Government will support the equalisation of funding between the kinship care allowance and the foster care allowance. I also welcome Aileen Campbell back from her maternity leave.

Although Kezia Dugdale is not in her seat at the moment, I welcome her to her new role. I know

that her commitment to looked-after children is genuine, and it is shared across the chamber. I also recognise her passion for tackling gender inequality. However, I do not agree with her about the need to introduce a special qualification for teachers who work with disadvantaged children in disadvantaged communities. Just as I believe that looked-after children are all our bairns, I believe that everyone in every part of the education system has, at heart, a moral responsibility to ensure that Scotland's poorest children get every chance to succeed in their education.

I agree with Ruth Davidson that more time should be spent on literacy and numeracy in the initial teacher education. The Education and Sport Committee and other members have raised the matter with me, and I am pursuing it with the providers of initial teacher education, recognising that they are part of autonomous higher education institutions. I also agree with Liz Smith that delivering equity does not mean providing the same to all children, as some children need more support than others.

Liz Smith: I praised the First Minister for announcing a policy that will ensure that discrimination against kinship care is ended. Will the Scottish Government do the same in relation to access to nursery provision, which discriminates according to a child's birthday?

Angela Constance: A lot of really important issues need to be addressed as we move forward with our ambition to deliver over 1,000 hours of free early learning and childcare. There are three things that we need to do. As well as increasing the number of hours, we need to maintain the quality of provision and find ways to improve the flexibility. As we move forward, we will lay out in more detail how we intend to address those three important principles of increasing the number of hours, maintaining the quality of provision and increasing the flexibility.

I struggled most to find consensus with Willie Rennie. I say to him that I looked very closely at the pupil premium but the evidence of what happens south of the border just did not back it up. I was also particularly disappointed that he misrepresented and tried to blister the debate around the draft national improvement framework. Following the First Minister's statement this afternoon, Larry Flanagan, the general secretary of the Educational Institute of Scotland, said:

"EIS is encouraged to see that the First Minister has been listening to us, and others, and is not advocating a return to the failed high-stakes testing regime of the past, which we would have opposed resolutely. The Scottish Government's intention to create a Scottish-designed bank of standardised tests to support teachers' professional judgement would appear to be designed to build on the ethos of curriculum for excellence rather than undermining it. It is essential, however, that the mistakes of the past are

not repeated and that safeguards are put in place to avoid the misuse of data generated through the proposed assessment changes."

I say to Mr Rennie that this is not about harking back to the past but about looking to the future and ensuring that every child and every community has every chance to succeed.

Although we know that nine out of 10 school leavers go into positive destinations, I want our education system to work for the remaining one out of 10, and the purpose of the national improvement framework and other aspects of the programme for government is to improve outcomes for children. In that regard, we will always move forward on the basis of the evidence.

The Presiding Officer: You need to wind up.

Angela Constance: Unlike some of our colleagues across the floor of the chamber, we are not interested in ideology.

The First Minister has outlined an ambitious programme for government that builds on the strong foundations that have been laid in the past eight years. It looks to the future and acknowledges the challenges that lie ahead, which we will address from a position of strength and a position of hope.

The Presiding Officer: The debate will continue tomorrow.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are no decisions to be taken as a result of today's business.

Point of Order

17:00

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I noted with interest the First Minister's announcement in her statement that a Scottish elections (dates) bill is to be introduced, which will propose a five-year parliamentary term. Can you clarify that the date of future elections should be determined following cross-party consultation and debate in the Parliament, not by the First Minister alone?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Thank you, Ms Fee, and thank you for giving me early notification of your point of order.

I will quote directly from the First Minister's statement, in which she said:

"I also confirm that the Scottish elections (dates) bill will propose a five-year term for the Scottish Parliament after next year's election, to prevent a clash with the United Kingdom general election".

Every bill proposes something. It will be for the Parliament to take evidence on, to discuss, to debate and to come to a conclusion on the Scottish elections (dates) bill.

General Practitioner Recruitment

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-13973, in the name of Jim Hume, on promoting sustainable general practitioner recruitment. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with concern the reported challenges facing GPs across Scotland, including a shortage in numbers in South Scotland; understands that the British Medical Association and the Royal College of General Practitioners Scotland have said that the country will need an additional 740 GPs by 2020 and that it is facing a recruitment crisis in general practice; believes that around 90% of patient contact with the NHS is through the primary care provided by GPs and that quality primary care is the bedrock of the NHS and a lifeline to many, particularly in remote and rural communities; further believes that the pressure on GPs is intolerable and that the situation at present is unsustainable, and notes the calls from Scotland's healthcare professionals for a full and frank debate on the future of primary care.

