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Thursday 29 September 2016

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 29 September 2016

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

General Question Time

2016 Olympics and Paralympics (Legacy)

1. Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to ensure that there will be a legacy arising from the success of the Scottish competitors at the 2016 Olympics and Paralympics. (S5O-00201)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): I am sure that the whole chamber will agree that Scottish Olympians and Paralympians have had great success at the games in Rio, bringing back a total of 30 medals.

To build on that, sportscotland will continue to use its investment from the Scottish Government and the national lottery to develop its world-class sporting system, including investment in sports facilities for use by communities and performance athletes alike. Those facilities are being further enhanced with the addition of our new national sports performance centre—Oriam—and the purpose-built, fully inclusive national centre Inverclyde, which is opening in spring 2017.

I am delighted that sportscotland has exceeded its aim of creating 150 community sport hubs across Scotland. To date, 155 hubs have been created, with a further £6 million investment creating a total of 200 hubs by 2020.

Tavish Scott: I thank the minister for that reply and I share her sentiments about the performance of our athletes in Brazil. Does she agree that the important legacy is about our future athletes, particularly our young future athletes?

Is the minister aware that this weekend in Glasgow, district hockey players from across Scotland will be competing and training for the future? Does she recognise that for island competitors that means an additional two nights away and the flight costs of getting to Glasgow for the weekend—which, of course, will be a wonderful weekend? Does she recognise that the need for an islands travel fund, which I have been asking sportscotland to push and to introduce, is paramount and will she agree to take that forward?

Aileen Campbell: I thank Tavish Scott for raising the issue, which I know that he has pursued. Of course, I know through my family connections the challenges and barriers that

island life can bring for young competitors. I hope that whoever is going from Shetland to the district hockey event in Glasgow does well.

There have been on-going discussions between sportscotland, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Government on the issue of funding for travel. I give a commitment to Tavish Scott to update him on the progress of those discussions and I will make sure that we meet to work out what further action can be taken to help island competitors.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I thank Tavish Scott for lodging the question on legacy. Last night, I attended the team Scotland sports awards and those of us who were lucky enough to be there could not fail to be inspired by the incredible achievements of Scotland's sportsmen and women in 2016.

On the back of the huge success of the Scottish contingent in team GB and Paralympic team GB, our children have been eager to find ways to get involved, only to find clubs with ever-growing waiting lists. When discussing legacy, we often talk of increased participation without recognising that that requires increased capacity. In short, we need more coaches and destinations to participate. Investment in our army of volunteers and physical education teachers would be a fantastic legacy from the recent games. Will the Scottish Government undertake to remove barriers to obtaining coaching qualifications and look at opening up schools after hours to enable easy access to facilities?

Aileen Campbell: I am well aware of the barriers that many coaches might experience when they are trying to create opportunities for young people. We have worked on that for some time. That is why, as I stated in my original answer to Tavish Scott, we have invested heavily to meet and exceed our target of community sport hubs across the country, with a further £6 million investment creating 200 hubs by 2020. We are working with the governing bodies and others with an interest in providing sporting opportunities for young people.

We have a great commitment to making sure that young people have an opportunity to participate in sport and we will do what we can to ensure that that happens. However, I think that our record to date is an impressive one and our further investment in facilities across the country shows the direction that this Government wants to take, which is to increase participation activity for all across the country.

Equal Pay (Local Authorities)

2. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it

will provide an update on how many local authorities have outstanding equal pay claims. (S5O-00202)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government believes that it is completely unacceptable for any equal pay claims against local authorities to remain outstanding. Local authorities are responsible for the employment of their staff, and the Scottish Government is therefore unable to provide details of outstanding claims.

However, the Accounts Commission has indicated that councils estimate that approximately 30,000 equal pay cases remain outstanding. Audit Scotland plans to look at equal pay issues across local government in more detail during 2016-17.

Rona Mackay: Can the cabinet secretary give an update on what action the Government is taking to ensure equality for women in the workplace?

Angela Constance: Over and above our work to support and promote equal pay, the Scottish Government is involved in a wide range of actions to tackle inequality for women in the workplace. Those actions include promoting family-friendly flexible working and high-quality and flexible childcare. We also fund organisations such as Equate Scotland and its careerwise programme, and the close the gap project.

In addition to the commitments on women returners in our programme for government, we have set up a new advisory council on women and girls, and a working group on pregnancy and maternity discrimination, which will be chaired by Jamie Hepburn. That work will help us to ensure that we remove the barriers that women face in the workplace, on top of the work that we will do to tackle the underrepresentation of women on public boards.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): The issue of equal pay has been raised in the chamber on numerous occasions, including in November 2015 and February this year. The First Minister has encouraged local authorities that have not yet dealt with outstanding claims to do so quickly.

Will the cabinet secretary consider writing once again to local authorities—I know that the Scottish Government has done that before—including Inverclyde Council that have not yet dealt with outstanding equal pay claims?

Angela Constance: Mr McMillan raises a valid point. The issue of equal pay and outstanding claims has been raised in the chamber many times. Earlier this morning, I met my constituent Rose Jackson, who is with the Scottish

Pensioners Forum, which is outside Parliament today. She told me that she was fortunate that her own equal pay claim was settled prior to her retirement, but we know that that is not the case for tens of thousands of women the length and breadth of Scotland.

I and the Scottish Government will consider what more can be done, including on our manifesto commitment, which mentions a system of penalties for local authorities that have not settled by April 2017. We can of course write again to our colleagues in local government to follow up those matters. However, the Scottish Government has already taken other action, such as allowing local government the flexibility to use capital receipts to settle claims, and we will abolish fees for employment tribunals when that power comes our way.

High Street Banks (Meetings)

3. **Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives of high street banks that have retail operations in Scotland and what was discussed. (S5O-00203)

The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse): Details of all ministerial engagements are published in arrears on the Scottish Government website. The database includes references to ministerial engagements with representatives of retail and high street banks from September 2015 to April 2016. Details of subsequent engagements will be published in due course.

At those meetings we discussed our mutual interests in supporting Scotland's economic growth. I will next meet representatives from across the financial services sector, including the high street banks, at the Financial Services Advisory Board meeting on 4 October.

Gordon Lindhurst: The minister may be aware of research that shows that Scotland has been losing more than 140 bank branches over an 18-month period beginning in July 2015. More than 20 of those branches are in Edinburgh, including a Currie branch that is one of those branches that are commonly referred to as the last branch in town.

Although I appreciate that retail operations may be the prerogative of the bank in question, to be considered in the context of its overall operations, branches play a wider role in society, particularly for the elderly, those who are less able and people in remote areas who are often unable to bank in other ways. Has the minister relayed any concerns to banks operating in Scotland about the ever-increasing number of branch closures and the effect that they can have on communities?

Paul Wheelhouse: The member raises a very important point, particularly in relation to those who are elderly and who may be less able to use digital services or less equipped with the skills and confidence to do that. I recognise the concerns of his constituents, and members across the chamber will have similar concerns in their constituencies.

These are also worrying times for any branch staff who are directly affected by branch closures. I appreciate that banks, as Gordon Lindhurst indicated, must make commercial decisions and that the way in which people carry out their day-to-day banking is changing, as they move increasingly to digital services. However, I share the member's concern that banking services must consider the needs of all in our society.

There is a continuing need for face-to-face provision of banking. I made that point very clearly in the members' debate led by Iain Gray in respect of a closure in East Lothian. We certainly welcome points such as those made by Mr Lindhurst being borne in mind whenever high street banks consider closures, especially where a branch is the last one in the community and especially where elderly customers may be affected.

Housing Developments (Impact on Villages)

4. **Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it takes to ensure that housing developments do not have a negative impact on the character and infrastructure of villages. (S5O-00204)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): It is for local authorities, through their development plans, to direct the right development to the right place. Scottish planning policy provides a framework of guidance to support authorities in promoting both high-quality development and a sustainable pattern of development.

Tom Arthur: I welcome that approach. However, many of my constituents in Brookfield, Howwood and Kilbarchan have raised concerns with me over the scale of housing developments in their communities. What further action could possibly be taken to preserve the individual character of villages while, of course, ensuring that there is a sufficient supply of new homes?

Kevin Stewart: Planning authorities have responsibility for the development plan and decisions on planning applications in their area. Renfrewshire Council has published "Renfrewshire's Places: Residential Design Guide", which sets out the objectives for sustainable place-making within the area. Throughout the planning system, opportunities are available for everyone to engage in the

development decisions that affect them. All those involved in the planning system have a responsibility to engage and to work together with communities and all stakeholders to achieve quality places.

Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con): There are huge concerns in parts of East Lothian that housing developments will have a negative impact on health services, schools, public transport and so forth. Can the Scottish Government commit to improvements in infrastructure before housing developments commence?

Kevin Stewart: The Scottish Government recognises that there is a need to improve the alignment of housing and infrastructure delivery and for that to be addressed in development plans. That significant issue is being considered in the on-going work to review the planning system. We are working with a wide range of stakeholders to consider the options for implementing the recommendations of the independent panel that reported in May. The output from that will inform a planning white paper that will be published around the end of this year.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): While local authorities have responsibility for drawing up and bringing forward local development plans, it is for the Scottish Government to sign those plans off. Is the minister aware that in many areas there are major delays in getting those plans signed off? In Fife's case, that is costing the council £400 per day—it is now running into thousands of pounds. Will the minister agree to look at that?

Kevin Stewart: I am aware of the Fife situation. The deputy leader of Fife Council has written to me about it and I will respond. There are some issues with the Fife plan. Scottish Government officials have written to the council to say that about 200 questions need to be answered. I can assure Mr Rowley that I will respond to the deputy leader of Fife Council and will let Mr Rowley know how the matter progresses.

Hate Crime

5. **Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with Police Scotland regarding tackling hate crime. (S5O-00205)

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Annabelle Ewing): Scottish Government officials and Police Scotland are in regular touch to discuss tackling hate crime. Police Scotland takes all forms of hate crime extremely seriously and it monitors the level and type of incidents that are reported on a daily basis in order to provide the most effective and robust response

to safeguard victims and community groups. It has not seen a significant increase in the level of reports being received since the European Union referendum in June. We encourage anyone who believes that they may have been a victim of hate crime to report it to the police, either directly or through their network of third-party reporting centres.

Sandra White: The minister might be aware of the recent incident outside the St Enoch centre in Glasgow, where a far-right group calling itself national action organised a food bank collection for whites only. What steps can and will Police Scotland take to ensure that such discriminatory and racist action is stamped out?

Annabelle Ewing: The behaviour that Sandra White mentioned is, of course, completely unacceptable, and we as a Government are committed to doing all that we can to stamp it out. Police Scotland is closely monitoring the situation and will not hesitate to take action against hate crime.

Air Quality (Aberdeen)

6. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it has taken since January 2016 to improve air quality in Aberdeen. (S5O-00206)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): The Scottish Government continues to provide practical and financial assistance to Aberdeen City Council in implementing its air quality action plan, which has been in place since 2006 and was updated in 2011.

Liam Kerr: In January, Market Street, Union Street and Wellington Road in Aberdeen all failed to comply with the Scottish standards for air quality. In that month, the Scottish Government said that there was still much to be done to deliver benefits for human and environmental health where areas of poor quality remain, but to date there have been no Scottish Government-led initiatives in Aberdeen this year that focus on improving air quality. When will the Scottish Government stop taking Aberdeen and its citizens for granted and deal with the air pollution that seriously affects its citizens' quality of life?

Roseanna Cunningham: I do think that the member might have taken the small hint from my initial answer that it is the council that has drawn up an air quality action plan and is taking the actions in connection with that. That is the appropriate way in which to do it, and the member will discover that Aberdeen City Council is not the only council that is doing the job that is required of it.

We believe that Aberdeen City Council has a good plan. It has been revised and the council is taking the appropriate action, where necessary, to declare management areas. We will continue to support it both practically and financially to do the work that it has set out to do.

Scottish Ambulance Service (Road Traffic Accidents)

7. Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps are being taken to ensure that the Scottish Ambulance Service supports co-responding of emergency services to road traffic accidents. (S5O-00207)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government and the Scottish Ambulance Service understand the importance of a combined response from the emergency services to road traffic accidents. The Scottish Ambulance Service, Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service continue to work collaboratively to deliver a joint response to emergencies, and public safety remains a key priority for all our emergency services.

Richard Lochhead: My constituents Mr and Mrs McKandie, who tragically lost their son Keiran in a road traffic accident in March while he was cycling, have highlighted the fact that ambulance control rooms do not routinely alert the fire service to such incidents even though their appliances can get to incidents more quickly with their life-saving equipment. That is despite the emergency services in Grampian signing a memorandum of understanding on such issues in 2010.

Will the cabinet secretary take action to support my constituents' campaign, which they see as a legacy for their late son Keiran, to ensure that all emergency services are properly co-ordinating their responses?

Shona Robison: I met Mr and Mrs McKandie in the summer. I was very moved indeed by their desire to create a legacy in Keiran's name by improving the response to out-of-hospital cardiac arrest, and I said that I would do what I could to support their campaign.

It is important that all our emergency services take a joint approach in responding to emergencies. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service will always attend a road traffic accident where there are additional risks such as entrapment of a patient, fire or spillage. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Scottish Ambulance Service are already conducting trials of a joint response in several parts of Scotland as part of the out-of-hospital cardiac arrest strategy, and I have asked them to consider how the evaluation and roll-out of those trials can be accelerated. However, if there is more that we can

do, I would want to do that. I am happy to keep Richard Lochhead and the McKandies informed of the progress being made.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Before we move to the next item of business, members may wish to join me in welcoming to the gallery a number of visitors, including His Excellency Ľubomír Reháč, ambassador of the Slovak Republic. [*Applause.*]

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-00283)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I have engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland, including discussions with the cabinet secretary for the economy to follow up on yesterday's welcome resumption of production at the Dalzell steel plant.

Ruth Davidson: Is the First Minister in favour of shale gas being used in Scotland?

The First Minister: Ruth Davidson is well aware of the Scottish Government's position. We are taking a cautious, evidence-based approach to shale gas and fracking. That is the right approach, given the range of environmental, health, transport and community impact concerns that have been raised. We have a number of research exercises under way that will report over the next few weeks, followed by a full public consultation. When that has ended, the Scottish Government will come to a considered judgment. Given the seriousness of the issue, that is the right and proper way to proceed.

Ruth Davidson: That is interesting, because the Gemmell report was due out in the summer, and on Saturday it will be October.

Let us set out, for a moment, this Government's principled stance on shale. For the past year, when it has come to shale gas in this country, the Government has leapt on its high horse, preached about a moratorium and boasted that it is the planet's best friend. However, when the gas is poured into a tanker and shipped all the way across the Atlantic to our shores, the Government turns a blind eye and hopes that if it ignores it, everybody else will too.

Not surprisingly, the First Minister and her Cabinet have refused absolutely every media opportunity to talk about the issue this week, so I will give her the chance now. Will she explain the Scottish National Party's total double standards on the matter?

The First Minister: The decision about the import of shale gas to Grangemouth was taken by Ineos, which is a company that is absolutely free to take such decisions. Ineos, of course, is an extremely important company in the Scottish economy.

I appreciate that the Scottish Conservatives' position on fracking in Scotland is to ride roughshod over local opinion and the range of environmental and other concerns that have been raised. Ruth Davidson is perfectly entitled to argue that position.

I think that it is better to take the evidence-based, precautionary approach that this Government is taking, because we should not play fast and loose with our environment. We will continue to undertake the work that we have set out, the detail of which is well known. When the research projects report, we will embark on a full public consultation. Everybody with any opinion on or interest in the issue, including the Scottish Conservatives, will be able to contribute to that consultation.

When we take account of all the issues involved, we see that that is absolutely the right and responsible way to proceed, and that is what the Scottish Government will continue to do.

Ruth Davidson: The First Minister has already ignored her own experts on shale gas. The results of its expert advice in 2014 are on its own website, for everyone to see.

Let me try another question. It is quite possible that shale gas will get the go-ahead in the rest of the United Kingdom soon, if local communities back it. Providers say that if it gets the go-ahead, much of the gas will go to Grangemouth and will end up in the national grid, powering Scottish homes. We could end up with a ban on Scottish gas, but with Scottish homes reliant on English gas to keep the pipes warm. Is the First Minister entirely comfortable with that?

The First Minister: I know that the Scottish Conservatives are a party that is controlled by London but, in the era of devolution, I think that it is right that we take the decisions about fracking in Scotland here in Scotland in our national Parliament, and that is what we will continue to do.

Given the concerns that have been raised domestically in Scotland, in other parts of the United Kingdom and in many other countries, we will continue to take an evidence-based approach. I will leave Ruth Davidson to explain to communities across the central belt of Scotland why her party would choose to ride roughshod over the concerns that have been raised.

From an energy point of view, of course this is an important decision, and it will be considered carefully by the Scottish Government. I thought that Ruth Davidson might want to take the opportunity to talk positively about the record levels of renewable energy that are being generated in Scotland and some of the world-leading projects in tidal energy and offshore wind that are being taken forward here. However, the

Tory Government at Westminster is, of course, more interested in undermining renewable energy than it is in supporting it.

We will continue to take decisions that are right for Scotland and right for our future energy needs. As I said, I will leave Ruth Davidson to explain her position to communities across Scotland.

Ruth Davidson: The First Minister might want to pick her own questions, but she still has no answer to the one that she is being asked. I am not surprised by that, because she is a First Minister who does not want to admit that her Government's failure on energy will leave us reliant on others to keep our homes heated. *[Interruption.]* There are 10,000 jobs in central Scotland that are reliant on shale gas coming here from other countries, but we still have no answers on shale gas at home.

I fully accept that there are differing views on fracking, but nobody is well served by a Government that hides from view and kicks the issue into the long grass. The moratorium was announced nearly two years ago. Her Government has been overtaken by events, because the first tanker of shale gas arrived this week. Will the First Minister give the country some proper answers? When will they be forthcoming?

The First Minister: We set out the timescale for the reviews, and the moratorium is in place while those reviews are under way. The process and timescale were described by Friends of the Earth Scotland as

"a well designed process, over a sensible timescale",

and I would agree with that.

Being lectured on energy by a representative of the party that is pouring public money into the white elephant that is Hinkley Point is a bit rich. Ruth Davidson has asked a series of questions about energy, but she has somehow managed to forget to mention the statistics that have come out today that show that 2016 is on track to be a record year for renewables generation in Scotland. That is a real success story, and I think that we have just heard that the Scottish Conservatives do not like talking about success stories in Scotland.

National Autistic Society Scotland (Meetings)

2. **Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister when she will next meet the National Autistic Society Scotland. (S5F-00309)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I pay tribute to the invaluable work that the National Autistic Society Scotland does to help to support people with autism in our local communities. This month, the Minister for Childcare and Early Years made a speech at the 11th Autism-Europe

congress in Edinburgh, and he will soon meet the director of the National Autistic Society Scotland.

Kezia Dugdale: That is hugely welcome—thank you.

The day after May's election, on the steps of Bute house, the First Minister said:

"We will always respect the people—now and in the future. We simply ask that other parties do likewise."

Last night, the members of this Parliament—the representatives of the people of Scotland—spoke with one voice on the planned cuts to local national health services. Will the First Minister now respect the will of this Parliament?

The First Minister: Kezia Dugdale raises an important issue. It is important first to emphasise that no decisions have been taken on any of the proposed service changes. It is also important to stress, as the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport did yesterday, that there is a well-established and long-standing process in place to consider proposals for service change. The early stages of that process—which Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board is currently engaged in—inform the judgment about whether a particular service change is to be considered major and, therefore, ultimately decided by ministers.

When the long-established process has reached the stage at which that judgment can be made, the health secretary will report it to Parliament. In reaching that judgment, of course she will take account of yesterday's debate and the decision of the Scottish Parliament.

Kezia Dugdale: We recognise that there is a due process. That is why we are angry that Scottish National Party candidates during the election promised people that the services were safe when they were not. The truth is that the Parliament agreed that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport should call in proposed cuts by health boards in Glasgow, Lanarkshire and the Lothians. That is because the services concerned are vital to communities throughout the country but are now at risk. We are talking about maternity services at the Vale of Leven hospital, the Lightburn hospital in Glasgow, cleft palate services in the Lothians and many more. Now that the Parliament has spoken, will the health secretary immediately call those decisions in and reject the planned cuts?

The First Minister: That is another example of the complete incoherence at the heart of Scottish Labour. Kezia Dugdale says that she recognises that there is a due process. It is a five-stage process. I have a copy here and anybody can read it on the Scottish health council's website. At a certain stage of that process, the decision about whether a service change is major is taken. When

we reach that point, the health secretary will take that decision. She will take account of the Scottish health council's views and, of course, of the views of this Parliament.

Week in, week out, the Labour Party stands up in the chamber and accuses the Government of undermining local decision making. Today, it stands up and demands that we undermine local decision making. It is an absolute shambles. We will continue to follow due process. We will take no lessons from Labour when it comes to standing up for local health services because, unlike Labour, we have demonstrated time and again a willingness as a Government to block changes when they are not in patients' interests. When Labour was in government, it sat to one side and allowed services such as the Vale of Leven accident and emergency unit to close.

Labour allowed services to close; this Government protects local services.

Kezia Dugdale: If the First Minister did it then, she could do it now. There is a democratic process at work: it is called the will of the Parliament.

In March, Shona Robison told the Parliament that services at the Royal Alexandra hospital, the Vale of Leven hospital and the Lightburn hospital would be maintained, but each faces major cuts. George Adam said that we were scaremongering when we said that services in Paisley were at risk, but cuts are on their way. Before the election, the SNP told people that their local services were safe. Even the First Minister did it on the front of the *Greenock Telegraph*.

The Parliament has now said that promises that were made before the election must be delivered. If the vote of the Parliament, which was elected by the people of Scotland, does not make the First Minister keep her promises what will?

The First Minister: Unless Labour is taking the position that local health services never change no matter the change in demand or demographics—and I assume that it is not—it must accept that there is a process through which we go to consider and reach judgments on such changes. That process is long established. It has been in place for years. I have a copy of it here. When we get to the stage in the process at which the health secretary has to decide whether it is major service change, that is what she will do.

