



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 10 February 2016

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

Portfolio Question Time

Finance, Constitution and Economy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time. At the outset, I remind Parliament that, in order to get in as many members as possible, I will need short and succinct questions, and answers to match.

HM Revenue and Customs (Centralisation)

1. Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what the impact would be on Scotland's economy of the proposed centralisation of HM Revenue and Customs offices. (S4O-05534)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): As I indicated in my letter to Margaret McCulloch on 27 January, I know that we share concerns about the organisational change programme that HMRC announced on 12 November. Over a 10-year period, the number of HMRC jobs in Scotland is estimated to reduce by around 825, as local offices are closed and centralised in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

That is a worrying situation for staff, those whom they serve and the local economies concerned. We are fully committed to working with all interested parties at local, national and United Kingdom level, including the trade unions, in order to mitigate the impact of HMRC office closures in Scotland.

Margaret McCulloch: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response and for his correspondence with me about the impact of the planned HMRC closures in my region.

What plans does the Scottish Government have to provide assistance to trade unions and community leaders to help them to build a case for the retention of HMRC's offices in the central belt and for the continuation of employment for all tax office workers in Cumbernauld and East Kilbride?

John Swinney: In my earlier answer, I signalled my willingness to work with all relevant parties to make that case. We have been in touch with the UK Government on the issue and have raised it with HMRC in particular. We have made the case

for maintaining the expertise that exists in these facilities, and marshalling those arguments will be essential to put in place a credible proposition that will encourage HMRC to take a different approach.

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): Is the cabinet secretary aware that the announced closure date of the HMRC operation in East Kilbride is dependent on the lease negotiations for the building, which was disposed of by Gordon Brown to a subsidiary of a company whose financial arrangements enable it to avoid paying UK corporation tax? Will he impress on the relevant UK minister the importance of maintaining the East Kilbride operation and of the negotiation with the Guernsey-based Mapeley group being robust?

John Swinney: Linda Fabiani highlights some of the practical and detailed issues that it will be challenging to address.

I reiterate what I said: the Government is willing to work with all interested parties to marshal a strong case for preserving the facilities in question and the employment that they provide. It is vital that the specialist skills that are available in those centres are able to be deployed to undertake the very important work of tax collection and to manage those resources so that they can be utilised to support public services in Scotland.

Economy (Aberdeen)

2. Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to support the Aberdeen economy. (S4O-05535)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): With the global downturn in the oil and gas sector, the region faces challenges, but there are also significant opportunities for the future. On 1 February, the Scottish Government announced the provision of further support to the oil and gas sector, including a new £12 million transition training fund and £12.5 million for oil and gas innovation and further business support.

The Scottish Government believes that Aberdeen and the north-east are central to driving future growth and prosperity in Scotland, which is why we recently committed to investing £125 million through a city region deal agreement, which will be matched by the United Kingdom Government. The Scottish Government believes that more can be done to achieve a more significant step change in the economy of the north-east, which is why we also announced a further £254 million of additional Scottish Government investment to help to cement Aberdeen as one of the world's leading cities for investment and business. That funding is paving

the way for massive investment in innovation, digital connectivity and infrastructure across the region.

Mark McDonald: I welcome the near half a billion pounds of investment that the minister has highlighted has been provided on top of the nearly £1 billion that is being invested in the Aberdeen western peripheral route and the improvements to the Inverness rail line. However, does the minister share my disappointment that the sum total that the United Kingdom Government, with its broad shoulders, has so far been able to cough up is £125 million for the city deal and £20 million to support the oil and gas industry, amounting to £145 million? Does he agree with me that the Chancellor of the Exchequer needs to make meaningful changes in his March budget to support the industry and the wider economy of the city?

Fergus Ewing: We did seek a greater contribution from the UK Government; that was not successful.

In answer to the second question, it is absolutely imperative that George Osborne uses the opportunity of the spring budget to announce a substantial package of tax measures, not because tax is the major issue facing operators at the moment—that is survival—but because the chancellor providing a substantial package of tax reduction measures will be the loudest, clearest signal of a boost of confidence in this key sector. It is absolutely central to giving the industry a “second wind”, as one of the leaders I met on Monday put it.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the minister acknowledge that the bid for the Aberdeen city deal contained projects to the value of more than £1 billion in devolved areas that the Scottish Government has yet to agree to support? Does he accept that it is in those devolved areas that the city deal falls so far short of what was hoped for and will he, therefore, indicate the Government's intention to bring forward funding for those projects at the earliest possible date?

Fergus Ewing: I am afraid to say that I do not agree with that presentation of the facts. Indeed, I was able to see for myself some of the investment that is taking place in Aberdeen and the north-east on Sunday and Monday during a visit to Aberdeen. I was able to see the Inveramsay bridge nearing completion; to discuss the western peripheral road, which is going ahead on budget—from memory, at a cost of £744 million; to meet Sir Ian Wood and discuss Opportunity North East and the exciting opportunities not only in oil and gas but in food and drink and in life sciences; and to learn about the Scottish Government's investment in other areas such as health and housing.

Therefore, I think that Mr Macdonald's characterisation of the position is unnecessarily churlish as well as being inaccurate. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Minister, if you turn away from your microphone, members in the chamber cannot hear you.

Local Government Finance Settlement

3. Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of how the reduction in the local government budget settlement could impact on the economy and inequality. (S4O-05536)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government funding proposals for the coming financial year deliver a strong but challenging financial settlement for local government. Taking into account the addition of £250 million to support the integration of health and social care, next year's reduction in local authority overall estimated expenditure is less than one per cent.

I believe that such a reduction should have a minimal impact on the economy or inequality. Scotland's councils should be able to address those challenges from a healthy base, as local government funding has been rising in Scotland in recent years, with core funding being protected and new money being provided for additional responsibilities.

Hanzala Malik: The Scottish Government has added to the Tory cuts and has squeezed local councils further. Glasgow City Council is facing a real-terms cut of £64 million. I have already had several elderly minority ethnic constituents and minority ethnic organisations raise concerns about the tripling of the cost of their day centres. Subsequent job losses are also expected in the area.

Does the cabinet secretary agree with me that as resources are cut for specialist services, the Government should assess the impact of those cuts on minority ethnic staff and services and make sure that an equality impact assessment is carried out before any further jobs or services are lost in that field?

John Swinney: The Government's budget is subject to assessment for equality considerations as part of the budget process and I publish the equality impact assessment along with the budget. I did that in December. I maintain on-going dialogue with the equality and budget advisory group, which always makes a fruitful and thoughtful contribution to the budget process. I warmly thank its members for the contribution that they make to the assessment.

It is for Glasgow City Council to determine the equalities impact of any specific decisions that it makes on programmes. The council has duties that it has to fulfil, and I am certain that it will attend to those as part of its decision-making process.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary tell us how much more the City of Edinburgh Council has received in funding for the current financial year, over and above the funding formula allocation and the level of reserves available to the council? How does the local government settlement in Scotland compare with the cuts that are being imposed on councils south of the border?

John Swinney: The Government has taken two decisions that are material to the City of Edinburgh Council's funding. One of those was negotiated with our dear late colleague, Margo MacDonald, in the very early years of the Scottish National Party Administration, when she made the case for a capital city supplement. In 2015-16, that generated £3.9 million for the city of Edinburgh, beyond the allocation that would have been determined by the formula. Mr Eadie will also be aware of the application of the additional funding floor that I established, which in the current financial year generates £13.7 million extra for the City of Edinburgh Council on top of the funding formula. According to the most recently available statistics, the City of Edinburgh Council had general reserves totalling £123 million.

The Parliament has considered the comparative strength of local authority funding in Scotland compared with the significant reductions that have taken place in authorities south of the border. That funding creates a strong platform for local authorities to undertake their financial planning, and has been part of the long-term commitment of the SNP Administration.

Fiscal Framework (Adjustment Mechanism)

4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the impact on Scotland's future budgets would be of not adopting the indexed deduction per capita method as the block grant adjustment mechanism in the fiscal framework. (S4O-05537)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): Independent academics such as Professor Anton Muscatelli have estimated that the proposals that would take forward the levels deduction or indexed deduction mechanisms would reduce the Scottish Government's budget by up to £7 billion over a 10-year period. Any mechanism that would systematically reduce the Scottish Government's budget simply as a result of devolution and before

the Scottish Government makes any policy choices is unacceptable and will not be agreed by the Scottish Government.

Kenneth Gibson: Does the cabinet secretary agree that the failure of the United Kingdom Government to agree to fairness in the no-detriment principle in delivering the fiscal framework will be a breach of faith in relation to the vow made to the Scottish people before the referendum; that it will show the Prime Minister's promise to deliver the Smith commission proposals to be false; and, as we approach another referendum—this time on Europe—that it will demonstrate that the Prime Minister's words cannot be trusted?

John Swinney: We are at a key moment in the fiscal framework discussions. As the First Minister set out yesterday, the key issue in resolving the question of the block grant adjustment is the interpretation of the no-detriment principle. I am confident that when the Smith commission made its recommendations on what powers were to be devolved it was not volunteering a systemic reduction in the Scottish block of expenditure as a consequence. The Smith commission was agreeing to the devolution of the powers on what is essentially a no-better-off, no-worse-off principle. The exercising of powers is a different matter, because there is clearly a risk that must be accepted by the Scottish Government and we are prepared to accept it.

The no-detriment principle is central to the discussion, which hinges on the question whether we should be better off or worse off as the consequence of the devolution of powers. If we adopt a mechanism other than indexed deduction per capita, we will be worse off, which is why that would be unacceptable to the Scottish Government.

Lesley Brennan (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give us an absolute assurance that the Scottish Government will remain at the table until an agreement that is fair to all is secured?

John Swinney: The Scottish Government is committed to the negotiations. I have now taken part in nine meetings of the joint exchequer committee. I do not think that anybody could question the amount of time, energy and commitment that I have put into trying to resolve these questions.

It is clear that we have to have difficult discussions in order to resolve our different interpretations of the no-detriment principle. I am committed to continuing the discussions to get to an outcome that is fair to the people of Scotland and fair to the people of the rest of the United Kingdom. That is what the no-detriment principle

is, and neither Scotland nor the rest of the United Kingdom would be better or worse off as a consequence of the devolution of powers under the mechanism that I have advanced.

The Scottish Government will not sign up to a mechanism that is damaging to the interests of the people of Scotland; that was not what the Smith commission intended.

Fiscal Framework (Agreement)

5. Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made in finding an agreement on the fiscal framework. (S4O-05538)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): I met the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on Monday for the ninth time with the intention of agreeing a fiscal framework for Scotland that meets the Smith commission recommendations.

Any agreement must be true to Smith and fair to Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. It has not yet been possible to reach such an agreement but the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and I are committed to continuing to meet with a view to reaching agreement shortly.

Stuart McMillan: I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary could highlight what the process will be if no deal can be reached before the dissolution of Parliament. For example, could the discussions reconvene after the parliamentary elections in May?

John Swinney: The Government's objective is to secure agreement on the fiscal framework. That will be welcomed across the board, provided that the agreement is acceptable to the Scottish Parliament. It will enable a much wider discussion and debate around issues connected with the exercising of the Smith powers that the Government wishes to be able to have.

The convener of the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee has asked me to ensure that a fiscal framework agreement is available by the end of this week so that the committee can properly consider its contents before taking evidence from me during the week after next week's parliamentary recess. I have now written to Mr Crawford to ask the committee to identify what further flexibility it might have to enable discussions to continue, so that Parliament can have the proper opportunity that I wish it to have to fully scrutinise the contents of the fiscal framework.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): Surely it is clear to everyone except the UK Government that population increase is

relevant when analysing the growth of tax receipts. Is it not therefore essential to focus on the growth of the UK tax base per capita in order to be true to the no-detriment principle, to treat Scotland and the rest of the UK equally, and to avoid money being withdrawn from Scotland simply because the English population is growing at a faster rate than ours?

John Swinney: I agree unreservedly with Mr Chisholm's cogent and well-articulated point. From his extensive experience with such issues, he will also be aware that population difference is already factored into the Barnett formula, so Scotland already carries risks in relation to the growth in our population compared with growth in the rest of United Kingdom. The analysis that Mr Chisholm has presented to Parliament is absolutely accurate and I agree with it in its entirety.

Fife Council (Budget 2016-17)

6. Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy has had with Fife Council regarding its budget for 2016-17. (S4O-05539)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): I have not so far had direct discussions with Fife Council about its 2016-17 budget. I have had a series of meetings with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, of which Fife Council is a member. I have also written to the leader of Fife Council setting out the details of the 2016-17 local government finance settlement. I have indicated to Councillor Ross that, when I am in Fife next week for a meeting of the Tullis Russell task force, I will see him to discuss those issues.

Cara Hilton: Thanks to the choices that have been made in the Scottish Government's budget, Fife Council faces an additional cut of £17 million, on top of the cuts of £21 million that are anticipated for this year. Two thirds of the people who responded to Fife Council's budget consultation said that, to make up for those cuts and protect local services, they would be willing to pay more council tax. However, yesterday, the leader of Fife Council, David Ross, was forced to accept the Scottish Government's budget settlement, thanks to the sanctions that Fife Council would face if it went along with the wishes of Fifers. The result will be job losses, cuts to third sector projects and cuts to our schools. How does slashing council budgets fit in with a commitment to local democracy and fighting austerity?

John Swinney: When we take into account the investment that has been made in the integration of health and social care, which all of us accept concerns an integral part of local authority

services, the local government finance settlement represents a 1 per cent reduction in local authority revenue. We need to get a sense of perspective about some of the language that has been used on this issue.

The second point concerns the contents of the issues about which I have been concerned in the local government settlement. The integration of health and social care, the payment of the living wage to social care workers, the protection of the numbers of teachers in order to preserve the pupil teacher ratio and the freezing of the council tax are all material issues that matter to local residents with regard to the delivery of their local services. I have been anxious to ensure that we secure a local authority settlement that protects all those items.

I appreciate the fact that 32 local authorities have now indicated their willingness to accept the Government's local government settlement. That enables us to proceed to its implementation. What is surprising is that the Labour Party seems to be taking exception to an investment of £250 million in social care, the payment of the living wage to members of staff in the social care sector and the maintenance of the council tax freeze, which I thought that the Labour Party supported—certainly, many of its local authority members were elected in 2012 on a commitment to freeze council tax. Further, I would have thought that maintaining the teaching population would have been critical to improving attainment in our schools. I am, therefore, at a loss as to why the Labour Party cannot support the Government's approach.

Superfast Broadband (East Lothian)

7. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what the target is for access to superfast broadband in East Lothian by 2018 and whether it expects to achieve it. (S4O-05540)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The digital Scotland superfast broadband programme aims to deliver fibre broadband to at least 95 per cent of all homes and businesses in East Lothian by the end of 2017, and is on track to deliver that target. Commercial coverage alone would have delivered fibre broadband to only around 67 per cent of homes and businesses.

Iain Gray: The fact is that nearly half of the residents in East Lothian do not have access to superfast broadband and just 57 per cent of premises in the county have that access. It seems extremely unlikely that the target that the cabinet secretary has just described will be achieved by the end of next year. Indeed, East Lothian has one of the worst figures in Scotland—better than only the extremely remote local authority areas such as

Orkney, Shetland and the Highlands. Will the cabinet secretary take some action to prioritise getting East Lothian up to speed so that he can reach the target that he has just recommitted himself to?

John Swinney: I will consider Mr Gray's points in detail, and I may well raise them with BT when I meet its representatives at 4 o'clock this afternoon. However, I want to reassure Mr Gray on a number of points. First, the commitment to at least 95 per cent of all homes and businesses in East Lothian having access to superfast broadband is a contractual agreement with BT. It has to be fulfilled and I assure Mr Gray that it will be, in terms of the contractual obligations.

On progress towards that, we have already surpassed the target of 85 per cent coverage by the end of 2015—that target was met in June 2015. The completion of this programme is absolutely practical.

Mr Gray's constituency will have a range of properties and homes that are not covered by the 95 per cent assurance. I give him a commitment that the Government is increasingly focusing on ensuring that those individuals are not disadvantaged by not being part of the core programme at the moment. We are looking at various technological and programme solutions that can ensure that broadband is available to as many households and businesses in Scotland as possible.

Draft Budget 2016-17 (Public Services)

8. Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the expected impact of its draft budget 2016-17 on public services. (S4O-05541)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): Within a challenging financial settlement, the Government continues to provide the resources that are necessary to protect and reform our public services, thereby ensuring that public resources better meet the needs of the people of Scotland. The budget will increase the national health service budget by £500 million to around £13 billion, invest £250 million in the radical reform of health and social care, protect the front-line police resource budget and deliver a pay rise for around 50,000 of Scotland's lowest-paid workers.

Our budget will equip the country for the future and lay the foundations for the reforms that will define the next parliamentary session.

Mary Fee: In my region, Renfrewshire Council has had its budget cut by £13.5 million, North Ayrshire Council by £13.3 million and Inverclyde Council by £8.8 million. Will the cabinet secretary

explain to my constituents why he is implementing savage cuts to local authorities that will have an impact on education provision, environmental services and recreational facilities and will result in further job losses in under-pressure local authorities throughout West Scotland?

John Swinney: The comments that Mary Fee made are misplaced in two respects. First, it is a stretch of the vocabulary to describe a 1 per cent reduction in local authority expenditure as savage. What is savage is a 27 per cent reduction in local authority expenditure south of the border. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

John Swinney: Secondly, Mary Fee's comments did not take into account the investment of £250 million in the reform of health and social care.

Mary Fee: That is nonsense.

John Swinney: I hear Mary Fee. *[Interruption.]* I have not been able to catch up with all the shouting and muttering that has been going on from Labour members, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I have called for order.

John Swinney: Every time that I have mentioned the £250 million investment in the reform of health and social care, there has been muttering and moaning about it from Labour members. That is precisely what the Labour Party called for. A week before the budget debate, it called for us to invest in health and social care. I have done exactly that to integrate those services to ensure that we can meet the needs of individuals, provide additional health and social care packages and pay the living wage to social care workers. I thought that the Labour Party might have supported that.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): In recent weeks, Labour MSPs have suggested spending additional resources on building more homes, the NHS, climate change and local government, for example. Has the cabinet secretary been provided with any detail as to how the additional 1p in tax that Labour proposes to raise will be allocated to meeting its stated commitments, which now total £5 billion?

