



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 2 September 2015

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 2 September 2015

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

Portfolio Question Time

Fair Work, Skills and Training

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Good afternoon, everyone. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio questions. In order to get in as many people as possible, I would be grateful for short and succinct questions and answers.

Scottish Business Pledge

1. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made in encouraging businesses to sign up to the Scottish business pledge. (S4O-04518)

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham): Ninety-nine companies, large and small, have made a pledge in the three months since the launch, which is roughly equivalent to an employer in Scotland signing up every day. That positive start signals the growing enthusiasm of the business sector to share the Government's vision of an innovative, entrepreneurial Scotland that grows in a fair and sustainable way.

Roderick Campbell: The cabinet secretary may be aware that I recently corresponded with the Government regarding seasonal zero-hours contracts being used by a company in St Andrews in my constituency. Can she advise how signing up to the business pledge could be beneficial for small organisations such as that one and what is being done to encourage small enterprises to register with the scheme?

Roseanna Cunningham: The member is probably aware of the figures that have been released today in respect of the prevalence of zero-hours contracts in the United Kingdom. Some 1.9 per cent of people in employment in Scotland are in a zero-hours contract. That compares with 2.4 per cent across the whole of the UK, so there are some signs that firms in Scotland are not using such contracts to anything like the same extent.

Zero-hours contracts and poor working conditions, in effect, motivate employees to find new and better jobs and to leave those firms that insist on using those forms of employment, with

high recruitment and retention costs and big productivity challenges.

The business pledge celebrates Scotland-based companies that want to engage in empowering their employees and be exemplars for other workplaces. They recognise that fair work and innovation can make jobs attractive and rewarding, make recruitment easier, lower staff turnover and boost productivity and competitiveness. Those are all pluses for businesses, and I hope that everyone in the chamber agrees that they are to be welcomed.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The business pledge quite rightly has at its heart a requirement to pay the living wage. I am sure that we all want that to be a meaningful living wage that is not taken away by sharp practices such as those of some restaurant chains that have been under fire for creaming off tips from their employees. That has received significant attention in recent weeks. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that businesses that employ such practices would not be eligible to sign up for the business pledge if they bring their employees down below an effective living wage after clawing such money back from them?

Roseanna Cunningham: The criteria for the business pledge are published on the website and are clear. They do not go into the detail of issues such as that, but I will have a look at the question, which is a fair one. It raises with us the possibility that some companies might find loopholes. From our perspective, the living wage that we are talking about is the true living wage and not any ersatz living wage that might be discussed in another place.

Living Wage (Public Sector Workers in Rutherglen)

2. James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made in introducing the living wage to public sector workers in Rutherglen. (S4O-04519)

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham): Workers in Rutherglen, like those across Scotland, will be benefiting from the substantial progress that we are making on the living wage.

In the local area, South Lanarkshire Council and NHS Lanarkshire pay the living wage to nearly 27,000 employees in total. As Peter Kelly, director of the Poverty Alliance, has highlighted, Scotland now has the highest public awareness of the living wage and a faster rate of growth of the number of accredited living wage employees than any other part of the UK. I commend accreditation to all employers, whether they are in Rutherglen or anywhere else.

James Kelly: Does the cabinet secretary agree that payment of the living wage in both the public and private sectors brings benefits in motivating and retaining staff? Does she support my call for the soon-to-be-opened McDonald's restaurant in Rutherglen to ensure that all the staff are paid the living wage, ensuring that they are rewarded adequately and also giving the McDonald's business the bonus of motivated staff who are more likely to continue working for the company?

Roseanna Cunningham: I whole-heartedly join the member in making that call, not just for McDonalds but for every employer. The member will have heard my response to Roderick Campbell about the big benefits that employers will get if they set about paying the living wage and introduce proper fair work practices. They can reduce recruitment, get better morale and productivity and have a better all-round workplace atmosphere. As I said, that is something that we all want.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): What is the cabinet secretary's view of Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne's appropriation of the language of the living wage for what is effectively a supplement to the national minimum wage?

Roseanna Cunningham: The member might have heard my use of the word "ersatz" in response to Patrick Harvie and jumped to the conclusion that that was what I was referring to. Indeed it was.

Obviously we will welcome any rise in the national minimum wage, but what is proposed is not a living wage. That ought to be calculated according to the basic cost of living and take into account the adequacy of household incomes for achieving an acceptable minimum living standard. Frankly, regardless of what it is called, what is proposed is not a true living wage.

Youth Unemployment (Glasgow Provan)

3. Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to tackle youth unemployment in Glasgow Provan. (S4O-04520)

The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing): The Government has invested in a wide range of employment initiatives that are directly helping to create sustainable employment opportunities for young people in Scotland, including Glasgow Provan. Those initiatives include modern apprenticeships, community jobs Scotland and the youth employment Scotland fund.

Opportunities for all is the Scottish Government's commitment to an offer of a place in education or training for all 16 to 19-year-olds to

ensure that all young people develop the skills that they need to progress into employment.

Paul Martin: I welcome the minister's response, but many of the challenges that my young constituents face relate to the financial support that they need to get into work in the first place. Particularly in relation to travel, can the minister be specific about the financial assistance that is provided to those 16 to 19-year-olds?

Annabelle Ewing: As I said to the member, there are a number of initiatives. He will be aware of the Glasgow guarantee, which is delivered by Jobs & Business Glasgow and provides every young person in Glasgow with support in the form of apprentice training at work. It also provides financial support to help businesses to grow. Glasgow City Council benefits from a range of Scottish Government funding to help local people get into employment and to support economic recovery.

There are some travel options for young people, and I am happy to write to the member with further details on them.

We are making progress in tackling youth unemployment but there is more to do, which is why we are investing £16 million this year in implementing our youth employment strategy. Any progress can be illustrated by the most recent labour market statistics that show the highest levels of youth employment since the period April to June 2005 and the lowest levels of youth unemployment since the period April to June 2008. We are making progress, but we recognise that there is more to do.

Youth Employment Scotland Fund

4. Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the youth employment Scotland fund. (S4O-04521)

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham): Following the launch of the youth employment Scotland fund in June 2013, the Government has allocated up to 10,000 employer recruitment placements to local authorities. Further to the update that I provided by letter to Mr Brown on 24 June, we have recently commissioned an evaluation of the programme and it is envisaged that the report will be available this autumn.

Gavin Brown: Of the 10,000 placements that were funded over that two-year period, approximately—to the nearest 1,000—how many are still in employment?

Roseanna Cunningham: I do not have the figure for the number who are still in employment. One of the reasons for doing the evaluation is that

there are some issues around how the fund has been working, not least of which is the fact that we have discovered that a number of employers who have taken on individuals under the scheme have not claimed the money for the wages, which means that they are not entitled to be counted as part of the scheme.

We are evaluating the programme at the moment. Of course, the member will be aware that we have brought in a new employer recruitment initiative to deal with what were seen as some of the inflexibilities and bureaucracy in the original programme.

The precise figures that Gavin Brown is looking for are not available at present. One of the issues is that it is up to local authorities to deal with the matter. I see the sceptical look on Gavin Brown's face but, given that we are accused of being in Stalinist control of everything in Scotland, I am always slightly amused when we are attacked for not being in Stalinist control enough.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): How does the number of young people in employment in Scotland compare with that in the rest of Europe?

Roseanna Cunningham: My colleague referred marginally to that issue earlier. We are doing extremely well in terms of youth employment. In quarter 1 of 2015, Scotland had the third highest youth employment rate of the 28 European Union countries at 54.3 per cent. Only Denmark and the Netherlands had higher youth employment rates.

The youth employment rate for the United Kingdom in quarter 1 was 47.8 per cent.

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): Since the fund was extended to people aged 25 to 30, how many have been helped in total, and how many have been helped in targeted groups such as working mothers, care leavers and disabled people?

Roseanna Cunningham: I will need to get back to John Pentland on the specific figures that he is asking for. They would need to be ingathered from all the councils that are dealing with the programme.

Secondary School and Employer Partnerships (Dundee)

5. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the recommendation by the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce, how many secondary schools in Dundee are paired with an employer. (S4O-04522)

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham): The Scottish Government does not collate that

information, but we know that there are good examples of partnerships between secondary schools and employers in Dundee, such as Michelin's work with Braeview academy, of which I expect that Jenny Marra is already aware.

As part of developing the young workforce, we are making good progress in developing the infrastructure to encourage and support partnerships between schools and employers. Developing the young workforce regional groups are being established across the country, and Dundee is part of that process.

We have produced guidance for school-employer partnerships, with input from employers. That will be available later this month.

Jenny Marra: It is a slight concern to me that, since her ministry is putting that effort into creating those guidelines and providing that support for schools and employers that are pairing up, the cabinet secretary has not sought information from Dundee City Council about how successful that has been so far.

It is a year since the Wood commission reported. The partnership between Michelin and Braeview predated the Wood recommendations, and I urge the cabinet secretary to find out whether her efforts in this area are bearing fruit on the ground.

What support is available for schools in areas of high deprivation and low employment to pair with employers, where they might not be as ready or available to engage with the Wood commission process?

Roseanna Cunningham: In my initial answer, I indicated that DYW groups are being rolled out across the country. One group is currently being discussed for Dundee and Angus. They are employer-led groups that will look specifically at the local jobs market, including the issues that the member raises.

I do not have a precise date for the Dundee and Angus regional group being brought on stream, but it will happen this year. It is currently being discussed and I hope that the member will engage directly with the group when it is announced.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

6. Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of recommendation 12 of the report of the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce, what progress it is making in ensuring that there is a focus on STEM subjects to help young people into employment. (S4O-04523)

The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing): We are making

excellent progress with our developing the young workforce programme and I am encouraged by the focus on STEM that is emerging in colleges and schools.

We have seen increases in the number of science, maths and engineering full-time-equivalent students in our colleges since 2006-07. Developing the young workforce reinforces the priority that colleges have long placed on responding to the need for STEM courses in their regions.

Interest and attainment in STEM subjects at school remain healthy. Maths, chemistry and biology are among the most popular subjects at higher, being in the top six, with physics only shortly behind. Education Scotland and the Scottish Schools Education Research Centre provide a strong package of support for STEM in schools.

The first annual report on progress on developing the young workforce is due to be published later in the year, when we will have a parliamentary debate.

Annabel Goldie: That is all fine, but the minister will be aware that, despite the overall increase in entries to highers this year, there was a 4 per cent reduction in entries to STEM subjects, including maths, biology, chemistry, physics and computing science. Surely that will hamper progress on the youth employment strategy, will reduce opportunities in STEM careers for young people and, if training opportunities are not improved rapidly, could damage the huge economic contribution that such industries make to Scotland.

Annabelle Ewing: If we look at the overall picture, we see that, since 2007, there has been a 12 per cent increase in the number of entries to STEM highers and a 15 per cent rise in the number of passes over the same period.

On going forward with our seven-year youth employment strategy, we have taken up all of Sir Ian Wood's recommendations and there is a focus of activity in our schools and colleges. Through our regular monitoring and annual progress reports, we will ensure that the progress that we all wish to make and that we all—including the member—recognise is important for the future of our economy is made at the rate that we foresee.

Disabled People (Access to Work)

7. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its strategy for supporting access to work for disabled people. (S4O-04524)

The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing): The Scottish

Government's ambition is that people with disabilities who can and want to progress towards, and move into, mainstream employment do so. We are very clear on that. We want everyone, including disabled people, to get fulfilling jobs that are suitable to their skills. To that end, we provide a variety of different types of support—for example, through the supported employment model, by helping supported businesses and by working to ensure that the general employment services that are offered are flexible and integrated to support individuals with particular needs.

As we plan for the devolution of employment support services, we will ensure that we have a more people-centred approach with a focus on individual needs, rather than the situation that obtains at present with respect to the work programme and work choice.

James Dornan: The minister will be aware that I had the pleasure of hosting Catriona Johnson, the first intern in the Inclusion Scotland internship in the Parliament, which a number of my colleagues later got involved in as well. It was clear from that experience that the way to help disabled people into work is to offer support and flexibility.

Does the minister agree that those values should be at the heart of our welfare system, rather than the heartless and punitive reforms that Iain Duncan Smith wants to introduce, which will no doubt create additional anxiety and stress for the people whom the welfare system is designed to help and not hamper?

Annabelle Ewing: I was pleased to be able to attend—albeit briefly—the reception that the member had to celebrate the success of the cross-party internship for young disabled graduates. I commend him and all those involved for the assistance that they provided with respect to that.

The current supported employment model is a person-centred approach in that it identifies what the individual wants to do and can do. That is at the heart of the support that is provided. We will continue to support and promote that evidence-based model, which supports people with disability into employment. We are clear that we will take those fundamental principles into our planning for the devolved employment support services. There is no place for the inhumane policies of Iain Duncan Smith in the Scotland that we wish to see.

John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): The minister will be aware that around 8 per cent of the population have a disability but only around 1 per cent of people entering an apprenticeship have a disability. That proportion is far lower than in other parts of the United Kingdom. What will she do to address

barriers to access to apprenticeships for disabled people in Scotland?

Annabelle Ewing: I agree that there is more work to be done and we are determined to do it. The member might be aware from previous debates in the chamber that Skills Development Scotland is currently working on the equalities action plan that we have discussed. It is anticipated that the action plan will be published shortly. I hope that, after that, we will have a debate on where we go from there, but we are very determined to make progress and the action plan will signpost the way forward to ensure that a far higher percentage of young disabled people are able to take up modern apprenticeships.

Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights

United Kingdom Social Security Reforms (Mitigation)

1. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how much it is spending in 2015-16 to mitigate the United Kingdom Government's social security reforms. (S4O-04528)

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): The Scottish Government has provided £104.2 million in 2015-16 to mitigate the worst effects of the UK Government's welfare cuts. That funding is part of a total of £296.4 million that is being provided across 2013 to 2016.

Kevin Stewart: With nearly £1 billion more cuts to welfare benefits to come every year from the UK Tory Government, the cost of mitigating the full brunt of those cuts cannot be borne entirely by the Scottish Government. How can we seek to protect the most vulnerable and poorest people in our society from the appalling austerity policies that are being inflicted on the people of Scotland?

Margaret Burgess: As I have outlined, the Scottish Government is providing significant mitigation resources but recognises that it is impossible to fully mitigate the cuts. The Scottish Government will always do what it can to protect the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society, but responsibility must lie with the UK Government and its unfair austerity agenda, which we will continue to oppose. We will do all that we can with the new powers that are coming to the Scottish Parliament to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I welcome the minister's comments. As well as mitigating the UK social security reforms, will the Government promise to use the powers that it already has, as well as those that are coming, to help—for

example, to help the disabled and the elderly in Scotland?

Yesterday, the First Minister outlined her plans for legislation, including a bill on social security in the coming year. Will the minister undertake to use that bill to abolish the care tax in Scotland with the powers that the Government already has?

Margaret Burgess: As Ken Macintosh will be well aware, the Scottish Government is currently having discussions with stakeholders and the people of Scotland on how to take forward the new powers and on how to use some of the powers to make things better for those who are disabled and on social security. We will continue with those discussions and we will report back at the beginning of next year on the outcome of those discussions about how we create a fairer Scotland and reduce inequalities across the country.

Prejudice towards People with Faith

2. Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it considers that enough is being done to tackle prejudice towards people with faith. (S4O-04529)

The Minister for Local Government and Community Empowerment (Marco Biagi): The Scottish Government is clear that there is no place in Scotland for any form of religious prejudice. Statistics that were published in June 2015 showed that the number of religiously aggravated crimes is at its lowest level since 2004-05, but we are not complacent. Even one incident is too many.

The First Minister is hosting an interfaith summit this month, which will raise the profile of interfaith activity and recognise the importance of dialogue and building relationships between communities. The Scottish Government has provided funding of more than £3.1 million to organisations working towards race and religious equality for 2015-16. That includes £145,000 to Interfaith Scotland, which works across Scotland to develop and support interfaith relations and assist faith communities in engaging with civic Scotland.

Dave Thompson: I am very pleased to hear that the interfaith summit is going to take place this month. That is a very positive development. Can the minister tell me whether the summit will deal with religious freedom in its broadest sense and whether he is supportive of my proposal for a cross-party group in the Parliament on religious freedom or faith?

Marco Biagi: The agenda for the interfaith summit has been set in partnership with the participants. Religious freedom is not on the agenda per se, but it is certainly implicit in the subject matter that the summit will be dealing with.

The Presiding Officer will want me to be clear that cross-party groups are creatures of Parliament, not Government. However, ministers are always keen to work constructively with CPGs and we are always supportive of any efforts to highlight the important positive role that faith and belief can play in public life.

Scotland Bill (Welfare and Employment Support Powers)

3. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to use the additional welfare and employment support powers proposed in the Scotland Bill. (S4O-04530)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil): First, I congratulate the Deputy Presiding Officer on his recent wedding. I have not had the opportunity to do that before now. I am sure that everybody else in the chamber would want to congratulate him, too.

As set out in our programme for government, we will take forward a comprehensive and ambitious programme to help deliver our commitment to reducing inequality and stimulating sustainable economic growth.

We do not believe that the Scotland Bill delivers on the spirit or the letter of the Smith agreement. We are continuing to negotiate with the United Kingdom Government to amend the bill, so that we have a fuller range of powers over welfare.

In the meantime, we are consulting widely on what to do with the new powers, which is the right thing to do. Where we can, we are moving quickly to implement them. We are working with the Department for Work and Pensions on changes to how the universal credit is paid in Scotland, and we are developing an alternative to the DWP's contracted employment support programmes that will be in place from 1 April 2017.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for your good wishes.

Alex Johnstone: I congratulate the minister on the cheerful nature of the opening to his answer. However, his response went downhill as he carried on. Will the minister flesh out not only how he would like to use the powers but how he is likely to finance the changes that are coming? This Government has given the clear impression that additional welfare powers will be used to distribute significant additional levels of support. If that is the case, which some doubt, there will be a cost. Will that be financed through cuts in other services or by using the powers that are coming his way to increase taxes?

Alex Neil: As part of the overall package of implementing the Smith recommendations—or, in the bill's case, less than the Smith recommendations—a fiscal framework must be agreed between the Scottish and UK Governments. That is part of the discussion on how we fund welfare. We want to make sure that we do not end up in the same position as the UK Government has put Northern Ireland, where the Executive has been landed with £70 million of responsibilities that have not been funded by the Treasury or in any other way. Therefore, the fiscal framework will answer the question put by Alex Johnstone.

