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AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Wednesday 23 November 2016**

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 23 November 2016

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Education and Skills

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is topical questions—sorry, general questions. [Interruption.] I mean portfolio questions. [Laughter.] So long as we are clear.

Question 1 was not lodged.

#### University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University (Revenue Grant Reduction)

**2. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact the reported reduction to revenue grants from the Scottish funding council has had on the University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University. (S5O-00366)

**The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Notwithstanding the context of continued United Kingdom Government fiscal austerity, the Scottish Government has in 2016-17 invested more than £1 billion in Scotland's universities for the fifth year in succession. The University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University, alongside all Scotland's other higher education institutions, continue to benefit from that substantial investment, which enables them to attract a range of additional funding.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I am sorry that the minister did not see fit to answer the question about the impact of the reduced funding on those universities. She will acknowledge that Aberdeen university and RGU had among the largest reductions in teaching, research and innovation grants in the current financial year—they lost 3.9 per cent of those grants. She will also be aware that both have since made staff redundant and that further redundancies are planned. In light of the impact of this year's cuts, will the minister say whether universities in the north-east should expect to be among the hardest hit again when indicative grant figures are published for the next financial year, or will ministers take a different approach this time?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Decisions on funding for individual institutions are made by the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council,

which considers a number of factors. The settlement may be challenging for some universities, and it comes at a challenging time for the north-east. However, we are working with the SFC and the sector to secure greater efficiencies, maintain the benefits for learners and ensure that core outcomes remain a key priority. Decisions for future years will be made as part of the spending review.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** What is the Scottish Government's assessment of the risks that are posed to universities in Scotland by the double hit of withdrawing from the European Union and its research funding programmes and the UK Government's reluctance to consider Scottish universities as being eligible for post-study work visa programmes?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Scotland is an outward-looking and inclusive country that has benefited socially, economically and culturally from students from the rest of the EU coming to study here and from the EU researchers and staff who we have. The UK Government's consistent ambiguity on the status of EU nationals and the planned point of Brexit is hampering our universities, including those in the north-east, from protecting Scotland's interests.

We will consider how we can ensure that the higher and further education sectors continue to attract the best students from the EU and globally. We are disappointed that Scottish universities are being excluded from the English tier 4 visa pilot. We continue to press the UK Government to introduce a post-study work visa in Scotland that meets the needs of our universities and our economy.

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** In spite of the minister's protestations in reply to Mr Macdonald, the recent Audit Scotland report made it clear that funding for higher education has, in fact, fallen year on year in recent years. Will she commit to protecting the higher education budget in next year's budget, which is due next month?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Despite Iain Gray's invitation, I will not write Derek Mackay's budget today.

#### Moray College UHI (Financial Support)

**3. Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what financial support it provides to Moray College UHI. (S5O-00367)

**The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Moray College funding is provided through the regional strategic board of the University of the Highlands and Islands. A combination of grant funding from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council

and UHI provided a total of £8.467 million in the 2014-15 financial year. In 2015-16, the funding through the UHI regional strategic board was £8.483 million for the academic year.

**Richard Lochhead:** The minister may be aware that Moray College UHI, which is in my constituency, has provided evidence that after the regional strategic body has divided the funds among the various colleges, Moray College is underfunded by about 10 per cent, which equates to about £500,000 in its budget. I understand that the Scottish funding council is giving technical support to review the allocation formula.

I would be grateful if the minister investigated the issue. It is clear that the college has been underfunded recently and I hope that the formula can be fixed so that that does not continue. For Moray College UHI to develop new degrees and continue to do its good work, it must have an equitable share of the funding.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** The distribution of funding for UHI colleges is a matter for the regional strategic body, UHI. I understand that UHI remains in active discussion with Moray College on its funding for future years and is waiting for further material from the college to move the process forward. I am sure that UHI will want an equitable settlement for the colleges across its region that is consistent with the envelope of funding that is available. Since the matter is more for UHI, I will ask it to respond directly to Richard Lochhead with further details and keep him updated.

#### **Colleges (Response to Employers' Needs)**

##### **4. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)**

**(Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures it has introduced to assist the college sector in responding to the needs of employers. (S5O-00368)

**The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The college sector has seen increased involvement from employers as a result of the college merger process. Through outcome agreements with the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, colleges are committed to delivering vocational pathways, apprenticeships and workplace learning in partnership with employers.

**Alexander Stewart:** Over the Scottish National Party Government's first eight years, the number of part-time students who are aged over 25 fell from 179,685 in 2007-08 to 82,402 in 2014-15, which is a staggering reduction of 54 per cent. Will the Scottish Government commit to revising its decimation of college places and improve the current situation for students and employers?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** The Scottish Government has a target of 116,000 full-time equivalent places, which we have fulfilled. We are ensuring that our college places are based on what the economy needs. That includes not just full-time places but part-time places, which are funded. In particular, places are funded to ensure that they are based on the needs of the local economy and local employers. That applies to both part-time and full-time courses.

**Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP):** I recently learned of the fascinating skilled trade of scientific glass blowing, which is carried out in East Kilbride. It struck me that recognised skills shortages are coming up and I have been told that there is a great concern about a skills shortage in scientific glass blowing. Are there particular initiatives that offer incentives and help to start up college courses when there is a recognised potential skills shortage?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Colleges respond well to meet employment demands from particular employers in their areas. Linda Fabiani mentioned a demand that is specific to her area, and I believe that the British Society of Scientific Glassblowers has applied to the Scottish Qualifications Authority for an award qualification. If that request is granted, colleges could offer that qualification and ensure that people could meet the demand and receive a progression route into existing higher education courses.

##### **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):**

The Audit Scotland report on colleges that was published over the summer identified that there has been a 6 per cent fall in teaching numbers and cited Unison and Educational Institute of Scotland surveys that indicated high levels of dissatisfaction. What is the impact of the reduction in teaching numbers on the ability of Scotland's colleges to deliver high-quality education?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** The Audit Scotland report on colleges also highlighted that students have positive feelings towards the courses that they are doing and that there is a high level of satisfaction. I am pleased that that is the case in our colleges. In many ways, that is because of the policies that the Government has put in place to ensure that we have a financially stable college sector that is built on what the economy needs and which delivers for local people.

#### **Educational Institute of Scotland (Meetings)**

**5. Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government when ministers last met the EIS and what matters were discussed. (S5O-00369)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John**

**Swinney):** I last met the EIS formally on 1 June 2016 when a wide range of issues was discussed. In addition, I addressed the EIS's annual general meeting on 11 June and its headteachers conference on 7 October. The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science met the EIS further education lecturers association on 9 November and I will see EIS representatives later this afternoon and again in December.

**Tavish Scott:** When the cabinet secretary meets the EIS representatives later this afternoon, will he be prepared to discuss the performance of the Scottish Qualifications Authority? This morning, evidence was provided to the Education and Skills Committee that, for the physics higher assessment, there had been three versions of the assessment in three years and 81 separate pages of guidance had been issued. In the light of the widespread concerns that have been expressed to the Education and Skills Committee in this parliamentary session, is the cabinet secretary prepared to look at the SQA's performance?

**John Swinney:** It is very important that the SQA is constantly mindful of the feedback that it receives from various stakeholders in the field of education in preparing the necessary examination processes and it must ensure that those processes command confidence among a variety of stakeholders. I am determined to ensure that the SQA undertakes that role and that it engages constructively with a variety of different parties as it prepares for the examination diet.

As part of my discussions yesterday with the chief executive of the SQA, we discussed the further raft of changes that have been agreed—not by the SQA, but by the assessment and qualifications group. It is very important to remember that many of the changes and reforms that are made to the system are not made unilaterally by the SQA; they are made following discussions involving a wide range of stakeholders. For example, in the assessment and qualifications group that I chair, there are about 20 stakeholders in the room and we have to reach agreement on the necessary changes to take forward. I assure Mr Scott that the issues that he raises are uppermost in my mind and in my discussions with the SQA.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** The EIS has said that any education review must clearly set out what benefits it would bring to schools, teachers and pupils, but a great degree of uncertainty remains surrounding the proposed regional boards. What practical benefits will the proposed structural change bring to teachers and pupils? Will the cabinet secretary confirm once and for all whether he will rule out allowing schools to opt out of local authorities?

**John Swinney:** I have answered the second part of that question in Parliament on previous occasions in response to Mr Gray.

On the first point, regarding the practical benefits of regions, I am concerned to address the fact that, on the information that is publicly available, there is a very wide range in performance by local authorities in adding value to the educational experience of young people in schools. As Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, I am not prepared to turn a blind eye to that. It is not good enough that some local authorities are not as good as other local authorities in providing educational development resources and support to schools.

One practical benefit of the review that I am undertaking is that young people around the country would benefit from a stronger educational development resource as a product of the increased collaboration that should exist in Scottish education, and which the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development called on us to ensure is the case. That would be deployed not just for some pupils in Scotland, but for all pupils, which is my priority as education secretary.

#### **Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council**

**6. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to disband the board of the Scottish funding council. (S50-00370)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** Phase 1 of the enterprise and skills review recommended the creation of a new single strategic Scotland-wide statutory board to co-ordinate the activities of Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council. Our intention is that, once established, the overarching board will replace individual agency boards while retaining the separate legal status of each of the bodies.

**Iain Gray:** The cabinet secretary must be aware of concerns in the higher education sector that autonomy will be compromised if the Scottish funding council goes the way that he has just described. Last night, the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science assured Universities Scotland that it should not worry and that she understood the importance of the institutions' autonomy. However, I think that they will find those two statements to be entirely contradictory. Will the cabinet secretary think again? Will he maintain the Scottish funding

council and thereby the autonomy of our higher education institutions?

**John Swinney:** The autonomy of the higher education institutions is derived from the status of the higher education institutions. There is total consistency between the answer that I just gave Parliament and the statement that was made by the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science at the Universities Scotland event last night.

Of course I am aware of the unease within the universities—I read the newspapers and watch BBC Scotland. However, I am also absolutely determined that our university sector will be an autonomous sector that is able to exercise the same academic independence that it has today. We have to handle with great care the issues in connection with the board of the Scottish funding council in order to ensure that we can protect the independence of the university sector and guarantee that there is no reason for the sector to have the concerns that it currently has.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** In terms of what the minister said last night, I welcome the cabinet secretary's comments today about preserving the autonomy of our higher education institutions, which was such an issue in the previous session of Parliament.

That reassurance notwithstanding, when it comes to phase 2, the real concern is that the new board will potentially be chaired by a minister. That is where the concern about the issue of autonomy arises in phase 2. Can the cabinet secretary rule out any circumstance in which there will be Government control of the universities?

**John Swinney:** I am happy to rule out Government control of the universities. I can give that absolute cast-iron commitment to Parliament today: there will be no Government control of the universities.

On the issue of the arrangements around the exercise of phase 2, the Government will consult comprehensively around those questions. In its response to the publication of the enterprise and skills review, Universities Scotland said:

"Universities fully support the drive to increase Scotland's productivity and inclusive economic growth and we believe that Scotland has the assets we need in our research base ... We totally agree that Scotland must take a 'no-wrong-door' approach to businesses, public and third sector organisations".