I say again that, week after week, the Labour Party accuses the Government of overriding local decision making but, today, it wants us to override local decision making. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Will members please keep it down?

The First Minister: We will do the right thing. Let us never forget that it is because of this SNP Government that we still have an accident and emergency service in Monklands and in Ayr. Lightburn hospital is still open because we stepped in and prevented its closure. The Vale of Leven emergency services are there only because the Government stopped the trend that Labour had started to remove them completely.

We stand up for local services; Labour used to stand aside while they were closed.

The Presiding Officer: I will take a couple of constituency questions.

Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I am sure that the First Minister will share my concern at the news of potential job losses at A G Barr, including at a number of sites in Angus in my constituency, as well as in Cumbernauld. Although consultation on redundancies is still at a very early stage, what support will the Scottish Government give to assist the business and the staff who are affected at this challenging time?

The First Minister: Of course, I was disappointed to learn of potential job losses at A G Barr. This will obviously be an anxious time for the company's employees, their families and the local communities in both Forfar and Cumbernauld. Scottish Enterprise is working closely with the company to understand any potential impacts on the two Scottish sites and to establish where and how they can support the sites and the workforce. In the unfortunate and, I hope, avoidable event that any redundancies proceed, the Scottish Government stands ready to assist those who are affected through our partnership action for continuing employment—PACE—initiative, which helps people who are faced with redundancy. The economy secretary will be happy to engage with the local members of Parliament as the situation becomes clearer.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The First Minister will be aware that Highlands and Islands Enterprise, like the Highlands and Islands Development Board before it, plays a valuable role in the Highlands because of its dual remit of promoting both economic and community benefit. She will also be aware of press speculation regarding its future. Can she give an assurance that those two important functions will continue to be discharged by HIE in the Highlands and Islands?

The First Minister: Yes. Highlands and Islands Enterprise does a fantastic job. It has done a fantastic job over the past 50 years and I give the member an assurance that we will make sure that it is in a position to continue to carry out those functions and provide its excellent services to the Highlands of Scotland.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The First Minister may be aware that, earlier this week, agreement was reached between Orkney Islands Council and Historic Environment Scotland that will allow Maeshowe, in my constituency, to be reopened. As Maeshowe is an absolutely key component of Orkney's world heritage site, its closure would have had a disastrous effect on the local tourism industry. Does she accept that a planned shuttle bus service can be only a temporary solution, and will she encourage Historic Environment Scotland to act on the planning permission that it already has for a visitor centre, car park and pedestrian underpass, so that Orkney's world-class attractions are served by world-class facilities?

The First Minister: Yes, I am happy to encourage those discussions to continue. The health and safety of both visitors and staff at Maeshowe are obviously of the utmost importance, so I welcome the collaboration between Historic Environment Scotland and Orkney Islands Council on the project. They have worked hard to develop an interim solution, and they continue to work towards a sustainable long-term solution to enhance and enrich the tourism offer in Orkney. I know that Liam McArthur will continue to be very closely engaged with the issue and I am happy to ensure that the relevant minister corresponds with him as the situation develops. One thing that is certain is that Maeshowe is one of the world-class attractions in Orkney, and we want to do everything possible to ensure that it continues to be so.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S5F-00289)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): On Tuesday.

Patrick Harvie: One of the first debates that the Parliament had when we returned from the summer break was about refugees. The First Minister and her colleagues backed a Green amendment that called for the devolution of the accommodation and support services that asylum seekers in our communities need. Since then, the most significant change that we have seen, which was announced in a press release from Serco, is that it will be taking over from Orchard & Shipman the provision of accommodation services.

What involvement or communication did the Scottish Government have with those private sector providers or with the United Kingdom Government in advance of that decision? What was the Scottish Government's awareness? Has the Scottish Government been able to influence

the decision at all, and what is the First Minister's response to it?

The First Minister: We have said before that we are deeply concerned about the continuing allegations about the standards of asylum seeker accommodation and about allegations of the mistreatment of asylum seekers. As Patrick Harvie knows and indicated in his question, asylum seeker accommodation is a reserved matter—these are not our decisions. We frequently make our views on such matters known to the UK Government, but the decisions are taken by the UK Government. I would very much like the decisions to be devolved to this Parliament.

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities is due to meet the UK Minister of State for Immigration early next month—in the next two weeks, I think—and will raise the issues with him. I understand that the communities secretary will also meet the Scottish Refugee Council later today, when, I am sure, the issues will be raised as well.

The issues are of the utmost importance because they go to the heart of how we treat some of the most vulnerable people in our society. I assure the Parliament that we will continue to press very strongly with the UK Government the case for dignity in how we treat asylum seekers.

Patrick Harvie: I welcome that response. Again, I encourage the Scottish Government to be proactive in putting together a public sector bid to take on the provision of the services. We know that the Scottish public sector and Scottish non-governmental organisations and charities can provide them to a higher standard of dignity than is being provided at present.

The UK Government is putting pressure on Scottish local authorities to expand the asylum seeker dispersal programme. That may well be a legitimate goal, but it has to be done in a decent way, involving negotiation and respect, with communities and local authorities. If that expansion happens, the Scottish Government will have a role, because designation orders to achieve that UK objective will require the Scottish ministers' consent. Will the First Minister use the purchase that the Scottish Government now has on the issue to the maximum to advocate for an asylum seeker dispersal programme that meets the needs of people on the basis of respecting their humanity, while ensuring that local authorities are provided with resources to provide the service to a high standard and that those services are brought back into the public sector as a matter of urgency?

The First Minister: The short answer is yes, but I suspect that Patrick Harvie wants me to give a slightly longer answer. Our position and principle

have always been that asylum seeker accommodation should be provided in the public sector. I am certainly happy, together with Angela Constance, to consider Patrick Harvie's suggestion of a public sector bid and to consider whether that would be feasible. I am happy to engage further with him on that.

On the question about asylum seeker dispersal, we will use whatever influence we have to the maximum to ensure that the arrangements for looking after asylum seekers are as humane and dignified as we would all want them to be. We have considerable experience from the programme for welcoming Syrian refugees to Scotland. Many of them went to areas other than Glasgow, and there was good engagement with local authorities through our task force and other agencies to ensure that all the support arrangements were in place. We have some useful experience to bring to bear.

I am happy to ask Angela Constance to engage with Patrick Harvie about some of the detail that underlies the issues, but I end by giving an assurance that we will always seek to act on the issue in a way that prioritises the humanity and dignity of the support that we give asylum seekers here in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: There are a number of supplementary questions.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of the reported crime statistics that were published this week. Although they show a welcome overall drop in crime, there is a worrying increase in sexual crimes. That is partly because more victims are prepared to come forward, but there are growing concerns that there are more and more sexual crimes involving young people, particularly online, such as those that relate to the sharing of images and videos. I ask the First Minister to consider the call from Rape Crisis Scotland for more support for its sexual violence prevention project, so that it can reach every secondary school in the country.

The First Minister: We will consider that. We work closely with Rape Crisis Scotland. Claire Baker is absolutely right to say that we should in no way be complacent about the trend in sexual offences. Particularly in these days of social media and online activity, there is a real need to prioritise education and awareness.

I am sure that Claire Baker will recognise the point that I am about to make. There is a sense and a suspicion that, in years gone by, sexual offences were underreported. A lot of work has therefore gone into encouraging and supporting people to come forward and report sexual offences.

Claire Baker mentioned Rape Crisis Scotland. Earlier this week, when the statistics were published, the national co-ordinator of Rape Crisis Scotland said:

“It is important that people have confidence in reporting sexual crime. Changes introduced by Police Scotland in recent years have transformed how sexual crime is investigated in Scotland. It is likely that at least some of the increase in recorded sexual crime is due to people having more confidence to report what has happened to them.”

We should welcome that and we should continue to give people that confidence, but Claire Baker is absolutely right that we should not take our eye off the ball regarding some of the underlying trends. I will ensure that her specific suggestion is followed up.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): There were reports this morning that the United Kingdom Government has spent £65 million on establishing Brexit departments, but it seems still to have no plan in place. Does the First Minister agree that it is time for the Prime Minister to set out exactly what Brexit means?

The First Minister: Yes—I do. We are now more than three months on from the referendum and we have no greater clarity today than we had on 23 June about exactly what Brexit means. The United Kingdom Government and the Prime Minister in particular have to start to set out the detail of that extremely soon. I am not the only one making such comments. I noticed that two Conservative MPs—Ken Clarke and Nicky Morgan, the former education secretary—made similar comments today. The latter said that, if the UK Government does not start to define what Brexit means, other people will do that for it.

The UK Government needs to get a grip. I want the UK to take a negotiating position that keeps us in the single market. I know that Ruth Davidson used to support that position, but I do not think that she does any more, as she has become a bit of a born-again Brexiteer. Nevertheless, I hope that common sense will prevail. We need to start seeing the detail, and soon.

Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con): In light of the £5 million General Medical Council investigation into the conduct of eight consultants at Aberdeen royal infirmary clearing all eight of wrongdoing, what action will the First Minister take to reform management practices in NHS Grampian?

The First Minister: The concerns that were raised were investigated in the normal way by the General Medical Council and a conclusion has been reached. Obviously, it is for the local health board to consider the conclusions and learn any lessons from them. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport will ensure that that happens and

will be happy to correspond with the member if he has any further questions on the issue.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): As the Scottish National Party Government has stepped in to save Scotland’s steel industry, Ferguson’s shipyard and Prestwick airport from closure, and as it has invested in support for oil and gas workers, does the First Minister agree that it is high time for the UK Government to step up and take decisive action on exploration and development in the North Sea, or else to take the blame for one of the most shameful betrayals in Scotland’s industrial history?

The First Minister: Yes—I agree. [*Laughter.*] This is actually quite an important matter and a serious issue for the oil and gas sector in Scotland, and I think that people should perhaps show it slightly more respect.

Earlier this week, Oil & Gas UK published a report that showed the work that the oil and gas industry has done to reduce its costs and become more efficient so that it can be sustainable and, it is hoped, competitive in an era of low oil prices. Last Monday, I visited Aberdeen and met Oil & Gas UK to discuss in more detail the work that has been done. One of the key themes that came through in that meeting and is coming through in much of what we hear about the sector is the need for further support for exploration, because today’s exploration is the production of tomorrow. As we saw in the report this week, there are still potentially 20 billion barrels of oil to be exploited in the North Sea. However, unless the exploration happens now, there is a danger that we will not get the benefit of that.

I call on the UK Government to do what it has done previously and announce in advance of the autumn statement additional investment in exploration so that we can continue to support the oil and gas sector as it comes through these difficult times.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Given the number of the First Minister’s Westminster colleagues who are now helping the police with their inquiries, is she confident that Police Scotland has the resources to deal with this upsurge in its workload?

The First Minister: As the member is aware, we have committed to real-terms protection of the police revenue budget, which will ensure that Police Scotland has an additional £100 million to spend over this parliamentary session. That is a particular achievement when we consider that, since 2010, the Conservative Government in London has cut our budget by 5 per cent in real terms.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): Can the First Minister explain how any political party can claim

to be autonomous from London while relying on money from London to keep it afloat?

The First Minister: I do not think that any political party that relies on its London parent party for funding can claim to be autonomous. That seems to be a contradiction in terms.

Brexit (Reciprocal Healthcare Arrangements)

4. Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what representations the Scottish Government will make to the United Kingdom Government to ensure that reciprocal healthcare arrangements are a priority in Brexit negotiations. (S5F-00307)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We understand the importance of European Union healthcare arrangements that allow Scots to receive necessary healthcare using the European health insurance card in the event of illness and accident while travelling in the European economic area. We also recognise the considerable benefits of being able to travel in the EEA for planned treatment under the S2 scheme and of our state pensioners receiving state healthcare under the S1 scheme when they choose to live in other EEA countries. We will therefore make it absolutely clear to the UK Government that citizens must retain the right to access healthcare in Europe under the various schemes, and I am of the view that that must be treated as a priority in Brexit negotiations when they finally take place.

Tom Arthur: I am sure that members across the chamber share my astonishment at hearing that the Tory Government made no contingency plans for the future of the European health insurance card service, as it potentially means hefty medical bills for Scots travelling abroad. Three months on from the EU referendum, has the First Minister had assurances on any services, benefits or rights to which we are currently entitled as members of the EU and the single market and on how the UK Government is working to ensure that we do not lose out on them?

The First Minister: As I think has become abundantly clear in the three months since the referendum, the UK Government did no contingency planning for any aspect of Brexit. I think that that was a shameful abdication of its responsibility.

On the specific issue, we have to date had no assurances from the UK Government on the future of the services, benefits or rights to which Scots are currently entitled as members of the EU and the single market. That uncertainty is disconcerting to our businesses, universities, farmers, fishermen and the Scottish people in general, and it is why we will continue to work as hard as we can to protect the interests of Scotland

and the people of Scotland as these discussions progress.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): Given that reciprocal healthcare depends very much on healthcare that is actually provided in this country and given what the First Minister said earlier about healthcare, is she aware that the decision to remove orthopaedic and trauma services from Monklands hospital, which was one of the downgrading options that she stopped 10 years ago, was made in July with no public consultation? Will she now call in that decision in line with the will of the Scottish Parliament and try to stop that downgrading?

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but I am not sure that that is a supplementary on Europe or the Brexit talks.

Police Scotland (Finances)

5. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the comment by the chief constable that it will

“take a two-to-three-year adjustment period”

to balance Police Scotland's finances. (S5F-00310)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): As I announced in December and indeed mentioned a few moments ago, we are protecting the police resource budget in real terms in every year of this session of Parliament, which means a boost of more than £100 million by 2021. The Scottish Government is in regular dialogue with Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority on the police budget and the steps that are being taken to manage current pressures.

Douglas Ross: The cancellation of the i6 project, the cost of which has been estimated at £60 million, was announced hours after Parliament rose for the summer recess, even though the Scottish Government was made aware of its termination two weeks before that. Does the First Minister agree that the shambolic failure of that project undermines the great effort of police officers and staff across the country, who are dealing with ever greater demands, including the challenges of dealing with a growing elderly population?

The First Minister: No, I do not. Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority take decisions that they consider to be appropriate, and let us not forget that our police do a fantastic—and very difficult—job. As we have seen from the crime statistics earlier this week, recorded crime in Scotland is now at a 42-year low, and we should thank every single police officer across our country for that. We will continue to work closely with

Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority to ensure that pressures on their budgets can be properly managed, and the protection that I have already mentioned will, of course, help protect front-line policing services.

However, as I said a moment ago to Murdo Fraser, it beggars belief that Conservative MSPs raise in this chamber issues of public spending when the Conservative Government at Westminster has reduced our budget by 5 per cent in real terms since 2010. Indeed, as we have seen in the Fraser of Allander institute report, it looks likely to cut our budget by up to £1.6 billion over the rest of this session. If Tory MSPs want to make a case for well-funded public services, I suggest that they start doing so with their colleagues at Westminster.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Would the Conservatives not be better to challenge their own Government to return the £75 million of VAT that has been paid by Police Scotland, which is the only police service in the whole of the UK that has VAT levied on it?

The First Minister: Christine Grahame is absolutely right. Police Scotland is the only police force in the whole of the UK that has VAT levied on it. If the Conservatives at Westminster want to ease the burden on Police Scotland, they could do so at the stroke of a pen by reimbursing the VAT payments, and I call on them to do that.

National Strategy for Survivors of Childhood Abuse

6. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to calls by those working with abuse survivors for an urgent investigation into the direction of the national strategy for survivors of childhood abuse. (S5F-00304)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We are absolutely committed to preventing and tackling child abuse, and we have consistently engaged with survivors and support organisations across the country to inform our policy, and to shape services and support. Our current framework builds on the original Survivor Scotland strategy of valuing support groups, and it responds to the most recent evidence on the impact of child abuse. It specifically responds to what survivors have told us matters most to them. We will, of course, continue to engage with the organisations that have raised concerns to understand their views more fully, and to ensure that everybody has an accurate and up-to-date picture of the current approach and evidence base for our strategy.

Iain Gray: These are difficult and sensitive issues, but they have to be addressed and every day seems to bring fresh concerns. When some of the leaders in the field tell us that the national strategy for survivors of sexual abuse has lost its direction and deviated from the original survivor strategy, and when they have described the key body, Survivor Scotland, as "unacceptable and unethical", it is not enough for the First Minister to provide simple reassurance. We have heard serious allegations against the head of survivor support in the Scottish Government, and we have seen the resignation of two out of three panel members of the historical abuse inquiry amid allegations of Government interference. I do not doubt the sincerity of Government efforts to get this right, but the First Minister must accept that, as far as survivors are concerned, the Government is getting it wrong. Will she personally investigate that and take the action that is required to correct it?

The First Minister: Of course I will continue to take a personal interest in these issues. The Deputy First Minister has ministerial responsibility for these issues and, as we have seen in the chamber in recent weeks, takes them extremely seriously.

Iain Gray referred to the independent inquiry, and I take the opportunity to stress the independence from Government of that inquiry. The Deputy First Minister has appointed Lady Smith to chair it. She is a respected judge whose appointment, I think, removes completely any suggestion of anything other than complete independence.

On the other points that Iain Gray raised, we take these complex and sensitive issues very seriously. When I answered his original question, I took care to say to him that we will engage with the organisations that have raised those concerns to understand them more fully. Without going into detail, at this stage we would not agree with all the concerns, but we want to ensure that we understand them so that we can respond properly to them.

We will continue to engage with survivors and survivors groups so that we ensure that the arrangements that we have in place for support of survivors are the right arrangements that take full account of the impact of abuse on survivors.

We take the matter hugely seriously. These are never going to be easy issues to get complete consensus of opinion on but we will strive, each and every day, to do our best to achieve that.

Teacher Vacancies

7. Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish

Government's position is on reports that there were 729 teacher vacancies the week before the start of the 2016-17 school term. (S5F-00311)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Well, there were not. The figure of 729 teacher vacancies is wrong. To get that figure, Tavish Scott included 200 vacancies in Argyll and Bute.

As of 9 August—the date of the Liberal Democrats' freedom of information request that resulted in that figure—there were not 200 vacancies in Argyll and Bute; there were 12. I also understand that yesterday the Lib Dem convener of education in Argyll and Bute informed Tavish Scott of that. I hope that he will take the opportunity today to correct the record. What is more, in the time since the Lib Dem FOI request, many vacancies that did exist will have been filled.

All that said, we all want schools to have the right number of teachers with the right skills so that every child has the opportunity to fulfil their potential, and that is exactly what we continue to work to achieve.

Tavish Scott: I understand that those figures are of course correct, but I do not think that it is fair to blame a junior FOI officer in Argyll and Bute Council, which is the implication of the line that the First Minister has just taken.

Does the First Minister accept that there were 500 teaching vacancies at the start of the school term and that the steady increase in the numbers of teachers leaving the profession is a cause for concern? Does she know that, yesterday, Keir Bloomer, the architect of curriculum for excellence—the way in which we teach our children in schools—said that the system is bedevilled by red tape, which he described as “self-evident lunacy”? In those circumstances, will the First Minister not look to the General Teaching Council for Scotland or the Government to investigate the reasons behind the number of teacher vacancies?

The First Minister: First, I did not blame anybody, other than perhaps Tavish Scott; I simply made the point that the figure that he had used previously was wrong and that he knew it was wrong. I thought that, given that he had just repeated it in Parliament, he might have wanted to take the opportunity to acknowledge that it was wrong.

At the start or before the start of school terms, there will be vacancies and they will reduce in number as we go into the school term. The figure of around 500 that Tavish Scott has now quoted will already have reduced. Of course, we continue to work with local authorities to keep teacher vacancies to an absolute minimum and to ensure that we have the right numbers of teachers in our schools.

On the comments by Keir Bloomer, with the greatest of respect, I would say that that is exactly why John Swinney has been working as hard as he has been in recent weeks to reduce the bureaucracy and unnecessary workload that teachers face and of course to commence the governance review, which will take a long hard look at exactly how our schools are governed. The Government is getting on with the reforms that we need in our schools, and I hope that we have the support of members from across the chamber as we do so.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Can the First Minister tell us when the GTCS reforms that will allow people who have qualified as teachers in other countries to teach in Scotland will come into force?

The First Minister: I am happy to provide the precise information to the member. We are absolutely determined, as part of the work that we are taking forward, to ensure that the arrangements that we have in place through the General Teaching Council support our objective of getting the brightest and best people into teaching in Scotland. We are committed to doing that. I do not have the details of the question to hand, but I will ensure that they are provided to the member very soon after today's session.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Dundee suffered chronic teacher shortages last year. This year, the vacancies in primary schools are exclusively in schools in the most deprived areas of our city. Council officials tell me that there is significant underrecruitment to teacher training. Why is that, when there is such an impact on children and their education?

The First Minister: We have continued to work to expand teacher training. We have of course provided funding to local authorities to maintain the number of teachers in our schools, and we will continue to work hard to ensure that we get the right numbers of teachers into our schools. A range of initiatives has been taken to address particular shortages in particular areas. For example, we spoke earlier about the difficulties in the oil and gas sector in the north-east of Scotland, and one initiative that has been taken forward there is to help train former oil and gas workers in teaching to get them into our schools. A range of initiatives is under way to ensure that we have the right numbers of teachers in our schools. As I have said repeatedly in the chamber, making sure that we have the best education system in the world for all our young people, whatever their background, is the Government's top priority.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister's question time.

Mental Health Education

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a members' debate on motion S5M-01183, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, on mental health education. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. Members who wish to speak should press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes what it sees as the vital importance of mental health education in contributing to closing the attainment gap in Mid Fife and Glenrothes and across the country; is concerned that 70% of young people recently surveyed by the Scottish Youth Parliament said that they did not know what mental health support was available in their area; understands that the Scottish Government will be publishing a new mental health strategy later in 2016, and notes the view that the strategy should provide clear curriculum guidance regarding mental health education.

12:45

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I am delighted to be speaking today in my first members' business debate on mental health education in schools, which I care passionately about.