17:02

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I welcome fellow members back for the first members' business debate after the summer recess. Unfortunately, I must bring to the attention of the chamber the many issues surrounding the state of our general practices. As many members are aware, progress has not been made on the number of general practitioners or their working conditions.

Scottish Liberal Democrats have taken a strong stance on the issue and have raised it many times. Earlier this summer, my colleague Willie Rennie conducted a survey that uncovered some truly disturbing facts about the mood of GPs and the state of affairs in GP practices across South Scotland and the rest of our country.

The issue of GP recruitment and the future of GP surgeries that face a crisis is one that affects the health of nearly everyone, as general practices deliver 90 per cent of patient care in the national health service, yet they receive less than 8 per cent of NHS funding. Naturally, that has hard-hitting consequences for GPs, who face increasing demands with increasingly shrinking budgets. Their funding has faced near-constant reduction, from 9.2 per cent of NHS funding in 2007 to 7.8 per cent in 2013, and it is further reduced by inflation of 1.2 per cent. Those are preventative funds that the Government is not spending, even though evidence suggests that investing in GP practices could save the NHS in Scotland around £200 million.

In line with its 2020 vision, in November the Government first pledged £40 million for primary

care in 2015-16, but it then said that £50 million would be spent through the primary care fund over three years. That is a reduction of £24 million per year from the amount that was originally announced.

One of the elements of the scheme—the pharmacist independent prescribers—promises to recruit 140 new pharmacists, which is 10 pharmacists per health board. I do not deny that that is a welcome start, but it is only the first step in a very long journey, and we need to ensure sustainability. We are already seeing health boards taking over GP practices, so we need to face the real numbers and the real issues. If the Government does not reverse its spending cuts and remove them from where they are most hazardous, we will face a 2020 crisis rather than have a 2020 vision.

The Royal College of General Practitioners has called on the Government to provide urgently a clear strategy for sustainably investing in Scottish general practices, and we back that call. We also back a call from the British Medical Association, which has raised a warning flag over recruitment. One third of GPs are currently considering retirement and more than one in 10 are planning to move to part-time work, which will leave a number of practices unable to operate.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):

Does the member accept that one of the factors impacting on retirement dates for general practitioners is the change in the lifetime allowance for pensions and that that has been encouraging a lot of senior GPs to consider retirement, making the problems worse? As far as I recall, the Lib Dems were in government when that change was proposed.

Jim Hume: I can assure the member that the replies that we have had from GPs focus on issues that are very different from pensions.

We do not need to look into the future, because a real problem already faces us. A total of 463 practices have at least one GP vacancy and some have not been able to secure locum GPs for 15 days or more in a one-month period. Practices are not able to see as many patients as need to be seen, appointments are being slashed, waiting lists for registration are getting longer and people are being sent elsewhere because practices have reached maximum capacity.

I stress the importance of the issue because the Scottish Government risks turning GP services from an accessible, first-point-of-contact service for every Scot into an exclusive service that many will not have access to. I point out how important it is for the Scottish Government to work constructively with GPs and listen to what they are

saying, because we are at risk of losing the right to healthcare for all Scots.

The results of the GP survey undertaken by my colleague Willie Rennie speak volumes: almost four in 10 GP practices find their workload unmanageable—I say to Mr Campbell that these are the real problems—and they say that that is their greatest challenge. What is most telling, however, is that 92 per cent of the survey respondents want the Scottish Government's quality and outcomes framework for primary care to be reduced in scope or abolished. Perhaps one of the most worrisome and discomfiting facts is that one third of GPs unfortunately answered “no” to the question whether they would choose to become GPs again.

The survey raises many questions about the future of our GP services. Why is the Scottish Government not ensuring that the right amount of resources is being put where GPs think it is important to put them? Why are we seeing fewer GP trainees and less retention of GPs across Scotland? Why are GPs under so much stress and work pressure that many see their own health deteriorate? When the Scottish Government enables GPs to put professionalism back into the profession, many such questions will surely find an answer. If the Scottish Government wants to listen and to implement substantial solutions, both the Royal College of General Practitioners and the BMA have a number of recommendations.