Universities Scotland went on to say that it looks forward to close engagement in phase 2 of the enterprise and skills review, and that is exactly what the Government will deliver.

### Physical Education Teachers (Primary Schools)

**7. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how many specialist primary school PE teachers there are. (S5O-00371)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** The 2015 teacher census reports that there were 156 primary school physical education teachers based in schools and 77 local authority centrally employed PE teachers in Scotland.

**Brian Whittle:** Given the recent worrying reports on the continuing decline in our children's activity, is it not about time that the Scottish Government recognised that physical education is as much a specialism as every other subject?

Under this Scottish Government, since 2011, the number of PE teachers in Scotland has decreased dramatically, by 17 per cent. That is a major area of concern that was raised with me by teachers at the recent Scottish PE teachers conference. The commitment to provide two periods of PE in schools is hugely devalued if specialist teachers do not take the class. Will the cabinet secretary take the physical education of our schoolchildren seriously, recruit more primary school PE teachers and reverse that decline in teacher numbers?

**John Swinney:** This is not the first time that I have answered a question from Mr Whittle on the issue of physical education in schools, and I am genuinely perplexed about what he is trying to achieve, given the way in which he characterises the issue. If I can summarise what I have just heard—which is what I heard the last time that Mr Whittle questioned me on the subject—it was essentially a pretty negative assessment of the presence of physical education in our schools.

This morning, I have opened two primary schools—the fact that I opened two brand-new schools just this morning goes to show that the Government is building a lot of schools in our country. Both of those schools champion the use of the daily mile as part of the young people's physical education activity. If the daily mile is not good enough for Mr Whittle, I do not understand his point, because the daily mile is part of the physical activity of young people in our schools and is part of their activity.

There is another question that the Conservatives need to wrestle with. Last week—it might have been the week before—Liz Smith came to the chamber to demand that we had specialist science teachers in our primary schools. At the same time, the Conservatives come here and demand that we have more of a focus on literacy and numeracy in primary schools.



Far be it from me to point out that the Conservatives seem to be all over the place in their approach to primary education in Scotland. Worse still, they are prepared to devalue and belittle the commitment of the teaching profession to encourage—

**Brian Whittle:** Nonsense.

**John Swinney:** Well, they seem to be prepared to belittle and demean the amount of activity and the concentration on exercise in our schools. If Mr Whittle wants to influence the debate, he could take a more constructive approach to doing so.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** Will the cabinet secretary outline in more detail how the daily mile initiative helps children and young people's future health and wellbeing?

**John Swinney:** The focus on the daily mile is an integral part of encouraging young people to become involved in daily and regular exercise and to take an interest in their wellbeing. Of course, it is an integral part of the broad general education to encourage young people to be more aware of their health and wellbeing. It also contributes directly to ensuring that young people exercise regularly, which we all know to be of significant benefit. The commitment that has been made to the daily mile initiative and the support that has been demonstrated for it are integral parts of advancing the agenda of encouraging young people to be active and benefit as a consequence.

#### **Secondary School Building (South Lanarkshire Council)**

**8. Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with South Lanarkshire Council regarding the building of secondary schools. (S5O-00372)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** Government officials have had no recent discussions with South Lanarkshire Council regarding the building of secondary schools. I am aware that all 17 of the council's secondary schools are currently classified as being in good condition. However, through the Government's schools for the future programme, we are currently replacing three primary schools in South Lanarkshire—Spittal primary, Halfmerke primary and West Mains additional support needs school, and Burnside primary—with the Government providing approximately £11.6 million towards those projects.

**Clare Haughey:** There has been a significant increase in house building in my constituency over the past 10 years, particularly in the Halfway and Newton area of Cambuslang. Unfortunately, poor planning by South Lanarkshire Council means that

there is a dearth of facilities to support that otherwise welcome expansion. Although there is new primary school provision in the area, changes to school catchment areas require pupils in Halfway and Newton to travel considerable distances to attend secondary school. Given the strength of feeling in the community for provision of a new secondary school in Halfway, what support can the Government give to South Lanarkshire Council to progress that initiative?

**John Swinney:** The statutory responsibility for planning schools capacity rests with local authorities under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. Management of the schools estate is, accordingly, part of their responsibilities. The Government has co-operated with South Lanarkshire Council on a number of projects to enhance that capacity, but I recognise the significance of the issues that Clare Haughey raises on behalf of her constituents. I would be happy to have further discussions with her and South Lanarkshire Council on that question to try to do all that we can to address the local issue that she has raised.

#### **Hate Speech (Schools)**

**9. Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether the European Union referendum has led to an increase in hate speech in schools and, if so, what action its education directorate is taking to tackle it. (S5O-00373)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** All forms of hate crime and prejudice are unacceptable. I am concerned by recent reports from Moray House school of education and the Educational Institute of Scotland about incidents of that nature, which highlights the need for constant vigilance. We want all children and young people to learn tolerance, respect, equality and good citizenship, in order to address and prevent prejudice.

I welcome the Equalities and Human Rights Committee's interest in prejudice-based bullying and have sought its input to development of the refreshed national anti-bullying strategy for children and young people. I will carefully consider the issues that the committee raises, as well as anything further that can be done to support our diverse communities, over and above our holistic approach to anti-bullying.

**Gail Ross:** I thank the cabinet secretary for his answer. He has, in essence, answered my supplementary question at the same time.

**The Presiding Officer:** That is excellent timekeeping.

### Gifted and Talented Pupils (Support)

**10. Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it ensures that gifted and talented pupils in all schools are properly supported. (S5O-00374)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, education authorities must identify and provide the support that their pupils require to overcome barriers to learning. That includes the additional support that is required by children and young people who are able pupils.

The Scottish Government also funds the Scottish network for able pupils to support development and sharing of good practice in supporting such pupils.

**Alison Harris:** As the cabinet secretary will know, at several Royal Society of Edinburgh events in recent years there have been interesting discussions about how best to support particularly gifted and talented pupils from all parts of the country and all social backgrounds in order to ensure that they receive specialist teaching that is appropriate to their needs. Will the cabinet secretary acknowledge that gifted children in whatever academic discipline are vital to development of Scotland's economy? Could he update Parliament on what support is being provided?

**John Swinney:** I acknowledge the point that Alison Harris makes, and I recognise the importance of able and gifted pupils' being able to make a significant contribution and to fulfil all their potential in Scotland.

The Government currently funds the Scottish network for able pupils, which is a network of support to schools and teachers, to assist, through sharing of ideas and practice, the enhancement of educational support for such young people. SNAP also runs workshops for young people and provides advice to parents to assist them in that respect. A number of resources have been developed for practitioners and parents to help them to support highly able children, including a number of what are called SNAPshots, which can be used as a starting point for developing activities for highly able learners.

### Training (People over 25)

**11. Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what training opportunities are available for people over the age of 25. (S5O-00375)

**The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** Skills Development Scotland,

provides professional careers advice and training support to individuals of all ages. We also fund in-work support via the Scottish Trades Union Congress's Scottish union learning programme. We support people into employment through a range of programmes, including modern apprenticeships, skills training, employability and work experience through the private, public and third sectors.

**Sandra White:** I know that I am probably among other members who have many constituents over the age of 25 who say that they cannot get apprenticeships or get into training opportunities. Can the minister provide assurances that people over 25 will be afforded the same level of opportunity as those who are under 25?

**Jamie Hepburn:** I do not know the specific circumstances of Sandra White's individual constituents, but I can tell her that there are a number of specific modern apprenticeship frameworks for which people over 25 are eligible. I have a long list of them here, which I will be happy to provide to Sandra White. I can also say that, at the end of October, I committed to assessing whether we can look at embedding further flexibilities across other frameworks.

I will always be willing to consider whether there are other things that we can do, but Sandra White or any other member who has any specific issues to do with a specific constituent or constituents can write to me. I will be happy to consider what we can do.

### Guidance for Schools (Resources to Raise Attainment)

**12. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will issue guidance to schools regarding how the money that is raised through its council tax reforms can be spent to raise attainment levels. (S5O-00376)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** Next month, we will launch a framework of fully evidenced and proven educational interventions and strategies to help to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. The framework will inform the decisions that schools make to spend the additional funds, and we will monitor the impact on improving children's progress.

**Mark Ruskell:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that response, and I welcome the production of the framework. Regardless of the reasons why councils find themselves in very difficult financial circumstances at the moment, the fact is that they do. The cabinet secretary will be aware that cuts

are being made to service-level agreements and additional support across Scotland. That is having an impact on the workload of teachers and their ability to innovate, in particular around literacy and numeracy. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that schools are able to spend funds on whatever is appropriate for driving attainment? That could involve filling gaps in SLAs, additional support for learning or behavioural support.

**John Swinney:** I acknowledge the relationship between teacher workload and the ability to deliver learning and teaching that closes the poverty-related attainment gap: I accept that there is a connection between the two things. That is why I have spent so much time in the past few months trying to reduce what I would describe as unnecessary teacher workload. The purpose of that work is to create space to enable the concentration on learning and teaching that Mark Ruskell highlighted in his question.

Many of the techniques and interventions to which Mark Ruskell referred will undoubtedly be part of the framework that we will bring forward. We will look to individual schools to implement that framework to make a profound impact on the educational attainment of young people. I accept Mark Ruskell's argument about the importance of schools being able to make those judgments, so the framework that we will put in place will assist schools in doing that.

**Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** What specific steps have been taken to reduce teacher and pupil workload? What role will the new benchmarks play in that respect?

**John Swinney:** The purpose of the new benchmarks is to ensure that we address the uncertainty that exists in the teaching profession about the levels of achievement and attainment that young people should reach at different stages in their education journey. The feedback that I have had from members of the teaching profession suggests that the benchmarks that have been published so far have significantly enhanced teachers' ability to do exactly that. The benchmarks provide clarity that can remove some of the workload that is created when the teaching profession tries to search for those answers, and they open up opportunities for a greater concentration on learning and teaching, which is exactly the point that I made to Mr Ruskell.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Can the cabinet secretary confirm whether some of the money that is raised for the attainment fund in one council area could be spent in another council area?

**John Swinney:** I would have thought that Liz Smith would be aware that all council tax money that is raised in a local authority area is retained in

that area. The Government has set out its position, and we are engaging in discussion with local authorities about how we implement the policy commitment more widely. I reiterate that all council tax money that is raised in an area will be retained in that area.

### **Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scheme (Review)**

13. **Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans to review the protecting vulnerable groups scheme. (S5O-00377)

**The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald):** On Monday, the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, spoke at Disclosure Scotland's stakeholder event in Glasgow. He outlined the broad themes that the protecting vulnerable groups scheme review would cover, including digital delivery of services, the importance of safeguarding vulnerable groups and the financial sustainability of the scheme. Between now and the end of February 2017, Disclosure Scotland officials will continue to engage with stakeholders to develop terms of reference for the review. Once that work is completed and ministers have agreed the terms of reference, I will write to the convener of the Education and Skills Committee and arrange for the information to be provided to the Scottish Parliament information centre.