Citizens Advice Scotland (Meetings)

4. Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights last met Citizens Advice Scotland and what was discussed. (S4O-04531)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil): I met Margaret Lynch, chief executive of Citizens Advice Scotland, on 27 May as part of the Scottish leaders welfare forum. Previously I had met Citizens Advice Scotland along with the Secretary of State for Scotland on 11 March, after a meeting of the joint ministerial working group on welfare. At both meetings, I discussed progress to date with the Smith proposals, welfare mitigation and how CAS might get involved in discussions around the new powers.

Linda Fabiani: When the cabinet secretary next meets the joint ministerial working group, will he discuss CAS's view, which was published in August 2015, that some sections of the Scotland Bill do not appear to meet the Smith agreement's intent on social security and tribunals? Is he concerned that, without changes being made to the draft clauses, there are clear risks of detriment to citizens advice bureau clients rights across the country?

Alex Neil: I absolutely agree. CAS's response describes a concerning rise in the number of employment cases that bureaux are dealing with on pay and poor—often illegal—workplace practices. Its report highlights in particular the situation with employment tribunals. It says that new fees that have been introduced by the UK Government have been causing problems for many people on low incomes who feel unable to challenge unfair treatment.

As the First Minister outlined yesterday in the programme for government, we intend to abolish the tribunal fees, and make access to tribunals much fairer for employees as well as employers.

United Kingdom Benefit Sanctions Regime (Promotion)

5. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the recent admission by the UK Government that it used fake quotes to promote its benefit sanctions regime in Scotland and across the UK. (S4O-04532)

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): Sadly, that is unsurprising from the United Kingdom Government, which brought in the discredited sanctions system. We know the problems that the current sanctions regime is causing. It is clear that the system is not working, and no number of made-up public-relations case studies can demonstrate otherwise. This further highlights the failings in the whole system and the flawed approach of the UK Government. That is why we believe that the current regime should be suspended pending an urgent review. It is a discredited system that needs a complete overhaul, and we support the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee's call for a full and independent review of the system.

George Adam: I thank the minister for her response. Does she agree that the time to end the sanctions regime is now? Every MSP in this chamber will have had constituents in their offices telling horrendous tales that have been brought about by the sanctions. Does the cabinet secretary—I am sorry, I am promoting Margaret Burgess. Does the minister agree that we need a welfare reform programme that helps people into work instead of penalising them for being out of work?

Margaret Burgess: I absolutely agree with George Adam. Unfortunately, I have heard a number of such tales in my constituency office. I am sure that there is no member of this Parliament who has not had similar experiences. They are not isolated cases, and that is what makes the situation so tragic. As I said, the current system is flawed. There should be an independent review of the entire system, and we firmly believe that the Scotland Bill does not go far enough and that all social security powers should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. It is clear that, if we want a fair and effective social security system that treats people with dignity and supports people into work, it should be in the hands of this Parliament.

Town Centre Regeneration (Central Scotland)

6. Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it supports town centre regeneration in Central Scotland. (S4O-04533)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex

Neil): Scotland's town centre first principle, which is agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, together with the measures that are set out in the town centre action plan, set the conditions and underpin activity that is designed to tackle the key issues in town centres across Scotland.

Local authorities remain responsible for local regeneration and local economic development. They are best placed to respond to local circumstances, working with their communities to develop the right vision for their town centres, in partnership with the wider public, and with the private and community sectors.

Furthermore, in 2015-16, we will provide £1.7 million funding directly to local community organisations through the town centre communities capital fund.

Margaret McCulloch: New-start rates relief is an important part of the town centre action plan, and is designed to help businesses into vacant new-build properties. Information that I had to obtain through freedom of information requests shows that only six of Scotland's 32 councils have granted new-start applications in the first two years of the scheme. What is the Government's view about the level of successful applications, and does it share my concern that new-start rates relief is not supporting regeneration in the way that it should?

Alex Neil: Everything should be done to encourage new-start businesses as part of the regeneration strategy in all our town centres. In particular, I would like to point out the work that has been done by the Carnegie Trust, which has, in a number of towns the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, been working with entrepreneurs and young people who are setting up new businesses, and it has deliberately located those new businesses in vacant premises in town centres. The Carnegie Trust reports a success rate of 80 per cent in survival and expansion of those businesses. That is a very good example of how we can make new businesses—and, in particular, the dynamism of young entrepreneurs—part and parcel of the overall solution for developing our town centres and making them fit for the 21st century.

Town Centre Communities Capital Fund

7. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what process communities should follow to apply for funding from the town centre communities capital fund. (S4O-04534)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil): Communities can access details and full

guidance about the town centre communities capital fund on the Scottish Government website. The fund is open to community organisations to support capital projects in town centres across Scotland. The deadline for applications is 29 September 2015.

Patricia Ferguson: The cabinet secretary will be aware of my interest in town centre regeneration and my support for the Scottish Government's previous scheme. Although the funding for the new scheme is welcome, I worry that the amount of money that is available will be oversubscribed, as was the case with the previous scheme. Will the cabinet secretary give some more information about the criteria that will be used to judge applications and to make awards of money?

Alex Neil: The £1.7 million fund is not the only one that is available for town centre regeneration. As you may remember, Presiding Officer, in the past month we announced a £4 million fund that has been tailored specifically to bring disused properties in our town centres into use as housing.

The main issue regarding the criteria is that the money that is applied for must be used for capital spend and must be committed by the end of March 2016. It does not necessarily have to be spent by then, but under Treasury rules it must be committed by then.

Patricia Ferguson will be able to access the more detailed criteria on the website. I do not have time to go through them here.

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): Will the town centre communities capital fund encourage transport-based projects that include town centres?

Alex Neil: If an appropriate application is made, in principle there is no reason why a transport project could not be supported, provided the money is for capital expenditure and is clearly part and parcel of a town centre regeneration plan.

Housing (Brownfield Sites)

8. John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to encourage developers to build housing on brownfield sites rather than bring forward plans for using agricultural and green-belt land. (S4O-04535)

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): Scottish planning policy requires that development plans promote sustainable development and consider the re-use or redevelopment of brownfield land over greenfield sites.

John Pentland: My constituency currently has a proposal for housing on green belt that will turn a

village into a suburb of a town. We need more private and social housing, but there are several brownfield sites that are not being developed. Will the minister consider what else can be done to encourage brownfield development?

Margaret Burgess: As John Pentland will be aware, how land is zoned for housing development is a matter for local authorities and their local development plans. We say in the guidelines that local authorities should look first at brownfield sites, but how they zone their land for housing development is up to them.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): The minister will be aware that there are many brownfield sites in the constituency that I represent, which is Clydebank and Milngavie. What can be done to encourage owners to release those brownfield sites for development?

Margaret Burgess: Gil Paterson raises a good point. However, brownfield sites often have complications that can delay their release for development. The Scottish Government and local authorities are working with the private sector across Scotland to find solutions to the challenges that are being faced. For example, progress is being made in West Dunbartonshire Council to secure infrastructure investment to make significant brownfield sites in Clydebank such as Queens Quay more readily available for development. The progress has started, but we still have some way to go.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): As a Central Scotland MSP, I echo John Pentland's concerns regarding green-belt development in that area. How many brownfield sites have been redeveloped since 2007?

Margaret Burgess: The 2014 Scottish vacant and derelict land survey showed that 319 hectares of derelict and urban vacant land on 250 sites had been reclaimed since the previous survey in 2013, and that 30 per cent of derelict land and 54 per cent of urban vacant land was reclaimed for housing.

Planning (Local Participation and Decision Making)

9. Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to increase support for local participation and decision making in planning applications outside of local development plans. (S4O-04536)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil): Through changes in planning legislation, opportunities are available for everyone to engage in the development decisions that affect them. We continue to support people's engagement in the planning system, through the charrette

mainstreaming programme and core grant funding for Planning Aid Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please be brief, Mr Buchanan.

Cameron Buchanan: I do not have a supplementary question, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Many thanks. That concludes portfolio questions. I apologise to members whose questions I have not been able to take.

Programme for Government 2015-16

Resumed debate—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): The next item of business is the continuation of the debate on the Scottish Government's programme for government 2015-16.

14:40

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil): Yesterday, in delivering the programme for government, the First Minister set out measures that we will introduce over the coming year to ensure a more prosperous Scotland while creating a fairer country, improving public services and empowering our communities. There is, or should be, little argument that those four key elements work together to build a better country—that opinion is shared across civic Scotland—and today I want to give examples from my portfolio of how they do so.

The creation of a socially just Scotland is at the heart of what this Government is trying to achieve. The First Minister's words yesterday resonated with my experience. This summer, I have travelled up and down the country asking people what a fairer Scotland should look like. All over the country, people spoke about the unfairness of sanctions, of working full-time hours but being unable to look after their family without their low pay being topped up by the Government, of being unable to afford housing—that cannot be right—and of many other injustices, which are too numerous to mention here.

As the First Minister pointed out, our new welfare powers, as proposed in the United Kingdom Government's Scotland Bill, fall far short of the powers that we need if we are to make up for the harm that the UK Government's policies are causing. The Scottish Government will spend more than £100 million next year, as we have done this year, to mitigate the worst aspects of welfare cuts and so-called reform. That is money that could be free to be spent on making Scotland fairer if it were not being spent on mitigating others' mistakes.

In the meantime, we will do what we can with the powers that we have as well as considering the new powers that we will get. We will prepare for a social security bill that is suited to Scotland's needs, which will be introduced in the first year of the new parliamentary session. The bill will include improvements to how the system works for disabled people, people with long-term health

conditions and carers, giving new flexibility within universal credit.

We are also committed to abolishing the hated bedroom tax in the first year of the new session, as the First Minister said. We will go as far as we can do in combining our existing powers and new powers to help the most vulnerable members of our society.

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

Does the cabinet secretary envisage that, with the new powers, the amount of money that is spent on welfare in Scotland will go up, go down or remain roughly the same?

Alex Neil: If the member had been in the chamber for question time he would have heard me answer the same question from Alex Johnstone. The answer is simple: the amount of money available will be agreed as part of the fiscal framework, which is to be agreed between the UK Government and the Scottish Government. It is unfortunate that so far we have not seen the colour of the UK Treasury's money.

What we will not do is end up in the same situation as Northern Ireland, where the Tories have placed responsibilities on the Government there but funding has fallen short to the tune of £70 million. As a result, services are suffering, because welfare in Northern Ireland has not been properly funded.

We are formally consulting on what will be in our social security bill and how we can improve the social security system—"social security" is a far better term than "welfare", because it sums up our philosophical approach. What is in the bill will be the result of widespread consultation, not just with organisations that deliver social security and with the third sector but, more important, with people who are on the receiving end of the social security system.

Let me move on to other aspects of my portfolio in the two minutes that I have left.

Our private tenancies bill will mean that private tenants will be more secure in their homes, will have more predictable rents and will be able to exert their rights without fear of eviction. It will also enable ministers to limit local rent increases. The bill will build on previous legislation passed by this chamber, on the recommendation of the Government, to fully protect the rights and aspirations of people who live in the private rented sector, which now makes up about 15 per cent of all housing tenure in Scotland.

Creating a fairer Scotland goes hand in hand with creating a more prosperous one. In my portfolio, housing is at the heart of our drive to secure economic growth, promote social justice, strengthen communities and tackle inequality. Our

investment in affordable housing will exceed £1.7 billion by the end of this session of Parliament. Housing has been a recurring theme in the fairer Scotland conversations that I have been holding throughout Scotland during the summer, and it is clear that the provision of—and access to—good housing can empower communities. An established, well-maintained and warm home can also tackle inequalities and poverty. It benefits health, wellbeing and the security of families and individuals. It also benefits education by improving educational attainment.

That is why not only will we deliver the 30,000 new affordable homes that we promised at the start of this session of Parliament but, by the time of the election next May, we will have exceeded that promise. The help-to-buy scheme will also help 6,500 families in Scotland, and we are orientating the new scheme much more towards helping those who are on lower incomes.

I could say much more, but I do not have the time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are extraordinarily tight for time today, so I ask for speeches of up to 6 minutes, please.

14:47

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I welcome much of the legislation that was announced yesterday and some of the reactive measures relating to general practitioners, attainment, the police and the private rented sector. However, those measures are not just reactive but reactive late, on issues that Labour MSPs have been highlighting for a long time.

I spoke about GPs yesterday, so I will spare members that subject today, but rent controls are another good example of such an issue. No one can dispute that Labour has been pressing for such controls for many months. Nevertheless, I welcome the commitment that was given yesterday that we will have

"the ability to introduce local rent controls for rent pressure areas."

I assume that that includes my constituency and I hope that the commitment has genuine substance. I heard what the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights just said about the bill generally, but a housing expert I spoke to a few weeks ago said that the central plank of the proposed private tenancy rights legislation will not deliver very much in the way of substantial change—I hope that he is wrong about that. There is much to discuss in relation to that.

Notwithstanding that, there is little in the legislative programme that is likely to prove controversial, the proposed Scottish Fiscal

Commission bill apart. The SNP-dominated Finance Committee is leading the critical charge on that bill, as the cabinet secretary found at the committee's meeting this morning. The committee's report made significant criticisms of the fiscal framework, but the key point for me is that, although the independence of the Government's advisers is central, the evidence that we have heard from the commission members is that they are acting more like high-level advisers to the Government during the forecasting process rather than as scrutineers afterwards. There are issues there, and those concerns are shared by all members of the Finance Committee irrespective of their political party.

On the fiscal framework more generally, I agree with the First Minister, who said that the Scottish Parliament should approve the Scotland Bill only if we have a fair fiscal framework.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): On the legislative proposals relating to the Scottish Fiscal Commission, can Mr Chisholm confirm whether he believes that there are any circumstances in which it would be acceptable for the commission members to have discussions with Scottish Government officials?

Malcolm Chisholm: Of course that would be perfectly acceptable. My point is that they seem to be having discussions as part of the forecasting process and therefore are becoming high-level advisers. Of course they would need to have discussions at various points, particularly when they are critiquing forecasts at the end of the process.

I welcome the proposed abusive behaviour and sexual harm bill, particularly the proposals on revenge porn and a statutory domestic abuse aggravation. However, there is disappointment among non-governmental organisations—and I share that disappointment—that a specific offence of domestic abuse is not to be created during this session of Parliament. There was a good consultation paper, which proposed a new criminal offence that would capture patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour between partners or ex-partners. It is a matter of regret that that does not appear to feature in the forthcoming legislation.

I hope that the loophole in relation to non-harassment orders only being available upon conviction will be closed. Members will remember the high-profile case that was highlighted by *The Herald* a few months ago.

I also welcome the focus on the attainment gap—some members on this side of the chamber might say, "At last." Again, we must question the fact that, on the one hand, we have £25 million a

year dedicated to addressing the attainment gap but, on the other, the Scottish Government proposes to cut £125 million from air passenger duty. I am not sure what the official Labour front-bench position is on that, but I totally oppose that proposal on climate change grounds, as well as in terms of the loss in revenue for the Scottish Government.

Assessment and testing in schools have been controversial issues. However, I have no problem with them in principle; if done properly, they are a very good thing. I am sure that the Scottish Government is reassured by what the Educational Institute of Scotland said yesterday—I declare that I am a member of the EIS—when it talked about

"a Scottish-designed bank of standardised tests to support teachers' professional judgement".

I hope that that is really what is proposed.

The key questions remain: how will the information be used, and who will have access to it? Although I welcome the principle of assessment in primary schools, like others I have concerns that we may have unintended results. We will have to watch that very carefully.

Once again, I welcome the proposals on early years, although I have two points to make. First, the childcare agenda, which has moved on considerably during this session of Parliament, still needs to be broadened out so that it is not just focused on nursery education and the three to four-year-old cohort, but highlights the importance of after-school care, where there is a big gap that many of our constituents emphasise.

Secondly, there needs to be more emphasis on quality in early years services. That issue was not highlighted in yesterday's statement. In terms of the central concern with the attainment gap, speech and language development in the early years is crucial. That point is highlighted in the "Read on. Get on." campaign report, "Ready to Read: Closing the gap in early language skills so that every child in Scotland can read well".

My final point is that we should support three demands from the "Read on. Get on." campaign: to invest further in the early learning and childcare workforce; to strengthen support for parents; and to introduce a child development measure for pre-school children with early language skills as a key priority area.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I encourage members to hold conversations that are essential at the back of the chamber or elsewhere.

14:53

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I welcome the programme for government that the First Minister set out yesterday.

Opposition members would expect me to support the First Minister, but they do not need to take my word for it: measures in the programme for government have been welcomed by organisations including the Educational Institute of Scotland, Citizens Advice Scotland, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Scottish Police Federation, the advice, support, safety and information services together project—ASSIST—and domestic abuse services, Community Safety Glasgow, Rape Crisis Scotland, gordonsfightback.com, the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, the link worker programme, Shelter, the Law Society of Scotland and MND Scotland, among others.

Since May, we have had the dubious benefit of knowing that, in the years ahead, Scotland will continue to be battered by cuts at the hands of a Tory majority Government in Westminster, with a four-year spending review scheduled for the end of November. Therefore, a robust programme, such as the one that has been announced, is an absolute necessity.

Over the past five years, the Scottish Parliament's revenue budget has been cut by 10 per cent and the capital budget by more than a quarter. The finance secretary and Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, must take huge credit for minimising the pain of those cuts and for making the most of available resources to grow the Scottish economy. At this morning's Finance Committee meeting, he reminded us that construction employment in Scotland has grown by 21 per cent over the past 12 months as a direct result of Scottish Government decisions to focus on capital investment where possible. In addition, unemployment levels fell by 13,000 in Scotland in the last quarter, while they rose by 25,000 across the UK.

We need only look at the chief economist's state of the economy report, which was published on 21 August, to see that, despite a challenging backdrop, earlier this year the Scottish economy was in its 11th consecutive quarter of growth. The report also states that growth has been recorded across all main sectors of the economy, which gives the lie to the assertion that uncertainty over Scotland's constitutional future deterred investment by business here or from overseas.

Between 2007, when the SNP first came into government, and 2013, the value of Scotland's international exports increased from £20 billion to £27.9 billion, which is an increase of 40 per cent. The Scottish Government has made great efforts to sustain our vital small business sector, which I know is delighted that the small business bonus scheme will be extended for another five years. That will deliver stability to our small businesses and help them to not just survive but thrive.