John Swinney: The only way that I could rationalise that is to say that the Labour Party intends to spend the penny several times over.

Local Government Funding (Reform)

9. Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans to reform local government funding. (S4O-05542)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): Before the end of the current parliamentary session, we will introduce plans for reform of the present council tax that reflect the principles of the commission on local tax reform's report; enter into consultation with local government about the possible future assignation of a proportion of income tax receipts, thereby giving local authorities an incentive to boost economic growth in their areas; and launch a review of the non-domestic rates system in Scotland.

Nanette Milne: There is increasing concern that north-east households, which already pay the highest council tax levels in Scotland, will be hit by new higher bands that the commission and local tax reform proposed. Any change to the banding system, such as the introduction of two new top-rate bands, could mean that council tax in Aberdeen will increase from £2,461 a year to around £3,960. Therefore, Aberdeen, which has the worst local authority funding settlement in the country, could soon have even higher council tax rates than the rest of Scotland. Are the cabinet secretary and his Government willing to allow north-east taxpayers to be disproportionately affected in that way?

John Swinney: The Government will undertake a considered analysis of the commission on local tax reform's report. We will formulate our proposals accordingly within the context of the issues that the report raises.

As Dr Milne will be aware, the Government has put in place specific funding that is designed to address Aberdeen City Council's funding position in comparison with other authorities in Scotland. The position on funding is a product of the local government distribution formula, which is jointly agreed between the Government and local authorities, but we have taken exceptional action to strengthen local authority funding in the north-east of Scotland, and we will pay particular attention to the issues and considerations of the economic situation of the north-east of Scotland in any review that we undertake.

Scottish Rate of Income Tax

10. Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the impact would be of raising the Scottish rate of income tax to 11 per cent. (S4O-05543)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): Following the United Kingdom spending review in November, HM Revenue and Customs updated its forecasts for the direct effects of illustrative tax changes. It

forecast that a 1p increase in the Scottish rate of income tax, allowing for potential behavioural responses to such a change, would have raised £475 million for the tax year 2016-17. HMRC will review that forecast following the UK Government's budget in March.

Christina McKelvie: Given that the Opposition policy includes a £100 rebate or payment or benefit—we do not have any detail as to what it would be—what does the cabinet secretary suggest would be the likely administration cost to local government of administering a scheme for low-income earners to get that £100 payment or benefit, or whatever it is?

John Swinney: The first thing to accept is that the need to put in place some form of mitigation demonstrates my point that this is a tax change that would have a detrimental effect on the incomes of low-income households. That is the principal consideration that persuaded me not to raise the Scottish rate of income tax beyond 10p. The second point, on which I marshalled evidence for the Finance Committee back in January, is that there would have to be the legislative and operational basis for putting a rebate in place. I set out to the committee the fact that I do not believe that it is within the legislative competence of this Parliament to legislate for such a rebate and that I do not think that the practical issues are in place to enable it to be undertaken.

As for the costs, we are several weeks into—actually, are we? No, it was just last week—my goodness, doesn't time fly when we are enjoying ourselves? Just last week, the Labour Party set out its proposals, but we are no further forward in understanding the detail of how it proposes to deliver the rebate or what the administrative cost of the rebate would be. I simply say for comparative purposes that the cost of ensuring that council tax reduction and housing benefit are paid to individuals in Scotland is £41.1 million. That is an illustrative number as to the cost of a rebate scheme of this type.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): The Institute for Public Policy Research, David Eiser of the University of Stirling and the Resolution Foundation understand the policy, and the Resolution Foundation says that the lowest four deciles in Scotland—the 40 per cent lowest-paid Scots—would have no net consequence from the policy. Does the cabinet secretary think that they are wrong?

John Swinney: That is based on the heroic assumption that it is possible for the rebate to be paid. I asked last week for the Labour Party to set out the detail of how the rebate would be paid. If it wants to be taken seriously, Labour should set out the detail, not just imagine it or hope that it can be done. If the member will tell us the detail, we will

explore and examine it, but the Labour Party published a proposal—

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Would you support it?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

John Swinney: Mr Bibby will know that Labour said that the cost of administering the rebate would be £1 million. I think that Parliament and the public are entitled to understand the assumptions underpinning that number, given that it costs £41 million to administer housing benefit and council tax reduction, which are comparable types of schemes to the one that is proposed. Actually, they do not even touch the same number of cases. There are a potential 800,000 cases in the Labour Party rebate, and the council tax reduction and housing benefit deal with only 500,000 cases, so before the leader of the Labour Party asks me questions on that point, a little bit of detail would be nice.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Raising the Scottish rate of income tax will take money out of the pockets of hard-working families across all income scales. Has the Scottish Government done any assessment of the impact on Scottish economic growth of that spending power being lost to the economy?

John Swinney: As part of my consideration of the Scottish rate of income tax, I looked at various questions around behavioural response, informed by the analysis that was undertaken by HM Revenue and Customs. Some of that is illustrative with regard to the point that Mr Fraser highlights, but a much wider economic impact assessment would cover further ground on the issues that he raises.

Draft Budget 2016-17 (General Practice)

11. Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy considers that the draft budget for 2016-17 provides adequate resources for general practice. (S4O-05544)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): In the draft budget for 2016-17, the Scottish Government has increased general practitioner and primary care funding to £780.1 million, which includes investment of £45 million in the primary care development fund. That will provide significant additional resource for general practice. The Scottish Government is also working to transform primary care, including developing new ways of working with multidisciplinary teams, reducing bureaucracy and working constructively with the GP workforce to

ensure that services are fit for the future and meet the needs of the people of Scotland.

Siobhan McMahon: Analysis by the Royal College Of General Practitioners Scotland has shown that, under the current draft budget plans, the proportion of the budget that is devoted directly to general practice in Scotland is set to reduce further. I have received several representations from my constituents—some of whom are practising GPs—who have asked that the Scottish Government reassesses the budget and ensures that an additional 0.5 per cent is available for general practice to begin the move towards an 11 per cent share of the overall national health service budget. Will the cabinet secretary undertake to consider the issues that my constituents have raised and work with colleagues to identify an appropriate way forward?

John Swinney: I recognise the importance of the issues that Siobhan McMahon raises in relation to general practice. We engage actively with the Royal College of General Practitioners on such questions, and I know that those issues have been aired in public. I will certainly reflect on the issues that the RCGP has raised in finalising the budget.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 12 has not been lodged. An explanation has been provided.

Oil and Gas Industry (Jobs)

13. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many jobs in Scotland it estimates have been lost as a result of the downturn in the oil and gas industry. (S4O-05546)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The number of redundancies or job consultations that have been announced by oil and gas companies in Scotland has reached almost 10,000. The industry body Oil & Gas UK estimates that the total employment that is supported by the sector across the United Kingdom has fallen by approximately 65,000 jobs. We continue to monitor the impact that low oil prices are having on the oil and gas industry and its wider supply chain, and that will be discussed at the next energy jobs task force meeting, which will take place in March.

The task force has helped to support more than 2,500 individuals and 100 employers through the current downturn and will continue to support the industry to improve collaboration, co-operation and innovation. Last week, we announced a £12 million transition training fund that will augment the work of the task force and will offer grants to individuals to support their redeployment through retraining or further education.

Lewis Macdonald: Has the minister read this week's state of the industry report from the trade union offshore co-ordinating group? It notes that

"insufficient up-to-date economic and labour market data are available to paint an accurate picture of the impact the falling oil price has had on the Scottish economy",

and highlights recent increases in claimant count unemployment of as much as 80 per cent year on year in the north-east. Will he undertake at his hand to address that serious undercounting of the number of workers who have lost their jobs, in order to allow Government agencies to provide adequate support and trade unions to do their job and protect their members?

Fergus Ewing: On Monday, I discussed many of those issues with Grahame Smith. This morning, I wrote to the newly formed offshore co-ordinating group to seek a meeting to discuss the issues.

We entirely agree that the issues are extremely important, and we are determined to continue to do everything practical within our power to assist those individuals who need assistance. Some of them may not seek employment or may find employment by their own efforts, but those who need support will get it.

That is why the First Minister announced last Monday in Aberdeen the £12 million transition training fund; why I was in Aberdeen this Monday for discussions at three different meetings with Sir Ian Wood, with the industry leadership group and with senior representatives from the service companies; and why, incidentally, I was in Fort William yesterday discussing with the Underwater Centre—which I believe is the best-quality diving centre in the world—how the training fund can be best deployed. I think that Mr Macdonald and I have similar objectives, and I am happy to continue to work with him to achieve them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Dennis Robertson may ask a very brief supplementary question.

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): What discussions is the Government having with the oil and gas sector and the wider supply chain to ensure that the appropriate skills will be retained in the event of the recovery, which I hope will be in the not-too-distant future?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be brief, please, minister.

Fergus Ewing: Mr Robertson has identified an absolutely key point. If we lose skills, teams of experts in fields such as drilling and subsea exploration, and divers, when we emerge from the cycle—as most experts predict will happen, of course—we will not have the skills that we require to serve an industry that has an excellent future as

well as a proud past of achievement. That is precisely why we have set up the £12 million transition training fund package. My job, working with my colleagues in the Scottish Government, Aberdeen City Council, Oil & Gas UK, Opportunity North East and the industry as a whole, is to ensure that that money is used to maximum effect and as quickly as possible to help the people whom Mr Robertson has identified as requiring support for the future of the industry.

Education

14:41

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Under standing orders rule 7.2.3, the Presiding Officer may stop a member speaking if they depart from the subject of a debate. I seek your advice on what you may judge under that rule to be the subject of the debate that we are about to start.

The debate is entitled “Scotland’s Future Prosperity”, but the terms of the motion are substantially more narrowly drawn to refer only to education. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Order, please, while I hear the point of order.

Stewart Stevenson: Can you advise me, Presiding Officer, whether the title of the motion, which constitutes the title of the debate, and the terms of the motion stand equally in determining what you consider to be the subject of the debate? In particular—I say this not because I envisage that it will happen but for future reference—would it be in order for someone to make a speech that referred to Scotland’s future prosperity but made no reference to education? We are, of course, about to have a very important debate on education, and I do not intend to diminish the importance of that subject. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

The member is correct that I can stop a member speaking if they depart from the subject of a debate. In fact, most members in the chamber will know that, on occasion in members’ business debates, I have been known to do so. The subject of the debate is determined by the terms of the motion and the amendments, not the title of the motion. I judge whether a contribution is relevant in each case. In the case that Mr Stevenson has asked about, I advise the member to refer to education in his contribution, given the terms of the motion and the amendments.

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-15588, in the name of Iain Gray, on Scotland’s future prosperity. I call Kezia Dugdale to speak to and move the motion.

14:43

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): Education is my passion. I was raised by teachers, and I learned from them how education can enrich lives and overcome any predetermined destiny. Education offers a first chance for individuals to blossom into the people they are capable of

becoming and a second chance to start again and choose a new life.

Our schools and nurseries are where we place our children's future into the trust of the Government's hands. Our colleges and universities are where we seed the future prosperity of our nation.

Education is both an anti-poverty policy and our most important economic policy. Education is everything. Our nurseries, schools, colleges and universities are the stairway out of disadvantage, and they are the map that shows us where to locate our potential. Just ask any of the big thinkers on the left: Joseph Stiglitz tells us that, if we do not invest in education,

"we are transmitting advantages and disadvantages across generations",

while Thomas Piketty tells us:

"the best way to increase wages and reduce wage inequalities in the long run is to invest in education and skill."

The sad truth is that investing in education has not been the priority of this Scottish National Party Government. When this Parliament was established in 1999, we spent £204 more per person on education than the United Kingdom average. Today that difference has fallen to just £18. We still have higher public spending than the UK; we just do not spend it on education. Education must be our national priority: the very first call for resources and the very last place that we choose to cut.

Yet the SNP cuts and cuts and cuts. Teacher numbers are at a 10-year low after local council funding has been cut and cut. The amount spent on each primary pupil has been cut by over £560. Primary pupils—cut. Secondary school spend per pupil has been cut by £285. Even nurseries, which are supposedly the signature policy of this First Minister, have faced cuts of £290 per person.

Audit Scotland found that every local authority has cut spending, and almost every council has had to cut teacher numbers. This is a Government that came to power promising to cut primary 1 to 3 class sizes to 18 or less, yet today just one in eight primary 1 to 3 pupils is in a class under 18 in size, and one in four of our five to seven-year-olds is being taught in a class of more than 25.

The SNP keeps on cutting: more cuts to childcare, £130 million less for education in the current budget, and hundreds of millions of pounds more of cuts to the local authorities that run our local schools.

Enough. Today we put a simple proposition before Parliament: no more cuts to education. We ask MSPs of all parties to vote to support one principle, in one sentence:

"that education spending should be protected in real terms over the next five years."

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Kezia Dugdale: Let me make a bit more progress.

That sentence means one thing: we will not cut education. There are no party politics in our motion and no judgment on other parties' education proposals, records or plans—just that simple statement. The parties that will oppose our motion today leave only one conclusion: that their plans include cutting education further.

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): Given that Kezia Dugdale's plans for income tax do not meet the cost of the proposal that is laid out in her party's motion, can she tell us where the remainder will be found? Does she intend to amend the budget so that it explains that?

Kezia Dugdale: I will come on to the detail of that in a second. We do not have just one progressive tax policy with which to invest in education and the future of public services—we have four. We have yet to see a single one from the SNP.

Our motion is simple, and the request it makes is not an unreasonable one. Every party in this chamber has made spending promises that reach into the next parliamentary session. None of us has any problem offering the good news to voters, but, as the debate on income tax in the last few days has exposed, when it comes to telling voters the truth about the harder choices that we must make, most run for cover.

Let us take a look at the SNP's plans. It has promised to protect spending on the national health service in real terms over the next five years, to protect spending on police in real terms over the next five years, and to protect the small business bonus over the next five years. It has no problem in making long-term spending commitments. Will it make the same commitment to protect education spending in real terms over the next five years?

Mark McDonald: The member highlighted three policy areas that we have committed to protect for the next five years. Will she confirm whether she agrees with those commitments and whether the Labour Party will also sign up to them?

Kezia Dugdale: I posed a question, and I was hoping that Mark McDonald would attempt to answer it, but he did not. Of course we support those goals, but I mentioned them to draw a contrast. If the member and his party can focus their spending on the NHS, the police and the small business scheme, what is it about education

and investing in our young people's future that so offends them?

The truth is that the SNP can do one of three things in order to rectify its position when it comes to education. It can cut areas that are protected under its current plans; it can make even bigger cuts to an even smaller number of unprotected areas such as transport, culture or justice; or it can, as we have done, be honest about the need to find new resources. The choice that we on the Labour benches have made is not an easy choice, but we cannot go on in Scotland with a Government that pretends to stand on the left but, when it comes to the crunch, stands for nothing.

That is why Scottish Labour has made a very clear commitment to protect education spending in real terms over the next five years. We can do that honestly because we have set out how we will use the powers that we have and the powers to come, with a 50p top rate to invest in closing the gap in our schools so that a child's chances in life do not depend on how much their parents earn, the Scottish rate of income tax being set 1p higher to protect schools and local services from cuts, and half a billion pounds more investment in our future.

That is our choice. That is the Labour choice, and when people reflect on it and realise the scale of the cuts that are coming to their communities, they will know that the truth cannot be avoided. There is a choice. Some of us can pay a little more, or we can all get a lot less. We should make no mistake—the cuts are so severe that we will all be affected by them. They will eat into the very fabric of our society and the social contract that binds us all together. They are not just cuts to our schools, but cuts to the future prosperity of our nation.

If we believe—as I do—that the greatest natural resource that this country has is its people, we have to invest in their future. We are faced with a global race for skills and knowledge, and the only way that Scotland can compete in that race is by investing in all our people.

SNP ministers say that they have no choice but to cut funding for schools and nurseries, yet the reality is that we have no alternative but to invest in the future. We simply cannot afford not to do that. Time and again, I have heard the First Minister say that education is her number 1 priority. I ask members to forgive me for saying that the hundreds of millions of pounds-worth of cuts to schools and other public services is a funny way of showing it.

New analysis by economists in the Scottish Parliament shows that, under the SNP's plans, more than £2.2 billion could be stripped from Scotland's public services in the next five years from areas that the SNP Government refuses to

protect. That is a 16 per cent cut to schools. That is not Labour's figure but the Scottish Parliament information centre's figure. We cannot afford to cut our schools and nurseries in that way.

If we want to close the gap between the richest and the rest and give every young person the skills that they need to grow our economy and succeed, we need to invest in our schools. That is why we have to use the powers that we have and the powers that are coming to protect education spending. Faced with a choice between using the powers and making cuts to our children's future, the only responsible choice is to use those powers.

How on earth can so many other areas be priorities for the protection of spending while our schools, colleges and universities are not? That is the massive contradiction at the heart of this SNP Government. If education is a personal priority, a political priority and a policy priority, it should be a budget priority. I say to the SNP front bench, "If you want to show that you value education, don't deliver a speech that promises that you mean it; deliver a budget that proves that you mean it." I say to SNP members: vote today to commit to protecting education spending in real terms over the next parliamentary session.

Our commitment to protect schools and other services by setting income tax at 1p higher than the rate set by George Osborne has been looked at by SPICe, the Institute for Public Policy Research, the University of Stirling, the Resolution Foundation and the House of Commons library. All have concluded that, contrary to the First Minister's claim that the policy is regressive, it is progressive.

Our commitment is fair and it is the only viable alternative to cutting education now, yet still the SNP opposes it. Almost every argument the SNP has mustered against it can be debunked with the facts. There is a litany of evidence to prove that the policy is fair. There is an abundance of voices that say that it is workable.

However, one argument that the SNP offers cannot be broken down by facts, because it is about how SNP members feel and who they are. I have heard SNP minister after SNP minister denounce Labour's plans as a punitive tax rise. As recently as last night, the finance secretary was decrying our policy as a "tax grab". The SNP candidate in Edinburgh Western called it "Labour's tax bombshell". SNP members have used that pejorative language, despite being warned against doing so by the Scottish Trades Union Congress and countless trade unions, because it is the language of the right-wing press and the Tory party.

I know that the SNP thinks that it can cynically exploit our commitment to ending austerity, but let me say this: the SNP will pay a political price if it chooses cuts to education over using the powers that we have now to invest in our children's future.