**Stewart Stevenson:** The minister has provided very welcome and up-to-date information. Disclosure Scotland plays an important part in ensuring that vulnerable groups are protected. Can he provide further information about how the disclosure system might emerge from the review that is now being undertaken?

**Mark McDonald:** The review will cover both aspects of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007: the listing and barring functions under part 1; and the vetting and disclosure functions under part 2.

With regard to what Mr Stevenson says, the important point is that we ensure that there is strong stakeholder engagement as part of the review. During the stakeholder event on Monday that I mentioned, officials offered attendees the opportunity to become involved in the work to devise the terms of reference for the review. In response, 39 individuals who represent organisations in the regulatory, public, private and voluntary sectors in Scotland signed up. Officials will take forward further discussions with those individuals and with Who Cares? Scotland, the recruit with conviction network and members of the Disclosure Scotland stakeholder advisory board with a view to presenting terms of reference

for the review to me by the end of February 2017. Once we have had the opportunity to flesh out those terms of reference, that will be an appropriate point at which to respond to Mr Stevenson on what the review will cover.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question 14 has not been lodged.

#### **University Student Numbers (Effect of Leaving the European Union)**

15. **Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what effect it anticipates leaving the European Union will have on university student numbers studying in Scotland. (S5O-00379)

**The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The continued ambiguity of the United Kingdom Government on the future immigration status of EU students and, for that matter, students from across the world is hampering planning by universities in Scotland. We have responded to university and student concerns by ensuring that current eligible EU undergraduate students and those starting courses next year will continue to be entitled to free tuition. However, the UK Government urgently needs to share its plans on the immigration status of EU and other students.

**Gordon Lindhurst:** In 2014-15, more than 13,000 EU nationals studying full-time degrees at Scottish universities were funded from the same public pot as Scottish students. Audit Scotland has recognised that Scottish students are finding it increasingly difficult to access university. If—it is of course only if—EU student numbers fall, will the Government be better placed to meet its target for getting more Scottish students from poor backgrounds into university, or will it continue to fail on that front?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** The number of Scotland-domiciled students from poor communities is rising and the Government is committed to ensuring that we follow all the recommendations of the commission on widening access, which will improve the situation still further.

It beggars belief that the Conservatives are asking the Government to make a policy on the issue when we do not know what the immigration status of EU nationals will be, when any change will happen, whether it will happen at all and what the timetable is for any of the Brexit negotiations. Given that background from the UK Government, it is a bit rich of the member to ask the Scottish Government a hypothetical question and to ask us to take a decision on EU national students.

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** The minister makes a valid point. Does she agree that it is rich for a Tory member to ask the Scottish Government about the impact of something that his colleagues in the UK Government have caused? Does she agree that decisions by the UK Government such as its refusal to include Scottish universities in the post-study work visa pilot scheme are deeply damaging to our universities?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** George Adam raises an important point. As I said to Gillian Martin earlier, the actions of the UK Government on immigration are highly damaging, whether that is the decision to exclude us from the English tier 4 visa pilot or the implication in what the Home Secretary has said that we should somehow further limit the number of international students, who contribute so much to our economy and community. We will continue to press the UK Government to introduce a post-study work visa for Scotland that meets the needs of our communities and universities.

#### **Free Childcare (Access to Entitlement)**

16. **Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that every eligible child has access to their entitlement to 1,140 hours of free childcare provision. (S5O-00380)

**The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald):** We have published the consultation “A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland”, which sets out the Scottish Government’s vision for transforming early learning and childcare. That vision is underpinned by the four principles of quality, flexibility, accessibility and affordability. The consultation seeks views on the key policy choices that are required to deliver the vision, including future funding options and models of delivery. We will publish our response to the consultation in spring 2017.

**Peter Chapman:** Birthday discrimination remains a problem. Groups such as fair funding for our kids continually highlight the issue. Surely the Scottish Government can agree that it is unacceptable that the month in which a child is born can dictate their allowance of childcare.

**Mark McDonald:** Peter Chapman raises a point that the Conservatives have raised on more than one occasion. It is worth noting that local authorities have the flexibility to offer early learning provision to the children to whom he refers should they choose to do so, and some local authorities do just that. However, for that to be applied across the board, we estimate that it would cost in the region of £26 million over and above what is currently being spent. If the Conservatives wish to

spend extra money, they have to tell us where they would find it.

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** How much money has the Scottish Government provided to local authorities to deliver 600 hours of free early learning and childcare and how much of that funding have councils spent?

**Mark McDonald:** The financial review of early learning and childcare, which was published in September, highlighted that we had provided £329.2 million of additional revenue and £170 million of additional capital to support the delivery of the expansion of entitlement to 600 hours. The review indicated that, over the same period, local authority spending on early learning and childcare increased by £189.1 million in revenue terms. Capital spending was £17 million in 2014-15, yet additional capital funding of £71 million was provided in that year.

Although the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has provided new information to the Education and Skills Committee, we consider that the original figures, which were provided to us by councils and reported in the financial review, remain robust. We will, of course, study COSLA's letter and information with interest, and I am sure that the Education and Skills Committee will continue to maintain its strong interest in the matter. However, it is clear from the information in the financial review that we have fully funded our commitment on early learning and childcare expansion.

## Rail Services

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is a statement by Humza Yousaf on rail services. The minister will take questions at the end of the statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions during it.

14:41

**The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf):** I am grateful to Parliament for the opportunity to make a statement about our railway network. Let me be quite clear. Everyone rightly expects a railway network that operates effectively, so when things go wrong, I fully understand the dissatisfaction of passengers and the inconvenience that is caused.

Before I set out information on the performance of our railways, the actions that we are taking and the long-term transformation that we have planned, I say to any passenger who has had a bad experience on our railways that I am sorry and that this Government is committed to improving the service that they receive.

On any transport system, there will always be incidents beyond our control that interrupt service. In respect of last Thursday's failure at Edinburgh Waverley, I add my regret to that which the First Minister expressed. The breakdown happened at the worst place on the network and at the worst time, and it had a massive effect.

Although no minister in any Government can guarantee that major failures will not happen, I can advise that ScotRail has learned lessons to ensure that it is better prepared for contingencies and, importantly, for communication with passengers when such incidents take place. Indeed, today, we have seen a much more responsive reaction from ScotRail to the incident that, regrettably, affected a large number of commuters in the Glasgow area.

Let me be clear: this Government expects the highest possible standards of our rail industry, and to achieve that we have set some of the toughest targets of any franchise in the UK. The franchise agreement asks for 91 out of every 100 trains to arrive at their destination within the recognised industry punctuality measure. I have no intention of underplaying either issues for passengers or the effect that a slide in service quality can have on individuals' journeys, but it is important to recognise that, in a number of areas, that target is being met. On the Glasgow to Dunblane line, for example, 93 per cent of services meet that target. For Ayrshire services, the figure is 93.8 per cent and for the Paisley canal line it is 97 per cent.

Overall performance for the past year is sitting at 89.8 per cent, which is better than the figure that we inherited in 2007 despite the network being far busier, with a 33 per cent increase in passengers and an additional 130 services running daily. That performance is higher than the Great Britain average of 87 per cent. However, let me be clear that, when performance is measured across the network as a whole, it is not where I want it to be. At the same time, I know that increases in passenger numbers and pressure on services mean that the experience for many passengers is not what they want it to be either.

To respond to those concerns, on 23 August I instructed ScotRail to develop a performance improvement plan and to deliver improvements to the customer experience. That plan was published on 20 October, and the Office of Rail and Road, which is the independent regulator, has confirmed that it is robust and challenging but deliverable. There are some 250 individual actions in the plan and work is well under way to deliver them.

Passengers want to see action now to strengthen the reliability of the rail infrastructure across the network, and I can announce that £16 million of investment is being brought forward—over and above what we have already planned—to upgrade key junctions, track and signalling equipment.

This week, for example, action is taking place to renew points at Cowlairs, improve circuits in Dunblane and improve the reliability of the class 334 fleet that serves North Lanarkshire, Dunbartonshire and West Lothian.

Action is taking place to fit an improved radiator design, to tackle the cooling issues that have been experienced by services to the Borders, and £14 million is being spent on improving the overall reliability of the ScotRail fleet.

In respect of operations, revised procedures are in place at major stations, to focus on prompt departures and on managing known pinch-points on our network. Commuters tell me that they are tired of skip-stop, so a skip-stop protocol has been introduced, to protect peak-time commuters and reduce the instances of stops being missed.

I know that overcrowding is frustrating for passengers when it happens. I can confirm that we are finalising details to provide more carriages from mid-December on the morning and evening peak-time services on the Borders railway.

At the same time, we will introduce an early morning Perth to Inverness commuter service, which will arrive just after 8 am. A new, direct southbound service will depart Inverness for Edinburgh, arriving in Edinburgh before 9.30 am, or, with a change, in Glasgow at a broadly similar

time. The services will increase daily travel opportunities between north and central Scotland.

I know about the work that is required and the service that has to be delivered. I have taken action and a plan is in place. This Government has a track record of delivering for our railways and it is my firm intention that we continue to deliver. In the period to 2019, we are investing £5 billion to transform the railway, with huge increases in the numbers of carriages, seats and services.

Since 2007, 140 extra carriages have been introduced to the ScotRail fleet. An extra 200 carriages will follow in the next 30 months, starting now. That means that there will be 50 per cent more carriages than there were in 2007.

We are investing twice as much per capita in the existing network as the UK Government invests. Our seven cities will be linked by higher-speed trains, with rolling stock that is more in keeping with an intercity experience, providing the latest standard of comfort, accessibility and catering provision, plus 40 per cent more seats.

Seventy new electric trains will be delivered in the central belt next year, to provide commuters with up to 40 per cent more seats at peak times on the main Edinburgh to Glasgow route.

We are not forgetting the existing fleet. Ninety per cent of our current fleet will be totally refurbished to improve performance and reliability, with much better on-board facilities, such as wi-fi, power sockets, new lighting and new seats.

We are also moving with the times and expanding electronic payments for travel. Smart cards can already be used for season ticket journeys across the rail network.

Fare increases are at their lowest level since the devolution of rail in 2005. Increases in peak fares are capped at inflation and a £5 intercity fare has been introduced.

All those initiatives and more are a direct consequence of our passenger-focused franchise specification.

To support the service improvements, we are in the midst of one of the most significant transformations of our railway infrastructure in recent memory. In only four years, we have delivered: the award winning Paisley Canal electrification project, in 2012; the transformation of Haymarket station, in 2013; the electrification of the Glasgow to Cumbernauld line and the Whifflet line in 2014; the opening of the Borders railway last year; and the re-modelling of Queen Street tunnel to prepare for electrification.

Advance works to improve the Aberdeen to Inverness line have started; the redevelopment of Dundee station, in partnership with the local

authority, is scheduled for completion during December 2017; there is on-going electrification work on the line between Edinburgh and Glasgow via Falkirk; and advance works have commenced for the rolling programme of electrification on the Shotts line and the line to Stirling.