Investment in the tools that GPs have at their disposal to lead the development of new models of care would empower GPs and enable them to provide better services to their patients. Whether we are considering the recently announced investment of £500,000, which I welcome, for the programme for improving out-patient services through better technology or enabling GPs to work alongside advanced nurse practitioners in their practices, it is important to recognise the leading role that GPs play, and must continue to play, in communities.

I urge the Government to improve support and resources for general practices in order to ease GPs' workloads and the pressures that they face. That support must include reducing GPs' administrative burdens. We know not only that GPs currently work more hours than they should during a typical day, but that they are also responsible for administrative work when the practice closes for the day.

Instead of being forced to do tasks that are not related to medical practice, GPs should be enabled to spend more time with their patients, have closer working relationships with other professions and have a good interface with other experts who are involved with their patients' care.

With the advent of social care and health integration, we can and should prioritise that.

I close by expressing once more my concern for the future of our general practices in South Scotland and in the rest of the country, and also my respect and gratitude to all our hardworking NHS staff. I hope that, by listening to the facts today, the Scottish Government will decide to act to prevent that cornerstone of our healthcare system from reaching a crisis.

17:10

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Jim Hume for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I begin by thanking the national health service for the services that it currently provides, in case I forget to do so at the end of my speech.

General practitioners are a linchpin of the national health service, so I am surprised that the Government did not respond earlier to the British Medical Association's statement back in March that the shortfall in general practitioners would impinge on patient care. It is important to try to encapsulate the difficulties faced not only by GPs but by the public.

My colleagues have highlighted a number of issues facing our doctors, including the fact that vacancies are not being filled. I know of a practice in Glasgow that has been looking for somebody to fill a vacancy but has failed to find anyone. It is quite shocking that morale is low among our doctors, because we depend on them to boost our morale. We depend on our doctors to be there for us to ensure that we are not suffering from all sorts of ailments, but if they themselves feel under pressure or feel that they have inadequate resources at their disposal to treat their patients, that sends a poor signal to our citizens.

The inequalities in Glasgow are probably the greatest. We talk about services for communities that are sparsely populated and where patients or doctors must travel long distances only to find that they do not get the services that they want at the end of their journey. I would have thought that that is pretty detrimental for any community. However, I see more and more people in densely populated areas such as Glasgow now complaining about not being able to get appointments or, when they get appointments, being rushed in and out of the surgery because of pressures on doctors' time.

It is really important not only that doctors feel valued and that they have the resources at their fingertips but that patients who go to see their doctor feel that they are listened to and get a proper hearing. No patient feels comfortable going in to see a doctor who says, “Right, what's wrong with you?”, starts scribbling and then says, “Here's your medication—now, out the door.” A lot of

people do not think that that is what they go to see the doctor for. Sometimes, people do not need medication—just good advice can be valuable, but that can depend on the resources that doctors have at their disposal.

A lot of doctors now say that they would rather not be in the job and that they would not choose that career if they had another opportunity. I remember that people used to want to give their right arm to become a doctor. It was a profession that people tried very hard to get into because they wanted to serve their community and to make a difference where they lived. If that is not happening, it is a bad day.

A proper policy needs to be developed to look at all the issues and the pressure that is being put on doctors. The Scottish Government really needs to take up the gauntlet, address the challenge and work more closely with doctors than it has done so far. Talking to doctors is not a bad idea. Let us do that, please, and let us hope that we can improve on the service and reduce the pressure on people.

17:14

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank Jim Hume for bringing the debate to the chamber.

General practice is central to the future of the national health service in Scotland. It is the front line for many people. The recent BMA conference for Scottish local medical committees discussed the struggle that many general practices are facing to recruit doctors and get locum cover.

General practice can be a cost-effective part of the Scottish healthcare system. Recent calculations by the Royal College of General Practitioners show that investing another £72 million in GP consultations in the United Kingdom would lead to a saving of £375 million, rising to £708 million by the end of 2019. That translates into a possible saving of £70 million in Scotland. That could be done by looking at creative ways of freeing up time for general practitioners.

The Scottish Government recognised that when, in June this year, it announced increased funding for primary care of £50 million over three years. That will provide an initial impetus to encourage GPs to try new ways of working over the three years and it will help to address the problems with recruitment and retention that are so common in primary care services.

Alan McDevitt, the chair of the BMA's Scottish GP committee, also raised another important opportunity to increase primary care funding: the evolving health and social care integration plan. Mr McDevitt states that

"investment in leadership training will provide GPs with additional skills to influence the design and delivery of community services for their patients."