The First Minister told the people of Scotland:

"the only party with the unity and the conviction to stand strong against austerity is the SNP."

Today, the SNP is united in opposing the only alternative to austerity that has been put forward in this Parliament. What happened to that strength? What happened to that conviction? I hope that the SNP will vote to protect education today, and I hope that tomorrow it will vote to provide the means to do so, by rejecting John Swinney's do-nothing budget.

That is the choice—today and in future. We must use the powers that we have to protect education, or we must accept cuts to our future. Labour has chosen not to cut into our future. Where do the other parties stand?

I move the motion in the name of Iain Gray,

That the Parliament agrees that education spending should be protected in real terms over the next five years.

14:57

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): This Government wants to create a world-class education system that is founded on excellence and equity. That is why we are investing around £7.2 billion in education in the current year, to help our education system to perform well.

Under this Government, our children and young people's achievements are something that we can all be proud of. Last year, our young people achieved record results in exams and qualifications, and record numbers left school for positive destinations. The highest-ever level of students obtained higher education qualifications at college, and last week's statistics from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service show that record numbers of Scotland-domiciled students are applying to go to university in Scotland this year.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angela Constance: Perhaps later.

We are making progress on closing the attainment gap. There has been an increase in the number of school leavers from the 20 per cent most deprived communities who achieve three or more As at higher.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angela Constance: No. I want to make some progress first, thank you.

There has also been a decline in the number of school leavers who leave without qualifications of at least level 3. This year, UCAS figures showed a 50 per cent increase since 2006 in university applications from 18-year-olds in the most disadvantaged areas of Scotland.

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angela Constance: Perhaps later. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, Mr Henry.

Angela Constance: Other people have acknowledged the progress that I described. The improvement service has found that

"all the available measures of educational outcome have improved, including the performance of children from the most deprived areas of Scotland."

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said, in its review, "Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective":

"There are clear upward trends in attainments and positive destinations."

It is sad that no one would know about any of that if they listened only to Scottish Labour.

Hugh Henry: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angela Constance: I will do, later. *[Interruption.]* That is my prerogative.

However, there is more to do. We are investing in specific priorities to improve all children's literacy and numeracy skills, while also closing the attainment gap between children from the most and the least deprived communities.

Jenny Marra: Will the minister take an intervention?

Angela Constance: Perhaps later.

The read, write, count campaign for all families with children in primary 1 to primary 3 is a great example. Since we launched the campaign in August 2015 with £1.5 million funding, all primary 1 children have been given additional counting and writing materials. Packs have been given to every library in Scotland, and our national social marketing campaign has achieved a remarkable 100,000 web page views.

Perhaps Scottish Labour members should pay more attention to the read, write, count campaign, or even the make maths count campaign, because they are clearly having a little problem and need to do a little more work on their numeracy. How else can we explain the fiction concocted by Labour

about a 16 per cent cut in education spending over the next four years? The suggestion is based on a false premise. We have not set any tax or spending plans beyond next year. There is nothing to substantiate the claims about a cut to education spending.

Iain Gray: Will the minister give way?

Angela Constance: Gladly.

Iain Gray: The cabinet secretary has inadvertently come to the core of the question of today's debate. We ask her to set out those plans and to protect education spending. Will she do that now?

Angela Constance: In case Mr Gray had not noticed, there is something called an election to be held soon. The Government will of course set out our proposals in our manifesto and indeed let the people of Scotland judge.

What we will not do is force folk who are already on a low income to pay for Tory austerity, not once but twice. Ms Dugdale says that her parents were teachers. Well I am the daughter of low-paid workers and I will not be standing aside to allow the low paid to be punished even further.

Kezia Dugdale: If I thought for a second that the policy would punish low-income earners, I would not be proposing it. I have the Institute for Public Policy Research, the Resolution Foundation, the University of Stirling, David Bell, David Eiser, the House of Commons library and SPICe—at least six credible sources all saying that the 40 per cent lowest-paid Scots will not just not be worse off but will be better off as a consequence of Labour policy. With six sources of evidence like that, why cannot the education secretary accept it?

Angela Constance: For a moment I thought that Ms Dugdale was going to tell us all about her detailed plans for how she intends to pay for her £5 billion wish list. The only idea that Labour has come up with today is to shift the burden of Tory austerity further on to the low paid.

It is all very well making promises now—promises that Labour well knows that it will never get the chance to deliver. In my book, that is gesture politics of the very worst kind. But we still have a misunderstanding by Labour, which does not even understand a technical budget adjustment—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, you have moved your microphone and we are having difficulty hearing.

Angela Constance: Worse still, a technical budget adjustment has been mistaken for a real cash sum that simply does not exist. There is no actual cut of £126 million to the front-line higher

education budget. Excluding this resource accounting and budgeting adjustment, funding for education has in fact increased by over 1 per cent in cash terms. Further, the latest figures suggest that education spending by councils, far from falling, is set to increase by 3.3 per cent this year.

Perhaps Labour can explain how its list of never-ending spending commitments has now exceeded £0.5 billion on education alone. As Dr Allan said, its funding plan would not raise enough to make the real-terms increase in education funding that the motion calls for.

We know that raising income tax by a penny would hit low-income households, including those with children, the hardest. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Will the minister take an intervention?

Angela Constance: Perhaps later, Mr Rennie.

Worst of all, those households would feel the pain of a tax rise that would not even raise enough to meet the £560 million required to apply a five-year real-terms increase. While Labour indulges in fantasy economics, this Government is getting on with real investment, such as the £2.9 billion in 2016-17 to prioritise early years and early intervention, to close the attainment gap, to support the next phase of curriculum for excellence, to continue supporting reform in Scotland's colleges and to maintain free access to higher education.

Willie Rennie: The minister talks about fantasy economics, but I cannot quite understand her argument. She complains about Tory austerity but then says that she has record amounts of investment in education. The two do not go together. Does she not accept that we must have a progressive policy of a penny on income tax for education? That is how we should invest in our children.

Angela Constance: I was merely pointing out what happens once the resource accounting and budgeting charge is excluded. Surely all the finance spokespeople have some indication of what that is about. It is not real money; rather, it is a ring-fenced technical adjustment. Surely I am entitled to point out that, overall, our portfolio has increased by 1 per cent, because we have made choices about our priorities for this year's budget.

Iain Gray: Will the minister give way?

Angela Constance: No thank you—I have been more than generous with my time, Mr Gray.

Undoubtedly, we must maintain high levels of investment in education, and we will always do what we can to prioritise education funding, as we always have. The public sector in Scotland faces

significant challenges. Perhaps Mr Rennie knows something about that, because he was complicit with the Tories. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Angela Constance: Westminster's continued fixation with austerity has reduced Scotland's finances, forcing us to make difficult budget decisions. We must be sure that we maximise that impact from every penny—not a concept that the Liberal Democrats or Scottish Labour are overly familiar with.

Compare our record with Labour's—its years in power between 2003 and 2007 were a missed opportunity. It squandered the relative plenty that it had and failed to improve standards in education. We are making progress on restoring the programme for international student assessment scores on reading, writing and science. Those scores fell sharply under Labour.

In accordance with our manifesto commitment, teacher numbers have been broadly maintained since 2011. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Angela Constance: When Labour failed to meet its many targets for education, it simply replaced them. That is classic Labour—exclusions were up and our PISA standing was down. Labour did nothing to close the attainment gap. It has taken this Government to halt the decline in education. Labour was not credible in government then, it is not credible in opposition now, and it seems increasingly unlikely that it will ever find itself in government again.

Labour's approach ignores the reality for all the devolved Administrations in these straitened times. Scotland is not the only country managing a poor financial settlement from Westminster. Labour criticises the local government funding settlement here in Scotland, but is silent on the 2 per cent that Labour in Wales has applied to its funding for councils. It conveniently ignores that we have maintained more than £1 billion investment in higher education for the fifth successive year, in stark contrast with the 32 per cent funding cut that is being applied to universities in Wales this year.

Jenny Marra: Will the member give way?

Angela Constance: I have given way three times in a 10-minute speech, so no thank you, Ms Marra.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary is closing.

Angela Constance: I want to finish by making this offer to Scottish Labour: join us in common cause on behalf of the Scottish people against a UK Government determined to do real and lasting

harm to all our public services, not least education. The alternative is that Labour stays carping from the sidelines, presenting half-baked ideas to raise tax and ignoring who hurts the most when costs go up but incomes do not. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order please, Mr Bibby and Miss Campbell.

Angela Constance: Until Labour decides, we will keep focused on the job at hand: making less work better, delivering real investments and tangible improvements for all our children, maintaining teacher numbers so that our children get a high-quality learning experience, replacing a quarter of all schools so that more children learn in decent environments, and giving every three and four-year-old 600 hours of free early learning and childcare and every child in primary 1 to primary 3 a free school meal so that they can get a better start in life. That is the kind of success that a competent Government delivers—the kind that is delivered on promises that are meant to be kept, rather than pledges made on the cheap.

I move amendment S4M-15588.3, to leave out from “agrees” to end and insert:

“welcomes the estimated £7.2 billion invested in education in 2015-16; further welcomes the increase in local government education resource spending of at least £208 million since 2006-07 and the planned increase of 3.3% in 2015-16; believes that Scottish education is already performing well, with attainment improving; notes the OECD view that Scottish education has the potential to lead the world; further believes therefore that there is more to do to improve education, and agrees that protection of the pupil-teacher ratio, investment in closing the attainment gap and reform of how attainment is assessed is the right way forward.”

15:10

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): First, I commend Kezia Dugdale for her commitment to education. I happen to know Kezia's father, who was a headmaster at Elgin academy. I know what his commitment was, and I know the respect that people had for him locally. I also commend each and every single teacher in every subject in every classroom across Scotland for the work that they do every single day.

I am very pleased that education is a battleground for May's elections, but, having listened to the cabinet secretary, I think that I am even more pleased that I am retiring. It is like a rerun of the referendum.

In the time that I have been in the Parliament, the one area of education in which I think that the Parliament, across the parties, has made the most progress—along with the rest of the United Kingdom—is in early years. There can be a difference of 13 months in development, including in relation to vocabulary, between children by the

age of five, so the extension of free childcare to 30 hours a week to mirror the UK Government's commitment is welcome.

Despite the improved training and qualifications of the early years education workforce, their registration with the Scottish Social Services Council and a thorough inspection regime that reflects the development of every child, most of that workforce is still paid the minimum wage—not the living wage, but the minimum wage. Successive Governments have asked more and more of that workforce, but the Government still does not value it. While we are all battling it out over education, pay for teachers and pay for lecturers, I ask us not to forget those who are educating, training and supporting the under-fives.

The Scottish Government has a role in that regard, because, through our local authorities, nurseries are paid minimal rates, and that is reflected in staff pay. I know that our manifesto is not absolutely complete, so I ask the Scottish Government whether that is something that it would consider going forward.

Talking of local government, I have never, ever known the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Government and local authorities to be so badly divided. Nobody benefits from that—no one. The arrogant and bullying approach of the Scottish Government leaves little decision making and discretion to our local authorities.

In today's *Scotsman*—I never thought I would read that paper—Mr Swinney is described as using “Chicago gangster” tactics—

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: No, I would quite like to finish this piece.

I think that the Godfather himself could learn a few lessons from the approach of the Government in Scotland today.

Given the reported £2.2 billion in cuts to local authorities, which will impact on education, I can fully appreciate the principle behind Labour's motion. However, we are at the stage of finalising manifesto commitments and costings. As that principle is essentially about ring fencing, it requires much wider debate and consideration, particularly given that we are opposed to an increase in tax.

Rather than micromanaging local government, the reduction of the attainment gap could be better managed if headteachers were given more autonomy and respect in the running of their own schools. It is teachers who know best which pupils need help and support and when they need it. As Audit Scotland stated, deprivation is “not the only factor” when it comes to low attainment.

I mentioned gangster tactics. When the Highland Council found out that the Government was attempting to impose—with no consultation whatever—a 25-hour week on primaries 1 to 3 only four days before the relevant amendment to the Education (Scotland) Bill was to be voted on at stage 2, even SNP councillors were embarrassed, but they kept their heads down and remained loyal, as they are expected to do. Such a lack of consultation is disrespectful to local authorities, which we expect to implement our education policy, and it usurps local democracy.

I only wish that pupils in Scotland could again be at the heart of the education system, rather than the constant battles between the Scottish Government, local authorities and the Educational Institute of Scotland.

As someone who was a lecturer in further and higher education for more than two decades before I entered Parliament in 1999, I know more than most just how much further education transforms lives. It transformed mine. I left school at 15, got a full-time job and started to go to night classes. As a single parent with two children, I returned to further education to get enough highers to get into university. I then became a lecturer in economics and the rest is history. Therefore, I know how further education transforms lives, and not just mine—over the years, I watched students who had slipped through the net at school get a second chance in further education.

As well as cutting the number of places for part-time students by 152,000, the Scottish Government has cut the number of places for students who are over 25 by 74,000—I was one of them. In 2014, almost 20,000 school students attended further education colleges, which represented a fall of 70 per cent. To be more precise, that was a fall of 48,000 students. Even the number of places for those in the 20 to 24 group had fallen by 9 per cent in 2014.

Therefore, when Audit Scotland states, correctly, that the merger process has had

“minimal negative impact on students”,

it is talking about those students who are still students. The merger process has absolutely had a negative impact by cutting 152,000 part-time places, 74,000 places for over-25s, 48,000 places for school pupils under the age of 16 and 9 per cent of the places for 20 to 24-year-olds. Further education is no longer a second chance for around 300,000 people; many people across Scotland now have no chance at all, thanks to the SNP. They deserve better.

The SNP Government is very proud of its record on further and higher education and on widening access, so I give its ministers the opportunity to

explain to the chamber why it is that, in 2015, in England—which the SNP loves to criticise—18 per cent of the most deprived 20 per cent of young people were accepted into university, while in Scotland only 10 per cent of the most deprived 20 per cent went to university. Why is that? Why has England got it so right when we have got it so wrong?

I will close for the Conservatives, too, so I will continue my speech then.

I move amendment S4M-15588.2, to leave out from “education” to end and insert:

“the primary focus of education policy must be on reducing the attainment gap between the most and least deprived pupils; believes that this will be achieved by head teachers being given significantly more autonomy to run their schools, including giving Scottish Attainment Challenge funding directly to schools and ensuring that this money is awarded to deprived children, regardless of where they attend school; acknowledges the crucial role of vocational education and is disappointed that free tuition in higher education has been prioritised over adequate funding for colleges, which has in turn resulted in 152,000 places being lost since 2007; recognises the importance of substantially increasing funding for colleges, and regrets that deprived young people in Scotland are almost half as likely to get the chance to go to university as their peers in England.”

15:18

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I welcome this further debate on education, which reflects many of the issues that we considered when I led a similar debate a fortnight or so ago, and I thank Kezia Dugdale, Iain Gray and their colleagues for enabling it to happen.

Scottish Liberal Democrats agree with Labour that education spending must, as a minimum, be protected over the next five years. That does not represent an undue focus on so-called inputs; rather, it is an entirely appropriate response to the considerable challenges that Scottish education faces: 152,000 college places have been lost since 2007 and there has been a failure to deliver on early learning ambitions, given that just 7 per cent of two-year-olds from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are accessing free provision, which is a quarter of what was promised by ministers.

In addition, our education system is slipping down the international standings. In that context, a commitment from each party to maintain education spending would be a welcome start. However, there is a risk that persevering with the current approach will simply embed some of the failures that the SNP has presided over in recent years. It will not deliver the transformation in education that the Scottish Liberal Democrats want to see; it may not even be enough to reverse some of those worrying trends. However, as I said, in the context of the impending cuts that the Scottish

Government has chosen to impose, it would at least be a start.

Those cuts are real, and they are savage: £500 million from local authorities that are tasked with delivering our schools and our childcare. Bizarrely, in highlighting those concerns, I have incurred the wrath of nationalists locally in Orkney, who have accused me of scaremongering, yet the convener of the local council condemned the cuts as totally unacceptable. Councils across Scotland have not been mincing their words. They told the finance secretary in no uncertain terms that his cuts will hurt front-line services and

“prove very bad for the most vulnerable in our communities”.

Mr Swinney’s response was to increase the fines for those daring to disobey.

Some councils have already started to spell out where the cuts will fall. When half of what councils do is education, ministers should be in no doubt that the cuts will be felt most severely by our children and in our classrooms.

That is why the Scottish Liberal Democrats have proposed a penny for education. That would give us £475 million, which would enable us to make the biggest investment in education since devolution. It would enable us to deliver a transformation in Scottish education, from the early years right through to further education. It would enable investment in a pupil premium, in early learning, in our colleges and in our schools.

That investment in education would get Scotland fit for the future. It would help to propel our education system back up the international tables. It would help the one in five businesses that cannot find people with the skills that they need. Crucially, the investment would ensure that every child and young person has the opportunity to get on in life. It is a progressive alternative to the cuts that are being imposed or proposed by SNP ministers—cuts to schools that are anything but progressive.

The cabinet secretary need not just take my word for it. As Kezia Dugdale indicated earlier, this week the IPPR said:

“For Scotland, matching the UK government’s tax plans would reduce tax for the rich but not the poor; the proposals of the Scottish Liberal Democrats and Scottish Labour”

to raise income tax by a penny

“would increase tax on the rich but not on the poor”.

The Resolution Foundation think tank concluded that the policy would reduce the impact of cuts and that it “would be progressive”, thanks to the big increases in the personal allowance that Liberal Democrats secured under the previous coalition Government.

For all their voodoo maths, SNP ministers cannot escape the fact that someone on £100,000 would pay 30 times as much as someone on £21,000. Under our plans, someone would have to earn more than £19,000 to pay more tax next year compared with this year.

The way that the Liberal Democrats would spend the penny for education would be similarly progressive. We would reverse the cuts to education and focus on creating opportunity where there is none or where it is presently curtailed. We would focus on giving children and young people, particularly those from the poorest backgrounds, the best possible start in life.

Ministers' tired excuses no longer apply. The Scottish Government's income is no longer fixed. We have the powers and there are costed alternative tax proposals on the table. We do not need to wait, yet ministers are happy to talk left and walk right. John Swinney has chosen to impose the kind of budget that he has previously condemned.