In addition, Edinburgh Gateway station will shortly open, we have committed funds for stations at Robroyston, East Linton and Reston, and we increased the level of central funding for the new Kintore station.

We are committed to completing those projects—we are not in the position that people are in south of the border, where there have been deferrals and cancellations, and large cost overruns have triggered an aggressive programme of asset sales.

Our investment in infrastructure signals our confidence in Scotland's railway. It also means that there is a substantial challenge to operate an effective service, introduce new trains and enhance the passenger experience, while making major infrastructure improvements.

Recognising that challenge, we encouraged ScotRail and Network Rail to form an alliance to cement their operational relationship, and we have seen some benefits from that approach, particularly through the effective communication and management of the improvement works at Winchburgh and at the Queen Street tunnel. However, clearly, that alliance could do more. Network Rail is a body whose activities in Scotland are fully funded by the Scottish Government, yet its formal accountability remains to the UK Government. To fully realise the potential of the alliance and enable it to deliver the modern railway that passengers expect, we need further devolution of rail powers and responsibilities. I call on all parties in this chamber to support that objective.

We signed a 10-year contract for the provision of passenger rail services with Abellio, and we set tough targets on behalf of Scotland's passengers. It is the duty and responsibility of Abellio to fulfil its obligation under the contract. It is my job to hold it to account, and I will personally be closely monitoring Abellio and its progress on the improvement plan until performance returns to acceptable contractual standards.

At the same time, we will act on the additional powers given to the Parliament in the Scotland Act 2016, which removes the prohibition on public sector bodies to bid for future Scottish rail franchises. However, the act does not remove the need for competition. Any public sector bid would need to be tested in competition so that we could pick the best option for Scotland's passengers in an objective manner. We will use the powers that

we have and will follow through our manifesto commitment to take steps to establish a level playing field in franchise competitions.

To take that forward, I have written to trade unions, party transport spokespersons, regional transport partnerships and Transport Focus, inviting all parties to an initial round-table meeting next week at which I will set out our approach and legal powers and the potential options for a public sector operator. These have been testing times—for passengers particularly—but there is a performance improvement plan in place and the concrete actions that I have detailed are being taken here and now. Abellio and the Government are committed to ensuring the success of the ScotRail franchise.

As I have briefly highlighted, there is a broader backdrop with exciting service propositions, more and new rolling stock and significant infrastructure improvements that will benefit our growing number of rail passengers. I am acutely aware that we are about to enter a winter period with all the attendant challenges that that brings. There will be times when winter weather will mean that passengers will face disruption. However, I stress that I am personally determined to achieve the best outcome for passengers. I hope that the chamber will join me in supporting the efforts and actions of the management and staff of ScotRail in delivering the improvement plans and making a resounding success of our franchise—a franchise that I firmly believe delivers for Scotland.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. If he thought that, by making a statement today, he would avoid media scrutiny because of the chancellor's autumn budget statement, he has been run down by the express train of events. It has been another day of delays, cancellations and disruption, which harm our economy and hurt passengers, and this is from a train service that the minister said yesterday is not bad.

We should be clear about where responsibility lies. It was the Scottish National Party Government that awarded the current franchise to Abellio; it is the SNP Government that sets the fares and decides how much overcrowding there is on the trains; and it is the SNP Government that must start taking responsibility for the state of our railways.

We have heard a lot of promises from the minister, but passengers want to know when we will see improvements. What deadline has he given Abellio for meeting its current contractual obligations, and what exactly will be the consequences of its failing to do so?

We will participate in the minister's round-table discussions about how we can improve the rail service. However, let us be clear that the idea of a public sector bid has been floated to win over the rail unions, which have called for the minister's head. Even if such a bid were possible, it would be 2022 before a public sector organisation could take over the ScotRail franchise. Does the minister understand that passengers want improvements now, not in six years' time?

**Humza Yousaf:** I heard Murdo Fraser talking yesterday about a shambles on Scotland's railways. I completely reject that proposition. Let me put the matter in a regional context. Although ScotRail is not performing to the standard to which I want it to perform, its performance level is 2 per cent higher than the Great Britain average and its passenger satisfaction rate is 7 per cent higher than the GB average.

Yesterday, I saw on the news that ferries were stranded, roads were closed in England and trains were cancelled across the network. If Murdo Fraser describes ScotRail as a shambles, the situation that his Government presides over is surely an omnishambles. I will therefore take no lectures from him.

Murdo Fraser is right to ask what actions the Scottish Government is taking. Passengers and commuters want actions now, and I have detailed some actions. We are accelerating and bringing forward £16 million of spending on our infrastructure, which is on top of the spending that we are already bringing forward. People want action and I have brought forward £14 million of improvements to the reliability of ScotRail's fleet. They want action on skip-stop, so a protocol has been put in place for skip-stop at peak times. They want action on capacity, so we have introduced—and will continue to introduce—more carriages in our fleet. When passengers want action and—rightly—demand action, they are getting action from this SNP Scottish Government, which I know Murdo Fraser will not like.

Murdo Fraser asked about the public sector bid. This may be novel to him, but it was in our manifesto and we intend to take forward and fulfil the pledge to have a public sector operator putting forward a bid. I heard him talking about renationalisation. It is worth saying that his Tory Government has reclassified Network Rail under the Department for Transport.

I am pleased that Murdo Fraser has accepted the invitation to come to the meeting. As I said in my statement, a public sector bid has to be competitive with a private sector bid as well. There is some merit in a public sector bid in which the profits are reinvested in the railways and I will work for that with the unions, other political parties and transport spokespeople. I welcome the fact

that Murdo Fraser will be there and I look forward to what I am sure will be his constructive ideas.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** Scottish Labour is happy to meet the minister next week to explain to him the benefits of a people's ScotRail, but today's statement was requested in relation to performance here and now. The facts are that the minister demanded an improvement plan, but services have become worse. Staff morale is at rock bottom. His handling of the situation has seen him fall out with Abellio, Network Rail and transport unions. He claimed that he was not a transport expert and he is right.

After today, will the minister ditch the spin and publish his 246-point improvement plan in full? So far, passengers and Parliament have seen only a summary document.

The minister failed to give a guarantee to passengers about when services will get better. Is it still the case that it will be March before targets are hit?

This week, the minister claimed that ScotRail is not a poor service. Passengers who are standing on overcrowded platforms waiting for late-running and overpriced trains would beg to differ. Is it not the case that he is wrong, passengers are right and he is on the wrong side of Scotland's passengers?

**Humza Yousaf:** What I have heard from Neil Bibby in the media this week, which he just repeated, is that kind of petty, pathetic and personal attack towards me. I could respond to every attack, but I will not, because passengers and commuters want to know what action we are taking.

When Neil Bibby says that improvement is not being made, he is being disingenuous, because in the past eight weeks improvement has been made—the percentage of services meeting the target has gone from 89.5 to 89.8 per cent. That is not good enough and the figure is not where I want it to be. Neil Bibby shakes his head, but that 89.8 per cent is higher than what was achieved in every single year when Labour was in government. When he says that it is not good enough, I agree. That is why the improvement plan that we want, and the franchise that we have committed to, will have a target of 91.3 per cent.

I want to see regular improvement. I have been honest in saying that disruption can happen. I think that every reasonable commuter—every passenger I have spoken to—understands that winter weather, for example, probably will affect certain services at certain points, but I want the communication to be better, including to passengers, and I want improvements to be made.



Neil Bibby said that action is demanded and I agree that it is demanded. That is why I have highlighted investment of £16 million in the infrastructure and £14 million in the fleet, and the skip-stop protocols that are in place. I also mentioned that fare increases are at their lowest level anywhere on these islands and at their lowest since we took over those powers in 2005.

If Neil Bibby wants to carp from the sidelines and make pathetic, personal and petty attacks on me, that is fine—I will leave him to do that. I will stand up for the commuters and the passengers in this country, day in and day out.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** I welcome the potential option of a future public sector bid, but my constituents—particularly those who use the Maryhill train line—are more concerned about service improvements over a much shorter period. I met Abellio ScotRail to ask it to meet impacted commuters in my constituency and listen to their concerns, with a view to a local improvement plan being put in place, and it agreed to do so.

I ask the minister to take a personal interest in that improvement plan for a train line that has suffered more than most. Does he agree that it is vital that Abellio has such local engagement to help it to drive change?

**Humza Yousaf:** I agree with all of that. I take a personal interest in performance across all routes. I speak to ScotRail daily—I do so early in the morning and Transport Scotland follows that up in the evening peak to make sure that services are running to the standards that we expect. I take a personal interest in performance, including performance on the Maryhill line, to ensure that ScotRail delivers on its performance improvement plan.

I am pleased that ScotRail has had positive engagement with the member. I will take that up with ScotRail when I next speak to it to make sure that that local engagement continues. I am pleased to hear that Bob Doris is having a positive experience. That message goes out to all members because, in representing their constituents, they will see where improvements can be made. I have spoken to many members who have had constructive relationships with ScotRail, which I want to continue. If there are ever any blockages in getting to ScotRail's senior management, I will be more than happy to take that up with the company, because local engagement is vital.

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. If he is receiving twice-daily updates from ScotRail, it is no wonder that he has a glum demeanour.

Having an effective and efficient rail network is key to meeting our climate change targets. That is why it is deeply concerning that ScotRail's performance improvement plan identifies 250 individual actions. How many of those 250 individual actions must be delivered for the minister to be satisfied? What will happen if they are not?

**Humza Yousaf:** I will again leave aside the petty personal attacks that have characterised much of the Opposition's attack, which show that it does not have much to say by way of substance. Passengers and commuters will not thank the member for taking such an approach.

When it comes to improvements, as I said to Neil Bibby, improvements are already being made. Performance has improved from 89.5 to 89.8 per cent. It is still not where I want it to be, and we will drive that harder where we can. We expect all the actions in the performance improvement plan to be undertaken.

I will speak to ScotRail, as a couple of members have suggested, to establish how many of the 246 actions can be made fully public and how that can be done. ScotRail has told me that it would be willing to meet any member, to take them to the control room in Atrium Court and to talk them through any of those measures.

I have made it very clear to the public and to members that, if performance dips or does not improve, there will be serious consequences, but I have confidence that performance can continue on the right trajectory, notwithstanding the fact that there will be disruptions as a result of weather events, mechanical faults and technical failures—we know that those things can happen. Passengers want a better service, and I instructed the improvement plan's production. A number of actions will follow, and I will be happy to keep Maurice Golden updated on progress.

**James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab):** It is totally unacceptable that too many trains are overcrowded, particularly at peak times. Why does that continue to be the case in a so-called "world leading contract"? Why does Abellio continue to rake in millions of pounds in profits while passengers have to stand during their train journeys?

**Humza Yousaf:** That is a fair question. Let us take the overcrowding issue. Since 2007, there has been huge passenger growth—the number of passengers has increased by 33 per cent. Since 2007, we have introduced 140 extra carriages. On top of that, I have today announced the provision of an additional 200 carriages up to 2019, starting immediately. Six of the seven additional trains that are being provided on the busiest route—the Glasgow suburban route—are already on route;

there is one more to come. I am sure that that will affect Mr Kelly's constituents. On top of that, we have just announced from mid-December additional carriages coming to the Borders.