He went on to state:

"The recruitment of additional pharmacists working directly with GPs will provide much needed support and I would hope that in the long term this investment could be extended so that every practice in Scotland would be able to have a practice based pharmacist."

Practice-based and community pharmacists are uniquely placed to work with GPs to improve patient care and safety and can play an important role in the long-term management of patients who have chronic diseases. I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport to suggest that we should have triage nurses in pharmacies in this instant society, so that lesser illnesses can be treated in pharmacies, which would free up time for GPs.

In March this year, the RCGP and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society issued a joint statement on general practices in which they highlighted the important role that practice-based pharmacists can play in creating efficient general practice services. There should be investment in the recruitment and training of pharmacists who are based in general practice and who could be of considerable value in reviewing patients' medication, managing polypharmacy and medication for the housebound within the newly integrated healthcare system, linking effectively with community pharmacists and undertaking medicines reconciliation across the interface. That would all have a significant benefit for patient health and safety, and it could improve care and save the NHS a significant amount of money while alleviating the pressure on GPs, thereby creating a free-time investment opportunity.

The RCGP and the RPS also worked on how community pharmacists and GPs can work together to improve patient care. They set out recommendations on the benefits to patients of improving liaison between community pharmacists and GPs.

A number of initiatives across Scotland already promote collaborative working with community pharmacists, of which the Highland community pharmacy project is one example. There is also the Healthcare Improvement Scotland national patient safety programme.

Much is being done to improve the recruitment and retention of GPs, and I commend that work. However, let us look at much wider vehicles for the provision of a more extensive landscape for recruiting and retaining GPs.

17:19

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): As the motion states, 90 per cent of patient interactions with the NHS come through the primary care services. Since the whole direction of health policy for more than a decade has been towards more services being delivered in community settings, that percentage can only be set to increase. That is the background to the serious concerns that I am sure everybody has about the current situation.

I have found that to be the case in my own constituency recently. The starkest example has been the Leith Links medical practice: three GPs left and it could not replace any one of them. The results were that 2,000 patients were told that they had to leave the practice and were sent somewhere else, and the health board took over the running of the practice. Of course, that health board intervention is not unique in Edinburgh.

Nationally, we know of some alarming figures. Part of the background is the percentage of the budget that is spent on GPs. It was 9.8 per cent 10 years ago, while the 2012-13 figure was 7.8 per cent. That in itself is grounds for serious concern.

The overall number of full-time equivalent GPs is flattening and the applications for GP training posts last year fell by 10 per cent. Clearly, something must be done, and I am sure that the Government accepts that, too. We probably need a whole range of measures—including, perhaps, incentives for graduates to enter GP training—but the big issue that has to be addressed is workload. Jim Hume referred to the survey that overwhelmingly put workload as the number 1 issue. Of course, that is partly related to the overall number of GPs—that is fairly obvious—but it is also related to what GPs do and who they work with.

Some people may be surprised that workload is such an issue because after the new contract was introduced, which I was involved with as health minister at the time, some people were saying, “They’ve got it easy now—they’re not having to do all that out-of-hours work.” That was the mood music among a lot of members of the public. However, we have to understand that, as the years have passed, several things have happened. That includes demographic change—there are more people in the population, simply—and the fact that there are more older people with complex medical conditions who have to be looked after by GPs and primary care more generally. There has also been a shift towards primary care, which has not happened as much as we wanted but has still been happening.

To some extent and in general terms, the Government has addressed that issue in the

programme for government. It talked about developing clusters so that the skills and expertise of GPs are shared across practices, which is a good thing. However, we also need to embed general practice in the wider primary healthcare team and expand the wider primary care workforce, including practice-based pharmacists. On the clusters, I should also have made the point—which, in a way, is fairly obvious—that they need to be aligned with the locality integration arrangements; there is a good opportunity to do that.

The quality and outcomes framework is much talked about as well. Some GPs want to abolish it; others want to disassociate it from practice income. When the GP contract came in—and I was getting a bit of stick for the new consultant and GP contracts in those days—I was quite pleased that some of the extra money for GPs was related to doing specific things via the QOF. I notice that even GPs who are critical of the QOF have said that it transformed the management of care—certainly for some practices that were perhaps lagging behind the best practices. No doubt the best practices, such as Dr Simpson’s practice, were doing many of those things anyway. My own view is that we need to keep the good bits of the QOF and still relate it to practice income, but clearly not all GPs agree with that.