Exactly a week after I was elected, I was contacted by my constituent, Rachel, who is in secondary 5 at Glenrothes high school. She wanted to know why teaching about mental health is not a compulsory part of the curriculum. She wanted to know why lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer issues are not discussed openly in personal and social education lessons. She quoted GIRFEC—getting it right for every child—which is the Scottish Government policy that aims to support

“the wellbeing of our children and young people by offering the right help at the right time from the right people”.

If the Government is to close the attainment gap and drive aspiration and ambition in the next generation, I believe—as Rachel does—that it is imperative that schools get to grips with mental health education.

We were all at school once, and we all think that we know about education. However, whether we sat O grades or standard grades, national 5s or sixth year studies exams, a commonality remains: to succeed academically, a pupil needs to be supported. When 74 per cent of young people do not know what mental health services are available in their area, it is clear that teachers, pupils and schools need support and direction from the Government to deliver that aspiration.

I have noticed in recent weeks that the Government has conflated the terminology of “attainment” and “achievement”. Those are different words. “Attainment” is a narrow measure of academic success. “Achievement”, however, is a far broader concept that can be about a contribution to the whole school, about playing for the school football team, or about applying oneself in class to the best of one's abilities. It is not something that we can, necessarily, measure with a test. I argue that without our schools building in opportunities for our young people to achieve, we will never fully be able to close the attainment gap. Schools should not, after all, be exams factories. To that end, I was delighted by the announcement by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills last week that mandatory unit assessments for national 5s and higher will be removed.

Our schools have a key role to play in preparing our young people for life and in skilling them with resilience, confidence and the attributes that they need to cope in an ever-changing economy. Those are the fundamental principles of curriculum for excellence.

What, though, is the picture for our young people in Scottish schools today? For girls it is mixed. A recent Educational Institute of Scotland report entitled “Getting it right for Girls” makes for some pretty shocking reading. Casual misogyny was found to be commonplace—for example, using terms such as “man up” or “girlie” in a derogatory fashion. That type of behaviour impacts on girls' mental health directly because it makes them feel unequal.

Last month, a Chartered Management Institute report showed that the gender pay gap in Scotland is the worst in the United Kingdom at 29.2 per cent, with a difference of £11,000 between the earnings of men and women.

As Rachel stated, mental health education is of vital importance to pupils from the LGBT community. A report by the Time for Education campaign found that 90 per cent of LGBT pupils who were surveyed had experienced homophobia, biphobia and transphobia while at school, and 72 per cent of those reported that that bullying had not been challenged by teachers. Only 4 per cent felt that the Scottish Government was doing enough to tackle it.

It is clear our schools need to do more to ensure that LGBT bullying is tackled head on. The associated link between such behaviour and poor mental health is evident: 42 per cent of respondents who had been bullied because of their LGBT label had attempted suicide once or more than once. Furthermore, a Stonewall Scotland report from 2014 highlighted that LGBT people were almost four times more likely than the

general population to access mental health services. If pupils across Scotland are not taught about mental health—whether it be anxiety, depression, bereavement or low confidence—how can we say that we have succeeded in preparing the next generation for the challenges that the world is yet to throw in their way?

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD)
rose—

Jenny Gilruth: I do not have time for an intervention just now.

As Samaritans has highlighted, young people in Scotland have some of the highest rates of health and social inequality in Europe and North America. The Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland notes evidence that children in low-income households are nearly three times more likely to suffer from mental health problems than are their more affluent peers. There is clearly a link between poverty and poor mental health.

We know that poverty presents in school. Last year, an EIS survey recorded an increase in the number of pupils who were coming to school without any food—not even a play piece. The Government is seeking to close the attainment gap that exists between Scotland's poorest and wealthiest children. The Government must therefore recognise that children who grow up in poverty face greater challenges in attaining academically. Conversely, schools need to focus their efforts on the type of social and emotional support that will build resilience and confidence, thereby enabling pupils to succeed academically and to go on to lead fulfilling lives. That type of support will further seek to challenge discrimination and intolerance.

In its submission to the Government's mental health strategy consultation, the Scottish Association for Mental Health noted the 30 per cent increase in the child and adolescent mental health services workforce between 2009 and 2016, but it also noted the increase in the waiting list for assessment and the number of young people who are being admitted for CAMHS treatment. SAMH also points to the fact that not all health boards are meeting the access to treatment target. I am sure that the minister will agree that waiting for mental health support such as CAMHS is not acceptable. For young people, it can be devastating. SAMH is calling on the Government to include the assessment of mental health education in the schools inspection regime and I support SAMH in that aspiration.

This time last year, I was a teacher. Every morning, I stood in front of my registration class for 15 minutes, saying the school prayer, taking the register, and reading the daily bulletin. Registration also involved listening to my pupils.

For that reason, I always found registration to be a fundamental part of the school day. Although it is now time for the Government to reflect critically on how mental health education is delivered, there is also a role for individual schools, in particular secondary schools, to reflect on how they timetable that first point of contact between pupils and teaching staff in the school day.

I know that some local authorities have removed registration altogether, but from sexism to homophobia, from any type of bullying to bereavement, registration is a crucial time in the school day in which pupils often come to teachers with their fears. I know that from experience.

Health and wellbeing is a core curriculum area under curriculum for excellence. A whole page of curriculum content is devoted to mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. It is clear, however, that the Government needs to provide greater clarity to schools in developing a preventative approach to issues around mental health, and to supporting resilience in the next generation. I understand that the Government is reviewing its mental health strategy, and I am grateful that the minister will provide a response today. I say to the minister that the strategy must contain a reference to delivery of mental health education in our schools if it is to be truly effective.

Young people need to know what good mental health means. They need, for example, to be taught about the importance of sport in developing positive mental health, and they need to develop an understanding of how positive relationships with others can decrease depression and anxiety. They need to be taught resilience within the safe space of the classroom, as Rachel explained to me in May.

I hope that the Government will listen.

12:52

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank Jenny Gilruth for this members' business and for giving us the opportunity to talk about mental health in the chamber today. It is an area of health policy that has often been overlooked in the past and is now receiving the kind of attention that it deserves. I commend her for her persistence in pursuing the matter.

Although there is a high degree of political consensus around mental health, we cannot let consensus breed complacency. Around one quarter of Scots suffer, or have suffered, from a mental health problem. That remains a staggering statistic and, given the stigma that still surrounds the issue, the figure might be higher still.

I will concentrate my brief remarks on the Scottish Youth Parliament's report on mental

health, which notes that the one-in-four figure is mirrored in young people—one in four suffer, or have suffered, from a mental health problem. It is astonishing that half of all diagnosable mental health problems start before the age of 14, and three quarters by the age of 21.

Last week, with my colleague Miles Briggs, I had the pleasure of meeting a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament. I was incredibly impressed with her passion to see change in how we think about mental health and how we act on it—her message was loud and clear. The topic is being raised in youth parliaments across the UK because—to use the SYP’s terminology—it is truly an “epidemic” among our young people. As Jenny Gilruth notes in her motion, it is extremely worrying that 70 per cent of young people are unaware of what mental health services are available in their community. That is not just down to a lack of publicly available information; it is—as the Scottish Youth Parliament’s report notes—also down to mental health not being discussed enough in the classroom.

That report says that discussing mental health is “way down the list of priorities”

and that

“It’s felt to be more important for you to get qualifications than be healthy and happy at school”.

With that in mind, it is no wonder that only one tenth of young people feel that they would be comfortable talking to a teacher about their mental health. In my view, we need to act now so that young people feel confident and able to discuss mental health openly, without fear of ridicule or recrimination.

I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government will later this year be publishing its strategy for mental health, which will, I hope, provide a blueprint for addressing the mental health needs of Scots of all ages, but particularly young people. However, we cannot just let that strategy gather dust: well-intentioned sentiments must be matched with action.

Our party points to our pledge for an additional £300 million to be invested in improving mental health treatment over the course of this parliamentary session. We would like to see some of that go towards mental health education.

It is clear from the Scottish Youth Parliament’s report and other sources that we need to work harder to deliver better mental health support in education, and to ensure that all young people in particular are aware of where to find such support.

The emphasis on early intervention in the Scottish Government’s consultation paper is welcome, but as the Scottish Youth Parliament

has noted, more needs to be done in schools to ensure that mental health becomes an open topic, rather than a closed book.

12:56

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Jenny Gilruth on securing an opportunity to discuss this important issue. I apologise for having to leave before the debate is concluded.

The Scottish Government put down a marker in this area when it launched the Scottish attainment challenge in February 2015 and referenced delivery not just in relation to literacy and numeracy but health and wellbeing, thereby joining the dots between the two areas.

As Barnardo’s states in its briefing for the debate,

“Good mental health is integral to children and young people’s ability to achieve and reach their full potential in education.”

We know that there can be a number of contributory factors to poor mental health among young people and I will touch on a couple. First, there is bullying. I am mindful of the push to tackle LGBT bullying, which Jenny Gilruth highlighted. We would all, of course, be supportive of that, but it is important that we do not focus on that particular type of bullying to the detriment of other types. Bullying is bullying, whether it concerns someone’s sexuality, ethnicity or appearance, and it is unacceptable on so many levels, not least of which is that of mental harm. Indeed, bullying can leave a legacy into adulthood.

Secondly—I admit that I had not recognised this factor until reading the Marie Curie briefing for the debate—there is the impact of bereavement. Any adult who has suffered the loss of a parent knows the impact, immediate and lingering, that it can have. Imagine what it must be like for a youngster who does not have the emotional maturity that comes with adulthood and life experience.

We are told that 2,500 parents die each year in Scotland, leaving 4,100 bereaved children. The research suggests that there are more than 5,000 kids in our country who are significantly affected by bereavement and that 90 per cent of those at Polmont young offenders institution have suffered significant bereavement in the past. Those are thought-provoking statistics that absolutely endorse the Government’s plans to appoint a new national co-ordinator for childhood bereavement.

How do we set about better supporting young people in this area? There is quite clearly a need for early identification of issues and for the creation of an environment within educational settings that increases knowledge and

understanding around mental health and gives youngsters ready access to any information and support that they might require in the area and the confidence to take advantage of that. We need to be able to head off a majority of issues long before CAMHS referrals become necessary.

However, in developing such an approach, we must also—more than anything—listen to the views of young people themselves in order to understand what they feel they need and the form that messages might best take.

Jenny Gilruth's motion notes the report by the Scottish Youth Parliament on the matter. I want to reference a comment from the report, covering the lived experience of a youngster who, feeling isolated and alone, sought to self-diagnose online:

"The internet is a very scary place. It over-exaggerates and the scaremongering is extreme ... I was feeling sad at the start of the year. I googled how I was feeling, and by the end I was convinced I had paranoid schizophrenia. It was terrifying."

That comment really hammers home the need to ensure that troubled young people can easily access the right information and support.

It was reported recently that more than 900 children in Scotland contacted ChildLine about suicide last year. That stat tells us that we are currently coming up short in the area of children's mental health.

I will finish on a positive note by highlighting a small example of good practice that is being implemented in my constituency—indeed, at the primary school that my children attended. Deaf children often suffer from low self-esteem and mental health issues as a result of feeling isolated, particularly if they are the only child in their school who is deaf. Carlogie primary in Carnoustie has a hearing support base for deaf pupils from across Angus, so in that setting isolation is less of an issue. Nevertheless, the base offers a communal area where deaf pupils can meet each other in the morning and discuss their day with the teacher of the deaf before beginning class—an opportunity that is damagingly denied them in mainstream settings.

That initiative, and the wider work that is done by the hearing support base, is designed to develop confidence and positive self-esteem and to ensure inclusion, thereby helping to address the mental health and wellbeing of the deaf pupils. It may sound like a relatively simple idea that is targeted at a relatively small number of young people, but successfully tackling mental health issues among youngsters will involve small-scale as well as large-scale measures. If we are to achieve that success, we must ensure that no group is excluded.

13:01

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful to Jenny Gilruth for bringing a debate on this important motion to the chamber. As Scottish Labour's inequalities spokeswoman, I welcome the opportunity to debate the contribution that mental health education can make to closing the attainment gap.

Jenny Gilruth rightly refers in her motion to the worrying statistics collated by the Scottish Youth Parliament, which members have mentioned today. They show that almost three quarters of young people who have experienced a mental health problem did not know what support was available in their local area. We must commend the Scottish Youth Parliament for its comprehensive research, which has enabled us to hear the voices of almost 1,500 young people from across Scotland. It is concerning that more than half of the young people in the survey said that they would not feel comfortable speaking to a teacher about mental health. That indicates that we need a cultural shift to deal with what the SYP is calling "Our generation's epidemic".

I am not sure whether it was Terri Smith, the chair of the Scottish Youth Parliament, to whom Donald Cameron was referring in his speech, but I too had the pleasure of meeting her recently. She talked me through the vital work that the SYP is carrying out to uncover the truth about young people and mental health. I was really moved by her story of recovery from mental health issues. The fact that she has spoken so openly will certainly encourage others to do the same.

It is clear from speaking to Terri Smith and other young people that they feel that they are being failed by the system that should be supporting them. That is putting young people at a disadvantage in the classroom.

Jenny Gilruth spoke about the region of Mid Scotland and Fife. In the Central Scotland region that I serve, dozens and dozens of young people are unable to access the mental health services that they need. We have discussed the CAMHS targets today, and I look forward to getting an update from the minister on the efforts that are being made to address the issue of waiting times. It is simply unacceptable that thousands of young people are left languishing on waiting lists for more than four and a half months, which amounts to more than an entire school term.

Jenny Gilruth highlighted the link between poverty and poor mental health. Just last week at First Minister's question time, I raised that point with Nicola Sturgeon. The Scottish health survey shows that there is a real postcode lottery and a link between deprivation and poor mental health. That situation is not improving. The Government

has recognised that there is much more work to be done, and I hope that we see in the new mental health strategy a commitment to take forward evidence-based, targeted programmes to improve this dismal situation and address the stubborn link between deprivation and poor mental health.

We know that the treatment of young people with mental health issues is just as important as treatment for those who experience problems with physical health. There needs to be a step change in the way in which schools approach attainment to ensure that good mental health is embedded in the curriculum. The Scottish Youth Parliament is in a strong position to make recommendations on the matter. It suggests that Education Scotland should develop a mental health standard for schools to bring mental health into sharp focus in classrooms.

Graeme Dey mentioned Barnardo's Scotland, which has come up with some really good ideas in its response to the Government's consultation. I hope that those ideas will be taken on board. Barnardo's tells us that it feels that there is an overemphasis on the medical model and that there should be more emphasis on a social model. The "Time 4 Me" project in Northern Ireland presents some really good practice and I hope that the minister can take that on board when she looks at the consultation responses.

Wraparound support programmes provide opportunities to promote positive mental and emotional health through discussion around relationships, working with others, sex, drugs, smoking, alcohol and other health-related issues. For those pupils who are having difficulties or are in distress, schools also have the capacity to offer support through mentoring or school-based counselling.

That is a model we can all learn from, and I urge the Scottish Government to look at Barnardo's work in Northern Ireland as the new mental health strategy is taken forward.

13:05

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I also congratulate Jenny Gilruth on securing today's debate. I am pleased to take part in it. It is important to recognise the classroom experience that she brought to the chamber on the issue. I hope that the minister takes forward her ideas.

All of us agree that mental health education is extremely important. We must work to deliver a better strategy in the future that meets the needs of our young people. Early access to information and support can be crucial in preventing mental health difficulties among our young children and adolescents developing into more acute mental health conditions. Awareness and information

have a vital part to play in progressing the elimination of the stigma around mental health problems.

Half of those with lifetime mental health problems first experienced symptoms by the age of 14. Jenny Gilruth's motion refers to the Scottish Youth Parliament's recently published report on mental health awareness and information, "Our generation's epidemic". As Donald Cameron said, we both met the Scottish Youth Parliament last week to discuss the report, which makes a valuable and welcome contribution to the debate.

As the motion suggests, it is of great concern that the vast majority of young people who took part in the SYP's research did not know what mental health information, support and services were available in their local areas. One of the report's key recommendations is that schools, colleges and universities should all provide high-quality information about mental health.

We believe that it is essential that such information is made available, and that access to it is user friendly. Where possible, pupils and students should be involved in the process so that they can have real input on the type of information they would like to receive and its design. Young people should be aware of what support is available for them in their local areas, and mental health and physical health should be looked at together.

For a generation that is used to getting most of its information from the internet, it is appropriate that young people are directed to safe online resources such as Young Minds and Aye Mind. Aye Mind works with young people aged 13 to 21 to create and share a wide range of online resources in partnership with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Snook and the Mental Health Foundation.

I believe that social media has a vital role to play, and that companies such as Facebook and Twitter should also play a role in providing information. As part of the social responsibility agenda, those companies could be encouraged to offer opportunities in their geographical and age-specific advertising. I have written to both Facebook and Twitter to raise that idea and I am happy to share the responses with members across the chamber once I receive them.

We also believe that age-appropriate information on local mental health support services should be provided in general practitioner surgeries, hospitals and other national health service settings. Informal peer-to-peer support at youth groups, clubs and voluntary organisations that work with young people is also vital.

The previous mental health strategy made a commitment to increase local knowledge of social

prescribing opportunities—low-intensity treatments such as self-help and peer support—but SAMH has pointed out that progress in meeting that commitment has been very slow.

A lot of good work is already being done in the voluntary sector to offer mental health education and support to our young people. I commend Place2Be, which is working with primary schools in some of Edinburgh's most disadvantaged communities to offer therapeutic and emotional support to pupils and their families.

Today's debate is timely. I hope that it will help inform ministers as they prepare the new mental health strategy and encourage them to ensure that mental health education is an integral part of that strategy when it is brought forward.

13:09

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I join others in congratulating Jenny Gilruth, not just on securing the debate but on setting the scene very well. I also thank the Scottish Youth Parliament for its work in the area. "Our generation's epidemic: Young people's awareness and experience of mental health information, support, and services" is a thorough report that articulates very well the nature of the problems that are faced and what gives rise to them. Just as important, it goes on to set out a number of recommendations, all of which are practical and deliverable, on information, support and services.

I pay particular tribute to Orkney's two members of the Scottish Youth Parliament, Jack Norquoy and Thorfinn Moffat, for their actions in promoting the report locally in Orkney, and for effectively articulating the specific islands dimension to the issue. Young people who live in an island setting face specific challenges—for example, the availability of services or the risk of isolation—that, perhaps, others do not have to face.

Before I address the specifics of the report and focus on the motion, I will make a couple of general observations on mental health. I still feel that it is not being taken seriously enough, which shames us all. Mental ill health will affect about one person in three in this country during their life, but we are still not open or honest enough about it. The impacts can be shattering for individuals and their family, friends and wider communities. Ultimately, there can be no good health without good mental health. That is why I believe that mental health needs to have parity in law with the treatment of physical health. If nothing else, that will help to drive budgetary decisions.

The on-going lack of a mental health strategy is more than regrettable.

The Minister for Mental Health (Maureen Watt): Will the member take an intervention?

Liam McArthur: I do not have time. The minister can address the point when she winds up.

I realise that the strategy is in the offing, but it is simply not acceptable that it has been allowed to lapse. I very much welcome Maureen Watt's appointment to her role, but her appointment needs to lead to the Government upping its game.

As I outlined, it is widely recognised that poor mental health has a damaging impact, but that is particularly so for young people, not least in shaping their life chances. That is illustrated well in the SYP report. Poor mental health can affect attainment, as Jenny Gilruth's motion rightly points out; it damages relationships and attachment; it undermines self-confidence and self-esteem; and it can exacerbate health inequalities, although it is important to remember that it affects people from all backgrounds and all parts of the country—it is utterly indiscriminate in that respect.

The report also paints an unsettling picture of patchy availability and awareness of services. I put on record my gratitude to all those who provide vital mental health services, both nationally and locally in my Orkney constituency, including the local mental health team, third sector organisations such as the Samaritans and the Orkney Blide Trust, and counselling services. In that regard, I declare an interest as a patron of the Orkney Alcohol Counselling & Advisory Service. I look forward to taking part in a panel discussion with a number of those groups at the Orkney youth cafe next month, but I think that they would all contend that they are under enormous strain. Gaps exist, delays are happening and young people are suffering as a consequence. Jenny Gilruth made that point powerfully in her opening speech.

As I said, the SYP's recommendations are practical and perhaps chart a way of delivering improvements, whether through a mental health standard for schools, the availability of good information for children and young people in our schools, or an action plan to promote good mental health. However, those things need to form part of a wider effort and to be picked up in the Government's overall strategy when it is finally produced.

I thank Jenny Gilruth again for making the debate possible and I thank the Scottish Youth Parliament for its invaluable contribution, which shines a light on an issue that too often remains shrouded in stigma, ignorance and complacency. It is long overdue that we, as a country, speak our mind clearly when it comes to the critical importance of good mental health.

13:14

The Minister for Mental Health (Maureen Watt): I, too, thank Jenny Gilruth for bringing this debate to the chamber. I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Scottish Government.

However, I start by saying that Liam McArthur has got it completely wrong. We have, and have had, a mental health strategy. It is just that we are going to update it and take it forward for the next 10 years, and I have been working on that since I was appointed to my post. Those who work in mental health and all the young people who have contributed through their various organisations realise that the Government is taking the issue very seriously through the creation of my position, which has been well received by the many organisations that I have met.

The importance of mental wellbeing in raising attainment and closing the gap is recognised, and it is a focus of many of the authorities and schools that are involved in the Scottish attainment challenge. Using nurturing and restorative approaches helps to create positive environments in which to encourage marginalised children and young people to learn, thrive and feel engaged.

Health and wellbeing is one of the eight curricular areas in curriculum for excellence. Its substantial importance is reflected in its position at the centre of the curriculum and at the heart of children's learning, as well as in the fact that it is a central focus of the Scottish attainment challenge and the national improvement framework for education. Along with literacy and numeracy, health and wellbeing is one of the three core areas that are the responsibility of all staff in schools. Children and young people should feel happy, safe, respected and included in the learning environment, and all staff should be proactive in promoting positive relationships and behaviour in the classroom, playground and wider learning community.