As my amendment notes, there are many examples of world-class teaching and learning experiences here, from early learning through to further and higher education. Ministers are right to state that Scottish education has the potential to lead the world. However, they once again overlook that, under their leadership, our international standing is headed in the wrong direction. For all the positives, the OECD report made it clear that our standing is slipping.

Implementing savage cuts to education is a destructive response that will do nothing to reverse a trend that should seriously worry members in the chamber. It is certainly worrying parents, businesses that cannot get the skilled workforce that they need and those who care about nurturing the talents of each and every individual in our country.

The Liberal Democrats are not prepared to stand by while the SNP is happy to demand powers but not to use them; happy to blame Westminster rather than take responsibility; and happy to slash council budgets rather than invest in the future of our children and young people.

That is why we will support the Labour motion this afternoon. I move amendment S4M-15588.1, to insert at end:

“; notes that, while Scotland has traditionally excelled in education and many aspects of the system remain world class, its international advantage is slipping, there is an urgent need for new measures to close the attainment gap, college places have been cut by 152,000 since 2007 and businesses are struggling to find the skills that they need, and endorses the proposal to put a penny on income tax, raising £475 million per year, to prevent planned education cuts, improve life chances and strengthen the economy”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Members have six minutes for their speech, with a bit of time in hand for interventions.

15:25

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Another week, another education debate—that is okay because, as I have said during the many debates that we have had, education is important to everyone across the chamber and to the Scottish Government in particular. It is with the work on attainment that the Scottish Government has put education at the top of the agenda. The SNP Government has said that a child who is born today in one of our poorer areas will have the same education opportunities as a child who is born in one of our wealthier areas has. That is what the debates on educational attainment have been all about.

I have enjoyed the debates, because we have looked to the future and to how we can deliver for all the young people in Scotland. Education in Scotland is a success, and thanks go to the many members of our society who are committed to delivering that education. The Scottish Government's focus on education must also be taken into account. Making education one of the key priorities for government has ensured that progress is continually made.

Our progress is recognised internationally; we have only to look at the recent OECD report's list of positive developments to see that

“levels of academic achievement are above international averages”.

The report adds that

“achievement levels are spread relatively equally”

and that

“there are clear upwards trends in attainment and positive destinations”.

That shows that there is scope for the future and a clear base to move on from.

That is the complete opposite of the narrative that Opposition members want to create. The education system is not in decline; it is striving to do better and it remains ambitious for our children and young people and for their future.

School education in Scotland is getting better, with record exam results and a record number of school leavers in work, education or training.

Hugh Henry: Will the member take an intervention?

George Adam: In 2015, the number of higher passes went up by 5.5 per cent to 156,000 from 147,899 in 2014.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Henry, the member does not seem to want to give way.

George Adam: In August last year, the number of advanced higher awards at grades A to C also increased—it increased by 4 per cent to a record 18,899—and 43,911 qualifications that recognise skills for life and work were gained last year. That shows that the Government is building for the future in education.

Kezia Dugdale: Will the member give way?

George Adam: No child can learn effectively in crumbling buildings. I remember that in the days when I was young—it was a long time ago—we were in Victorian buildings with masonry flying all about us and tumbling from the ceiling as we tried to learn. However, during the current challenging times, the Scottish Government has made sure that such scenes have been consigned to the past, and a record number of children are learning in high-quality school buildings.

Kezia Dugdale: Will the member give way?

George Adam: Between 2007 and 2015, under the SNP Government, 607 schools have been rebuilt or refurbished, which is 250 more than under the previous Administration.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Dugdale, I do not think that the member is giving way.

George Adam: The proportion of schools that are in good or satisfactory condition increased from 61 per cent in April 2007 to 84 per cent in April 2015. Incidentally, none of that has been done with a tax hike that would hit the pockets of the poorest working people in Scotland.

It is not good enough for Opposition parties, in desperation, to denigrate the good work of those who are involved in education and it is not good enough to tax working poor people either. Around 2.2 million basic rate taxpayers, including 500,000 pensioners, would be hit by Labour's tax grab. At a time when families are struggling because of Westminster austerity, Labour plans to pick the pockets of the working poor.

According to SPICe, as the cabinet secretary mentioned, to provide real-terms protection to the total education and lifelong learning budget, Labour would need £561.9 million over the five years. What would happen in future years? Would Labour continue to increase tax while Westminster slashed the Scottish budget? What would Labour cut to raise the money that it is looking for?

Education in our schools is delivered by local authorities. As I said during last week's budget debate, local government has received a challenging but fair financial settlement. Local government must also be ambitious and lead from the front by looking at ways to integrate services

and deliver for our communities. I have always believed that there are solutions to even the most challenging problems, and local government must find innovative new ways of working.

When the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities came to the Education and Culture Committee, I asked whether it had any evidence on local authorities delivering education either through schools working on their own or through grouping schools and education authorities together. COSLA representatives said that they had not done any work on anything like that. They must look at innovative and new ideas.

I have set out the case for the Scottish Government's continued ambition for education, which is a key priority for the Government. As always, we can strive to do better. We will continue to have the debate in the coming months, but I believe that the Scottish Government and the SNP are continuing to deliver for the people of Scotland.

15:30

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I declare an interest as a member of the EIS, a former schoolteacher and somebody who believes passionately in the power of education to liberate our children and create a stronger economy.

I know that George Adam does not see himself as a Tory, but he might want to reflect on the speech that he just gave, because he used the language that the Tories have used for generations to argue against fair taxation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Lamont, could you pull your microphone round to face you?

Johann Lamont: I was never accused of not being heard in the classroom—forgive me.

I cannot say that the cabinet secretary's speech was much of an advert for the power of education, rational argument and debate. The Government needs to reflect on the way in which it is presenting its case. I have been dismayed by its response to our simple proposal. There has been a lot of noise and shouting, and a total absence of any reflection in the argument. A schoolchild would be ashamed of such behaviour. It is simple: any schoolchild could tell the Government that what it says it believes in and what it does should match.

Dr Allan: The member calls for rational debate and questions. She suggests that the argument that the Government has been making about Labour's tax proposals echoes that of the Tories in some way. What is Tory about the First Minister pointing out that Labour's tax proposals would mean a 2 per cent tax increase for the First

Minister but a 5 per cent tax increase for someone who is on low pay?

Johann Lamont: That is the kind of misleading use of statistics that a maths teacher would throw out on day 1. The First Minister should be ashamed of herself for presenting the position in that way.

It is self-evident that, in these tough times, we require to have a mature debate. If it was presented in my classroom, the quality of the argument from the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister would have meant that their work was returned liberally scattered with red pen and the comments "Try harder" and "Keep it real".

If we are to close the gap between rhetoric and reality, we should support the protection of the education budget and do it with real money. Why? First, the Scottish rate of income tax is progressive. John Swinney has said so, John Mason has said so and any number of experts agree with them.

There is something unbelievably distasteful, at the very least, in encouraging people of modest means and income to oppose proposals that would benefit them, and in that argument being deployed by the people who would save most from the defeat of the proposals. That approach is a disgrace. False claims are being made about the impact of the choice, and those who would be affected more are using low-paid people as some kind of human shield to oppose tax rises. The figures are there. Those who are on the lowest incomes would not suffer and those who are at the top might pay something over £1,000 more.

The next argument is that there is no harm in targeting local government. Humza Yousaf, who was commended in the Scottish *Daily Mail* as a sort of Scottish Eric Pickles, said that it is all about waste, but it is not. Our approach is about the waste of children's potential across the country, which is to the detriment of them and of the economy as a whole. Anyone who has children and who cares about their education knows that it is not just about teachers and buildings; it is about the critical support staff who help young people to overcome the barriers that they face so that they can achieve a good education. That is about equality and closing the attainment gap.

Then we hear, "Why should we pay for Tory austerity twice?" That might be an argument that can be sustained on Twitter, but it does not survive for one moment in the real world, because we are already paying for the Tory austerity approach, and the Scottish Government's approach is to leave the poorest and the most vulnerable to pay more by making choices that amplify rather than tackle the inequality that the

Tories promote. I do not understand why SNP back benchers would take that approach.

Although the SNP tries to prove that SRIT is not progressive, it does not apply any such test to a cut in air passenger duty, which would benefit the better off. It leaves untouched, unanalysed and untested its own priorities on the ground of its belief in universalism. I say that universalism has to be matched by fair taxation if it is not simply to benefit the best off.

The greatest puzzle is this: why has the SNP moved so quickly to rubbish the proposal instead of using Government resources, in the best traditions of Scottish education, to test the proposition with a rational argument? It has refused to do that because it knows that the proposal would stand that kind of scrutiny.

That led me to reflect on the biggest political argument that we—all of us, collectively—have lost in my lifetime: that about the benefits of fair taxation and fair spending. As a young schoolteacher, I was blessed to get a permanent job right away working for a council that, even in the toughest times during the 1980s, was able to direct resources to deprived areas in order to address inequality. When I started teaching in 1979, the basic rate of income tax was 30p. At the height of Thatcherism, it was 29p. When I came to the Scottish Parliament in 1999, it was 23p. I do not say that to advocate mega tax hikes but simply to put the 1p rise that we propose in context.

I understand that political parties of all stripes have been frightened to raise taxation in case other parties seek electoral advantage by attacking them for being reckless on tax, but why is the Scottish Government being so timid? It will not be attacked by the main parties for such a bold proposal; it will be celebrated for it. The Tories will attack it, but the case for rational, progressive taxation will be supported in the Parliament. That is not making an electoral calculation; it is having the confidence that, with that support, the Government would be able to make the case to the country.

All that I can say is that members should support the motion and stop scaremongering on the benefits of fair taxation. If people continue to prosecute the case that any tax rise is a tax grab, we will all pay a price, as will our children.

15:38

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I will consider education in its wider social and economic context. Kezia Dugdale said that the best way to reduce wage inequality is through education. I would not diminish education in any way, but I think that the best way to reduce wage inequality is to increase wages. The EIS supports

that view. In its written evidence to the Education and Culture Committee earlier this year, it said:

“The EIS supports and promotes initiatives which redress the imbalance in achievement and attainment caused by poverty but we do not believe that educational initiatives alone will sufficiently and permanently close the pernicious and damaging attainment gap.”

We know that the attainment gap is caused by income inequality. Poverty is the greatest cause of underachievement in education. The levers that we need to address that inequality in society—such as the ability to raise the minimum wage to the level of the living wage, to stop trade union legislation that prevents people from organising to improve their pay and conditions and to exercise control over benefits such as universal credit—are ones that we could have in this Parliament but which were vetoed by the Labour Party at Westminster.

There is an element of hypocrisy on the part of Opposition members when they try to isolate education and get themselves off the hook for their failure to get powers transferred to the Parliament that would allow us to close the gap that is the real cause of educational inequality.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Joan McAlpine: No—I need to make progress.

On top of that, Labour says that we should use the limited powers that it cooked up with its pals in the Tory party during the Calman commission to raise only part of the basic rate of income tax. I would like to know how taxing the poorest workers helps to reduce educational inequality, as we know that poverty is the root cause of that inequality.

Drew Smith: Will Joan McAlpine give way?

Joan McAlpine: Johann Lamont talks about fair taxation, but the Calman deal that the Labour Party struck with the Tories is unfair taxation.

Johann Lamont: Will Joan McAlpine give way?

Joan McAlpine: Johann Lamont also talked about tax under Thatcher several years ago. The member will be aware of the Trades Union Congress research from a few weeks ago that showed that, in Scotland since 2008, workers' wages have fallen by about £1,500 in real terms. I do not know how we sort that out by increasing tax for people who earn more than £11,000 a year, such as postal workers, nurses and other health workers. That does not seem to be the way to raise educational attainment. Those people are already suffering from far too many cuts.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's studies on educational attainment considered pressure in the home environment. The learning environment has

one of the biggest impacts on educational outcomes, which is why it is important that we consider the budget as a whole. The budget has protected areas. Protecting people's health, investing in housing by providing 50,000 more affordable homes and investing in welfare reform mitigation measures to address, as far as we can, the very damaging cuts that are coming from the Tories in Westminster all helps to address poverty and educational inequality.

In relation to education, we have to consider the broader context of the 12.5 per cent cut to Scotland's budget over 10 years under the Tory Government. We would like to protect every area of spending in the same way as we are protecting health spending, for example, but we cannot do that when our budget is being cut by 12.5 per cent—£3.9 billion—over 10 years. It is interesting that Labour never wants to talk about that. It would always rather talk about the SNP instead of having an honest debate about how we deal with that cut other than by taxing the poorest workers.

Hugh Henry: Will Joan McAlpine take an intervention?

Joan McAlpine: No—I am sorry. I want to make progress because I have quite a lot to say.

We are focusing on raising educational attainment in key areas and particularly the early years. We know that investment in early years education has some of the best outcomes in addressing the problems that poverty causes. That is why I am pleased that we have increased early years education provision to 600 hours. Incidentally, that is far more than anything that Labour was able to deliver when it had access to far more income for the Parliament than the SNP Government has, because of the cuts that Westminster has forced on this Government. I am pleased that, despite those cuts, we aspire to almost double the number of early years hours that are on offer by the end of the next parliamentary session.

I will close by talking again about Labour hypocrisy. In Dumfries and Galloway, we have a Labour council that was given money for early years provision last year by the Scottish Government but failed to spend it. It put £900,000 of that money into its overall budget instead of spending it on early years. Labour talks about prioritising education, but it should examine the behaviour of its own councillors, which is letting down children in many parts of Scotland.

Drew Smith: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would appreciate your guidance on the courtesy that members can expect to receive from other members who repeatedly refer to others' political arguments as hypocrisy and fail even to engage in the simple courtesy of debate. Is it in

order for a member to behave in the way that Ms McAlpine has just done by repeatedly referring to others as hypocrites and refusing to engage in political debate? Does that enhance debate in the Parliament in your view, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): I am afraid to say that that is not a point of order. It is up to members to decide whether to take interventions. However, a little time is available in the debate for interventions, should members wish to take them.

15:45

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): In spite of what my colleague has said, it is always a pleasure—as it was last week—to follow Joan McAlpine in a debate. She helpfully reminded us of the time when public expenditure through the Labour Government was increasing significantly. Ironically, the SNP was then proposing an increase in income tax when it was not necessary, but is now opposing such an increase when it is manifestly necessary. I will come to that in a moment.

We all across the chamber agree that education is absolutely fundamental, both for realising individual potential and, as Kezia Dugdale emphasised, for growth of the economy. I would have thought that we would all agree that there is no alternative to education when it comes to investing in our future and ensuring that Scotland can compete in the world, and I would have thought that members who support independence would have clearly seen the sense of that.

I accept that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, for whom I have high regard, wants to create a world-class education system, but she and her colleagues must simply will the means for that to happen. I also accept that there have been some successes in education policy. She mentioned read write, count—an admirable scheme—and I am sure that there are others that we would happily acknowledge, but we also have to face some facts about the past and, which is even more important, look realistically at what is coming down the track.

I do not want to dwell too much on the past, because this is a debate about the future, but let us just remind ourselves that the improvement service has released figures that show a big decline in spending per pupil in Scottish schools over the past five years—a decline of £561 in primary schools and £285 in secondary schools. That is just one fact that we can put beside some of the positive things that the cabinet secretary has said.

Let us focus on the future, because that is what we are concerned about now. It is simply

impossible to be sceptical about one simple fact. If there are going to be 5.2 per cent real-terms cuts to local government budgets, as the Scottish Parliament information centre, the Finance Committee and everybody else agree, it is not credible to believe that education, which constitutes half of local government expenditure, will be affected by that. If the cabinet secretary does not agree with SPICe's figure of 16.2 per cent over the next session of Parliament, perhaps her colleagues could say what action the SNP has in mind that will ensure that that figure does not come to pass.

Mark McDonald: The Labour leader of Aberdeen City Council has stated that it has managed to identify £20 million-worth of savings without any impact on front-line services, and has stated that the council believes that it can protect education as part of that package. If Aberdeen City Council can do it, what is stopping other councils from doing so?

Malcolm Chisholm: I know the City of Edinburgh Council a bit better than I know Aberdeen City Council. I have looked at the budget for Edinburgh: there will be nearly 2,000 job losses and there will certainly be cuts to bits of the education budget. There is a coalition in Edinburgh council and the SNP leader of that coalition, Sandy Howat, has said:

“A revenue cut of this scale would be very damaging for jobs and services within Scottish local government generally, and here in Edinburgh specifically ... Everyone will be hurt by this.”

Some SNP members are looking realistically at what is happening.

The education issue has led us to the conclusion that we must propose a 1p increase in income tax for next year. I am disturbed by some of the language that is coming from the SNP today. It is changing the critique of the policy. Today we are hearing language such as “tax grab”, “bombshell”,

“pick the pockets of the working poor”

and passing on Tory austerity. There is so much that could be said about that. First of all, Tory austerity is being passed on in the local government cuts, which will affect the poorest people. The fact of the matter is that we have proposed a rebate scheme, but even if there was not a rebate scheme there are lots of illustrations of what would happen. To take just one example, the First Minister would pay 76 times more in terms of the tax increase than would a low-paid worker, irrespective of the rebate.

The most disturbing thing—we might as well deal with this head on, because we will be hearing a lot more about it—is the way SNP MSP after MSP and minister after minister has used the

percentage more tax that people will pay. I dealt with that matter last week and quoted David Eiser, who said that the important thing is to look at the change in after-tax income.

John Swinney himself was at it: he said that a person on £13,000 would have their tax increased by 5 per cent whereas someone on £200,000 would have their tax increased by 2.6 per cent. That is completely irrelevant. The fact of the matter is that the person on £200,000 would pay 132 times more in extra tax than the person on £13,000. We will get used to hearing that from the SNP for the next few months, but I hope that people will eventually see through it.

The latest line is that the cuts to local government are not really that bad. Marco Biagi, the Minister for Local Government and Community Empowerment, said last night that the settlement is a good one. I have already quoted Sandy Howat, the leader of the SNP group in the City of Edinburgh Council. It is simply not credible—sticking with the Edinburgh example—to claim that £85 million-worth of cuts for next year, with 2,000 job losses as a result, will not have a devastating effect on jobs and on services. As Sandy Howat highlighted, everyone will be hit hard by that.