Our gross domestic product has not only returned to but surpassed its pre-recession level. The female employment rate is at a record high of 72.5 per cent, whereas the UK rate is 68.6 per cent. Furthermore, the Scottish Government's clear commitment to youth employment seems to be paying off, as there are 363,000 young people in employment, which is the highest number since 2005. Between April and June of this year, 20,000 people in Scotland aged 16 to 24 who did not previously have jobs were able to move into employment. That rise in youth employment levels is in stark contrast to the situation across the UK where, over the same period, the youth employment rate did not increase at all.

I will respond to what Malcolm Chisholm said about air passenger duty. Last week, I visited Glasgow airport. Over the past three years, it has increased its workforce from 4,300 to more than 5,000, and it is growing its number of routes by 17 this year. Those 5,000 people include everyone from baggage handlers and retail workers to those in high-engineering and high-tech employment. Airports are an engine of the economy, and they say that the Scottish Government having control of APD will allow them to expand much further and employ hundreds, if not thousands, more people in the years ahead, thereby bringing into Scotland some of the revenue that Mr Chisholm fears will be lost.

I turn to the health service. The Scottish Government allocated a record £12 billion to our national health service this year, and staffing levels are at a record high. There has been an increase that is equivalent to more than 10,500 full-time NHS workers since the Scottish National Party came into office.

The Scottish Government has replaced the Tory-Labour private finance initiative with the non-profit-distributing model and funded investment by traditional means. In my constituency of Cunninghame North, on-going capital projects include the new £18 million Brodick harbour, the £43 million Garnock academy and the £12 million development at sportscotland's national sports training centre Inverclyde in Largs, which was signed off two days ago and is to be completed by December next year. In addition, 70 affordable houses for families will be started in Ardrossan in January.

Moreover, one of the two ships that were announced as part of the £97 million tender that Ferguson's shipyard won will ply the Ardrossan to Brodick route; work will soon begin on a new £63 million Largs academy campus; and the Minister for Transport and Islands, Derek Mackay, confirmed just yesterday that, in reference to the £28 million Dalry bypass, which has been delayed because of a public local inquiry,

"The Scottish Government remains committed to delivering this much-needed infrastructure project."

Scotland now has 1,038 more police officers than it did when the SNP came to office, while in England and Wales numbers have fallen by more than 17,000 over five years. There are fears among police chiefs south of the border that, over the coming years, an additional 22,000 officers will be lost.

The Scottish Government ensures sustainable benefits to the Scottish economy through investing in skills, education and job creation. In that respect, I welcome the Scottish Government's proposal to increase the number of apprentices to 30,000 by 2020.

Welfare reform has meant that the Scottish Government has committed resources to mitigate some of the ill-thought-out policies imposed by the UK Government, such as the bedroom tax. That illustrates the need for further devolution, not only to abolish such impositions but to ensure that they are never again imposed on Scotland.

Yesterday, the First Minister set out how the Scottish Government plans to use the new powers that are coming our way, but for fiscal devolution to work, it is essential that the Scottish Government has the flexibility to pursue distinct fiscal policies within an overall UK fiscal framework.

With regard to the additional borrowing powers proposed by the Smith commission, those for current spending need to be significantly increased and should be commensurate with the risks faced by the Scottish Government post-Smith, while prudential borrowing over current capital departmental expenditure limits is necessary to increase investment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should draw to a close, please.

Kenneth Gibson: What of the Labour Opposition in all this? It has decided to thirl itself to London while the UK party staggers from crisis to crisis—it is incoherent, inept, inward looking and riddled with infighting, and it has lost the trust of the people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: And finally, Mr Gibson.

Kenneth Gibson: By contrast, ambition, vision and ideas are the hallmark of this Scottish Government. With more powers in the years ahead, we will do even more to realise Scotland's potential, which, as SNP members realise, will be met only with full independence.

14:59

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

It is always a pleasure to follow the fair-minded and balanced convener of the Finance Committee. I am sure that Mr Gibson will agree that this was a very good week for the Scottish economy. The chancellor, George Osborne, was in town to make two significant announcements, the first of which was of a massive investment of £500 million of UK taxpayers' money in Faslane, which will safeguard nearly 7,000 jobs on the Clyde. The second announcement was of a £3 billion investment by the Danish firm Maersk Oil to develop the Culzean gas field in the North Sea, which will secure 6,000 jobs and create 400 more. Both announcements were excellent news for the Scottish economy and Scottish workers.

We might have expected both announcements to get a warm welcome from the SNP for the jobs that will be safeguarded, the new ones that will be created and the inward investment that they represent. Instead, we had a negative, carping response from the First Minister to the investment in Faslane. We can only imagine what the response would have been had the chancellor proposed a cut in investment in the Clyde.

I turned to the programme for government to look for a more constructive approach to the economy and found some things in what was announced yesterday that we would welcome. For example, the First Minister stated that she wants to make Scotland the best part of the UK in which to do business, with an ambition for us to be the "real northern powerhouse". The Scottish Conservatives support that. In that respect, we welcome the planned root-and-branch review of the planning system to find out how it can better support the economy. We also welcome the extension of the small business bonus scheme, although I have to ask why, if it is here to stay, it should not be set in statute.

Furthermore, we welcome the pledge to create a competitive business rates regime. However, that will come as a surprise to those who run sporting businesses in rural Scotland or farmers with sporting rights over their lands—whether or not they exercise those rights—who for the first time in more than 20 years are facing a new rates bill. Despite all the rhetoric about being competitive, that proposal in the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill will put Scottish businesses and farmers at a competitive disadvantage to those in England and Wales, and it is not the way to help rural businesses. Finally, we welcome the proposals to reduce air passenger duty from April 2018, although we await with interest the replacement tax that will be proposed.

So far, things are mostly positive, but what is equally interesting is what is missing from the

programme. We believe that more can be done on business rates. The UK Government is conducting a thorough review of the whole business rates regime, and it could come forward with major changes for England and Wales. We know that business rates have a major impact in particular on high street retailers, which are struggling with competition from the internet or out-of-town retail parks. Unlike the other business taxes that the cabinet secretary for finance would like to get his hands on, he has full control over business rates, which have been devolved since 1999. There is therefore no reason not to act.

As for income tax, businesses want to know what is coming down the line from the Scottish Government, given that from next year it will have much greater power to vary the rates. We know that the Labour Party would like the top rate to be increased; however, there are only 14,000 additional-rate taxpayers in Scotland, many of whom already do business part of the time south of the border, and the inevitable consequence of a higher top rate of tax in Scotland would be a flight of wealth and capital down south and a reduction in the tax base and the consequent tax take. Raising the top rate in Scotland would be an entirely self-defeating policy, and it would be good to know whether the SNP agrees.

Our view is that the Scottish rate of income tax should be set no higher than the rate in the rest of the United Kingdom. As the Scottish Retail Consortium pointed out in its submission to the Finance Committee, any variation to income tax rates will have an impact on consumer spend and therefore the wider economy.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the member accept the evidence that we received at the Finance Committee that income tax rates can be varied certainly by a few per cent without causing any movement?

Murdo Fraser: I am relying on the evidence from the Scottish Retail Consortium, which, given that its members are in business, might know a bit about what it is talking about. It also made the point that any variation will also impact on businesses' ability to retain and attract talent.

Businesses also need constitutional stability. Over the summer, an awful lot was said about the prospects of a second independence referendum by the current First Minister, the former First Minister, various SNP members of Parliament at Westminster, various SNP candidates, and even members of the Scottish Parliament fighting for reselection—in some cases, they were fighting each other for reselection. Scottish business needs talk of a second referendum like it needs a hole in the head. We need a period of constitutional stability so that businesses know that we are secure within the United Kingdom.

More powers are coming to the Parliament next year, and more powers are coming the year after. The Scottish Government's default excuse for inaction—that it does not have enough control over the levers of power—wears ever thinner.

The quote

"To govern is to choose"

has been attributed to various politicians of the past, but that does not make it any less true. The Government will soon have to start making choices on spending and on tax. We Conservatives would give priority to growing the economy, expanding the tax base and improving the tax take. Yesterday's programme for government gives us only a limited vision of how the Scottish Government plans to approach those issues. We await with interest hearing how it will take them forward.

15:06

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I am pleased to take part in the debate on the Scottish Government's programme for government for the coming year. The programme is more ambitious than that, as the First Minister stated yesterday, because it sets out our vision for our nation's future for years to come. Much in the document is bold and exciting, but I am aware that I must stay within the parameters of the allocated time, so I will stick to a few issues that are important to me.

Members will be aware that Glasgow international airport is in Paisley. Although it is not in my constituency, it has a major economic impact on our community. It is one of the main employers in Renfrewshire and it brings much-needed investment. For our businesses to be competitive, we need to ensure that they have the opportunity to compete on a level playing field. That has been difficult for the aviation industry for some time. I am aware that the Scottish Government has established a forum with membership from the airline industry, Scotland's airports, environmental groups, business organisations and tax professionals.

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

George Adam: That will help to ensure that the industry continues to contribute to our economy. I, for one, have faith in our transport minister, for some reason or other.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Mr Malik, you can sit down. I do not think that George Adam is going to take an intervention from you.

George Adam: It is welcome that the Scottish Government will reduce the burden of APD by 50 per cent when Scottish APD is introduced in 2018,

with a view to abolishing it completely when resources allow. That is helpful, because APD is currently the highest level of aviation tax in the world. It artificially depresses demand and dissuades airlines from flying to and from Scotland. Even with that major disadvantage, Glasgow international airport has managed to be very successful in the past couple of years. Just imagine what we can achieve after 2018 that can benefit the economy of Renfrewshire—or, as I like to call it, greater Paisley.

I will talk about some of the education issues that the First Minister raised yesterday. Scotland's children and our young people are our greatest asset, and investing in their education is essential to achieving their aspirations and our ambitions as a country. As I have said before, since I became a very young grandparent, my belief that we must ensure that all our children get the same chances has been reinforced. That is for personal reasons and because it is the right thing to do.

The Scottish Government is taking the right steps to improve Scottish education, and we are seeing the results. With the development and implementation of the curriculum for excellence, we have a more coherent, flexible and child-focused curriculum that sets higher standards for achievement than ever before. It is heartening to hear that, as the next phase of the curriculum for excellence, the Scottish Government is developing and implementing a national improvement framework for Scottish education that sets out our vision and priorities for Scotland's children and their progress. The framework will set out the Scottish Government's vision and key priorities.

We have asked the question "Why?" for too long. Why do children and young people from poorer areas not get the opportunities in education that others get? I have said before in the chamber that there is an east-west divide in my constituency. Ferguslie Park in the west is an area of deprivation, whereas Ralston in the east is a lot more affluent. Why?

My father came from Ferguslie Park, where there has been an educational attainment gap for generations. I am glad that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government, in particular, are working towards doing something about the attainment gap.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Does the member agree that it was wrong for the Scottish Government not to give Renfrewshire Council any money from its attainment fund last year?

George Adam: Mr Bibby—what do you say? The reality of the situation is that in Ferguslie Park, which is one of the worst areas of deprivation in Scotland, two schools—St Fergus's and Glencoats primary schools—will be part of the attainment

fund process, which is about identifying the need and ensuring that we can make a difference.

The framework will ensure that there is a forensic focus on data—obviously something that Mr Bibby is not too interested in—which will inform our approach to educational improvement at every phase of Scottish education. We must ensure that parents and carers get support for the role that they play in their children's education. That is a crucial area where we must ensure that parents engage with us, which is an issue that has come up time and again in the Education and Culture Committee.

The most important aspect is that the Scottish Government wants to close the attainment gap completely. Of course, that will not happen overnight—if only it was that easy. My old dad, who is no longer with us, used to say when the family had its latest disaster, "Who said it was going to be easy?" In the real world, life is just not that easy.

Closing the attainment gap is an economic and social challenge for all of us, but it is also a moral one. We must remain focused on that goal and the Scottish Parliament must come together and see that it is our main goal and challenge for years to come. A child born today in one of our most deprived communities should, by the time he or she leaves school, have the same chance of going to university as a child born in one of our most affluent communities.

However, progress has been made, and it would be churlish for Opposition parties to say otherwise. For example, in 2008, just two in 10 students from deprived areas in Scotland obtained at least one higher or the equivalent, but last year, the figure was almost four in 10. However, that is not far or fast enough. The programme for government is bold and ambitious, and I believe that it is time to work together to ensure that that ambitious programme can be put forward so that Scotland can truly be the best country in the world for children to grow up in.

15:12

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I believe that we need to be more ambitious for our health service. The First Minister told us about the 10,000 new staff in the national health service and mentioned the £50 million investment in the primary care fund and the £100 million investment in mental health services. However, what she did not mention is the number of vacancies in the NHS, such as the 447 vacant consultant posts and the 2,255 vacant nursing and midwifery posts, and the 1,218 reduction in the number of ambulance staff since 2011.

Only yesterday during my members' business debate on promoting sustainable GP recruitment, I raised the issue of the crisis in our general practices in Scotland. In the words of the Royal College of General Practitioners,

"Such is the current strain on GPs, brought on by the demands placed on them and the inadequate resourcing of the service, that over a quarter of Scottish people ... were unable to book an appointment within a week".

Forty-two per cent of Scots—almost half the population—agree that waiting times to see a GP are a national crisis.

The Scottish Government, meanwhile, is putting £20 million per year into the primary care fund, but GPs do not see the benefits. One example of that spending is the GP returner programme, but the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing said in answer to one of my questions:

"The number of GPs recruited into this programme has always been low; on average between five and six per annum."—[*Written Answers*, 27 July 2015; S4W-26378.]

I question whether it is wise for the Government to spend money on a programme that serves the right cause but which, to all intents and purposes, makes next to zero progress in solving the crisis. After eight years in power, the Government decided to listen for the first time only last month to what the people are saying and to the experts' warnings.

I want to touch on the issue of mental health, which has been a top priority for me for a long time. At the end of July, I held a summit in the Parliament to explore what causes thousands of children and adults to wait for months on end for treatment. I wanted to hear why the number of medical trainees is reducing in mental health specialties such as psychology and psychiatry, and why health inequalities continue to be so prevalent. What I heard from the experts—the British Medical Association, the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland and a number of the royal colleges—is that there is not enough support for staff, patients, families of patients and, most of all, resources.

I urge the Government, in its programme, to expedite the publication of the 10-year follow-up to the Grant report, which was supposed to be out by the end of the summer—it was actually supposed to be out by the end of last year. The report might give us an insight into why parents of children with autism are forced to send their children to England for treatment because of a lack of in-patient beds in Scotland, and why GPs are forced to prescribe drugs instead of sending their patients to specialised, evidence-based treatments because they know that those 3,500 patients will wait for more than four and a half months to see an expert.

I would like to know when the Scottish Government will decide to hear the repeated calls from the Liberal Democrats to establish parity of esteem in law between mental and physical health. The impact on the equality of funding places pressures on other parts of the system that have to do with mental and physical wellbeing.

In its report "A blueprint for Scotland's future", the commission on housing and wellbeing recommends that

"Housing should be a full and equal partner in health and social care partnerships."

That means allowing every family and household to afford the type of housing that they need when they need it. There is no doubt that, as we have heard, plans have been put in place, policies developed and strategies created, but the facts speak for themselves. The number of households turning to the private rented sector has nearly tripled in the past 15 years owing to the chronic shortage of affordable homes. Shelter Scotland's recommendation of 10,000 new homes for social rent each year to meaningfully tackle Scotland's housing crisis stands. The Government has mentioned that it will surpass the building of 30,000 affordable homes, but they are not socially rented homes. The promise in its manifesto was for socially rented homes. Only about 20,000 of those have been provided in the past five years, which is about 40 per cent of what is needed.

Everyone has a right to a safe, warm and permanent home. I look forward to discussing the Government's plans for the private tenancies bill and how it will bring about positive change for the Scottish housing sector.

In setting out its programme, the Scottish Government must realise what the starting and ending points are for the wellbeing of the people in Scotland. In doing so, it must prioritise the health of the population and the right to a safe, warm and permanent home.

15:17

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Being visionary and committed to a stronger, fairer Scotland is the keystone of this Government. The legislative programme is ambitious and demanding and I look forward to playing my part in it with colleagues.

As the Parliament knows, I have been advocating legislative action on domestic violence and revenge porn throughout the current session of Parliament, so I am particularly pleased to see that coming, as I am sure many of my colleagues throughout the chamber are. The fight to ban internet publication of intimate images without the consent of those who are depicted has been on the Scottish Government's agenda for three years

and I have led two debates on the subject. As a direct result of my close contact with and support of Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland, I learned just what an extensive and important problem revenge porn has grown to become. I hope that I have been able to bring that knowledge to the attention of every member in the Parliament and helped to raise awareness of this gross invasion of privacy. I pay tribute to and thank all my colleagues throughout the Parliament who supported any of the motions that I have lodged on this important subject and allowed us to debate it in the chamber. I appreciate that support.

The issue should not divide political parties. It is about protecting people—especially young people—from having their lives destroyed by the malice of a former partner. Groups such as Scottish Women's Aid have spoken about how the publishing of images and videos that were meant to be private is used as an act of sexual abuse, often alongside intimidation and blackmail. Some victims have felt so threatened and distressed that they have contemplated or even committed suicide.

I believe that Police Scotland will make a vital contribution. It will apply the law, so it needs to be certain that the law is workable. Its input will be sought and, I hope, carefully considered during the legislative process. It has already made it clear to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice that it welcomes the proposed legislation and will work co-operatively to apply it effectively, and I welcome that. It is clearly crucial that the legislation that we produce is effective and accessible. To an extent, I imagine that the law will have a significant deterrent effect that will make current offenders think more carefully, and I hope that it will also further raise awareness of the issue.

The consultations that will take place as legislation is written will address how best to structure the law alongside existing laws and that is the practicable and effective way to do it. The new legislation will also mean that we will have stronger and more effective powers to eliminate domestic and sexual abuse. For far too long, men—and in most cases it is men, but I understand that there can be abuse across the genders—have been able to abuse their partners with little prospect of their victims ever being able to secure a conviction. I hope that we will see the end of that.

On a personal note, I am delighted to see that motor neurone disease sufferers will get access to voice equipment through an amendment to the Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc and Care) (Scotland) Bill. Like many, including the inspirational Gordon Aikman and MND Scotland, I have lobbied for a voice library to be built and for voice services to be provided that will make a

huge difference to the quality of life of MND sufferers. With your participation, Presiding Officer, the Parliament very kindly hosted the voice bank last year and I have a plea to make. The voice bank is on tour and it needs male voices, especially those who come from the north-east of Scotland, so anyone who is Doric or a highlander or whatever should get along and donate their voice to this extremely worthwhile project.