Jenny Gilruth specifically mentioned the position of LGBT children. The Government is providing £75,000 to LGBT Youth Scotland to underpin delivery of youth work to young LGBT people, which includes supporting their positive mental health. The Deputy First Minister recently met LGBT Youth Scotland to discuss what can be done to support those with LGBT issues.

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of nurturing approaches in addressing and overcoming the barriers that some children experience in school. That addresses many of the concerns around equity that are outlined in the Scottish attainment challenge.

Education Scotland has developed a national resource to support the development and practice of nurturing approaches for secondary schools,

which will help to provide equal opportunities for all children and young people to learn and develop. Monica Lennon and Miles Briggs made good points when they said that people are not aware of what is available. People may have heard of CAMHS but, as many members said, they might not need to wait for CAMHS—I am dealing with waiting times, which is a separate issue—as they may instead require lower-tier intervention. Children's input to that is vital and a lot of third sector organisations are involved in it.

Monica Lennon: Does the minister accept that having counsellors based in schools might be part of the solution? Rather than have people waiting to go through the CAMHS referral system, might it not be a better approach to have support in schools?

Maureen Watt: Absolutely, and that is already happening in many schools. For example, we are providing £90,000 for Place2Be, which is a charity that provides school-based mental health services, including one-to-one counselling and group therapy—I think that Miles Briggs mentioned it. Place2Be is delivering those services in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and it is expanding into North Ayrshire. It deals with a wide range of social issues that might be affecting children's mental health.

Education Scotland is developing a national resource to support the development and practice of nurturing approaches for primary schools. A whole-school nurturing approach can promote school connectedness, resilience and the development of social and emotional competences, all of which are key aspects of promoting mental wellbeing.

In Jenny Gilruth's own patch of Fife, six primary schools and three secondary schools are receiving support through the Scottish attainment challenge schools programme, through which more than £450,000 has been allocated to the primary schools in 2016-17. The funding is supporting improvements in health and wellbeing across the schools, with a focus on supporting wellbeing through the recruitment of educational psychologists and family support workers.

I highlight the example of St Kenneth's primary school in Lochgelly, which is funding a drugs, alcohol and psychotherapy worker to work with children and families and talk through concerns through nurture, counselling and coaching support, with the aim of reducing or negating social and emotional barriers to learning.

As other members have done, I very much welcome the Scottish Youth Parliament's latest research, "Our generation's epidemic: Young people's awareness and experience of mental health information, support, and services". That

research has been undertaken as part of the SYP's speak your mind campaign on mental health. I met the Scottish Youth Parliament on 21 September, and I congratulate it on its fascinating and well-written document. I have taken note of the recommendations that are specifically for the Scottish Government, and we will consider those as part of our public engagement on the new mental health strategy.

During that public engagement, we have worked closely with the Scottish Youth Parliament to ensure that young people have had an opportunity to contribute their views on matters that affect them. In addition, I met the Church of Scotland's youth assembly, Young Scot and the Scottish children's services coalition in an effort to help me to decide how to take forward the strategy. That work is all part of the improvement agenda that we have driven forward over the past few years through the delivery of our national mental health and suicide prevention strategies.

I expect that the new strategy will focus on encouraging the development of new models of managing mental health problems in primary care, and I anticipate that it will have a very strong focus on early intervention and prevention, which Donald Cameron mentioned. The strategy will certainly not gather dust on my watch. As soon as the strategy is published, I will drive it forward and I will continue to do so for as long as I am in this post.

The strategy will also have a focus on developing and measuring outcomes for mental health work, and part of the significant £150 million of additional investment that the Scottish Government recently announced for improving mental health and wellbeing will contribute directly to that aim. In January, the First Minister announced that part of that funding—£54.1 million of it—will go towards directly improving access to mental health services for adults and children.

In February, we announced a mental health primary care fund as part of our £10 million commitment to mental health primary care services and the wider transformation of primary care. Working with their partners, boards can submit proposals for innovative approaches to mental health support in primary care. That provides a real opportunity to think differently about how services are organised.

I look forward to the challenge—it is certainly a challenge—and I look forward to working with members to deliver our ambition.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. That concludes the debate. I suspend the meeting until 2.30.

13:22

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Early Learning and Childcare Provision

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-01703, in the name of Mark McDonald, on expansion of early learning and childcare provision. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons. I call Mark McDonald to speak to and move the motion.

14:30

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald): The current Scottish National Party Government has done more than any previous devolved Administration or other Government in the United Kingdom to expand entitlement to free early learning and childcare. When we first came to power in 2007, we increased provision of free early learning and childcare provision from 412.5 to 475 hours annually. In 2014 we legislated to increase entitlement to free early learning and childcare provision further to 600 hours annually. We also extended entitlement to two-year-olds who are looked after or in kinship care, and then to two-year-olds who are in families on low incomes. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 also placed duties on local authorities to consult parents and families as well as to provide flexibility and choice.

In short, the Government has achieved a lot, but there is more to do to achieve our ambitions. It is worth reminding ourselves why our policy of provision and expansion of free entitlement for all three-year-olds and four-year-olds and more than a quarter of two-year-olds matters. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has identified participation in early learning as a key policy to promote economic growth, higher productivity and social equality. The expansion to 600 hours has helped to reduce costs on families and to protect household budgets. Changes that we have made since 2007 are saving families an additional £780 per year.

The changes are also enabling more parents to return to work, education and training, thereby boosting family incomes. Scotland's current female employment rate is higher than that of the UK as a whole and is the fourth-highest in Europe. International evidence also highlights the positive benefits of early years provision in helping to support more women into work.

Although the economic benefits of our approach are among the drivers, they are not the primary reason for seeking to expand and improve provision of early learning and childcare. High-quality early learning and childcare can play a vital role in our overall approach to narrowing the attainment gap. It is my ambition to prevent children starting school with any substantial gap in attainment.

Our approach means additional support needs can be identified and addressed earlier, thereby minimising the need for additional support in education. Studies in the US also suggest that there are significant social benefits from participation in early learning, with vulnerable children being less likely to become involved with the criminal justice system as young people and adults.

That is why this Government is determined to transform early learning and childcare in this parliamentary session by expanding free entitlement for all three-year-olds and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds from 600 to 1,140 hours annually by 2020. It is also why we have described—and will continue to describe—the policy as our most transformative infrastructure project. No other policy has such potential to change children's lives, the fortunes of their families and the prospects of our economy in the short and long terms.

It is a policy with a purpose, so it is essential that we get the expansion right. We now have a substantial evidence base upon which to build. On Tuesday we published "Financial review of early learning and childcare in Scotland: the current landscape", which provides a comprehensive picture of the current early learning and childcare landscape in Scotland. The review contributes robust data to our existing evidence base and will support our work to develop the funding and delivery models that will give effect to our transformative expansion plans.

The review highlights that 125,000 children and their families benefit from free entitlement to early learning and childcare each year. The early learning and childcare sector is diverse, with around 3,700 providers offering funded and non-funded provision. Of those, 46 per cent are run by local authorities, 29 per cent by the private sector and 25 per cent by the third sector. There are about 5,600 childminders currently operating. Partner providers in the private and third sectors play key roles in offering funded entitlement, and account for about 1,000 of the 2,500 settings that are offering the entitlement.

The review highlights that the cost of delivering provision is, relatively, more costly in local authority settings, when they are compared with partner-provider settings. However, the gap

appears overwhelmingly to be explained by the relatively lower rates of pay in partner settings. We estimate that about 80 per cent of practitioners and 50 per cent of supervisors in partner settings are paid less than the living wage. I note that the National Day Nurseries Association commented yesterday that it wants to see the Government's living wage ambition realised across the sector as part of the expansion. I am keen to work with it and with others to make that happen.

In terms of the funding situation that has been highlighted today by the BBC—the money that has been allocated does not all appear to have been spent as intended—it is for local authorities to account for their spending, but it is clear that the Government has met its commitments to fund the policy fully. We will use the learning from the review to inform our choices for the future.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I tend to agree with the minister about that point, but does he accept that the Scottish Government has some responsibility for finding out exactly what has gone wrong?

Mark McDonald: I have had, and will continue to have, discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. When we put in place a policy and the funding to follow it, we want to be sure that the funding benefits the children whom we want it to benefit. I take on board Liz Smith's point; she should be reassured that the Scottish Government continues to discuss the situation with COSLA.

If the policy is to fulfil its potential, it must be developed around key universal and underpinning principles. I have identified four key principles that I consider to be central to delivering a policy that benefits children and families: quality, flexibility, accessibility and affordability. Quality is absolutely central to achieving the best outcomes for our children. It means ensuring a high-quality experience for all children and it complements other early years and educational activity to close the attainment gap. It recognises the value of those whom we trust to give our children the best start in life. It encompasses the following: support for positive child development and help for children to develop their cognitive, social and behavioural skills; help for the children who stand to benefit the most, which will result in a narrowing of the attainment gap; and a highly skilled and diverse workforce working in physical environments—indoor and outdoor—that are designed to maximise children's experience.

Flexibility means ensuring that the expansion supports parents who are in work, training or study, and that patterns of provision are better aligned with working patterns, while delivering in a way that maintains a high-quality experience for the child. Flexibility encompasses effective

partnerships between public and partner providers, a range of delivery options that meet the needs of parents and carers across Scotland—including improved links with working hours—strengthened cross-authority working, and implementation of a more accessible system for parents and carers to secure early learning and childcare for their children by exploiting the benefits of digital technology.

Accessibility refers to the geographical location of the provision—it must be as convenient as possible for families to access—but it also incorporates the need for children who have complex and additional needs to be offered appropriate and accessible early learning and childcare experiences. Accessibility encompasses the following: targeted investment to boost capacity in areas that have poor availability and areas of deprivation; innovative new capacity being delivered by the private and/or voluntary sectors, including opportunities for closely located employers to work together to offer early learning and childcare provision close to the workplace; encouragement of expansion within the social enterprise sector and exploration of how community empowerment could be used to encourage and develop community-led provision, particularly in remote and rural areas; and development within their locality of appropriate provision for children who have additional support needs.

Affordability means ensuring increased access to affordable early learning and childcare that will help to reduce the barriers to participation in the labour market that some parents face. It encompasses the following: delivery of a funding approach that sustains a range of provision for families; our ensuring that the cost of additional paid-for hours does not act as a barrier to employment, training or studying; our ensuring that we deliver on time and within budget, thereby paving the way for long-term financial sustainability; and improvement of integration with wider services, including hub-type provision in which a range of services for children and families are located.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): On affordability for flexibility, the key issue for a lot of parents is that too much provision is half days so they have to mix and match childcare, which is a fundamental cost. What will the minister do to address that point?

Mark McDonald: The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 contains a requirement for local authorities to consult parents and to pay due regard to flexibility. It would be fair to say that, in a number of areas, we have seen shifts in the offer that is being made to parents, although I accept that more needs to be done. The

expansion provides greater opportunity for that kind of flexible approach. I will go on to outline how we will take that forward.

We are at a pivotal moment in the development of our policy in early learning and childcare. Just as children have one real chance at childhood, which we in the chamber share a responsibility to support, we have an historic opportunity to create provision that gives our children's educational and economic prospects a solid foundation for success. I believe that all parties broadly support our policy. There may be degrees of disagreement on its extent, the approach and how to achieve it, but I see that as a strength and not as a weakness. It is good that we can debate the detail of the policy, having collectively signed up to the principle.

Organisations, providers and, importantly, families have a view on what needs to happen to realise our ambition to ensure that every child benefits from their free entitlement to early learning.

I want to hear a diverse range of views—and not just within the confines of today's debate. I want to consider the variety of ideas, views and experience that exist out there to ensure that we get absolutely right the blueprint behind the policy. That is why I can announce that we will undertake a consultation on our blueprint for early learning and childcare, which will begin on Friday 7 October. Once we have analysed the responses and determined our approach, I will report back to Parliament on the next steps.

I want to make it clear that it will be a genuine consultation. We have a better understanding of what is working well with existing provision and where we need to think more carefully about how we will take forward expansion. Within that, it is becoming clear that in order to deliver universal entitlement while also focusing resources where they can have the most impact for children and families, there might not be a single model that meets all needs. Instead, a more blended approach to funding and delivery might be what we should be considering. Quality will remain paramount, but I especially want to know more about which approaches work well to create the flexibility and choice that we need while also improving accessibility in its widest sense.

I hope that we will see positive engagement with the consultation that can help to ensure that our final approach delivers the best possible experience and outcomes for our children. In the meantime, we will also get on with delivering on commitments that have already been made that support our ambition. Our delivery model trials, which are due to be launched in January, will help to determine best practice in local-level delivery models.

We have committed to ensuring that nurseries in the most disadvantaged areas will benefit from an additional early learning and childcare graduate or teacher by 2018. To support that, we will increase the number of early learning and childcare practitioners undertaking the bachelor of arts degree in childhood practice from autumn 2017. I will continue to keep Parliament updated on our progress towards that ambition.

Good design guidance for early learning and childcare settings is being developed for publication by next summer, utilising up-to-date intelligence from the Care Inspectorate and the Scottish Futures Trust. We will develop a new induction and professional learning framework for childminders in order to deliver best practice in the profession, and we will continue to take steps to ensure that provision is appropriately tailored to suit the needs of eligible two-year-olds.

I have said that it is a policy that I believe commands broad support in principle both in Parliament and across Scotland's communities. I believe that today's debate and the consultation that we are about to undertake will help to ensure that we give Scotland's children not just a better today, but a better tomorrow.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the publication of the *Financial Review of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland: the Current Landscape*, which provides a comprehensive picture of how the funding provided by the Scottish Government to deliver early learning and childcare in Scotland is being used; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to transform provision by almost doubling free entitlement from 600 to 1140 hours for every 3- and 4-year-old and eligible 2-year-olds; agrees that this transformational expansion must deliver a high-quality experience for children, involving a highly-skilled and qualified workforce, which is geographically accessible and meets the needs of children who require additional support, while also delivering the flexibility, affordability and choice, which parents need to support them in work, training or study, and agrees that the Scottish Government should consult on a policy blueprint for early learning and childcare in order to achieve this and ensure that this entitlement helps to ensure that more of Scotland's children get the best possible start in life and contributes to the Scottish Government's ambitions to close the attainment gap, tackle inequalities and boost inclusive economic growth.

14:42

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I think that this is the eighth time in the recent past that the Parliament has engaged in a full debate about the early years programme, alongside the many committee sessions and ministerial statements on the same issue. That is a sign of what the minister just said about the issue's prominence; it is also a sign that the issue continues to present the Scottish Government—if not the whole Parliament—with some of its most

significant challenges, as the publication of this week's report makes abundantly clear.

Even if we might dispute some of the figures and exactly whose fault the underspend might be, we learn from the report that such an underspend has taken place. I can well understand that some parents, when they saw that news this morning, might have wondered exactly what happened and might be a little perturbed.

The feedback from last week's early years Scotland conference, which included some of Scotland's foremost thinkers in the area, made plain exactly what the policy challenges are, as well as reiterating the compelling and consistent evidence about the importance of the early years. There is unanimous agreement about the challenges that we face but perhaps less agreement about how to confront those challenges.

I will set out the policy commitments from the Conservatives and I will press the Scottish Government hard to make one important and radical change by adopting another Scottish Conservative policy that it has said publicly that it is keen on, because of the feedback from parents, but which I notice does not appear in its motion. I will come to that a bit later.

First, I will deal with the earliest years—even the period pre-birth. I restate our firm commitment to the midwife and health visiting system, which commands the overwhelming trust of the public because it delivers some of the finest personal family care in Scotland, thanks to a dedicated and professional staff. The Scottish Government has rightly pledged to create 500 more health visitor posts, but that still leaves many professionals with huge case loads, and we know that there are recruitment issues in some areas.

Evidence from abroad suggests that we should seek to extend health visitor provision up to the age of seven years rather than just five, but that demands a major spending commitment. As that can be only a longer-term aim just now, there are perhaps other things that we can do in the short term.

Part of that should involve addressing neonatal care. We all know that a recent report from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health identified overworked staff, cancelled appointments and insufficient medical cover in some children's wards. The report also said that staff did not get enough time off to study for the crucial training courses and qualifications that they need to do their jobs properly. Those are serious concerns.

I turn specifically to childcare and nursery provision, and I set my comments against the backdrop of the changes to schools policy that

were recently announced. The Scottish Government has a laudable aim to deliver 600 hours of free childcare, but the reality is that the provision of places remains a problem. The majority of funded places are made up of three-hour slots, exactly as Daniel Johnson described. In many schools, provision can happen only in term time, and some families are forced to use private providers even if that is not their first choice.

On top of that, a number of local authority places can be purchased only in partnership nurseries, for which there is sometimes a capping policy. We know from the work that has been carried out by authorities, education experts and parents groups such as the fair funding for our kids group that there are serious pressures in provision. Despite the Scottish Government's commitment to increase the number of hours that are provided, those pressures are putting barriers in the way of really flexible access for parents in choosing a place for their child. The net result is that both choice and flexibility are heavily constrained.

Here lies a contradiction in the Scottish National Party policy. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney, has said unequivocally that the best education needs to be based on strong pupil-teacher trust and that that is greatly enhanced when staff are liberated to follow their own professional instincts and when schools enjoy greater autonomy. If that is true—I wholeheartedly agree with Mr Swinney in that respect—surely that is also the case for childcare and nursery provision.

If the Scottish Government is now committed to the principle of freeing up our primary and secondary schools and to acting on "A Plan for Scotland: The Scottish Government's Programme for Scotland 2016-17", in which it says that it wants to spend £1 million on testing different delivery models—the minister hinted at that—why will it not also properly free up our nurseries and childcare facilities? Is the Government really committed to a child account, as was reported this morning? I will be interested to know when the minister sums up whether that is a specific pledge.

Like parents, the Scottish Conservatives firmly believe that we need to completely free up the system so that there is genuine choice and so that local authorities are not able to restrict places in the manner that has been flagged up by the fair funding for our kids campaign. At present, the mix of state, partnership and private provision is simply not working well enough.

As a start, we should perhaps look to some of the more flexible local authorities, which at least recognise the problem, even if they are not able to solve it completely. For nursery provision in

Edinburgh, for example, a voucher is allocated to parents in the form of a number code that the parents pass to the partnership nursery in which they want to purchase a place. That sometimes does not happen in other council areas, which leaves parents with an unacceptable postcode lottery.

Should we perhaps look to a country such as Sweden, which operates a wholesale and highly successful child voucher system that gives families a choice between public pre-schools and nurseries and approved private and voluntary sector childcare providers? Indeed, should we go even further and introduce a voucher system that allows the state money that is due to a child in his or her early years to be spent in units on registered childcare or nursery provision as and when parents choose? In that way, money would truly follow the child, and the system would be wholly responsive to parental demand.

Mark McDonald: I am grateful to Liz Smith for her supportive comments. On the funding issues, part of the reason why we are taking the opportunity to consult on the blueprint is that we want to gain feedback on the different approaches that could be taken, although we recognise that there might not be a one-size-fits-all model. I know that the Conservatives have nailed their colours to the mast in their amendment, but part of the consultation exercise will be about looking at different approaches that could be taken and at the feedback that we get on them. I give Liz Smith that commitment.

Liz Smith: I am grateful to the minister for that. However, we already know some of the feedback. The Conservatives are responding to what has been a long-term campaign from many parent groups about what the nub of the problem is.

I will raise something else. If we went to the system that we propose, we would get rid of the problem of birthday discrimination that the SNP persistently seems not to want to deal with. If the SNP is absolutely committed to closing the attainment gap, which I believe it is, we should not tolerate such a system. It is clear that some children are receiving the full two years, some children are getting 18 months and another set of children is getting only 15 months. Changing the funding mechanism could get rid of some of that difficulty, which is a serious problem for many parents.

Notwithstanding that or today's report, we recognise that no party is in a position to afford to do everything that it would like to do, so we believe that, in the short run, we have to focus on the families who face the toughest challenges. There is a thread of agreement there with the Scottish Government. That is very important.

I will finish by pressing the Scottish Government hard, because I would like it to commit to radical reform that would free up the system, reduce the inequalities and put the focus firmly on the quality of care delivery rather than on the numbers game of more and more hours of provision, welcome as that may be. We are in a qualitative argument. There is no use in debating the numbers game if we cannot provide flexibility that works to ensure access for all parents and all our youngsters.

I move amendment S5M-01703.1, to leave out from "almost doubling" to end and insert:

"increasing free entitlement; agrees, in light of the evidence related to the earliest signs of the attainment gap, that the priority should be extending hours to a higher proportion of disadvantaged one- and two-year-olds, and believes that, in order to address the growing challenges of increasing the provision and quality of childcare, the Scottish Government should be radical in its approach by adopting a fully-flexible voucher system that is wholly responsive to parental demands for different kinds of childcare and early learning and that removes barriers to the supply of places."

14:52

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The Parliament holds consensus as one of its key virtues. The procedures that we adhere to, the committee structures and even the building's architecture were designed to promote agreement on the issues that are important to Scotland. That is not always how it works out, but I think that we all agree that this is one of those issues on which we do agree. We agree that tackling inequality is one of the key things that we are here to do, and the role and importance of childcare in doing that are beyond dispute.

We are all aware of how stubborn the gender pay gap is: women's pay is on average £175 less per week than that of their male colleagues, and flexible childcare is critical to helping working parents and especially mothers back into work. As the minister and Liz Smith pointed out, we know how critical early years education is to developing children's education. By the time they reach school, children from the poorest families have a vocabulary of on average 3,000 words, while their wealthy peers have a vocabulary of 5,000 words. If we are serious about tackling the attainment gap, waiting until children are at school is simply too late.

That is why getting childcare right is so important because, without it, we will simply not make headway in tackling such inequalities. I welcome the commitment that the Government is showing to childcare. I welcome the free hours that are being provided and I think that it is right to deliver more.

