



OFFICIAL REPORT
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Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 16 June 2016

Session 5



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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 16 June 2016

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

Business Motion

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good morning. The first item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-00490, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business programme. Joe FitzPatrick is not here, so I ask Fergus Ewing to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 16 June 2016—

delete

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: The Best Start in Life for Scotland's Children

and insert

2.30 pm Ministerial Statement: Policing and Security

followed by Scottish Government Debate: The Best Start in Life for Scotland's Children—
[Fergus Ewing.]

Motion agreed to.

General Question Time

11:40

Fishing (Discard Ban)

1. **Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives of the fishing industry to discuss the discard ban. (S5O-00051)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): My officials last met our Scottish discard steering group on 17 March 2016 to discuss the discard ban. The group includes representatives from the fishing industry, non-governmental organisations and fishermen. The next meeting is planned to take place on 24 June 2016. I will be meeting representatives from the fishing industry on 20 June 2016 at the Scottish Fishermen's Federation executive committee meeting, at which the discard ban will be a topic for discussion.

Tavish Scott: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for that reply on a topic that is among his busy ministerial responsibilities, which have been added to this morning. Is he aware of the concerns of the Shetland white-fish industry about the implementation of the discard ban, in particular in relation to choke species, and of the need for a flexible and pragmatic approach to those problems? Will he agree to meet the Shetland Fishermen's Association when he next visits Shetland as part of his ministerial responsibilities?

Fergus Ewing: I look forward to such a visit and such a meeting in due course.

For the uninitiated, choke species are fish species for which quotas are so limited relative to local or general abundance that the imposition of a landing obligation is liable to result in fishing vessels having to cease operations well before they have caught their main quota allocations. It is therefore an extremely serious threat and one on which we are working very carefully. Identifying choke species in advance is important, as are potential solutions, such as quota transfer, quota swaps and the 5 per cent de minimis exemption. I am well aware that this is a matter of extreme importance among the fishing community as a whole, which is principally why I am meeting the fishing representatives on Monday of next week.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I call Sandra White.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to introduce legislation regarding responsible parking on footways.

The Presiding Officer: Sorry, Ms White. I called you early—I thought that you were asking a supplementary question on question 1. I beg your pardon.

Sandra White: Can I not just go ahead, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer: Your time will come, Ms White. I call Finlay Carson, who is asking a supplementary question 1.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Does the Scottish Government agree that the planned termination on 1 January 2017 of the grace period for fishermen who are affected by the discard ban—on the same date that cod and other choke species are included in the ban—makes no sense and will unduly punish commercial fishermen who are already struggling with the implementation of the ban? Does the Government therefore agree that the grace period should be extended?

Fergus Ewing: The public want to see an end to discards which, because they are an incredible waste, are an aspect of fishing policy that has caused great concern among the public and among fishermen. The landing obligation must therefore come in by 2019. However, we have sought to deal with this—so far as we can in Scotland—by discussion, consideration and negotiation. I have already had discussions with Mike Park, for example, and others, and I will continue to do so.

The member is quite right to highlight the concerns and I can assure him, and everybody who represents a fishing community—excepting, of course, Sandra White—that my officials and I are pursuing these matters diligently.

Passenger Flights (Ashaig Airfield)

2. **Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made to reintroduce passenger flights from Ashaig airfield on Skye. (S5O-00052)

The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf): We recognise the aspirations of communities in the Skye area to restart regular air services to and from the island, and we would be happy to discuss the issue with them. However, any future development of the airstrip is a matter for Highland Council as the owner of the site.

Kate Forbes: The minister will be aware that, for rural island economies, physical connectivity is critical for business success. The Skye brand is world renowned, drawing in visitors and exporting products. Does the minister agree that we need to ensure that there are adequate transport links,

including decent roads, reliable ferries and an air service, to enable business growth?

Humza Yousaf: Of course I agree with everything that Kate Forbes has said. I was delighted to meet her during my first few weeks as minister, when she mentioned a number of issues, including the airstrip at Broadford. I understand the importance of transport issues to the islands in particular and to rural communities across Scotland. I have chosen to meet members of the Scottish Parliament and other elected members throughout the country to discuss those issues.

I understand that a study has been commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise, HITRANS—the Highlands and Islands transport partnership—and Highland Council to look into the airstrip issue. I can assure the member that, once that report is ready, I am willing to sit down with stakeholders.

On the wider point about connectivity with Skye, and with the islands and other rural areas in general, I agree with the member. I also agree with her about the undeniable allure of Skye, which brings benefits for international and domestic tourism.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The original survey of the airfield suggested that it would cost in excess of £15.3 million to refurbish it and make it fit for flights. It is unlikely that Highland Council will have the funds to do that. Is the Scottish Government in a position to assist the council in that respect?

Humza Yousaf: As I mentioned, HIE, HITRANS and Highland Council have decided to commission another study precisely to look at where they might reduce that cost. It should be noted that £15.3 million is the upper end of the range; if the member looks at the report, he will see that the lower end is approximately £2.5 million.

The issue is one for Highland Council, but we are happy to work with the council in that regard. Of course, from the studies that we have seen so far, it is clear that any passenger service that exists in Broadford would need to be subsidised. As the member will know, we are currently in a position of financial constraint and difficulty. We would need to have frank and open conversations, but I have no problem with doing so. If Edward Mountain, as an elected member, wanted to join those conversations, he would be welcome to do so.

Responsible Parking on Footways

The Presiding Officer: I call Sandra White to ask question 3.

3. **Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. We have salmon in

the River Kelvin in my constituency, of course, so there is a fish question there. [*Laughter.*] I thank you for your indulgence in that respect.

To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to introduce legislation regarding responsible parking on footways. (S5O-00053)

The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf): I feel like taking the fish puns even further, but I will stop myself from doing so.

The Scottish ministers are committed to introducing a transport bill that will include provisions that seek to enforce responsible parking. To ensure that any proposed legislation is fit for purpose and commands public confidence and support, a full review and stakeholder consultation will take place later this year. I put on record my appreciation for the amount of great work that Sandra White has done on the issue to serve not only her constituents but vulnerable groups throughout Scotland.

Sandra White: I thank the minister for his reply, and I will take pleasure in looking at that consultation this year, in the not-too-distant future.

The minister will be aware of the situation in my constituency of Glasgow Kelvin, where motorists have taken to parking wholly on the pavements to avoid double yellow lines, as in the photo that I am holding up. Does he agree that legislation is urgently needed—I thank him for his reply in that respect—to ensure that people can walk on the pavements without encountering the danger of cars on the pavements and being forced to walk on the road?

Humza Yousaf: I saw a report in the *Evening Times* on the particular issue to which Sandra White refers and the difficulties that it is causing. Such parking is causing difficulty for some of our most vulnerable groups, including carers, those with disabilities, and pram users, as well as pedestrians in general. The member will know, having carried out work on the issue previously, about some of the intricacies and nuances of the enforcement issues. That is why a full review and a stakeholder consultation is necessary, but I assure the member that that work will take place in the first year of the new session of Parliament.

Scottish Autism (Funding Support)

4. **Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide funding so that Scottish Autism's one-stop shop in Motherwell can reopen. (S5O-00054)

The Minister for Mental Health (Maureen Watt): We are committed to working in partnership with North Lanarkshire Council, South Lanarkshire Council and Scottish Autism to support the transition to local services. Scottish Government

officials are in discussion with North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council to agree how transitional funding can be used to ensure that the expert resource from Scottish Autism supports users of the one-stop shop to transfer to appropriate local services. We also want to ensure that the views of service users are represented in future local service delivery.

Graham Simpson: Unfortunately, I think that this has become something of a political football between the Government and councils. What we should be doing is putting users first. The initiative, which was set up by the Scottish Government, was an excellent one that has been widely praised. The problem is that when the money runs out, there is nothing to replace it. I spoke earlier today to the chief executive of Scottish Autism, Alan Somerville, who told me that the service would love to be able to carry on. I urge the minister to get back to the table, if she can, and ensure that the service continues, because the situation is deeply painful for the parents of those involved.

Maureen Watt: I absolutely agree with the member that of course the service users should be at the heart of this. He will know that the services provided by Scottish Autism, the National Autistic Society and Autism Initiatives Scotland were part of six pilots throughout the country to provide one-stop shops. The pilot one-stop shops were time limited, and it was always expected that local councils, in partnership with integration joint boards and health boards, would build on the experience of the one-stop shop and take the pilot forward on that basis.

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): The minister is of course aware of my on-going concern about the implementation of the autism strategy by South Lanarkshire Council. Of course, Mr Simpson is an executive member of that council, which has promised a one-stop shop in South Lanarkshire. Does the minister agree that, as well as meeting all its statutory obligations, the council must provide at least the services that were offered by the joint one-stop shop in Motherwell, funded by the Scottish Government, for an extended period?

Maureen Watt: Yes, I absolutely agree with the member. It was always hoped that the one-stop shop would identify gaps in services and that, under the local autism strategies that every council is expected to have, they would build on the services and the gaps that were identified in local provision and take forward the lessons from that in providing their own services.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I say to the minister that it is hard to see how local authorities can carry on providing that service after the central funding from the Scottish Government

runs out, especially given the budget cuts that have been handed down. At the very least, will the minister consider additional transitional funding to allow this vital service to continue until the health and social care partnerships are set up and new arrangements can be put in place?

Maureen Watt: The cabinet secretary has already said that, if Scottish Autism is able to provide the services, extra transitional funding will be provided until the local authorities get the services up and running. That has already been agreed. However, it is really important that both North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council get round the table with the Scottish Government and Scottish Autism to make sure that the service users are given the service that they need.

Ferry Fares (Northern Isles)

5. Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made on reducing ferry fares for the northern isles. (S5O-00055)

The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish National Party manifesto made clear our commitment to take action to reduce ferry fares to Orkney and Shetland. I have already met the northern isles constituency MSPs and discussed the matter with them, and I am meeting Highlands and Islands MSPs later on today to listen to their views. I also intend to visit Orkney and Shetland in the summer, and I look forward to meeting local authorities and stakeholders to discuss this very issue.

Maree Todd: I ask the minister to explain what impact road equivalent tariff would have if it was imposed on the northern isles routes using the same formula that has been used in the Western Isles.

Humza Yousaf: From the studies that we have examined, RET would significantly increase the majority of fares on ferry services to the northern isles, particularly on the routes from Aberdeen, due to the longer distances that are involved. It is true that RET would reduce the islander fares on certain routes. The Scrabster to Stromness service is an example of such a route. However, introducing RET, or indeed reducing fares, on that route is complicated by the presence of a commercial operator. Transport Scotland will be meeting that operator later this month to discuss how fares can be reduced.

I have also tasked Transport Scotland officials with taking forward work to generate options for reducing ferry fares to the northern isles, and decisions on that will be taken in due course.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I thank the minister for his willingness to meet me early on

to discuss the issue. As he will be aware, the implementation of RET saw fares being capped, where they would otherwise have been increased on the west coast routes. As part of the discussions that he is taking forward with officials, will he remember to bear in mind the need to address internal ferry fares within Orkney as well as the fares for services to and from the Scottish mainland?

Humza Yousaf: Yes. I appreciated the meeting with Liam McArthur, which was on that very point; he made the point very well. It is certainly part of our consideration and I will endeavour to keep him up to date on that. I look forward to meeting him when I go up to the northern isles. I should say that his colleague from the Shetland isles offered me a cup of tea when I go to Shetland, but I notice that that offer was not reciprocated by the member for Orkney. *[Laughter.]*

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The next tender for the northern isles ferry services will be in 2018. Will the minister use the European Commission's Teckal exemption so that no expensive tendering exercise is required and the award is simply made to the public sector company, the David MacBrayne group? Will he agree to meet me so that I can share the opinion of the European Commission's director general for transport, who said to me that the direct award of a public service contract is in principle accepted by the European Court of Justice?

Humza Yousaf: First, I sincerely hope that we will still be part of the European Union when we have that conversation, and that in a week's time we will be making that positive and progressive case.

The member knows that we have an honest disagreement about some of the issues around Teckal. However, my predecessor looked to take a joint approach to the European Commission with Mick Cash and those from the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. We are waiting to hear the results of that, and we will keep the member updated.

Of course I will meet the member. I think that I am due to meet him later today, but I will have a one-to-one meeting with him on this very issue.

Mental Health Services (Ayrshire and Arran)

6. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with NHS Ayrshire and Arran regarding mental health. (S5O-00056)

The Minister for Mental Health (Maureen Watt): Scottish Government officials, Health Improvement Scotland and NHS Education for Scotland met NHS territorial boards including NHS Ayrshire and Arran on 5 May to discuss current

performance and provide information on the mental health improvement programme. Health Improvement Scotland also met NHS Ayrshire and Arran on 10 May to discuss the tailored support that will be provided to the board throughout the programme. The improvement programme will work in collaboration with NHS boards to deliver sustained improvements in access to child and adolescent mental health and psychological therapy services.

Ruth Maguire: I welcome the Scottish Government's investment in North Ayrshire's new health and social care partnership community mental health facility, Woodland View. I hope that the minister will have an opportunity to visit soon and meet staff to hear about the new models of care.

To shift the balance of care from acute to community settings is a challenge in times of increasing demand. Will the minister detail how the Scottish Government will support North Ayrshire health and social care partnership to continue to transform support and care for our people who are facing mental health issues?

Maureen Watt: I look forward to visiting Woodland View and seeing how North Ayrshire health and social care partnership is delivering better outcomes for people with mental health issues locally. The integration of health and social care is about ensuring that those who use services get the right care and support whatever their needs at any point in their care journey. The partnership has benefited from Scottish Government investment in increasing access to mental health services and primary care, and I will be interested to see how that is being used locally.

National Health Service (Major Trauma Centres)

7. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what decisions it has made about the future provision of major trauma centres in the NHS. (S5O-00057)

The Minister for Mental Health (Maureen Watt): As members are aware, the cabinet secretary has confirmed that there will be four trauma centres in Scotland, in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. They will operate in an inclusive national trauma network to help to deliver improved outcomes for severely injured patients across Scotland.

Lewis Macdonald: That decision is, of course, very welcome. The minister will recall that when the original commitment to four major trauma centres was made two years ago, the then cabinet secretary made a commitment that they would be operational from 2016. However, the Scottish Government press release that was issued

yesterday quoted the current cabinet secretary as saying that the preparatory work would be "completed by the end of the year."

When does the Government expect to move on from preparatory work to making the major trauma centres operational and delivering its pledge on enhanced major trauma care?

Maureen Watt: As the cabinet secretary announced, the chief medical officer will chair a new national trauma network implementation group to take the work forward. It is extremely important that we plan the trauma network thoroughly, to make sure that we get it right. We will not be pressed into implementing a model that does not suit Scotland's circumstances or has not been properly thought through. We will take time to plan and deliver a bespoke solution that will best serve the people of Scotland.

First Minister's Question Time

12:01

Engagements

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):

To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-00080)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):

Engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Ruth Davidson: Once again, we are facing the prospect of teachers either boycotting work or striking altogether, and potentially shutting schools. I accept that teachers have every right to raise legitimate concerns about their workload, but I do not believe that industrial action is the answer. It is simply wrong that parents and pupils will have to pay the price for a dispute between teachers and the Government. Does the First Minister agree?

The First Minister: The Government is working very hard to ensure that industrial action does not take place in our schools. I do not believe that it is in the interests of teachers and I certainly do not believe that it is in the interests of the young people in our schools.

As Ruth Davidson is aware, at issue is what teachers consider to be unnecessary workload. The Government has been very clear about our determination to take action to reduce teacher workload and we will continue to do that: indeed, that is why we established the working group on assessment and national qualifications. The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills published the group's initial work on 26 May, which set out concrete steps that we are taking to reduce workload for teachers. This week the Deputy First Minister has written to all the teaching unions, asking for specific deliverable proposals to help to reduce workload.

We are determined to address the concerns and to do so in the interests of teachers, and, more important, in the interests of our young people.

Ruth Davidson: I hear what the First Minister is saying, but the question is this: how was the situation allowed to get to this stage? Secondary teachers have been complaining for quite some time about the assessment requirement for national qualifications and we have all heard warnings about the added bureaucracy and the extra burdens that that is placing on classrooms. Given that, and given that we may now be facing industrial action, is the First Minister satisfied that the Government has done enough to sort this out before now?

The First Minister: Yes—we have been working to do that. I hope that Ruth Davidson will—if she is sincere, as I hope she is, about wanting to avoid industrial action in our schools—get behind the actions that the Scottish Government is taking.

It was because we were determined to tackle the issue that the working group on assessment and national qualifications was established earlier this year. That group has done very detailed work, and the report of that work was published at the end of May. It set out some concrete initial steps, which have already been announced. The Deputy First Minister will reconvene that group and has, as I said, issued an open invitation to the teaching unions to come forward and give examples of where they think there is unnecessary workload, and suggest what can be done to reduce it.

As we have debated in the chamber many times over the past few months, improving standards in education and closing the attainment gap is my top priority. Ruth Davidson, Kezia Dugdale and Willie Rennie joined us yesterday in an education summit that was very positive and constructive. Enabling our fantastic teachers across this country to do what they do best and to give our young people the best educational experience is absolutely central to achieving that goal. Everybody has an interest in ensuring that the issue is addressed, so I hope that Parliament will get behind the work of John Swinney and the entire Government, as we seek to do.

Ruth Davidson: I have just listened to the First Minister say that the working group was established earlier this year, but Larry Flanagan of the Educational Institute of Scotland claimed last night that the need to remove duplication was first raised by teachers in August 2014. He claimed that, since then—I quote him directly—

“not a single unit assessment has been removed”.

After years of inaction from the Government, only this week is the education secretary asking for fresh ideas on how to cut down on bureaucracy. Teachers are preparing to take industrial action right now. Is all this not just a little bit late?

The First Minister: As Ruth Davidson knows—this view was, I believe, expressed by the chief examiner in Scotland—removal of unit assessment too quickly would actually compromise certification of qualifications. If that is what Ruth Davidson is suggesting, it is a deeply irresponsible course of action for her to be putting forward.

We will continue to work closely with the teaching unions and the teaching profession as a whole. We will continue to take sensible action to reduce unnecessary workload. It is in nobody's interests—certainly not the Government's

interests, any more than it is in the interests of teachers or pupils—for teachers to be burdened with unnecessary workload. I want all our great teachers across the country to be freed up to do what they do best, which is teach our children and give them the best educational experience.

As I said, all the party leaders joined us at the education summit yesterday; I was very grateful to them for doing so. They will have heard many great examples, as we did. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development praised the many strengths of Scottish education and the work that the Scottish Government is taking forward. Many suggestions were made about what we need to do, including by the teaching unions. Let us get together in a national endeavour to take forward those actions in the interests of improving our education system for all our young people.

Ruth Davidson: There is a wider point to be made. We have a system that is constantly sending out ever more directives, initiatives and diktats to our schools, but does not think about how they are to be implemented. Now, at the 11th hour, we have John Swinney saying that he wants “specific, tangible ideas” on how to cut down on teacher workload. He is acting as if this is year zero, but the Government has been in power for nine years. He is trying to clear up the mistakes that his Government has made.

If John Swinney wants clear and tangible ideas, let me give him one. The EIS said today that a “half-resourced” named person scheme will be

“potentially dangerous and ... worse than no scheme at all.”

Teachers are saying that it will be

“potentially dangerous and ... worse than no scheme at all.”

If the Government wants to scrap red tape on our teachers, it should scrap the unwanted named person scheme. It should cut out the bureaucracy and let teachers get on with the job.

The First Minister: I do not speak for the EIS, but I suspect that the EIS will be as horrified as I am by the Tory attempts to hijack its legitimate concerns, and the points that it has put forward, for the narrow political interests of the Conservative Party, which is clearly less interested in our children and the interests of our children than it is in trying to score cheap political points in Parliament.