As the First Minister has also made clear, our powers over welfare policy and action are limited but it is nevertheless clear that the Government intends to take action to mitigate the devastating damage that has already been inflicted by George Osborne's cuts. Although the chancellor slightly increased the tax-free allowance, he cut back the annual income of approximately 200,000 Scottish households by around £3,000 a year. I therefore greatly welcome the announcement of a social security bill and am glad that it will be called a social security bill, because social security is exactly what it is.

George Osborne has also tried to rewrite the living wage and reduce it, but we are not that stupid or cynical. In Scotland, when we say living wage, that is exactly what it is—a wage that people can live on.

As colleagues are aware, I have a long-standing association with the trade union movement, fighting for a living wage, and I am proud of that relationship. I believe in enhancing workers' powers to improve their employment rights in areas such as health and safety, bullying, sexual harassment and the important issue of blacklisting, which we seek to eliminate. That is why I am glad to hear that the fair work convention is to create a new framework that will build strong, sustainable relationships between the stakeholder groups. The Scottish Government will not stand idly by while the UK Government tries to undermine the rights of unions. We will oppose that every step of the way.

We work from the fundamental principle that employment has to be on fair and equal terms, both in gender and pay levels. When workers are not getting a fair deal, they need to be able to take their employer to a tribunal. Under the UK Government's terms, an employee will have to pay £250. We do not have the power to stop that just now, but I am pleased to see that, when we have that power, we will abolish those fees and possibly turn around the 70-plus per cent drop in the number of cases that we have seen just in the past year.

The powers that the Scotland Bill will bring to us are indeed far more limited than we would have liked. I want a country that does not turn its back on refugees, which upholds human rights and

trade union rights, and which has a social security system that protects our vulnerable people. Our Government has that in its legislative programme.

15:23

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to debate the programme for government. There are elements of the legislative programme that I support. The proposed abusive behaviour and sexual harm bill is one and the private tenancies bill, which we have been calling for for the best part of a year, is another. Of course, there is also the proposed fiscal commission bill, which I repeatedly asked for last year, and which will make sure that we get the stewardship of the nation's finances right.

Our support for an independent Scottish equivalent of the Office for Budget Responsibility is hardly surprising when we have an SNP Government that got it so badly wrong when making financial projections about oil revenues. The price of oil is now less than \$50 a barrel and revenues are at an all-time low. Recent reports show that tax receipts from the industry were £168 million for the first quarter compared with a staggering £969 million for the same period in the previous year. That is a fraction of what the Scottish Government was relying on to make its sums add up. However, this is not some random debating point, as there are very real consequences, with thousands of jobs already lost in the north-east and across Scotland. I welcome the fact that the energy jobs task force is to continue for another six months. However, I am genuinely not sure that that will be enough. If I understand it correctly, its record so far is helping 12 apprentices while thousands have lost their jobs. We need to push that further forward.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Does Ms Baillie agree that one of the things that could help job security in the North Sea basin is if the Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced a tax incentive for exploration, so that we could see the likes of what has happened in Norway, with much more drilling?

Jackie Baillie: I agree with the member, but I am looking at what the Scottish Government can do in its programme for government. If we got both Governments working in concert and focusing on the North Sea, we would see substantial help being put in place.

In my view, we need an independent fiscal commission that has a wide range of powers. That is more important than ever because, in April, for the first time, we will be able to set a Scottish rate of income tax.

We all know that just as important as the laws that a Government passes are the things that it

does—how it spends its money and how that signals its priorities. At this point, I join Christina McKelvie in congratulating Gordon Aikman on securing support from the Government for voice equipment for people with MND, and I commend the Government for taking that approach.

In her statement yesterday, the First Minister talked about an economic plan. I welcome the focus on growing our economy and the recognition that the strategy that was set out in March needed much more detail and a clear plan for implementation. We will, of course, be debating that next week, and I expect John Swinney to make the case for a greater reliance on onshore tax receipts now that the oil price has plummeted.

Interestingly, the programme for government restated the commitment to full fiscal autonomy as the SNP's preferred position, short of independence. The problem is that the sums did not add up when John Swinney first suggested it and, despite all the name changes, they still do not. Whether the SNP likes it or not, it is a fact that public spending in Scotland is £1,300 higher per person than the UK average. That reflects the choices that we make, based on our priorities. So, let me say as gently as I can to the Deputy First Minister that, when Labour started in government in 1999, our spending on health and education, as a proportion of our budget, was higher than was the case in England and that, when we left office in 2007, our spending on health and education, as a proportion of our budget, was higher than was the case in England. The SNP inherited that. However, now, Scotland spends a smaller proportion of our budget on health and education than is the case in England. That is the legacy of the SNP. We now spend less on education and health than even the Tories do.

In health, £1 billion has been stripped out of the GP budget; we have a crisis in recruiting GPs and consultants; and vacancies are increasingly hard to fill. Further, for all that we have integration of health and social care, our social services are creaking at the seams. Little is said about them in the programme for government.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: I do not have time.

The renewed focus on education is welcome but, after eight years, the SNP's record speaks for itself. There is a 12 per cent gap in reading for primary 7s between the most and the least deprived, a 21 per cent gap in writing and a 24 per cent gap in numeracy. That attainment gap between the richest and poorest pupils has not changed in eight years. There are 4,000 fewer teachers and 140,000 fewer college places. That

is not investing in our young people or in our economy.

Education is to be the new priority for the SNP. If that is the case, it should put its money where its mouth is. Its £100 million attainment fund, welcome though it is, has been announced several times. It will average £25 million a year. Yesterday, the Government said that it would take £250 million away from public spending by abolishing air passenger duty. What does that tell us about the SNP's priorities? Surely it is not the case that it would much rather give us cheap holidays abroad than invest in our children's future.

The programme for government is a sleight of hand that points towards the next election and beyond in the hope that the people of Scotland will not notice the Government's abysmal record.

15:29

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): There is much to commend and welcome in yesterday's statement by the First Minister. I will touch upon a couple of those points, but, first, I thank the First Minister and the Minister for Transport and Islands for the fabulous news on Monday, when it was announced that Ferguson Marine in Port Glasgow was the preferred bidder to build the next two Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd ferries, which are worth £97 million. I also thank the former First Minister, Alex Salmond, for his pivotal role in saving the yard last year, which ensured that Monday's fantastic news could happen.

Members of my party know of my long history of raising the issue of shipbuilding and my lobbying to bring work to Ferguson's even before I was elected. I have maintained that approach since becoming an MSP because I knew that shipbuilding on the lower Clyde could have a future. Monday's announcement proves that to be the case. It will take the number of ships awarded to Ferguson's by the Scottish Government to five and it shows that the SNP commitment to the reindustrialisation of the lower Clyde is being delivered.

Monday's announcement is also brilliant news for Inverclyde. It is a real vote of confidence in the area. It will give a significant boost to the local economy, create jobs and continue the west of Scotland's justified reputation as a leader in the shipbuilding industry. It shows that commercial shipbuilding in Scotland has a bright and prosperous future ahead of it.

Since 2007, a key target of the Government has been to create a more successful country and provide opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish by increasing economic growth. A strong, vibrant and diverse economy is essential to our national

prosperity and helps to create the wealth that is needed to support high-quality public services, such as our commitment to deliver on the NHS budget of more than £12 billion for this year.

One of the best ways that we can help people to help themselves is by giving them access to the best possible education. Excellence in education is essential to our prosperity, competitiveness, wellbeing and future overall success as a nation.

The past eight years have been tough. The recession has had a financial impact on Scotland's economy and its budget through Westminster cuts. However, the fact remains that education in Scotland has made progress. The introduction of the curriculum for excellence was a major step forward. Since 2007, 520 schools have been rebuilt or refurbished. That is more than one in five of school premises in the country and 200 more than in the previous eight years. We have provided funding to maintain teacher numbers. In 2006, more than 15,000 primary 1 children were in classes of more than 25. Now, that figure is below 500.

As a result of the SNP Government's investment in education, outcomes are better than ever before. School leaver destinations are the best on record. More than nine out of 10 of the students who left school last year were in employment, education or training nine months later. This year, young people in Scotland gained a record number of passes at higher or advanced higher.

In every part of Scotland, there are good schools and teachers, our young people are good learners, and standards have risen and continue to rise. Although record exam results and a record number of school leavers in work, education or training show that school education in Scotland is getting better, we have long recognised that attainment is an important area in which improvement is needed. The new Scottish attainment challenge will play a key role in driving that work, with a fund of more than £100 million that is to be invested over four years.

From January, an additional 22,000 16 to 19-year-olds will be eligible for the education maintenance allowance, which is in stark contrast to the approach of the Westminster Government, which removed the EMA from England a number of years ago. The announcement that kinship carers will be placed on the same financial support as foster carers is also welcome.

Throughout the deliberations of the Smith commission and the Scotland Bill process, the SNP has argued that more powers over the economy and social security should be transferred to Scotland to allow stronger action to tackle poverty and inequality, including full devolution of the social security system and powers over the

minimum wage. The Scotland Bill does not go as far as I or my party want it to go but, nevertheless, I welcome the announcement of a proposed social security bill if we are re-elected in the 2016 election.

As co-convenor of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on funerals and bereavement, I welcome the First Minister's announcement of the proposed burial and cremation bill. Some of the members of the CPG were members of the burial and cremation review group. They kept us fully informed of that group's progress and also that of the Bonomy commission.

Another point in yesterday's statement was the commitment on the small business bonus scheme. That scheme has been a lifeline to local businesses the length and breadth of Scotland, so the small business community will warmly welcome the commitment to keep it until the end of the next parliamentary session. I know of a few businesses that have kept their doors open in recent years because of that scheme and I am sure that they, too, will be delighted.

On the commitment to reduce the air passenger duty, as convenor of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on recreational boating and marine tourism, I know that that sector will benefit from that. A third of berths in Scotland are being taken up by people who live in the south-east of England. That reduction might encourage them to come up to Scotland a bit more often and spend even more money when they come here.

The Scottish Government's ambition for radical reform remains undiminished, and the programme for government for the next year sets out the policies and legislation that will build upon all that we have achieved so far and establish a springboard to the future—in education, fairness and industry. I warmly welcome the programme and I am sure that the people of Scotland will welcome it too.

15:35

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): There is much to be commended in the Government's programme for the coming year, not least with regard to workers' rights. I very much welcome the abolition of employment tribunal fees. The imposition of those fees had the desired effect, as we have heard, with a 70 per cent reduction in cases. I agree with the First Minister that that was a very positive early use of the powers.

Similarly, I welcome the reduced threshold in relation to the duty to publish information on the gender pay gap. I commend the fact that the Scottish Government supports the 50:50 by 2020 campaign, but that must apply across the public

sector. Only yesterday I raised that issue in the Justice Committee with regard to the composition of the Scottish sentencing council.

I commend collaborative work across the chamber, within and outwith the chamber, and the fair work convention is an example of that.

Also mentioned in the programme for government is developing the young workforce, and the issue of a per head payment for training rather than a payment to providers that reflects the costs incurred must be looked at again.

The use of language is very important and I commend the use of the word "partners" rather than "opponents". We see an opportunity for unity in a large section of the chamber around the issues of the trade union bill and the lobbying bill. I welcome the Labour Party's positive approach to that.

Many members in the chamber—including me—have been involved to a small extent in the private tenancies living rent campaign. That is a significant issue across the country, particularly in the Highlands and Islands.

I welcome the abolition of the bedroom tax and I am delighted that the Scottish Government included in the programme for government the comment that

"greater equality is good for economic growth".—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2015; c 16.]

That is the case.

The rural housing fund is to be commended but, of course, that is not without its challenges too, because access to land to build those very houses is a challenge. I took the opportunity to stop and speak, outwith the Parliament this morning, to the our land campaign. The campaign has sent all members a list of what I think are very modest and reasonable requests for us to follow. It asks us to:

"1. Reinstate the requirement for all land-owning entities (like companies) to be registered in a member state of the EU."

I will not go through the full list but I will go to the fourth request, which says:

"4. Acknowledge that this Land Reform Bill won't solve the problem of unaffordable and unavailable land in Scotland and prepare to adopt further measures in the next parliament to tackle land taxation, lack of information about land ownership, derelict and vacant land, absentee landlordism and the exorbitant cost of land for housing."

I hope that in future we will see some unity about that.

The planning review is welcome, but it is not just about having a review for the sake of it. I am interested to know what consequences there could be for the Gypsy Traveller community, for instance, who have long been neglected in the

process, and whether there will be issues about their tenancy, which we have been assured will be addressed. Similarly, will the investment of £60 million in primary care enhance life expectancy, which is already much lower for the Gypsy Traveller community? I hope so, but the evidence for that remains to be seen.

The First Minister stated:

"The success of our economy is essential to all our aims"

and the aspiration is

"to become the real northern powerhouse ... We will do that not by a race to the bottom ... We will continue to support our oil and gas industry."—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2015; c 13-14.]

It is certainly the view of members in this area of the chamber that the way in which we would support that industry is through a just transition to a low-carbon economy. I commend the "Jobs in Scotland's New Economy" report by Mika Minio-Paluello. That outlines the fact that we have 470 platforms in the North Sea, 10,000km of pipelines and 5,000 wells that will need to be decommissioned over the next 30 years. It also states:

"Costs over the next decade are estimated at £14.6 billion".

That is not an estimate by the Scottish Green Party; it is an estimate by Oil & Gas UK, with those costs rising to £40 billion by 2040.

This year, Shell's enormous Brent Delta platform has been partially dismantled and shipped to Teesside, and 97 per cent of it will be recycled. It would take 12 years to dismantle the entire Brent oil field, and that alone would require 1,000 offshore workers.

There is an opportunity for the Scottish Government to position Aberdeen as a global centre of decommissioning skills. That could be linked to the failed climate change targets. I acknowledge the baseline change and the UK Government's cynical policy shift, but adopting the same approach will not change things.

Air passenger duty is an aspect of that. We heard how Stuart McMillan is looking forward to the increasing flow of people being involved in recreational sailing. I, too, would welcome that. However, I hope that they would sail or take the train here. If the air travel costs are reduced, there will be a modal shift.

Stuart McMillan: My point was that a third of the people who berth in Scotland live in the south-east of England. Some may want to travel by train; others may want to fly.

John Finnie: I commend the existing excellent cross-border rail services. I hope that the member would commend them, too.

The programme for government mentions investment hubs. I would have liked to see it include reference to goods rail hubs. A city the size of Dundee does not have a goods rail hub. If Invergordon had a hub, there would be a clear linkage with decommissioning goods. In response to a parliamentary question, I was told that the issue is not a Government matter. Of course it is a Government matter. We must work together.

There is a lot to commend in the programme, but there is no mention of Gaelic and no mention of drugs. I would add that the money that has had to be allocated to mitigate the UK Government's welfare reforms could be much better spent.

15:41

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I, too, welcome the programme for government for the coming year. In my first speech in this chamber, I drew on my own experience in industry, which I suppose was inevitable. I spoke of the need for manufacturing and making products and providing services that the international community needed and wanted. Before I address that issue, I first welcome the Government's reconfirmation that it will reduce APD by 50 per cent by April 2018 and extend the operation of our four enterprise areas. That can only be very good news for Prestwick and Ayrshire.

I have heard some members' comments on APD. Michael O'Leary of Ryanair said that APD is the most "insanely stupid" tax ever introduced by any Government. That is probably why Holland and Ireland got rid of it after only one year's implementation.

John Finnie: Perhaps the member could tell us about a tax that Mr O'Leary does approve of.

Chic Brodie: Understandably, Michael O'Leary certainly does not approve of APD.

That, along with other enterprise initiatives, will spur us on to the growth of jobs. The combination of strengthening Scotland's manufacturing base, the support for the innovation challenge fund, a new trade and investment strategy focusing on our international export aspirations and our inward investment ambitions are and will be the springboard to create the wealth that we want to see distributed fairly. We will also see the capitalisation of our resources. Of course, the greatest of those resources are the will and the skills of the Scottish people.

Several of my colleagues have mentioned education, and I will not rehearse all those points, but the development of skills is definitely a key strategic input to our economy. It is an important—if not the important—component to our competitiveness and productivity.

I make no apology for applauding the proposals to encourage business and commercial growth, and to encourage more small and medium-sized businesses to consider internationalisation, innovation and partnerships as routes to growth. That will necessitate all our agencies and finance institutions helping such companies to access the seed finance to allow them to grow, innovate and internationalise. That growth will be further accommodated by the creation and the establishment of new innovation and investment hubs in London, Brussels and Dublin, to augment the work that is done by Scottish Development International in the international community, with outposts in, for example, America and Asia. That will also help the globalscot network.

Those linkages will be crucial in building the connectivity and networks to achieve the programmes for international growth, as indeed will the plans for our digital infrastructure. We should harness the experience of those that have already performed successfully in roles such as international marketing, finance, sales or manufacturing, to aid and abet the small and medium-sized businesses in adopting an internationally competitive ethos.

The significant progress made towards the Scottish Government's target of increasing exports by 50 per cent by 2017 is laudable, but it hides the fact that only around 100 large companies account for 60 per cent of Scottish exports. We have to ensure—and I believe that the programme certainly promotes it—that exporting and internationalisation of our businesses is in the DNA of every Scottish manufacturing and service company, and that our agencies can monitor those outcomes within the national performance framework, to secure an indication of the number of businesses capable of exporting.

Innovation is important. Partnership is important. Above all, however, our international competitiveness and importance will depend on our productivity. That means, I believe, that there must be a greater marrying of capital and labour, and in proposing and welcoming the manufacturing action plan, we must ask that it considers how we can effect greater equity and democratic participation in the workplace to secure the high-wage, high-productivity economy that we need, where investment and the depreciation of new, productive capital equipment is denied because of a lower-wage economy.

It was Bill Clinton who said, in the run-up to an election, "It's the economy, stupid." Yesterday, the First Minister said:

"The success of our economy is essential to all our aims,"—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2015; c 13.]

and so it is.

15:47

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I will obviously comment on the programme for government from the particular aspect of the justice portfolio that I represent, but I would like to begin with a more general comment.