My last point is that infrastructure is clearly important. One particular concern in my constituency is the development of the north-west Edinburgh partnership centre just on the edge of my constituency, which will have a new GP practice as well as many other services. That, of course, has been delayed because of the changes to the funding arrangements for the hub programme. I know that that is not totally within the control of the Scottish Government, but if the minister cannot say something about it, I would expect the cabinet secretary to make a statement about it to Parliament in the very near future.

17:24

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I, like others, congratulate Jim Hume on securing the debate. It is a motion that should—and obviously does—concern each and every one of us, and I would like to think that it is an issue that can be addressed by a genuinely cross-party approach, as my party has been advocating over the past few years.

The statistics that surround the subject really do speak for themselves. If Scotland’s predicted growth up to 2020 reaches its maximum, we will require 915 more GPs. If it reaches its minimum, we will still require a further 560-plus GPs. Let us take the average and assume—as the motion

itself does—that we will require somewhere around 740 or 750 more GPs by 2020.

That is quite a challenge, especially when we take into consideration the fact that fewer medical students are opting to go into general practice every year, two thirds of all GPs could retire in the next five years and 20 per cent of GP training positions were not even taken up this year. If this is not yet the crisis that the BMA claims, it is certainly a major problem that demands urgent attention.

Much more needs to be done to improve the recruitment and retention of GPs. Too many currently go abroad, because of improved salaries and conditions, and they do not return. Too many GPs—92 per cent in the survey that members have spoken about—believe that consultation times are inadequate. Sixty-nine per cent said that their workload has a negative impact on the care that their patients receive. Surely we need to review urgently aspects such as the box-ticking activities that GPs have to undertake, which could just as easily be undertaken by nurse practitioners and others, especially as patients who need more specialist care are increasingly transferred from hospitals to their local communities. It seems to me that the primary care structure is not geared up to deal with the current policy of having more and more people spend their later years in their homes rather than in a hospital.

That issue particularly impacts on a rural constituency such as my own of Galloway and West Dumfries. Across the local Dumfries and Galloway health board region there are currently around 12 GP vacancies out of a required establishment of 130 GPs, which is near enough 10 per cent. Some of those vacancies are proving extraordinarily difficult to fill. The further west we go—or, if I could put it another way, the more remote we become—the harder it becomes to fill those vacancies. Recruitment becomes harder; retention becomes even harder; and the issue itself therefore becomes harder to solve. On top of that, the risks to both in-hours and out-of-hours services also increase and become very substantial under such circumstances.

To the board's credit, advanced nurse practitioners are being appointed to try to plug some of the gaps, but the board accepts that, if it is to manage age-related and chronic conditions outside acute hospital settings, comprehensive primary care GP coverage is absolutely essential. If that coverage continues to decline at the current rate, the default position will simply be higher hospital admissions, with a real possibility that there simply will not be enough hospital beds. Simultaneously, the planned integration of healthcare with social care services will not be

able to achieve its full potential without the required GP workforce.

That does not paint a very pretty picture, so we must have a clear strategic direction to reverse the decline in recruitment and retention. On that note, I was interested in the First Minister's announcement this afternoon that 10 pilot schemes of new models of primary care are to be introduced across Scotland. I would strongly recommend that one of them be located in the west of my constituency, where, if nothing else, it would be extremely well tested. I hope that that initiative works because, if it does not, the crisis that the BMA is talking about will become a very serious reality.

17:28

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I congratulate Jim Hume and I thank him for bringing the issue to the chamber, because, as Alex Fergusson has said, a lack of GPs is a significant issue in Dumfries and Galloway, albeit that it is more significant in his constituency than in mine. It is significantly problematic to the extent that the BMA specifically referred to Dumfries and Galloway in its briefing.

The chief executive of NHS Dumfries and Galloway has told us that one of the reasons for the problem is that graduates are more interested in specialisms. Specialist medicine is more attractive than general practice for a host of reasons, and it is difficult to get people to go into general practice. However, shortage of professionals is not confined to general practice in Dumfries and Galloway. There is a shortage when it comes to recruiting teachers and social workers. Some of those shortages are around opportunities for the partners of professionals—there is certainly a shortage of professional jobs.

Other professions have had initiatives to grow more professionals. For example, Dumfries and Galloway Council paid for the training of social workers at the University of Glasgow, and in Dumfries and Galloway an initiative has recently been launched called grow your own teacher, in which people are being encouraged to come out of other education professions and train as teachers.