I agree with the member that overcrowding is an issue, and tackling it is part of the improvement plan and part of our investment. By the time investment is complete, the 200 additional carriages and 200 additional services that we are introducing, the lower fares and lower fare increases and the additional spending on the infrastructure will, I believe, have led to a much better service for passengers. The member is right that overcrowding is an issue; part of the improvement plan is about tackling it, and I have set out some of the actions for how we intend to do so.

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):**

I thank the minister for early sight of his statement and, indeed, for the invitation to the meeting, which I will be happy to take up. I also acknowledge the good news about the Inverness to Perth commuter services.

Although it is entirely fair to record that delays are inevitable on any service, I think that it is important that the minister has acknowledged the level of dissatisfaction. With performance being so low and the situation—as I think he is aware—being worse on the far north line, it is our view that passengers should automatically receive a form for claiming compensation instead of having to go looking for one. Is he able to ensure that that will be the case? Moreover, can the minister direct a small amount of capital investment at ensuring that facilities for passengers who are waiting for connections are warm, secure and safe?

**Humza Yousaf:** I thank John Finnie for the constructive tone of his question. On the compensation side of things, he is absolutely right: passengers who do not get the service that they expected get frustrated when they find that they have to go through additional obstacles and hoops in order to get compensation. Recently, my officials instructed ScotRail to review its compensation processes and procedures; I will make sure that the idea of forms being given out automatically when performance does not meet the thresholds and our expectations is fed in to that. Indeed, I am sure that it has already been fed in. I will keep the member updated on that.

On John Finnie's wider point about below-standard investment in facilities at some stations, he will know about the service quality incentive regime—or SQUIRE—which is by far the toughest auditing regime on these islands. Recently, ScotRail had to pay just under half a million pounds because it had failed to meet expectations for passenger facilities at stations and so on. That fund, which now tops £2 million, is reinvested in

ensuring that standards are met. I will ensure that my officials write to the member about the actions that ScotRail has taken. If there are specific stations at which he thinks facilities need to be upgraded, that information can be passed on to ScotRail directly. I will be happy to look at it, too.

As for Mr Finnie's support for our commitment on a public sector operator putting forward a public sector bid, I look forward to discussing the matter with him next week and to hearing the Greens' ideas on that.

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):**

When will the minister stop causing confusion? At the weekend, he said that the service was so poor that he was setting up a public sector operator, but just now, he said that it is not poor after all.

Passengers do not, I am afraid to say, want ministerial flannel. They want to see the plan of action and they want the timetable for improvements to be enforced. The minister has just said in his statement that he published the plan with its 250 actions, but he has done no such thing. That is more confusion from a confused minister. Where is the evidence that the minister has any intention of publishing the full list of 250 actions with their time limits?

**Humza Yousaf:** That is not what I said. What I said was that a version of the improvement plan was published on 20 October. Mike Rumbles, along with a number of other members, has asked me whether the actions—around 250 of them—can be published. I will speak to ScotRail and get back to him on that. There should be as much accountability and transparency as possible with regard to the actions. Sometimes, however, there will be issues and there will be reasons why that cannot be the case, but I will be fully transparent and open with the member and with passengers and commuters about that.

On the level of service, I have made it clear that it is simply not good enough. If I had thought that it was good enough, I would not have instructed that an improvement plan be put together. I have done that because I believe that the level of service is not good enough. If we look over the eight-week period, we will see that improvements are being made. The demand is that there is improvement on performance below 90.3 per cent in the railway year, which is the trigger for the improvement plan. Of course, 91.3 per cent is the target in the contract. It is a very high target, and one that we expect the operator to deliver.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** I understand that this morning there were delays on the Glasgow central station to Partick low-level line because of damage to the overhead wires. Is the minister satisfied with the way in which ScotRail dealt with that?

**Humza Yousaf:** We are making £60 million of investment on overhead line equipment and Network Rail's infrastructure. Commuters frequently hear about points and signal failures and failures with overhead line equipment, which is why we are bringing forward that investment.

I said in my statement that lessons have been learned. Last Thursday's disruption caused huge amounts of disruption for passengers and commuters, and I heard from passengers that one of the most frustrating parts of the disruption was the lack of information that came out. Passengers were not being given information by front-line staff, who feel that information was not communicated to them from the centre.

Lessons have been learned. Let me give some examples. John Mason was right to mention that in the early hours of this morning a railhead treatment train that is operating for the autumn period came into contact with an object that was hanging from overhead line equipment in the vicinity of the Kelvinhaugh tunnel, near Finnieston, which caused damage to the overhead line equipment. After that, ScotRail sent the first text messages to passengers at 5.59 in the morning. That alert was then repeated every 30 minutes and from 7.45 it was repeated every 15 minutes. ScotRail initially updated its website at 11 minutes past 6 this morning. Station announcements were initiated at the beginning of the service and were repeated every 10 minutes. Twenty additional staff were deployed to affected stations across the network. Senior managers were also sent down to Exhibition Centre station and Anderston station to ensure that they could deal with inquiries there.

I am not saying that what happened was perfect. Of course, disruption of any nature causes difficulties for commuters and passengers, so I repeat my apology for the disruption. As the transport minister, I do not want to see such disruption, but sometimes these things happen. I do not think that anybody is seriously suggesting that services should have run. Running a train through wires hanging from an overhead line would have put passengers' lives at risk.

Lessons have been learned. Things can and should get better, of course, which is why I will continue to hold Abellio to account for that.

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** If the minister accepts that he is struggling in his job to hold Abellio to account, what makes him think that he would be any better if he ran the trains himself? If he is failing as the ticket examiner, why would he be any better as the driver?

**Humza Yousaf:** Again, that was a pathetic and petty personal attack with no substance whatsoever. However, I must say, Presiding Officer, that it was well read from the script.

On the public sector bid, the Conservatives have said that their transport spokesperson will come. I am very happy to listen to their ideas.

Annie Wells should not be dismissive of open competition. When a private company can compete, why on earth could a public sector company not? We have already had that with CalMac Ferries, which competed with a private operator and runs a good service. Annie Wells might not like that, and she can shake her head at it, but why can a public sector company or an operator that is run by the public sector not compete with a private company? It can. Our manifesto commitment was to get as many people as possible to come together in the big bothy or big tent to inform the discussion. I am delighted that the member will attend, and I look forward to hearing her constructive—I hope—ideas.

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** A Rail Accident Investigation Branch report this month into the closure of the Lamington viaduct between Carstairs and Lockerbie in my region revealed a series of faults by Network Rail that could have led to serious loss of life, had it not been for the actions of a vigilant train driver. The report said that corrosion was identified in 2005 but nothing was done, and the chief inspector expressed serious concern. What power, if any, does the Scottish Government have to hold Network Rail to account for that appalling neglect? How can we be sure that Network Rail has not been similarly negligent in its maintenance of other stretches of track in Scotland?

**Humza Yousaf:** It is clear that the safety of passengers, staff and the wider public is the number 1 priority for all parties that are involved in Scotland's railways. I do not think that any of the political parties in the chamber would differ on that.

The Rail Accident Investigation Branch report raised a number of serious questions and concerns about the circumstances that led to closure of the Lamington viaduct last winter. The Scottish Government has a number of devolved responsibilities, but railway safety is a reserved matter, as Joan McAlpine may know. The Office of Rail and Road, which is the independent health and safety regulator, is undertaking a review of the incident. We will look to it to determine whether there has been a breach of health and safety obligations by Network Rail and whether enforcement action is required.

I have a constructive relationship with the railway minister in the UK Government Department for Transport, Paul Maynard. Of course, I will be happy to share any lessons learned and to hear from him how the UK Government might also take forward some of the findings of that review. However let me be clear

that the Scottish Government has funded Network Rail to discharge all its safety obligations fully, as determined independently by the ORR. The issues that are identified by the RAIB can in no way be equated to lack of funding from the Scottish Government.

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** The minister mentioned the signing of the 10-year contract with Abellio in his statement, and talks about pursuing a public sector bid. Can he confirm—as was outlined in my motion of October 2014 and confirmed by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers—that the Government could have delayed the contract award until the new powers were devolved and a public sector bid would be permitted? He also mentioned Whifflet, where 53 per cent of trains arrive late. Can he now tell us exactly how much longer people will have to put up with late, overpriced, overcrowded and cancelled trains before the Government steps in to establish a public operator of last resort?

**Humza Yousaf:** I will make a point to Elaine Smith about attacking Abellio. I agree with her that its performance has not been up to scratch, but the Labour Party, when it was the UK Government, also appointed Abellio to a franchise. I remind the member that this Government introduced legislation that allows public sector operators to bid, after inaction by her party's Government for a number of years.

I have seen a question by Kenny MacAskill to Lewis Macdonald on that very question from 2002, in which Lewis Macdonald said that he was having discussions with the UK Government, which clearly did not materialise into powers coming to the Scottish Parliament. It should be acknowledged that the SNP introduced the powers to allow public sector operators to make a public sector contract bids. Clearly, a lot of work has to go into that, which is why I am calling for political party transport spokespersons, rail transport providers and unions to come around the table to inform that discussion. I very much look forward to hearing Elaine Smith's constructive views. We are committed to a public sector bid, and the SNP is the party that brought forward the legislation that allows that to happen.

**The Presiding Officer:** I thank members. That brings to an end—

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):** On a point of order.

Presiding Officer, I seek your guidance. The minister read out his statement, and I have a copy of it here. He said:

"I instructed ScotRail on 23 August to develop a performance improvement plan ... That plan was published

on 20 October ... There are some 250 individual actions in the plan."

I have been unable to locate those 250 actions: they have not been published in the public domain. More importantly, the Scottish Parliament information centre—if members would like to listen to this, they might find the information helpful—does not have the information. *[Interruption.]* This certainly is a point of order. I seek your guidance as to whether SPICe could make that information available.

**The Presiding Officer:** I thank Mike Rumbles for that point of order. It was the same as the question that he asked the minister, and to which the minister replied. The member is at liberty to ask further questions of the minister, to write to him or to make inquiries of SPICe seeking the information he requests. However, it is not a point of order for me to rule on.

**Elaine Smith:** On a point of order.

Thank you, Presiding Officer. I wonder whether you could advise on whether there is anything in the standing orders about replying to questions. I laid questions to the Government at the beginning of the month, some of which were addressed in the statement. Today is the last day for replies to my questions, and they had not yet been replied to before I came to the chamber. Can you give guidance on when members of this Parliament should expect replies to their questions?

**The Presiding Officer:** I thank Elaine Smith for her question. There are laid-down timescales that offer guidance to members, of which the member should be aware. I expect the Government to respond within those timescales. The member is free to ask questions of the minister if timescales are not adhered to.

We have gone well over time and have eaten into a debate that I know is of great interest to members. We will take a few minutes to change seats then move on with the debate.