The First Minister spoke yesterday of her desire to close the attainment gap between children in the most deprived and least deprived areas. I remind Government ministers that, with the drugs-deaths trend on the rise and a substantial growth in the number of chaotic drug abusers, unless the Government makes progress with substance abuse, whether it be abuse of drugs or alcohol, there will still be children who are left behind and children who are living in chaotic households with adults who are abusing drugs and/or alcohol. We test children when they get to school, but the support that families really need so that we can close the attainment gap must often start before they begin at school.

The SNP Government has an unenviable record of having in a matter of weeks lost—some people outside this chamber would say "abandoned"—its convener of the Scottish Police Authority followed by the chief constable of Police Scotland, at the same time as policing, as an authority, has become immersed in controversy. I therefore welcome yesterday's announcement by the First Minister that there is a need to

"learn from experience and make improvements where necessary"—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2015; c 21.]

even if that acknowledgement comes after many months—indeed, years—of hostile rejection of any lessons both by ministers and by many SNP back benchers.

The closure of control rooms, the arming of police on routine patrols and the stop-and-search debacle were all vehemently defended by the Government month after month. It is, quite honestly, a relief to hear what I presume is a shift in position and a change of tone. I take that as a clear acknowledgement that the penny has dropped.

I hope, too, that yesterday's speech brings about an end to hostilities as we move forward to deliver a truly world-class police service—a target that I am sure we all agree about. I therefore welcome the First Minister's announcement of changes in the expectations of the Scottish Police Authority under a new convener. I hope that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has the courage to ensure that the authority stands tall in its role of delivering effective governance and accountability. It would be helpful if in his statement tomorrow the cabinet secretary were to further develop that change in approach.

The “*mea culpa*” that is implicit in the acknowledgement of the need to enhance local community accountability is welcome. However, an occasional visit from a chief constable to events is no replacement for the candid exchange of information at local level in response to questions that are raised within communities. Only when we have such exchanges will we begin to develop a truly world-class police service.

I trust that the cabinet secretary will deliver on his promise to consider a right of audience for local panel conveners to be heard by the national policing authority when issues are unresolved through normal channels.

The commitment to implement the recommendations of the report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary is welcome. We should remember that the move towards a statutory code of practice on stop and search has, although inevitable, come about as a result of police chiefs' blind commitment to delivering targets and results that are at odds with community expectations, which is evidence in itself of the need for effective oversight of policy.

It is a pity—perhaps it is an oversight—that the Government did not think to extend the review of policing to encompass the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, which is an area of public reform that has been all but overlooked, in the scheme of things. All the emergency services not only need our support and thanks but deserve our attention, so that we can ensure that a healthy culture that is conducive to good public service exists within them. The fire service has undergone tremendous reform in the past couple of years, as we also witnessed in the police service.

The proposed legislation on revenge porn and the enhancement of domestic abuse protections through law are timely and are welcomed by Labour members, although I identify with the comments that Malcolm Chisholm made earlier. Also welcome is the Government's commitment to delivering a lobbying bill, which has been so ably advocated by Neil Findlay, and its commitment to workers' rights in the years ahead.

It has been a difficult time in Parliament in dealing with reform, so I hope that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, supported by the Government, will move forward in a positive vein and with the support of all of us who seek a fairer Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: I call Alex Johnstone, to be finished—to be followed, I mean, by Willie Coffey.

15:52

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): And to be finished as quick as I can, Presiding Officer.

There is an often-used practice in politics: if you say a thing often enough, it begins to be perceived as true.

John Swinney: Here we go.

Alex Johnstone: Here we are. We heard the First Minister say yesterday, and Alex Neil told us today that this Government is going to hit its targets for building affordable housing. However, Jim Hume pointed out in his speech that the manifesto commitment in advance of the previous election was to build 30,000 socially rented houses during the course of this parliamentary session. That was, after the election, very quickly revised to 30,000 affordable homes, of which 20,000 would be socially rented. The fact is that ministers who stand up and claim that they will hit that target should look very carefully at their own words and commitments, because they will discover that they are going to miss that target by 10,000—a full third.

That is only consistent for the Government. During its previous session—2007 to 2011—budgets year on year seemed to target housing as an area where huge and disproportionate cuts could be made. The Government hoped that nobody would notice. The result of that practice is that over the past eight years and more we have become progressively more dependent on the private rented sector to provide homes for rent in Scotland.

It was therefore only to be expected that the Government would bring forward proposals for a private tenancies bill. During the course of the consultation on the bill I met and spoke to many representative organisations who pursue the interests of landlords. I reassured them that they should participate constructively in the consultation, because I believed, as I still believe, that there are people in the Scottish Government who can count—well, there is the finance minister, at least—and who will understand reasoned argument and ensure that the legislation meets its purpose.

There is no question but that there is room for improvement in private rented sector tenancies, but there is a real danger that the SNP, which is invariably a hostage to one pressure group or another, will cause further damage to the private rented sector and to investment levels in the sector, if it introduces rent controls. Rent controls, rent ceilings and rent regulation have a long history of being a politically favoured policy and are often championed as a social justice cause at times of financial restraint.

Rent control addresses another growing issue, which has emerged as a by-product of the end of local council house building—the cost of housing benefit. With the end of council house building, the stage shifted from bricks-and-mortar support to financial support, and increasing costs in the market have led to increasing housing benefit bills. In Scotland, housing benefit costs rose by 20 per cent in real terms from 2003-04 to 2012-13 and are now £1.8 billion a year. Approximately 21 per cent of the people who receive housing benefit live in the private rented sector—that is almost 100,000 households. The cost of accommodating someone in the private rented sector is approximately 39 per cent higher than the cost of accommodating someone in social housing, with average weekly housing benefit awards of £89 per week in the private sector, compared with £64 per week in the social rented sector.

John Finnie: Will Alex Johnstone take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: I want to develop my argument, if John Finnie does not mind.

The problem is that history tells us that rent controls do not work. Swedish economist Assar Lindbeck said:

“In many cases rent control appears to be the most efficient technique presently known to destroy a city—except for bombing”.

In 1992, a survey of American and Canadian economists found that 93 per cent of people agreed with the statement,

“a ceiling on rents reduces the quality and quantity of housing available”.

Capping of rents increases demand and can cause divestment by the sector, which creates a shortage in the market. That makes it more difficult for renters to find properties in rent-controlled areas and often results in people staying longer in their rented accommodation, thereby further reducing the availability of supply. Landlords also become more selective in their choice of tenants, which means that people on lower incomes, whom the rent control was meant to assist, are excluded from the market.

The Presiding Officer: You need to bring your remarks to a close.

Alex Johnstone: The fact is that rent control in any form artificially caps the potential return from an asset, and that restriction can discourage investment in the sector, at a time when investment to address housing demand is much needed. We cannot legislate our way out of a housing crisis; we can only build our way out of it. Let us build houses.

15:59

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley)

(SNP): Over the summer I had the privilege of visiting the Laigh kirk mission hall in Kilmarnock to see for myself the good work that the town's churches are doing to help some of our poorest citizens and disabled citizens. There were homeless people, people who were trying to get into a recovery programme, people with disabilities, people who were trying to avoid reoffending and people who were just dropping in for support and perhaps a hot meal. Some had not eaten a proper meal for days, and I could tell those who were too proud to admit that they were in such dire circumstances. They arrived at the mission slightly suspicious of the motives and intentions of their hosts, and for a while at least they kept a safe distance from any close contact or interaction that might have exposed their plight in front of others whom they did not know and probably did not trust.

That was a brief glimpse of what is happening in modern Scotland to some of our most vulnerable people. The people whom I met did not choose those outcomes as a career option; rather, through a variety of circumstances, they have found themselves in need of help. At the same time, they have become the victims of a callous and uncaring Government whose purpose is to save money at their expense and to balance its books no matter the human cost and no matter the damage that is done. A Government that deliberately drives more of its poorest citizens further into poverty will surely stand condemned by any reasonable person who aspires to live in a caring society.

In all that adversity, there are some wonderful people who are helping to turn those lives around. The mission is mainly staffed by volunteers and, with the assistance of health professionals and council expertise, an incredible range of good work is going on, from smoking-cessation guidance to housing and tenancy advice, and from helpful advice on form filling to demonstrations of how to cook the most basic and inexpensive meals, which even I could follow. It was a heartening experience to see that work, and it set the context for what I hoped I might hear in the First Minister's statement yesterday, when she announced her plans to introduce a Scottish social security bill.

Of course, we need to deal as best we can with circumstances such as those that are presented by people coming to that mission for help, but I hope that we would rather intervene earlier and prevent people from falling into poverty in the first place. Surely to goodness no caring Government would want to engineer the conditions that drive people into poverty, with the consequent damage that that causes. We cannot go on treating the

symptoms of poverty if one Government deliberately sets out to make it worse. Therefore, it was with great pride that I listened to the First Minister when she said that her Government will stand against a Government that imposes austerity on the vulnerable while preparing to spend billions of pounds on renewing Trident.

As economist Mike Danson said, our social security bill can create the basis for addressing some of the evils that are being inflicted on the poorest people in our society. It can be the framework that will allow us to make provision for those early but limited policy changes that are coming down the line. We can undertake the groundwork to get rid of the bedroom tax, which is a blatant piece of money grabbing from the poor if ever there was one, without there being even the pretence of its being tied to wider housing policy or housing supply. It is hoped that the bill will improve how the system will support disabled people and their carers, and will change the universal credit arrangements to help people to manage their money better, thereby restoring the dignity and respect that have been largely abandoned under the current system. The Department for Work and Pensions work programme is not designed to help people to overcome barriers to work and it does nothing to prevent people from becoming long-term unemployed, so it will be replaced by April 2017.

A number of other important measures in the programme for government support those important principles. The Government will invest £100 million in mental health services—in particular, for children and adolescents. The commitment to increase financial support for kinship carers to the level of financial support for foster carers is very welcome, and there is a small but important commitment to assist with funeral payments people who may run into debt while organising a funeral for their loved one.

My hope is that the social security bill can be a model for a society that truly cares about its most disadvantaged citizens. I hope that it embeds at its heart the kind of compassion and respect that, in themselves, will allow people like those in the mission in Kilmarnock to recover the hope and respectability that have been taken from them, so that they can move forward in the knowledge that their Government in Scotland cares enough about them to help them through the most challenging times in their lives. As the last speaker from my party group, I am delighted to commend the First Minister for announcing the bill, and I look forward with eagerness to its early implementation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): I call Mary Fee. After her speech we will move to the closing speeches at the end of this two-day debate. I remind members that all those who have

taken part in the debate over the past two days should be in the chamber for those closing speeches.

16:05

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): Kezia Dugdale remarked on the positive impact that the leaders of Scotland's three main parties are expected to have on our country and the duty that is placed on each

“to deliver material change and equality for women”.—
[*Official Report*, 1 September 2015; c 26.]

I echo those comments by welcoming the announcements made by the First Minister on further childcare to allow mothers and fathers back to work, on action to tackle domestic abuse, rape and revenge porn and on tackling unequal pay imposed on women in the workplace.

The First Minister said that, by 2020, her aim is to expand childcare provision to 1,100 hours a year. That is a significant increase, which parents and I will welcome if it is delivered, given that it is almost double what the Scottish Government has only recently achieved, eight years on from its last pledge to Scottish families of 600 hours a year.

In 2013, at the Scottish Women's Convention conference in Dynamic Earth, the First Minister called for childcare to be viewed as part of our infrastructure, which is an aspiration that I fully support. To ensure that that happens, we must look at extending provision, as well as flexibility and additional costs.

No woman should live in fear of abuse, rape or intimate moments that are captured on camera being shared with others. A society that can tackle those abuses is a society that we embrace for all women. We know that more action can be taken and, as Kezia Dugdale said yesterday, we will support the Scottish Government where we can. That is just one example of the co-operation that we can and must offer.

Tackling gender inequality in the workplace has long been the ambition of successive Governments, both in Scotland and the United Kingdom, since Barbara Castle passed the Equal Pay Act 1970 under Harold Wilson's Labour Government. Yesterday, the First Minister was right to announce that, over the next year, she will extend the duty on public authorities to publish information about the gender pay gap by reducing the threshold. That is a further step in the morally right direction, but the First Minister knows as well as I do that we can go further. Scottish Labour will help to set the agenda to tackle low pay in all sectors across Scotland.

The First Minister aptly referred to the “real living wage”. What George Osborne proposes is a

con for people on low pay and is discriminatory to younger workers. The living wage rate must be set independently and the chancellor's cynical rebranding of the "national living wage" is nothing more than political opportunism.

The First Minister set out her stall ahead of next year's Holyrood elections, with a renewed focus on education. Unfortunately, that comes too late for the generation that is currently at school, with literacy and numeracy standards falling. Educational inequality is a shame that stains our nation, but more shameful is the SNP Government, which has presided over falling standards in our classrooms, fewer teachers and restricted resources for more than eight years.

John Mason: Will the member give way?

Mary Fee: No—I would like to make progress.

The record on colleges is dismal and no First Minister should proclaim it a record to be proud of when there are 140,000 fewer college pupils, which means that young people and those who wish to retrain will lose out on the opportunities that were afforded to many when Labour was in power.

To tackle the failures in attainment, the First Minister proposes new national assessments. I wholly welcome reducing the attainment gap, but I share the concerns of education unions that such proposals could lead to the reintroduction of league tables. Jack McConnell rightly scrapped league tables, and the current First Minister must assure the chamber that new national assessments will not be a means to undermine teachers, headteachers and local authorities.

As Chris Keates of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers said,

"There is nothing intrinsically wrong with testing. It already takes place in schools across Scotland. It's the use to which the tests will be put which is the problem."

We as a Parliament must work with the Government to ensure that the proposals that the First Minister put forward are not league tables by the back door.

Along with my colleagues in Scottish Labour, I am proud of our trade unions and the work that they carry out each and every day on behalf of their members. As a trade unionist and former shop steward who sat on the Scottish Trades Union Congress general council and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers executive, I believe that the attacks on our unions by the Tory Government are attacks on all workers. Our workers need representation, and any attempt to gag the unions must be stopped. I welcome the opposition of the First Minister and the Scottish Government to the UK Government's anti-trade union proposals, and I assure Parliament that I will

work with all colleagues who are committed to ensuring that workers' rights are protected, enhanced and promoted.

The proposed private tenancies bill is to be welcomed, although the Government had the opportunity to take action in previous years and specifically in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014. It has been and will remain Scottish Labour's position that we must act to control rent rises and to ensure that young people, families, the elderly and tenants of all ages and from all walks of life are not ripped off by rogue landlords who make unjust increases in the cost of living.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches, for which I again invite all members who have taken part in the debate over the past two days to join us.

16:11

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): Along with my colleague Patrick Harvie, I welcome the Government's intention to invest in measures to tackle inequality and its opposition to Westminster's on-going austerity.

A Scottish social security system that helps people to cope with life's challenges when they happen is sorely needed. Rent controls are to be warmly welcomed. This is a cost-of-living issue that is really important to many of my constituents. Rent controls in areas of extortionate rent and longer, more secure tenancies will help to put people in control of their lives, which is an important foundation for leading a successful life. People's rented property needs to feel like their home.

We welcome the proposals on domestic abuse and revenge porn and the intention to abolish employment tribunal fees. I also welcome the commitment to oppose anti-trade union legislation. Surely a confident and employee-friendly Government would never entertain the idea of such legislation. Employment should, at the very least, strive to be a fair partnership in which people are fairly paid for the work that they do. Patrick Harvie called George Osborne's so-called living wage con artistry that everyone can see. In a fair partnership, nobody would be paid a wage that forces them into poverty or hardship.

Scotland should have a quality-jobs-rich economy that is built on decent work. Our report "Jobs in Scotland's New Economy" sets out the potential to create thousands of good jobs through a move from austerity to investment and a focus on the industries of the future. I have always seen micro and small businesses as the resilient foundation of Scotland's creativity and communities, and I will follow closely the impact of the Government's proposals. It is time to

recognise the often-overlooked contribution that such businesses make to society, our high streets and the economy.

I welcome the Government's putting kinship carers on a par with foster carers, which will make it far more likely that children can live with grandparents, aunts and uncles, who might otherwise not have been able to afford to look after them, even when that was in a child's best interests.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill must be strengthened if we really aspire to having a more democratic system of land ownership. When the bill was first proposed, many people hoped that we would finally see genuine positive change, particularly when, at the launch of the land reform consultation, the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform spoke of having a democratically accountable and transparent system of land rights that would promote fairness and social justice, environmental sustainability and economic prosperity. The initial consultation included the requirement that any corporate entity that wanted to own land in Scotland would have to be registered in a European Union member state. I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary told us in his closing speech why that proposal was dropped.

I hope, too, that the review of the planning system gives a voice to the many communities that feel steamrollered by the local development plans that are being adopted across Lothian.

The Government's programme contains little mention of climate change and no answer for all of those who demand that underground coal gasification be added to the current moratorium on unconventional gas extraction and that that moratorium be upgraded to a permanent ban to give communities confidence that the Government is putting their interests above those of oil company shareholders. I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary addressed that in his closing speech, so that I and others can pass on the good news to the tens of hundreds of people who are writing in to ask us all to do just as I have suggested.

The Government will know that the EIS, education leaders and many parents oppose a return to high-stakes national testing. I am sure that it is looking at what works and that it knows that the much-lauded Finnish education system has focused on equity, flexibility, creativity, teacher professionalism and trust. High-stakes testing and externally determined learning standards have not been part of that Finnish policy and success. Moreover, the EIS has told us that what must be central is assessment for learning, not feeding the statistics machine so beloved of some of the media and some politicians.

Although this issue has already been much discussed, we must look at all the issues that affect the attainment gap. Attainment is affected when teachers do not have enough specialist support for learners with additional support needs or on-going access to high-quality continuing professional development and the time to access it. We know from Siobhan McMahon's recent parliamentary question that, although a fifth of the school population is identified as having additional support needs, additional support for learners has dropped markedly—by more than 10 per cent. I am sure that we can imagine the impact that that is having on attainment and on the wellbeing of pupils, parents and teachers. Parents and carers are our children's first teachers, and the early years are recognised as critical to attainment. I hope that the national strategic forum for adult learning will result in appropriate investment in what is too often an overlooked service and will look at the calls that have been made in the manifesto for adult learning.

I am sure that we all welcome the increase in hours of nursery provision for our youngest children, but the issue is not just quantity but the quality of those hours. As a result, I, like others, support Save the Children's calls for further investment in the early learning and childcare workforce and in strengthening support for parents. All of those involved in childcare should be paid the living wage and supported to maintain quality; indeed, all of those involved in all sorts of care should be paid the living wage. Finally, investment in primary and social care is essential to decrease the strain on our acute services.