That is not as easy to do with GPs. We cannot really grow our own GPs, particularly in an area where there is no teaching hospital and no medical courses are on offer at the universities, so we attempt to recruit from other countries, for instance. However, that always makes me slightly anxious because we recruit from countries that need their own GPs and often we take them from countries that are worse off medically than we are.

I, too, am concerned about recently trained GPs going off abroad, perhaps into private practice. I

wonder whether there are ways in which we can dissuade people who have been trained by the taxpayer in Scotland or the United Kingdom from taking the skills that they have recently acquired into private practice abroad.

This it is not Labour Party policy, so I hope that nobody will take it as that—the idea comes from me—but I wonder whether there is a possibility of training other suitably qualified professionals to bring them into medicine. My daughter has degrees in psychology and is training as a mental health nurse. I know a number of young people with degrees in history or even chemistry who trained to become lawyers after they graduated. I wonder whether there is a possibility of well-qualified scientists, for example, managing to be retrained into medicine, perhaps with an indication that they go into general practice. I am not suggesting that lots of scientists should leave science, because we know that there is also a shortage of scientists, but people with that sort of training might be able to be retrained. There is a loss of people from science, particularly women; perhaps there is a possibility there.

I ran the possibility of retraining other people past the chief executive of NHS Dumfries and Galloway, who was a bit concerned about it. He felt that people who were not adequately trained in medicine could be risk averse, just refer everybody on to consultants and create workload problems elsewhere. However, people who are trained to a high level in science have expertise in assessing the evidence and making evidence-based decisions, so I lay the idea on the table.

I will probably completely horrify the entire medical establishment in Scotland by making the suggestion, but I wonder whether we could examine whether other professionals might be able to be trained. It would be shorter, quicker and less expensive than training people from scratch. It might be one of a number of possible solutions.

17:32

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):

Having spoken a little bit about primary care in my speech during the programme for government debate and during a health debate that we held prior to the summer recess, I thank Jim Hume for bringing the issue back to the chamber.

I was interested by the comments on workload. I have spoken in the past about how we can better align primary care services in order to reduce GP workload by triaging people to other services if they can more appropriately deal with their conditions—Malcolm Chisholm alluded to that. Some GP practices in my constituency do that; they speak to people when they request an appointment and redirect them to, for example, the

pharmacy, if that is the more appropriate place for them to be seen. Some GP services do not do that yet, which might be a contributing factor to some of the workload issues. A percentage of the workload might be able to be redirected and dealt with in a different environment.

How we use other primary care professionals needs to be examined. I am confident that that will happen through the work that the Scottish Government is undertaking to redesign how primary care is delivered. Good-practice examples exist: for example, the minister will be familiar with the Middlefield healthy hoose in Aberdeen, which is an example of good practice and good use of nurse-practitioner services based on which other areas could remodel their services, depending on their circumstances.

The point on pensions that my colleague Rod Campbell raised in his intervention is relevant. The conversations that I have had with GPs—in particular, GPs who are in their mid to late 50s—suggest that, as a result of the changes that the UK Government introduced, they now face making the decision whether to continue to work in general practice and to take the pension hit that will follow as a result, or to retire early in order to benefit from their pensions. One does not want those GPs to have to make that decision, but there is a financial element to the decisions on retirement that they now face.

We also have to consider the fact that the make-up of the GP workforce has changed over time. It used to be a predominantly male full-time workforce, but it is now a predominantly female part-time workforce. There are a number of reasons for that, which I probably do not have time to go into in detail. I acknowledge that you are shaking your head, Presiding Officer. Do not worry; I was not going to go into the issue in detail.

We need to consider how GP services are structured in relation to that change in the workforce and we also need to think about how we attract graduates into the profession. That point has been made by members in various parts of the chamber. In discussions that I have had with medical students and their representatives, I have learned that the issue of partnership has been a decisive factor for many. I agree with the point that Dr Murray made about the issue also being about the fact that specialisms might be more attractive, but it might also be to do with the view that there might be a requirement to take on the role of partner, which is something that graduates might not want to do. That is why it is worth considering a confederated model, in which a smaller cohort of partners could operate a number of premises and employ GPs in them. I know that that is being considered by NHS Grampian.

There are a number of things that can be done; the programme for government contains some encouraging signs with regard to the reforms that are taking place. I am sure that they will help us to address some of the issues that we face in our general practices at the moment.