To get back to the issue at hand, I say that John Swinney asked for suggestions in addition to the work that is already under way. For example—as, I assume, Ruth Davidson is aware—the chief inspector of education has already published for teachers and schools clear national expectations that will directly tackle workload issues and help to improve the learning experience for young people. It includes advice on preparation of young people

in their broad general education, on the transition to the senior phase and on the importance of appropriate course choices. Those are sensible actions to deal with a legitimate issue, and are how the Government will continue to take the matter forward. That is what our teachers and young people deserve.

Stonewall Scotland (Meetings)

2. **Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister when she will next meet Stonewall Scotland. (S5F-00087)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I met representatives of Stonewall Scotland last night when I, with other party leaders, attended the vigil in St Andrew Square to show our sympathy and solidarity with the victims of the attack in Orlando and with our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community. Ministers will continue to meet Stonewall on an on-going basis on a range of issues. Indeed, officials are meeting Stonewall Scotland this afternoon to discuss the new powers coming to Scotland under the Scotland Act 2016.

Kezia Dugdale: The First Minister’s words last night were very welcome, particularly her emphasis on the need to drive out homophobic bullying from our schools and to build an education system that is inclusive, so that every young person can be themselves and fulfil their potential. I hope that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills will meet Stonewall Scotland at the earliest opportunity.

The Government’s recent export statistics confirm that the European Union is Scotland’s second biggest trading partner after the rest of the United Kingdom. What assessment has the First Minister made of how many jobs in Scotland are dependent on our unfettered access to the single market?

The First Minister: Right now in Scotland, there are more than 300,000 jobs that are associated directly or indirectly with Scotland’s access to the single market. In addition, more than 40 per cent of Scotland’s international exports go to countries within the single market and, of the more than 2,000 foreign-owned companies in Scotland, more than 40 per cent are owned by firms that are based in other European countries. Those are all positive reasons, related to the jobs and livelihoods of thousands of people across Scotland, for my conclusion that Scotland’s continuing relationship with Europe is absolutely vital.

Kezia Dugdale: In the days leading up to the referendum in 2014, this Parliament debated the case for and against independence. We did so with passion and with a sense of the importance of the decision that we were about to make.

This is a Parliament elected by the people of Scotland—much more than a public body. Next Thursday is about securing hundreds of thousands of jobs, protecting the rights of workers, and showing the world the type of country that we want to be. I ask the First Minister, when it comes to issues like terrorism, climate change and the refugee crisis, does she share my support for the principle of working together with the other nations of the world?

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)
rose—

The First Minister: Yes, I do. I agree with that very strongly. As Kezia Dugdale, the whole chamber and—it is fair to say—the whole country know, I believe passionately that Scotland should be an independent country and I very much hope that in the near future we will be an independent country. I also believe very strongly that, in the modern, interdependent world we live in, independent countries must work together to tackle the issues that no country can deal with on its own, including issues like climate change, the refugee crisis and tackling terrorism. Independent countries working together on those issues makes us all stronger and safer.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I will take Margaret Mitchell's point of order at the end.

Kezia Dugdale: The future of our economy is one of the biggest issues being debated outside of this chamber and sudden shocks would have a damaging impact on our ability to fund public services. People need to know what plans are in place. Can the First Minister tell us what contingency planning is under way to prepare for a shock to the UK economy?

The First Minister: I very much hope that such a scenario does not arise. Let me be very clear: as First Minister, my duty is to seek to protect Scotland's interests in all circumstances and, therefore, I am ensuring that appropriate planning for all eventualities is being undertaken by the Scottish Government. Let me also say—I have said this many times before—that, if Scotland faces the prospect of being taken out of the European Union against our democratically expressed will, all options to protect our relationship with Europe and the European Union will require to be considered.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Prior to the election, the First Minister and the health minister dismissed concerns about cuts to services at the Vale of Leven hospital, Inverclyde hospital, the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley and Lightburn hospital in Glasgow as, somehow, scaremongering. They promised that the Scottish National Party Government would not approve any

changes that would run counter to the vision for the Vale, as set out in the document before me.

I have been given a leaked document—the final draft of the local development plan for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde—which lists the closure of the Vale of Leven maternity unit, the closure of the Inverclyde maternity unit, the closure of Lightburn hospital and the transfer of children's emergency care away from the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley. Will the First Minister keep her promise to my constituents so that babies will continue to be born at the Vale?

The First Minister: As Jackie Baillie knows, when I was the health secretary I took a number of actions and steps to protect the Vale of Leven hospital. When I became health secretary, the hospital was under threat from the previous Labour Administration. As I have made clear, and as the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport has made clear, we will not approve proposals that run counter to the vision for the Vale. I am not aware of the document that Jackie Baillie has—to the best of my knowledge, I have not seen it, and I would be happy to receive a copy of it—but I am sure that what she has just read out are, at most, proposals. Let me be very clear about this Government's commitment to the vision for the Vale: we will continue to take forward that commitment.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. **Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S5F-00072)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Matters of importance to the people of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: Last weekend, the education secretary was greeted by jeers, boos and cries of "Rubbish!" at the Educational Institute of Scotland teachers conference because he is making the problems with workload, which have already been discussed, worse with his plans for compulsory testing. Why does the First Minister think that her minister is right and the teachers are wrong?

The First Minister: I am astonished that Willie Rennie has asked me that question. He was in the room yesterday, at the education summit, when Larry Flanagan of the EIS made extensive comments about standardised assessment. He said—I am paraphrasing; it is for Mr Flanagan to speak for himself—that he thought that much of the opposition and objection to standardised assessment is based on a misunderstanding and a misrepresentation of what the Government is doing.

I am frankly staggered that, having sat in that education summit yesterday while those

comments were made, Willie Rennie has come and asked me the question that he just asked.

Willie Rennie: I do not know who the First Minister thinks that she is building a consensus with, but it is certainly not teachers. We have already heard about their plans for industrial action. I do not know which planet she is on.

Testing small children is not the answer to our problems in education—we have already been down that blind alley before. Meanwhile, Scotland's employers cannot get the skilled workforce that they need. Save the Children told us today about the lack of investment in early-years vocabulary, and nursery education targets have been missed, too. All the while, education budgets have been cut by the SNP Government.

Instead of fighting with teachers over tests, why does the First Minister not provide the investment, including the early-years investment, that we need for our future?

The First Minister: I notice that Willie Rennie did not respond to what I just said about Larry Flanagan's comments yesterday at the summit that Willie Rennie also attended.

During that summit, Willie Rennie would also have heard the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development talk about the clear distinction between national testing, which we are not doing, and national assessment, which we are doing. He would have heard Andy Hargreaves of the OECD, who is a very respected educationist, praise the Scottish Government for trying to move from what he described as a culture of teacher judgment to a system of teacher judgment, saying that he thought that we are on absolutely the right track.

We are seeking to have the information that we need to ensure that our children—regardless of where they grow up and regardless of their background—get the best possible education. Willie Rennie can oppose that if he likes, but I am all for it and I am determined that we are going to achieve it.

Alcohol Sales (Restrictions)

4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government plans to restrict the amount of alcohol that can be sold in pubs and supermarkets. (S5F-00091)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We have no plans or proposals to restrict the amount of alcohol that can be sold in individual pubs or supermarkets, but we will continue to pursue an evidence-based approach to tackling alcohol harm.

The World Health Organization has a global target of reducing harmful alcohol use by 10 per cent by 2025. Through our on-going work to refresh our alcohol framework, we are examining whether there are merits to a Scottish target for reducing harmful alcohol use.

Kenneth Gibson: The First Minister will share my disappointment that, after steady decline in recent years, alcohol consumption is once again on the rise, with Scots adults last year each consuming an average equivalent of 41 bottles of vodka, with all the health and social ills that that implies. Does she agree that the sooner minimum unit pricing clears the courts and is implemented the better? Although I am pleased that no new legislation is being considered at this time, does she also agree that the effectiveness of existing legislation—for example, to restrict the overprovision of alcohol-selling outlets—should be reviewed?

The First Minister: I very much agree with the sentiments behind Kenny Gibson's questions. As I said, we will continue to pursue an evidence-based approach to tackling alcohol harm.

Obviously, the court case remains active and that restricts what I can say, but I will say that I continue to believe that minimum unit pricing is more effective than tax, precisely because it is able to better target the cheap high-strength alcohol favoured by the heaviest drinkers. I am sure that I am not alone in wondering why a measure that would save 2,000 lives over the next 20 years is still so resolutely resisted by some parts of the industry.

Infrastructure (Impact of New Housing)

5. Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will ensure that existing infrastructure is expanded to cope with new demand from housing developments. (S5F-00097)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The delivery of a further 50,000 high-quality affordable homes is a key priority for this Government. To support that, we recently published draft planning guidance on housing and infrastructure, which recommends that planning authorities take into account current infrastructure capacity and future requirements when approving new developments. In addition, the recent independent review of the Scottish planning system made a number of recommendations to strengthen planning for infrastructure. We will respond to the recommendations shortly.

Rachael Hamilton: There are serious concerns in the south of Scotland, particularly in East Lothian, that new housing developments will mean that health services, schools and roads will not be

able to cope with the new demand. Will the First Minister give a commitment that, before the new developments are built, East Linton station will be restored and the A1 will be dualled north of the border as set out in our Scottish Conservative manifesto?

The First Minister: We will continue to do what I said in my original answer. We have published draft planning guidance on housing and infrastructure, which recommends that planning authorities, wherever they happen to be in the country, should take account of current infrastructure capacity and future requirements when they are approving new developments. That is a sensible approach.

We need new housing. That is why we set and exceeded our target for affordable housing in the previous session of Parliament; that is why we have set an even more ambitious target in this session of Parliament. However, we must also ensure that the infrastructure is there to support new development, and our new approach to planning is all about achieving that.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I echo Rachael Hamilton's questions and concerns. Just two weeks ago, the City of Edinburgh Council's Scottish National Party-Labour Administration approved the garden city development in Gogar and Gyle against the advice of officials. The area is on the fringes of the A8, which is the most congested stretch of road outside the M25. It is also in the footprint of the Ladywell medical practice, which is at capacity. With 4,000 extra patients, the practice would have to close its list. Does the First Minister agree that the issue is not just about roads infrastructure, but about addressing the general practice crisis in our health service?

The First Minister: All those matters are important when any local authority is looking at new development. Of course, those are matters for local authorities. The Liberal Democrats frequently get up in this chamber and accuse the Government of centralisation and talk about the merits of localism, so they should probably start practising what they preach.

The Government is very clear, in the draft planning guidance that I have spoken about, about the importance of housing development—nobody can deny the need for new housing development in this country—and ensuring that we have in place adequate infrastructure, whatever the nature of that infrastructure. That is what we will continue to focus on.

Paediatric Services (Lothian)

6. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's

position is on the future of paediatric services across Lothian. (S5F-00090)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Next week, Lothian NHS Board will consider the recommendation of an independent review of its paediatric services by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. That recommendation is for the retention of in-patient children's services at St John's hospital. The Scottish Government stands ready to support NHS Lothian to implement the report's recommendations, including retaining in-patient paediatrics to ensure that all necessary improvements are delivered for the benefit of patients.

Neil Findlay: The report by the royal college into children's services has, indeed, recommended the retention of a 24/7 ward at St John's. NHS Lothian must now accept that recommendation, which will be a tremendous victory for people power. However, the report also raises very serious concerns about management failure, recruitment, training, incident recording, information technology problems and staff morale, all of which affect the care of children.

Last week at question time, the First Minister took credit for a number of good things that have happened at St John's. Will she now, after nine years in government—much of that time as health secretary—take responsibility for those failings and, more important, for putting them right?

The First Minister: I would have thought that Neil Findlay might come to the chamber and utter an apology for some of what he has previously said on the issue. Every time that he stood up in the chamber to raise the issue—it used to be from the benches of the official Opposition; now it is from the benches of the third party in the Scottish Parliament—he said or suggested that that independent report was somehow an underhand way on the part of the Scottish Government to force the closure of the in-patient paediatric service at St John's. Now that the report has recommended the retention of the children's in-patient service, surely he will have the good grace to admit that he got it wrong previously.

Now that the recommendation has been made, it is for Lothian NHS Board to discuss it next week. However, I repeat what I said earlier: the Scottish Government will support NHS Lothian to implement the recommendations to ensure that all necessary improvements are delivered for the benefit of patients. Then, we will be able to add the work that we do on those matters to the long list of improvements that the Government has helped to ensure happen at St John's hospital.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): The First Minister will be aware that the threat to the unit at

St John's has come from a shortage of staff within NHS Lothian. What action will the Scottish Government take to investigate that and will the First Minister agree to host an NHS summit to consider workforce planning across the country?

The First Minister: Recruitment and retention to the children's unit at St John's hospital have been under investigation and discussion. A lot of activity has been undertaken to recruit people for a long time. That will continue to be one of the central issues in taking forward the independent report's recommendation.

I say in passing that we have many first-class clinicians from many different countries across Europe and the world working in our NHS. It would be a massive mistake to close off the supply of any of them in any decision that we might take over the next few days.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Only days before the election, the First Minister wrongly denied that there were proposals to downgrade or close paediatric services at the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley. Now, from Jackie Baillie's question, we know that there are proposals to move in-patient paediatric services away from the RAH to Glasgow. Does the First Minister support those proposals?

The First Minister: Neil Bibby will have heard my reply to Jackie Baillie, but he might also want to reflect on the fact that, before the election, Neil Findlay stood up in the chamber week after week scaremongering about the Scottish Government's plans to close paediatric services at St John's hospital. Today, we are talking about the recommendation of an independent report about the retention of paediatric services. That underlines the Government's commitment to quality, sustainable local services. That is what will continue.

Schools (Healthy Eating)

7. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what progress the Scottish Government is making to reduce the availability of unhealthy products in schools. (S5F-00084)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): School food legislation sets high nutritional standards that all food and drink provided in schools must meet. That includes lunches, tuck shops, breakfast clubs and vending machines. Although food and drink brought into school by pupils is exempt from those regulations, the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 requires all schools to set health-promoting policies. We expect those to apply to food and drink permitted on school grounds.

Liam Kerr: As the First Minister will be aware, our country's children now find it easier than ever

to gain access to unhealthy food and drink. Energy drinks, which cause particular problems in schools throughout the country, have been cited by people such as Forfar academy head Melvyn Lynch as a contributory factor in many behavioural issues. He has introduced a ban, and I fully support the campaign by *The Courier* to get that ban in place across Tayside.

Tomorrow, I will visit a Dundee secondary school, and I would be delighted to tell the staff there that the First Minister will back the can it campaign. Will she join me in supporting that worthwhile cause?

The First Minister: I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport, Shona Robison, has already publicly supported *The Courier* can it campaign, and I think that it is a very positive campaign that is worthy of support.

As I outlined in my answer—I agree that some worrying conclusions have been drawn about the impact of energy drinks on young people—food and drink brought into schools by pupils is exempt from regulations but the 2007 act requires schools to set health-promoting policies. I would certainly expect such policies to apply to food and drink that is permitted on school grounds. Therefore, I think that schools have the tools that they need here. We continue to talk to local authorities about all those matters. We all have an interest in making sure that our young people eat healthily, because not only is it good for their health but it is good for their ability to learn.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): The debate is about what is purchased by children near schools, as opposed to just within schools. Given that many of our children head out to supermarkets and local shops at lunch time or on the way home from school—and given that price, promotion and display influence what is purchased—would ministers be willing to engage with the retail sector about having better policies that promote healthier products as opposed to unhealthy ones?

The First Minister: Richard Lochhead is absolutely right. Not only are we willing to engage with retailers: we are already engaging with retailers and caterers through our supporting healthy choices framework. That challenges them to rebalance their promotions and to support children and families to make healthier choices.

As I have just said, we also welcome public health campaigns such as the can it campaign from *The Courier*. We will continue to engage with industry to promote healthier choices wherever possible. Any efforts in that direction are very welcome indeed.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): As the First Minister has acknowledged, this is about

more than what is sold within schools. Recently, North Lanarkshire Council tried to enforce a ban on fast-food snack vans operating in the vicinity of local schools. That ban was overturned in the courts, calling into question bans that operate across the country, in Glasgow, Renfrewshire and other areas. I ask the First Minister to ask the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to look at that recent court ruling and to consider whether any legislative changes are required to give local authorities the power to enforce a snack van ban to improve the health of pupils in Scotland.

The First Minister: I will certainly do so, and I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to write to the member when he has done so.

In Vitro Fertilisation (Access to Treatment)

8. **Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to improve access to IVF treatment. (S5F-00103)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): This week, we confirmed that we would accept recommendations in the national infertility group's report, to build on the improvements we have made to IVF access in recent years. That will see the number of IVF cycles offered on the NHS increase from two to three and also allow access for couples where one partner does not have a biological child.

Clare Haughey: I thank the First Minister for her answer and for the action that her Government is taking to ensure that IVF provision in Scotland is as fair and as generous as possible. When will those changes come into effect, ensuring that Scotland remains at the forefront on IVF action and rights across the UK?

The First Minister: We are working to ensure that Scotland remains at the forefront of IVF action and rights across the UK. That is in comparison with, for example, Northern Ireland, where eligible couples can access only one fresh and one frozen cycle of treatment; England, where the majority of patients can access only one cycle; and Wales, where couples can access only two cycles of treatment. The action that we are taking therefore puts us very much at the forefront.

Work is now beginning with health boards to develop a sustainable implementation plan that will include setting out final timescales for the introduction of each of the IVF criteria changes. I will make sure that the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport keeps Parliament informed of the implementation as it progresses.

Points of Order

12:34

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I thank Margaret Mitchell for waiting for the end of First Minister's questions to raise her point of order.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer—

The Presiding Officer: I will take Margaret Mitchell first, if I may, Mr Adam.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance on whether the line of questioning from Kezia Dugdale in the exchanges with the First Minister has breached the Parliament's purdah rules in advance of next week's referendum—the test of which is, I believe, that the content is likely to influence the outcome of that referendum.

If those rules have been breached, what opportunity will there be to point out that the unfettered free movement of people will deeply damage the economy and our public services; that, as the fifth-largest economy in the world, the UK, with its talented and innovative people, is more than capable of surviving outside the European Union; and that, in fact, it has been NATO and the United Nations that have preserved our security, not the EU?

The Presiding Officer: Before I respond, I ask Mr Adam whether his point of order is on the same issue or a separate issue.

George Adam: It is on a different issue.

The Presiding Officer: I thank Margaret Mitchell for raising that point of order; I think that she is quite right to do so.

As members may know, the Parliament has decided, in a meeting of business managers in the Parliamentary Bureau, to observe our legal guidance—legal advice on how we are affected under the European Union Referendum Act 2015—that the Parliament should not use parliamentary resources to promote one side or the other during the referendum.

Members may also be aware—given that I believe that it is as a result of an oversight rather than an intent that the Parliament is covered by the referendum act—that I wrote on behalf of the Parliament to the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Secretary of State for Scotland to voice our concern that we should be covered in that way.

I listened to the questions and the answers very carefully, and it is my judgment that they did not breach that agreement, as they did not take a side on either side of the referendum debate. That was my decision, and I listened very carefully to what was said. [*Interruption.*] They did not use parliamentary resources to promote one side of the argument.

Mr Adam, you may now raise your point of order.

George Adam: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I, too, seek your guidance. Earlier, Willie Rennie stated that Save the Children said that there was a lack of investment in early years. I have read Save the Children's recent press release, and it does not say anything of the sort. Is it correct that Mr Rennie should come to the chamber and misrepresent a very important charity?

The Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Adam. That is a point of information or accuracy—

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: One second, Mr Findlay.

That is a point of information or accuracy for Mr Rennie. I am sure that he is aware of and heard Mr Adam's comments, and it is for him to reflect on them. That is not a point of order.

Neil Findlay: In reply to Margaret Mitchell's point of order, I think that, whichever side people are on in the referendum, they have the right to be heard and to have their views put forward in the chamber.