There are too many subjects to cover in depth in the time that I have. The Green group will continue to work constructively with the Government whenever it can and, if we are critical, our criticism will be constructive.

16:17

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Presiding Officer, I apologise for my late arrival in the chamber this afternoon—although I have to say that, looking around me, I do not seem to be the only one in that position.

Earlier this year, the First Minister made a speech at the London School of Economics in which she argued that the Government's record should be

"opened up to proper scrutiny".

She meant the UK Government's record, but I think that the principle is sound, particularly with a Government that has been in power for more than eight years.

I am sad to say that, too often, this Scottish Government eludes such scrutiny. Too often, outlandish promises are made by ministers, whose failure then to deliver is, as a number of members have observed, ignored, rewritten or blamed on someone else—usually Westminster, although councils are increasingly finding that life after the death of the historic concordat is pretty unforgiving. With the First Minister determined to keep outflanking Labour on the left and with the Tories heading right, such scrutiny must also reflect the desire of many in Scotland to see politics anchored in the centre, with economic discipline allied to social justice and the creation of opportunity for all. That is what the Liberal Democrats will provide.

With the programme for government, the First Minister invited us to look ahead. That is fair, but we also need honesty about where we are now. As Willie Rennie highlighted yesterday, there are key areas in which that honesty—a willingness to accept that critics are not talking anyone down but rather pointing out that things are not as they are being portrayed—is lacking.

There are areas in which we fully support what the First Minister said yesterday, including the steps to address failures that were exposed by the Mortonhall baby ashes scandal; the establishment of a new right to voice equipment for those who need it, in response to the tireless and dignified campaigning led by Gordon Aikman; and the promise of equality in treatment of kinship carers. All those measures are worthy of support. Christina McKelvie, Jackie Baillie, Mary Fee and others spoke passionately about the measures to tackle domestic abuse and revenge porn, which are other examples of areas where we will surely find common cause.

However, there are many areas in which, even if we agree on the principles, we do not agree with the Government's approach. As Jackson Carlaw observed yesterday, democracy is ill served when agreement can be reached only on the SNP's terms.

In justice, Willie Rennie set out vividly where the Government has got it badly wrong. As Graeme Pearson observed this afternoon, those failings have been ignored and dismissed month after month. Even now, Nicola Sturgeon and her Cabinet Secretary for Justice talk of the positive legacy of the departing chief constable and the successful implementation of police centralisation. That view is delusional.

John Mason: Will the member give way?

Liam McArthur: Not now.

That view is certainly not shared by rank-and-file officers or, increasingly, by the wider public—and little wonder. A charge sheet of armed police on

our streets, industrial stop and search, call centre closures, the recent tragedy on the M9 and allegations of illegal spying is hardly the positive legacy that the SNP demands that we salute. Officers and civilian staff are doing their level best to deliver, but they and the public will be dismayed at the First Minister's failure to face up to the reality of a botched centralisation. They and the public expect better of their Government.

Alison McInnes has put forward proposals to address the problems in Police Scotland and the SPA. The SNP's review needs to take those proposals on board.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Liam McArthur: Not now.

Similarly on health, it is not a condemnation of doctors, nurses and other staff working in our NHS to point to the problems that exist. Staff are often the ones who raise concerns.

On mental health, as well as the additional funding, we need to see parity of treatment between mental and physical health, as Jim Hume said.

On accident and emergency waiting times, the Government must face the fact that it is not meeting its targets and is going in the wrong direction.

Ministers have been warned for years about the looming crisis in GP recruitment, and 99 per cent of GPs who had heard about the Government's plans say that they are insufficient. The Royal College of General Practitioners has put forward a blueprint; SNP ministers need to take their heads out of the sand and respond positively.

I turn to education, which is apparently the flagship of the programme. I do not at all question the sincerity of the First Minister's desire to tackle inequality in education, but I have serious questions about the way in which she is going about it. Like George Adam, Nicola Sturgeon claims that she wants to

"close the attainment gap completely"

between children from poorer backgrounds and their more affluent counterparts. She has even asked to be judged on her actions to achieve that goal. So that is not just an ambition; it is a firm, measurable and absolute goal. However, how can that goal be achieved when her attainment fund ignores the needs of those in poverty living in all but half a dozen council areas or attending all but around 50 schools elsewhere? Unlike the pupil premium that is proposed by Liberal Democrats and delivered south of the border, that broad-brush approach does not target the individuals who need support. It will do nothing for thousands of individual children from poorer backgrounds

across Scotland, and it means that there is no prospect of the First Minister honouring her commitment.

We have concerns about standardised testing, too. Liberal Democrats abolished five-to-14 testing, teaching to the test and league tables. Nicola Sturgeon insists that her plans will not take us back to the future. She has even persuaded the Educational Institute of Scotland to voice conditional support. However, there is a reason why the only people who have been calling for standardised testing have been the Tories. They have been consistent on the issue, and they are delighted. That at least should give Ms Sturgeon pause for thought.

Meanwhile, the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill betrays the SNP's control freakery. We know that the best-performing universities globally are those that are free to exercise responsible autonomy, but the SNP cannot resist. Even its rhetoric about wanting to meddle is damaging to the reputation of our world-class universities.

The role of the Parliament—of MSPs in all parties, including the SNP—is to hold Government to account on what it does, not just on what it says it is doing or has done. That is what Liberal Democrat members will continue to do.

16:23

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): This lengthy debate, which commenced yesterday, has encompassed many words, opinions and views. Having become something of a fixture here, I have witnessed various programmes for government. Some of the programme was predictable and worthy, to be fair, if not necessarily innovative or radical.

In a workmanlike speech, the First Minister laid out her vision for Scotland and announced eight new bills. Few will take issue with measures to address domestic abuse and the conduct of lobbyists, to regulate burial and cremation law, or to set Scottish Parliament election dates. However, the budget bill, the bankruptcy consolidation bill and the private tenancies bill will all require to be judged on content, not title, before any meaningful comment can be made on them.

As for the Scottish fiscal commission bill, unless it separates the Scottish office of budget responsibility from any connection with or tie to the Government, it will not be worth the paper it is written on.

John Swinney: That was a generous remark.

Annabel Goldie: I am characteristically generous to the finance secretary.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Swinney, if you wish to make an intervention, please do not do so from a sedentary position.

Annabel Goldie: I will give Mr Swinney the opportunity to make one while standing.

John Swinney: I invite Miss Goldie to set out to Parliament what constructive contribution she has made to the consultation exercise on the content of the Scottish fiscal commission bill.

Annabel Goldie: I leave that to my colleagues who know something about it. *[Laughter.]* I am sure that the consultation will be much enhanced by that approach.

What was notable about the First Minister's speech was not the lengthy list of proposals, intentions and aspirations and the eight bills but the glaring absence of any analysis and review of her party's eight years in government. Many members have commented on that. Had she had the courage to do that, it might have led her to exciting and innovative changes to policy consequent on such analysis and review, but we have waited in vain.

There was one exception, which proves the need for and relevance of determined and competent opposition in this Parliament. The First Minister said that she will reintroduce tests on literacy and numeracy for primary school children. I know that, had it not been for my colleague Liz Smith's fearless, relentless and enduring criticism of Scottish Government policy, not even that concession would have been made. It is welcome, but it is overdue.

Let me assist the First Minister in addressing her omission by offering my own review and analysis. Police Scotland is not working satisfactorily—I do not think that anyone will disagree with that assessment—so the First Minister will hold a review of its governance. When her Government decided to create a single police force, my party was clear and warned repeatedly that we could not vest the control of a country's law enforcement in very few hands without transparent, visible safeguards to protect the public interest. Our entreaties fell on deaf ears and Labour, unable to offer any coherent analysis of the proposals, fell in with the SNP and supported a single police force, proximate to Government with the public interest protected by a quango. It was always going to end in tears, which is why my party refused to support the measure.

From the outset, it was clear that the structure was unstable. Civil servants should have been instructed to work out an alternative so that what was announced yesterday could have been not a review but meaningful proposals that would give the incoming chief constable clarity about the police force and allow the incoming head of the

SPA, if it is to continue, to know what is required. The continuing vacuum is damaging and destabilising, and it was avoidable.

On the NHS, the First Minister has various ideas, not least some interesting rhetoric about getting to grips with local healthcare and treating people locally, thereby keeping them out of hospital. It may have slipped off her radar screen, but not only are we struggling to recruit GPs to existing practices, there is evidence that new entrants to the medical profession are not choosing general practice as their future. We have known over the past eight years that, proportionately, our population is ageing faster than that of the rest of the UK; our GPs are already seeing that in the intensifying demand for services for that cohort of patients. Believe me, Presiding Officer, I am taking a keen personal interest in all of this. Yet not only has the Scottish Government no strategy for dealing with the issue, it is now proclaiming a new approach to increase the workload of GPs, many themselves ageing with no clear idea of where their successors are to come from or who is to deal with the new responsibilities. That is after eight years of the SNP being responsible for the health service.

I looked again at the programme for government section on health and what I saw was aspirations to increase the numbers of medical students and to increase the output from medical schools but not one whit of information about how to do that—how to start the process, what it will cost or what the end point of delivery is to be. There is a total absence of forensic analysis, a Scottish Government complacency on a challenge that was becoming apparent years ago and a deafening silence on a strategy to respond to that challenge.

However, there was another area of eerie silence. The Scottish Parliament will acquire significant new powers with the passing of the Scotland Bill and will be the third most powerful sub-state legislature in the world. We will be raising income tax, we will be responsible for significant welfare payments and we will have to look at how we cut our coat according to our cloth. Where did that feature in the First Minister's vision? I heard a lot about expenditure—capital expenditure on infrastructure projects, revenue expenditure on a real living wage, money for a housing fund and, implicit in all of this, more money to be spent on welfare provision than currently. I heard a great deal about encouraging business and making Scotland the best place in the UK in which to do business. That is a fine aspiration but, as my colleague Murdo Fraser pointed out, what about a review of business rates? That is one of the taxes for which this Government has responsibility, and it impacts significantly on high street retailers.

Murdo Fraser was also right to point out that Scottish business wants to know what is coming down the line in terms of taxation. What is the outline shape of the Scottish economy? How much more will be spent on welfare? Kevin Stewart criticised the reduction in working tax credits. I presume that he supports people earning more than £60,000 being subsidised by the taxpayer. When a Scottish Government reinstates working tax credits, how much will that cost and where is the money coming from?

The programme for government would have enjoyed much more credibility if there had been a candid review and assessment of eight years in power, a robust and frank recognition that all has not gone—and is not going—well and specific proposals spelled out to deal with the failings.

Where there was no silence was in the now ritual froth and fuming about the Westminster Government, whose transgression in the eyes of the SNP is to grow the Scottish economy, increase employment, reduce unemployment, cut taxes for more than 2 million people in Scotland and leave working people with more of their own money in their pockets at the end of the month. That the SNP should concentrate on criticising such major improvements for those of us who are in the working population says enough about its perversity in its priorities.

The Scottish Government is short of innovative ideas for doing things differently and better. It has become hidebound within a constitutional debate to which it is still captive. It is still in the business of gripe, grrn and resentment. Scotland needs better. Scotland wants to move ahead within the UK. Scotland is waiting for exciting new political thinking. That will not come from the SNP. It will come from the Scottish Conservatives.

16:32

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): We have heard many pleas from the Government speakers for Opposition speakers not to be too churlish about the programme for government, or to be generous, as Mr Swinney asked from his seat just a moment ago. Always keen for pointers, I had a look back at how the First Minister used to respond to these debates when she led the SNP in opposition here. I particularly liked the response that opened with the unforgettable, almost Churchillian phrase

"I do not know about broccoli curry, but the First Minister certainly likes his mince."—[*Official Report*, 6 September 2005; c 18774.]

I will try to channel that degree of positivity and generosity today, as far as I am able to do so.

Indeed, the programme for government that was unveiled yesterday is not all mince. It contains many measures that members in all parts of the

chamber have supported—for example, legislation to ensure that the baby ashes scandal can never happen again; the outlawing of revenge porn, which Christina McKelvie eloquently described the importance of; and a right to voice technology for those who need it. Those are all good.

The programme also contains some measures that command our support as well as that of the Government, if not, perhaps, that of Tory members, such as the abolition of fees for employment tribunals; the extension of the duty to publish gender gap information; the fair work convention; and opposition to the Tory Government's Trade Union Bill, which, as Kezia Dugdale made very clear, we will support too. Those are all good.

However, many measures in the programme are really about correcting the mistakes of the Government's past eight years. An example is the inquiry into Police Scotland. There is also the announcement of payments to kinship carers, which is so welcome but was so long in the making. It was first promised in 2007. To paraphrase Jackson Carlaw from yesterday, I note that Governments in history have won a world war, defeated global fascism, created the NHS or negotiated our entry to Europe in less time than it has taken this Government to meet that commitment to kinship carers.

Another example is the extension of education maintenance allowances. That is welcome.

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Iain Gray: Not just now.

It was announced in March, reannounced last week and rereannounced yesterday, but for the most part it restores the cut to the EMA budget that was made previously. However we still have no action on bursaries for college students who have to be bailed out year after year as they fall into crisis.

Then there are rent controls, which the Government has resolutely blocked for years. We now have a timid, half-hearted admission that it was wrong. How many Scots have suffered crippling rents in the meantime?

What of the one-time priorities that failed to make the cut at all? Patrick Harvie was right to point out that climate change got a page in the document but not a word in the statement. Sarah Boyack was right to raise the point about fuel poverty, which is due to be abolished by law next year but did not make the programme at all.

People can say what they like about the First Minister's predecessor, but his programmes for government had a bold sweep on such issues. Who can forget

"the most ambitious climate change targets in the world"—[*Official Report*, 20 December 2007; c 4701.]

or the "Saudi Arabia" of the seas? Of course, those things meant little because the Government had no idea how it would deliver on carbon targets or marine energy, and it has failed. However, for wild hyperbole, the statements were top notch. My favourite was that Scotland would be the first "hydro nation" on the face of the planet. So bold was that programme for government that none of us really knew what the First Minister was on about. As it turned out, neither did he, but my goodness, it sounded dramatic.

In contrast to those days, yesterday's programme for government was tired and worn out.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Have you seen the polls?

Iain Gray: Yes, I have seen the polls today. I choose my words carefully and do not say that it is the programme of a tired and worn-out Government, because how could that be? Our First Minister is in an unassailable position, fresh from an astonishing victory in the general election. She commands an absolute majority in the chamber and in every parliamentary committee.

Members: No. Wrong.

Iain Gray: She has behind her the most slavishly loyal collection of supine back benchers since—[*Interruption.*]

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Christine Grahame: First of all, I am not supine. Secondly, the Justice Committee does not have an SNP majority. Thank you.

Iain Gray: I can only thank Christine Grahame for that slavishly loyal intervention to help in the debate.

In eight long years, a rebellious thought has never troubled the craven collective consciousness of this bunch of parliamentary sheep. Now the First Minister is riding so high in the polls that she tells us about the things that she will do in 2017, 2018 and 2020, untroubled by such trifles as elections that might intervene. It appears that, as First Minister, she can do no wrong but she leads a Government that can do little right and nothing bold or imaginative. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Iain Gray: If only we had the same slavish loyalty on these benches.

With one exception, the First Minister has failed to use that power with any kind of vision. The one exception is closing the attainment gap in our schools and the First Minister has our support on that, but how big a priority is it for her? Kezia Dugdale was right to invoke the Biden rule:

“Show me your budget, and I’ll tell you what you value.”

Yesterday’s statement committed £25 million a year to that priority. However, it committed £125 million, rising to £250 million, to abolishing air passenger duty—10 times more public money to cut tax than to cut inequality. That speaks of a Government that knows the price of an airline ticket but not the real value of educational equality.

I heard George Adam argue that the cut in APD would grow airport traffic and help the economy. That might or might not be true. However, on these benches, we believe that the greatest boost that we can provide to the economy of this country is to unleash the potential of the young people who are at the wrong end of the educational attainment gap. That should be our priority.

What is more, the First Minister is in danger of letting this idea become simply a debate about testing. We think that she is doing the right thing—or trying to do the right thing—by correcting the current inefficient and inconsistent diagnostic testing practice. However, it is a year since she told us that she would do that, and the slow progress is fuelling concerns that we are returning to the failed system of the past and, in some quarters, strengthening demands that we should do so. The First Minister might think that she is leading this, but she is in real danger of losing control of it.

In any case, until we have more teachers, more classroom assistants and more literacy specialists working with families and parents as well as with children, until we have additional resource that is adequate to the task and is targeted effectively and until we have new investment in teachers and their professionalism, we will not close the gap, and testing will describe only our failure. We will support such investment, but we will do so critically when it does not appear or is not delivered.

It is not just schools that need new vision. The First Minister could have taken the chance to shift the childcare debate into a whole new dimension by talking not just about free nursery hours but about all-age, year-round, fully flexible provision that is affordable for all, whatever the family’s needs and the children’s ages. We could take an approach that is about quality of provision as well as quantity. The childcare sector wants that—it has described its position in great detail in the MacLean commission. In Scandinavia, they already have that approach. In Scotland, our

families need it. The First Minister could use her unassailable position to move towards providing it.

The First Minister had nothing to say about the other great inequality that blights Scotland: inequality of wellbeing and life expectancy. Our NHS is struggling to cope with 21st century needs. She boasted of staff numbers on the very day that we heard of record vacancies and a recruitment crisis. Today, we published wide-ranging proposals for the reform and reinvigoration of primary care and the GP system in order to begin to address some of that crisis. However, where was the Government’s vision for reform instead of the application of sticking plasters to a system that is struggling?

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

Iain Gray: The truth is that the programme for government lacks vision. Where it has vision, the resources and urgency have not followed it. It is a programme of fixing mistakes, covering up failures and patching up long-ignored problems.

It is not that the iniquity of this programme for government offends; it is that its tiredness and timidity so comprehensively disappoints.

16:44

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): On an annual basis, this debate brings areas of agreement between political parties and areas of disagreement. I want to start on the areas of agreement, because a number of thoughtful remarks have been made in the debate over the course of the past two days about some of the provisions that the Government has brought forward. We of course expect them to be subject to detailed parliamentary scrutiny but, in principle, they command support across the parliamentary spectrum.