## Social Security

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-02651, in the name of Jeane Freeman, on the future of social security in Scotland. Members will be aware that we now have no spare time in hand, unfortunately. I call the minister to speak to and move the motion.

15:20

**The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman):** I am pleased to open this debate on the future of social security in Scotland.

The new social security powers will devolve a total of 11 benefits to the Scottish Government. The benefits affect one in four of us—1.4 million people across Scotland. It is no exaggeration to say that transferring the new devolved benefits safely is the biggest challenge that any Scottish Government has faced since devolution. When our Parliament was reconvened we collectively took responsibility for existing Scotland-specific institutions, laws and delivery infrastructure in health, education and justice. There is no Scotland-specific social security legislative framework or infrastructure. Our job is to build a social security system—a public service—from scratch.

The 11 benefits that will be devolved represent 15 per cent of the total United Kingdom spend on welfare. What we have to do together is simultaneously unpick an integrated UK benefits system that has developed in a piecemeal fashion over the past 50 years, design and build the Scottish social security system and plug it back into the UK welfare system, which will, for the benefits that it retains, carry on operating in Scotland and will itself be undergoing reform at the hands of the UK Government.

The scale is large—11 benefits and 1.4 million people—and the task is complex. I will give a couple of examples so that members have some idea of the complexity. The existing cold weather payment rests on 11 different Department for Work and Pensions information technology systems that have to work together to give us the data on who in Scotland is eligible for the payment. The industrial injuries disablement benefit is paper based. That means that for us to simply know who in Scotland receives the payment—the basic information of name, address, age and payment level—someone will need to go through all the brown folders, one each for everyone in the UK who receives the benefit, and pull out the Scottish postcodes so that those paper folders can be passed to us.

We need to understand that the UK Government's approach to transition will also have a bearing on timescales—introducing devolved benefits does not simply depend on what we do but depends equally on what the DWP has to stop doing. We are not, and will never be, entirely in control of any timetable or the switch-on or switch-off of social security powers.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** The minister has given a detailed summary of the bureaucratic stuff that has to go on behind the scenes, but none of that is new. This has been going on for some time. Why was a commitment given in the white paper that all this could be introduced in 18 months?

**Jeane Freeman:** We have gone over this before. I urge Neil Findlay to go back and read the white paper. The white paper commitment refers to the transition platform of 18 months, which would set the framework in which all the subsequent work, including this transfer, would go ahead.

My point about complexity is to demonstrate, I hope, to members who are not hard of understanding that unpicking 15 per cent from a total is a lot harder than taking 100 per cent and redesigning the system from scratch. We have dealt with that, so I will carry on.

If we set that scale and complexity against our overall primary objective, which is to ensure the safe and secure transfer of benefits, I hope that members will understand why no one outside this chamber has at any point asked us to move more quickly, and why everyone has urged us to move safely.

We need to make sure that, when we take over delivery of the 11 benefits—which will happen in the timeframe that we have consistently given, which is within this parliamentary session—every one of the 1.4 million people receives the money that they expect, at the level to which they are entitled, on the day when they expect it. Not one person can be let down or can fall into a gap between the Scottish and the UK systems because we have not taken the time to think through and work out every aspect and angle of what needs to be done.

We have been clear from the outset that the social security system that we will build will be based on a clear premise and guiding principles. Social security is an investment that we collectively make in ourselves and in each other, and our system will operate from the premise that everyone who comes to it for help and support does so because they need to. Further, the service and the system will have the principles of dignity, fairness and respect embedded throughout its operation.

We are also very clear that, to get it right and to deliver on those principles, we need to build the system from the ground up. We have recently completed a three-month consultation, which was specifically designed to hear directly from those with lived experience of the current benefits system, from those who work with and support them, and from the people who deliver the system. More than 120 events were held, covering every local authority area in Scotland, and many hundreds of people were reached. More than 500 written responses have been received, more than half of which were from individuals, and they were published on our website yesterday.

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities and I went to many of those events and we were privileged to hear many people tell us about their experience. Very often, it was not easy for those who told us their story. We heard experience after experience that had the common threads of a lack of information; a difficult-to-access service; assessments that did not touch on how life really is for the individual concerned; decisions that are based not on the evidence presented but on what appears to be subjective judgment; and a process that feels heartless and impersonal and leaves people feeling judged, demeaned and diminished. Members around the chamber will have heard very similar stories from their constituents.

It was not easy for the people I listened to or for the many more who spoke out at those events, but I am profoundly grateful to them for their trust in us. They trusted that we were listening and that their experiences will be at the forefront of every step that we take and every decision that we make to build our new social security system for Scotland. I am sure that every member in the chamber will want to take the opportunity to put on record our thanks as a Parliament to everyone who was involved in the consultation for taking the time to give us the benefit of their experience and their knowledge.

We cannot fix every wrong or address every unfairness that we heard about. Those wrongs and that unfairness exist in a UK welfare system that the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has rightly condemned for “grave or systematic violations” of the rights of disabled people.

**Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** The minister is perfectly right to say that 11 benefits are devolved under the Scotland Act 2016. However, she has not said anything yet about the fact that, in addition, the Scottish Government has the powers to top up any reserved benefit and to create new benefits within devolved competence. Will the minister say anything about that in her remarks?

**Jeane Freeman:** No, I do not intend to, although Mr Tomkins is correct that those powers have been transferred to us.

Where was I?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** It was something to do with the UN committee—I was listening.

**Jeane Freeman:** Yes—interestingly, Mr Tomkins interrupted me right in the middle of what I was telling members about the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Let me repeat that it condemned the UK welfare system for “grave or systematic violations” of the rights of disabled people.

The Scottish Government will not replicate those mistakes, nor can we fix the cumulative loss to Scotland of £2 billion a year by 2020 as a result of the UK welfare cuts made since 2010, which the Sheffield Hallam University research for the Social Security Committee highlighted. However, we can ensure that our social security system will not be ruled by an ideologically driven intent to impose cuts on those who are least able to withstand their impact and those who are least responsible for the state of public finances, unlike what we have seen from the Westminster Tory Government.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jeane Freeman:** No, I will not.

Each and every response that we received, and each and every one of the conversations that we had, is important. The consultation responses are now being independently analysed, and we will publish that analysis and our response to it in early 2017.

As we have said, the devolution of these powers is a process. In that process, there are key stages. The relevant sections of the Scotland Act 2016 need to be commenced by the UK Government, this Parliament needs to make its own legislation and the Scottish Government needs to ensure that the necessary operational infrastructure is in place. In the words of the motion, that all adds up to

“a robust delivery infrastructure and a legislative framework scrutinised”—

as it should be—

“by the Parliament”.

A number of parallel work streams have begun. In January, in order to continue to reflect our absolute commitment to build our social security system on the foundations of lived experience and grounded expertise, we will launch a recruitment exercise for 2,000 volunteers to join our experience panels. The volunteers will be people

who currently receive one or more of the 11 benefits, and they will work with us in the long term to help us to make the right improvements and changes to every aspect and detail of how our system will work, how it will communicate, how it will engage and how it will make decisions. We already have people coming forward to express their interest in joining us, and I hope that members will make sure that their constituents know about that opportunity and will encourage their involvement when we launch in the new year.

At the same time, we will bring together people with direct experience and expertise in providing benefit advice and support services to help us to ensure that the benefits that we deliver are aligned with the UK system and that we do not create unintended negative consequences by improving Scottish benefits in a way that creates knock-on detrimental impacts on the benefits that an individual receives from the UK system.

Alongside that, we will engage more real expertise in delivering payment systems—benefits and others—to help us to design the processes and build the working culture of dignity, fairness and respect that will be essential for those who will deliver our social security system in Scotland.

All that work will run in parallel with drafting the necessary legislation, which we will introduce in this parliamentary year. To provide additional strategic oversight to our work and help us through the challenges of improving critical areas such as the assessment process, we will establish a disability and carers benefits expert advisory group, working with us in the long term from early next year.

The scale and complexity of our task is clear. However, so, too, is the golden opportunity that we have not only to build a social security system for Scotland that brings our founding principles alive but to build that system in direct response to the lived experience and long-term involvement of those who know best what needs to change.

Every party and every member in the Parliament have a direct stake in the future of social security in Scotland. Our collective job is to put the people of Scotland first and political point scoring last, and to get on and build this new public service as an exemplar of fairness, accessibility and transparency that is focused on doing the right thing for those whom it serves.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that social security is an investment in the people of Scotland, by the people of Scotland; expresses its thanks to all the individuals and organisations across Scotland who responded and engaged with the recent consultation on the future of social security; notes that the Scottish Government will continue that engagement and will harness and use the lived experience of people across Scotland as the social security

system is developed; understands that this is the largest transfer of powers to the Parliament and will require a major programme of transition and implementation in order to ensure that Scotland's future social security system meets the needs, expectations and ambitions of its people; recognises that this transfer will affect 1.4 million people and that therefore the safe and secure transfer of benefits must be the priority and is only possible with the underpinning of both a robust delivery infrastructure and a legislative framework scrutinised by the Parliament, and agrees that reform of the benefits to be devolved is necessary in order to build the fair, accessible and dignified social security system that Scotland needs and deserves.

15:33

**Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** Social security in Scotland is now the joint—that is to say, the shared—responsibility of the Scottish and UK Governments. In the Smith commission, nobody seriously advanced the proposition that the state pension should be devolved, and that accounts for nearly one half of social security spending in Scotland.

To have devolved all of working-age social security would have been to fail to respect the result of the independence referendum, in whose immediate aftermath the Smith commission met. In that referendum, a clear majority of Scots voted to maintain the pooling and sharing of risk and resources that the union of Scotland with the rest of the United Kingdom represents. In no field is that pooling and sharing more important than in social security. Therefore, working-age social security was split, with some of it remaining at the UK level and some of it being devolved. The UK is responsible for about two thirds of that, and the Scottish Government for one third. However, even within the two-thirds share that the UK remains responsible for, Scottish ministers will have powers to top up reserved benefits, powers to create new benefits and powers to alter the operation of reserved benefits in Scotland. I say all that because Jeane Freeman's motion bizarrely fails to acknowledge any of it, hence our amendment to include "the UK" as well as "Scotland" in the opening words of the motion.

We realise that social security devolution is novel and complex and we are surely all agreed—right across the chamber—that the priority in the design and delivery of devolved social security must be the welfare of the people in Scotland who rely on it. However, it is also important that the Scottish ministers be open with, and accountable to, the Parliament for the decisions that they make about social security devolution.

It emerged earlier this month that, in October, the Scottish ministers asked the UK Government to consider a wholly novel split competence approach to the devolution of certain welfare powers under the Scotland Act 2016. No one had heard of that notion before and, for all their

protestations to the contrary, neither the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities nor the Minister for Social Security explained to the Social Security Committee, on which I sit, what precisely they mean by it or what impact it will have on the timing of the transfer of the welfare powers to the Parliament. When we sought to ask questions about it last week, we were accused of playing political football. It was only late yesterday afternoon that members of the Social Security Committee finally received an explanation of what is going on.