As Mark McDonald said, although much has been achieved, there is still much to do. To achieve the aims, we need some honesty about what is being delivered and some realism about whether it is meeting the needs of parents and our children.

Most important, we need to know how the Government is going to achieve a massive expansion in capacity. We need three things. We need a plan—we need to know how the expansion is going to work and how capacity is to double. If I may be blunt, while it is welcome that a blueprint is being published for consultation, that is not a full plan.

Secondly, we need quality. Childcare has to improve children's education and wellbeing. Thirdly, we need flexibility. If childcare does not fit with how work parents work, we are—frankly—barely getting started.

Let us look to the plan. The First Minister has called childcare the biggest capital project of this parliamentary session, and she is right. It will cost more than the Queensferry crossing, more than the M8, M73 and M74 project and more than any school or hospital. Its impact will also be far greater. However, we do not know how much the investment will be, where it is going, when it will be delivered or even who will deliver it.

Almost doubling the hours that are available will almost double the cost. Is the Government committing to spending—in revenue terms—an extra £300 million or maybe £400 million a year? The analysis this week does not spell that out.

On staff, the Government said this week that it does not know how much it will cost to advertise for, train and employ the promised extra 20,000 staff. Most childcare providers are not set up to provide lunch, so an expansion of the current local authority nurseries will require a huge capital injection not just to double the provision but to install hundreds, if not thousands, of kitchens.

We need quality, yet the average full-time early years practitioner who works in a private nursery is paid less than the living wage—they are paid a median of £7.71 per hour. However, nurseries are making a loss on their places, according to the National Day Nurseries Association. How can it be that partner providers are paying poverty pay to the people who look after our children? That cannot be the way to reduce the attainment gap. Any Government system that does not start with the living wage as its absolute minimum and the cornerstone of its calculations needs to look at how it is coming up with its numbers.

Save The Children is calling for all nurseries to include an early years teacher—a graduate with expertise in supporting children's language development. As we expand funded childcare, we

have to ensure that the extra money that is being invested delivers higher-wage, higher-skilled and higher-quality childcare.

We also need flexibility. Labour's call is for the SNP to lift its sights to what the childcare commission and others have said should be Scotland's long-term vision—52 weeks a year, and not 38; 50 hours a week, and not 30; provision for one and two-year-olds, too; and provision beyond the age of four.

We need childcare that is flexible enough for parents to use so that they can go back to work. As it stands, childcare is not flexible, and the Government must sort that out as it expands provision. Local authority nurseries are overwhelmingly half-day only. They provide their care in chunks of three hours and 10 minutes once a day, either in the morning or in the afternoon, and not in the school holidays. That is not how my working day runs, and it is the same for parents the length and breadth of Scotland. Every parent is therefore topping up childcare provision with other help and is sometimes ferrying their children—or asking grandparents or childminders to take them—from free provision to paid-for provision.

I ask members to imagine that childcare was totally flexible. If a parent dropped off their child at 8 am and picked them up at 6 pm five days a week from January, their 600 hours would run out by the end of March. Even if the provision was doubled, it would get them only to mid-June. With half-day childcare, we are only halfway there.

Because childcare issues do not go away when a child goes to school, we also need a plan for childcare that includes children beyond the age of four, with proper wraparound care. A great starting point would be a breakfast club being available to every child in every school. The arguments for breakfast clubs are clear and have been well rehearsed. They are great for parents who work, train or study. They are brilliant for children's nutrition and they set children up for the rest of their school day. Despite those facts, however, the proportion of schools with breakfast clubs is lower in Scotland than it is anywhere else in the UK, and there is no plan from the Scottish Government to expand that provision. We therefore hope that SNP members will back our amendment.

The Scottish Government is right to expand childcare. If Labour members sound critical, it is because the current situation needs to be better. We need flexibility and more capacity. We need a plan for childcare. We need childcare that works for children, for parents and for working families.

I am pleased to move amendment S5M-01703.3, to insert after "training or study":

“; notes the pressures that working families face in accessing affordable and high-quality childcare that fits round their daily lives; considers that a transformational expansion of childcare in Scotland must also look at how to provide affordable wrap-around childcare for all ages as recommended by the Commission for Childcare Reform; recognises the important role that breakfast clubs can play in a child’s start to the school day and to parents’ needs in work, training or study; agrees that the Scottish Government should provide additional investment in breakfast clubs, ensuring that they are available to all primary schools”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Tavish Scott to speak to and move amendment S5M-01703.2. You have up to seven minutes, Mr Scott.

14:58

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I enjoy the poshness of your voice on these occasions.

Late last night—Mark McDonald will appreciate this, as a football fan—I watched a bit of the highlights of Celtic and Man City from Glasgow. Just after that, the news came on. I was surrounded by papers for the debate, the Government’s financial review and so on, but what got me last night was the haunting picture of that young boy from Aleppo who had been gassed in one of the Russian or Syrian attacks on that city. I call it a city, but it hardly exists any more.

I turned back to all the papers that were in front of me, and here we are, all asking for X hundreds of millions for this and X hundreds of millions for that—by the way, I should add that that is not my party’s policy. Quite a lot of me immediately thought that we should be discussing how to get humanitarian aid into that young boy’s life as much as we should be discussing our country. Maybe that was just the moment that I was in as I tried to think about childcare in Scotland; instead, I thought that childcare in Aleppo is a different concept—they are just trying to stay alive.

As Daniel Johnson and the minister said, there is a lot of broad political agreement on the direction of travel that is being embarked on. Liz Smith struck up an entertaining debate about vouchers. I seem to remember that being Conservative policy when I was a candidate in 1999, which probably shows that I am pretty long in the tooth. You probably remember the same policy, Presiding Officer, although you were not advocating it, I should swiftly add.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Tread warily when you talk about being long in the tooth.

Tavish Scott: Liz Smith talked about providing enough flexibility, and I guess that that will be part of the debate.

There does not seem to be much doubt about the importance of making the big switch and big investment in our children’s future. I would not disagree with the minister’s arguments about trying to do as much as possible to target those in our society who face the greatest challenges, whether in terms of their educational upbringing or the health inequalities that, to be blunt, very much exist in parts of Scotland. As Daniel Johnson rightly pointed out, when children from the most deprived backgrounds start primary school, their vocabulary is, on average, 12 months behind that of their well-off peers. The OECD, which is much cited by all of us these days, has confirmed that

“these gaps widen as children move up the school system”.

That, surely, is not acceptable. It is intolerable that we continue to see that.

Liz Smith: Is it not true that one reason why it would be helpful to have a flexible voucher system is that it would get rid of some of the difficulties around birthday discrimination, which prevents some of our youngsters from getting their full share of nursery provision?

Tavish Scott: That may be a good argument for a voucher system, but I can think of one or two others that are perhaps less good arguments for it. I will come to them later, not least because of the region that I represent in Parliament.

I will make two other points by way of introduction. The first is that I recognise that the Government has moved its position on the issue. For some time, Liberal Democrat members have argued for more investment in early intervention, and it is important to recognise that the Government has moved in that direction. Secondly, it is also important to cite Professor James Heckman’s Nobel prize, which gave worldwide recognition to the fact that a child’s life chances are improved if there is investment before the age of three. Research that he used shows that for every £1 that is spent before a child is three, £11 is saved later on.

I want to address the flexibility point that the minister, Liz Smith and Daniel Johnson made, in the context of rural and island areas. My amendment seeks to bring that point to Parliament this afternoon. I want the minister to consider three issues that arguably apply to the whole of Scotland, and which certainly apply to rural parts of Scotland, in terms of how we achieve the plan that Daniel Johnson was pushing back at the minister.

The first issue is workforce. Audrey Edwards, who is an executive education officer for Shetland Islands Council, told me:

“We currently struggle to recruit appropriately qualified staff to our remoter pre-school settings. The further away from the central area of Shetland”—

not Aberdeen or Edinburgh—

“you go, the harder it gets.”

Therefore, increasing entitlement will only become more of a challenge. What are the Government’s plans to support workforce development in the most remote and rural areas?

The Government is increasing the required level of qualification to improve quality. Perhaps the minister can address that issue when he winds up. I understand the point. We have seen such things in other areas. I seem to remember, some years ago, a long argument in the Parliament about the care sector, with a previous Government arguing for a greater level of qualification. However, that did not necessarily help us to get more carers in communities across Scotland. Although the principle of better qualifications is extremely laudable, there is a concern, not just in my local authority but, I am sure, in others, about how that will impact on the ability to recruit to those areas.

Mark McDonald: I take on board the point that Mr Scott makes. It is a question of making sure that we get the right combination of qualifications and career pathways, so that people know that they will have an opportunity to develop in the profession. We might address some of those issues by getting that balance right.

Tavish Scott: That seems an entirely appropriate way forward.

I also have a point to make about revenue funding, which I am sure that many other members will make. It relates to places in which pre-school provision has grown, but where there are no private providers. I make this point to counter Liz Smith’s argument about the complete freedom that the voucher system that she proposes would provide. I would love to have that freedom in places such as Shetland, but the reality there—and, I am sure, in many other local authority areas—is that the local authority is the provider. The Scottish Borders area is another good example. There will be some private providers, but there will have to be a whole lot more. We will have to encourage the development of that capacity if the target of providing 1,140 hours of early learning and childcare is to be achieved. I hope that the Government accepts that there needs to be a mechanism in the revenue funding streams that it is contemplating that will support not only the increased number of hours of provision, but the change in the model of delivery that is required.

On infrastructure, it will be the case not just in the islands but across Scotland that additions will have to be built on to many of our primary schools to enable them to have the capacity in nursery provision to cover the whole day. I hope that the minister will give some thought—in due course, if

not today—to the best way of making capital funds available to the sector to allow it to achieve the policy objective.

I make it clear that we strongly support the growth in the number of hours of early learning and childcare that children will be entitled to for the laudable reasons that have been given by all the front-bench speakers. As Daniel Johnson fairly put it, the plan is now the most important aspect for the future.

I move amendment S5M-01703.2, to insert at end:

“; believes that the importance of having a robust long-term delivery plan in place is demonstrated by the fact that many parents have problems accessing current entitlements to free provision and that the financial review confirmed that only 7% of two-year-olds were receiving free nursery care at the 2015 census, and believes that this plan must address the additional challenges of ensuring that rural and island communities fully share the benefits of this policy, both on the provision of pre-school education and the capital costs that local education authorities will incur.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Speeches should be of up to six minutes, although there is a tiny bit of time in hand, so if members take interventions, I will make it up to them.

15:06

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): There is not a member of the Scottish Parliament who would disagree with the notion that children are the key to Scotland having a prosperous future. That point has been made by the three previous speakers. Every child in Scotland deserves high-quality education. It is essential for there to be more teachers and childcare graduates to provide that quality of care, and to provide protection for young children and assurance for parents. Deprived communities need more resources and staff to provide that high-quality care for low-income families.

Increasing the amount of time that children from disadvantaged backgrounds spend with highly qualified practitioners can contribute to our efforts to close the attainment gap in school. As our motion says, we aim to provide every child with the highest standards of literacy and numeracy, because we know that the young children who face the greatest disadvantages benefit the most from high-quality provision.

I would not disagree with anything that Daniel Johnson said. It would be fantastic to have such wraparound care for 50 hours a week, 52 weeks of the year, but I think that the step from where we are now to what we are proposing is a considerable leap, on which we should be being congratulated. What Daniel Johnson was talking about was almost an uncosted wish list, and we

could all make one of those. I suggest that members should work with the Government to implement the current proposals and only then look at more ambitious targets.

Early learning and childcare provision should fit around families' needs. Every family from a disadvantaged background must be given the flexibility to have access to affordable high-quality childcare. OECD and European Commission evidence shows that childcare costs are a barrier to participation. Expanding the amount of funded childcare will help those with young children to participate in the labour market. As well as helping parents to work, that will help the Scottish economy. As the Scottish Government outlined in its economic strategy of March 2015, it will promote inclusive growth through support for a more diverse workforce by removing barriers to employment, such as lack of childcare.

I was concerned to read in the financial review that some local authorities do not appear to be using the funding that has been provided to benefit children and parents through childcare, and I would hate to think that that was indeed the case. However, it is not entirely clear from the financial review and the information that has been presented which areas are doing particularly well and which areas might have issues with where the money is being spent. It would be helpful for me as convener of the Education and Skills Committee to know what is happening around the country, so I would welcome any information that the minister could provide to assist with that when he makes his closing remarks.

The Education and Skills Committee recently held an informal meet-and-greet on, among other things, early years issues in Raploch. Childminders, nursery staff, parents and people who work for community initiatives that support families came along. When I asked a group of parents from Raploch what the most important aspect of early years policy was for them, the clear answer was that it should be flexible so that providers can tailor their service to meet the needs of the children and their families. When identifying flexibility in care, the role of childminders must be acknowledged. Childminders provide a service that often cannot be beaten on flexibility.

Having spoken to childminders, I understand that those care givers take their role seriously and see themselves as much more than just a place to keep kids safe. They are educators, confidants and often a constant in children's lives.

Early learning and childcare can be provided by a local council nursery, a nursery class in a primary school, a private day nursery, an independent school nursery, a playgroup or a childminder. However, there can be a problem, in that only some local authorities have decided to

engage in early learning and childcare contracts with childminders. I encourage all local authorities throughout Scotland to re-engage with the childminding sector and carefully consider that extremely flexible arrangement for parents and the benefits of having an early learning and childcare contract with childminders. That can lend itself to the idea of tailoring care to meet the needs of every unique family and child. I doubt that the minister will disagree if I say that we will not be able to achieve the 1,140 hours without the childminding profession.

Family workers can also play a key role in identifying families who may need additional support. They enable parents to understand the nursery and school enrolment system and are key in parents and carers understanding what free provision is available to the children. I was delighted to hear about the work of the thrive project, an initiative based in Stirling that provides training to parents inside a nursery facility. The training can cover anything from managing stress to helping to find pathways to adult education and employment. That type of engagement with parents can lead to a better and more stable life for a child. If a parent is supported, the knock-on effect on children is invaluable and immeasurable. A child is led by example, and what better example to set to a child than building up strong and confident parents?

Early years childcare is imperative, and not only in setting a child out on their educational journey on the right foot or as a way in which parents can return to the workplace. It can take great strain off parents who are struggling with physical or mental health issues.

One young single mother of two shared her experience with me. She had a difficult-to-manage heart condition and an older child with severe health problems, while both her parents—her main support—were battling cancer. On the verge of a mental health breakdown, that young mother took her baby to a health visitor who realised that the mother was in danger of sinking and quickly got the baby a place in a local nursery. The mother was able to rest, her children were well cared for and her family and home life dramatically improved. The mother is now a success.

I was touched by how thankful that young lone parent was for that early years childcare, which she told me saved her life. She wanted me to make it clear to members that she does not think that she would have been around to tell me that story had she not had that support.

The story of that young mother is not unique. There are examples involving additional support needs from every area of Scotland. Regardless of socioeconomic status or geography, families can be hit with all types of problems during the early

years of a child's life. Postnatal depression is not the sole affliction affecting mothers of newborns—although it can carry on for many years into the child's life. The respite provided by outlets such as playgroups and nurseries can be the start of recovery for women—and, in some cases, men—up and down the country.

Early years childcare is also the first step in identifying any additional support needs that a child may have. Early intervention in addressing such needs is often key in equipping that child with the right tools for a successful, stable and constructive learning future.

I thank the Minister for Childcare and Early Years for bringing the debate to the chamber and welcome the expansion of early learning and childcare hours to Scotland. As has been said before,

“Education is not solely about earning a great living. It means living a great life.”

There is no doubt in my mind that, by increasing the number of hours and flexibility of childcare, we are responding to the needs of modern-day family life.

15:13

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): Rarely do we see cross-party support and consensus in the chamber, so I am pleased to hear the Scottish Government echoing some of the Scottish Conservatives' policies on expanding childcare provision. Although I welcome those policies, I look to my party for a vision of how they can be implemented, particularly when it comes to flexibility, which I will talk about later.

What is the point of a flagship policy if taking advantage of it becomes a logistical nightmare for parents? The best start in life for Scotland's children needs to be created in a way that is realistic about the funds available. We also need to be honest about how much services cost and, most important, to prioritise help for the people who need it most.

Doubling childcare hours to 30 hours a week for all three and four-year-olds is great in theory, but I ask the Scottish Government whether the money could not be spent in a more effective and socially just manner. As it stands, the Government proposes that childcare provision be extended to a small proportion of two-year-olds—27 per cent—but we want a higher proportion of two-year-olds to receive it and disadvantaged one-year-olds to be brought into the system.

We know the benefits of children receiving high-quality childcare at an early age, and we know how, early on in a child's life, gaps begin to grow between those from affluent backgrounds and

those from less advantaged backgrounds. Understanding Glasgow reported, as part of its Glasgow indicators project, that in 2010 more than 10,000 children—9 per cent of the child population—were receiving social work input and that, in 2009-10, over 2 per cent of the child population had one or more parents with a substance misuse problem and were being supported by social work services.

The Scottish Conservatives offer an alternative use of public money that focuses the attention on disadvantaged children, as demonstrated in our proposal for the creation of a crisis family fund worth £10 million. We believe that focusing money on early intervention and support for troubled families is the best way of ensuring that all children grown up equally in Scotland.

Looking to help mothers to get back into work is also important. There are parents in Glasgow who have come to me because they have found a job but cannot afford childcare. Expanding the system to include a higher proportion of two-year-olds would surely ease some of the pressure that currently exists because of the gap between statutory maternity pay and free childcare provision.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Annie Wells: I am sorry, but I have quite a lot to get through.

I have been a mother all my working life, dropping my son off at half past 7 in the morning and picking him up at half past 7 at night for many years. It is an expensive business, and having to foot the bill alone means that work does not really pay.

Bob Doris: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Annie Wells: I am sorry, but I just want to get on with this.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you a little extra time, Ms Wells.

Annie Wells: No, I am fine. I have quite a lot to get through.

Flexibility in childcare is important. Although 30 hours a week is, in theory, fantastic, the provision is split into blocks of 3 hours and 10 minutes. For the majority of parents who live hectic lives and for anyone who works from 9 to 5 or does shift-pattern work like I did in retail, although the number of hours is high, the provision is unworkable and they do not add up. The Scottish Government's motion talks about flexibility, but I see no evidence or mention of how its flagship policy achieves that. Fair funding for our kids, the

Glasgow-based campaign group, has worked tirelessly to highlight the issue. Having begun its focus in the city, the group now champions reform countrywide, arguing that families are unable to make the most of their entitlement because of the unsuitable hours that are offered by most council nurseries. It has shown that a whopping two thirds of nursery places in Scotland are half-day only.

As Liz Smith has said, we need innovation such as we see in the Swedish system, with the use of a childcare credit or voucher system. Parents should be able to use their hours as they wish, using a mixture of private, local authority and partnership care. That is the only way in which we will be able to accommodate any increase. As it stands, under the Scottish Government's proposals, doubling childcare eradicates the one-day model, which is made up of one morning session and one afternoon session. A new 9 to 3 model will require huge investment in childcare—something that is not accounted for by the Scottish Government. We estimate that 650 new nurseries will need to be built and that 3,250 new nursery staff will need to be trained. The move to 30 hours a week will result in a 40 per cent reduction in the number of available council places, with 72,000 places needing to be found.

The Scottish Conservatives have addressed mental healthcare provision for children through our proposal for a £300 million investment in mental health and—specifically for children—our proposal for a £10 million investment in a crisis family fund, which I mentioned earlier. The Scottish Government is currently failing our young people, as official figures have shown, and is struggling to meet the 18-week target that was set by the SNP for treating young people and children with mental health problems. There is genuine consensus on the importance of this area, and it is an issue that needs to be got right.

Although we agree, in principle, with the Scottish Government's plans to increase childcare and mental health provision, it is the Scottish Conservatives who offer the innovative and focused approach that is required. Investment in our children needs to be affordable, flexible and, most important, fair.

15:19

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Before I start, I will say that my mother-in-law is one of the valued childminders we have been talking about today. That is not a declaration of interests, but she will be delighted that I have mentioned her. [*Laughter.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You may get extra help for that.

Gail Ross: There are few things in life more important than aiming to give children the best start. They will grow into the leaders and decision makers of the future, the teachers, doctors, police officers, joiners, plumbers and childminders—and, indeed, politicians. They will go on to inform and invent, and it is our duty to ensure that they are given every opportunity to do so. I am glad to see consensus across the chamber for that principle.

As the party of government, we have made a commitment to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up, and we believe that high-quality childcare is an important feature of that aspiration. Besides the obvious economic benefits that enabling parents and carers to go out to work brings, nursery education or childcare provision enhances development and gives children the best opportunity to achieve in later years.

Childcare has been the topic of many a debate both in the chamber and in the homes of parents across the country. Since the SNP came to power, we have increased nursery entitlement from 412.5 hours per year in 2007 to 600 hours in 2014, but we are not stopping there, because we believe that we can and should go further. We made a manifesto commitment to nearly double free early learning and childcare entitlement to 1,140 hours per year by 2020. We have also committed to closing the attainment gap in our education system.

That investment in preventive spend will help to ensure that all our children, no matter where they are from or what their circumstances, will have the chance of an equal start to their education. That is especially vital in our most deprived areas, where children have less opportunity. As part of the roll-out, we will ensure that every child in early education in the most deprived communities will have access to an additional teacher or childcare graduate by 2018. We know that that will bring massive developmental benefits and confidence and will equip every child with literacy and numeracy skills, and that that, in turn, will also address the attainment gap.

In my area, Highland Council's director of care and learning, Bill Alexander, is committed to ensuring that children all over our vast and diverse region are given the same access to choice, but he realises the challenges of delivery in remote and rural areas. Despite that, Highland Council has already made good strides towards flexibility. There are 13 childcare managers in post in its schools, and many of them are now offering a level of choice that goes well beyond the fixed morning sessions. That is being well received by both schools and families. Cala and other partner providers continue to work towards developing more choice and flexibility for parents.