I hope that, over time, we will be able to have a more sensible debate about the 1p tax increase. We are absolutely clear that it is necessary in order to protect education, which is fundamental for the future of Scotland.

15:51

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To state the obvious, education matters to us all, and to all the people of Scotland. Education has touched my family, as it has the families of other members. My grandfather started teaching in 1881. When he retired in 1926, he was a fellow of the Educational Institute of Scotland. His father was a coal miner, so he did not come from a highly educated family. My mother was the daughter of a ship's rigger, and started teaching in 1931—on an annual salary, I may say, of £36. Today, I have a niece who teaches in England and a nephew who teaches in Denmark. Alas, I do not seem to have in my family any current teachers who live in Scotland. My own pedagogic activity was strictly limited to the three years that I spent lecturing postgraduate students at Heriot-Watt University after I retired from my long-term career.

I accept that we all, across Parliament, have a shared ambition for and a belief in the importance of education. I presume that the same goes for training, because the two are often linked. We are really debating the means rather than the ends.

The title of the debate is "Scotland's Future Prosperity", and education plays a key part in

contributing to that prosperity. There is, of course, the economic activity that is associated with the preparation and delivery of education. We employ teachers and others in, and we attract students from around the globe to, a system that has long been recognised as excellent. Substantial difficulties for that aspect of our education system have been created by the withdrawal of one of Jack McConnell's achievements: the system of visas for foreign students. I very much regret that that is happening, and I suspect that most members in the chamber feel the same.

We also get economic benefit from education because it equips our citizens for future challenges and opportunities. Of course, future challenges are very interesting because we do not know what they will be. Above all, education is not simply about putting a set of skills into the cerebral cavities of our students; it is about equipping them to make future decisions, the nature of which this generation of politicians and teachers can know nothing.

I am a regular visitor to schools, as other members in the chamber will be. Most recently, I visited the North East Scotland College campus at Fraserburgh in my constituency. It has had significant investment, and there is more building work under way. Inside the building, there are new computers. Given the pressure of increased demand and increased student numbers, the school is stealing some of the public space for new teaching rooms. When the building is complete, we will return to the kind of balance that we want. More fundamentally, substantially more students in that college—the whole attitude and approach of which I like very much—have, on their graduation, certificates and diplomas that are relevant to the employment opportunities in the area, and which will also endure as a contribution to their wellbeing.

Historically, we in Scotland have, of course, placed an emphasis on rational argument and personal responsibility. That came partly from the reformation, which brought Calvinism to Scotland. We might say that that was a mixed blessing, but it put in place a value on education that was delivered by our having an education system that was available to most of our population long before other countries in Europe.

We were also fortunate, where others were unfortunate, in Scotland's being one of the early medical training centres in Europe. That was because of the bad reason that Edinburgh had substantial morbidity in the old town because the buildings were built upwards for safety, so that people could live near the castle in dangerous times. That created a hotbed of infection transfer, which led to the opportunity to create a medical school of international renown.

I want to be a little didactic about the subject of technical adjustments to numbers, which has emerged, by illustrating something from our ordinary natural lives. If I had a car that I assessed a year ago as being worth £12,000, I might, in looking at my assets and liabilities, consider that it would be worth £10,500 this year on my balance sheet. That would represent depreciation of £1,500. However, if I went along to John Menzies and quickly, while no one was looking, looked in the appropriate books to see what its value was, I could find that it was worth £11,000. In other words, the depreciation that I had put on the balance sheet would be £500 less than the reality. That would be good news. My assets would have grown, but there would not be a penny more in my pocket. Perhaps members might care to think about the fact that some of the numbers that we talk about are exactly the same as that.

I commend the read, write, count campaign, and the making maths count campaign that the Government has been engaged in.

Teachers bring perspiration to their tasks much more than is commonly recognised. They work longer hours than people often realise, bring inspiration to their students and create a supnation.

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

Stewart Stevenson: Finally, on how to deal with raising tax, Gordon Brown said on 30 April 2008:

"We did not cover as well as we should that group of low-paid workers and low-income people who don't get the working income tax credits".

In other words, the last time Labour upped the tax for basic rate taxpayers, Gordon Brown acknowledged that it didn't work. The evidence is that Labour hasnae thought it through any more carefully this time.

15:58

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Like Mary Scanlon, I will not be standing again in the coming election. A number of things that she said struck a chord with me. No one can doubt her commitment to education—her passion for further education, in particular. She very eloquently described the contribution that further education makes to changing the lives of ordinary people for the better.

When I was reflecting on the subject of the debate and what I might say, I thought that it was quite depressing that the debate that we are having about education and its role in Scotland is exactly the same type of debate as pertained in the 1980s, when I was first elected—when I stand

down, I will have been 32 years in elected office. In a way, it is also the same debate as pertained when I was born into an ordinary working-class family in the east end of Glasgow in the 1950s. Children in those communities were unlikely to go to college or university or to be represented in the professions. Only a handful managed it.

Things changed. They changed because there was a boom in the world and British economies, and because of political decisions that were made in the immediate aftermath of the second world war, when the welfare state was established. They also changed because of commitments that were made in the 1960s by the Government that Harold Wilson led. I was a direct beneficiary of that Government, which enabled people like me to be the first in their family to go to university, and to go with the support of a grant.

When I reflect on that community in the east end of Glasgow, and communities that I represent such as Johnstone, Linwood, Barrhead and Neilston, I see that young people in similar circumstances to the ones in which I grew up in the 1950s are as unlikely to be able to go to university and get into professions now as young people were then. They are burdened with poorer grant support and they come out with more debt than I did when I went to university. Is the fulfilment of all my years of activity, which have been about trying to make my community and this country a better place, that we are still having that debate?

If I were to accept for a moment that the cabinet secretary's contribution was the fulfilment of all our ambitions and that things are as wonderful as she tries to portray them, I would have to say, "What poverty of ambition." Yes—good things have happened in education over the years. To be frank, I believe that the teachers who are coming into Scottish education now are of far higher standard and are far better prepared than I was when I came out as a teacher. What our young people are learning in our schools is of far higher quality. It is different. People sometimes want to reminisce and say that exams were harder in the past and that we learned French and maths better, but young people now come out able to take up their place in the world with a broader and more rounded education. However, there is still unfairness and inequality in respect of the ability of those from the most deprived backgrounds to advance themselves. There are exceptions in the communities that I mentioned—Barrhead, Neilston, Linwood and Johnstone—who go on to become doctors, architects, lawyers and so on, but there are too many who are not able to fulfil their potential.

Despite the sneering remarks that I have heard about councils and whether they could find money

and do better, the stark reality is that most councils across Scotland are trying to do their best with the very bad hand that has been dealt them. Renfrewshire Council is trying to protect education. The cuts to education might not be as bad in Renfrewshire as they are elsewhere, but that is only because other services are being cut and will see the direct consequence of less money being delivered.

Even if the cabinet secretary, George Adam, Joan McAlpine and others were correct—I will not go into arguments about taxation; others have dealt with that far better than I could—have we no ambition to be able to say, in this Parliament, in 21st century Scotland, that although some good things are going on, there is much still to be done? Have we no ambition to say to people like you, Presiding Officer, me, the cabinet secretary and the First Minister that we should put our shoulder to the wheel and contribute more to help those who are not reaching their full potential? Have we no ambition to see, in the current circumstances, what difference extra investment might make to education in this country? If we do not have the ambition or courage to say that we should contribute to something that will transform lives for the better, we do not, to be frank, deserve to be here.

16:04

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): I do not doubt for one minute any member's commitment to having a better education system in Scotland. Every single person who stands for election to the Scottish Parliament, local authorities, the UK Parliament or even the European Parliament wants to make a positive difference for their community.

Usually, I do not agree with Mr Henry—or vice versa—but I could agree with quite a lot of what he said, certainly at the beginning of his speech. When he mentioned as an example people from poorer backgrounds accessing university, it took me back to when I was at university—I was the first person in my family to attend university. I remember that once, when I went home for the weekend, I got a taxi from the town up to the house and I was speaking to the taxi driver. He asked me where I had come from, so I told him, and I said that I was going home for the weekend. His attitude to university was appalling. I asked him about his family, and he said straight away, "My daughter's not doing that rubbish. That's not for people like us." Going back to Mr Henry's comments, I accept that there are challenges, but one of the biggest challenges that we have to face is parents who do not see university as something for them or their family. We have to work on that barrier and that understanding.

Kezia Dugdale and Malcolm Chisholm, who has, unfortunately, left the chamber, spoke about some of the language that has been used in the debate, and Kezia Dugdale used the phrase "pejorative language". I am sure that she will agree that describing children as a "human shield", as one of her colleagues did, falls into that category. I would like to think that she will reflect on that.

The Scottish Government is committed to delivering both excellence and equity in equal measure for all children in Scotland. Almost £5 billion is invested through local authorities to deliver education each year, and the additional £100 million attainment Scotland fund is now benefiting more than 300 primary schools, including six in the area where I live. Having invested £51 million specifically to maintain teacher numbers this year, the Scottish Government has also committed £88 million to protect teacher numbers and places for new teachers across Scotland next year.

We heard earlier about the read, write, count campaign, and the national improvement framework has been introduced with Education Scotland inspections to focus on raising attainment in literacy and numeracy. We also have the making maths count programme as well as the national and local numeracy hubs.

Kezia Dugdale: I am enjoying the member's speech, but I ask him a direct question. Does he think that he pays enough tax? If not, would he be prepared to pay a bit more in order to invest in education in his community in Greenock?

Stuart McMillan: I am happy to pay a bit more tax. I have no issue with that whatsoever. The thing that I am not prepared to do is to ask people with lower incomes to pay more tax and to pay a higher percentage of their income in tax than others would pay. I do not think that it would be fair for someone who earns £20,000 or less to pay a higher percentage of additional moneys as compared with the First Minister, which would be 2.7 per cent.

Kezia Dugdale: Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: I have already taken an intervention and I have only a short time left.

Labour has not outlined the cost of protecting the education budget in real terms over the next five years, or how it would fund that. Figures that SPICe has produced show that Labour's plan would entail spending more than £561 million during the next session of Parliament, taking its total spending commitments to almost £5 billion. Despite those huge spending commitments, Labour has thus far brought forward plans to raise only an additional £400 million by shifting the burden of Tory austerity on to low earners in

Scotland through a 1p tax hike on working people. In addition to increasing the tax rate by 1p, I would like to know what Labour wants to cut to raise the money. Does it want to take money from the NHS budget or from another budget? I really do not know. I hope that someone will tell me in the closing speech.

Labour has proposed a £100 cashback from local authority coffers to compensate low earners for their losses. Last week Jackie Baillie provided an extraordinary spectacle in the Parliament when she said that how compensation would be given was a mere detail and that we should concentrate on the principle.

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: I am sorry, but I do not have time to do so.

The detail is everything. There are questions as to whether the rebate would even be legal. The powers would become available only after the Scotland Bill comes into force next year, but Labour wants to implement the measure this year. The cashback cannot be a tax rebate, as Labour's Alex Rowley called it last week, nor can it be a social security payment, because powers in that regard are not yet devolved. Even then, the proposed refund will be riddled with complexity. How will it be administered? How much will it cost? Will the new income itself be taxable? How will it impact on other benefits, such as tax credits? Any proposal for a tax increase must be examined in that broader context.

It is clear that, under this Scottish Government, education is moving forward. Labour's sums on the issue do not add up and never will do.

16:11

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab): I am pleased to have the chance to speak in today's debate in support of Scottish Labour's call to protect Scotland's education budget.

As Kezia Dugdale said, education is everything. Our nurseries, schools, colleges and universities are the stairways out of disadvantage. The best investment that we can make as a nation is in our children, to ensure that every child gets the best start in life and has the support that they need if they are to reach their true potential. It can never be right that a child's postcode has more influence on what a child achieves in life than their talents, efforts or hard work. We will achieve a fairer, more equal Scotland only if we act now to ensure that life is fairer and more equal for every child.

Over recent weeks and months, we have had many debates in the Parliament on the attainment gap, and rightly so. However, the SNP

Government has been in power for nine years. It is time for its ambitious goals and aspirations and its warm words to be backed up by concrete policies, secure funding and real results.

I want education policies that do not just scratch the surface but transform the opportunities for our children. I want policies that have at heart the need to close the cycle of disadvantage. I want policies that harness the new powers that are on their way to our Scottish Parliament, such as Labour's fair start fund, which would deliver investment to support every poorer child, in every school, nursery and community.

In my constituency, Dunfermline, just two schools receive money from the Scottish Government's attainment fund. Under Scottish Labour's plans, an additional £1 million would be invested in my constituency every single year to support measures to tackle the attainment gap.

Bold ambitions do little good if the budgets that fund our schools, nurseries and early years programmes are slashed. Research by the Scottish Parliament information centre has revealed that if the SNP proceeds with its plans, real-term spending on education could be cut by a staggering 16 per cent by 2020.

Just over half Fife Council's budget is spent on education. Thanks to investment in early intervention to end the cycle of disadvantage, we have bucked the trend and are starting to close the attainment gap in Fife schools. However, thanks to the cuts that are on the way—£38 million this year and £91 million over the next three years—that progress will be undermined and put at risk.

COSLA said that the additional cuts that John Swinney announced will have "potentially devastating consequences" for local authority budgets for schools and nurseries in Scotland. Those cuts come on top of cuts in spending per pupil. Since the SNP came to power, spending per pupil is down by more than £560 in primary schools and by as much as £300 in pre-schools and high schools. Those cuts will undermine the education and life chances of our children. They will hit the children who need the most support hardest. They will undermine our ambition to make Scotland the best place to grow up.

The cuts will also undermine the SNP's policy pledges, such as the commitment to 30 hours of free childcare. There is a cut of 57 per cent to the budget to build new nurseries, at a time when the fair funding for our kids campaign estimates that we will need 650 new nurseries if the SNP's election pledge is to be delivered. Parents waited seven years for the SNP to deliver 15 hours of childcare per week; if the cuts go ahead, the wait for 30 hours could be indefinite.

We cannot cut the gap between the richest and the rest in our classrooms if we cut the budgets for our schools, our nurseries and our early intervention programmes. Today, Kezia Dugdale challenged the First Minister and the SNP to back our pledge to protect education spending and our call for a penny on income tax to protect education and local services.

Nicola Sturgeon has said that education is her priority, yet those cuts will short change our children's future. Added to the cuts to our schools and our colleges over the past few years, is it any wonder that our education system is no longer the envy of the world? Is it any surprise that the attainment gap is growing; that one in four P1 to P3 children are in classes of over 25, despite the pledge that no child would be in a class of over 18; and that, every year, thousands of children leave primary school unable to read or write properly?

The choice is clear. We can choose to pay a little more to protect education, to stop the cuts, to protect the education budget in real terms, every year, as the Scottish Labour motion calls for today, or we can choose to accept the cuts to the education budget under the SNP and accept that our children and our young people will pay the price of austerity.

Last week in the chamber, Tory members proudly stated that they were happy to stand shoulder to shoulder with the SNP against Scottish Labour's plan to stop the cuts. I am disappointed that Murdo Fraser is not here to hear the debate today.

The SNP often says that it wants us to have the power in our own hands to create a fairer Scotland. Right now, we have got that power, but there is no sign of any political will to create a fairer Scotland. The reality is that, despite the rhetoric that we hear all too often, the SNP is embarking on cuts that would make George Osborne proud. The SNP is not just standing shoulder to shoulder with the Tories; it is leading by example. It is implementing damaging and regressive cuts that will hit our vital public services and our communities—cuts to our schools, our nurseries, our colleges and our early years programmes. Last May, Nicola Sturgeon promised families in my constituency and across the country that she would stand up against Tory austerity, but now the SNP slogan, "Stronger for Scotland", can be seen for what it really is—"SNP: stronger for austerity".

It does not have to be this way and I do not believe that the majority of SNP voters or SNP supporters want it to be this way either. The SNP Government has a choice. Faced with the huge cuts to schools and services, it can choose to use the powers that we have in our hands to stop the cuts.

In conclusion, I very much hope that the Scottish Government and the cabinet secretary will think again and support Scottish Labour's call to protect education budgets. Let us show George Osborne that in Scotland we can and will make different choices, and that there is and must be a better way. Let us reject austerity and let us reject the cuts. Let us use the powers of our Parliament to invest in our children and to invest in Scotland's future.

16:17

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I have been struck by an element of double standard in the debate. I hear many calls for SNP members to temper their language and rhetoric, yet those members who are making the calls themselves engage in hyperbolic narrative and the casting of aspersions against those they oppose. I say to Labour members that, if they want to throw stones, they should step outside the glass house before doing so.

I recognise the importance of education. I was the first person from my family to go to university after leaving school. As a parent of two children, education is of vital importance to me, particularly as one of those children has additional educational needs and requires a greater degree of support for learning than in the mainstream environment. I recognise entirely the importance of education, and it is not something that is alien to me. If we start on that basis and remove ourselves from the casting of aspersions, let us look at some of the things that we should be talking about and focusing on in the debate.

First, there is a need for us to remember the world that exists outside the school gate. By the time that a child arrives at school, many formative experiences that a child has already had play a vital role in that child's future development. The door of the nursery is not the first point at which their brains can be influenced and they can gain knowledge and understanding of the world.

That is why things such as the play, talk, read and the wider play strategy are important. They are about encouraging parents to take an active role in the early formative years in encouraging children and their inquisitive nature. That is exceptionally important. It is also a question of support for other organisations, such as the Middlefield, Fersands and Printfield family projects in my constituency, which deliver important early years work prior to children arriving at school.

Johann Lamont: Will the member give way?

Mark McDonald: I will happily do so after I have developed my argument further.

The wee green spaces scheme in Aberdeen has taken children from areas of deprivation where they do not have a great deal of outdoor learning opportunity or space to, for example, the botanic garden at the University of Aberdeen, enabling them to gain a wider understanding of nature and the world around them.

That work does not cost that much in monetary terms but its impact on the children is extremely valuable and important.

Johann Lamont: I absolutely agree with the member about the importance of such projects. Education, particularly for children from difficult backgrounds, is about more than the school. However, does the member not recognise that, if local government is targeted for cuts, those are precisely the types of projects that will get stripped out of schools and communities? In the schools that I go into, there are no longer the same numbers of education, behaviour and learning support teachers and support staff. Surely that must be a concern. It is the soft measures that help to close the attainment gap.