17:36

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife (Lab)): I am glad that we are debating general practice. I welcome Jim Hume's motion and the survey that he did. As he knows, I did a survey this summer, as did the BBC. A lot of work has been done on trying to collect data, so the first question that I would like to ask is this: why on earth were the data not clearly available before?

This crisis—that is what it is; a growing crisis—has not just emerged out of nowhere. In 2010, I warned that we should be considering having a separate GP contract because the NHS in Scotland is now radically different from that in England, but we still have a UK contract. I am glad that we are now going to have a separate contract.

Let us look at the factors. I am not going to talk about the solutions. I will publish tomorrow a document that has a list—it is not a comprehensive list, because it is a consultation document—of all the suggestions that I received over the summer. I received 400 replies from doctors representing 330 practices. After the survey closed, another 49 practices responded.

The factors are clear. First, there has been an increase in the population of roughly 170,000 since the SNP came to power. If we want one GP for every 1,500 people, that means that we would have needed about another 120 GPs just to stand still in relation to the population. However, the situation is worsened because the demography of the population has changed: there has been a 17 per cent increase in the number of over-75s and it is they who have more complex conditions. GPs have to spend more time with them. Why? It is because hospital services operate on a silo basis: they treat single-disease entities, not humans in a holistic way, which is what GPs are excellent at. They are good at diagnosis and at managing complex morbidity, but they do not have the time to do that. That is because, although the QOF was useful initially and was a good part of the new contract—it was the first time general practice had been paid for quality—but it became an increasingly bureaucratic exercise. Two years ago, the document on QOF ran to 226 pages. Even this year, with cuts, it was 186 pages.

The other thing that has happened—apart from the increase in morbidity, the increase in population and the increase in the number of over-75s—has been a shift in the balance of care,

which is something that we have all wanted. However, that has been almost totally unresourced.

Those are the factors in the background. What is the result? The result is that, as we stand here today, trainee vacancies are at 20 per cent, predominantly in the west of Scotland.

Emigration is up. My local practice in Bridge of Allan and the practice in neighbouring Dunblane—two of the nicest spots in which a GP could want to practise—have lost one doctor each to Australia in the past 18 months. Those are doctors in their 30s. When I contacted them to ask them about it they said that there was no way that they would come back. One of them said that he would try it, but then phoned and said, “No. I’m definitely not coming back.”

That has been going on for some time. Malcolm Chisholm mentioned the reduction from 9.8 per cent to 7.8 per cent in the percentage of the budget that is spent on GPs. With a decrease in the share of funding to general practice and an increase in the resources that GPs need, it is no coincidence that there is a crisis.

In 2011, this party said that we should have a national conversation. We called it a Beveridge commission for the 21st century. This Government ignored that request and so did the Conservatives. However, the Welsh Government established the Bevan commission and, in 2013, it introduced clusters. Only now in its statement today has the Government announced that it will introduce clusters. The introduction of clusters and a raft of other measures, which I have discussed with people in Wales, has resulted in a rise in the per capita number of GPs in Wales in the past 18 months, whereas the number has continued to sink in Scotland.

In my indirect debate with Maureen Watt on the BBC earlier this summer, we were told, “There are more GPs in Scotland than ever.” That has been the mantra for eight years, and yet the number of full-time equivalents has actually gone up by only 35 since 2008. I am glad that the crisis has been acknowledged and that some funding is being applied. In my view, however, that funding is wholly inadequate. We will need to do very much more. My proposals will be published tomorrow and we will discuss them with general practitioners.

17:42

The Minister for Public Health (Maureen Watt): We have heard much this evening about the difficulties in which parts of general practice find themselves. I will address those issues shortly. First, I want to make it clear that this Government attaches the highest value to

Scotland's GPs and to the work that they do. As we have heard, Scotland's population is increasing and we are living longer, with multiple and often complex conditions. That will increasingly become the norm over the coming years.

I have every confidence that Scotland's general practice can deliver what is needed to meet the challenge of demographic change. However, at the same time I acknowledge that significant changes need to be made in order to relieve work pressures and to help with recruitment and retention. We are working with GPs and have started to make such changes.

Earlier today, the First Minister set out the programme for government, in which she highlighted the early success of the integration of health and social care, which will ensure that as much care as possible is provided in community settings. She also outlined the importance of testing new models of care, building on the innovation that is being developed and integrating different types of care. We want to ensure that community-based services are delivered by the appropriate range of health and social care professionals working together more effectively.