Presiding Officer, you expressed the view that parliamentary resources would not be used—I am not making a point on side or the other—but given that we use power and we have the *Official Report*, which are parliamentary resources, I think that we need absolute clarity on the issue, because it is very important.

The Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Findlay. The point that he makes is exactly the one that we considered in the bureau and with our legal advisers. The use of official report staff to report on our proceedings is a use of parliamentary resources. In this case, I did not judge that either the questions or the answers were an abuse of those resources. That was my judgment.

Margaret Mitchell and Neil Findlay have made their points of order, but my ruling so far is that neither of them is a point of order. However, I have taken them on board.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I raised a similar point of order during yesterday's members'

business debate on trade union membership, and I still await a response. Will that be forthcoming?

The Presiding Officer: Yes, I think that the member will receive a response from one of the Deputy Presiding Officers. The information will be passed to the member—I imagine that that will happen before the close of proceedings today. Just for information, our decision was that yesterday's point of order was not a point of order, either. However, more information will be passed to Elaine Smith later.

Before there are any more points of order, I suggest that we move on to members' business. I ask members to leave the chamber quietly.

Post-study Work Visas (Rural Communities)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-00247, in the name of Kate Forbes, on rural communities and the post-study work visa. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the case of the Brain family, who migrated from Australia to the Scottish Highlands; understands that the Brain family intended to apply for a post-study work visa in order to remain in Scotland; believes that attracting young families to live in rural areas such as Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch is essential for the economic and social success of rural Scotland, and believes that rural communities would benefit from a new post-study work visa scheme.

12:40

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I am a migrant; I have been so individually and as part of a family. My family migrated to India twice—first when I was only a few months old and again when I was in my teens—for a total of eight years. I have also been an economic migrant, as I left the Highlands for several years to work and study.

This is a time when we are battling over the meaning of "migration", in a battle that is so fraught that I fear that it is shaping our constitutional future—when the word has the dual power to break hearts, as bodies are washed up on Mediterranean beaches, and to harden hearts, as faceless numbers are reported in the press, and when families in my constituency, such as the Brains and the Zielsdorfs, face deportation. At such a time, which is charged with complexity and confusion, I want to be clear and simple in the debate.

I have two points to make. First, in rural communities such as the Highlands, our greatest challenge is emigration. Secondly, among all the United Kingdom Government's unhelpful changes to visas, the scrapping of the post-study work visa has been hugely detrimental to Scotland.

I will sketch out the challenge that we face in the Highlands, where we have fewer young people and a skills shortage. If the Highlands had the same demographic profile as the rest of Scotland, there would be an additional 18,000 young people there between the ages of 15 and 30. In my constituency of Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch, 51 per cent of the working-age population—those between 16 and 64 years old—are aged over 45. That is 10 per cent higher than the figure for Scotland as a whole. Many of our young people

leave as economic migrants to pursue training and work opportunities elsewhere.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Kate Forbes has made some excellent points. Does she share my view that it is important that the University of the Highlands and Islands can recruit not just young people from Scotland but international students from around the world?

Kate Forbes: I could not agree more. I will come on to that issue.

Employment figures for the Highlands are deceptive, because the unemployment level is lower than that for Scotland as a whole. The employment rate for Scotland as a whole is 73 per cent, whereas the figure for my constituency is 83 per cent, which is impressive. However, that is driven by a much higher dependence on part-time work.

The skills shortage is a challenge across Scotland, and it is acute in the Highlands. According to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, the number of job vacancies in Scotland has risen steeply since 2013—the figure went from 54,000 in 2013 to 74,000 in 2015, and 34 per cent of those vacancies arose from a lack of necessary skills. I do not need to spell out that skills shortages also have an impact on business productivity and growth.

How does the post-study work visa fit in? I will make the case for reintroducing it as a way to meet the skills shortage. The current situation is costing us. I believe that, in Scotland, we are unanimously agreed on the need to reintroduce a post-study work visa. All Scottish political parties, as well as our colleges, universities and businesses and even the Scottish Affairs Committee at Westminster, have agreed that we need talented international graduates. Universities Scotland conservatively estimates that Scotland has lost about £254 million of revenue since 2012 as a direct result of the closure of the tier 1 post-study work visa for international graduates.

If the skills shortage and population pressures are more acute in the Highlands, so is the need to reintroduce a post-study work visa. Last week, for example, I had dinner with a fine family from India, who have brought a wealth of medical knowledge and experience to NHS Highland and whose son got five As in his highers. We need them. A close friend of mine in the Highlands works as a dentist, at a time when dentists are in short supply, but her husband still needs a visa to join her. We need them.

Many members will have seen the Brain family in the news—they are a family whose skills we need and whose son is in Gaelic-medium primary education. They came to Scotland expecting to be

able to stay on after studying, on the post-study work visa. We need them.

The Zielsdorfs run the village store in the small community of Laggan, but the family have been denied leave to stay by the UK Government. We need them. We need all the international students who no longer apply to the University of the Highlands and Islands, because there is no post-study work visa and because it is easier for them to go to our competitors in Canada, the United States and Germany. I just do not get why we are kicking out families when we need them in rural Scotland.

To take up David Stewart's point about the University of the Highlands and Islands, in 2012-13, there were 26 full-time undergraduates from Nepal at the university, but this year the figure is seven. In 2013-14, there were 61 full-time undergraduate students from India; this year, there are 12. Universities Scotland is clear that the visa changes have impacted on recruitment to the University of the Highlands and Islands. India was previously UHI's main market and it was once the main international market for Scotland as a whole. However, since 2011-12, the number of students applying from India has fallen by a whopping 57 per cent and, in the same period, the number of students applying from Nigeria has reduced by 24 per cent. That is happening at a time when our competitors in Canada, Germany and the United States, to name but a few, are reporting significant growth in international student numbers.

In conclusion, our current visa arrangements are restrictive and off-putting, and all of us are the poorer for that.

12:48

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank Kate Forbes for bringing to the chamber a motion on what is clearly an important issue. Miss Forbes mentioned the background and the Brain family, who live in her constituency and who have had quite a high media profile. As I said, the current lack of post-study visas is an important issue, but I am pleased to note that the Home Office has granted the Brain family a further extension, which was the right thing to do with their application, so they will remain in the United Kingdom. I hope that there can be a satisfactory conclusion for the family.

It is essential that we attract people with skills and talent to Scotland. There is a broad consensus among all the parties in the chamber that a dedicated post-study immigration route is essential; I, too, am very much in favour of that. I pay tribute to what happened in the previous parliamentary session when my colleague Liz Smith argued for a Scottish solution to the

problem. She has continually been contacted by colleges and universities that are greatly concerned about the ending of the tier 1 visa, which happened in 2012.

Liz Smith sat on the cross-party post-study work steering group, which considered post-study work visas, and, on behalf of the Conservative and Unionist Party, signed up to the recommendation that the UK and Scottish Governments should work together to find a solution. I still believe that that is an important way for us to go.

The Minister for International Development and Europe (Dr Alasdair Allan): Notwithstanding what the member has just said, does he share my disappointment that the Secretary of State for Scotland has indicated that he has no intention of taking any further any of the issues that the Scottish Government has raised with him?

Alexander Stewart: I appreciate what the minister says, but lobbying is still taking place and I will be part of that lobbying, along with Liz Smith and others, because we believe that there is an opportunity here. It is important that we give the Secretary of State information and try to move things forward, because there is a case to be made. Liz Smith has been asking Westminster colleagues, including the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland, to reconsider their position. That is what we are doing at this stage.

We must consider the demographics of Scotland, which are markedly different from those of England. The population is projected to grow by 16 per cent in England between 2012 and 2037 but by only 9 per cent in Scotland over the same period. That causes us alarm and concern. Moreover, our working-age population is forecast to fall by 4 per cent during the same period, so there will be gaps that need to be filled—there is no question about that. As Miss Forbes highlights in her motion, such demographic effects are felt particularly strongly in the rural community that she represents.

It is important that we also consider what business and industry are looking for and trying to achieve. Talented individuals from overseas are aware that they have the opportunity to come to Scotland. We must make sure that cultural transformers in business can do the best that they can and take the opportunities that we have in Scotland.

We are looking at all aspects. Our universities lead the way and are at the cutting edge in what they can achieve. Many of their projects are pioneering and we must ensure that they go ahead.

We need to make decisions about the future of post-work study visas. It is important that we look at all the facts. I hope that members across the

chamber can work together and that the UK and Scottish Governments can co-operate in seeking a solution that is right for Scotland, for the economy and for our communities.

12:52

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I congratulate my fellow Highlander, Kate Forbes, on her success in securing this afternoon's debate and on her work to raise the constituency case of the Brain family. I was happy to add my name to the cross-party support for the Brain family to carry on living and working in Scotland.

I will touch on the wider issues that are raised by the post-study work visa before I talk about the specifics of the Brain case. As Universities Scotland said in its helpful briefing for today's debate, there is significant and respected evidence on the economic, social and cultural benefits that Scotland would gain if the post-study work visa were reintroduced.

Members should not just take my word for it but ask key universities, such as the University of Glasgow, the University of Edinburgh and the new kid on the block, UHI. They should ask the college sector and the student unions.

I have an example. A number of years ago, I visited Taiwan, as part of the cross-party group on Taiwan. I met the British Council and universities, who made it clear that in Taiwan there is a strong tradition of students going to university after school and then studying abroad and staying on to work in their international destinations. Since the change to the visa, the number of Taiwanese students coming to the UK has collapsed, which is worrying. Our loss has meant gains for New Zealand, Canada, Australia and America.

Universities Scotland argues that there is a direct correlation between the change in policy and student numbers falling off a cliff. The number of Indian students is down 60 per cent, Pakistani student numbers are down 46 per cent, and Nigerian student numbers are down 22 per cent. Although demand from China is still relatively strong, the majority of universities in Scotland are not meeting their international recruitment targets.

As the National Union of Students said to the all-party parliamentary group on migration at Westminster, more than half of international students see working in the UK after study as a very attractive option.

What is the problem with the UK's new tier 2 route? In my view, which I think is shared by other members, it is strict, bureaucratic and unattractive to international graduates. The United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have a much more compelling visa offer for international

students who study there. In its 2015 report, the Westminster APPG on migration said:

"the restrictive nature of Tier 2 ... has prohibited some employers from being able to recruit skilled ... graduates under this route."

In Scotland, we have a great higher education product for international students. We exceed the global benchmark for international student satisfaction, there are strong quality assurance mechanisms in our universities and we have world-class research. That is why I want the Brain family to stay and work in Scotland. As we heard, they came here on a student visa, but the Home Office cancelled the tier 1 scheme in 2012, which forced the family to apply for a tier 2 visa instead. Mr Brain said to *The National* newspaper:

"We are ready and able to contribute to the economy of the UK ... The restrictions being imposed on us aren't coming from Brussels, they are coming directly from Westminster."

For generations, Scots have left the nation of their birth to seek a new life in America, Canada, Australia and beyond. They have enriched universities, industry and the political process. All we ask is that the Brain family be given their chance to enrich their adopted country. I ask the Government to think again on its restrictive and anti-competitive tier 2 policy.

12:56

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):

I, too, congratulate Kate Forbes on obtaining time for the debate. I thank my work placement student for the week—Daisy Collins—who has done the research and written the notes that I will use during my speech.

Scotland has been greatly enhanced by the diversity that comes with immigration—people from different nations who have freely chosen to build their lives here. It is hard to imagine any area of human activity that has not benefited from that input—economically, politically, socially and culturally; in our classrooms, surgeries and elsewhere; and in our towns and rural villages. Especially in remote areas, the endeavours of people from different backgrounds are evident to us all and continue to be overwhelmingly positive.

However, the current rules that have been imposed by Westminster, and which we have been discussing, are driven by the needs of another area in these islands: the populous—some might say overpopulous—parts of the south. Certain parts of the Conservative Party have rather cynically taken the opportunity to use immigration to pander to other agendas, which has resulted in backward-looking immigration rules that help no one and which utterly fail to reflect the stark divide between Scotland's needs—and,

almost certainly, those of disadvantaged areas in England—and those of the rest of the UK.

That is to the detriment of our economy, our education system and, in particular, the rural communities that are the focus of the motion. It is for that reason that I support the motion to reinstate the post-study work visa. We need a fair and robust system that is sensitive, intelligent and designed to support the requirements of all the countries of the UK. When, in 2012, the coalition Government decided to scrap the visa, our potential as a nation was fantastically weakened and all our futures were affected by that.

If we continue to support and allow unnecessary barriers, we all suffer—in the short term and the long term. We miss out on the enormous gene pool that comes from international students. In particular, there is a direct and very personal effect on the Brain family and other families. It is a bankrupt policy whose time for abolition has come. We are losing a well of talent. We want to accept in Scotland people who will train with us and develop our society. Otherwise, we get a Brain drain.

We have heard from a number of members about the effect on the number of international students coming to Scotland, especially given the counter-attractions of other nations. The impact of that decline is economic as well as practical and moral, and it is very much to be regretted.

Historically, there has been emigration from our rural communities, which does not help. My family, like other Scottish families, is represented in countries including Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden and Denmark, and even the odd place like Lebanon. If we prevent people from coming here, the odds are that our people will find it more difficult to travel, which helps no one.

We have to strengthen and enhance our economy and our cultural diversity. The current policy does not help us, and the long-term effects are obvious and depressing. It is time that we used a post-study work visa scheme as a lever to tackle depopulation in our rural communities. We need a sensible post-study work visa system because the current arrangements simply do not work.

13:01

The Minister for International Development and Europe (Dr Alasdair Allan): I apologise, Presiding Officer, as I am still struggling through a cold and my voice may run out halfway through my speech.

I thank Kate Forbes for lodging the motion and for her fine speech today. I am pleased to be

called to represent the Scottish Government in closing the debate. The debate has not been about only one very compelling case—that of the Brain family, who are desperate, as we have heard, to secure a future in the Scottish Highlands—but the broader and equally compelling case for a fair and managed immigration system that meets Scotland's specific social, economic and cultural needs.

I am pleased again to see broad cross-party support in the chamber for the principle of the reintroduction of a post-study work visa. Such support has been expressed many times before, and I assure Ms Forbes that the Scottish Government is committed to continuing to push the UK Government to deliver that policy.

I welcome—as other members have welcomed—the Home Office's decision to allow the Brain family to stay until August. I hope that the family are able to take the opportunity to find a UK visa route that meets their needs and allows them to remain in the community that they clearly call home.

However, such compassion—uncharacteristic, I must say—from the Home Office in that case does not help others who find themselves in the same situation as the Brain family. We should make no mistake about it: the Brain family's case is not the only compelling immigration case. As members have mentioned, there will be many other families in equally difficult circumstances throughout Scotland.

The fact is that if there was a reasonable post-study work option for international graduates, for which the Scottish Government has been pushing since the UK Government announced the closure of the previous route in 2011—in effect, if we had been listened to—we would not be in the chamber debating the matter today.

The Brain family—Kathryn, Gregg and Lachlan—would be happily carrying on with the life that they have built for themselves in Dingwall. Kathryn would have had two years after she graduated in which to develop further her skills in the workplace, gain experience and move into graduate-level employment, which—with luck—might have met the UK Government's UK-wide income requirements.

As it is, under current UK immigration rules, international graduates do not have two years in which to find graduate-level employment. They have a maximum of four months from graduation to find a job that pays, at the very minimum, £20,800. Depending on the job and the sector in which they hope to work, the amount could be much higher.

It is clear that four months is not an adequate period to enable international graduates to make

the transition between education and skilled employment. That is not a new issue, and it is not the first time that I have stood in the chamber and called on the UK Government to listen to Scotland's specific needs and introduce an effective post-study work visa scheme. The Scottish Government has evidenced and argued, and evidenced again, the case for a post-study work route to allow international graduates to remain and work in Scotland, and for Scotland-specific immigration flexibilities.

I stood here last year as Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages and argued the case for a post-study work visa. I welcomed the cross-party support for post-study work, offered the evidence that had been gathered by leaders across our education and business sectors and called on the UK Government to honour the commitment in the Smith report to discuss the potential for the reintroduction of a post-study work route for Scotland. In that debate, Liz Smith said that it would be to Scotland's detriment if we did not sort out this issue, and that the Smith commission provided us with an opportunity to do so. I appreciate the sentiments that have been expressed here today by Conservative and other members, but I am, with respect, sorry to say to Liz Smith that we are still waiting on the UK Government, which has so far failed to honour that commitment.

Following that debate, my predecessor, Humza Yousaf, set up a cross-party steering group on post-study work, which included representatives of all the major political parties in Scotland as well as representatives of education, student and business interests.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I apologise for being a little late for the debate due to another commitment. I say to the minister that the situation is as follows: the Secretary of State for Scotland has until 23 July to reply to the Westminster Scottish Affairs Committee report, so there is still a window of possibility for getting a Scottish solution. I can give the minister a guarantee that we will continue our discussions with the Secretary of State for Scotland to press the issue.

Dr Allan: I very much appreciate the tone of that intervention and I hope that the window is being pushed vigorously. Certainly, as far as I am concerned, the statements to date from the Secretary of State for Scotland have been very far from encouraging. However, as I said, I welcome Liz Smith's comment that she intends to change minds at Westminster on the matter.

As I said, following the previous debate on the subject, my predecessor was involved with a steering group, which published its findings on 3 March this year. Again, that report concluded that

a flexible post-study work route would benefit Scotland. The report was sent to the UK Minister for Immigration, James Brokenshire, who advises me that he is still considering its contents.

Again, the Brain family are clearly not the only family to be unfairly caught out by the UK Government's increasingly restrictive immigration rules, and the removal of the post-study work route is not the only issue that I have with the UK Government's immigration system. I offer my sympathy to all those who wish to live in Scotland and contribute to our economy, culture and society but who have been stymied by the UK Government's increasingly restrictive rules. I call again on the UK Government to honour the recommendation in the Smith report to discuss with the Scottish Government the possibility of a post-study work route. I have already written to Mr Brokenshire asking for a meeting to discuss the issue and I await his response.

Again, I thank Ms Forbes for securing this debate and I hope that we are here again next year—but discussing the success of the new post-study work route that we have won for Scotland. I also wish the Brain family every success with their visa application.

13:08

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Policing and Security

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is a statement by Michael Matheson on policing and security. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions until then.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): I would like to make a statement about Police Scotland's announcement of an increase in the number of armed police officers.

Let me be clear at the outset that today's announcement is about the number of armed officers and not the circumstances in which they are deployed. Members will recall the controversy in summer 2014, when armed officers were deployed to incidents not involving firearms or a threat to life. Police Scotland then reverted to the policy of deploying armed officers only to incidents involving firearms or a threat to life. There is no change to that approach.

The threat that we face from terrorism is real. The overall threat level in the United Kingdom from international terrorism is classified as severe and has been since August 2014. The events that we witnessed at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 and again on the streets of Paris in November and the mass murders in Brussels are scenes that we never want to see again. They brought home just how vulnerable major cities can be. In the past few days in Orlando, we have again seen carnage and terror caused by a lone gunman.

There is no specific known threat to Scotland, but it is the duty of Government to protect its citizens, so we must plan and prepare for any eventuality. Sadly, we know that Scotland and the United Kingdom are not immune from terrorism. Previously, we have seen attacks in Glasgow and London. The criminal use of firearms also poses a threat.

The Government will always ensure that Scotland is well protected, that plans are in place to respond to such threats and that the risks are mitigated. I assure members that Scotland is playing its full part in the continuous planning and preparation that go on across the UK to protect communities. The Scottish Government and our emergency services continue to work alongside the UK Government in considering our preparedness against all threats. We are committed to ensuring that Scotland's law enforcement and other bodies have all the tools

that they need to tackle terrorism and organised crime effectively.