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** Will Adam Tomkins give way?

**Adam Tomkins:** I want to finish the point about split competence.

**Sandra White:** Will Adam Tomkins give way on that point?

**Adam Tomkins:** I will finish the point if the member will permit me and then, of course, I will give way to the convener of the Social Security Committee.

Obtaining accurate information about the process of so-called split competence has been like pulling teeth. It is simply not good enough. The Scottish ministers have an obligation to explain to the Parliament in advance of joint ministerial meetings what they propose to discuss at those meetings. In this case, no such advance notice was given, in clear breach of the Government's written agreement with the Parliament. If the Government wishes to avoid giving the impression that it is delaying the transfer of welfare powers, perhaps it should start to explain itself in good time, rather than leaving us chasing ministers for scraps of information about what they have sought to arrange behind closed doors.

**Sandra White:** As convener of the Social Security Committee, I do not recollect anyone talking about political football in the committee meeting—perhaps in private, but certainly not in public. You mentioned letters, Mr Tomkins, and the Scottish Government or the minister operating in secrecy. You all have a reply and the answer that you were given in the committee was already written on 8 November and also in June. You got the answer, so perhaps the political football and blaming are coming from you, Mr Tomkins—from the Tory side.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please do not use the term “you”—just the names of the parties.

**Sandra White:** I apologise, Presiding Officer.

**Adam Tomkins:** I am just trying to understand exactly what the Scottish ministers mean by split competence. The expression “political football” was used in open session by the minister and by me and was quoted by the First Minister at First

Minister's questions last week, so it was not in private at all.

A second area of confusion which, again, has been caused entirely by the Scottish ministers, concerns the use of conditionality in devolved employability programmes. We know that it is the Scottish Government's desire that its employability programmes operate without the use of sanctions. We think that the Scottish ministers are in danger of being naive if they are really of the view that effective employment support can be run without conditionality but, if that is what they are minded to do, so be it. I wish them well.

The confusion arises when we think about the relationship of devolved employability programmes with reserved benefits such as jobseekers allowance and universal credit, which will continue to be operated by the DWP. A successful social security system will be one in which the reserved benefits for jobseekers and the Scottish Government's employability programmes operate together as smoothly and seamlessly as possible. Therefore, it was with some concern that we read that the cabinet secretary, Angela Constance, said in an interview in September:

“While we can't stop the UK Government putting conditions on the work-related benefits, we're not going to be giving them any information or responding to inquiries if we think that might lead to a sanction.”

So much for not playing political football.

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** Will Adam Tomkins give way?

**Adam Tomkins:** No, I want to develop this point.

UK ministers have made it perfectly plain that the design of Scottish employability programmes is a matter entirely for this Parliament. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions reaffirmed that point only this week in a letter to the convener of the Social Security Committee. I should have thought that it was perfectly obvious that there is a world of difference between DWP ministers clarifying that the design of Scottish employment support programmes is a matter for us and not for them, on the one hand, and DWP ministers accepting that everyone on a Scottish employment support programme will somehow be free of conditionality in respect of the reserved benefits that they may continue to claim, on the other. However, that elementary distinction seems to have escaped our rather confused cabinet secretary.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** Will Mr Tomkins give way?

**Adam Tomkins:** If I can finish this point, I will absolutely give way to the cabinet secretary.



Angela Constance has apparently interpreted the UK Government's commitment to the devolution of employment support to mean that

"a deal had been struck with the UK government which would mean that Scots won't face the threat of sanctions".

Similar comments appear from Jamie Hepburn in today's *Herald* and *Guardian* newspapers.

I am not sure whether the Scottish ministers have deliberately misunderstood what the secretary of state has said in order to stoke yet another nationalist grievance or whether the complexity of the matter is simply beyond them. Perhaps Angela Constance can answer that question now.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Briefly, please, cabinet secretary, as Mr Tomkins is now into the last minute of his speech.

**Angela Constance:** I remind Mr Tomkins that I have some history on this matter, as I was previously, a few portfolios ago, Minister for Youth Employment. Sanctions have never applied to Scottish employability programmes. Our position on the UK Government's disproportionate, out-of-order and broken sanctions regime is well known. We were never going to have a sanctions regime for employability; nor were we going to do anything to perpetuate it. I am pleased that Damian Green has confirmed the position that Iain Duncan Smith originally articulated some years ago.

I therefore beg to differ. I think that the confusion lies at Mr Tomkins's door and at that of the UK Government, not ours.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will give you a little bit of extra time to deal with that, Mr Tomkins.

**Adam Tomkins:** That is very kind of you, Presiding Officer. I am grateful.

There is a difference. Everybody understands that the employability support programme that will be run by the Scottish Government will be a voluntary programme, but it does not follow from that that people on those programmes who are claiming jobseekers allowance under the still reserved DWP-administered programmes will not have to prove or demonstrate that they are looking for work. If members read the second page of Damian Green's most recent letter as well as the first page, they will find that that is confirmed.

Whatever the case is, the devolution of employability programmes is yet another area of Scottish social security where, instead of clarity, which is all we are asking for, there is obfuscation from the Scottish ministers. Rather than co-operation with the UK, there is belligerence and hostility. Instead of getting on with it, the Scottish National Party is dragging its feet, more

enthusiastic about contrived grievance than constructive government. Six months into this session of Parliament and the mid-year report on the future of social security in Scotland is "Must do better."

I move amendment S5M-02651.2, to leave out from "by the people" to end and insert:

"and the UK, by the people of Scotland and the UK; expresses its thanks to all the individuals and organisations across Scotland who responded and engaged with the recent consultation on the future of social security; notes that the Scottish Government will continue that engagement and will harness and use the lived experience of people across Scotland as the social security system is developed; understands that this is the largest transfer of powers to the Parliament and will require a major programme of transition and implementation in order to ensure that Scotland's future social security system meets the needs, expectations and ambitions of its people; recognises that this transfer will affect 1.4 million people and that therefore the safe and secure transfer of benefits must be the priority and is only possible with the underpinning of both a robust delivery infrastructure and a legislative framework scrutinised by the Parliament, but is concerned at the lack of accountability regarding the Scottish Ministers' proposals on the commencement of sections 22 and 23 of the Scotland Act 2016 and at the confusion that the ministers have generated over the future use of conditionality in the context of devolved employability programmes."

15:42

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to debate the future of social security in Scotland.

When it comes to the devolution of social security powers,

"It is important that the transition is smooth and people do not find themselves with a gap in payments. We recognise that this is a complex process and will take time to get right but it is also important that where we can help people now, we do this. The current social security system is failing people every day and we should not delay any opportunity we have to improve the lives of people on low incomes."

Those are not my words, but the words of the Poverty Alliance.

"The longer no action is taken, the more disabled people will suffer and die at the hands of the Tories."

Those are not my words but the words of the Scots film maker, in today's *Daily Record*, who has documented the harrowing testimonies of those who have been subjected to personal independence payment assessments.

The devolution of welfare powers gives us the chance to restore dignity to the heart of the social security system, yet now we know that the SNP has delayed the devolution of the key welfare powers that it claimed to want urgently. The Tories will continue to make their cuts, and the most vulnerable will continue to suffer.

That is the same Scottish Government that told us that a whole new independent country could be set up in 18 months, but it now turns out that it will take years to devolve 11 benefits.

**Angela Constance:** Will Mr Griffin give way?

**Mark Griffin:** I would like to make some progress. I have a specific point on the timetable and the delay that the cabinet secretary would perhaps like to address, and I will happily bring her in then.

The Scottish Government has spent its entire time in office arguing for the powers to enable it to make different choices from the Tories. Now, it is signing deals to delay the delivery of those powers that would allow it to choose a different path.

The cost to Scotland of leaving those powers with the Tories is substantial. Sheffield Hallam University calculates that Scotland has already lost £1.1 billion a year in social security payments, with another £1 billion to follow. Between 2010 and 2020, Glasgow alone looks set to lose £167 million, while West Lothian will lose £38 million, Fife will lose £74 million and North Lanarkshire will lose £78 million.

One of the most concerning examples of how that decision could impact people in Scotland is the migration from disability living allowance to the personal independence payment. The United Kingdom Government is currently moving disabled benefit recipients from the old benefit—DLA—to the personal independence payment, which could lead to Scots losing a collective £190 million a year.

Leaving executive competence in the hands of the UK Government could mean that 150,000 people on the old benefit remain at risk of going through the new assessment process while the Scottish Government waits for full control over those powers. During that time, the Tories will continue to make their cuts and the most vulnerable will continue to suffer. In the minister's constituency, almost 3,000 people may have to endure a Tory PIP assessment while the Scottish National Party delays the transfer of powers. That also applies to another 2,260 people in the cabinet secretary's constituency. In the region that I represent, almost 20,000 people will be at risk of going through the new assessment process and losing out because of the delay in assuming control over those benefits.

**Angela Constance:** Mr Griffin, who is normally very eloquent and insightful, started off by quoting the Poverty Alliance. However, the Poverty Alliance has said to the Government and to every member in the chamber that we should proceed and conclude matters safely.

I must correct Mr Griffin—the minutes of the joint ministerial working group go to the Social Security Committee. On the cheap point that he tried to make about independence, if Scotland had voted yes in 2014 we would have been independent this year, but the welfare state would not have transitioned fully into our grasp until 2018. We need to set the record straight in that respect.

**Mark Griffin:** I said that I had a particular point to make about the delay in assuming those powers. That related to the danger for people who are on DLA and are reassessed and moved over to PIP. There has been no answer on that from the Scottish Government, but I hope that the minister will address the issue in summing up.

Approximately 20,000 people in my region, more than 2,000 people in the cabinet secretary's constituency and 150,000 people overall across Scotland are on DLA and at risk of being reassessed and moved over to PIP because the Scottish Government is leaving executive competence with the UK Government.

**Jeane Freeman:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mark Griffin:** I will happily leave it to the minister to respond to those points in summing up—I have progress to make.

I welcome the opportunity to debate the future of social security in Scotland, but for people who rely on that support, the future is tomorrow, next week or next month—it is not 2020. The constituents who come to see us daily just cannot wait that long.

In September, we called on the Government to use the social security bill to set a legal duty on its new social security agency to increase the uptake of social security benefits and maximise incomes in Scotland.

Ahead of this debate, Labour has released new figures that show that 56,000 carers in Scotland do not receive the carers allowance to which they are entitled. Those figures have been verified by the independent experts in the Scottish Parliament information centre. They show that carers allowance worth £170 million has not been collected by 56,000 carers in Scotland who are entitled to it. Carers are often the unsung heroes of our country. Thousands of people dedicate their lives to caring for others and save the Government—in particular our national health service and social care system—billions of pounds through their selfless care and attention.

All parties in the Scottish Parliament agreed to increase carers allowance to the same rate as jobseekers allowance. That is an increase of £11 per week—the very least that carers deserve—

and it will be worth £600 a year. To truly make sure that carers benefit, we want to increase the amount that they receive and ensure that every single carer who is eligible claims it. We believe that that could be achieved by placing a statutory duty on the new social security agency.