Bill Alexander has told me:

“There are many challenges involved in getting to 1140 hours (and even more flexibility) but we have an infrastructure in place that we are confident about. As well as working on this within Highland, we have agreed a collaborative framework with the other northern and island authorities (in the Northern Alliance) that will ensure we share best practice and pool our efforts to deliver not only 1140 hours, but the best possible service for children and families.”

Those hours are not just about childcare and support for parents to get back to work. As I said, they offer a real opportunity to promote positive child development and to assist and work in partnership with families. Highland Council is already planning to take forward those various elements. It has a senior manager in place to oversee that, and it has deployed family resource co-ordinators out to the various areas. The council has also reorganised its curricular support and that is proving to be very effective.

Across the chamber, we have agreement—I think—that that is great news for families all over Scotland who struggled in the past to find quality, flexible, accessible and affordable childcare. By the end of the session, the benefit to families will be worth more than £3,000 a year compared with 2007. We will support parents and carers who want to return to work or study and we will pilot a range of different approaches to find out what works best in each area.

Boosting the number of hours to 600 made a huge difference, and saved families an average of £707 per child per year, but many parents made requests for further hours and choice. In many areas, the system needs further work, but the flexibility that is built into the system going forward will make a huge difference to many families. We will work alongside local authorities and other childcare providers to ensure that we are getting it right—as we said at the start, getting it right for every child.

15:25

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to have this debate today on the Government’s plans to expand free entitlement to early learning and childcare provision from 600 hours to 1,140 hours for every three and four-year-old and eligible two-year-olds in Scotland.

Working families across Scotland face a multitude of pressures when trying to balance their household budget and, often, the cost of childcare is a major contributing factor to that. The Scottish Government’s “Financial review of early learning and childcare” tells us that more than half of the hourly wage of a working parent on the living wage will need to go towards childcare costs, and that is before that person even thinks about other monthly costs such as rent or mortgage payments.

For a single parent with two children under the age of five, the predicament becomes quite stark.

In the current climate, it is therefore certainly not surprising that the Scottish household survey revealed last week that single parent households—23 per cent of all households—are the most likely to report that they are not managing well financially.

Managing childcare costs can be a difficult and stressful task, particularly when parents are balancing their childcare commitments around work or study. That is why, with colleagues across the chamber, as well as parents across the country, I welcome the Government’s commitment today to expand free entitlement. However, it is also why I hope that today’s debate will generate some much-needed further consideration of how we can best serve the needs of parents and children in a way that provides not just affordable childcare but childcare that is high quality and flexible.

From conversations with parents in the Central Scotland region, which I represent, the issue that I hear raised consistently as a top priority is the availability of affordable childcare that is also flexible enough to meet the needs of parents’ commitments. As others have said today, in order to create a transformation of the childcare system, the expansion of free entitlement to childcare needs to fit around the daily lives of parents.

I would like to draw particular attention to a recent report that was published by the National Union of Students Scotland, which collated the childcare experiences of student parents, who we have not heard much about today. The findings showed that the availability of affordable, flexible childcare for parents who are studying is severely lacking.

The report—it is called “The Bairn Necessities”—showed that student parents face a significant shortfall between the childcare and student support funding that they receive and the actual costs of childcare. For college students, that ranged from £20 to £400 a month, with an average of £123; and, for university students, it ranged from £100 to £1,000 a month, with an average of £382. Across university and college, the most common monthly shortfall was around £200.

The reasons behind those figures are diverse but can be linked to an information gap at universities and colleges with regard to how many student parents they have, which leaves them unable to offer targeted support. In fact, only three colleges and nine universities were able to provide such information to the NUS during its investigation.

There were also issues around the differences in university and college term times and those of

schools, the lack of affordable childcare and the necessary support for student parents to access it, which means that student parents are forced to miss significant amounts of study time or else pay for extra childcare hours.

Mark McDonald: I thank Monica Lennon for the points that she is making. I, too, have read that report and can say that, along with Shirley-Anne Somerville, I have looked into whether there are synergies in our review of student support and our work on expansion that could help to address the points that the report raises. The issue is very much on the Government's radar, and we are looking into what can be done to address some of the concerns that have been raised.

Monica Lennon: I appreciate that clarification. That will be reassuring to the students who we are talking about. In the past couple of days, a college lecturer from—I think—the north-east of Scotland shared with me the experience of a single mother of three children who had applied for various part-time courses but could manage only to get on a waiting list, and was then told that numbers had been restricted because full-time courses were the priority. Childcare provision is not enough for her to do a full-time course and, in order to access a full-time nursery place, she would have to take her youngest child out of the local authority-run nursery and use a private one, which, aside from the expensive cost, would be impractical for picking her other children up from school.

People are having these experiences day and daily; as a result of this particular situation, the individual in question is being prevented from continuing her college education until her youngest child starts school. The warning signs are certainly there. For example, according to the latest figures from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, there are fewer women in part-time study in further education.

I do not think that it is good enough that we still have parents who, because of childcare restrictions, are being held back from contributing to the workplace or continuing their education, and I believe that this Parliament should make it its mission to ensure that we are doing much more to support parents to reach their potential. Expansion of free entitlement is welcome, but if it covers only some of the cost or some of the year, it will not solve the problem of how we can achieve wraparound childcare to deal with the diverse pressures faced by families across Scotland. In its recent report, which was based on freedom of information requests to all councils, the fair funding for our kids campaign highlighted that 65 per cent of all nursery places in Scotland were half days only.

Early years provision is vital and, as I have said, I support the extension of free entitlement.

However, it will lead to a transformation in childcare arrangements only if we make it flexible to parents' needs with regard to work and study commitments and if we also keep in mind that childcare issues extend well beyond the nursery years. Extension of childcare for two, three and four-year-olds must go hand in hand with transformation of pre-school and after-school care, and I hope that the Government will support Scottish Labour's amendment on the important role played by breakfast clubs in the start to a child's school day.

Truly transformational reform of the childcare system requires the Government to use the Parliament's powers to invest in our vital public services and council budgets. Only then will we see a childcare system that serves the needs of all.

15:31

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I thank the minister for bringing this debate to the chamber, and I hope that those who want us to do more will reflect on how they might assist the Government in getting more control of the mechanisms that will allow Scotland to do that. I was very interested to hear Annie Wells mention the Swedish Government, as I recently read that it spends more on early years learning than it does on defence. Perhaps, then, we can stick the £170 billion that we might save on Trident renewal into childcare; I wonder how many childcare hours that would give us.

The potential impact of childcare on the economy is significant. Traditionally, economic debates about childcare programmes have centred on cost, but in my contribution to the debate, I will look at the economic benefits of publicly funded childcare and I hope to bring us back to one of the core reasons for the SNP putting an extended childcare programme at the heart of its manifesto in May.

It makes economic sense to make the pathway to work easier for parents, and the measures that are outlined in the commitment to extend free childcare are a massive step in addressing issues around the gender productivity gap. A lack of good, flexible and affordable childcare is a historical barrier to accessing work that pays. The financial dilemma of the working parent affected me when my children were small. The question was how could I earn enough to offset childcare costs and leave me with any income to justify my return to work—work that I loved, which utilised my qualifications and which was, in effect, a return on the Government's investment in me through the free university tuition that I enjoyed.

For some, the answer is going part time, which means less money for the parent and less money going into the economy. As we know, part-time work tends to pay less pro rata, and women often cannot access part-time work that is commensurate with their skill set and qualifications, particularly if they have taken a couple of years out of the workplace after childbirth. Another answer to easing the dilemma is for another family member to take on the childcare responsibilities. It is very common to hear of grandparents going part time or giving up work altogether to help out, which means less income for them and, yet again, less money going into the economy. We talk about mothers because—let us face it—even in 2016, it is usually the mother who tends to stay at home or go part time when the financial dilemma hits, but lack of affordable childcare can also take grandmothers out of the workplace well before retirement age. As a result, there is an impact on two generations of female labour and a stubborn gender gap in workforce participation, all because of the cost of childcare.

Research has found that a 50 per cent reduction in the gender gap in labour force participation could lead to an additional gain in gross domestic product of about 6 per cent by 2030, rising by a further 6 per cent if the gap is completely closed. I take this opportunity to ask for more gendered data on productivity in Scotland. When we reflect on the success of the programme—maybe in about five years' time—I would like to see data evidence that I am certain will show the productivity gap decreasing. That data does not exist at the moment.

It is helpful to look at the examples of countries that have undergone similar schemes and at the economic impact of those schemes. One cursory search of the internet reveals reams of studies on how free childcare policies of Governments around the world have dramatically increased a country's productivity. We should be mindful that many of those studies cite countries that have full fiscal control, such as Norway, whose former Prime Minister cited free childcare and women playing a full part in the workforce as the main reason for its economic success. Yes, members heard right: free childcare is the reason, not oil and gas. Those on the opposing benches who ask us to do more and who ask about the affordability of the programme should take note of the studies that they quote with gay abandon when they think about Scotland's budgetary constraints.

With increased productivity comes increased income tax contributions, busting the myth that childcare is a cost when, in fact, it could be a productivity and tax generation enabler. If members do not believe me, they only have to look at the countries with the smallest percentage

gap. The common denominator is that they have childcare programmes.

With the easing of the childcare burden, it is not just the employment figures that we should examine when we assess the impact of the programme. The lack of affordable and flexible childcare is the top issue that is raised in my conversations with groups and women in business when we talk about the persistent gap in the number of women in enterprise—women who are a huge, untapped resource. Any boost to the number of women setting up businesses is wholly welcome.

I end with one of my favourite statistics, and I am not normally a fan of stats. It is estimated that if as many women as men set up in business, the contribution to Scotland's gross value added would be £7.6 billion. That is a significant amount, and programmes such as the one that we are discussing are opening the door to that increase in productivity.

15:37

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I welcome the opportunity to discuss the wider positive impacts that changes to early learning and childcare provision can bring, and how those positive impacts will be realised only if we ensure that the child is at the centre of the decisions that we take. I am pleased to hear the minister say that the economic benefits are not the primary driver.

Research has shown that the best ways to improve life chances begin before birth and pre-conception and involve ensuring that children have positive experiences in their early years. The greatest rate of child development occurs in the first five years of life. By the age of three, almost half our language capacity is in place, and by the age of five, when many children first enter primary school, that figure is as much as 85 per cent. The evidence from psychology, neuroscience and biology is clear: our experiences in our early years are the greatest determinant of our capacity to grow into confident, resilient adults who are able to handle life's ups and downs.

I therefore recognise the urgent need to improve the pay and conditions of our childcare staff, who play an important role in providing stability and positive learning experiences for our children in their earliest years. The financial review of early learning and childcare provision made clear that pay for childcare staff is substantially lower in the private partner provider sector. The average salary for practitioners in local authority settings is estimated at £28,000, but it is only £15,000 in partner provider settings.

On average, for an early years practitioner, the public sector spends two thirds more than the

voluntary and 80 per cent more than the private sector on staff-related costs such as wages and pensions. The same report says that that may be explained by the higher proportion of practitioners who are still in training in the partner provider sector, but the matter is too important simply to theorise about. I welcome the minister's comments on the need to tackle the issue. It is vital that we do so as free childcare entitlement is expanded. As welcome as it is, we do not want to expansion of free childcare to happen by increasing the number of low-paid childcare workers, the vast majority of whom are women.

The career is massively gender segregated, so I would like to know what the minister proposes to do to attract more men into it. I am sure that we are agreed that all care workers, whether they care for elderly people, people with care needs or children, play a hugely valuable role in society, and that we must reflect that in their pay and conditions, regardless of the sector they work in.

Another challenge is increasing the number of staff available and making sure that there are enough qualified staff. The Fraser of Allander institute has estimated that an additional 20,000 qualified staff will need to be hired. Research from the Educational Institute of Scotland in February of this year shows that the presence of a qualified teacher in early years settings can have a range of positive outcomes for our most deprived children. The report "Sustaining the Ambition: The contribution of GTCS-registered teachers as part of the early learning and childcare workforce in Scotland" has shown that the number of General Teaching Council for Scotland registered teachers in that workforce has fallen by almost 30 per cent over the past decade, with the rate now at one teacher for every 84 children. That is due, certainly in part, to the scrapping in 2003 of the requirement to have one GTCS-qualified teacher for every 20 children, which has been replaced with an ill-defined requirement for all children to have access to a qualified teacher.

Local authorities operate different guidelines and charging structures for the deployment of teachers to private partner providers, which has resulted in some partner providers choosing to have no teacher support. As a result, the proportion of three and four-year-olds with access to a GTCS-qualified teacher fell from 85 per cent in 2014 to 82 per cent in 2015. The EIS argues that qualified teachers are a core part of the early learning and childcare workforce and that they give children the best possible start as well as providing well for vulnerable children and families in poverty. An EIS survey found that those teachers play an important role in the early level curriculum for excellence. They create good transitions from early years to primary school, co-ordinate with other agencies as part of getting it

right for every child and take on training, mentoring, leadership and management responsibilities for the nursery team.

Although the Government pledge to have an extra graduate in nurseries in the most deprived areas by 2018 is welcome, I encourage it to go further and examine how educational inequality at the earliest stages can be tackled by delivering meaningful access to a GTCS-qualified teacher in every nursery. That was a Scottish Greens manifesto pledge that I was proud to stand on in the election earlier this year.

I urge members to recognise the opportunity that the expansion of early learning and childcare gives us to have a broader discussion about our values around childcare and about whether, by considering the impact of the expansion as fully as possible, we can better support our children. I turn to the research of Alan Sinclair in his report "0-5: How Small Children Make a Big Difference", which was done for the Work Foundation. The report is part of the "Provocation" series, and some of the questions in it may be provoking. He points out that some parents have their children in childcare not out of choice but out of financial necessity. No matter how high quality the childcare is, they perhaps feel that the day is very long for their child, but they struggle to juggle the demands of an increased workload, an insecure job market and a long commute. The expansion of childcare provision has to allow parents greater choice and flexibility to build childcare into their day-to-day lives. In that regard, I completely agree with James Dornan's comments regarding the need to consider and invest more fully in childminding.

Sinclair shows that the UK's ranking in the bottom 25 per cent of OECD countries for levels of child wellbeing and the roots of many of our social problems of low educational attainment, health inequalities and alcohol misuse can be traced to what happens in the first five years of life. I welcome the fact that we are having this discussion in Parliament and I look forward to being involved in its continuation.

15:44

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): There are a few occasions in the life of the Parliament when we as members get an opportunity to take part in something that will transform the lives of Scotland's youngsters and their families. The proposal to offer 30 hours each week of fully funded childcare for all three and four-year-olds and those two-year-olds who are most in need will give our children the best possible start in life. It will transform the lives of their parents, too, giving many the opportunity to return to work, and it will provide up to 20,000 new jobs in the childcare sector. I endorse the

comments that Alison Johnstone made about the need to have more men working in the sector. This is such an important development for Scotland and I am sure that all members will be proud of the part that they play to support this policy.

When I came here in 2007, the provision was around 400 hours per year, or about 10 hours a week. The steady progress from that to 15 hours per week and now on to nearly 30 hours, or a full week of funded childcare, is astonishing; it will be one of the finest achievements by this SNP Government. The policy will help about 120,000 children and it will save families about £700 per child each year—which my colleague Gail Ross mentioned earlier—in addition to allowing families to get back into work.

As early as January of next year, the Scottish Government will start a programme of trials to test different delivery models to see what works best and to pave the way for this expansion. I hope that those trials will address a number of the points that members have made today about having flexible models to deliver this.

With such an expansion, costing £500 million, a number of consequential impacts will arise that will need to be carefully managed and prepared for. We need professional training for the staff delivering the service, including enhancing the role for childminders—several members have mentioned that—and we will need about 600 new early learning and childcare centres in order to deliver it successfully.

One of the key issues to consider is how to make any arrangements as flexible as we can; they have to be possible to fit around parents' working hours. Employers, too, need to offer some flexibility so that every family that is eligible but which has working obligations can access this service fully for their children.

As usual, we will rely heavily on our local authority partners to drive this forward and make it the success that we all hope it will be. I am grateful to colleagues from East Ayrshire Council for sharing their experience and their advice in advance of the debate. They stress the importance of flexibility in allowing parents to access any new arrangements, with spare capacity being built in to provide patterns of flexible hours. Workforce planning will be crucial, as they anticipate quite a movement from the independent and third sectors as the early years workforce expands to reach the 20,000 additional posts that will be needed.

As part of the consultation that it carried out in January this year, East Ayrshire Council found that 66 per cent of parents preferred the term-time sessional model of delivery. However, a significant 33 per cent of parents wanted to see a more

flexible model, perhaps offering longer hours or full days or some access across a calendar year. A model that supports longer opening hours will probably lead us towards consideration of shift working patterns, and there will need to be discussion about that if it is what we want to deliver.

The proposal to pilot the scheme for parents in low-income households using a deposit guarantee scheme—which is often a barrier—and the plans to provide an additional qualified teacher or childcare graduate in every nursery are crucial interventions for those children and families who probably need this kind of help most. I also like the idea of encouraging early learning providers to set aside an hour a week to be spent outside, running the “daily mile”, as it is described in the programme for government, or doing some other outdoor activity. I am sure that that will be music to the ears of Mr Whittle—he is not in the chamber, but I am sure that he is listening.

The expansion of early learning and childcare has the potential to completely transform the lives of our young children and their parents in Scotland. It will help thousands of families to overcome many of the barriers that have been systemic in our society for generations. It will unlock doors and lead on to greater opportunity.

The fruits of this policy may not be evident for 10 or 15 years as these youngsters make their way in life. My hope in this parliamentary session, during the time that we are here, is that this once-in-a-generation investment in Scotland's youngsters will genuinely transform their lives and make Scotland the fairer and more equal country that we will be proud to hand over to the new generation.

15:49

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I declare that I am a city councillor here in Edinburgh.

I agree with the minister that there is broad agreement among all parties in the chamber today on the general principles of early learning and childcare. We need to look at how it works in practice at the grass roots. We can have a theory but if it is not working in practice, we need to go back and look at it again.

I would like to talk about two points this afternoon. The first, capping, has already been raised by my colleague, Liz Smith. Most local authorities in Scotland offer free childcare only in slots of three hours and 10 minutes and in term time only, with no option for parents to buy extra hours for the rest of the day even if there is the capacity within the nursery for parents to have that service. A recent report by the fair funding for our kids group found that 65 per cent of all nursery

places in Scotland were half days and 89 per cent of all council nursery places for three to five-year-olds were half days and were available only during term time. In order to access those places, a working parent needs to make alternative arrangements for drop-off and pick-up on working days and during the holidays. Such a patchwork of childcare is impossible for many families to manage and almost useless for most working parents.

Although most local authorities buy extra spaces at private partnership nurseries, there is no requirement for them to buy enough places for all the eligible children in their area. Thus, children miss out or have to move to another partnership nursery.

Further challenges arise because of the underfunding of private nurseries by local authorities. Either the partnership nurseries have to make a loss per child or the cost is passed on to the parents, which puts extra financial pressure on them. Sometimes that means that they do not go into a career because it simply is not financially viable.

That begs the question of whether the policy, which the Scottish Government informs us aims to “support parents to work, train or study, especially those who need routes into sustainable employment and out of poverty”,

is doing what it says on the packet. It is a Scottish Government policy that we all agree with, so surely the Scottish Government has responsibility for ensuring that local authorities are actually providing the 600 hours childcare for three to five-year-olds.

I would like to tell the chamber about one family’s recent experience of trying to access funding for appropriate childcare here in the Lothians. The family recently moved from Edinburgh to West Lothian and they were sending their son to a private nursery in West Lothian. The nursery was able to provide flexible opening hours, which meant that both parents were able to work. Unfortunately, their application for funding was refused because there was a council place available close to their home. The council did not seem to care what was best for the child or for the family. The family has found a solution, as it appears that there is an agreement between City of Edinburgh Council and the bordering councils for partnership funding, so the family now sends their son to a private nursery in the west of Edinburgh. However, that is not ideal because their son has had to leave his old nursery and has lost some of his friends.

It seems bizarre that West Lothian Council is willing to fund a private nursery that lies outwith its council area but not one within. These might seem

to be small issues to us as parliamentarians, but to parents who are trying to make the system work, it is just another obstacle. It also means that people who live in West Lothian but do not work in a neighbouring area do not benefit.

For many of us, childcare that works Monday to Friday and nine to five is an old model that might have worked in the past but does not work today. In order to provide a childcare sector that is fit for purpose, we need to look at what people are doing within retail, healthcare and hospitality, as working patterns are changing. I was encouraged by a recent conversation with officials from a council who are thinking about offering nursery care for six days a week; they are also looking at offering it during the holidays.

I ask the Government these questions: how many three to five-year-olds are receiving 600 hours of free care? How many women are returning to work as a result of the policy? How many partnership places are being capped?

In order to judge a policy’s success, robust data needs to be collected. However, no one knows how many children are actually getting their entitlement. The fair funding for our kids campaign has repeatedly expressed its disappointment that the Scottish Government continues to claim more than 90 per cent registration for funded childcare, despite reassurances from the First Minister back in March of last year that she would find ways to improve the figures when research suggested that around one in five children are missing out.

If we want to design a solution that works for parents, we need to understand the practicalities. I urge the Scottish Government, as it carries out the consultation, to also carry out a national survey that looks at the socioeconomic background of service users, what childcare provision parents are using and how it can be improved. Then we will see what transparency there can be to ensure that there is a level playing field across Scotland that will help to make the policy more successful and make it work for all the families in our nation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have been quite kind, letting members run over their time, but I will eventually have no generosity left. I call Rona Mackay—do not take it personally, Ms Mackay—followed by Mark Griffin.

15:56

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): The Scottish Government has said that bridging the attainment gap for all children is its defining mission—and rightly so.

I believe that bridging that gap should start as early as possible in a child’s life and that is why I

am delighted that our Government is investing in expanding early years education.

As we have heard in the chamber, our Government is doubling free early learning and childcare entitlement by 2020. The extension in provision will help around 120,000 children per year and will save families up to £707 per child per year.

It is an ambitious goal but one that we believe it is crucial to implement, as investing in our children is surely the best investment that any Government could make.