The attacks in Paris and Brussels as well as intelligence about organised crime have informed the work that Police Scotland has undertaken to review plans, and it has today announced an increase in the number of armed officers to help maintain safety and security in our communities. The chief constable has briefed me and ministerial colleagues on the case for the increase. It is an operational decision for the chief constable to make, and it is a decision that has the full backing of the Scottish ministers and the Scottish Police Authority.

Police Scotland constantly assesses and reviews resources against the latest intelligence and, to inform its decision to increase armed officer numbers, it has carried out a very detailed and robust assessment of capability and capacity. Currently, there are 275 Police Scotland officers who are dedicated to armed response vehicles. The increase of an additional 124 officers that has been announced today includes 90 officers who are dedicated to armed response vehicles. The increase will be phased over a number of months, as the officers are recruited internally and trained to the very high standards that are demanded for that specialist role.

The vast majority of Scotland's officers are not routinely armed. We have made an unequivocal commitment that that position will not change. Of our 17,317 police officers, only a small proportion have standing firearms authority to carry a weapon. That figure will now increase, but it will still represent a small percentage—it will be fewer than one in 40 officers.

Police Scotland has written today to the Justice Committee to notify members of the planned increase, which will take the percentage of officers with a standing authority to over 2 per cent, as officers are recruited. That fulfils a commitment that was made by my predecessor in August 2014. Police Scotland will continue to keep armed policing capacity and capability under review based on understanding of the evolving threat. The Scottish Government will fully support Police Scotland in doing so.

As part of Police Scotland's engagement with communities, local commanders in all parts of Scotland will meet local authorities and chairs of scrutiny committees to ensure that they are briefed. Senior officers have briefed representatives from the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents and the Scottish Police Federation, whose members include most armed officers.

In its announcement today, Police Scotland has made it clear there is no change to the policy of

deploying armed officers only to incidents that involve firearms or a threat to life. Armed response officers will also continue to be able to use their professional judgment as police constables to deal with any situation that they come across during their patrols. Armed police officers are, first and foremost, police officers, and they are expected to respond appropriately to keep people safe. However, I want to be clear that armed officers will not be routinely deployed to incidents other than those that involve firearms or a threat to life. Members will recall that it was the fact of armed officers attending more routine calls that gave the impression that our police service was becoming routinely armed and caused controversy back in 2014. There is no proposal to return to that.

The model of deployment of armed officers will, of course, continue to be kept under regular review by Police Scotland's armed policing monitoring group, which advises the chief constable. I am clear that any proposed change to the model of deployment would have to take into account the views of the public, stakeholders and Parliament.

Today, I offer my gratitude for the role that the men and women of Police Scotland play day in and day out in protecting our communities. Their commitment and dedication to the police service often means that they put themselves in harm's way to protect others. That is especially true of officers in the firearms role.

Officers volunteer to become armed officers. They are then carefully selected for what is a highly specialised role. Training is long and hard as they ready themselves for the responsibilities and risks that the role entails. They then put themselves in the front line of many of the most perilous situations that police officers can face. They are among the most highly trained officers in the service, and they deserve our respect and support in the difficult and often dangerous work that they do across Scotland on behalf of us all.

All that preparation goes hand in hand with our work to build cohesive communities so that extremist messages do not resonate. We do that by building strong and enduring relationships with all Scotland's communities. We have a strong track record of working for an inclusive and cohesive Scotland where diverse communities are valued for their contribution and a culture of respect and social justice is fostered.

The Government has always sought to build stronger and more resilient communities across Scotland and we will continue to do so. Respecting diversity and challenging hate are key to that. The Government, Police Scotland and other agencies are strengthening the protection of our communities but the responsibility for our

collective safety also lies with each one of us as citizens and neighbours.

The attacks in mainland Europe and Orlando caused shock and grief around the world. The Government is resolute in protecting the way of life that we enjoy and cherish in this country. The different threats that we face in our daily lives and as a nation mean that we must ensure that we are prepared for any eventuality. That is precisely what today's announcement is about.

There is no specific known threat to Scotland. People are safe to go about their daily business and should be further reassured by today's announcement by Police Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The first question is from Douglas Ross.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I thank the cabinet secretary for advance notice of his statement, and Deputy Chief Constable Ruairaidh Nicolson and Assistant Chief Constable Bernie Higgins for the briefing that they provided to party spokespersons and leaders.

The cabinet secretary is right to highlight that this move is about preparing. The public should not be alarmed by it; in fact, they can take some comfort from it. Over recent days, weeks and months, we have seen individuals and groups slaughtered by terrorists. The first duty of our brave men and women in the police force is to protect the public. Today's announcement will allow for that greater protection.

The UK Government has set aside significant funds to increase the armed response capability in England and Wales. What financial support will be required by Police Scotland specifically to increase the number of highly trained and skilled armed officers, and what provision will be made for that?

I welcome the guarantee given by the cabinet secretary that today's announcement does not indicate a change to the deployment procedures of our armed officers. This Parliament well remembers the concerns raised by the cabinet secretary about armed officers in the Highlands going to fast food restaurants, for example. What can Police Scotland and the Scottish Government do to reiterate to the public that they will not see a change in the deployment of armed officers?

Finally, I take this opportunity to praise our policemen and women for the work that they do each and every day. It is because of that work that today's announcement is a proactive one rather than a reactive one. We are preparing for the worst, when in fact we should be highlighting the skills of everyone in the police force, who ensure that we are always kept as safe as possible in Scotland.

Michael Matheson: I thank Douglas Ross for his comments. I agree: the public can take reassurance from today's announcement by Police Scotland about ensuring that we have the necessary preparations in place to deal with any eventualities that could come to Scotland.

A key part of Police Scotland's planning around this announcement has been to look at the nature of the threat that we face in Scotland and how Police Scotland can best deploy its resources to deal with and mitigate that threat. The officers who will be recruited into the firearms teams will be officers who are presently within Police Scotland. Part of that involves some increase in the availability of equipment for those officers. Police Scotland has set out a range of costs associated with that, which is in the region of £3 million.

As the member will recognise, there has been a consequence to the Scottish Government of the uplift in funding for armed officers in England and Wales. That has been provided within the Police Scotland budget for this year to give Police Scotland the resources that it requires to meet the additional costs associated with the increase in the number of firearms officers. The extra £100 million that Police Scotland will receive over the next five years as a result of that decision will assist it in meeting some of those costs. Alongside that, we will continue to be in dialogue with Police Scotland on any other funding matters.

The member is correct to point out that the announcement today does not result in any change in deployment. Deployment of firearms will continue to be for incidents that involve a firearm or where there is a threat to life. Equally, though, police officers should use their skills so that, should they come across an incident, they respond to it in a professional manner. Ultimately, their responsibility is the safety of the public. That is exactly the model of deployment that we have at present, and it will continue with this uplift in armed officers in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: For members' information, there will be around 20 minutes for these questions.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement and Police Scotland for the briefing earlier today.

I am responding to the cabinet secretary's statement just moments after hearing the horrific news about my colleague Jo Cox, a member of Parliament in Yorkshire. I am sure that the thoughts and prayers of everyone in the chamber are with Jo and anyone else who has been injured.

Following the horrific events in France, and in Orlando at the weekend, no risk can ever be fully

assessed. We must always ensure that our police services can respond effectively and proportionately to protect the people of Scotland. The Scottish Labour Party supports the decision by Police Scotland, working with ministers and the Scottish Police Authority, to ensure that we can protect all our communities from severe and violent threats.

I welcome the minister's recognition that the routine arming of police officers will not increase—that is clear and rightfully so.

I ask the minister to keep Parliament regularly informed about any further increases in the numbers of armed officers in the future, and about where capacity is lacking. I also ask the minister whether Police Scotland is working to ensure that it can build the intelligence and track the risk that would lead to incidents involving firearms or threat to life, so that the use of firearms will always remain the last resort.

Michael Matheson: I also learned of the very sad attack on Jo Cox MP this afternoon. Like all members in this chamber, my thoughts and prayers are with her and her family at what is an extremely difficult time for them.

Mr Rowley made a very important point when he used the term "proportionately". A key part of the approach that Police Scotland has taken forward, in considering the uplift in the number of firearms officers, is to make sure that it is in proportion to what we believe the overall risk to be within Scotland.

I give the member an assurance of my determination to ensure that Parliament has the opportunity to consider any further increase in the number of firearms officers within Police Scotland. The very reason why we are having this statement—and also the briefing that we provided earlier—is to afford members of the Scottish Parliament that particular opportunity. That is certainly an approach that I would seek to take forward again in the future. Equally, the approach includes informing the Justice Committee, as my predecessor had previously given a commitment to do should there be an increase above the 2 per cent level that Police Scotland had prior to the time of that commitment.

On the issue of Police Scotland developing its capability to be able to track and to mitigate risks, one of the key aspects that we have with the national force is the ability to draw all of that type of information and capability into one central point. That allows us to make sure that we are operating within Scotland in a way that ensures that, no matter where a person is in the country, they receive the same level of service, reflecting the risk that is informed by that understanding. One of the things that Police Scotland does—working with

other agencies—is to ensure that it interrogates that intelligence and information to consider whether there are any further measures that it then has to take forward here in Scotland.

I certainly give the member an assurance that, should there be any plans in the future to see a further increase in the number of armed officers within Scotland, the parliamentary process will be respected in the way in which it has on this occasion.

The Presiding Officer: The first two questions and answers have taken quite a long time. I recognise that the subject is very important, but there are a lot of members who want to speak, so I ask for quite tight questions and answers.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): What level of engagement has taken place between the Scottish Government, the Scottish Police Authority, Police Scotland and other partners on today's announcement?

Michael Matheson: As the member will recognise, the decision is an operational decision for the chief constable to make, although it is a decision that has the full backing of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Police Authority.

Members will appreciate that, since the attacks in Brussels and Paris, we have been liaising with Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority to consider what further firearms capacity and capability may be required in Scotland. That has been considered over several months, resulting in Police Scotland's announcement today. I give the member an assurance that the matter will be continually kept under review and that we will consider further information or any further incidents that occur to ensure that the approach that we take in Scotland is proportionate to the risk here and is informed by experience in other parts of Europe and the wider world.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of his statement.

There is clearly a balance between assessing any possible current threat and raising anxiety among the public. It seems to me right and proper that, in the light of world events, Police Scotland should seek to reassess its response to any potential threat in Scotland.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that, in session 4, the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing was established to report on the functioning of the new Police Scotland. Given today's statement and the issues that regularly arise, does he agree that the sub-committee performed an invaluable function in ensuring transparency, openness and accountability in all aspects of Police Scotland's activities?

Michael Matheson: In her initial comments, Margaret Mitchell referred to assessing the threat that we face as a result of incidents that have occurred in other parts of Europe. I emphasise that there is no known threat to Scotland. The course of action that Police Scotland is taking is based on the nature of the incidents that have occurred in Europe. It is taking that action to ensure that we have the capacity and capability to deal with incidents—should such incidents occur here—and that our response is proportionate.

It is of course for the Justice Committee and the Parliament to decide whether to have another policing sub-committee. However, I assure the member that the Scottish Police Authority has been considerably engaged in the action that Police Scotland is taking, through scrutinising and being involved in discussions with Police Scotland as it has developed its thinking and final response to the issues that have been raised with it. The SPA has given the matter thorough consideration.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): What engagement has taken place with local authorities and the public on the increase in the number of armed officers?

Michael Matheson: A key aspect of the work that Police Scotland will take forward from today is engagement with the chairs of the scrutiny committees, individual local authorities and local authority chief executives. Local commanders in each area will undertake that work to ensure that the scrutiny committees and local authorities understand the announcement that Police Scotland has made today and are provided with further information about the decision. A key part of that work is therefore about ensuring that local scrutiny committees and local authority chief executives are informed about the matter.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for an advance copy of his statement, and I put on the record my support for the commitment and dedication of our police force.

The breaking news at lunch time about my colleague Jo Cox casts a dark shadow over today's statement and highlights the need for safety and security in all our communities. Given the ever-changing threat and nature of terrorism and the need for increased numbers of armed officers, can the cabinet secretary tell the chamber what support and psychological services are available to armed officers who are deployed to deal with terrorist incidents to ensure that their health and wellbeing are fully supported?

Michael Matheson: Armed officers are trained to the highest level that officers can be trained to because of their extremely specialist role. If we consider policing right the way through from the role of constable to the various specialisms, we

can see that there is no doubt that the skills required for armed officers are at a very high level. Police Scotland trains to the very highest level to ensure that our officers are equipped and trained to undertake their role professionally and effectively.

The member asked about the support and assistance provided to officers who deal with potentially traumatic incidents. There are standing arrangements within policing for officers to be debriefed and to get support in dealing with these matters. It is for the chief constable to ensure that the welfare of their staff is appropriately looked after. That applies to any constable involved in any incident in the same way as it applies to those who are armed officers. It is a matter for the chief constable, but there is a standard process for officers who are involved in serious incidents to be debriefed and provided with welfare and support following such incidents.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I draw members' attention to the fact that I have a close family member who is a police constable.

Many incidents that happen in local communities across Scotland could not reasonably be foreseen through intelligence and stem from the actions of a single individual. Is the cabinet secretary satisfied that there are adequate ways in which local commanders can get access to the new resource that he has announced today?

Michael Matheson: Part of the work that Police Scotland has been undertaking over the past couple of months has been to look at the changing nature of the threat, and there is no doubt that the incidents that we witnessed in Paris in particular highlighted that changing nature, in that several different incidents took place simultaneously. That has led to a reassessment of how policing resource should be deployed in order to prepare for such an event, should it occur. However, the resource will be deployed by Police Scotland on the basis of where it believes the greatest risk is presented. The model is constantly reviewed and it reflects the information that Police Scotland has.

I assure the member that the uplift in resource will provide a greater level of coverage across the whole of Scotland and will ensure that all communities have the armed officer provision that is necessary and appropriate to the situation and the risk in the area. Police Scotland reviews that regularly, based on the information and intelligence that it receives.

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): I say to the cabinet secretary that I and the Scottish Conservatives welcome the announcement and Police Scotland's continuing commitment to our

security both across the country and here in Edinburgh, the capital city, with its many residents and visitors, particularly at the time of the Edinburgh festival.

The commitment includes ensuring the availability of sufficient armed officers in the event of any firearms incident. The cabinet secretary will appreciate that there is a difference and a distinction between having such officers available should such an incident arise and officers being visibly armed from a public point of view. Can the minister give the Parliament a categorical assurance that we will not now see visibly armed officers on Scotland's streets except where necessary in the event of such an incident or an immediate verifiable threat?

Michael Matheson: As I made clear in my statement and as Police Scotland has made clear, the model of deployment will not change from the arrangements that we have in place—that is, armed officers are deployed only to incidents that involve a firearm or where there is a threat to life. Outwith that, it will be for officers to exercise their professional judgment should they come across an incident where they believe that there is an issue of public safety, in order to respond to that. I am sure that all members would expect that to happen when officers witness such an incident taking place.

As I also made clear in my statement, if there was to be any change to the deployment model, the matter would require a level of public and parliamentary engagement and a level of scrutiny so that the issue could be considered in detail. I assure the member that the deployment model that we have at present, with the uplift in officers, will continue.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I welcome having early sight of the ministerial statement and the earlier briefing from the chief officers.

The Scottish Green Party accepts in good faith the information that we have been given, which we are told informs the threat level and therefore the change. I think that it is fair to repeat our earlier concerns about the Scottish recording centre, the quality and quantity of information and the legitimacy of its acquisition and retention. That said, we welcome that there is to be no change to the deployment policy.

Does the cabinet secretary nonetheless accept that there will be concerns that, however modest the increase is, it could be viewed as mission creep towards more routine use of armed officers? Does he accept that, although many will be reassured by what they have heard, a sizeable section of the community are concerned about the presence of armed officers, whether within or

outwith vehicles? Can he reassure me that this is not the point of no return on arming and that, when the threat level reduces—we both know that there are groups that do not want that to happen—the number of armed officers will reduce as well?

Michael Matheson: I assure the member that the uplift in firearms officers within Police Scotland reflects intelligence and the service's consideration of the threat level within Scotland and the UK as a whole. I assure the member that this is not simply a matter of mission creep or a desire to have more firearms officers. The matter has been considered in great detail and it reflects the changing nature of the threat given the incidents that have occurred in Europe as a whole over the past year and a half.

I have no doubt that a change in the threat level—if it is a reduction—will allow for further reflection and for the existing level of resource for firearms officers to be revisited, based on that change.

It is important that we reassure the public that Police Scotland's approach is informed by its understanding of the threat and the changing nature of that threat. We must ensure that we have a proportionate response to the threat in Scotland, that we have in place the necessary resources to deal with any incident that should occur and that we revisit the matter, should the threat level change at any point in the future.

Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary reaffirm the Government's commitment to protect the police resource budget in real terms for the lifetime of this parliamentary session, ensuring that our police forces have the funding that they require to keep Scotland's communities safe?

Michael Matheson: As I have said, we have given Police Scotland's policing budget real-terms protection over this parliamentary session, which will allow it to invest an additional £100 million in policing. Alongside that, we have provided an additional £55 million reform budget in this financial year, to assist it in reforming the organisation. We are determined to continue to provide our law enforcement agencies and other partners with the necessary resource to ensure that they are able to meet and mitigate any threats that we face in Scotland.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I confirm to the chamber that the First Minister has asked me to be the parliamentary liaison officer for the justice secretary. I look forward to working with colleagues across the chamber over the coming period.

How do armed policing levels in Scotland compare with those in England?

Michael Matheson: Fulton MacGregor will be aware that Police Scotland has considered the approach that it believes is best suited to ensure that we have a proportionate response to the risk in Scotland. It has engaged with its colleagues south of the border, including through the National Police Chiefs Council, to consider matters. The approach that Police Scotland has set out is proportionate to the approach that is being taken in other parts of the UK. The approach that Police Scotland has outlined today is very much in line with the approach that forces in other parts of the UK are taking.

The Presiding Officer: I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement and I apologise to the two members whom I was unable to call.

Children

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-00467, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on the best start in life for Scotland's children.

15:03

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): I am delighted to be here in a new role, joining my colleagues Shona Robison and Maureen Watt in continuing to improve the health and wellbeing of all children in Scotland. I am also delighted to be part of today's debate alongside my friend and colleague Mark McDonald, the new Minister for Childcare and Early Years.

This Government remains committed to our ambition of making this country the best place to grow up in. Despite the differences that we may have across the chamber, I know that that aim transcends party-political lines. The life journey of our youngest members of society does not fit neatly into one portfolio, which is why our ambitions to give our children the best start are a whole-Government effort.

John Carnochan, formerly of the violence reduction unit, says:

"the most important years of a child's life are up to the age of 3."

For me, that beautifully sums up the need to continue our focus on children's health and wellbeing from pre-birth and to continue our efforts to embed prevention and early intervention to address inequalities. Disadvantage begins before birth and continues in a child's early years, and it can have lifelong negative effects on their health and wellbeing. An analogy that I have often used to describe that is that children are like wet cement: whatever lands on them leaves an impression. Our job—whether we are parents, practitioners or politicians—is to ensure that the impressions that we leave are positive, as they can last a lifetime. That is why we are committed to ensuring that universal and targeted services provide the support that all children need to have the best mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): Breastfeeding is not mentioned in the motion, yet, in relation to preventing disease and saving resources, a UNICEF publication of two years ago says that recent studies have shown an

"increased risk of poorer cognitive development and behavioural problems in children who are not breastfed".

Could the minister comment on that?

Aileen Campbell: Breastfeeding is not specifically and explicitly mentioned in the motion, but I will mention it later in my remarks. I pay tribute to the effort and work that Elaine Smith has put into promoting breastfeeding; I certainly want to continue to work with her on that and I am happy to meet her again.