Mark McDonald: I am unaware of any proposals on the table to reduce or remove the projects that I have mentioned in the communities that I represent. I cannot speak for other communities or, indeed, for the priority-based budgeting approach that other local authorities will take. I will come back to the point on budgets.

My second point is about the learning environment for children. I can look in my constituency at a range of improvements that have been made in that regard. Examples include Heathryburn school and Manor Park school, which are now state-of-the-art school buildings that replace dilapidated structures dating from many years previous.

Another example is the new Brimmond school in Aberdeen, which took over Newhills and Bucksburn schools—where the buildings were not fit for purpose for the modern curriculum—and amalgamated them into one campus. Interestingly, the Labour Party was vehemently opposed to the proposal when it was made. Now, with a state-of-the-art school building on site, it is singing its praises.

That demonstrates the commitment that we took as a local authority administration—I was part of the administration at the time—as well as the Scottish Government's commitment to fund the project through its programme for improving and renewing school buildings.

Johann Lamont's point about support for learning and additional support needs is important. I welcome that the minister has given a commitment to look at how the presumption of mainstreaming is being applied. I think that there

are discrepancies in how individual local authorities are applying that, so I welcome that review. It might help us to take a more holistic approach to how we deliver education for children with additional support needs.

A call was made to have a rational debate on taxation. Allow me to take up that opportunity. I am fully signed up to the notion that those with the broadest shoulders should carry the highest burden. However, the issue that I have, which is the same issue that the Finance Committee has and why it unanimously recommended to retain the Scottish rate of income tax at 10p, is that to add on one penny would essentially make it a flat tax, because that would increase all the rates, regardless of how much people can pay.

I recognise that those of us on a higher income should be prepared to pay a higher burden, but the inflexibility of the Scottish rate of income tax means that, while one penny would be added to my tax, it would also be added to those on lower incomes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Draw to a close, please.

Mark McDonald: The Labour Party recognises that fact—if it did not, it would not have proposed a rebate scheme. It is important for the detail behind the scheme to be laid out. It cannot be enough for a Labour spokesperson when asked about that by a Sunday newspaper to say, "I'm sorry—I'm too busy watching the rugby. That's all you're getting."

Lesley Brennan (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Mark McDonald: I am afraid that I am at the end of my speech, Ms Brennan.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is excellent; thank you very much.

Before I call Liam McArthur, I invite members who have taken part in the debate to return to the chamber for the closing speeches, please.

16:24

Liam McArthur: I think that this has been an excellent debate. There have been a few rebukes for language that might have been less than parliamentary, but the quality of the contributions this afternoon has been of a very high order.

I take my lead from Mary Scanlon at the outset not just by paying credit to Kezia Dugdale's father, to my mother, who is a retired headteacher, and to my sister, who is a modern languages teacher in Glasgow, but by putting on record my gratitude for the work that is being done by teachers and the

other staff in our schools across Scotland and, more broadly, for the support that they provide to our children and young people.

I think that it was Stewart Stevenson who helpfully set out not just the value and the purpose of education but the challenges that it faces in a modern era if it is to prepare our young people for life in the modern world. It has been said previously that it is a question of lighting fires rather than filling buckets, and I think that that is true. There is undoubtedly any number of examples of where our education system is genuinely world class, and there is much that we can rightly take pride in. Hugh Henry made a valid point about the way in which we are preparing not only our young people but our teachers to perform the roles that they need to perform.

We must also acknowledge that there are warning signs. The OECD report gave us ample evidence of them, and the Scottish Government needs to face up to them more honestly. The talk from the cabinet secretary about how promises are meant to be kept sat rather awkwardly with the list of issues such as nursery education provision, student debt, class sizes, teacher numbers, college places and so on.

The trends for Scotland in a number of areas of international comparison are going the wrong way, which should set alarm bells ringing. We have seen literacy rates, particularly for those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, going backwards rather than forwards. To give due credit to the Government, it has attached the highest priority to closing the attainment gap, which has universal support in the chamber. Hugh Henry was candid in suggesting that that is not something that can be squarely laid at the door of the current Scottish Government. It is something that successive administrations of all political hues have had to wrestle with, and it has proved to be stubbornly resistant to a range of different measures.

The problem that I have is that aspects of the Scottish Government response look deficient. The criticism that I have made on many occasions in relation to the attainment fund, welcome though it is, is that it takes an area-based approach that ignores, overlooks or downplays the extent to which poverty and need are reflected in communities right across the country. I also think that the confidence that appears to be invested in a move back to national testing in primary schools is misplaced and will be regretted.

It was interesting that in part of the debate on how we tackle the attainment gap there were repeated calls from SNP members for more powers. There was no sense of irony in Joan McAlpine's comment that the levers that are needed to address that issue are all at

Westminster. That is against the backdrop of a Scottish Government that is proposing £500 million of cuts to council budgets. Half of what councils do is in the area of education and broader children's services, so it is not difficult to see where those cuts are more likely to fall and to fall heavily. That is a choice that has been made by the SNP Government.

In her opening remarks, the cabinet secretary called on Labour members to join in common cause to fight the UK Government. She did not appear to be interested in having them join in common cause to take responsibility by using the powers that we have to protect council budgets that deliver so much in terms of our schools and early learning. That is the area where common cause would be more usefully found.

There is no doubt that the choice is a decision that the Scottish Government has made. It has the option of expanding the budget for the first time properly since devolution, yet it has opted to take the route of savage cuts and blaming Westminster, rather than using those powers to invest in education. It could do that by investing in a pupil premium for every child who needs it, wherever they live in Scotland; by delivering childcare and early learning against the promises that were made but have so far failed to be delivered on; and by using that investment to repair some of the damage that has been done to our college sector. As Mary Scanlon and Hugh Henry both pointed out, around 150,000 student places have been cut in the further education sector, as well as many of the jobs and the support functions within it as well. Those are all areas where investment is desperately needed. We also need to make up some of the shortfall that will be passed on to councils this year.

The tax power that is available is progressive. I thought that Johann Lamont made that point better than anyone in an excellent speech. We have argued for the Parliament's powers to be expanded precisely to take enable it to take such action. Malcolm Chisholm debunked the statistical chicanery that has been deployed by the First Minister and by most of the SNP speakers in the debate.

I was interested in Lucy Hunter's view. In her blog, she said:

"the main tactic has been to find any angle at all which looks at the earnings side of the equation. Because as long as that's the focus of attention, conversation is shut out on what might be done with £400m or more of avoided cuts."

That is what we have had in this afternoon's debate. Good though it has been—speeches by members of all parties have been excellent—SNP members have wanted to focus solely on the earnings side, despite the fact that the Government's statistical chicanery bears little or

no scrutiny. What many of us want to do is focus on what that investment would allow us to do in making good the shortfall in funding in education.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Draw to a close, please.

Liam McArthur: John Swinney agreed with that, as many have said. He called for tax increases when they were not needed, as Malcolm Chisholm said, and his party is now using the language of the right-wing media to denounce the use of progressive taxation as a “tax grab”, as George Adam described it. George Adam also referred to people’s pockets being picked. SNP members may come to regret the use of such language—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Liam McArthur: —as the cuts begin to bite at a local level. I urge the Scottish Government to think again about using the powers that the Parliament has to demonstrate the priority that it and all of us should attach to education.

16:31

Mary Scanlon: Today’s debate has focused on who is going to spend more on education and who is going to raise taxes, but I would like to put forward a spend-to-save policy as something that the SNP might consider including in its manifesto for the next election. It is a policy to help us to close the attainment gap.

I start by commending someone who is rarely mentioned in the chamber—this is probably the first time that it has happened: the Duchess of Cambridge. I commend her for speaking out in favour of children’s mental health and counsellors in schools. Helping and supporting young children at the earliest opportunity through schools counselling can increase attainment and attendance, improve behaviour, have a positive impact on studying and learning, reduce bullying, lead to higher achievement and more positive destinations, and reduce the number of referrals to child and adolescent mental health services.

Labour members are laughing. I have to tell them that, such has been the success of the policy in Wales that the Labour Government there has embedded it in legislation. I would like to think that, where Labour leads in Wales, perhaps the nationalists could follow in Scotland.

School counsellors are available in every school in Northern Ireland. As I said, such has been their success in Wales that the service has been embedded in legislation. At Westminster, school-based counselling programmes are being piloted and rolled out. It is only in Scotland that we have a Government that lacks the commitment to help all

troubled children and young people who are experiencing emotional health difficulties. Surely at least some of the £100 million attainment fund could be used for pilot studies to gather an evidence base to support this spend-to-save policy to benefit children, young people and, in future, our economy. I hope that the minister will pick up on that when he sums up.

In the Liberal Democrat-led debate, we considered the pupil premium. It is worth mentioning that it is not just the pupil premium that we are deprived of in Scotland; we are also deprived of the service personnel premium. In England, the sum of £300 per child is paid to local authorities to cover the changes in the school system that children of service personnel experience. However, Moray Council, for example, gets nothing for the hundreds of children of Royal Air Force personnel at Lossiemouth and the Royal Engineers at Kinloss. That is also worth considering, given that those children move around different education systems.

I want to talk about higher education, simply because the Education and Culture Committee considered the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 this week. We are having a serious debate here and we should also have serious legislation. However, we now have a piece of primary legislation that states that universities have to place advertisements on the internet and they have to let people know where they can get an application form. That is in primary legislation.

How those universities have managed for hundreds of years, I do not know. They must be so pleased that we now have a Scottish nationalist Government to tell them how to advertise for a job, how to write a job description and where to get an application form. All those learned, world-class scholars in Scotland must be breathing a sigh of relief.

The higher education bill actually states that vacancies must be advertised

“on the institution’s website”

and that advertisements must explain

“how the application form ... can be obtained”.

When we are having a serious debate on education, I think that that is embarrassing. Our ancient and not so ancient universities must be so delighted about this move from the SNP, setting out in legislation how to get an application form and a job description.

Not only is the relationship that was the historic concordat with local authorities at an all-time low, the SNP has managed to have a battle with every single university in Scotland. That takes something; falling out with one or other of them now and again is one thing—we can all do that—

but every single university is having a battle with the SNP so, my goodness, the SNP knows how to create problems.

I thought that Johann Lamont, as an ex-teacher, made a very good speech, although I did not agree with the taxation points. I think that we should listen to folk who have been in the Parliament for a long time—and I do not just mean myself. She said that we should be looking for a more mature debate. At times today, people who should know better have spoken in a way that does not make me feel proud of this chamber. We can all do better. If Johann Lamont in her former role or any current modern studies teachers were looking on today, I do not think that they would recommend the cabinet secretary as a good example of how to participate in a debating society.

However, when Johann Lamont asks why the Scottish Government is so timid on taxation, she might remember Alex's penny for Scotland in 1999—as Mike Russell might have said, muckle guid it did them.

Moving to Stewart Stevenson's speech, I have to commend dear Stewart. His grandfather was a teacher. My father was a farm labourer and I am just as proud of the work that he did. I thank Stewart for his lecture on history, mathematics, Calvinism and economic theory.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Mary Scanlon: Finally, I thank Hugh Henry because, when members in the chamber are constantly saying, "Who is the worst enemy of the Tories?", he had the decency to stand up and to say that he agreed with some of my points. I thank him for his common decency in doing so. Thank you, Mr Henry.

16:39

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): Today, we could have had a debate about the importance of education generally and the consequences of Tory policy for Scotland's budget, and at times we did. However, at times, the debate has effectively been about the difference between reality and fantasy in some areas. The reality of education in Scotland is inspiring. We have heard the reality, which is all that the Government is doing to raise attainment and improve standards in education and the very real amounts of money that we are investing to achieve that.

We have noted the £2.9 billion investment in 2016-17 to prioritise early years and early intervention, closing the attainment gap, on-going

implementation of the curriculum for excellence, continued support for Scotland's reformed college sector and maintaining free access to higher education. We have also shown that funding for education has increased by more than 1 per cent in cash terms.

Some of our key investments include £100 million in the Scottish attainment fund; £1.8 billion in Scotland's schools for the future programme; £329 million over two years to expand childcare; £530 million in college estates; and more than £1 billion for higher education. We can point to particular things that we are doing that we can be very proud of, such as the maintenance of the education maintenance allowance and the fact that we have ensured that the number of under-25s studying at college has increased 14 per cent since 2006.

Liam McArthur: The minister has listed a range of achievements, and I would not decry any of them. He mentioned the attainment fund in particular. He will be aware of the criticism that it is not addressing the needs of those living in 11 different council areas, and one of the reasons that has been suggested for that is that there are not enough resources. In the debate, we are trying to explain how those resources could be expanded to ensure that any child who needs it, wherever they live in Scotland, would have the support that a very welcome attainment fund is providing for those in other council areas.

Dr Allan: The Government has made a real commitment on attainment. In response to the point that Liam McArthur and other members have made about the fact that the initial commitment was to seven local authority areas, I point out that it has been extended to 57 schools outwith those areas. That is testament to the Government's commitment to tackling the large issue that remains in our society about closing that attainment gap as well as the equity gap.

We should not forget that councils have indicated that they are spending 3.3 per cent more in cash terms on the delivery of education in 2015-16. All that significant investment is delivering results. For most of our children, our education system in Scotland delivers success at all ages and stages. Even where we know that there is still much more to do to close the attainment gap—a point that I acknowledge—there are promising signs of real progress.

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): Does the minister accept that teachers in our secondary schools in particular are under massive pressure and that, when there are cuts to support services, such as classroom assistants, that has a major impact on the workloads of our teachers?

Dr Allan: At no point in the introduction of the new qualifications in schools, for example, did I seek to diminish or take away from the fact that there has been a huge workload for Scotland's teachers. That is why I have been chairing the working group on tackling bureaucracy in schools. It is also why I am bringing stakeholders together right now to look at the qualifications and the lessons that can be learned from the way in which they have been implemented and ensuring that teachers are given the time to teach in the process.

The OECD recommended that we should be

"rigorous about the gaps to be closed and pursue relentlessly 'closing the gap' and 'raising the bar' simultaneously".

That is indeed our vision for Scottish education. In developing the framework we have been clear that we need better evidence to help us to understand attainment and the gap between the most and least disadvantaged children. Both before children start school and in further and higher education our policies are also focused on helping those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve their potential.

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Dr Allan: I am sorry, but I have taken a couple of interventions already and I must make progress.

Mary Scanlon pointed to the issue of mental health and school counsellors. This week is mental health week in schools and I was very glad to visit a school in Edinburgh today that is taking very seriously the need to provide impartial advice to children in primary school about the emotional difficulties that they face, as well as developing emotional literacy and equipping them for the future.

Mary Scanlon will forgive me, but she said some other things during the debate that I struggled with. For example, I struggled to see how she made her case that the fact that the Government is ensuring that school pupils in the Highlands did not have their classroom hours cut below those that are enjoyed by pupils elsewhere in the country was an act of gangsterism. She made an important point about ensuring equity of access to higher education but neglected to mention that young people who come from the most deprived areas in Scotland are more likely to participate in higher education by the age of 30 than was the case in 2006. The figure is up from 35 per cent to 42 per cent, although I acknowledge that there is much more to do.

Kezia Dugdale: Does the minister recognise that students who come from a poor background in England are twice as likely to go to university as those from a similar background in Scotland are?

Dr Allan: I pointed out that Scotland's figures are increasing. I cannot for the life of me believe that equity of access to higher education would be enhanced in any way if we followed the example of others and charged £9,000 for the privilege of attending university, as some have called for.

George Adam described how he, like me, went to school if not in Victorian times then certainly in a Victorian building. The school estate is one of the things that have been transformed in our school system in the past few years; 607 new or refurbished schools have become available.

Liam McArthur argued as elegantly as ever but, in making his case for £0.5 billion extra spending, he conveniently forgot to mention his party's role in removing £2.3 billion in real terms from Scotland's budget while his party was in government with the Tories.

I began my contribution to the debate by saying that there is a difference between reality and the fantasy that has come out in this debate. If members can bear it, I will look briefly at the sorry fantasy world that Labour seems to inhabit, at least partially, these days. Labour has today suggested that we have cut education funding by 16 per cent while offering no evidence for any such thing, quoted education budgets for future years when no such budgets have been set, and suggested in its motion that we should commit to five years of real-terms increases in education with no indication at all of how it might be paid for. Such a real-terms increase would mean that education spend would increase by 7.7 per cent at a time when, Labour must acknowledge, Scotland's budget will increase by just over 1 per cent.

As Joan McAlpine pointed out, we heard barely a word of criticism from Labour members of the Tory cuts to Scotland's budget. We never ever hear that. The new money that would have to be found would have to be found from somewhere. Labour's contribution today was an example of frantic ingenuity of Phileas Fogg as he burned the decks of his vessel when his stokers ran out of coal, except that Labour is now burning down the hull and coming pretty close to the Plimsoll line. The voters are not daft. They will understand that it is this Government that is committing itself to Scotland's education system and doing so with great success.

16:48

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): The debate today has occasionally been fractious, but that is only because real and important issues are at stake. I agree with Stewart Stevenson that there is one thing that pretty much all members agree

on—the importance of education. For every young person, and some who are not so young, it is the key to being all that we can be. It is the surest path out of poverty and the most direct road to a better job in the future.

Education is also the critical ingredient in economic success and prosperity for us all. Years ago, when I taught in a rural technical school in Mozambique, young people came from all over the country and lived for years in the most basic conditions in spite of war and famine, just to learn. Why? Because they knew that education was their best chance of a better life. With almost no resources at all, that country made sure that it paid to keep that school and other schools going, because it knew that the future prosperity of the nation depended on lifting educational standards and attainment. How much more, in that case, should we—the nation of the enlightenment, of invention, of culture, of learning—be willing to protect our education system as very first priority?

Our universities, on which that reputation was built, understand that. Not only are they turning out thousands of high quality graduates every year, but they are investing in our economy and working with tens of thousands of companies to translate research and development innovation into new products and processes for business. The jobs and prosperity of our future lie in high skilled, high technology, high knowledge-content industries. We must have that because, in the 21st century, we cannot build prosperity on low-skilled, low-wage work. If we understand all that—if we truly understand the importance of education—we have to be prepared to stand up for it.