Christina McKelvie has rightly been complimented by a number of members on the way in which, over the years, she has pursued the need to address revenge pornography. I am delighted that the Government is able to introduce legislation to tackle that obscenity in our society.

The legislation to strengthen the framework for dealing with domestic abuse now has much greater priority in our society. To be fair to Police Scotland and the chief constable, Sir Stephen House, it has been a particular priority for them, and Sir Stephen is worthy of great admiration for the way in which he has made it absolutely clear that domestic abuse is intolerable in modern Scotland.

The measures that are being taken on the baby ashes legislation will similarly command

comprehensive support in Parliament, as will the measures that are being taken on kinship carers.

Parliament also warmly welcomed the announcement that the First Minister made yesterday about access to voice equipment to support people who are diagnosed with MND. That cause has been courageously advanced by Gordon Aikman, who deserves our commendation and support for the tenacious way in which he has approached the issue.

We welcome the support that comes from different shades of parliamentary opinion for some of the measures that we introduce, and we look forward to discussing and debating those issues in the remainder of this parliamentary session.

There will, of course, be other issues that are not quite as unifying. We have had a good measure of that in the debate over the past couple of days. Much of the Opposition criticism of the Government has been focused on our record and the programme that we propose to take forward our agenda in Scotland. I will address a number of issues as I sum up the debate on the Government's behalf.

On the economy, the Government has set out in the programme for government the range of measures that we will take to advance the thinking in the economic strategy that we published earlier this year about encouraging a greater emphasis on innovation, the internationalisation of our business community and the pursuit of inclusive growth and about the necessity of investment in our economy. Those approaches are the right way to build on the foundations that we have established in the Scottish economy.

Today, the Scottish economy has the highest employment rate of any country in the United Kingdom. Economic inactivity in Scotland is now the fourth lowest in the European Union. There is an increase in the female employment rate in Scotland, which is now the second highest in Europe. If the Opposition parties wish to scrutinise the Government's record on the economy, perhaps they should consider some of its achievements in strengthening our country's economic base and creating opportunity for our people.

Of course, there was criticism from the Labour Party about the stance that we have set out on air passenger duty. It is hauntingly reminiscent to me of the approach that Labour has taken to the small business bonus scheme. If we go around the country, we find countless businesses that are in operation today only because the Government put in place that small business support when individuals required it to continue contributing to their local economies. That investment has been

crucial to stimulating town centre and business activity the length and breadth of the country.

If the Labour Party wants to look at the research studies that have been undertaken on the impact of APD, it will find that a 50 per cent reduction in the current cost of APD would generate an additional 3,800 jobs in Scotland and a £200 million per annum gross value added to the Scottish economy. By taking the measures that we propose, we can boost our country's economic performance, create new employment for people and give them the opportunities that will allow them to have a greater stake in our society and economy. That is why the Government takes such decisions.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will Mr Swinney comment on how that policy impacts on climate change targets?

John Swinney: Climate change is one of the issues that I will come to in my speech, so Mr Findlay can wait for me to get to those remarks.

Reducing air passenger duty is a crucial measure in boosting our country's economic performance and creating the economic opportunities that people in Scotland want.

The Government's record on health has been subjected to analysis by Parliament today, but the share of the Scottish budget taken up by health has increased from 37.4 to 41.2 per cent since we came to office. This Government has invested in the health service in the sustained and consistent fashion that the people of Scotland would expect of us.

Jackie Baillie: I thank the cabinet secretary for giving way, but he will of course appreciate that, as a proportion of the budget, he and his Government are spending less on health than the Tories are in England.

John Swinney: That is not the case, I am afraid, Ms Baillie. *[Interruption.]* The Scottish Government has increased the share of the budget that is allocated to the health service since we came to office. For the first time, a health budget higher than £12 billion has been invested in the health service in Scotland. What that delivers is improved performance: for example, 70 per cent of out-patients waited less than 12 weeks when we came to office in 2007; that figure is now 89.7 per cent as an outcome of the Scottish Government's performance in managing the health service.

On education, there has been an understandable focus on the attention that the Scottish Government is paying to attainment in the programme that we have set out. That is in order to tackle some of the underlying challenges of the education service. However, we should also look

at the improving performance in the outcomes that are achieved as a consequence of our education service.

In 2007, only 87 per cent of school leavers were in positive destinations. In 2015, that figure has risen to a record high of 92.5 per cent of school leavers in initial positive destinations of work, training or education. Since 2007, awards at higher level have risen by 35 per cent and awards at advanced higher have risen by 42 per cent, with record higher and advanced higher passes this year.

I encourage the Opposition to reflect on the performance of the education system in Scotland, which is getting better. This Government is determined to put in place the focus that will ensure that we improve the performance of the system and tackle the attainment gaps that have persisted within Scotland. That is at the heart of the measures that the Government is taking forward.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Can Mr Swinney comment on the fact that 31 per cent of schools are not achieving good, very good or excellent when it comes to school inspection?

John Swinney: That is a measure of assessment that is undertaken by an independent inspectorate but what we are seeing in the outcome that I am setting out—[*Interruption.*] What we are seeing is the performance that is being achieved by individuals. We are seeing better outcomes being achieved for the young people of Scotland. The Opposition cannot ignore the fact that we are delivering better performance and better outcomes for the young people of Scotland.

Iain Gray: This is part of the problem: that is simply not true. The record higher passes this year are largely a result of there being more children in S5. The individual performances—the pass rates—fell, and they fell last year as well. It is that misuse of numbers that leads to a lack of trust in the Government.

John Swinney: Surely a key factor in the performance of young people in our system is whether they get to positive destinations and we now see 92.5 per cent of school leavers in initial positive destinations of work, training or education—which Parliament should be very proud of—as a consequence of the work of our education system in Scotland.

In the course of the debate, we have talked extensively about climate change and, as I promised Neil Findlay, I will now address the issues around it. On the original proposition that was put forward, the Scottish Government would have had to achieve a reduction in carbon emissions of 31.7 per cent by 2013. We have, in fact, achieved a reduction of 38.4 per cent, so we

have exceeded the original pattern of reduction that was anticipated when the legislation was passed.

The Government's difficulty has been the shifting sands of the analysis and the data that we have to depend on. However, we remain on track to reduce carbon emissions by 42 per cent, just as the Government is committed and determined to do. The measures on energy efficiency, fuel poverty and the Government's investments in sustainable transport that are set out in the programme for government are designed to support that objective.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Perhaps those “shifting sands” of analysis are why, according to today's opinion poll, the environment is the one policy area where the SNP is not the trusted party. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that, in order for the public to take seriously those commitments, the SNP will have to be clear before the next election whether it is on the side of Clough, INEOS and the others who want to add to the fossil fuel stocks, or whether it is on the side of the communities that are threatened by them?

John Swinney: For a Government with a moratorium on fracking in place, I am not exactly sure what question Patrick Harvie needs to have answered as a consequence of his intervention.

Policing is a major issue that has been raised. Tomorrow, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice will make a statement to Parliament that will set out in further detail the announcements made in yesterday's debate by the First Minister. There will be consultation on policing priorities and local engagement in the work of the police service.

There was much talk about looking at comparative experiences of police services across the United Kingdom. We should be mindful that, since 2007, there has been a 10 per cent reduction in the number of police officers in the rest of the United Kingdom, while there are 1,000 more police officers in this country. The difference in the approach that has been taken by this Government is that we have invested in policing, while the UK Government has reduced policing expenditure and the number of police officers in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Annabel Goldie: As the cabinet secretary knows, my party entirely approved of and supported the increase in police numbers here. However, is it not wrong to conflate police numbers with the inherent structure of a single police force in Scotland? Those are quite separate issues.

John Swinney: Those are not in the slightest way separate issues, because we took decisions about creating a single police service so that we could preserve police numbers and not cut them,

which is what the previous United Kingdom Government did.

Graeme Pearson: Will the minister take an intervention?

John Swinney: In a moment—I have taken a number of interventions.

When Annabel Goldie responded to my intervention in her speech—I have to say that that was preceded by some ungallant behaviour on my part—she criticised our approach on the Scottish fiscal commission bill. When I asked what contribution she had made to the consultation exercise, she replied:

“I leave that to my colleagues who know something about it.”

I simply make the point that Ms Goldie made a criticism of our Government and then accepted that she knew absolutely nothing whatsoever about the subject. That rather characterises some of the interventions in today's debate.

Annabel Goldie's comment was slightly outclassed by Liam McArthur's point, which was to warn the First Minister that, because the Tories supported something, that should give us pause for thought. I bet that a lot of Mr McArthur's Liberal Democrat MP colleagues now wish that they had paused for thought about believing the things that the Tories told them back in 2011.

I also have some gentle advice for Iain Gray. He used the words “tired and worn out.” I thought that that was a personal reflection on his speech. *[Interruption.]* He then went on to describe the First Minister as “unassailable”. If the Opposition wishes to marshal an argument that they have an alternative to put forward, I gently suggest that that is not the most helpful language to prosecute their arguments.

The First Minister: It is for us.

John Swinney: Yes, it is for us, First Minister—I accept that. More importantly, the Opposition parties must come up with a credible alternative to the Government's programme. We did not see any evidence of that. The programme is bold in its ambitions for the people of Scotland, and we are determined to pursue it.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-14115, 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 8 September 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Progress in the Scottish Economy

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 Labour Party 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 Economy, Energy and Tourism
Committee and Infrastructure and
Capital Investment Committee Debate:
Internationalising Scottish Businesses

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
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by 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
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of five business motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S4M-14017, S4M-14049 to S4M-14051, and S4M-14098, setting out stage 1 timetables for various bills, en bloc.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Footway Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 15 January 2016.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 15 January 2016.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 18 December 2015.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Succession (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 27 November 2015.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Education (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be extended to 30 October 2015.—[*Joe Fitzpatrick.*]

The Presiding Officer: If no member objects, I shall ask a single question on the motions.

The question is, that motions S4M-14017, S4M-14049 to S4M-14051, and S4M-14098 be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of five Parliamentary Bureau motions.

I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motions S4M-14053 on the referral of a Scottish statutory instrument, S4M-14112 on committee membership, S4M-14054 and S4M-14113 on substitution on committees, and S4M-14114 on the establishment of a committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Parliament (Disqualification) Order 2015 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Richard Baker be appointed to replace Margaret McCulloch as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Malcolm Chisholm be appointed to replace Lewis Macdonald as a member of the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee;

John Pentland be appointed to replace Siobhan McMahon as a member of the Education and Culture Committee;

Drew Smith be appointed to replace Jayne Baxter as a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee;

Jackie Baillie be appointed to replace Malcolm Chisholm as a member of the Finance Committee;

Margaret McDougall be appointed to replace Jayne Baxter as a member of the Justice Committee;

Malcolm Chisholm be appointed to replace Dr Richard Simpson as a member of the Health and Sport Committee;

Siobhan McMahon be appointed to replace Mary Fee as a member of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee;

Jayne Baxter be appointed to replace Alex Rowley as a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee;

Dr Richard Simpson be appointed to replace Drew Smith as a member of the Public Audit Committee;

Michael McMahon be appointed to replace John Pentland as a member of the Public Petitions Committee;

Mary Fee be appointed to replace Margaret McDougall as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee;

Hugh Henry be appointed to replace Michael McMahon as a member of the Welfare Reform Committee; and

Neil Findlay be appointed to replace Margaret McDougall as a member of the Welfare Reform Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Gavin Brown be appointed to replace John Lamont as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Justice Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Jayne Baxter be appointed to replace Malcolm Chisholm as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Health and Sport Committee;

Graeme Pearson be appointed to replace Hugh Henry as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Justice Committee;

Mark Griffin be appointed to replace John Pentland as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Public Audit Committee; and

John Pentland be appointed to replace Mark Griffin as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Public Petitions Committee.

That the Parliament shall establish a committee of the Parliament as follows—

Name of Committee: The National Galleries of Scotland Bill Committee.

Remit: To consider matters relating to the National Galleries of Scotland Bill.

Duration: Until the Bill is passed, falls or is withdrawn.

Number of members: 3.

Convenership: The Convener will be a member of the Scottish Labour Party and the Deputy Convener will be a member of the Scottish National Party.

Membership: Fiona McLeod, Anne McTaggart and Jean Urquhart.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on those motions will be put at decision time, to which we now come.

Decision Time

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S4M-14053, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the referral of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Parliament (Disqualification) Order 2015 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-14112, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on committee membership, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Richard Baker be appointed to replace Margaret McCulloch as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Malcolm Chisholm be appointed to replace Lewis Macdonald as a member of the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee;

John Pentland be appointed to replace Siobhan McMahon as a member of the Education and Culture Committee;

Drew Smith be appointed to replace Jayne Baxter as a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee;

Jackie Baillie be appointed to replace Malcolm Chisholm as a member of the Finance Committee;

Margaret McDougall be appointed to replace Jayne Baxter as a member of the Justice Committee;

Malcolm Chisholm be appointed to replace Dr Richard Simpson as a member of the Health and Sport Committee;

Siobhan McMahon be appointed to replace Mary Fee as a member of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee;

Jayne Baxter be appointed to replace Alex Rowley as a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee;

Dr Richard Simpson be appointed to replace Drew Smith as a member of the Public Audit Committee;

Michael McMahon be appointed to replace John Pentland as a member of the Public Petitions Committee;

Mary Fee be appointed to replace Margaret McDougall as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee;

Hugh Henry be appointed to replace Michael McMahon as a member of the Welfare Reform Committee; and

Neil Findlay be appointed to replace Margaret McDougall as a member of the Welfare Reform Committee.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-14054, in the name of Joe

FitzPatrick, on substitution on committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Gavin Brown be appointed to replace John Lamont as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Justice Committee.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-14113, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on substitution on committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Jayne Baxter be appointed to replace Malcolm Chisholm as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Health and Sport Committee;

Graeme Pearson be appointed to replace Hugh Henry as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Justice Committee;

Mark Griffin be appointed to replace John Pentland as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Public Audit Committee; and

John Pentland be appointed to replace Mark Griffin as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Public Petitions Committee.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S4M-14114, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the establishment of a committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament shall establish a committee of the Parliament as follows—

Name of Committee: The National Galleries of Scotland Bill Committee.

Remit: To consider matters relating to the National Galleries of Scotland Bill.

Duration: Until the Bill is passed, falls or is withdrawn.

Number of members: 3.

Convenership: The Convener will be a member of the Scottish Labour Party and the Deputy Convener will be a member of the Scottish National Party.

Membership: Fiona McLeod, Anne McTaggart and Jean Urquhart.

The Presiding Officer: That ends decision time.

Fair Trade (Gleniffer High School and Bala Sport)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-13467, in the name of Neil Bibby, on fair trade is the goal for Gleniffer high school and Bala Sport. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates Gleniffer High School in Paisley on working with Bala Sport to become the social enterprise's first member school in the UK; believes that the school is the first to invest in the community benefit society and to buy a small amount of shares, meaning that it will have a say in how Bala Sport is run; considers that the commitment by pupils and teachers to use Fairtrade footballs reflects a desire to promote fairness in the sports equipment industry and is a credit not only to the school but to the community; understands that, while currently less than a quarter of 1% of sports balls sold in the UK are Fairtrade certified, Bala Sport is a new co-operative organisation that was set up to expand the availability and use of ethically produced Fairtrade sports balls; notes support for raising awareness and encouraging the use of Fairtrade sports balls so that those who make them in Pakistan, which is the only country to produce Fairtrade certified balls, are paid a fair wage and work in safe conditions, and notes calls for other schools and organisations to follow what it considers the fantastic example set by Gleniffer High School and use Fairtrade sports balls.

17:04

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to introduce today's motion for debate and I thank all members who have supported it.

Fair trade in football is a very important issue. Why? It is because about 40,000 people work in the ball-making industry in the town of Sialkot, in northern Pakistan, producing tens of millions of footballs every year for a multinational company. A staggering 70 per cent of the world's sports balls are made there. However, less than 1 per cent of the sports balls that we play with around the world are made under fair trade conditions.

The Fairtrade football campaign aims to improve the pay and working conditions of the men and women who make those balls. Through Fairtrade certification, workers in factories and stitching centres benefit from decent conditions and the Fairtrade premium: an extra cash payment of 10 per cent that is invested in social and economic development projects that are chosen democratically by workers. Such projects typically involve healthcare and education for families, and schemes such as fair-price shops, which allow workers to obtain essential items at a fair cost.

Following a visit to Sialkot last year, Angus Coull, a co-founder of Bala Sport—which officially launched in February this year to expand awareness and availability of Fairtrade sports balls—talked about the vast differences he had found between factories. He said:

"We visited four factories producing balls under Fairtrade agreements. You could see that they had fire escapes, fire extinguishers, health and safety notices, proper ventilation and everything you'd expect to find in a UK factory. The workers had face masks and eye protection. But when we went to another factory there was nothing like that. It was underground in the basement of a building, and the only ventilation was from holes in the ceiling."

So, the difference between Fairtrade factories and others could not be clearer. Buying Fairtrade footballs really does make a difference to people's lives, and by purchasing Fairtrade balls we can demonstrate our commitment to fairness and our solidarity with others.

I am sure that members across the chamber will join me in congratulating the pupils and staff of Gleniffer high school in Paisley on their work with Bala Sport to become its first member school in the United Kingdom. Bala Sport has been a key driver of the Fairtrade football campaign, and by buying shares in the social enterprise Gleniffer high school will now have a say in how Bala Sport is run. That is crucial, because Bala Sport is a member organisation. The idea behind the share issue is to raise more cash for further investment. It will enable Bala Sport to order and sell more balls, so that more and more producers benefit in Pakistan. The shares will not be high value, but they are crucial to development of the organisation.

Gleniffer high school's commitment to Bala Sport and to using Fairtrade footballs is a credit to not just pupils, staff and headteacher David Nicholls, but to the entire community. It would be remiss of me not to give special mention to physical education teacher Dominic Tolan, who has been instrumental in making Fairtrade footballs a priority for the school.

I was delighted to visit Gleniffer high school earlier this year and to donate some Fairtrade balls to the school team. I am very pleased to hear that the balls have attracted from pupils positive comments about their quality, and I know that the school will be selling Fairtrade footballs during Fairtrade fortnight.

Plans are also being made to organise a football tournament within the school, using the balls from Bala Sport. Dominic Tolan has been contacted by another fair trade organisation called Koolskools, which is based in England, to discuss developing additional Fairtrade initiatives at the school. Gleniffer high school has led the way on the Fairtrade football campaign, and it is clear that that

has kicked off a wider interest in the fair trade movement, which is very welcome. We should do everything we can to encourage other schools to follow Gleniffer's example.