Children living in disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to be exposed to adverse factors such as parental substance misuse, mental illness, neglect, abuse and domestic violence. We need to strengthen our universal services to identify risk as part of an on-going assessment of child development. Early access to high-quality maternity care and antenatal education is crucial for both the mother and her unborn child in reducing the effects of the multiple and overlapping risk factors that some families face. It can also have a powerful effect on reducing rates of morbidity and mortality. Through our efforts, women are now accessing maternity care earlier in their pregnancy, with 93 per cent having their antenatal booking appointment by 12 weeks, compared with 87 per cent in 2013.

Our world-leading patient safety programme is also contributing, by driving through many improvements in maternity services. Through a combination of co-ordinated, collaborative actions by the Government, national health service boards and stakeholders, we reduced the stillbirth rate in Scotland by 18 per cent over a four-year period. We will continue to strive to reduce that rate further and help more families avoid the heartbreak and loss that that brings.

Last year, we conducted a maternity care experience survey, and we were pleased that the report highlighted that more than 90 per cent of women rated their care during pregnancy and birth very positively. That is a credit to the professionals who provide those services. However, we need to keep our foot on the gas to make good on our commitment that mums and babies get the best care possible.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I absolutely endorse the minister's remarks about the quality and dedication of NHS staff, but does the minister agree with me that it is still a problem that 71 per cent of health boards have no training or trained personnel in perinatal mental health and that they are not adequately equipped to deal with the many conditions that are faced by almost 8,000 mothers every year following birth?

Aileen Campbell: That is why, in our manifesto and under our commitment to the work going forward, we want to address some of those issues and have a look at mental health in our strategic plan now and in the future. I take on board the expertise that Alex Cole-Hamilton brings to the debate through his previous role at Aberlour. I look

forward to working with him on some of these areas of common concern.

We continue to invest in our maternity services. We are creating an additional 1,000 nursing and midwifery training places and we are retaining the nursing and midwifery bursaries. We are undertaking a person-centred review of maternity and neonatal services, with choice, quality and safety at its heart.

In the first few years of a child's life, health professionals, particularly health visitors, continue to have a vital role to play in supporting children and families. The early establishment of a therapeutic relationship provides health visitors with a sound foundation for their role as the named person from birth. That is why we have provided funding to every territorial health board across Scotland to appoint additional health visitors and grow the workforce by 500 by 2018.

We have strengthened the support to families by publishing the new "Universal Health Visiting Pathway in Scotland" last year. It details the core home visiting programme that will be offered to all families with children up to the age of five. The programme consists of 11 home visits to families, with eight within the first year of life and three child health reviews between 13 months and four to five years. Moreover, the child health review at 27 to 30 months, which was put in place two years ago, is now helping more children than ever.

We will also continue the roll-out of the family nurse partnership programme to reach all eligible teenage mothers by the end of 2018, extending it to include vulnerable first-time mothers up to the age of 24. However, we need to ensure that everyone is working together to put the child at the centre of all that they do. Interagency and interprofessional working, along with the valuable contribution from the third sector, must be pooled together, creating a strong focus on improving outcomes for all children, especially those furthest away from reaching their full potential. Early learning in childcare will play a key role in that endeavour, and I know that Mr McDonald will say more about that when he sums up this debate.

Over the past four years, we have invested an additional £19 million on specialised children's services, which has improved priority specialist services, and our patient safety programme has published the first worldwide paediatric early warning score system for use throughout our health systems. However, the Government is aware that it has to do more and we have made a number of commitments specifically relating to continuing to improve the health and wellbeing of children. We will develop a new 10-year child and adolescent health and wellbeing strategy, covering both physical and mental wellbeing, key to which will be support for children in community health

services. We will also implement a new framework for families with disabled children, so that all our children get the right support from birth to adulthood.

The Scottish Government is committed to equality for disabled children and young people in Scotland and to ensuring that all children can achieve their potential. Families with disabled children face a range of challenges and are far more likely to be affected by poverty than other families—by virtue of that, they are also at greater risk of health inequalities. Although a great deal of work has already taken place to improve the lives of disabled children and their families, we need to increase our efforts to ensure that our ambitions of getting it right for every child are met.

In 2011, we introduced a 10-year strategy, the maternal and infant nutrition framework, which was the first of its kind to recognise the importance of the pre-conception period. We are now five years into the implementation of the framework and are currently refreshing the evidence base to set the direction for the next five years, connecting with the work on obesity, diet and physical activity. As part of that work, we recently announced that all pregnant women will receive free vitamins from spring 2017. That is a positive step and we are also exploring how we can complement that work to further improve the diet and nutrition of pregnant women and young children. Evidence suggests that the best nutrition from birth includes exclusive breastfeeding and starting solid foods at around six months. We want to ensure that everyone understands the benefits and—perhaps more important—understands their role in ensuring that breastfeeding is protected, promoted and supported and being cognisant of the pressures mums feel at what is, or can be, a very vulnerable time for them.

To support that ambition, I am delighted that, from May this year, Scotland became the first United Kingdom country to achieve full maternity UNICEF baby-friendly accreditation. One hundred per cent of Scotland's births are now in hospitals that meet UNICEF's infant feeding standards, which compares with 52 per cent in England, 92 per cent in Northern Ireland and 61 per cent in Wales.

The best start in life for our bairns means recognising that parental smoking and substance misuse have an adverse impact on children. Giving up smoking is the single best thing that a pregnant woman can do to improve her health and that of her unborn child. Our support to NHS boards helps to ensure that vital stop smoking support is available to all pregnant women in Scotland who want to quit smoking. That support builds on the array of strategies and targets that are in place to raise awareness of tobacco harm to

children and young people, and to prevent it from happening.

Our priority as a Government is to give all children their fair chance to flourish, but we are doing so against a backdrop of persistent social inequality and poverty, and having to mitigate the worst impacts of welfare reforms. We know that, if we are going to close the poverty gap later in life, we need to do more to reduce disadvantage in the early years. That is why our manifesto committed to replacing the sure start maternity grant with a new maternity and early years allowance. The new benefit will be targeted at reducing inequality and will provide more support to low-income families, increase the maternity payment for the first child from £500 to £600, and restore a payment of £300 for second and subsequent children, which was cut by the Westminster coalition Government in 2011.

We will introduce two new payments to support families through key transitions as children begin their education: £250 when children begin nursery and £250 when they start school. The new benefit will help to tackle the impact of child poverty in a child's earliest years, to help ensure that all children who are born into low-income families can receive the very best start in life.

Within a year from now, every child born in Scotland will receive a baby box—a box of essential items to help level the playing field in the very first days of life. The First Minister stated in her opening address in this parliamentary session that our children deserve the best start possible in life, and the introduction of the baby box symbolises that fair and equal start. That commitment to the principles of fairness and equality is the hallmark of our approach to social and economic policy.

We promote the measures that we do because they advance both our economy and our society. Children only get one shot at childhood, so we must endeavour to do all that we can to get it right. The early years offer a glorious opportunity to mould and shape a landscape of opportunity for each child, and the benefits can last a lifetime.

I have set out the actions that the Government is taking from pre-birth; Mark McDonald will set out our ambitions to do ever more. I look forward to working with all the new spokespeople and members on this journey towards making Scotland the best place to grow up in. Regardless of party and politics, giving children the best start in life unites us and I hope that it will unite our effort, with the appropriate challenge and debate, to create the fairer Scotland that we all seek.

I move,

That the Parliament commits to making Scotland the best place for children to grow up; supports parents through

the promotion of children's health and wellbeing from pre-birth, in the early years and primary education; believes that the new 10-year mental health strategy should help renew focus on the early identification of child mental health issues; welcomes that all pregnant women will receive free vitamins and support to enable a healthier diet, and that every newborn in Scotland will be entitled to a baby box to help them to get the best start in life; agrees with a grant for expectant mothers on low incomes for the first and subsequent children, and that low-income families should also receive grants when their child starts both nursery and school; believes that investment in the expansion of high-quality early learning and childcare, alongside an increase in highly-trained staff, will support children during their early years and help them to reach their full potential, and supports efforts to reduce stigma and social pressures on children of all ages.

15:15

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome Aileen Campbell to her new post. Over a long period of time, she has done a great deal for children and young people in her previous role. I do not think that anyone can doubt the minister's commitment to her brief.

I have lost count of the number of debates on children and young people that I have taken part in, but that is because it is such an important policy area that has commanded a great deal of cross-party support. Nonetheless, it presents some of the most significant challenges to the Government and the other parties, in both the health brief and the education brief. We are probably agreed—pretty unanimously—about the extent of those challenges, so compelling and consistent is the evidence that is presented to us about the importance of the early years. We maybe agree a bit less on how to address those challenges, but it is important in this debate that parties take the opportunity to set out their positive vision, so I will do that on behalf of the Conservatives.

I will deal first with the very earliest years—even pre-birth—and restate our strong commitment to the midwife and health visiting system, which believes strongly in the earliest possible intervention and commands huge public trust, particularly among parents. That is important. The system has a very dedicated and professional staff, and we need to pay a bit of attention to what they are saying now about the additional responsibilities that they are expected to take on. We owe them a great debt.

We should also listen to what other countries are saying in this area. Many recommend that the health visiting system should be extended from year 5 up to when a child is seven years old, but that would require an extraordinary commitment of resources and a recalibration of Government priorities. Nonetheless, the evidence that is

presented to us—particularly from the Scandinavian countries—is pretty compelling.

Of course, we will not get all the results that we want if we do not invest wisely in neonatal care. Reports have been produced recently—I am thinking particularly of the report from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health—that identify issues of overworked staff, cancelled appointments and insufficient medical cover. We need to take those issues seriously, as neonatal care is a crucial area of intervention. The report also expresses strong concerns about the training opportunities that are available and whether staff have enough time to spend on professional training compared with what happens in other parts of the United Kingdom.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 contains provisions to extend the number of hours of free childcare that a child receives, and we warmly welcome what the Scottish Government has done in that respect. However, we are concerned that some disadvantaged two-year-olds are losing out. No party in this Parliament can ever pretend to be delivering all the childcare that we would like to deliver, because there are significant constraints on resources and the facilities that we use. Nonetheless, there is a debate to be had about where the greatest priority should be within tight spending and whether we should put more focus on one and two-year-olds, especially the most vulnerable ones.

Extending the number of hours of free childcare is only part of the issue, which is all about flexibility—I know that the Scottish Government is working on some aspects of that—and my colleagues will look at some reforms that we think are needed to make the system more responsive to the needs of parents, whose working lives are becoming increasingly diverse.

The same is true when it comes to nursery provision. We need to introduce greater flexibility in care, so that there is a good mix of state partnership and private provision, because parents should be allowed to choose. There is another debate to be had about the entitlement to public money for that provision. Again, we should take a leaf from the Scandinavian countries. We need to look at what they do, because I think that they do things a little bit better than we do.

There is an aspect of nursery provision to which I will return: the inequity that lies within nursery provision relating to the date of the child's birthday. We have debated the issue several times—during consideration of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill and at other times in the chamber. That matter still concerns us. Our party suggests that provision for all children should start at a fixed point in the year, because it is not

acceptable in today's Scotland that 50 per cent of youngsters do not have the same provision simply because of when their birthday is.

Of course, what matters most is staffing. I know that the Government is looking at some of the key spending commitments in that area, but there are concerns. Indeed, Alex Cole-Hamilton flagged up the concerns in his intervention. Again, that is a high-priority matter.

I turn to the issue of mental health. We welcome the new mental health strategy, which focuses on the early identification of such health issues, and the fact that consideration is being given to the long-standing call from the Scottish Association for Mental Health for a 10-year strategy. Indeed, the minister has good things to say about that area. A wealth of evidence shows that more than half of diagnosable mental health problems take root before the age of 14. Clearly, early intervention is vital. The Scottish Parliament information centre has provided interesting statistics about the impact of the mental health crisis—I do not think that "crisis" is too strong a word—in Scotland. It is a hidden crisis for many youngsters, so our talking about it in a cross-party way and the Government's focusing on the issue is a good thing.

According to NHS Scotland statistics, 83 per cent of children and adolescents who were referred for mental health treatment in the last quarter were seen within 18 weeks. That is an improvement on the figure for the previous quarter, but it is still quite a bit below the Scottish Government's target. We have issues about where the bed provision is and how quickly some of the treatment centres are able to deal with youngsters, many of whom, as I say, may not come forward to talk to someone. Barnardo's highlighted that important issue to us when it described the matter in considerable detail.

There is nothing more important than the early years—I do not think that there is any division at all among parties in this Parliament about that. We owe it to the Government to accept that it has done excellent work on that; nonetheless, there are significant challenges, and I would ask the minister to look particularly at nursery provision. We have mentioned that issue for a long time, and it has resonance with a lot of parents. An improvement in the flexibility of childcare would also be a huge step forward.

I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

I move amendment S5M-00467.4, in the name of my colleague Donald Cameron, to leave out from "agrees" to "potential" and insert:

"notes calls from children's organisations for a wholesale review of child and adolescent mental health services to ensure that funding is being used in the most effective

manner; considers that investment in neonatal training courses for nurses should be prioritised so that every newborn is always cared for by a team of fully qualified staff; believes that investment in high-quality early learning and childcare should focus on expansion into care for one and two-year-olds; agrees that parents should have flexibility in accessing childcare”.

15:23

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Before I talk about the motion or my amendment, I add that my thoughts are with Jo Cox and her family, given the tragic circumstances today.

I declare an interest—in fact, I have two of them. One is aged nine months and the other is four years old, and they are the light of my life. They are also the reason why this debate is so important to me. For my family, like all working families, childcare is not about abstract arguments, statistics about places or quality criteria; rather, the childcare issues that families face are practical, financial and daily.

My childcare challenge is quite often getting out the door in time, so that I can get my daughter to nursery and get to my desk here at a decent hour. We are a family with two parents, both of whom have busy, demanding jobs, but even for us childcare is expensive. Balancing the expectations of work and the demands of family life is, to put it mildly, testing.

To my mind, childcare is central to so much of what we seek to achieve in this place. The way that we treat, look after and raise our children speaks volumes about the kind of society that we are. In that direct way, childcare shapes our future.

We know how important the early years are to a child’s development. Childcare and early years education are vital if we want our children to thrive. One of the most encouraging aspects of the new parliamentary session is the consensus on the need to tackle some of those issues—in particular, the attainment gap—about which Liz Smith just spoke. However, it is also becoming clear just how important the early years are in closing that gap.

Language is the most fundamental learning tool that we have. The Save the Children analysis that was released today, which demonstrates that 7,000 of our youngest children are struggling with their first words, is of concern. Most alarmingly, the analysis shows that toddlers from the poorest families in Scotland are twice as likely to have those difficulties and that the gap that opens up at that stage persists until children are right the way through primary school.

In a real way, the attainment gap has already come into existence before children have even entered a classroom or so much as opened a textbook. Therefore, we should heed Save the

Children’s call for more qualified professionals with speech and language expertise to work in our nurseries and consider that proposal seriously.

Elaine Smith: Does Daniel Johnson agree that language is important in the debate and the motions? That is why I made the point about breastfeeding not being mentioned although it is so important to the best start in children’s lives.

Daniel Johnson: I thank Elaine Smith for that comment and echo the comments on the matter from right across the chamber. The importance of breastfeeding is well understood and we must make every effort to ensure that every child benefits from it.

Labour has taken the early years seriously for some time. Expanded childcare, the introduction of paternity leave, increased maternity leave and pay, tax credits and the sure start programme are all achievements of recent Labour Governments. The Scottish Government will have our support when it builds on those foundations.

Childcare also has serious impacts on women’s ability to work. According to figures from SPICe, a quarter of women who are at home caring for children under five would like to be out working. Access to affordable childcare is critical to ensuring that that can happen. The Scottish Government’s commitments on that are welcome, but most women do not—and, indeed, cannot afford to—wait until their child is three before they get back to work. Nor are childcare places comprehensively available for the parents who want to take them up, which leads many of them to have to top up childcare. Claiming the free hours needs to become more straightforward and provision needs to be more consistent if the Government’s ambitions are to be achieved.

The important point in our approach to childcare is not only what is provided but how it is provided. The pattern of dads dropping kids off at nurseries so that the mums can pick them up at the end of the day is familiar to me. It betrays an expectation that we still have in society that women will compromise their work by leaving early to pick up children. Indeed, a recent survey showed that, in the UK, for every hour of childcare that mothers provide, dads provide only 24 minutes. For single parents—

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Will Daniel Johnson give way?

Daniel Johnson: In a moment.

For single parents, the logistical problems are even greater. The way that the Government approaches and delivers childcare provides an important signal. Tackling the gender pay gap depends on implementing childcare.

Bob Doris: I am sorry that I intervened at a slightly inappropriate time, when Mr Johnson was halfway through making his point.

I declare my interest, which is a five-month-old baby called Cameron. This is the year of the dad, as I am sure Mr Johnson is aware. He mentioned gender roles in childcare. Does he agree that both of us and all dads have a responsibility to lead by example and challenge some of that gender inequality during the year of the dad in particular?

Daniel Johnson: I could not agree more, but I also emphasise that it is really important that the Government sends out the right signals on the accessibility and availability of childcare and ensures that our approach to childcare is not incremental but comprehensive.

More than one in four of Scotland's families do not have access to a breakfast club. That is worse than in any other part of the UK. We need to ensure that childcare does not stop at the age of five and that we have a more comprehensive, wraparound view of what it is. We need to set ourselves challenging targets and high ambitions for childcare. The way in which we approach it has profound impacts—not just on our children, but on our society and our future.

Frankly, the current incremental approach from the Scottish Government shows signs of creaking under pressure. Fair funding for our kids warns that 8,000 children are in danger of missing out on their entitlement—that is one in five children. That is perhaps unsurprising, given the way in which that provision is being delivered. Furthermore, according to the National Day Nurseries Association, 77 per cent of nurseries say that the funding provided simply does not cover their costs, with the average of £3.56 per child per hour providing little beyond staffing costs.

These debates, in the early weeks of the session, are important as they allow the parties to talk about what we agree on and where we share ideas on priorities. Most important, though, they enable us to talk about our ambitions for this country. I have set out criticisms of the SNP Government's childcare plans—not because I think that they are wrong or because I do not value the provision that is undoubtedly being made. Rather, I want us to be ambitious for more. We need a comprehensive childcare plan for the whole of Scotland. That is why I am pleased to move Labour's amendment.

I move amendment S5M-00467.3, to insert at end:

“; believes that high-quality childcare is good for children and families as well as the economy; recognises that some aspects of childcare in Scotland are now more expensive than anywhere else in the UK apart from London, with prices rising well above the rate of inflation and many

parents struggling to access affordable childcare that fits their needs; notes that nurseries often have a waiting list of parents waiting to access their funded hours; believes that Scotland's children and their parents deserve a childcare strategy that will genuinely deliver an affordable, flexible and wraparound system, and calls on the Scottish Government to deliver funding for a breakfast club in every primary school and to start delivering a wraparound childcare policy”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate, with speeches of up to six minutes, generally, please.

15:31

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): As we have heard from the minister and other speakers, this Parliament is committed to putting children and their families at the heart of policy making, as captured in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The aim is

“to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up”

and

“to ensure that all children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed”.

Today, right at the start of life is where I would like to focus—first, by mentioning the Scottish Government's announcement that it will accept the key recommendations of the national infertility group. Scotland already leads the way on in vitro fertilisation access and rights in the UK, and the changes will ensure that Scotland's provision is as fair and generous as possible. I know that news of the changes will be very welcome to couples who are having difficulty in conceiving.

I also welcome the announcement of free vitamins for women throughout their pregnancy. Good nutrition is, of course, essential but, even with access to a good-quality, healthy diet, additional nutritional support is beneficial for pregnant women and their babies, which is why universal provision is so important.

We know that the best nutritional start in life for babies is breastfeeding. Next week is national breastfeeding celebration week and, on Wednesday 22 June, the Ayrshire breastfeeding network will have an information and support pop-up stall in the Irvine mall, which I look forward to visiting.