That comes with a commitment to invest. In Scotland, we spend a record £12 billion each year on our health service, of which some £770 million is invested in general practice. We will be investing our recently announced £60 million primary care fund to transform primary care and to build on great examples from across the country of care being provided for patients at or near their home, rather than in hospital. That funding will help to address immediate workload and recruitment issues through long-term sustainable change. Specifically, the fund will increase the number of medical students who choose to train as GPs, and it will encourage those who want to work in rural or deprived areas. We will continue the enhanced returners programme to support GPs who wish to return to the profession, and we will develop a programme for local GP leadership and networking.

Hanzala Malik: I welcome the minister's comments. She touched on students who want to go on to become general practitioners. Would it be possible to work with the education institutions on increasing places for such students in order to try to relieve the shortage pressures that we will face in the near future?

Maureen Watt: Hanzala Malik makes an important point. For every one student place that we have, there are 11 young people who want it. We have people who want to go into the medical field, but we need to be sure that we are getting the right people in as students—the ones who want to live and work as GPs in their own communities. We are working with the BMA and

others on that. We are consulting others to increase the output from medical schools, and we are encouraging and improving training in general practice. By the end of 2015-16 we will have invested an additional £10 million in enhancing primary care. That will be further supported by a total investment of £50 million over the following two years.

However, there are challenges. The Government knows that GP workload is increasing, as is the complexity of healthcare. Where more healthcare is being delivered outside hospital settings, resources have not always followed.

We understand that GP services in some places are stretched and that, at the same time, communities rightly expect more of their health services. Our plan is to transform our approach to primary care to ensure that in the future people see the right professionals more quickly. That is why we will continue to work with Scotland's GPs to design that new future, that is why a review of primary care out-of-hours services was commissioned, and that is why we need to redesign primary care in a collaborative and inclusive way, thereby transforming and invigorating the workforce, creating new roles and supporting communities to innovate so that services are available where people need them.

Scotland's GPs have a vision for the future of general practice, and it is a compelling vision that this Government shares. It is a future in which care is provided by multidisciplinary professional teams, and in which it is planned and delivered within the localities that need such teams. It is a future in which GPs are the expert medical generalists—the doctors who make the critical clinical decisions about their patients—but are not necessarily the first point of contact.

We have been working with the Scottish general practitioners committee to redesign the contract and we will have the first version in place by April 2017—a timescale that GP union leaders tell us is realistic. Negotiations on the detail will take place in 2016. As others have mentioned, we have a separate agreement in Scotland, of which English GPs are very envious.

By 2017 we will have made significant progress to change how general practitioners work. We will remove the annual churn of contractual change and introduce the next version of the GP contract three years later in 2020, when the transformation in how GPs work will be nearly complete.

Our approach will build on innovations that are already under way and which reflect local priorities—for example, in reducing health inequalities in Craigmillar and Govan, in improving mental health in Fife, and in helping people to age

well in Tayside. Equipped with that flexibility, care will develop in ways that match the needs of individuals and communities in cities, towns, villages and rural areas.

The integration of different types of care is already the practice at Clackmannanshire community healthcare centre, which provides primary care through three GP practices while also providing wider services including outpatient services, two inpatient wards, a day therapy unit and a local mental health resource centre. The centre is also a base for district nurses, health visitors, community rehabilitation teams, health improvement and a wide range of support services and classes.

We know that one size does not fit all, which is why we wish to test and seek views on new models of care, including those that might be delivered by multidisciplinary teams in a community hub type of arrangement, whether physical hubs or virtual hubs, where professionals collaborate across the boundaries of primary and secondary care.

All that is, of course, focused on high-quality care and improved health outcomes that will provide more connected and streamlined working within healthcare and across health and social care and voluntary support services; on professionals being able to support patients who face wider social issues that impact on their health and wellbeing; and on clearer signposting, information and support so that people know where to go for the most appropriate treatment or follow-on service.

The time has come to start talking up Scotland's general practice, to encourage more doctors to stay within the profession and to ensure that medical students choose a career in general practice because it is one that deserves to be admired and respected. It is time to create some excitement for the future of general practice in Scotland. I know from social media that that is already the case with some of our young students.

For now, this Government will continue to work with Scotland's general practitioners to deliver a model of sustainable general practice that is right for the profession and—more important—for the health of the people of Scotland.

Meeting closed at 17:50.

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