As the minister has said, as well as doubling the provision, we are determined to deliver provision of the highest possible standard. Quantity without quality is not what we are striving for.

Our childcare staff are not glorified babysitters; they are highly skilled professionals who are entrusted with the care and education of our children—the future generation of Scotland.

Scotland is one of the few countries in Europe that employs multidisciplinary professional teams to support individuals or small groups. I am proud that, during 2017-18, the Scottish Government will pilot approaches to providing support for the up-front costs of childcare to parents in low-income households.

We will ensure that every child in early education in the most deprived communities has access to an additional teacher or childcare graduate by 2018. That, in my view, is bridging the attainment gap and I welcome those initiatives.

Of course, our third sector agencies play a huge part in helping us to achieve our aims. Barnardo's Scotland works with expectant and new mothers in the home on attachment-based approaches, as does the excellent Home-Start organisation. They believe that adopting a nurturing approach across early learning and childcare should make a significant difference to children's attainment levels later in life.

They agree that it is crucial that investment in the expansion of early learning and childcare includes disadvantaged children and families as a central part of the system and that support should be continued for better attainment as children grow older.

A nurturing approach to early learning and childcare helps children to learn, thrive and ultimately achieve better educational outcomes.

Childminders, too, will be central to providing more flexibility and choice for parents, as my colleague James Dornan has already said. We will create a new quality standard and induction programme for childminders in order to deliver best practice in the profession.

Our aim is to develop a high-quality and—crucially—flexible early learning and childcare system, which is accessible and affordable for all. In short, we want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow up.

A shining example of excellence in early years learning is the Lullaby Lane nursery, based in my Bearsden constituency. Despite being open for just three years, it has just won *Nursery Management Today's* 2016 training and development award at the Scottish nursery awards. I am very much looking forward to visiting the nursery with the cabinet secretary next month. Lullaby Lane, along with other first-class nurseries in my constituency such as the Tower Nursery in Lenzie, which is currently undergoing accreditation, represents exactly the model that we aspire to create throughout Scotland.

I believe that parents are the best judge of how good a nursery is, and I know that many of my constituents believe that the money should follow the child when it comes to nursery choice. While we balance the need to ensure that all nurseries in Scotland are of the excellent high standard that we expect for our children, hence the need for nursery partnership with local authorities, there is a little confusion over how much autonomy local authorities have to fund placements. I am pleased to hear that the minister will look at all options for funding during the consultation.

We need nurseries that parents and children are happy with and that provide the best possible start for all our children, regardless of family background or circumstances.

Our transformational increase in childcare is a remarkable achievement, and once again we are leading the way against all odds. Despite an ever-decreasing budget handout from Westminster, the fact that Scotland punches way above its weight on this issue in comparison with the rest of the UK and many other countries shows just how important investing in our children is to us in Scotland. I am proud that we are leading the way in this area, and I whole-heartedly support the motion.

16:01

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Transforming childcare is certainly one of the biggest challenges that we face, and if it is done properly there is a big prize in the form of increased economic activity, access to work and—crucially—closing the attainment gap.

In the One Parent Families Scotland programme for change, second only to tackling the attitudes and stigma that exist around being a single parent is the need to transform childcare to ensure that it is high quality, flexible and affordable.

I recognise the commitment from members on all sides of the chamber to tackle the childcare challenges that we face. One of the big challenges right now is that children across the country are missing out on the 600 hours that they are entitled to. We often hear in the chamber and in Government releases that there is an apparent 97 per cent take up of free nursery places, but that simply does not reflect reality. The fair funding for our kids campaign says:

“For parents who can’t afford the high cost of private childcare, the half day sessions available in council nurseries are often their only available option. Rather than supporting parents into employment, this model of provision simply becomes another barrier to work: few of us can find a job that will fit around three hours and ten minutes of childcare per day.”

The reality is that, despite the promises of 600 hours of free early education and childcare, many working parents are simply unable to access the free places that they are entitled to.

Mark McDonald: I want to be clear—I have made this offer to the fair funding for our kids campaign too—that if members identify that there is a specific issue in their local area around lack of availability, they can write to me and I will investigate the matter and speak to the local authority concerned. I am not necessarily speaking about individual cases, but a trend of lack of availability. I make that commitment clear here and now, but at present I am not seeing such examples coming to me from members in the Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): I can allow you the additional time, Mr Griffin.

Mark Griffin: The minister will see some personal testimony on the fair funding for our kids website. I am sure that the campaign would be able to present a case load of examples for him to look at, and I am sure that it would more than welcome his intervention in the matter.

For many parents who work full time, accessing a free space that is available for only three hours and 10 minutes a day for 38 weeks a year is not always an option. How many children are being offered places so inflexible that working parents simply cannot access them? How many children are not able to access their free 600 hours at all because they attend a private nursery and all the funded places have been allocated? How many children are attending a nursery that is not a partnership provider, which means they are not able to access funding at all? How many children are attending a pre-school nursery but not benefiting from the full 600 hours because the provision does not fit in with the school day, which means that they miss out on the extra hours?

The answer is that we can only speculate. Although three and four-year-olds have a right to 600 hours of free early education and childcare, no one actually knows how many children are benefiting from this policy. The fair funding for our kids group have pointed out examples of what they believe is double counting. Parents do not want to hear that we are on a journey to a better system; they do not want to hear that it will be sorted out by 2020, by which time their children will be at school. They want the flexibility in place that means that they can access the 600 hours that they are entitled to right now.

Although in today’s debate we are calling for the Scottish Government to take steps now to ensure that 600 hours is a reality for every eligible child, that does not fix the entire range of childcare challenges faced by families across Scotland. Childcare challenges do not begin when children turn three, or end when they start school.

The spiralling cost of childcare in Scotland continues to pose a headache for working parents. We pay more for childcare than in any other European country except Switzerland. Costs are rising in Scotland faster than anywhere else in the UK. Part-time childcare for two children under five costs more than the average mortgage. Many parents have no choice but to reduce their hours to make work pay or to give up their job altogether. If we are going to transform childcare, then much more attention needs to be paid to the overall childcare challenges that parents face. What we need is a real childcare revolution that will transform the lives of working parents.

Promises of 30 hours in the future would sound more convincing to those parents who are now entitled to receive 15 hours if they were actually getting them. I have listened to the minister and he is saying that his ears are open and he is willing to make interventions on behalf of those parents who are not getting the entitlement because of issues around flexibility. They would welcome that. It is time for the Scottish Government to deliver a childcare system that delivers for children, parents and for our economy.

That would be a system that puts flexibility and affordability at its heart and ensures that all our children have the very best start in life.

16:08

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I very much welcome the publication of the “Financial review of early learning and childcare in Scotland: the current landscape”. It is vital that we have a robust map of the baseline of existing provision, including not just the numbers of children and families benefiting from that provision—and it is worth stressing that

more are benefiting from more hours than ever before despite issues within the system; that is just a fact—but also, as the minister outlined, the variety of childcare provision that is out there. As previously indicated, that is 46 per cent local authority provision with the bulk of the remainder made up by private and third-sector providers.

It is vital that we know the bricks and mortar of childcare provision. That is my first substantive point. We must ensure that local authorities are, right now, examining the bricks and mortar of childcare provision. What does current capacity look like? What are the opportunities to expand that current provision, not just local authority provision but partnership nursery provision? As things stand, what does the existing infrastructure potential look like? What are the opportunities to develop further and new provision, to make sure that the range of provision is suitable, that it is in the right location and that it is suitably flexible? Local authorities have to be asking those questions right now.

I will give two examples from my constituency of cases involving opportunities to forward plan. First, I point to a local childcare provider called Summerston Childcare, which operates from Bellcraig community centre in the Summerston community, but also at two other sites. It is keen to expand and it identified a former care home that is now sitting closed within that community. I thought that that might be just the place to co-locate all its childcare facilities and look at expanding, working in partnership with the local authority and Government to help to meet needs, given the increased childcare provision.

Initially, the local authority looked to discuss that, but then it decided to sell the property on the open market and take the capital receipt. Of course, that was Glasgow City Council's prerogative and was its decision to make. I merely make the point that this was the second time that Summerston Childcare had identified a property in the community that would be suitable for its purpose, only for the property to be put on the open market for a capital receipt. That might be short sighted, because in the future there will have to be capital investment to bring bricks and mortar to the community in order to expand childcare provision.

The second example from my constituency is from Royston, where two wonderful local childcare providers—St Roch's Childcare Service and Rosemount Lifelong Learning—are working in partnership with a local youth organisation, Royston Youth Action, to look at the possibility of co-locating a community sport hub with a childcare facility at Glenconner Park in Royston. That involves looking at a procurement exercise and getting moneys from different pots of cash, and it

represents some blue-skies thinking about the best way to meet future childcare needs. Local authorities must challenge themselves and the Scottish Government must work in partnership with them to realise the work that has to take place, which is needed now and not just in the future.

Moving on to my second substantive point, I suppose that I should declare an interest as the dad of an eight-month-old baby, Cameron, who will benefit at some point in the future from expanded childcare provision. We have looked at two nurseries—neither is a local authority nursery—to put Cameron into when my wife returns to work in the national health service. One is a partnership nursery and the other is not. We have no way of knowing, when Cameron eventually qualifies for free childcare provision, whether the first will still be a partnership nursery with Glasgow City Council.

I raise that not because it is my personal case but as an example to illustrate the point. Constituents have previously had experiences of putting a baby into a nursery when mum goes back to work with the anticipation that the partnership place will be sustained. There need to be better guidelines—and thus more security for working parents—to ensure that partnership nurseries sustain that status, unless of course there is a direct and significant deterioration in standards.

Other constituents, because of their working patterns, have had to access partnership childcare provision in East Dunbartonshire. I brought that case to the minister's attention. Initially, provision was not forthcoming, but it is a two-way process because at times Glasgow has not provided partnership places for East Dunbartonshire families. That case was resolved through positive, constructive dialogue between the local authorities, which is positive. I merely make the point that, if ever local authority boundaries should not matter, it is in relation to flexible childcare provision. We have to look at that.

No matter how universal and wonderful childcare provision is, there will always be cases where it does not suit the working realities of parents. I understand that, but things are improving. Perhaps, once we reach the target that the Scottish Government set, we will have to start looking at what a reasonable offer of childcare provision looks like, and perhaps there should be an alternative system whereby parents can say to local authorities that might be trying to sweat the asset of local authority nursery places just to fill them up, "We don't accept that that's a reasonable offer."

It would be remiss of me if I did not finish by pointing something out to a Conservative member,

Annie Wells, who spoke earlier. If she wants to talk about lowering the cost of childcare for working families in the constituency that I represent, I draw her attention to the 2015 Scottish Parliament information centre briefing that says that 197,200 families totalling 346,000 children have been hit by changes to tax credits. I know families that are no longer in work because of Tory welfare reforms. Before members come to the chamber brandishing their childcare policies and saying how ethical they are, they should look at their own back yard. What is happening is not acceptable and it is not meeting the needs of my constituents.

16:15

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to contribute to this debate on a subject that is of great importance to every parent, grandparent and carer in Scotland. Everyone wants the very best start in life for all our children. Early learning and childcare play a vital role in ensuring that.

Parents who were asked, through the Scottish Government's discussion paper, what their priorities are in respect of early learning and childcare made mention of a number of issues, but three kept on coming up. First, parents want to know the quality of the provision, and that it is not being compromised by headline-grabbing attention to the number of hours of childcare. Secondly, they want to know that their children are with qualified professional and motivated staff. Thirdly, they want to know that the hours and services that are being offered are fair, flexible and suit the needs of modern families.

Sadly, many of the reasonable hopes that parents have for children are not being realised by the policies of the Government. Indeed, the current target of 600 hours of childcare provision is not being met in some local authorities—never mind the proposed increase in hours by 2021.

Let us look at the example of birthday discrimination, which the SNP has failed to address despite the problem being highlighted by the Scottish Conservatives and Reform Scotland, among others. Birthday discrimination is the reason why so many children are not getting the headline 600 hours of funded childcare a year—indeed, the shortfall can run to as many as 200 hours a year. Those are hours that Scottish children are not getting because of the inaction of the SNP Government—hours that, once lost to a child, can never be replaced. Birthday discrimination arises because funded childcare starts only the term after a child turns three. That illogical approach from the Government means that children who are born between March and August receive a full two years funding, but

children who are born between September and December will get only eighteen months of funding. If parents have a child who is born in January or February, the SNP says that their child qualifies only for fifteen months of funding. Why is a child entitled to less childcare because it was born on the last day of February rather than on the first day of March? Is that illogical? Yes it is. Is it discriminatory? Yes it is. Is it plain daft? It most certainly is. Birthday discrimination needs to be addressed.

I want to move on. At this point, the words of a respondent to the Scottish Government discussion paper on ELC are well worth mentioning. The person said:

“Parents should be able to choose an Early Learning and Childcare setting (subject to meeting nationally agreed quality criteria) which best suits their child, family working circumstances and locality rather than their local council's choosing of where to fund the hours”.

Flexibility in terms of hours, location, and provider are very important to parents. Even supposing that parents have a car—many do not—they do not want to drive for half an hour to a council nursery if after five minutes driving they pass a perfectly good private nursery or the door of a suitably qualified and registered childminder. That makes no sense on many counts, including time, convenience and environmental impact.

Councils and the Government need to do more to recognise the roles of all who are involved in childcare. Councils, the private sector and the voluntary sector all have important parts to play, and it is in no one's interests if failure to provide for increasing costs causes some providers to drop out, which results in fewer places, rather than more.

I commend groups such as the Glasgow-based fair funding for our kids, which highlights not only that the vast majority of local authorities are offering an hourly rate that is below the national average cost of a nursery place, but that 89 per cent of council-run nursery care is for half days only. That is simply not flexible enough for modern lifestyles, nor is it sustainable for long-term childcare provision.

Only by working together across all providers can the increased expectations of parents be met. Parents do not want to travel miles, or to have to chase funding and relocate their children, which they often have to do more than once. That is totally disruptive to the child and the parent.

I said at the beginning of my speech that everyone wants the very best for the children of Scotland. I believe that it is great to offer as many hours as possible, but the provision must be tailored to parents' and children's needs. It should not discriminate on the basis of the lottery of date

of birth but should be fair to all. The patchiness of provision and the lack of flexibility that we now have in many areas leave many parents frustrated and children short-changed in their formative years.

In meeting the needs of parents and Scotland's youngsters, the Government clearly has room for improvement. That being the case, I will be supporting the amendment in the name of my colleague Liz Smith and the opportunities that it offers to boost the quality and flexibility of childcare provision.

16:20

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I note that the Liberal Democrat amendment highlights the fact that, under current levels of funded entitlement, last year only 7 per cent of Scotland's entire population of two-year-olds—as opposed to 97 per cent of three and four-year-olds—took up funded ELC provision. Although the financial review notes that, overall, roughly 125,000 children and their families benefit from free ELC each year, it is clear that there is still work to be done by the Government in reaching out to families of eligible two-year-olds in order to ensure that that entitlement is taken up.

Of further concern in the financial review—as my colleague Alison Johnstone highlighted—is the gap between staff pay levels in local authorities and those in private providers. In common with other members, I was certainly disappointed to note that 80 per cent of practitioners in partner settings are paid less than the living wage, and I share the minister's ambition to ensure that that situation changes in the future.

I am delighted that the minister has today announced a commitment to ensuring that nurseries in the most disadvantaged areas will gain an additional ELC graduate or teacher by 2018. That action supports the professionalisation of early years education, which for too long has not been treated with parity with its primary and secondary education counterparts.

Accreditation of early years practitioners helps to build confidence in the system among not just staff, but among parents and carers. It also helps to make the vocation an attractive career prospect. The Government is committed to closing the attainment gap in our schools; today's announcement supports that aspiration by acknowledging the professional importance of early years education accreditation.

Early years education is not about babysitting. We know that the formative zero to three years in a child's life are those that make the difference. They are the years in which behaviours are formed and in which children develop coping

mechanisms. I have previously highlighted in Parliament the work of the former chief medical officer for Scotland, Dr Harry Burns. His research identified the link between babies' growing up in stressful households and learning of behaviours that will stay with them the rest of their lives. Therefore, good-quality early childcare has a fundamental role to play in closing the attainment gap for Scotland's poorest children. In its totality as a report card on the delivery of ELC, the financial review is clear: there is room for improvement.

The motion commits the Government to a manifesto promise to almost double free childcare, but as we have heard, the way in which that childcare is delivered needs to be flexible. There is an argument around geographical proximity and how childcare is delivered in rural communities, where childminders often play a vital role.

I recently met Maggie Simpson, who is the chief executive of the Scottish Childminding Association. She was keen to highlight to me the disparity that exists nationally in the use that is made of childminders in the entitlement provision. Some local authorities, including Fife Council, do not make use of childminders in that provision. In total, 11 local authorities have no contract with childminders to deliver early learning and childcare. It is clear that there is an issue in that respect with regard to flexibility, so local authorities need to look critically at the ways in which they deliver childcare to ensure that the provision is flexible and meets the needs of the populations that they serve. I find it extremely hard to understand why Fife Council makes no use of childminders to fulfil its provision. After all, it is an urban and rural council area that is made up of lots of little towns and villages.

Childminders often provide mums and dads and carers with the flexibility to come home from work later or to drop their children off on the way to an early morning shift. Local authorities should not narrowly direct parents to provision that is centred in local authority-run nurseries, for example, just because it best suits the authority's needs. Indeed, the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 introduced a requirement on local authorities to offer more flexibility and choice in how funded hours are delivered.

Accessibility and affordability have been central themes in today's debate. Those issues are of particular importance to women in Scotland, who remain the traditional care givers in many families across the country. We know that that work is not valued the same as traditionally male work is valued. One of the biggest barriers that women face is in getting back into employment after having children. The "Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings: 2015 Provisional Results" recorded the

fact that 42 per cent of the women who are employed in Scotland work part time, compared with just 13 per cent of men. That means that women are often prevented from having promotion opportunities, because part-time hours support their childcare needs. Women account for 75 per cent of all part-time workers in Scotland, but only 10 per cent of senior managers in the science, engineering and technology professions are women. There is clearly an equalities agenda here, which, I am sure, the Government's aspirations for childcare support.

Within ELC employment, gendered stereotypes continue: 97 per cent of childcare and early years education employees are women and 98 per cent of classroom assistants are female. We need to place greater societal value on those jobs. Additionally, we need to ensure that more men are brought into early years education because role modelling plays a vital role in developing aspiration in the next generation.

Today, the Government has committed to publication of a blueprint that will set out its milestones on early learning and childcare. It is clear that we need local authorities to play their role in delivering the transformational change that the Government has envisaged for childcare, but we cannot narrowly look to councils to fulfil that obligation. If the Government is to commit fully to its pledge to deliver 1,140 hours for every three and four-year-old and eligible two-year-olds, the blueprint should consider staff pay in the sector. It must consider how to deliver the flexibility that the 2014 act enshrined. It must look at the best way forward in developing a supportive approach to childcare that will provide children with the best start in life.

16:26

Tavish Scott: When we start the round of wind-up speeches, we always describe the debate as worthy, thoughtful, interesting or—that worst of all words in politics—consensual, which is an appropriate way to describe this debate. We cannot knock political lumps out of each other all the time, which is just as well.

Many contributions from around the chamber have addressed a couple of points. The first point is that, over a number of years, to many mums and dads—and grandparents and carers, as others rightly said—childcare has been a financial decision. The question has always been whether the family, the single mum or the individual can find the money to look after the child at some stage when the balance with work becomes impossible. It is important that the Parliament and the Government are trying to create something for the future that takes the money out of that equation by providing an entitlement to childcare

for the long term—an entitlement that can make a genuine difference to people's lives. That is a laudable aim for any Government or Parliament to seek to achieve.

James Dornan, the convener of the Education and Skills Committee, mentioned wraparound care. I think that he was the first member in the debate to do so. I must confess that my kids do not always think that I am a modern dad. When I said that I was doing a childcare debate, my seven-year-old said to me, "Dad, does wraparound not mean when I get a hug?" In some ways, that is a nice definition of wraparound care because of the importance of men in primary school teaching and childcare. That is one of the aspects about which Alison Johnstone—with whose contributions I invariably agree—made a strong point.

I will not be the only constituency member who spends plenty time drinking tea in staff rooms in schools, particularly primary schools, throughout their constituency to learn about education and the current challenges to find that the staff room is full of brilliant and able teachers who tend to be women. Many of my headteacher friends—a lot of schools in my patch are led by brilliant women—tell me that they could do with more men being involved in primary school teaching and in childcare as we consider how it will expand.

That is a very well made point, as was the point that Gail Ross made about the northern alliance. I confess that I have still not got my head round what the Government's education reforms are—perhaps none of us quite yet knows—but Gail Ross made a good point about the benefits that the northern alliance can provide by sharing ideas on how to deliver childcare. It seems to me that using the expertise of, in her case, Highland Council that can be beneficial to other authorities is self-evidently the right way to implement that change. There will be common issues across many of the large areas of Scotland that many of us represent.

Alison Johnstone also made a couple of points about placing children at the centre of decisions. That is how we should view such matters. She talked about the wage and cost differentials between the private and public sectors. Many members have raised that point this afternoon and, indeed, the minister addressed it in his opening remarks. I do not think that that helps the voucher approach that some are articulating, because if the wages that are currently paid in private sector nurseries and to childminders are very different from the wages that are paid in the local authority set-up, that makes me wonder how the heck a voucher system would work.

I agree with Alison Harris that we need a range of provision—not just public sector provision,

through nurseries, but private sector provision and childminders. For me, that is vital given the growth in childcare that there will be. There is no way that local authorities alone will be able to provide all that childcare; that will not be remotely possible. The aspiration is to see a much wider provision made available and the flexibility that many members have called for, and it will be necessary for that wider provision to be available if we are to see the growth in childcare that we are expecting.