The network's peer supporters, trained volunteers and drop-in centres provide important support and encouragement to new mums in relation to feeding their babies, including, importantly, in weaning them on to appropriate first foods. I am told that the chats that they have at the drop-in groups cover many other topics, such as parenting skills; sleep—or lack of it; maternal mental health; and infant bonding and development.

The network is also doing some good work with schools, including, recently, delivering simple information to some P3 pupils at Woodlands primary in Irvine and some secondary pupils at St Matthew's in Saltcoats. The hope is that talking to young people will help to normalise breastfeeding and make it a choice that they can imagine making themselves when they choose to have children.

Perhaps most importantly, the drop-in groups provide somewhere that families can come to meet other parents and develop supportive social networks, which we all know play a huge part in preventing feelings of isolation and therefore promoting wellbeing.

I take the opportunity to highlight the network's breastfeed happily here campaign, which it has been working hard over the past 12 months to promote. It has had a number of successes, including signing up all public transport in Ayrshire. Evaluation of the scheme shows that women value seeing the stickers and posters and can feel more confident about feeding somewhere that has a sticker visible. Businesses' feedback is also that they value the chance to support breastfeeding mums and their babies and to make families feel more welcome. That is really brilliant to see when out and about, although, of course, it is important to remember that it is a mum's right to breastfeed her baby wherever she wants—a right protected by law. However, it is always helpful to see positive encouragement and a welcome.

Speaking of helpful, I once saw a helpful cafe notice for those who object to breastfeeding in public. It stated that a blanket was available and that anyone who found the sight of a mum feeding her baby offensive should take the blanket and gently place it over their own head. [*Laughter.*]

I thank the Scottish Government for extending the family nurse partnership programme, which provides targeted support for young mothers to help them to improve outcomes for themselves and their children. The partnership programme has been running in my health board area—Ayrshire and Arran—since February 2013. I had the privilege of meeting some of the nurses and young women and their wee ones at the programme's first birthday celebration in Irvine. To date, the Ayrshire family nurse partnership has helped more than 250 mums and their babies, and it reports really encouraging results in areas such as smoking behaviour, breastfeeding initiation, healthy birth weight, immunisation take-up and children's developmental progress.

One of the most important things to note about the programme is the fact that it is grounded in good relationships. It is strengths and assets based, and it focuses on expectant mothers' intrinsic motivation to do the best for their child. In all our work with children and families, that

strengths and assets-based focus should be a hallmark of what we do. We need to build good, healthy relationships and provide positive support and encouragement for people to do the best that they can do, while always remembering that giving all our children the best start in life is the business of us all.

15:36

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): As my colleague Liz Smith pointed out, this is a very important debate. The link between a child's education and their health is clear, and it is helpful that we have brought the two issues together in this afternoon's debate.

I would like to raise two very different but important points. I welcome the minister's comment about disabled children and her intention to do more on their health and education, which brings me to the first issue that I want to bring up, which is the mainstreaming of disabled children. It has been helpful that, over the past few decades, more children have been mainstreamed in secondary and primary schools, and I think that we should encourage that. However, in certain cases it is not appropriate for children to be mainstreamed, because their education and their social skills are affected by bullying, feeling isolated and simply not getting the schooling that they require.

On Monday afternoon, I had the privilege of going to the Royal Blind School; I use the word "privilege" carefully, because I was grilled for 45 minutes by pupils in the modern studies class, who asked me more questions than I had at all the hustings I did before the election. The Royal Blind School and Donaldson's school, both of which are in the Lothians, are excellent examples of schools that provide specific education for people with a particular disability. From talking to the children, I found out that one of them had recently come to the Royal Blind School because they had been bullied in mainstream education. Another child I spoke to feared that her funding would be cut by the local authority, with the result that she would have to leave the school and enter mainstream education. She was deeply worried about the bullying that she might suffer.

I appreciate that it is up to each local authority to make individual decisions about each child. I should probably declare that, as a local councillor, I know that those decisions are not always easy to make. However, I encourage the Government to work with local authorities, where possible, to fund the type of education that I have mentioned, when that is appropriate.

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald): Jeremy Balfour was not a

member in the previous session, so he will not know that when I was a back-bench MSP, I secured a commitment from the then minister for schools, Alasdair Allan, to look at how the presumption of mainstreaming was operating. I am more than happy to find out what is happening with that at the moment and to write to the member, because he makes some very important points on the issue.

Jeremy Balfour: I am grateful to the minister for those helpful comments. That means that I can move on quickly to my second point, which is about funded childcare hours. The 600 hours that are provided in a year mean that three hours and 10 minutes a day are provided during the school term. It is often impossible for working parents to use that provision, because they cannot drop off their children, get to their job and be back within three hours and 10 minutes. There is no flexibility.

The Family and Childcare Trust's annual survey, which was published back in February, showed that only 13 per cent of local authorities in Scotland had provision for working parents, in comparison with 43 per cent south of the border. A challenge for national and local government is to look at childcare afresh.

The Government and local authorities need to look at how we make childcare more flexible. Instead of saying, "Here's the system—you must fit into it," we must ask how we can make the system work for each family. That will mean looking at examples such as the successful childcare voucher system in Sweden, which gives families the choice between public pre-schools and nurseries and approved private and voluntary sector providers. The small step of giving parents vouchers would open up the system and allow parents to have flexibility. I ask the Government to look afresh at that.

15:41

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): As Elaine Smith did in an intervention, I will refer in my comments to something that is not mentioned in the motion but which I am pleased about: kinship care.

My relationship with kinship care campaigners dates back to 2006, when a national kinship care hustings was held ahead of the 2007 election. I have campaigned for equity and equality for kinship carers for many years.

Last year, I was delighted that the Scottish Government invested £10.1 million in kinship care. That gave 5,200 children who are in kinship care equity and equality by ensuring that local authorities pay their carers the same amount as foster carers are paid. I am pleased that, after the Scottish Government made its commitment, we

got there and succeeded. At that time, Anne Swartz of the Scottish kinship care alliance said:

"We are delighted that the Scottish Government has finally recognised the comparable needs of children in kinship and foster care, which kinship carers have campaigned tirelessly for. This will make a huge difference to the 5,200 children who will be entitled to further support."

Two constituents of mine—Jessie Harvey and Sadie Prior—were part of the tireless campaign to get fairness and justice for kinship carers. If they were listening today, I am sure that they would say, "Well done, SNP Government, and well done, Bob—but we still want more." That is quite right. Just as Elaine Smith wants more in relation to breastfeeding, it is understandable that we always demand and campaign for more. However, the Scottish Government has made progress on how we deal with kinship care children, who are vulnerable.

We would like to look at the variance in foster care allowances across the country and kids who are in kinship care arrangements not because they were placed there by local authorities but because of a proactive act by their families. There is more to do, but significant progress has been made.

Aileen Campbell: I know from my previous role and from experience of speaking to kinship carers—as Bob Doris will know from his experience—that we must also consider the provision of therapeutic benefits; it is not necessarily about financial assistance. In that regard, sometimes traumas in the early years do not show themselves when a child is placed with a kinship carer but present themselves when a child hits adolescence. Especially when children are in kinship care settings, we need to be mindful of their individual needs.

Bob Doris: In responding to the minister's intervention, I promise members that we did not compare notes before the debate. I was about to make the point that much of what the motion refers to will support families, so that relationships between vulnerable mothers and fathers and their kids will perhaps not break down in the first place, which would mean fewer kinship care kids. That is vital.

Also, the motion refers to the commitment to the new 10-year mental health strategy, which

"should help renew focus on the early identification of child mental health issues".

In that regard, I return to the position of kinship care children. As the minister has just pointed out, kinship carers are not focused only on financial support; it is just one aspect of a much wider campaign for the vulnerable young people who they do so much to look after. Kinship carers seek equity and equality of access to a range of services, including mental health services.

Many young people in kinship care have been fundamentally impacted by their life experiences, sometimes because of what they have witnessed or because of the lifestyle of their mum before they came into the world, which may have involved drugs, alcohol or whatever. Through the mental health strategy, we must ensure that the situation and experience of kinship care children are properly assessed by medical professionals when referrals are made to mental health services. I ask the minister in his summing-up to give a commitment to consider how we can ensure that kinship care children are suitably assessed, because the system does not always meet the needs of those that we want it to serve, despite the fact that significant progress was made when Jamie Hepburn was mental health minister in dramatically reducing some waiting times.

I agree with many of the comments that have been made on childcare and flexibility. Considerations about the flexibility of childcare have to feed into the extension of partnership nurseries in a valuable way, so that childcare is available in the right place and at the right time for families. We also have to ensure that there are no artificial boundaries between local authorities in relation to childcare provision. I have a specific constituency case in that regard. I have not asked for permission to share the details of it with members so I will not do so, but I have specific concerns about a family who have not been best served in that respect. I ask whether the minister could make the space to discuss that case with me at some point in the near future.

Finally in relation to childcare provision, local authorities are disposing of assets, which is understandable, but they sometimes dispose of assets where childcare establishments could be suitably placed. The Scottish Government and local authorities must as a priority discuss with each other how we are going to roll out the welcome dramatic expansion of childcare facilities and how we can ensure that assets are kept for such strategic measures.

I hope that the minister will take on board some of those points in summing up the debate.

15:47

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): There are of course many ways to give children the best start in life, such as through a loving and caring family environment, good childcare and a good pre-school and nursery experience. However, the best start in life from a nutritional and nurturing perspective and to positively affect children's health and wellbeing is undoubtedly breast milk, a point that is clearly made in the Government's infant nutrition framework. I must say that I really

enjoyed Ruth Maguire's contribution on the subject.

When I saw the title for today's debate, I presumed that at last the Government was going to lead a plenary debate on breastfeeding. Therefore, I was astonished to see that, even though next week is national breastfeeding awareness week, the motion had no mention of breastfeeding and nor did any of the amendments, including those that were not selected for debate—apart from mine.

Only this month, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child highlighted the need to tackle the extremely low breastfeeding rate in the UK, including in Scotland, to improve and protect children's health and wellbeing. Among other recommendations, the UNCRC states that we should

"Promote, protect and support breastfeeding in all policy areas where breastfeeding has an impact on child health, including obesity, certain noncommunicable diseases, and mental health".

Therefore, I took the unusual step of lodging a back-bench manuscript amendment to include mention of breastfeeding in the motion for today's plenary debate. I regret that my amendment was not chosen, but I will focus on the issue. I think that the last time that I lodged such an amendment was when I wrote and lodged one in the name of John McAllion on the Iraq war in 2003, so I do not do that kind of thing very often.

If someone invented breastfeeding, they would be hailed as a genius and they would no doubt be worth a fortune, so why is it that this miracle food with substantial health benefits for mum and baby, which is readily available to most babies and specifically tailored to them as their own designer food, is bypassed for an inferior product with far less nutritional value and that has to be paid for? It makes no sense.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Elaine Smith: Do I have time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes.

Elaine Smith: Very briefly, please.

Liam Kerr: We have heard a lot about breastfeeding and the merits thereof and I do not disagree with the member. However, I am sure that the member will agree that many women are unable to or actively choose not to breastfeed, for whatever reason. It is important that that is not a source of censure.

Elaine Smith: I thank the member for that intervention. I am going to come on to that very point later in my speech. There are very few

women who cannot breastfeed, although I accept that there are some. Certainly many choose not to.

In her book "The Politics of Breastfeeding" Gabrielle Palmer says

"If a multinational company developed a product that was a nutritionally balanced and delicious food, a wonder drug that both prevented and treated disease, cost almost nothing to produce and could be delivered in quantities controlled by consumers' needs, the announcement of this find would send its shares rocketing to the top of the stock market."

However, the big corporations profit from selling a substitute and marketing it, even when the "International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes" bans formula good advertising. The World Health Organization, the UK Government, the Scottish Government and voluntary organisations all recommend breastfeeding as the healthiest way to feed a baby and provide the best start in life. Manufacturers of formula milk, however, make phenomenal profits from selling the substitutes, and that really must change if we are being serious about our children's health and wellbeing after birth and in the longer term.

Steps have been taken in countries around the world to address the issue. For example, in India, legislation requires that tins of infant formula carry a conspicuous warning about the potential harm of formula feeding.

With all the available evidence pointing to the health and wellbeing benefits of breastfeeding, we might think that it would be the standard way to feed our children and that society would view it as unremarkable, normal, nurturing and maternal behaviour. Sadly, that is not the case. As UNICEF points out,

"it is a highly emotive subject because so many families have not breastfed, or have experienced the trauma of trying very hard to breastfeed and not succeeding."

It goes on to say that no parent should have to feel the pain of any implication that they have not done their best for their child, but that

"the UK context has become so fraught"

that conversations about breastfeeding are shut down. I am a bit concerned that that might be why there was no mention of it in today's motion or amendments, although I accept what the minister said in her opening and I also accept her offer of a meeting on the subject.

Aileen Campbell: Will the member give way?

Elaine Smith: Do I have time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If it is brief, yes.

Aileen Campbell: The offer was meant in all genuine sincerity. Some positive things are happening right across the country such as the

early years collaborative and the fact that 100 per cent of hospital births are now in UNICEF-accredited hospitals that welcome breastfeeding. We are putting in an enormous amount of effort. I know that we need to do more but there was certainly no deliberate intention to hide or shy away from the challenges that we face in breastfeeding, and we actively promote and support it.

Elaine Smith: I am delighted to hear that, but it makes why it was not mentioned in the motion even more of a mystery.

The shutdown that UNICEF refers to has massive implications for child health, wellbeing and nutrition, for the future health of the population and for the public purse. Powerful new evidence about the benefits of breastfeeding provides a compelling case for altering prevailing attitudes and practices—that has just been published by the Gates Foundation. It adds to the evidence that was found for the UNICEF report "Preventing disease and saving resources: the potential contribution of increasing breastfeeding rates in the UK".

UNICEF also recommends that we change the conversations around breastfeeding by stopping putting the responsibility for such a major public health issue in the laps of individual women and acknowledging the role that politics and society have to play at every level. It is also difficult for individual women to make an informed choice unless they have the right information. Much more support for breastfeeding is needed, with all health boards treating it as a priority public health measure.

Breastfeeding is also an issue of class and poverty. Mothers in the least deprived areas are three times more likely to exclusively breastfeed than those in the most deprived areas. Although all babies benefit immensely from breastfeeding, children in more deprived areas need the start that breast milk gives even more than the better-off.

I know that the minister acknowledges that families also need access to professionals who are fully trained in breastfeeding, particularly health visitors.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could you come to a close please?

Elaine Smith: They need to be aware of the protection offered by the Breastfeeding etc (Scotland) Act 2005, which was my own member's bill, and they need support groups in the community.

I will come to a close, although I rather regret taking all those interventions. I acknowledge the excellent document "Off to a Good Start", which was produced by NHS Health Scotland last year to

commemorate 10 years of the Breastfeeding etc (Scotland) Act 2005 that was passed by Parliament—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You really must close Ms Smith.

Elaine Smith: I trust that the Government will include that in information to all pregnant mothers.

15:54

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): We do not speak a lot about affection in the chamber. Today, though, we are talking about giving our children the best start in life, and that can be done in so many ways. The Scottish Government has made a huge commitment to our children in the form of the baby box, the maternity and early years allowance, the increase in flexible childcare and all the other measures that are listed in the minister's motion. I warmly welcome them.

Social attitudes towards children have changed dramatically in recent decades—notably through the influence of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, with its strong emphasis on children's rights being respected, and on children being consulted about matters that affect them. The convention has been ratified by 191 countries, which makes it the most significant international human rights instrument designed to promote children's wellbeing. The convention draws heavily on the principle that children have a right to develop.

Those who have heard of Suzanne Zeedyk will know that she is an expert in infant attachment and is big on hugs. Hugs, cuddles and physical affection are things that most children take for granted, but they are also things that lots of children in Scotland miss out on every single day. Deprivation can mean different things to different people; it can be deprivation of food or finance, it can be deprivation of social activities or clubs, and it can be deprivation of physical contact and love.

It has been scientifically proved that infants and children who are deprived of a safe and loving environment in which to grow up develop at a slower pace than those who are not. Suzanne Zeedyk gave a presentation to Highland Council a couple of years ago at which she showed us two pictures of children's brains. One brain belonged to a child who had been brought up in a loving home, and the other belonged to a child who had been brought up in an environment in which it was starved of affection. The difference between the rates of brain development of the two was stark.

Let us also ponder on an experiment that was conducted in the 1950s by Harry Harlow. He placed two baby monkeys in a cage with a cloth mother with no food and a wire mother with food.

Guess which mother they chose. They chose the cloth one; the baby monkeys sacrificed sustenance for physical affection.

Elaine Smith will be delighted because I would like to pay tribute to her for her continued support for breastfeeding and her recent motion to recognise breastfeeding week next week. We actively promote breastfeeding in Scotland and we recognise that breast milk undoubtedly gives our babies the best start, but—as has been mentioned—judging by the statistics we can do better.

Elaine Smith: I thank Gail Ross for taking an intervention because I will make a point that I wanted to make in my speech but did not have time. Despite all the work and goodwill, breastfeeding rates have not changed in the past 10 years. Does the member agree that we need to do more in that respect?

Gail Ross: Indeed, I do, and—as the minister said—we are prepared to work together to ensure that that happens.

I have spoken to a number of new mums about breastfeeding and they say that what they need is support and encouragement throughout the process. They feel confident about breastfeeding in hospital, but change to bottle feeding when they return home. They sometimes feel embarrassed about breastfeeding in public because they think that people will stare or comment negatively. That is not their problem—that is society's problem. Breastfeeding needs to be seen as the norm, not the exception.

I would like to talk briefly about Highland Council and how it has been running the family nurse partnership, supported by the Scottish Government. My colleague Ruth Maguire also mentioned it. The family nurse partnership offers first-time young mums aged 19 and under valuable help and support to enable them to provide the best start for their children. As the minister said, that help and support will now be offered to vulnerable first-time mums who are aged 20 to 24. The initiative operates as a joint partnership between NHS Highland and Highland Council, and 82 mums across the region have recently completed the full programme. In Highland, we recently marked the fourth anniversary of the integration of health and social care, and the family nurse partnership team is being held up as a shining example of partnership working. Bill Alexander, Highland Council's director of care and learning, said:

"I am delighted that our Family Nurse Partnership team is being described as a shining light of best practice across Scotland."

The nurses have one-on-one time with the families and the relationship between them is at

the heart of the initiative. The mothers are encouraged to act on their natural instincts to give their children the best start in life. The breastfeeding rates are the highest that we have seen, the attachment is evident, and the relationship between mother and child is positive and strong.

Children's experiences of childhood are not simply an expression of the fact that they are young, growing and learning. Their childhood is shaped by the circumstances in which they grow up and by the beliefs and attitudes of those who influence them. When we go home from this great establishment where we do our jobs with enormous responsibility, we should give the people in our lives a hug—especially the little people. We should tell them that we love them, that we are proud of them and that they matter. Let us give them the tools to face the world and, together, we can make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I wipe a tear from my eye, Miss Ross, and call Brian Whittle.

16:00

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Yesterday, I hosted Arthritis Research UK in my office. Members may say that that is a strange way to start a speech during a debate on the best start in life for Scotland's children, but I ask members to stick with me. Interestingly, the discussion was around the prevention and treatment of musculoskeletal conditions such as osteoarthritis. Treatment of it—surprise, surprise—nearly always includes exercise, as it does for many ailments, but for a person who is not used to an active lifestyle that is not easy to hear.

Most important for this debate, though, is that preventing development of that painful and debilitating condition begins at birth. Parliament needs to consider the fact that by the time a child reaches school age, his or her bone density has already developed to about 90 per cent. The same is true for the neuromuscular system, for the cardiovascular system and for movement patterns. In other words, a child's life-health patterns are pretty much set by school age. If we want our children to mature fully and to develop to be all that they can be—to live a long, happy and healthy productive life—we need them to get active early and we need to stimulate minds and bodies early.