The First Minister has told us again and again that education is a priority, and that she will be judged on her record on education. However, her record tells us that those words are empty. In nine years, this Government has delivered nearly 4,500 fewer teachers, increased class sizes, a £500 per head per year drop in the spend on primary pupils, 152,000 fewer students in colleges—with thousands of lecturers gone, too—university grants that have been cut to pieces, student debt that has doubled, falling literacy and numeracy standards, and a situation in which we are trailing the rest of the United Kingdom on widening access to university.

Mark McDonald: Iain Gray mentioned teacher numbers. Teacher employment is a matter for local authorities. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Order.

Mark McDonald: Following calls from the Labour Party, this Government put in place conditional funding for maintenance of teacher numbers, but the Labour Party opposed it. What, exactly, does Iain Gray propose?

Iain Gray: That is not correct. We opposed fining local authorities for not being able, in the face of the cuts that have been passed down by the Scottish Government, to maintain teacher numbers. What Mr McDonald fails to acknowledge is that we are talking about a promise that was made by this Government and broken by this Government.

A year after the First Minister told us that education is a priority, what has she done to turn all that around? She has put in place an inadequate attainment gap fund, which is unplanned and misdirected, with 1,500 schools receiving nothing at all. A year on, many of the schools that are meant to receive money have yet to see any. She has given us a budget that cuts college budgets in real terms yet again, and which cuts funding in real terms to our universities, which are extremely important to us. Only this morning, we read that the University of Dundee says that it faces a threat to its financial sustainability. Surely more universities will follow.

Above all, the First Minister has cut hundreds of millions of pounds from council budgets, which are—I say to Mr McDonald—the very budgets that pay for employment of our teachers. We already see from around the country proposals to cut classroom assistants, to cut music tuition, to end breakfast clubs, to abolish school librarians—that proposal comes from Argyll and Bute Council—to close schools and to increase class sizes even further. We cannot cut hundreds of millions of pounds from council budgets and not damage schools.

Of course, this is just the start. Figures from SPICe show us that that dismal record is about to get worse. Its modelling—for the benefit of Mr Allan, I say that the modelling is not of the past but of the future—shows that, if the Government continues on the course that it has set, education faces a 16 per cent cut over the course of the next session of Parliament. That is not a plan for investing in our future.

Today's debate has been used by some members to raise some important issues. Mary Scanlon raised the issue of counselling in schools, and Mark McDonald rightly spoke about the importance of early years family support.

However, our motion is simple, direct and to the point. It asks that we come together—make “common cause”, as the cabinet secretary said—and make a promise to the people of Scotland that for the next five years, whoever forms the Government, we will use Parliament's powers to protect our education system. In response, the Government has lodged a meaningless amendment of self-justification and cynical sophistry to try to pretend that there are no cuts to education.

The First Minister has explained that there are no cuts, just reprofiling. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning told us today that there are just technical adjustments and, last night, John Swinney said that it is just changed accounting provisions. Parents will be relieved to know that the teachers that they thought had disappeared from their schools have just been reprofiled, 152,000 students will be delighted to hear that they have just been technically adjusted out of their colleges, and the University of Dundee is no doubt just changing its accounting procedures, and not cutting research and teaching at all.

That nonsense descended into farce when the cabinet secretary told us that none of us could count and then took on SPICe, the Resolution Foundation, the IPPR, David Eiser, Professor Bell and all the rest in a kind of celebrity debate death match so unequal that one could watch it only through one's fingers.

Johann Lamont and Malcolm Chisholm demonstrated clearly that the argument that the Scottish rate of income tax is not progressive is nonsense, but if SNP members do not believe any of us, will they believe Mr Swinney? He said:

"I view the Scottish rate of income tax as a progressive power".—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 13 January 2016; c 40.]

I know that I am sometimes characterised as dour, but there are some things for which I burn with a passion. One is education. It transformed my life and I have spent my life trying to give that opportunity to others. However, I am also passionate about the Parliament.

I am old enough to remember the last time Scottish education faced Tory cuts. I had a ringside seat for most of the 1980s, but then, standing between the Tory Government and our children's futures, were regional councils, which had no intention of lying down to the Tories. They fought tooth and nail for their workforces' jobs, for services and for our schools. They used every power at their disposal—and, to be frank, some that were not—to resist Tory cuts.

Out of all of that came a groundswell of support for a Scottish Parliament in which we could make our mind up about what really matters to us. We have done that: Labour-led Governments made personal care free, protected our citizens from secondary smoking and invested in schools, teachers and early-intervention programmes because all those were important to us.

However, the Parliament was founded for this moment: a Tory Government that is obsessed with austerity that threatens education funding and, thereby, the nation's future. Education was devolved to us so that we could say no, and the

Scottish rate of income tax was created to allow us the choice to do that. That is what the SNP said it would do. Instead, it has doubled the cuts up and passed them on to every council in the land.

We can do better than that. When we are asked what tax rates should be, we can do a bit better than Mr Swinney's answer, which is, "Whatever George Osborne tells me they're going to be." When we are asked what we are going to do for the schools of our children and grandchildren, we can do better than hundreds of millions of pounds of cuts. I say to Mr Allan that the Parliament was built not to criticise Tory cuts but to stand up to them. It was not built for spineless acquiescence and rank, rotten expediency. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Iain Gray: There may be three or four votes tonight, but there is only one question for each and every one of us, and we should search our consciences. We must ask, "Can I, will I, rise to the occasion, rise to this place and vote to protect Scotland's education system for the next five years?" We will. Will the SNP?

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on Scotland's future prosperity.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-15594, 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 23 February 2016

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Justice Committee Debate: Scotland's National Action Plan on Human Rights

followed by Scottish Government Debate: BBC Charter Renewal Process

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 24 February 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Rural Affairs, Food and Environment;
Justice and the Law Officers

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Budget (Scotland) (No.5) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 25 February 2016

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2016 [draft]

followed by Ministerial Statement: Programme of

Child Protection Work

followed by

Stage 3 Proceedings: Scottish Elections (Dates) Bill

followed by

Stage 1 Debate: Criminal Verdicts (Scotland) Bill

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

Tuesday 1 March 2016

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 2 March 2016

2.00 pm

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm

Portfolio Questions
Health, Wellbeing and Sport

followed by

Scottish Government Business

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

Thursday 3 March 2016

11.40 am

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am

General Questions

12.00 pm

First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm

Members' Business

2.30 pm

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

followed by

Stage 3 Proceedings: Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc. and Care) (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 business motion S4M-15595, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 2 timetable for the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the

Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 11 March 2016.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-15619, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the suspension of standing orders.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that Rule 2.2.5(a) of Standing Orders be suspended for the purpose of allowing the Parliament to meet beyond 5.30 pm on—

- (a) Thursday 11 February 2016; and
- (b) Tuesday 23 February 2016.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of four Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-15596, on referral of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motions S4M-15597 to S4M-15599, on approval of SSIs, en bloc.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2016 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Authority (Capital Finance and Accounting) (Scotland) Regulations 2016 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Welfare Funds (Scotland) Regulations 2016 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002 Amendment Order 2016 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on those motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to today's debate, if the amendment in the name of Angela Constance is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Mary Scanlon falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-15588.3, in the name of Angela Constance, which seeks to amend motion S4M-15588, in the name of Iain Gray, on Scotland's future prosperity, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

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

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brennan, Lesley (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

Abstentions

Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 61, Against 59, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Mary Scanlon therefore falls.

The next question is, that motion S4M-15588.1, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S4M-15588, in the name of Iain Gray, on Scotland's future prosperity, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brennan, Lesley (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

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

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 41, Against 80, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-15588, in the name of Iain Gray, as amended, on Scotland's future prosperity, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

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

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brennan, Lesley (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 61, Against 60, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the estimated £7.2 billion invested in education in 2015-16; further welcomes the increase in local government education resource spending of at least £208 million since 2006-07 and the planned increase of 3.3% in 2015-16; believes that Scottish education is already performing well, with attainment improving; notes the OECD view that Scottish education has the potential to lead the world; further believes therefore that there is more to do to improve education, and agrees that protection of the pupil-teacher ratio, investment in closing the attainment gap and reform of how attainment is assessed is the right way forward.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-15596, on referral of the—*[Interruption.]* Order.

The next question is, that motion S4M-15596, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on referral of the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2016 [draft], be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2016 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on motions S4M-15597 to S4M-15599, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments. If any member objects to a single question being put, please say so now. *[Interruption.]* No member has objected to a single question being put, despite the noise in the chamber.

The question is, that motions S4M-15597 to S4M-15599, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of SSIs, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Authority (Capital Finance and Accounting) (Scotland) Regulations 2016 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Welfare Funds (Scotland) Regulations 2016 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002 Amendment Order 2016 [draft] be approved.

Female Genital Mutilation

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-15275, in the name of Margaret McCulloch, on international day of zero tolerance for female genital mutilation. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that 6 February is International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation; considers that female genital mutilation (FGM) is recognised internationally as a violation of the human rights of women and girls, in which their genitals are injured or altered for non-medical reasons; understands that an estimated 140 million women and girls alive today have undergone some form of FGM; welcomes a growing determination around the world to eliminate FGM and support victims of this form of gender-based violence; further notes the development of a national FGM action plan in Scotland, and notes the aspiration to a world in which this extreme form of discrimination against women and girls is eradicated once and for all.

17:09

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank all members who have supported the motion and allowed me to bring the issue of female genital mutilation to the chamber. I also thank all the organisations and activists who have committed so much of their time to raising awareness of FGM not just among the wider public and in front-line services, but among members, ministers, researchers and staff in the Parliament. I am pleased that some of those people have joined us in the public gallery.

This might be the last opportunity that we have to debate FGM in a plenary session, but it is certainly not the first time that the Parliament has addressed the issue. Through members' business debates, Government debates, parliamentary questions and committee sessions, a number of members from across the Parliament—Kenny Gibson, Christina McKelvie, Jenny Marra and Patricia Ferguson, to name but a few—have taken an interest in the important issue of FGM.

In this session in particular, there has been a renewed focus on the issues that surround FGM and welcome progress towards the prevention and elimination of that appalling form of discrimination. In the past few days, people throughout the country and around the world—from policy makers in Assemblies and Parliaments such as the Scottish Parliament to those who work on the front line in countries in which there is a practising population to activists and agitators worldwide who are campaigning for change—have observed the international day of zero tolerance for female genital mutilation.

The international day of zero tolerance for FGM was a day for reflection, to think of victims, and to commemorate those who have been excluded, injured or even killed due to the ignorance and inequality that lie behind FGM. It was a day for education to raise awareness so that the world can know what that injustice is and why it must be stopped. Most important, it was a day for action, to say “No more”, to put forward solutions and to galvanise the work of charities, activists, non-governmental organisations and Governments in a drive to end that form of abuse.

FGM is an extreme form of gender-based discrimination. It is an act of violence against women and girls, a violation of their bodies and a violation of their human rights. UNICEF has estimated that more than 120 million women and girls worldwide live with the consequences of FGM. They are mainly in 29 African countries, where the practising populations are high, and in areas such as Kurdistan, Iraq and Egypt. The World Health Organization places that figure at around 140 million, and the most recent United Nations figures suggest that it could even be as high as 200 million.

Mass migration and cross-border travel bring opportunities to our society, but they also mean that policy makers here must confront unfamiliar challenges from other cultures, such as FGM.

For clarity, FGM is a form of abuse in which women's and girls' genitals are injured and altered for non-medical reasons. That is an important point. There is no medical justification for it, and nor does it have any basis in religion. It is a cultural practice that is rooted in patriarchy and gender inequality.

In some cultures, FGM is seen as a prerequisite for marriage. It is seen as a way of preserving a girl's chastity before marriage and a woman's faithfulness afterwards. The pressure to undergo FGM in societies in which marriage is a means of finding social acceptance and economic security can be severe. The stigma of not having undergone it can be overwhelming. In meetings that I have held in my capacity as convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee, I have heard about young girls who had resisted being cut being forced into the most extreme and disturbing forms of FGM by those who were closest to them. That is another important point.

There are different forms of FGM. The World Health Organization recognises four categories. Type 1 mainly involves the partial or total removal of the clitoris. Type 2 involves excision, and again involves partial or total removal of the clitoris as well as the partial or total removal of the labia. Type 3 is infibulation, which involves narrowing the orifice and creating a seal by cutting and repositioning the labia with or without cutting the

clitoris. Type 4 covers all other procedures, including pricking and burning, and some of the most extreme and disturbing forms of FGM.

Needless to say, there are no health benefits in any of those procedures; they serve only to injure and to harm. Victims can experience pain, bleeding, shock, infection and, in the longer term, abscesses, cysts, adhesions and neuromas. Type 3 FGM can cause further complications such as reproductive tract infections and incontinence. Many women who are cut experience chronic pain, recurring infections for the rest of their lives, depression and post-traumatic stress. The death rate among babies during and immediately after childbirth is higher for those born to mothers who undergo some kind of FGM.

Three million women and girls are cut every year. It has to stop. The Scottish Government has launched a national action plan for FGM, which sets out the steps that the Government, its agencies and its partners can take to prevent and, we hope, eradicate this form of abuse. It comes in the wake of “Equally Safe”, which is the joint strategy of the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the prevention and elimination of violence against women.

Doing more to raise awareness, to support the organisations that work with victims and to train health and social work professionals to spot the signs of FGM could be transformative for those who are at risk or who have undergone FGM and need support. We also need to reach out to those who are suffering and those who are at risk in other countries. The challenge of FGM is global. We must rise to the challenge not as one nation but as part of an international community.

Nobody should have to endure this abuse. We must do all that we can to close the gap between the world that we have, in which millions are cut every year, and the world that we want, in which FGM is a thing of the past. No injustice can last forever. As pernicious as this inequality is, I believe that when words become deeds and ideas lead to action, change will come. This generation can—and must—end FGM.

17:17

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate Margaret McCulloch on securing this debate on an issue that I have long been concerned about, as she pointed out in her speech. Indeed, nearly 15 years ago I lodged a motion condemning female genital mutilation and I am shocked and horrified that, as Margaret McCulloch said, it continues across the globe on such a vast scale.

FGM is clearly a fundamental violation of human rights. Along with the trauma and pain that it puts young women through, its lasting effects can include cysts, infertility, infections and increased risk of new-born deaths due to complications with childbirth. Additionally, in certain instances, the procedure has been known to cause death. When one considers that it is often inflicted on women by their closest relatives—people whom they have known and trusted all their lives—it is obvious that psychological problems and depression can also follow.

FGM is a sign of deep-rooted inequality between the sexes in the societies in which it is practised, and it is an example of great misogyny and discrimination against girls and women. FGM is often done in certain cultures to prevent women from having sex outside of marriage and to keep them pure for their husbands—which is a double standard, as similar practice is of course not expected from men who belong to such patriarchal societies. Police Scotland said:

“FGM is a social convention ... the social pressure to conform to what others do and have been doing is a strong motivation to perpetuate the practice.”

Since the practice is almost always carried out on girls, it is a violation of not only human rights but the rights of children. The violation that these girls and women are put through is a horror that we must vigorously oppose and educate against.

Scotland banned the practice of FGM in 1985 and it has created policies to stop the further spread of abuse among those minority communities in which it is commonplace in their own countries. Such abuse will result in the prosecution of anyone who performs the procedure or tries to coerce a young girl into having the procedure performed on them. For example, a father or grandfather can be tried in court for strongly encouraging a young girl to receive the procedure, even though he may not have performed it himself.

There must be zero tolerance of such practices. We cannot be seen to have any form of soft stance on this matter. The trauma that millions of girls and women all over the world have to endure is quite simply unimaginable. Having days such as the international day of zero tolerance for female genital mutilation, which took place four days ago, allows Scotland and countries around the globe to unite in showing that we will not allow this abhorrent practice to continue.

Often, women or girls who have gone through this horrific torture feel too scared or ashamed to speak out about the terror that they have faced as they face pressure from within their cultural group to remain silent and often fear the stigma that could be attached to them by those who do not share their cultural identity. The international day

of zero tolerance for female genital mutilation is therefore also a time to make it clear that the people who have been through such torture can find a safe place here in Scotland.

I applaud the efforts of various charities throughout Scotland to provide support and training for victims. For example, Rape Crisis Glasgow, which thanked the Scottish Government for providing assistance to survivors of FGM, has just this past week set up a group that already helps at least 10 women. Isabelle Kerr, the manager at Rape Crisis Glasgow, said:

“This is giving women the chance to come together and support each other, and has also given us the chance to work with the women on building confidence and self-esteem, on their health and wellbeing, and on managing the symptoms of their trauma.”

I echo Margaret McCulloch in hoping that we all live to see a world in which this extreme form of discrimination against women and girls is eradicated once and for all. I have a mother, a wife, a daughter and a sister, and I could not possibly imagine such horrors happening to any of them. I hope we will continue to have a Scotland where prevention, protection, services and support are provided to all victims of FGM.

17:21

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I commend Margaret McCulloch for taking this opportunity to mark the international day of zero tolerance for female genital mutilation—a practice that infringes the basic human rights and health of women across the world.

This cruel practice, which is often carried out with crude tools and without anaesthetic, has no basis in medical necessity but is embedded in a long-standing cultural system that is deeply patriarchal. As such, in seeking to intervene and change attitudes in communities where the practice is present, we must ensure that any Scottish action plan takes a consultative approach, engaging with knowledgeable charities and community leaders as much as possible. Only through working with communities will we be able to identify where this most violent and cruel form of repression is prevalent, raise awareness and punish perpetrators.

All women have a human right to feel safe within their families and as part of society as a whole. Safety means equality, security and absolute freedom over their own bodies and wellbeing. “Equally Safe: Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls” encapsulates those rights and shows how policies can be put in place to tackle all forms of violence, repression and abuse of women. FGM is included, but in light of reports both here and throughout the

United Kingdom it is only right that we as a Parliament look to develop a more targeted and long-term action plan, and I welcome the publication of the draft for consultation last week. It looks to prevent future mutilation by protecting young girls who are at risk while also seeking to provide accessible and anonymous support for women who are trying to survive with physical and mental scars.