The Labour amendment, which concentrates on breakfast clubs, which Daniel Johnson mentioned, seems entirely sensible. I take James Dornan's point—I think that one or two other members, including Bob Doris, made the point as well—that there is an element of aspiration about the Opposition parties. That is our job, and it is perfectly reasonable. I remember good friends and colleagues in the SNP making exactly the same points when they were in opposition; I do not think that it should be a barrier to our making a case for a particular point of view. My youngest son has benefited from a breakfast club in Daniel Johnson's constituency, so I take that point and think that it is entirely reasonable.

Liz Smith made many points that I broadly agree with, particularly in her opening remarks about health visitors and the earliest stages of life—indeed, she mentioned the period before life, which I thought was a dangerous area to get into, and I am certainly not going to do that. There is a news report out today that childcare costs for parents in parts of England could skyrocket as nurseries get less UK Government funding. There will always be such challenges, and it is important to recognise that those challenges will exist in whatever scheme is devised.

I will conclude by picking up two points that the minister made in his opening remarks, about the consultation and the delivery model trials that he said will start early next year. I encourage him to ensure that one of the delivery model trials—if that is the right expression—that the Government is considering is in a rural or island area in order to give a contrast with a city or larger, more urban, area. That will be important in building up the right provision. I also ask the minister to clarify that the consultation will cover all the issues—particularly revenue funding—that local authorities, and especially rural local authorities, have raised today.

In that spirit, I hope that many of the measures will be taken forward to achieve the growth in childcare that we all want to achieve.

16:33

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I agree with Mr Scott that the debate has been consensual. In

fact, it has achieved almost a metaconsensus whereby almost every speaker has commented on and agreed how consensual the debate has been.

We have had the debate many times before, as Liz Smith mentioned. I think that she said that we have already debated the topic eight times in this session of Parliament. That could mean one of two things: either the subject is of great importance to the Government and all of us, or the Government sees an opportunity for self-congratulation on the subject. If I am honest, I think that there is a bit of both in the choice of topic.

We agree how important early years childcare is, and there are two strands to that, which different members have explored to different degrees. First, there is the attainment gap. The minister quite correctly made a lot of that, and Daniel Johnson illustrated it graphically when he talked about the different vocabularies—3,000 words and 5,000 words—that children have at the time of going to school. That is a gap that we will struggle to close and probably never succeed in closing in later life, so it makes enormous sense, as the minister said, to address it in the early years.

The other strand is in allowing parents to go to work, so that family income can be improved and so that women in particular can resume their career and not have to face the disadvantages that Jenny Gilruth talked about in her speech.

We agree on how important all that is. Across most of the chamber, there is quite a lot of agreement on the problems that we face at the moment, including the problems of difficulty of access. Many members have talked about the work of fair funding for our kids. We should simply acknowledge what a sterling job that group has done over a number of years in highlighting the reality of the difficulties that parents have found in accessing their entitlement to 600 hours of funded nursery place. The group really has done a tremendous job. Its key figure, to which some members have referred, that two thirds of nursery places are provided as half a day, graphically illustrates how unsuitable that is for many people who are trying to find a way to work. Monica Lennon illustrated how difficult it can be for people—usually young women—who are trying to get to college and study, because of the difficulty of accessing childcare.

Many members have talked about quality. If we are going to close the attainment gap, we must remember that it is not just about looking after children; it is also about education, including early years education. The minister talked about the commitment that was made by the First Minister some time ago now to have additional nursery teachers in areas of deprivation. If we do not open the champagne for that, it is perhaps because—as

we should remind the minister—the promise was for that to be available in every nursery class. Welcome though the measures are, they fall rather short of what had originally been promised.

Much of the contribution from the Government benches has been about the next stage, which is the doubling of free nursery hours. That is a move that we support—we absolutely support it. It is a good thing, and it will surely go some way towards helping with some of the issues around half-day provision. It might not solve the problem for every family, but it must make it better, I think. All of that is good. Our only concern is the need for a plan of how that will be funded and delivered. The problems that we have had with the 600 hours of provision were largely because its delivery was not well thought out or planned with councils. That has been the basis of some of the problems. However, it is welcome that we start with the blueprint early on for how the next phase will be delivered.

In mentioning delivery by councils, the minister did not, in fairness, labour the point from the funding review about councils spending less than they have been given on childcare. However, I make the point that, considering how councils have faced a reduction of £500 million in their budgets—an 11 per cent cut—over recent years, that is an argument that has been prosecuted in a glasshouse using stones, and it is probably better to stay away from it.

Our key point was made by Daniel Johnson: the blueprint is also an opportunity to begin to plan beyond the provision of free hours for three and four-year-olds and some two-year-olds. We have a blueprint for that already, because the enormously important commission for childcare reform produced a suggestion, which was simply that the need for childcare, which encompasses the minister's own four principles of quality, availability, flexibility and affordability, does not end at the age of five. No matter how good families' childcare is for three and four-year-olds, for too many of them that comes to a crushing end when the first child goes to school.

We need access to all-year-round, all-age, wraparound childcare. Much of that may not be able to be provided completely free, but we should consider how we could provide it and ensure that it can be provided in a way that families can afford. Mr Scott is right to say that that is an aspiration. I am sorry, but I have to disagree with Mr Dornan, because the needs of parents cannot simply be curtailed to suit the convenience of the Scottish Government's current plans, no matter how welcome they may be.

James Dornan: Will the member give way?

Iain Gray: I am in my last minute.

That is what parents and families in Scotland need. We are not saying that the Government should deliver it by next year; we are saying that we should start planning now how it can be delivered.

A significant step forward, which we can afford, would be to support our amendment and commit to providing a breakfast club in every school in Scotland. In Wales, 96 per cent of schools have a breakfast club, so it must be possible to get to that level. In Scotland, where the level is 72 per cent, the proposal would cost something like £10 million or £13 million at most, compared to the more than £300 million annual cost of the Government's childcare policy. That would be a sign to parents that the Government is moving forward but is listening to what they need in the long term. It would be a great thing to do, and all that we need to do is to support the Labour amendment this evening.

16:41

Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con):

I declare an interest, in that I am a councillor on Aberdeen City Council, and I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

In her opening remarks, my colleague Liz Smith acknowledged the Scottish Government's laudable aim to expand childcare but challenged the Scottish Government on the reality on the ground, which is simply that the provision of those places remains a significant problem, particularly with regard to flexible access for parents.

Local authorities will have to deliver the Scottish Government's expansion of free childcare to 1,140 hours by 2020, and we have to be conscious of the challenges that they will face in meeting the expectations of the Scottish Government. From my discussions with senior education officials in the north-east, it is clear that there is genuine concern about the ability of local authorities to deliver that commitment within the timelines that are available. In Aberdeen alone, with 3,500 new places having to be secured, it will require 15 new nursery facilities to be built. To achieve the deadline, work on those facilities should really have started last year. The situation is even more challenging when councils such as Aberdeen face difficulties in accessing land to ensure that the facilities are built in the right place.

Further, the programme for government states that 20,000 qualified practitioners will be required. However, in the north-east we are already struggling with a chronic shortage of workforce in teaching and nursery. Aberdeen, in particular, is struggling to recruit new nursery nurses, yet staff projections show that, to meet the requirements of expansion, the city will need an additional 267

qualified practitioners. Even if all 267 of them were in training right now for their qualification, they would not be finished until 2020, which means that they would not qualify in time. Further, with colleges having their funding cut, resulting in a reduction in part-time and flexible places, the Scottish Government is not making it easy for local authorities such as Aberdeen to meet that challenge.

Educationists in the north-east have been clear with me that there needs to be a rapid expansion of private early years education. However, the Government's current policy does not provide enough incentives for providers to move into the market.

As Ruth Davidson announced in February 2015, those of us sitting on this side of the chamber advocate parental choice and flexibility within the childcare system. That involves a childcare credit so that parents can choose where and when they will use their entitlement for funded nursery provision in order to support them to combine work and family commitments. We learned this morning of a proposed child account to ensure that money follows the child rather than the institution. That is a welcome proposal and, if the Scottish Government is truly committed to it, it will show that Scottish Conservative arguments on flexibility and freeing up the system have finally sunk in. However, we on this side of the chamber are sceptical that the SNP leopard has truly changed its spots.

In her speech, Annie Wells touched on a number of very important issues. What Scotland's young people need is not mere political tokenism but support and early intervention. Drawing on her experiences in Glasgow, Annie talked about the need to support disadvantaged children and troubled families; in her further reflections on being a mother all her working life, she made a convincing case for why flexibility in childcare is so crucial.

I welcome Daniel Johnson's remarks about flexible childcare being critical in helping mothers back into work and ensuring that parents who are able to get back to work have that childcare support. If we do not provide that, we will, in his own words, have barely even started.

Tavish Scott spoke interestingly about how, when he was a candidate back in 1999, the Conservatives were even then talking about vouchers. I thank Mr Scott for reminding the chamber that the Scottish Conservatives are always consistent.

Gillian Martin focused on an economic argument—and rightly so. I absolutely agree with her about the need to get people back into work. However, a balance needs to be struck because,

as research shows, children need to spend time with their families. We need to avoid really young children spending more time in institutions than with their families.

Bob Doris made an interesting contribution that did not just take the party line. In raising questions that affected his constituency, he set out a sensible challenge to the Government, and I hope that ministers were listening to and act on what he said.

One of my other colleagues, Alison Harris, touched on another extremely important point: the inequality and injustice of birthday discrimination. As the member made clear, the Scottish Government's approach is illogical, and I agree that it is "just plain daft" that a child is entitled to less care if they were born on the last day of February than if they were born on the first day of March.

In his speech, Jeremy Balfour challenged what is a patchwork of childcare for working parents. He also raised the issue of the underfunding of partner providers. The fact that their staff work on very low wages can compound existing workforce issues, particularly attempts to secure the recruitment of new practitioners. Such a proposition is not enticing.

Mark McDonald: I made it quite clear in my opening remarks that I want the issue of pay in the private sector to be addressed. However, it is fair to point out that the partnership rates are set by local authorities. Until recently, Mr Thomson was the vice-convenor of education in Aberdeen City Council. Has he done anything about this issue?

Ross Thomson: Absolutely. We have been calling on the Scottish Government to support Aberdeen with a weighting allowance. Had it done so, we would have been able to do something about that. I am sure that the minister will be keen to engage with me and other council colleagues in achieving just that for Aberdeen.

It is absolutely right that we invest in high-quality childcare alongside early intervention schemes. As we have argued, the Government's priority should be to extend hours to a higher proportion of disadvantaged two-year-olds and one-year-olds in the first instance, with a gradual expansion of part-time hours to all one to four-year-olds. Scottish Governments have continually argued that that is where childcare provision should be primarily targeted and that it should be flexible and responsive to parental demand. The Scottish Government needs to radically reform the current system in order to widen choice, enhance flexibility and improve affordability, which will ensure quality in its delivery.

Scotland's children deserve the very best start in life. By accepting Scottish Conservatives' calls

for reform and a flexible system that allows money to follow the child, the Scottish Government can begin to make real progress in narrowing the gap in the life chances of children from poorer and more affluent backgrounds.

16:49

Mark McDonald: It is fair to say that we have had a very interesting debate, with a number of worthy contributions. I will try to encapsulate as many of them as possible in my summing up.

It might be helpful if I begin by outlining the Government's position on the amendments that have been lodged. We are unable to accept the Tory amendment. Given my quite clear statement of the Government's intention to undertake a consultation on funding models, it would be entirely wrong of us to pre-empt that consultation by nailing our colours to a particular funding model. Indeed, Tavish Scott quite rightly highlighted some of the potential pitfalls of the Conservative approach.

Liz Smith: Will the minister give way?

Mark McDonald: Perhaps I could just get a little further into summing up before taking some interventions.

I feel an alarming sense of *déjà vu* regarding the Labour amendment because it strikes me as similar to a previous amendment proposed by Labour. I agreed with much of it but, given the points that I made about our commitment to flexibility and autonomy regarding local priorities, we cannot take the universal breakfast club approach that Labour wants us to commit to.

We will accept the amendment lodged by the Liberal Democrats. To clarify, the figure of 7 per cent relates to the total population of two-year-olds, not the eligible population of two-year-olds. I accept that we have more work to do on that, but it is important that we take time to understand issues of rurality. Tavish Scott made a number of salient points in that regard.

Iain Gray said that today's debate was somewhat about self-congratulation. I know that Labour members would much prefer that every debate was about self-flagellation, but I prefer our debates in the chamber not to mirror too heavily Labour party conferences.

On Ross Thomson's points, I visited one of Aberdeen City Council's series of events that took place in my constituency. It was a drop-in session for parents to discuss the future of early learning and childcare and the expansion plans required. My discussion with officials was remarkably more optimistic about the opportunities of the expansion than the views that were relayed by Ross Thomson. I guess that it depends on whether one

reflects those opportunities through the prism of a half-empty glass, as he appears to do.

Liz Smith and a number of other speakers mentioned a numbers game versus true flexibility. This is not about a numbers game. It is about creating the capacity of hours to deliver the flexibility that families are looking for. It is not a zero-sum game.

Liz Smith: I am grateful to the minister for taking my intervention. Will he clarify whether the Scottish Government will consider the child account that was mentioned this morning in the consultation? Is that on the table?

Mark McDonald: We are in the process of developing the final consultation document, which will seek views on a number of different funding models. There is potential for individuals and organisations to suggest funding models that perhaps are not listed but that they might consider more appropriate, if they think that a different approach can be taken. At the moment, that is as much as I can say about the consultation that begins next Friday.

A number of members mentioned childminders. I am clear that there is a significant role for childminders in the expansion plans. On Saturday, I will speak at the Scottish Childminding Association's conference in Dunfermline, where I will take the opportunity to highlight the pivotal role that childminders can play in helping us to achieve our ambitions.

The convener of the Education and Skills Committee sought further information on the data captured in the financial review. I will write to the committee with the details that he requested and welcome the committee's input to the on-going consultation.

Annie Wells covered a much broader spectrum of points than simply focusing on the early years expansion. She mentioned the Conservative policy on developing a crisis family fund. This Government has a range of policies designed for early intervention. The point is to deal with issues before they get to the crisis stage, rather than to have a fund in place to deal with crises that have emerged. That is the approach that this Government will take.

Gail Ross highlighted the situation in the Highlands and the projects that have been developed there. She also mentioned the work of Cala, whose conference I will address in Inverness tomorrow morning. I have visited Cala and am encouraged by its work on developing the workforce for early learning and childcare.

On gender issues, Gillian Martin made a telling contribution about tapping into the resource of women in enterprise. There is a dual flexibility that

needs to be considered: there is the flexibility around childcare and the provision that we put in place, but there is also a duty on employers to look at the flexibility that could be provided in the working practices that they offer to employees, which might help to address some of the issues that arise in those areas.

Daniel Johnson: The report that was published this week showed that take-up was over 100 per cent, which is worrying. Gillian Martin made a good point about the need for productivity data. Will the minister commit to rectifying the data in that report from this week and will he perhaps address Gillian Martin's point about productivity?

Mark McDonald: We are confident that we are capturing data that gives us a picture of what is happening. Daniel Johnson highlights the issue that some local authorities perhaps report children on more than one occasion, but we think that, from within that, we can capture what is happening with the uptake of the provision.

Obviously, productivity data is not one of my ministerial responsibilities, but I commit to consulting with ministerial colleagues on whether that is possible. Obviously, if it is, we will look to take that forward.

Alison Johnstone mentioned the work of Alan Sinclair and said that it is often necessity rather than choice that leads to children being in childcare. The reverse is also true, in that it is often necessity rather than choice that leads to parents being unable to get back into the workforce, because of an inability to access childcare. That is one of the issues that we are keen to address as part of the work that we take forward.

Willie Coffey asked us to ensure that there are opportunities for play and outdoor activity, and he spoke about one hour a week to run the daily mile. I am not sure whether that is measured on how long it takes Mr Coffey to run a mile, but nonetheless we are absolutely committed to ensuring that opportunities for outdoor and play-based learning are built into what we offer in early learning and childcare.

Jeremy Balfour and a number of other members raised specific individual cases. If members cannot gain satisfaction through raising those issues with individual local authorities, as the minister, I am of course willing to look into what I can do. Bob Doris mentioned a case that he brought to me on which we were able to instigate discussion between local authorities on their cross-boundary arrangements.

Rona Mackay highlighted the good example of Lullaby Lane nursery, and she mentioned that the cabinet secretary was going to visit it. I do not want to be the bearer of bad news, but it is just me

she is getting. Nonetheless, I am sure that it will be an enjoyable visit. As I did at the time, I congratulate the nursery on its award-winning success. Rona Mackay also made the important point that having quantity without quality would mean that we would not deliver the best opportunities for our children. As well as providing the additional hours and flexibility, we have to ensure that, at the centre point of all this work is the quality of provision that children receive, so that they get the best possible outcomes as a result of our expansion.

Mark Griffin, Alison Harris and others mentioned local authorities where the 600-hour entitlement is not being met, but they did not mention which authorities those are. Our evidence suggests that the entitlement is being met, but if members have evidence of local authorities that are not meeting that, please write to me and I will take that up with those authorities and find out what is being done. Gail Ross and colleagues from across the chamber spoke about the flexibility that is being afforded in a number of local authority areas, so it is not beyond the wit of authorities to deliver that flexibility. Under the 2014 act, it is incumbent on local authorities to consult parents and give due regard to flexibility. If that is happening in some places, I do not see a barrier to it happening in others. Therefore, I am keen to work with members and local authorities to ensure that we deliver that flexibility, not just when we deliver the 1,140 hours but in relation to the 600-hour entitlement in the here and now.

In general, the debate has been positive, although, obviously, a number of points have been raised. Before we finish, I want to take a moment to pay particular credit to Bob Doris, who highlighted a number of issues that need to be addressed. On the continuation of partnership provision, we can perhaps do some work to ensure that there is long-term certainty for parents, which perhaps does not currently exist. Bob Doris also highlighted a number of positive examples from his constituency where thinking is taking place outside the box on potential hub arrangements and new ways of delivering early learning and childcare, in terms of practice and environment. I pay tribute to Bob Doris for that and I thank him for bringing his points to the chamber.

As always, I remain committed to listening to what members have to say. The consultation, which we will launch on Friday next week, will be an opportunity for parties from across the chamber and outside it to feed into the plans that we take forward. I look forward to continuing our discussions as we progress to ensure that children have the very best start in life.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S5M-01693, on names and remits of mandatory committees.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees, under Rule 6.1, that the names and remits of the following mandatory committees be amended—

Name of Committee: Finance Committee

New name: Finance and Constitution Committee

Remit: To the remit set out in Rule 6.6 shall be added—

Constitutional matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution

Name of Committee: Public Audit Committee

New name: Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee

Remit: To the remit set out in Rule 6.7 shall be added—

Post-legislative scrutiny

Name of Committee: European and External Relations Committee

New name: Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Remit: To the remit set out in Rule 6.8 shall be added—

Culture and tourism matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Relations

Name of Committee: Equal Opportunities Committee

New name: Equalities and Human Rights Committee

Remit: To the remit set out in Rule 6.9 shall be added—

Human rights, including Convention rights (within the meaning of section 1 of the Human Rights Act 1998) and other human rights contained in any international convention, treaty or other international instrument ratified by the United Kingdom.—[*Joe Fitzpatrick*]

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

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Liz Smith is agreed, the amendment in the name of Daniel Johnson falls. The question is, that amendment S5M-01703.1, in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S5M-01703, in the name of Mark McDonald, on expansion of early learning and childcare provision, 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)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (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)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (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)

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 (Dumarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 30, Against 92, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-01703.3, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S5M-01703, in the name of Mark McDonald, on expansion of early learning and childcare provision, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 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)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)

Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)

Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 32, Against 90, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-01703.2, in the name of Tavish Scott, which seeks to amend motion S5M-01703, in the name of Mark McDonald, on expansion of early learning and childcare provision, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (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)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (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 92, Against 30, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-01703, in the name of Mark McDonald, on expansion of early learning and childcare provision, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (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)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (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 92, Against 30, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the publication of the *Financial Review of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland: the Current Landscape*, which provides a comprehensive picture of how the funding provided by the Scottish Government to deliver early learning and childcare in Scotland is being used; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to transform provision by almost doubling free entitlement from 600 to 1140 hours for every 3- and 4-year-old and eligible 2-year-olds; agrees that this transformational expansion must deliver a high-quality experience for children, involving a highly-skilled and qualified workforce, which is geographically accessible and meets the needs of children who require additional support, while also delivering the flexibility, affordability and choice, which parents need to support them in work, training or study; agrees that the Scottish Government should consult on a policy blueprint for early learning and childcare in order to achieve this and ensure that this entitlement helps to ensure that more of Scotland's children get the best possible start in life and contributes to the Scottish Government's ambitions to close the attainment gap, tackle inequalities and boost inclusive economic growth; believes that the importance of having a robust long-term delivery plan in place is demonstrated by the fact that many parents have problems accessing current entitlements to free provision and that the financial review confirmed that only 7% of two-year-olds were receiving free nursery care at the 2015 census, and believes that this plan must address the additional challenges of ensuring that rural and island communities fully share the benefits of this policy, both on the provision of pre-school education and the capital costs that local education authorities will incur.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-01693, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on names and remits of mandatory committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees, under Rule 6.1, that the names and remits of the following mandatory committees be amended—

Name of Committee: Finance Committee

New name: Finance and Constitution Committee

Remit: To the remit set out in Rule 6.6 shall be added—

Constitutional matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution

Name of Committee: Public Audit Committee

New name: Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny

Committee

Remit: To the remit set out in Rule 6.7 shall be added—

Post-legislative scrutiny

Name of Committee: European and External Relations Committee

New name: Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Remit: To the remit set out in Rule 6.8 shall be added—

Culture and tourism matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Relations

Name of Committee: Equal Opportunities Committee

New name: Equalities and Human Rights Committee

Remit: To the remit set out in Rule 6.9 shall be added—

Human rights, including Convention rights (within the meaning of section 1 of the Human Rights Act 1998) and other human rights contained in any international convention, treaty or other international instrument ratified by the United Kingdom.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. I close this meeting.

Meeting closed at 17:05.

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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