What about the rewards? How about not spending £353 million a year on treatment of musculoskeletal conditions? How about having a healthier society, both mentally and physically? How about a more productive, inclusive society?

Last week, I had the great pleasure of visiting my old primary 1 school in Symington for the

school sports day. The children were bursting with excitement and enthusiasm. The experience took me back to my P1 sports day in the play park across the road, where I first discovered that I could run. Later, at Troon primary school, I won at the school sports, was picked for the Troon interschool sports and won there, and soon joined my first running club, which was called Marr Tortoises. There I met my coach, who stayed with me for the next 21 years. It was a series of events that we could call a happy accident.

There are countless such examples of a teacher or coach happening along at the right moment, with the energy and enthusiasm that captures a child's imagination, taps into an unrealised talent or skill, and sets them on a path. Too many of our kids achieve as a result of happy accidents, rather than by design. More important is the fact that without those happy accidents talents go unrealised. We need to strive to take the happy accident out of the equation wherever possible, in order to ensure that we open up the world of possibilities and ensure that academic and physical opportunities surround our children.

Members should speak to any teacher on the subject. Jenny Gilruth and I have discussed the difference between teaching children who are active in and out of school and teaching children who are sedentary. The active children are more alert, attentive, enthusiastic and confident. Many parents tell us that those children sleep at night. Bliss.

How could we pay for that approach? English primary schools receive £9,000 a year for extracurricular activities. I have spoken to a headteacher who uses that money to recruit teachers who can not only teach school lessons but can take extracurricular activity, and are paid accordingly. I sense beads of sweat popping out on the finance minister's brow.

I pay for out-of-school care for my youngest daughter who is moving from P3 to P4. Although the care that she receives is first class, if you came to me and said that she wanted to do games after school, or art, or music, or French and you were going to charge me for it, I would bite your hand off, because, in reality, it is not going to cost me any more. If councils were to collect money from all parents across the region who are in the same situation, they could then redistribute it in such a way that teachers and coaches could be paid appropriately for their time, at all schools. This is just an outline thought; members might think that there is merit in exploring it, or otherwise. However, we need to think laterally. I would welcome members' other thoughts and ideas on the issue.

It is the Government's responsibility to create an environment in which our children not only have

access to opportunity, but understand the choices that they can make and are confident and informed enough to make better lifestyle choices, irrespective of background and personal circumstances. Once they step into their arena, whether it is on a sports field, picking up a paint brush or musical instrument or stepping into a debating chamber—whatever their passion is—they are no longer defined by where they came from, but by where they are going, and they share a sense of purpose and responsibility with those around them.

Aileen Campbell: I point out that we have an active schools network across Scotland and an activity framework that has been lauded internationally that tries to get children and young people active. We also have the better movers and thinkers approach, which is trying to debunk some of the myths that we have around the current teaching of physical education which teaches children to be still, standing and sitting. We want to ensure that we get and embrace children's natural activity in order to allow them to take up the opportunities that Brian Whittle has described.

Brian Whittle: I know that steps have been taken, but we must—as I said in my previous speech—acknowledge that we have the unfortunate title of “unhealthiest nation in Europe”. We have to do more about that.

I have been lucky in life in that I have been immersed in a world of people of all colours, creeds and religions, all bound up in a common interest—in my case, sport. Mutual respect is a given, and when we are all together, all we see is sportsmen and sportswomen. The bonds have endured. In the light of recent atrocities and our collective belief that education is the big solution to overcoming prejudices, perhaps we should take time to consider another consequence of active participation—we open up a world to our children, help them to find a passion and introduce them to others who hold that same passion.

It is the duty of Parliament to help our children to step into their arena while their minds are open to opportunities, in a world in which aspiration, perspiration, expectation and excitement can take them anywhere that they can imagine.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Thank you. As members know, we are tight for time.

16:07

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): Scotland is a rich country. In 2012, we were ranked the 14th richest country in the world by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Today, inequality and poverty

continue to affect children's life chances from birth and even during pregnancy, but inequality is not a new phenomenon nor, indeed, as the Opposition might have us believe, is it a social construct of the SNP's making. When I was born in 1984, Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister, George Michael was singing “Careless Whisper” and there was, so Thatcher claimed,

“no such thing as society.”

Fast-forward to the 1990's and it was the Blair project, D-Ream's “Things Can only Get Better” and the third way. Consistently, under both the Tories and new Labour, the gap between the haves and the have-nots widened.

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

Jenny Gilruth: I will in a wee second.

The opportunities for the next generation shrunk as inflation ratcheted up house prices, council homes were sold off and Scotland's industries crumbled.

Iain Gray: The member must acknowledge that what she said about the Labour Government is simply not true. There was a massive reduction in child poverty in the years of that Government.

Jenny Gilruth: I do not agree with that at all.

Iain Gray: It is a fact.

Jenny Gilruth: From my position on this side of the chamber and as a member of the generation that had to pay the graduate endowment, I have to say that I completely disagree with that sentiment.

Granted, I am not painting a particularly positive picture for a Thursday afternoon, but I would nonetheless like to tell members that when the SNP swept to power in 2007, it was on a wave of optimism, hope and aspiration and to the tune of Rihanna's “Umbrella”. Although that last sentence might well be true, it remains a sobering fact that the life chances for some of Scotland's children are unequal from birth.

Before I became a teacher, I worked as a play worker at the Cranhill Beacon family learning centre in my colleague Ivan McKee's constituency of Glasgow Provan. The Beacon was the community in Cranhill that summer—in particular, for the children growing up there. It provided them with opportunities to take part in arts and crafts, to play sport and to develop their social skills. It gave them something to do. Being a play worker certainly made me realise the importance of building up young people by creating inner confidence, whether they became better at reading “The Gruffalo”, at playing badminton or, indeed, at hiding my house keys, which many became addicted to doing while I worked there.

One day, after visiting the stylish student's staple, Primark, I was on my way into work for an afternoon shift when I was met by Billie and Adele, two of the girls who came to the Beacon that summer. They did not know where Primark was. I explained that it was in the city centre—a 15-minute bus journey away. To them, that seemed like the ends of the earth; it was bad enough that I was from Fife. They were completely isolated in their own community, and there were no shops nearby where they could buy fresh food. There was just a boarded-up bookies, an overpriced corner shop, a local church and the Cranhill Beacon, which is beside junction 11 as you enter Glasgow on the M8.

I know from my experience how crucial positive relationships can be to young people, so it would, particularly given the Government's commitment to closing the attainment gap, be remiss not to consider the early years as the starting block for eradicating educational inequality later in life. Curriculum for excellence is a 3 to 18 system that joins up the early years right through to the senior phase, and it also encourages partnership working to enrich children's learning and widen their understanding.

One of the strongest ways for a teacher to engage their classes is the use of outside speakers. I know that my classes benefited from that, even if it just provided them with a break from listening to me. In 2010, I invited Dr Harry Burns, then the chief medical officer for Scotland, to speak to my senior class. Dr Burns spoke about the importance of wellness and nurture in a child's development, and about how babies process stress. When a child is born, it cries. That is stress. The parent or carer picks up the baby and the stress is relieved; the baby learns how to cope from a very young age. However, that is not the case for babies who grow up in chaotic households where no one picks up the baby. The baby cries and cries; the baby is stressed, and that stress is not relieved. Years later, the child will go to school and be given a simple instruction—even just to sit down or to take out a pencil, for example. That child does not have the resilience to deal with stress in the same way that other children will. Early intervention and opportunities to develop social skills are, therefore, crucial in ensuring the best start in life for Scotland's children.

This time last year, the Scottish Government announced £1 million to be earmarked for early years education staff development. That built on the progress that had already been established by getting it right for every child and curriculum for excellence. Crucially, it gave a renewed focus on age 0 to 3 as the period of a child's development that shapes their future opportunities.

In my constituency, the Ladybird family nurture centre in Glenrothes is a great example of committed professionals applying their expertise to ensure the best start for young people. My friend Nicola works there as an early years officer, supporting families and young children. The nursery is a real community. I visited its summer fête recently; it was great to see how one nursery with just over 100 learners creates opportunities and chances for young people right from their early years. There is free swimming for children, parents and carers, football coaching for under 5s, and there is even a forest kindergarten that encourages children to learn from the outdoors. Ladybird is open 52 weeks of the year, so it also provides holiday support to families in the Glenrothes area.

Getting it right for every child starts from birth. It starts with targeted support to those who need it most and recognition from Government that not all children have the same opportunities to succeed in life. From the baby box, to a grant for mothers on low incomes, to the commitment to double the amount of free childcare by 2020, the Scottish Government is absolutely determined to ensure the best start in life for all of Scotland's children.

16:13

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): The Scottish Green Party fought the election campaign on a range of pledges. One of them was to help parents, schools and care providers to give children in Scotland a better start in life, so we welcome the motion for the debate, which outlines several measures to do that. In my time today, I want to focus on two issues: early interventions to support children's mental health, and programmes to help low-income families to access financial support.

Research suggests that 20 per cent of children in any given year, and about 10 per cent at any one time, have a mental health problem. As we have heard, mental health difficulties early on can have an impact throughout the life course, and some studies estimate that about 50 per cent of mental illness in adult life starts before the age of 15. I therefore warmly welcome the news that the new 10-year mental health strategy will contain a renewed focus on early identification of child mental health issues, which the Scottish Greens called for during the election.

A key part of the strategy should be to provide schools-based interventions that can quickly address emerging mental health problems. Barnardo's Scotland reports that schools-based programmes to prevent conduct disorder through social and emotional learning programmes are some of the most cost effective, with gains worth almost £50 for every £1 that we spend. Schools-

based interventions will also be key in tackling stigma and social pressure on children. We have highlighted that previously, and I was pleased to see it in the Government's motion.

Where early years support has not worked, we must ensure that our children and young people can access the appropriate help. Although there have been some improvements, there are still long waits for treatment in some areas of the country. Between January and March this year in my region of Lothian, 66 per cent of young people waited 18 weeks or less for child and adolescent mental health services, compared to a national average of 84 per cent and almost 100 per cent in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. I ask the minister and the Government to examine why there are such large regional disparities in access to mental health support for young people.

I move on to measures to help low-income families. The Government's proposed benefit uptake campaign is a good start, but more can be done to help families, in particular, to access financial support. To that end, I lodged an amendment to the motion to urge the Government to consider the Green manifesto pledge on there being national roll-out of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's healthier, wealthier children initiative. The project trains health workers and midwives to assist families to maximise their income. Among other types of help, it does that by helping them to access support to apply for benefits to which they are entitled but often do not claim because of a lack of understanding about benefits or a hesitancy to approach the benefit authorities.

Aileen Campbell *rose*—

Alison Johnstone: I have only four minutes, minister.

The healthier, wealthier children campaign has been an outstanding success. Between its launch in October 2010 and May 2016, a total of just more than 11,000 referrals to money advice services were made across the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area, with a total annual financial gain of £11.6 million. Some families gained as much as £3,400, which obviously has a massive impact on their quality of life.

Child welfare academics from the University of Edinburgh have recently argued that extending such approaches could help to address child poverty across Scotland. Although my amendment was not selected, I urge the Government to consider national roll-out of the scheme. Alongside the other measures that are referred to in the motion, it would be a small change that would have a huge positive impact for some of the most financially vulnerable people in our society.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much for keeping to your time, Ms Johnstone. I call Rona Mackay.

16:17

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I am sure that all parties in this chamber agree that Scotland's children need the best start in life, but what do we mean by the best start? We mean a loving family, a warm home, enough to eat, stimulation to learn and to play, and the space to grow. As we all know, life is not like that for every child. Many, although happily not the majority, have the odds stacked against them from the day that they are born.

During my time on the children's panel, I saw babies and toddlers from hostile homes, where they were neglected, ignored and sometimes abused, thrive when they were placed in a loving environment. We know that if children are cared for at the earliest stage they can thrive, but there are still too many children living in poverty and I welcome the Government's initiative to counter that.

Using our new powers, we will create a maternity and early years allowance that will support new mothers and their children at key stages of a child's early life. The family nurse partnership programme will be extended, providing targeted support for vulnerable young mothers and improving outcomes for them and their children. The baby box, pregnant women receiving vitamins, and more good-quality free childcare will make a huge difference.

However, the issue comes back to public education. It needs all the effort that we can give as a Government to get the message across that to be responsible parents means recognising that there are no-go areas. A huge proportion of children in the hearings system come from a background of parental addiction. It is estimated that one in 100 babies—possibly more—are born with a condition called foetal alcohol syndrome, which damages their brain and affects them to varying degrees throughout their life. That is another reason why our minimum unit pricing policy is so important, and it was good to hear the First Minister's response on that during question time today. Of course, the policy is not a magic bullet that will change the culture of drinking overnight, but if it protects even one baby against that condition, it will be worth it.

It is important to stress the invaluable work on giving Scotland's children the best start in life that is done by our partnership agencies, such as Home-Start, which focuses on the effect that life at home has on a child from birth, and the value of improving the interaction between parents and

their children. Free childcare is crucial to helping families to cope, but at the end of the day most children will return home, which is often where the changes need to be made—and they need to be made sooner rather than later in a child's life.

Home-Start volunteers go into homes and work with the whole family. Sometimes they work with great parents who would usually cope, but are struggling to deal with postnatal depression or an accident that has left them unable to cope. Often, however, Home-Start works with families where parenting is the real challenge. Its volunteers can be positive role models for parents, helping them to understand the value of playing with their children, which is so crucial for development. They can be matched to a family at birth or matched with a mother antenatally, and the support is not time limited.

Third sector agencies such as Barnardo's and the Aberlour Child Care Trust are world renowned for the care and guidance that they give to children in need. If we are to reduce the attainment gap, which is our Government's defining mission, we must provide children with the care and support that they need, whether they are in mainstream or additional-support-for-learning schools. Those organisations are calling on all parties to work together to improve the lives of those who are most in need in our society, by giving every child, no matter their background, the best possible start in life. How can we put a price on the work that those organisations do? Quite simply, we cannot. The importance of children being supported in their own homes, where possible, cannot be overstated, and that is what those agencies do incredibly well.

I started this speech by saying that I was confident that all parties in the Parliament wanted the best for Scotland's children. I believe that all parties should be as one when it comes to children's welfare, strengthening child protection measures and wanting the best for our children. Party politics should play no part in that. Our children are our future, and they deserve nothing less.

16:21

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): Our debate today must be the re-ignition that our Parliament needs in its continued battle against poverty, deprivation and inequality. Children are not created poor or unequal, only born into the "giant evils" in society: squalor, ignorance, want, idleness and disease. The words are shocking. However, the five "giant evils", as William Beveridge labelled them, continue to haunt too many children and families nearly 75 years after the Beveridge report was published. In our new session, we must work

together to create a fairer, more equal and healthier country.

The proposals behind the Government motion are most welcome. Tackling health inequalities at birth is a leap in the right direction. The promotion of good prenatal health will greatly benefit many pregnant women, who may not consider nor be able to afford such regular supplies of vitamins.

The baby box gives each newborn the same start in life, although socioeconomic factors may impact later. The SNP's pledge to increase the number of health visitors by 500 is welcome, and I look forward to working with the Government to ensure that its promise is kept in an appropriate timescale. Increasing childcare for vulnerable two, three and four-year-olds will tackle the poverty that high childcare costs can result in.

However, I wonder when we will start to discuss increasing access to childcare for one-year-olds, as the Family and Childcare Trust's "Childcare Survey 2016" shows that the average nursery cost in Scotland for children under two is greater than the cost for over-twos. If our ambition is for all children to have the best start in life, to tackle poverty and inequality and of course to encourage parents back into the workplace, we must start the discussion soon, if not now.

The Labour amendment seeks to add to the Government motion. We know that childcare should be part of our national infrastructure and that it brings huge benefits to our economy. We also know that its cost places a heavy burden and can lock too many parents out of employment.

Since 2011, when I was first elected, we have often discussed the need for flexible childcare that meets the needs of a diverse and flexible workforce. When I have been issuing surveys in my local area or campaigning, many parents have told me that they cannot find the right childcare for their family, due to cost, opening hours or availability. As the Labour amendment states, nurseries often have waiting lists for access to funded places. To properly give every child the best start, especially before reaching school age, the Government must find solutions to those problems.

A recent study by Save the Children shows that more than 7,000 pre-school children have problems with speech and language development. The charity claims that the biggest issue affecting child development is speech, and that children from the poorest families

"are twice as likely to have delays or difficulties than those from more affluent homes."

The poor mental health of a parent or child has a massive detrimental impact on development and a holistic approach to mental health can help to

tackle health inequalities. Barnardo's Scotland warns us that

"increasing need and rising demand is likely to continue the pressure on specialist services."

Those young people may themselves go on to be parents some day and, to help the next generation of children and effectively tackle health inequalities, more must be achieved now to help today's generation of young people.

Finally, the legacy paper by the Health and Sport Committee of the fourth session of the Scottish Parliament discussed health inequalities in the early years. We know that many of the root causes of health inequalities are outwith the control of the NHS and, with new powers and a strong Parliament, much of that control lies in our hands. Together, we can make strides to tackle society's "giant evils".

16:25

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Before I start, I declare an interest as a former convener of Together, the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights.

Nelson Mandela said:

"There can be no keener reflection of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

I congratulate the Scottish Government on lodging its motion; we will support it. The motion is in the spirit of the ambition—shared across the chamber—to make Scotland the best country in the world in which to grow up. There is recognition in this debate that that journey begins in gestation and that a healthy pregnancy is demonstrably linked to life outcomes. It is easy to forget that, as recently as the last century, childbirth was the leading cause of death for women in this country—as it still is in the developing world—and that is because pregnancy and childbirth are hard. As a country, we have made great strides in the primary care that is given to babies in distress; the 8,000 babies each year that require extra support are given amazing care in our neonatal units. Would that that were so for mothers.

Although we welcome the Government's provision for vitamins and additional grants, once again I say that we are failing by being complacent about maternal mental health—I thank the minister for taking my intervention on the issue. Every year, 8,000 mothers suffer with underlying mental health concerns following birth. As I said in my intervention, it is not acceptable that 71 per cent of Scottish health boards do not have a workforce adequately trained to deal with post-partum depression, which happens on the same scale as the number of babies who receive extra care.

In the previous parliamentary session, it was a victory that we united as parties across the chamber to recognise that the first 1,001 days of life are key to life chances and life outcomes. Many of the determining factors are visible to us and have exercised us in debates in this chamber, particularly about the nearly a quarter of children in this country who are in poverty. There are also invisible challenges, such as attachment disorder and loss, particularly for our looked-after children—a generation of children that represents the challenge that this chamber faces.

The baby box and similar ideas are fantastic initiatives that we happily support, but they are window dressing against the deeper challenges that our society faces. We will forever fail in our efforts to tackle domestic violence while it is still legal to use any form of violence in the home, including physical punishment. Similarly, we will forever fail in our efforts to reduce violence in our communities if we legitimise the tool of violence in our homes. John Carnochan, whom the minister referenced, also supports that point of view.

To achieve the lofty aims that we have set ourselves, we must give justice to children and young people when their rights are violated. Justice can only happen with the full incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law. Only then can we ensure that the voices of children are heard at the centre of public decision making, and move towards the stated and shared goal of making Scotland the best place in the world in which to grow up. What we do for mothers and for children at birth and in the early years not only shapes who they become as individuals, but shapes our society. As Mandela said, how we treat our children defines us as a country. People around the world look at us, and we must ask ourselves what it is that we would wish them to see in the soul of our nation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Gil Paterson will be the last member to speak in the open part of the debate. We will then move to winding-up speeches, and I ask all members who took part in the debate to be in the chamber for the winding-up speeches.