One such survivor, Nimco Ali, was cut as a seven-year-old while on holiday in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa. She set up the Daughters of Eve charity, which works to protect women from FGM, and she shared her experience in advance of zero tolerance day:

“FGM is a brutal practice, but it is also a very simple one to end. If you stop one woman having FGM done to her then you break that link and prevent it being done to the next generation. I came from a family that was 100% FGM and that has gone down to zero in a generation. It is something that can be ended. We are finally shaking the taboo of FGM, but we have to be vigilant and cannot be complacent.”

Ms Ali wants FGM to be discussed as part of mandatory sexual and relationship education classes at schools in England. I do not see why Scotland should be any different, and I would welcome the minister commenting on that. Children of all backgrounds have the capacity to break the cycle, and their awareness and support of classmates can help to change this cruel cultural norm.

The draft action plan states:

“FGM will continue to be a problem in Scotland until communities themselves choose to abandon the practice and we recognise that in order to find a solution to eradicate FGM, working with potentially affected communities is vital to breaking the cycle of violence.”

I pay tribute to the organisations that work with those communities in Scotland to achieve eradication.

The Scottish Refugee Council report “Tackling Female Genital Mutilation in Scotland: A Scottish model of intervention” looked at existing census data and sought to provide a picture, albeit limited, of the extent of the risk to communities that are living here now. The findings are highlighted in the draft action plan. There are approximately 24,000 men, women and children living in Scotland who were born in a country that is affected to some extent by FGM. There are communities that are potentially affected by FGM in every Scottish local authority area—the largest such communities are in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Dundee, in that order. Some 2,750 girls were born in Scotland to mothers who were born in an FGM-practising country between 2001 and 2012.

That is the scale of the potential problem, but we can eradicate FGM in Scotland by taking a

consultative approach that is mindful of the many cultural factors that I mentioned. No woman should feel at risk, and no child should feel that they are powerless over their own body. Such abuse can never be tolerated and should never be the norm for any community. The equality and human rights of all womankind demand that all nations stand as one against this cruel practice, on zero tolerance day and every other day.

17:25

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to contribute to this debate to mark international day of zero tolerance for female genital mutilation, and I pay tribute to Margaret McCulloch for securing the parliamentary time for this important and deeply disturbing issue.

The campaign against FGM was originally an African-led movement, but awareness of FGM has greatly increased in recent years, thanks to the tireless efforts of campaigners such as those to whom Malcolm Chisholm referred, who have brought this hidden horror out of the shadows.

The horrific experience of FGM has psychological and physical aftershocks that reverberate for many girls, from adolescence to adulthood. It is understandable that girls and women who feel shamed by the stigma and traumatised into silence by what has happened to them are often reluctant to speak out about their ordeals.

However, some survivors have shared their experiences. Their accounts shake us to the very core. Girls in their infancy—trusting, unknowing and unable to defend themselves—are typically circumcised with a range of implements, without anaesthesia, in a non-sterile environment, and with no appropriate aftercare. Some girls bleed to death. Others are left with debilitating pain and complications that afflict them for the rest of their lives.

Some parents are complicit in this so-called rite of passage. Others have no idea what their daughters have been subjected to. The perpetrator is often someone who is in a position of trust in the family or local community—someone whom a child would not instinctively fear. Victims are reassured with meaningless platitudes about favourable prospects and promises of good husbands.

FGM is not a rite of passage. On the contrary, it is a gross violation of human rights and of the very essence of womanhood.

In the United Kingdom, a woman is barbarically cut every 96 minutes—indeed, the situation is feared to be much worse. FGM is a silent and

often unreported crime, so we must assume that the figure is considerably higher.

I applaud the UK Government and the Scottish Government for their efforts and initiatives to eliminate this horrendous practice in our home nations. It is my sincere hope that we can build on that momentum in the months and years to come.

Figures from UNICEF show that the scale of FGM across the globe is much worse than international organisations first thought. Previously, it was estimated that 125 million girls worldwide had been cut, but in the past few days UNICEF disclosed that that number is shockingly higher and closer to 200 million. UNICEF warns that, with increasing population growth, the number of girls and women who undergo FGM will rise significantly over the next 15 years. That is an appalling prospect.

Malian musician and FGM survivor Inna Modja bravely shared her experience of cutting and its aftermath with the United Nations last Saturday. She said:

"I felt that I would never become a woman because I had something missing and I wasn't worth it. It took a lot away from what I could achieve as a teenager and what I could realize as a teenager. So I lost my identity when I went through FGM. I didn't know who I was. I didn't know ... how strong I could be because cutting me was telling me that I'm not good enough."

FGM dates back to antiquity. Millions upon millions of women have been subjected to it, have suffered from it and have been devalued by it. We now have an opportunity to empower and protect not just a new generation of women but their children and their children's children.

This is our call to action. Let us unite to end a barbaric anachronism and, in doing so, let us give hope to women, their daughters and the unborn girls of the future.

17:30

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I thank Margaret McCulloch for securing the debate. The Equal Opportunities Committee was very keen that we should have a debate, although there was not normal committee time available in the chamber. Most committee members will speak in the debate. Sandra White apologises for not being here: she had another commitment that she could not get out of.

It is not the easiest topic to speak about, but I believe that we have a duty to speak about it, and that men in particular have a duty to speak about it and not to claim that we have no responsibility.

One of the main facts that the committee learned is that it is very difficult to find out the facts of what is happening in Scotland today. In the

past, we would have assumed that FGM was restricted mainly to the 29 or so countries where it is most commonly practised, and perhaps to the additional countries to which a significant minority had migrated from those countries.

In the past, that would not have included Scotland to any real extent, but things have changed. In Scotland, we have a much more diverse population than we used to have, and I very much welcome that. We gain from a whole variety of new Scots, including, in my experience, African Christians who are involved in churches and bringing a real enthusiasm.

However, alongside that positive input from other cultures, there can be more negative practices appearing and FGM is certainly one of those. In Scotland's national action plan, the wording on pages 11 and 12 is couched very carefully and wisely under the heading "FGM in the Scottish Context".

"There are no clear and robust figures for the prevalence of FGM in Scotland because of the hidden nature of the crime. In its report, Tackling FGM in Scotland - towards a Scottish model of intervention, the Scottish Refugee Council analysed ... data. ... the report did not seek to determine 'prevalence' of FGM, but rather found that ... there were 23,979 men, women and children born in one of the 29 countries identified by UNICEF (2013) as an 'FGM-practising country', living in Scotland in 2011."

It also says that

"2,750 girls were born in Scotland to mothers born in an FGM-practising country between 2001 and 2012."

This was very much the line from witnesses who the committee heard from in our evidence sessions. However, we also heard from some working in the sector that they are virtually certain that cutting is being carried out, in Glasgow and Edinburgh at least. Perhaps more common is the tendency for girls to be taken back by their families to the country of their roots for the procedure to be carried out there, with the parents often being under considerable family pressure.

Clearly, legislation is part of the answer, but we also heard of innovative ways of approaching the issue, for example by attempting to get parents to sign a certificate promising not to allow FGM to be carried out on their daughters. That might have no legal weight, but it can make a difference to the parents' own attitude and can strengthen their resolve when under pressure from extended family.

Last Tuesday, we had a very useful event hosted by the committee at which Margaret McCulloch, Alex Neil and representatives of some of those tackling the issue spoke. As always, it was particularly moving to hear from survivors of FGM speaking about some of their personal experiences. I found it helpful to hear from a young guy from an African background whose

mother had, perhaps unusually, discussed it with him and who has since become passionate about educating his peers who come from a similar background.

It is useful to emphasise, as Margaret McCulloch also did, that FGM is a cultural practice that does not have any basis in any religion. It is clear that there is a huge difference between FGM and male circumcision. The two are not comparable and there are both health and religious arguments for male circumcision that are certainly not replicated for FGM.

I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to speak in the debate. The committee members unanimously felt that we would like to raise the issue in the chamber. My hope is that both the Parliament and the Government will continue to treat FGM with the seriousness it deserves.

17:34

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I, too, congratulate Margaret McCulloch on securing the debate. I recognise her commitment to the issue, as well as the commitment of many other members, including Kenneth Gibson. I also thank the Scottish Refugee Council, which has contributed to the debate. Holding international days is of great importance, because it is a good way to highlight issues. As Annabel Goldie said, with 200 million women affected across the world, the issue of female genital mutilation certainly needs to be highlighted.

We know that many problems can be resolved by taking a gradualist approach. That is not the case with this issue. Zero tolerance is the only way to deal with it. I look forward to the day when society sees this vile practice as being a total aberration. In the meantime, we are dealing with a violation of human rights, and I am always keen to take a rights-based approach to matters. As has been said many times, the topic of injuring genitals is often difficult to talk about. As Margaret McCulloch said, such behaviour is extreme and disturbing. We are talking about violence against women and girls; it is gender inequality.

I am delighted that Scotland's national action plan is in place, and it is important that the Scottish Government works with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on that. Public service workers are often at the front line of how we can address the issue, and a significant number of those are medical staff. The action plan is about prevention, protection and providing services and support.

Malcolm Chisholm was entirely right to say that the issue is not only for Scotland, the UK or the European Union to deal with; it is for the world to deal with.

The proposal in the action plan to have access to "informed mental health services" jumped out at me. There is a veil of secrecy and mystery around female genital mutilation; as my late mother used to say, you only know what you know. It is very challenging for people to understand all the different aspects of the issue. As someone said, the mental health impact of living with the consequences of FGM is important, so the practitioner who is dealing with such cases must absolutely understand what is involved.

We must deal with what is a significant breach of trust. We have heard FGM being called euphemisms such as "children being taken on holiday". If people feel that there is breach of trust in their family, that is significant for their family relationship in the years ahead.

As has been said, there is a great deal of discomfort in reading or hearing about the topic, let alone in discussing it, but we must. It will not surprise anyone to hear me say this, because I say it about a number of issues, but FGM is not exclusively an urban issue. I know that no one is saying that. The density of population in urban areas means that there may be services there, but support must be provided around the country, not least because we know that there are challenges for ethnic minority individuals living in rural communities.

We know that the strategy's overall aim is to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls. That is key. The issue is about power and abusive relationships. As has been said, we know that such a thing would not happen to men. It is gender-based violence. Males have an important role to play.

As an MSP, I have the great privilege to meet people. It was a real privilege to meet the survivors of female genital mutilation and to hear their courage and the manner in which they spoke about it. I found that experience humbling.

First and foremost, we must ensure that there is respect for every individual. We must have a rights-based approach to everything. The abuse must end. Let us all fight together for the eradication of FGM.

17:38

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): Like John Finnie, I am a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee. I repeat his words that it has very much been a privilege to be involved in the debate and to see the progress that the Scottish Government is making and all that the third sector organisations are doing to tackle the problem. I, too, thank Margaret McCulloch for securing the debate. It is so important that we debate it here.

Of course, in February last year we debated a Scottish Government motion on the international day of zero tolerance to female genital mutilation. The motion in the name of Alex Neil, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights, asked the Parliament to note

"the Scottish Government's commitment to fund a programme of work to tackle FGM in Scotland and protect those women and girls at risk of harm from this human rights abuse".

I am delighted that the cabinet secretary launched the action plan last week. In my speech at last year's debate, I said that we should not call this unacceptable and illegal practice by its abbreviation, FGM. At the time, I encouraged everyone to speak the term in full—female genital mutilation—because that says what it is. That is so important. I would like the minister to reflect on what we write and what we say in that regard.

Another point that I developed last year was the role of men in communities where female genital mutilation is a reality. I said that men must not be excluded from considerations but must be seen as part of the solution in ending that unacceptable and illegal practice.

I am delighted that, one year on, the fantastic work of the my voice project has really understood the role of men. Let me read from a flyer inviting people to participate in that project:

"Are you a man who is from a community or ethnic group potentially affected by Female Genital Mutilation or cutting ... or by female circumcision? Are you living in Scotland? We would love you to get involved in a new project we are starting called MY Voice."

That project is very important. It has been set up with the support of the Scottish Government in collaboration with the Dignity Alert Research Forum, Roshni and the Institute for International Health and Development at Queen Margaret University. I encourage the minister to look at its research. I know that it is a bit late to ask, but I would love for the research to be published, but only after the election and not during purdah, to ensure that it gets all the coverage that it should get.

As I have said from the outset, it is crucial to work with men to develop services and support for communities that are affected by female genital mutilation. John Mason talked about the fantastic event that was organised by the Equal Opportunities Committee last week. A young man called Oyedepo Olalekun was truly inspirational. He told us how important the role of fathers, sons and husbands was, and he said that they often have no idea what is happening. Kenny Gibson said earlier that this practice occurs in patriarchal cultures. That may have been so at the start, but now the men are very much isolated from it. They do not realise that, in the modern-day world, it is

happening to women. The action plan talks about including men, women and young people, but I would again encourage the minister to make sure that men are seen as key to the solution to the problem.

To conclude, I would like to make a historical point. Some of the contributions have said that this is a problem from other cultures and countries. Let me read from the *Medical Times and Gazette*:

"That the performance of clitoridectomy on a woman without her knowledge and consent ... is an offence against Medical ethics, needs not to be said. We suspect it is amenable to the criminal law of the land."

That is from an article that was written in London in April 1867, denouncing a practice that was wrongly claimed to treat many conditions, including menstrual pains, bladder problems, epilepsy, insanity, spinal irritation, masturbation and even lesbianism.

It did not end there. In *The American Journal of Clinical Medicine*, half a century later, in June 1915, we can read that circumcision in the female is necessary and see the guidelines for performing it. We know that the practice survived in the United States for another 50 years and stopped only in the 1960s. White Christian women in America who are alive today have been mutilated in this way. Kenny Gibson says that he would not want his mother or wife to be involved with the practice, but maybe your grandmother was. Maybe your great-grandmother was.

It is something that we have to understand. We have to understand the past before we pass judgment on other cultures. Female genital mutilation has been a criminal offence in Scotland only since 1985. We should know our own history of female genital mutilation to better understand what is happening today.

Let boys and girls, men and women know about the reality and the horror of female genital mutilation, and let us eradicate it together.

17:44

The Minister for Local Government and Community Empowerment (Marco Biagi):

Some battles constantly need to be refought because they seem to re-emerge each generation. I was going to remark on the fact that the practice being made illegal in 1985 and the closing of the loophole in the law in 2015 were separated by 30 years and on the fact that we still need to have the debate, to take the action and to produce the action plan, but Christian Allard suggested—indeed, he quoted material that shows it—that the issue has been dealt with and argued over for a much longer period.

The fact that we are here and have got as far as we have in exposing the issue, to the extent that we have an international day, is testament to the efforts of everybody who is working in communities around Scotland and internationally, as well as here in Parliament, to continue to highlight it. Margaret McCulloch paid tribute to some of the many members who have done so for some time.

Margaret McCulloch was right to place the issue in the context of gender violence. Female genital mutilation is a form of structural gender violence, because of the way in which expectations are placed on people in the societies and cultures in which it is practised and the things that are demanded of them. The practice is not tied to religion although, sadly, there are those who seek to cite religion falsely to justify it. It is not tied to a particular continent or even a region. John Mason mentioned the figure of 29 countries, but there are local differences within countries. FGM is the manifestation of gender violence in particular societies and cultures, and gender violence is not acceptable wherever it takes place.

The procedure is often carried out by close friends. People even gain status as a result of their participation in the activity. I have read accounts that tell of the pressure that is involved—not just to undergo female genital mutilation but to perpetrate it or to support relatives to go through it. We could say that people in that position are complicit, but they, too, are under threat and greatly oppressed. They are forced to do things as a result of a cultural practice that should have been binned a long time ago. Those who do not take part are stigmatised; they are seen as “unclean”. Such words are common in accounts of the practice. Those who reject FGM are often treated less favourably as a result, while those who suffer it experience health problems that are often lifelong.

What is terrifying is that, in some cases, FGM is not even recognised as a practice. The phrase “FGM” is unfamiliar to many. In the communities in which the practice continues, it has become so normalised that it seems to be just a natural part of the growing-up process. It is a deep challenge to deal with that in an ingrained way. If we look back at the exposition of the issue 100 years ago, we can be sure that it fell far short of anything that could be described as culturally sensitive. It is an ever-present danger that those who are most at risk will be pushed further away by our well-intended attempts to help them.

Malcolm Chisholm identified the importance of partnership and sensitivity, and I totally agree. That has been the approach that we have taken in the national action plan; we have reflected the need to involve everybody. Given that we are talking about potentially asking people to

criminalise their own families, it is inevitable that that will be difficult and sensitive. Societal standards and attitudes can often best be challenged by people inside those societies who are expressing concern and showing leadership. We should support them to be champions for progress and reform.

In one of the Parliament’s previous debates on the subject, and in consideration of the issue by the Equal Opportunities Committee, of which I am an alumnus, I remember mention being made of a passport that could be shown by family members who had come under pressure to put their children forward for the procedure—often abroad—which would say, “If you do this, you will cause severe consequences for me.” Such a scheme is now operating from England and Scotland, and some of the early response from England has been quite positive.

Even though we are doing quite a lot, we must keep moving forward. We need to keep refighting the battle. We must continue to support people in the on-going challenge. That is why we have the national action plan and have identified further things that we want to do.

We must redouble our efforts with front-line staff. The action plan identifies that we will have our multi-agency national guidance soon—in early 2016. There is also a stage beyond that to provide even more information, so that people who work at the front line can identify the signs.

There will be a new international classification of diseases code to clarify reporting, to try to get into the system a clear understanding of how many instances are happening and to work on awareness. There is also a recommendation that

“All statutory agencies have at least one named professional with expertise on FGM”.

To answer the point that Malcolm Chisholm raised about considering legislation, we are looking at the provisions on female genital mutilation that have come into force in England and Wales and we have commissioned a community-based organisation—again, partnership is the key—to consult a cross-section of the communities so that we ascertain their views and see what we can do.

Even though we have not put a mandatory duty in legislation in Scotland, this is clearly a child protection issue—it is covered by that legislation and that work. We want to continue to support organisations and agencies across Scotland to deal with the issue and to support the champions for change in their own society.

We can look at the work that has happened to continually draw the issue into the limelight not just here but around the world, where there are

examples of great societal change. Kenya in particular has taken great action.

Our resolve is clear in this Government; our resolve is clear in this Parliament; and our resolve is clear in this society. Around the world, resolve is growing. That is a good place to be in, and we will continue to work in partnership with everyone around the chamber and around the country to tackle the scourge of female genital mutilation.

Meeting closed at 17:51.

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