There are other organisations that I want to acknowledge in the debate. The Five on 5 complex in Paisley has consistently supported the campaign and has given its pitches free of charge for Fairtrade tournaments that I have organised. The support of businesses and organisations is crucial in promoting the campaign—I should also mention Supporters Direct in that respect.

Bala Sport is key to the Fairtrade football campaign and it is currently working with the Fairtrade Foundation schools team on a video about the ball-production process and the workers in Pakistan, as well as on other resources for use in schools. Bala Sport staff will visit the factories again in late October and gather case-study information.

In July, Stirling Albion and Heart of Midlothian played with the Bala Pro ball in a Supporters Direct Scotland cup friendly. Bala Sport recently became the official match-ball sponsor of United Glasgow FC, the refugee team, and is sponsoring the spot-the-ball competition in *The Big Issue*, to continue raising awareness. The campaign is continuing apace; the key question for members today is what we can do to support it and to encourage more schools and clubs to get involved.

Millions of footballs are bought and sold in the UK every year. Football is the people's game. Although its reputation has been tarnished by recent FIFA scandals, it is still a universal language that spans the globe. It is powerful, and we can harness that power to change the world around us. Football is used to raise awareness of all sorts of issues and to help to tackle a variety of challenges. Our hope must be that football can have a real impact in raising awareness of the fair trade movement, particularly among young people and people who perhaps do not normally buy fair trade products.

I have welcomed the opportunity to meet minister Humza Yousaf to discuss what more we can do. I know that he and Jamie Hepburn have a keen interest in the issue. Perhaps they will give further consideration to the possibility of the Scottish Government supporting a national Fairtrade football tournament, to raise the profile of the campaign. We have had a number of local tournaments—a national tournament would raise awareness to new heights and ensure that more Fairtrade balls were bought.

We should not forget that Fairtrade sports balls are not exclusive to football. Bala Sport will have rugby balls on sale shortly after this year's rugby

world cup. We should consider how we might extend the campaign to other sports. Our challenge is to support and expand on the excellent work that organisations such as Bala Sport are doing.

I want to mention the role of our professional football clubs and authorities. People have said that it is futile to lobby clubs that are tied into long-term contracts and sponsorships. However, given the amount of money that some of our professional clubs have, the least that they can do is purchase ethically produced balls. I am in the near future going to write to all our professional clubs and the football authorities to urge them to follow the example of schools such as Gleniffer high. I hope that the Scottish Government will consider joining me in that call.

I am sure that it will not be easy, but I hope that in time Fairtrade footballs will be the norm and not the exception. Fairtrade footballs can be a game changer for thousands of people, and we must do everything that we can to make that happen.

17:12

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): It is a long time since I spoke in Parliament about fair trade. I used to do so quite a lot, because many years ago my home town, Strathaven, and Aberfeldy became Scotland's first Fairtrade towns. We were very proud of that at the time, and the tradition carries on, certainly in Strathaven—although I no longer represent the town, so I do not get to go to all the events there.

This Parliament has always been interested in the fair trade movement and its progress, which is why I welcome Neil Bibby's motion. A lot of work has been done through schools. I am going to a meeting of the cross-party group on Malawi after this meeting, to talk about the links that our schools have with schools in Malawi. A lot of that work is centred on fair trade.

Fair trade is often talked about in the context of products such as coffee, sugar and tea. When we hear about producers who are getting a good deal, they are often in agriculture. As time has moved on, we have recognised that fair trade agricultural practice in countries that are less fortunate than ours contributes to climate justice, because the production of fair trade products promotes sustainable agricultural practices.

That brings me to some of the aspects of the motion that I really welcome. This Parliament is now talking about a different kind of fair trade, which relates to factories and intensive production. That is so important, because, as Neil Bibby said, it is about workers' rights and their health and safety. We have seen terrible things happen in clothing factories, for example, so it is good that

we are talking openly about such things. Some of the things that are still going on in parts of Latin America—in the fruit fields, for example—are very much against trade union rights and we should always be aware of that. That is all part of fair trade.

Procurement generally is really important. I have spoken about this before, but I would like to mention John McAllion, a former MSP who, when he left here—I think he went to work for Oxfam—pushed for fair trade in procurement. I am still of the opinion that we cannot call ourselves Scotland the fair trade nation unless we insist on fair trade in more than consumer goods. I would like to see fair trade cotton being used throughout the health service, for example, and all our public services eventually insisting on fair trade in their procurement. Fair trade can apply at home as well, of course—it does not have to be overseas trade—and we should always look to procure fairly, particularly in our public services.

Going back to football, I congratulate Gleniffer high school on a wonderful initiative. I had a look at what the Scottish Government is doing on football, which is not something that I generally know much about, and I found that one of the Commonwealth games legacies is funding for a project in Malawi for a joint football coaching programme between the Scottish Football Association and the Football Association of Malawi. It is about sustainable infrastructure, equipment and sharing knowledge and skills over there. I would like to think that the equipment is fair trade and that the footballs and strips that are used are fair trade. For me, that fair trade would also be about production in Malawi, not about gathering shed loads of stuff and sending it over from here.

That brings me back to the point that all these things—fair trade, localism, sustainability and climate justice—are important. Only when we start to look at them all in the round can we say that we are really making progress.

17:17

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I congratulate Neil Bibby on securing the debate. I also congratulate Gleniffer high school on its excellent decision to invest in and promote Bala Sport. I will say more about Gleniffer high school later.

Bala Sport is based in Glasgow. It is a co-operative that was launched in February this year with a start-up grant of £19,500 from the co-operative Glasgow business development fund—a fund that was established as part of Glasgow City Council's drive to become a co-operative council. The aim of Bala Sport is to promote the use of

Fairtrade-certified sports balls. Bala balls are made by skilled people to the same specification as balls that are accredited by FIFA and they undergo the same rigorous testing. The only difference between a Bala ball and a FIFA ball is the logo, and I am with Bala when it says:

“we don't want to pay the fees imposed by FIFA for use of their logo—we'd rather pay the makers of our balls more”.

Every FIFA-certified ball that is purchased has involved the manufacturer or distributor paying a test fee to FIFA on top of a royalty fee that is paid for every ball that is sold, and those fees will be reflected in the purchase price. Buying a Bala ball ensures that the workers in Sialkot, Pakistan, who make the balls are paid fairly, have good working conditions and have made—as Neil Bibby rightly said—a democratic decision about how to invest their share of the profits. So far, they have invested in free eye tests and treatment for eye disease and defects, free school backpacks and scholarships for workers' children and a water purification plant that the entire community can use. Surely, that is a better use of money than payments to FIFA. When I was thinking about this debate this afternoon, it occurred to me that, if FIFA were to adopt Fairtrade footballs, that might help its rather tattered and tarnished reputation.

I was delighted to hear not only that Gleniffer high school is using Bala balls in its sports, but that it has become a shareholder in Bala Sports. That seems to me to be an excellent decision by the students and their teachers. It is an example of their support for fair trade, and I am sure that their experience of ethical investment is one that they will take with them into their lives beyond school. They deserve our congratulations, as do the students at Greenwood academy, who have also invested in Bala Sport.

I am very proud that Scotland is a fair trade nation, but achieving that accolade should be only the beginning of our campaign to make trade fair—I agree entirely with Linda Fabiani's comments on that issue—and the promotion of Bala balls should be part of that campaign. My colleague Neil Bibby has promoted the idea of a national football tournament utilising Fairtrade footballs. That is an excellent idea, which, as well as helping to promote fair trade and fairly traded footballs, could boost participation in football by girls and boys.

One in three of the bananas that are sold in UK supermarkets bears the Fairtrade mark, but the number of Fairtrade-certified sports balls that are sold in the UK is less than 0.25 per cent of the total number of balls sold. Bala Sport aims to increase that number significantly. Gleniffer high school is supporting it, and we should do so too.

17:21

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In today's edition of *The Times*, there is an interesting and what I think many people will regard as controversial article by Magnus Linklater in which he decries what he perceives to be the negativity that all too often surrounds Scottish football and contrasts it with the atmosphere that surrounds other sports in Scotland these days. However, I am sure that he would be the first to recognise that what has happened at Gleniffer is something to celebrate, because of the benefits that it brings not just to the local community, but to workers elsewhere.

I congratulate Neil Bibby on what I thought was a very moving and informative speech and on bringing his motion to Parliament. I also congratulate Gleniffer high school on being the first school to become an investor in Bala Sport. It is a tremendous accomplishment to be the first school to do that. I note that Patricia Ferguson said that Greenwood academy has also now invested in Bala, and I hope that it will not be long before other schools across Scotland are inspired to do the same. Such acts are extremely good for the spirit of local communities and for all those who are involved in the process of making the balls. I had not realised how impressive the statistics are until they were explained earlier in the debate.

Special mention must go to Dominic Tollan, who I understand was influential in encouraging Gleniffer high school's membership of and investment in Bala Sport. It is only right that individuals such as Mr Tollan receive our congratulations.

It is important to understand the background to Bala Sport's development. Patricia Ferguson provided some interesting information on how it came together as a co-operative to help workers in Pakistan by ensuring that those who make 70 per cent of the world's footballs receive a fair wage for their work and fair working conditions. Linda Fabiani made an excellent point about the need to spread the benefits of fair trade. She was right to say that the impression in the minds of many members of the public is that fair trade is about food, but it is not all about food by any stretch of the imagination—far from it. The benefits that have been described in the debate show how diverse fair trade can be.

The value of sport in that context is often forgotten. I agree with one aspect of Magnus Linklater's article—his homing in on the negativity that can surround sport. It is a great pity that we sometimes hear only about that. Many young people across Scotland are doing fantastic things, and it is good for us as MSPs to be able to highlight some of those activities, because they

are very special and they bind together the school and people in far-off countries.

It is important to promote collaboration between consumers, producers, non-governmental organisations and Governments to further fair trade in Scotland and worldwide. The benefits that that can bring are becoming increasingly evident. That must give all of us encouragement as we work together not only to secure market access to low-income countries but to tackle many of the social and cultural issues as well as the border obstacles to trade that such countries face. It is important that this Parliament has a strong united voice on this matter and that we support and promote the open-rules-based, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system.

Once again, I congratulate Neil Bibby on securing this debate, and I also congratulate the schools in question and Bala for the excellent work that they have done. I am sure that they have a bright future, and I certainly support the idea of holding an international tournament in Scotland to demonstrate how seriously we take the issue.

17:25

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): First of all, I thank Neil Bibby for securing this debate and Gleniffer high school and Greenwood academy for their participation in the scheme. I have visited Sialkot and have seen at first hand these footballs being made, and I can assure members that the people who produce them are very highly and exceptionally skilled.

I am sure that many Partick Thistle fans will be happy to learn that this Glasgow football club sells these Pakistan-made footballs with the official Partick Thistle logo on them. That made my grandson, who is a Partick Thistle supporter, very proud.

The Minister for Sport, Health Improvement and Mental Health (Jamie Hepburn): Hear, hear.

Hanzala Malik: Thank you.

Given that Pakistan is renowned throughout the world for manufacturing sporting equipment, including footballs and hockey and cricket balls—indeed, it is one of the world's largest manufacturers of pipe bags—one will not be surprised to learn that many of these skills can be found in the country. However, Neil Bibby made the important point that a fair day's work deserves a fair day's pay, and I think that the Bala scheme will be very good not only for the workers in Pakistan but the Pakistan Government. At the end of the day, it is competing in a world theatre, and it is important not only that these products are seen to be valued but that workers are paid fairly. I saw footballs being produced in Sialkot with Coca-Cola

logos and the logos of other very large companies, and they are used by world football tournaments and many other tournaments in the middle east and so on. These items from that part of the world are very popular and much in demand, and I am very thankful to people who want to ensure that the people involved are paid a fair wage for their work.

I also want to thank everyone who is involved in fair trade. I became aware of it when I first became a councillor; I was invited to one of the churches in my ward and saw for the first time various things that are manufactured around the world, including jam, tea, coffee and chocolate—which, I have to say, is a weakness of mine. When I understood the concept, I felt very proud that we in Scotland cared enough about people around the world to want to do something like this, and when I heard about this debate and the footballs made in Sialkot, I was really impressed and thought that it was an issue that I wanted to discuss and a debate that I wanted to take part in.

Finally, I want to send a message to the Government of Pakistan that its help and support in this matter will also be very important.

17:29

The Minister for Sport, Health Improvement and Mental Health (Jamie Hepburn): First, I say to Hanzala Malik that his grandson should always be very proud to be a Partick Thistle supporter. Of course, that is just my perspective, but I have no doubt that it is shared by Patricia Ferguson.

I am delighted to close the debate on behalf of the Government and I begin by thanking Neil Bibby for lodging the motion and other members for their contributions. I join Neil Bibby and other colleagues in congratulating the staff and especially the pupils at Gleniffer high school on their hard work in promoting fair trade generally and their interesting initiative with Bala Sport. It was very heartening to hear that Greenwood academy is following suit.

We are primarily focusing on Gleniffer high school's work with Bala Sport, but that work builds on the existing initiatives at the school. It should be placed on record—I am sure that Mr Bibby would want that, as well—that Gleniffer high school has a long-standing interest in the area, which it should be congratulated on. I know that that has led to the school being heavily involved in fundraising for Malawi. Linda Fabiani made a point about the Scottish Government and the SFA's partnership with Malawi for football coaching. That is an excellent initiative. I say to Linda Fabiani that I will undertake to look into her entirely reasonable point about the utilisation of fair trade equipment

as part of that project, and I will get back to her on that point.

Since 2007, the Scottish Government has awarded more than £1.2 million core funding to the Scottish Fair Trade Forum to take forward our ambition for Scotland to become a fair trade nation. I think that we were all collectively in the Parliament delighted to see Scotland achieve that in 2013. Although our funding has, I hope, been felt to be important, fair trade nation status would not have been possible without the people in cities, towns, villages, universities, schools and colleges throughout the country who have been committed to supporting fair trade. They are the individuals who make the difference. They often do so in their own small individual way to make a big and positive change around the world.

We now know that 100 per cent of local authority areas have active groups that are working towards Fairtrade status. Some 56 per cent of local authority areas have achieved Fairtrade status, and all the cities have Fairtrade city status. Some 88 of Scotland's 156 towns have either Fairtrade status or active groups that are working towards it. Linda Fabiani reminded us that Strathaven and Aberfeldy led the way on that. We have seen more and more people across the country buying fair trade products on a regular basis. Schools such as Gleniffer high school, whose teachers and pupils are leading the way by investing in Bala Sport and so have a direct impact on the lives of football stitchers in Pakistan, are the epitome of the effort across the country.

It is not just about footballs, of course. Over the past six years, the availability and range of Fairtrade products have continued to rise. More than 4,500 Fairtrade products are readily available, which means that consumers can buy everything from Fairtrade gold and clothes to wine and flowers. The list continues to grow.

As the number of Fairtrade products has risen, so has awareness of the Fairtrade mark. In the last poll that the Scottish Fair Trade Forum undertook, 81 per cent of the population recognised the Fairtrade mark. Some 63 per cent of people regularly buy Fairtrade products. That is positive, but it shows that there is still growth potential and more work still to be done.

It is very easy to assume that someone else is taking care of business and that we do not have to think about where the produce that we buy comes from or how the choices that we make affect the choices that someone else will have to make, such as having to choose which of their children will get an education, who needs medicine the most, or who will eat that day. We all know that that is the miserable and grinding reality that is faced by millions of people around the world each and every day. That knowledge should spur us on to

spread the message that making small changes to the way we shop will make a massive difference to the lives of others. We all have a responsibility to do what we can, and we can all buy Fairtrade products, not just because that will ensure that small-scale farmers and other producers are paid a fair price and can provide for their families but because of the impact that it has on them as people. Leading a dignified life, making our own decisions and controlling our own futures are things that we all have a right to expect whatever our circumstances and wherever in the world we happen to have been born.

Fair trade work is, of course, just a small part of the work that we as a Government are involved in to help to promote fairness and equality not just here in Scotland but around the world. Our international development and climate justice funds are making a difference to the lives of vulnerable people in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia, and our commitment to tackling climate change and promoting renewable energy shows that we are taking responsibility for our actions and the impact that they have on people around the world.

As a fair trade nation, we are leading the way in highlighting how support for fair trade means support for people in the developing world, just as Gleniffer high school is leading the way in highlighting how support for Bala Sport and Fairtrade sports balls means support for stitchers in Pakistan. I know that the school is working closely with Bala Sport's managing director, Angus Coull, to promote the organisation and its community share issue. I hope that the publicity that they help to generate inspires other schools—we have heard that it is starting to do so—sports groups and sporting organisations to get involved.

Liz Smith spoke of the power of sport to leverage social change and Neil Bibby spoke about the power of football in particular to make a difference through its universality. We have heard about action by football clubs, such as the match between Stirling Albion and Heart of Midlothian, which Neil Bibby mentioned, and the work that Partick Thistle has done, which Hanzala Malik mentioned. We also know that the SFA has a contract for the provision of Fairtrade footballs at the grass-roots community level. Neil Bibby also spoke of the leadership role in other sports on fair trade, and I was delighted to hear that some work was undertaken previously with the Scottish Rugby Union to try to promote Fairtrade rugby balls.

Patricia Ferguson: When the minister mentioned leadership, it occurred to me that we heard in the past 24 hours of the appointment of Louise Martin—a very worthy woman and Scot—as president of the Commonwealth Games

Federation. Given her new role, I wonder whether we might contact her to urge that the Commonwealth Games Federation take account of the availability of fairly traded sports equipment, particularly sports balls.

Jamie Hepburn: I am not sure that I welcome that intervention, because now I will be in trouble with Louise Martin for not being the person who mentioned her appointment. I of course offer my congratulations to her and will congratulate her in writing on her appointment. However, I am in regular contact with her and am happy to raise the fair trade issue with her.

Neil Bibby and Patricia Ferguson also raised the innovative idea of a national Fairtrade football tournament, and I am very happy to consider any serious proposal made on that; if one is forthcoming, I will give it my utmost consideration.

I thank Neil Bibby again for his motion and I thank all who have contributed to the debate for continuing to highlight our shared commitment to ensuring that we in Scotland all play our part in helping make the world a fairer place.

Meeting closed at 17:37.

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