16:29

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): As this is my first speech in this session of the Parliament, I welcome all the new members in the chamber. I hope that they progress well. I have been impressed so far. I am not one for singling people out, but one member has already singled me out and I am pleased to return the compliment. My former staff member Rona Mackay is now the MSP for Strathkelvin and Bearsden. She is a member of a strong and larger intake of women in session 5, which is a great example to girls across

Scotland and proof that if they want to be the best, they can be.

One thing that is important if someone is to make the best of themselves is education, particularly in the early years. Access to high-quality childcare gives our youngest people the best start in education and can help parents to return to work. Since 2007, the SNP Government has increased free early learning and childcare by almost half—there has been a 45 per cent increase from 412 hours under Labour to 600 hours now. Every year since the availability of free early learning and childcare was expanded, approximately 120,000 children aged 3 and 4 and their families have benefited.

I will touch on a few of the announcements that were highlighted by the minister that will particularly benefit my constituents. During the election, I was pleased to hear the First Minister announce that all new parents will be entitled to a baby box containing essential items for a child's first weeks. The idea has been adapted from the successful Finnish model. It is not about reinventing the wheel or coming up with the next new expensive idea; the baby box has a proven record in tackling deprivation, improving health and supporting parents. I am pleased that, once again, the SNP Government has taken successful ideas from abroad and has adapted them for Scotland. Equally, the Government is maintaining its position as a listening Government by bringing parents on board with the policy and gathering their views to shape the box's contents and the best way in which to deliver it.

At my surgeries, one of the hardships that I regularly see is the plight of young mothers who are looking for the best for their children. They usually have little or no income and are much dependent on their immediate family, although their love for their children is very much present. I am pleased that the Government will use its new social security powers to introduce a maternity and early years allowance. Many of the mothers that I come across have more than one child, and the reintroduction of the grant of £300 for a second child and subsequent children is a welcome announcement. That will go far to assist many of my constituents.

When you meet mothers who had their first child at a young age, you realise how important the support mechanisms that they had were to their own development as well as to that of their children. One such mechanism for many mothers in my constituency is the family nurse partnership, which was mentioned by Gail Ross and touched on by Rona Mackay. It works remarkably well and I am really proud of it. The family has to volunteer for the partnership. Let us say, for example, that a mother presents with an addiction to alcohol. With

input and help from the family nurse partnership there are immediate benefits while the baby is in the womb and no alcohol is being used. We find that children whose mothers have alcohol carry through their whole life issues that threaten their life and health, whereas 40 per cent of the time—the success rate is 40 per cent—there are no issues at all. That benefits the child for the whole of its life; it also benefits the health service, because it saves thousands of pounds over that child's lifetime. Another side benefit is that, for the first time, budgeting takes place in the home, which helps the whole family. In addition, it introduces families to how to cook healthy meals. It is an all-round great policy, and it certainly works for many of the mothers in my constituency.

We all want Scotland to be the very best place in the world to grow up. By investing in the early years, we can ensure that all children have the best start in life and are able to succeed. Hopefully, in 20 or so years' time, they will benefit from having had that best start in their early years. The best outcome would be to have 129 of those children right here in this Parliament making decisions for the next group of young people.

I commend the minister's motion to Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Iain Gray to wind up for Labour.

16:36

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I welcome the ministers to their new jobs although, of course, Aileen Campbell is continuing the passion for ensuring the best start in life for all our children that she demonstrated in her previous role. The Government has treated this issue not as a matter that falls within the responsibility of a single portfolio but as one that cuts across health, welfare, education and, on occasion, even more widely, which has been a strength.

Aileen Campbell—rightly—focused on very early interventions. The abolitionist, social justice campaigner and writer in the United States Frederick Douglass wrote:

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

That is true, but we are not always the best at acknowledging or acting on that. Of course, to say that it is easier to build strong children is not to say that it is easy. It requires constant focus and effort from Government and, indeed, from us all. The Government motion outlines a significant number of interventions and policies that it has introduced to try to ensure the best start in life for our children, and we certainly welcome those.

We have heard excellent speeches in the course of the afternoon. Elaine Smith provided a

masterclass on how to deal with a debate when the issue of most importance to her did not appear in the motion. She ensured that large sections of the debate were dominated by breastfeeding—and rightly so. She explained, as she has done so often before, why breastfeeding is so important. She was backed up ably by Ruth Maguire, who made a contribution on the topic, too. The minister said that the Government wants to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. To add my tuppenceworth, I suggest that she might want to look at the implications for mothers trying to breastfeed in Lothian of NHS Lothian's reluctance to deal with tongue-tied babies, which is an issue that a number of my constituents have raised with me.

Jeremy Balfour made the strong point that we must ensure that all children, including disabled children, get the best start possible. That cannot mean the same thing for everyone; we must provide the support and help that children need. That was a powerful point.

Brian Whittle made it clear that the best start in life is not just about childcare and health services but is about providing the widest possible opportunities for children and young people. Initiatives that the Scottish Government supports such as the daily mile and Sistema Scotland's work in a number of our cities to use music to provide young people with a better start in life are examples of that.

Mary Fee and Jenny Gilruth spoke passionately about the corrosive impact of poverty on children. Jenny Gilruth's speech was marred only by her failure to acknowledge that the previous Labour Government lifted 200,000 children in Scotland out of poverty. If we could repeat that now, it would be very worth while.

The minister said that we need to challenge and debate our approach to providing children with the best start in life. Our amendment is lodged in that spirit. It is an addendum: it does not remove any of the Government motion, which we support, but it provides some challenges. In particular, it provides a challenge on our approach to childcare.

We have to base our approach to childcare on the reality on the ground. This morning, there was a press release from the fair funding for our kids campaign, which has been campaigning for two full years and trying to explain the reality of the provision of free pre-school years and the difficulty that many parents experience in availing themselves of that right, for which we have legislated in the Parliament. That group has met the First Minister and other ministers on a number of occasions, but no action has been taken to address the issue that it raises. As the group points out, that could mean 8,000 families facing problems with childcare in the coming year.

The concerns that the fair funding for our kids group expresses were reflected in the childcare alliance's report on the future for childcare in Scotland. The alliance is an important group of third sector organisations that work with children. Those organisations are clear that they support free pre-school hours and their expansion, as we do, but they are also clear that that is not enough and that we need to produce a plan to move towards all-age, year-round, flexible, wraparound childcare, which might not all be free but should all be affordable. That is the way in which the one quarter of women at home who want to work but cannot because they cannot afford childcare, to whom Daniel Johnson referred, will be freed to make their contribution not only to their families but to the economy.

The Government motion is welcome. Our addendum provides some challenge in a way that should be entirely acceptable to the Government, and I hope that it will be able to support it.

16:42

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): As other members have mentioned, the early years of a child's life are critical to shaping their health and opportunities. As a country, we stand or fall on the wellbeing of our children. Quite simply, they are our future.

I am pleased to have a chance to contribute to the debate on that crucial issue. I will focus on children's health in particular. All members want to make progress on that, but securing a healthier start in life for Scotland's children requires more than high-level assertions and financial commitments: it requires a proper open-minded and dedicated approach to providing what is needed on the front line.

On mental health, on which Liz Smith and others have touched, it is welcome that there appears to be much common ground across the chamber. However, we must not let consensus breed complacency. It is astonishing that half of all diagnosable mental health problems start before the age of 14 and three quarters start by the age of 21.

It is concerning that the waiting times figures for child and adolescent mental health services in Scotland are below the Scottish Government's target of 90 per cent being seen within 18 weeks. That reflects an increase in demand and I have significant concerns about the pressure that that will place on CAMHS, which will, in turn, impact on the services that can be provided, as the parameters in which CAMHS have to work are necessarily narrowed. That tells us that there is still an awful lot of progress to be made.

It is clear that mental health problems can arise early in a child's life and it is vital that we respond by intervening to prevent such problems from developing in the first place. To do that, we must be active and accurate in our interventions. With that in mind, I have highlighted in my amendment the Scottish children's services coalition's call for a wholesale review of child and adolescent mental health services to ensure that funding is used as effectively as possible. Such a review would get to the heart of ensuring that high-level financial commitments translate into tangible improvements. It would be particularly influential if it were accompanied by a commitment to back up any findings with investment in mental health services. We Scottish Conservatives have repeatedly called for an additional £300 million to be invested in mental health, as a whole, over the course of this session of Parliament. Such funding could be used to improve capacity and staffing, among other benefits, for CAMHS.

The point is that we need a holistic approach to improving outcomes—one that involves identifying how we can make the most progress and backing that up with investment in multiple areas. It seems that one such area should be social prescribing. As the Scottish Association for Mental Health has set out, it is vital that we increase dedicated support in primary care settings. That can mean, for example, general practitioners directing mental health patients towards local community projects or gatherings of people with similar interests. Such improvements can, and should, play one role among many in a comprehensive programme of reform in mental health.

Turning to physical health, I think that we all agree that children's health must be safeguarded all the way from the pre-birth stage. Of course, as Alex Cole-Hamilton stated, the best start in life involves working to improve the health of pregnant mothers too.

As the British Medical Association has pointed out, of the 53,000 babies born in Scotland every year, approximately 8,000, or 15 per cent, are admitted to neonatal or special care units, principally due to premature birth and low birth weight. The BMA says that, in 2013, 33.8 per cent of babies born in the most deprived areas of Scotland were under weight, compared with just 9.4 per cent in the least deprived areas. That is a huge difference.

Again, it is good to see broad support here, but high-level commitments have to be followed through on the ground and delivered effectively. To highlight one area, it is paramount that every member of staff in neonatal services has continued access to the professional training that they need. Unfortunately, recent events at St John's hospital in Livingston have highlighted that

some nurses can struggle to access all the training they need on an on-going basis, which is compounded by all-too-familiar reports of staff shortages and excess reliance on overtime from a core of staff

When the teams that provide care to newborns, including premature babies, are afflicted by such problems, it is absolutely not good enough to delay taking action. We need the Scottish Government to set out how it is directing investment towards training schemes, so that no nurses—or indeed any members of staff—find that they have fallen behind. Each and every newborn deserves to be cared for by a team of fully qualified staff who are confident that the service they provide is first class.

I look forward to working with the Scottish Government to deliver the healthy start to life that every child deserves, and hope that it can give assurances in the areas of mental health and neonatal care that I have set out.

Of course, health services are not the whole story when it comes to giving children the best start in life. I would like to touch briefly on a few other areas as we near the end of today's debate.

On childcare, it appears to me that the questions are where to prioritise and how best to allocate support so that parents have meaningful access to free childcare. On that, the SNP talks a good game but parents' actual experiences tell a different story. We Scottish Conservatives believe that the way to deliver childcare that matches parents' needs is to take an approach that allows choice, accommodates diversity, embraces competition and provides equality of opportunity. To put it simply, we need proposals that build flexibility into the system so that every entitlement promised to parents can actually be redeemed by them.

My Scottish Conservative colleagues and I have set out this afternoon why we believe that reform is needed if we are truly to deliver the best start in life for Scotland's children. The underlying principle is that headline commitments must be matched with practical programmes that actually deliver improved outcomes for children.

The principles of the Scottish Government's motion are sound, and we have sympathy with them. However, it is apparent that further details on how those commitments are to be funded are needed, particularly on the grant proposals. We are happy to discuss the options but, in our view, the details simply are not yet clear enough. It is a similar story with the amendment that was lodged by Daniel Johnson—we support the principles but we cannot support calls, for example for breakfast clubs, that appear to be uncoded. Having said that, I look forward to working with colleagues

across the chamber to produce, refine and deliver practical proposals that will give each child the best start in life.

It is perhaps useful to finish a speech on starting life by looking at the other side of the coin—namely, the end of life. It has been estimated that 80 per cent of NHS funding is spent on the last two years of people's lives, so now is the time to put more into the first two years of people's lives so that each child is genuinely given the best start in life.

16:50

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald): On the whole, it has been a fairly consensual and constructive debate, and that was the general intention when my colleague Aileen Campbell and I thought about what sort of debate we wanted to have in Parliament today. We recognise that, on the issue of giving children the best start in life, there is far more that unites members across the chamber than divides us.

In my ministerial portfolio, I am extremely lucky in two respects. First, it is an extremely exciting area to be working in. Secondly, I start from a position in which I am building on the significant amount of fantastic work that was done by Ms Campbell when she held the portfolio. It is a great pleasure to be able to work alongside her in this debate, which highlights the fact that we will be working in a very cross-cutting way across Government in how we approach the issues that affect Scotland's children and in making sure that they get the best start in life.

In summing up the debate, I will begin—for reasons that will be obvious to those who have taken part in it—on the topic of breastfeeding. I say to Elaine Smith that there was no slight intended in the way in which the motion was drafted. Breastfeeding is a priority area for the Government, and it is an issue that I have had a close interest in in my work in Parliament. I put on record my tribute to the work of my constituent Donna Scott, who—this deals with the subject of Liam Kerr's intervention—submitted a petition to the Public Petitions Committee that resulted in the development of a donor milk bank for Scotland, which those women who want their children to receive breast milk but who are unable to breastfeed can access. That is an example of some of the development that has been taking place since Elaine Smith's pioneering bill—for which I pay tribute to her—went through Parliament.

Daniel Johnson made a very important point when he spoke about the return-to-work agenda. I totally agree that we must ensure that those women, or indeed fathers, who want to be stay-at-

home parents—given that I am married to one, I should make it clear that that is an absolutely valid choice; I would not suggest otherwise—can exercise that choice freely. For too many people, the decision to be a stay-at-home parent is not a choice that they exercise but something that they are forced into as a result of the cost of accessing childcare. We pay close attention to that.

Daniel Johnson made a very fair point about how we use language and how we can encourage fathers to play more of an active role. My colleague Mr Doris was right to point out that we are in the year of the dad—recently, I had a very good visit to the dynamic dads of Midlothian Sure Start, where I learned about the approach that is being taken there to encourage fathers to play more of an active role in the early years of their child's life. One change in the use of language that would be helpful would be to stop talking about whether dad is doing the babysitting, which is something that really gets Mrs McDonald's goat. That word is used all too often—it is not "babysitting"; it is looking after your kids. That is the kind of language that we should encourage, to ensure that parents take a more equal approach to bringing up children.

A number of members made points about flexibility. Donald Cameron said that the Conservative agenda was about choice and competition. For us, the agenda here is about quality. Quality must be the focus when it comes to the expansion of childcare that we want to deliver. We want to build flexibility into the system, but we recognise that there will obviously be limitations to how flexible it is possible to be if we want to maintain quality and availability across a range of local authority areas.

Daniel Johnson: I take the minister's point about flexibility and quality, and I agree with him, but the key point is that childcare needs to be delivered in such a way that it is built around the way in which parents actually work. Very often, despite the Government's best efforts, childcare does not quite match the working practices of parents. How would the minister respond to that?

Mark McDonald: We absolutely want a system that is flexible and accessible for all, but we will not compromise on quality, which is the point that I was making. We accept what has been said, but we want quality to be at the heart of our expansion plans, because we know that high-quality provision will be required to make a difference for our youngest children.

From January next year, we will commence a programme of delivery model trials for early learning and childcare that will help us to learn what works best and why. Those trials will be supported by £1 million of funding and will form part of our response to the independent adviser on

poverty and inequality's report "Shifting the Curve", which highlighted the need for high-quality provision as a key element of our plans.

As part of our on-going work to develop the trials, we published yesterday a summary analysis of responses that were received to our trials discussion paper, which was published alongside "Shifting the Curve" on 20 January. The paper sought the views of stakeholders and partners on the scope and design of the trials, and we will announce more details later in the summer about the process for securing a delivery partner to develop and manage the trials. We continue to take forward work on what we will deliver.

Bob Doris highlighted kinship carers. I was delighted to speak at a Mentor UK event on Tuesday about how we take forward the kinship care agenda and particularly the stipulations in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which my colleague Aileen Campbell piloted through Parliament. Mentor UK is developing a kinship care website that will be a valuable resource for kinship carers in Scotland.

Mr Doris raised a couple of specific queries. If he wants to write to me, I will be more than happy to meet him to discuss matters in more detail, rather than touching only briefly on them in summing up.

My colleague Gail Ross made a vital point about the importance of attachment and of recognising parents' role. The Government wants to expand early years childcare and learning, but we also want to support parents in their role in giving children the best start in life. A number of members across the chamber highlighted the critical impact on a child's development and life of what happens at the very beginning—going back even to the point of conception and pregnancy—and in the early years. We want parents to be key partners in that.

We launched a national parenting strategy that had 80 commitments—78 have been fully delivered and the delivery of the remaining two is under way. We recognise the support that is required for parents. We want to build on the programmes that we have developed, such as play, talk, read, which encourages parents to play with their children, to talk to and with their children and to read to and with their children, because we recognise that that is vital to children's early brain development, their literacy and their vocabulary. A growing up in Scotland report contained positive news of an improvement in three-year-olds' vocabulary skills, but we recognise the points that have been made about the disparities that continue to exist and the work that needs to be done to address them.

Jenny Gilruth made an important point about play and interaction. She also talked about what was number 1 in the charts at various times—she said that, when the SNP came to office, Rihanna's "Umbrella" was apparently at number 1, which seems appropriate today. Jenny Gilruth highlighted the opportunities from play and the exceptional work that Sir Harry Burns has done in helping us to understand more about how early intervention and the early years approach can benefit young people.

I echo entirely the tribute that Rona Mackay paid to Home-Start. Last week, I had a good visit to Home-Start Aberdeen, where I spoke to volunteers. Home-Start Aberdeen is taking a range of approaches to encourage parents to consider healthy eating and diet for themselves and their children; to support parents and families who might be affected by mental health issues, which I will discuss at the end of my speech; and to ensure that parents are aware of the financial support that is available, which relates to the work that has been done by the early years collaborative test of change to ensure that parents maximise household budgets.

It is appropriate to finish on mental health, which was raised a number of times across the chamber. In the previous parliamentary session, I led a debate on the healthy start, healthy Scotland campaign, which the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland launched. Maternal mental health and its impacts are important to me.

That is why—to refer to the cross-cutting agenda that I spoke about—I will work closely with my colleague Maureen Watt, who is the dedicated Minister for Mental Health. The Government is developing a strategy on mental health. I say to the Conservatives that, rather than putting that work on hold to undertake a review, it would be better to feed into that strategy suggestions and approaches that could be taken forward.

Generally speaking, the debate has been good and constructive. Because the Conservative amendment would remove the reference to the early years grant, we will not be able to support it. Unfortunately, we cannot support the Labour amendment, not because it makes an uncoded commitment in relation to breakfast clubs but because we do not believe in applying that approach on a universal basis when we should allow local authorities the flexibility to determine their priorities on the wraparound approach. Labour came very close to getting our support but, unfortunately, we have a disagreement with it on that one area. I hope that the Government motion will receive support at decision time. We will continue to work to give our children the best start in life.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S5M-00467.4, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S5M-00467, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on the best start in life for Scotland's children, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)

Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 33, Against 84, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-00467.3, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S5M-00467, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on the best start in life for Scotland's children, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 29, Against 59, Abstentions 29.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S5M-00467, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on the best start in life for Scotland's children, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 88, Against 0, Abstentions 29.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament commits to making Scotland the best place for children to grow up; supports parents through

the promotion of children's health and wellbeing from pre-birth, in the early years and primary education; believes that the new 10-year mental health strategy should help renew focus on the early identification of child mental health issues; welcomes that all pregnant women will receive free vitamins and support to enable a healthier diet, and that every newborn in Scotland will be entitled to a baby box to help them to get the best start in life; agrees with a grant for expectant mothers on low incomes for the first and subsequent children, and that low-income families should also receive grants when their child starts both nursery and school; believes that investment in the expansion of high-quality early learning and childcare, alongside an increase in highly-trained staff, will support children during their early years and help them to reach their full potential, and supports efforts to reduce stigma and social pressures on children of all ages.

Meeting closed at 17:04.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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