I will wind up there by simply asking members to support the amendment in my name.

I move amendment S5M-02651.3, to leave out from “understands” to “scrutinised by the Parliament” and insert:

“recognises the considerable work that local government and third sector welfare rights organisations do across the country to support people to maximise their incomes; believes that an extensive public information campaign, complemented by a well-resourced welfare rights network, can further this work in advance of the transfer of social security powers; agrees that a statutory duty on the new social security agency to maximise people’s incomes is necessary to ensure increased take-up by those who are eligible; understands that this is the largest transfer of powers to the Parliament and will require a major programme of transition and implementation in order to ensure that Scotland’s future social security system meets the needs, expectations and ambitions of its people; recognises that this transfer will affect 1.4 million people and that therefore the safe and secure transfer of benefits must be the priority, but believes that the complexities of devolution must neither undermine or impede the delivery of real changes for Scotland’s most vulnerable, and that devolution must be realised before 2020 to allow the Parliament and the Scottish Government to halt and reverse the worst effects of Tory social security cuts”.

15:50

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** I have been looking forward to the opportunity to speak in the debate, but first I want to clarify something for Mr Tomkins. The letter that he referred to says:

“Dear Sandra, ... as I confirmed to the committee DWP will make referrals to devolved employment programmes on a voluntary basis.”

It goes on:

“For the avoidance of doubt, a voluntary referral means that a benefit sanction would not be applied for failure to attend or participate in the programme.”

That is that issue laid to rest, and I hope that Mr Tomkins will take that on board.

**Adam Tomkins:** Will Sandra White give way on that point?

**Sandra White:** I will take an intervention.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I feel an exchange of quotations coming on.

**Adam Tomkins:** You read my mind, Presiding Officer. On the very next page of the letter, the secretary of state goes on to say:

“It is also worth noting that these claimants will still be required to meet other conditions to continue to receive

benefit—meaning they will need to demonstrate that they are looking for work”,

otherwise they will still be eligible for conditions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms White, do you have another quote back?

**Sandra White:** No, I do not want to quote back, but I want to say something to Mr Tomkins. He quotes the second page of the letter. He is also very confused. If Mr Tomkins turned up at meetings and did not have two jobs to go to, he might not be so confused. I will not take any lessons from someone who publicly said that he could not live on an MSP’s salary so he had to have a second job. I will leave it there, but perhaps Mr Tomkins can think about that. Maybe he is confusing—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could we return to the motion?

**Sandra White:** I will, but that is part of the motion.

I am proud of the SNP Government, which is committed to taking the new system in a very different direction from what I see as the archaic and punitive structure that the Tory Government has put in place. The SNP will deliver a system that will treat people with dignity and respect. I welcome that commitment and I sincerely hope that other members, regardless of their party, welcome it too. As the minister said, a timetable is in place for the safe and secure transfer of powers. It is the responsibility of the Social Security Committee, which I convene, to ensure that the social security bill is thoroughly scrutinised.

I was rather concerned by Mark Griffin’s remarks. I think very highly of Mark Griffin, but the Labour Party and the Tory party seem to be hand in hand in scaring people—that is what they are doing. We want a smooth transition that does not result in people falling through the net, but that will not happen if the legislation is rushed through, and Mark Griffin knows that.

**Mark Griffin:** We are clearly not working hand in hand with the Tories, since we are criticising the fact that the powers are remaining with the Tories. Perhaps Sandra White could address the point that 150,000 people in Scotland are in danger of being reassessed when going from DLA to PIP because of the delay in the transfer of executive competence from the UK Government. Why does Sandra White not want to protect her constituents and mine who are at risk of reassessment?

**Sandra White:** Obviously, I want to protect them. However, Mr Griffin does not seem to grasp the point. Of the people who are on DLA at the moment, those who are 65 and over will always be on DLA and some will go to PIP. That is

complicated enough without all of a sudden saying that we are going to do something within a couple of months. It is not a delay; it is looking at the issue responsibly. I would have thought that, of all people, Labour Party members would want the measures to work, not just for their constituents but for all the people of Scotland. We have a golden opportunity to do something absolutely different, yet members still carp from the sidelines and frighten people. That is what they are doing, and that is quite unforgivable.

We have to focus and ensure that we deliver for the people. The minister mentioned some of the initiatives that are being taken, such as the experience panels. That is a great and very people-focused initiative. It is a welcome move that will inform the initial design of the system and improvements to it going forward.

As has been said, we have to remember that 85 per cent of the powers will stay with Westminster. We wanted 100 per cent of the powers to be in the Parliament, and it is rather sad that the unionist parties did not want that. Let us be quite honest about that, and let us not confuse the people out there. We wanted 100 per cent and we could have delivered that 100 per cent. We have only 15 per cent but, as I set out to say, we are where we are and we have to make the best of what we have got.

I thank the *Daily Record* for its continued support with regard to PIP payments. It has done a good job on that and I am sure that it will continue to do so. We must not kid people on that the changes will happen in a couple of months. Their lives depend on it, and I do not want to be responsible for kidding them on.

Many members will have seen the film "I, Daniel Blake". I was asked to go along to a screening of it last Thursday and to take part in a question-and-answer session afterwards with Monica Lennon, who is not here today; Paul Laverty, the screenwriter; and representatives from food banks. The film was absolutely heartbreaking. I have heard some people say that it is not true to life, but I assure members that it is. Constituents come to us who have been sanctioned simply because they have an illness and, perhaps, they could not make it that morning. They have been told, "If you don't turn up on time, the reason doesn't matter. You will be sanctioned." That is punitive and it has nothing to do with people's actual lives. We have to look at it in a different way.

After seeing that film, I pledged to the people who were there that night that I would try to get a screening here in the Scottish Parliament, and that is in process. I believe that every member should be able to see that film and be charged with ensuring that we have no more Daniel Blakes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I do not know whether you were hitting the microphone, but something was crackling. Perhaps it was your passion. Also, although I recognise passion, I remind members to speak courteously to each other in the chamber. Thank you.

15:56

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** As Roosevelt signed into law the Social Security Act of 1935, which was the first act of its kind in the USA, he said:

"We can never insure one hundred percent of the population against one hundred percent of the hazards and vicissitudes of life, but we have tried to frame a law which will give some measure of protection to the average citizen and to his family against the loss of a job and against poverty-ridden old age."

I suggest that there can be no better definition of what a social security system should be and I hope that the Scottish Government takes inspiration from it.

I am grateful for the representations from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, Enable Scotland and Inclusion Scotland, to name but three of the many that I was pleased to receive, which make it clear that this is not just about protection but about emphasising that each individual is treated with dignity and respect.

Adam Tomkins was clear that, when the powers are devolved, the rest of the UK will remain responsible for around two thirds of social security, and that deserves respect. The motion is wrong to ignore that and the amendment is right to bring it up.

Working-age benefits perform two different functions: they support people with very low incomes and they support people with additional needs. Most of the former fall to be considered under universal credit, which will remain reserved to the UK Parliament, and most of the latter will be devolved. We agree that the priority in the design and delivery of devolved social security must be the welfare of the people in Scotland who rely on it, and the system should exhibit fairness, respect and responsibility. Those must be the watchwords for the Scottish Government as we move towards Scotland's first ever social security system.

However, fairness is two way. Real fairness requires that where people cannot work, they must be supported, but where they are able to work, they should do so. We believe that a successful system of social security is one that encourages an individual into fulfilling work for, as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation tells us,

"Work is the best route to economic security and a better standard of living."

The Scottish Government must therefore design with respect. It should acknowledge the success of the UK Government's welfare reforms and policies designed to help people to get back to work, such as—

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Liam Kerr:** I wondered whether I would get an intervention on that point. I will of course give way.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Adam, you are on cue.

**George Adam:** Well, yes. It would have been quite obvious. The member mentioned

“the success of the UK Government's welfare reforms”.

Does he agree that sanctions and the process for PIP reassessment have been proven to damage people's physical and mental wellbeing, in some cases leading people to commit suicide? Is that part of the success of the Tory Government's welfare reforms?

**Liam Kerr:** Sanctions are an important part of the benefits system. Of course I do not condone any of the things that George Adam described, and if there is evidence in that regard I will be pleased to consider it, but sanctions are a part of our benefits system.

**George Adam:** Oh dear.

**Liam Kerr:** I am sure that the Scottish Government will welcome the good parts of the UK Government's welfare reforms. It will no doubt also welcome this afternoon's announcement by the chancellor, Philip Hammond, that the personal allowance will be increased to £12,500, which will take 113,000 people out of income tax altogether.

**Jeane Freeman:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Liam Kerr:** Presiding Officer, if I take the intervention will I be allowed more time at the end of my speech?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will give you a little more time, because it is a shame not to have interventions.

**Jeane Freeman:** Does the member think that a 65 per cent success rate in appeals against PIP decisions is an advantage of the UK system that we should take into account? Does he think that the roll-out of universal credit, which has been postponed and postponed again, causing severe difficulty in the areas in Scotland where it is being rolled out, with a peak in applications to our Scottish welfare fund, because applications are failing—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is a long intervention, minister. That is enough—

**Jeane Freeman:** Does he think that those are good examples—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, minister. You have to sit down.

**Liam Kerr:** I thank Jeane Freeman for her speech. I say in response, and to move on, that we support a system that is uniquely designed for Scotland. In her earlier speech, Jeane Freeman said that we have to design and build a Scottish system together. We agree. We will constructively engage with the Scottish Government on that. That is what a fair social security system should have at its core, so let us get on and build it.

The Scottish National Party has complained long and bitterly about not having powers over welfare and social security. It can complain no longer. Soon, this Government will have serious decisions to make. It is right—indeed it is of the utmost importance—that the Government should take possession of those powers only when it is good and ready, because the powers are, by far and away, the most important ever held by this place. That is responsibility.

I find myself agreeing with Angela Constance and Sandra White—perhaps uniquely. Mark Griffin is usually balanced, interesting and good to listen to, but to say to this Government, “Get on and do it now, before you are ready”, is, to me, the height of responsibility. [*Interruption.*] Irresponsibility.

**Neil Findlay:** Make your mind up.

**Liam Kerr:** It is crucial for the Scottish people that we all have full confidence in whatever welfare system is created by the Scottish Government, because it will be the Scottish Government's system, not Westminster's. If there are faults, they will be the Scottish Government's faults. If there are delays or hold-ups to payments, they will be the Scottish Government's delays. Controversial or difficult decisions that have to be taken will be the Scottish Government's decisions. That will take some getting used to.

I am genuinely pleased and relieved that the Scottish Government has admitted that it is not ready to take on these immense new powers and has asked for a delay. However, let us all remember that the UK Government is ready to press ahead. Jeane Freeman talked about the UK Government having the right attitude to transition. Let us never lose sight of the fact that, as Messrs Mundell and Green made clear, the UK Government is

“willing to commit to try the untested method of splitting competence, using best endeavours to work with Scottish Government to transfer legislative competence by June 2017”

and that

“recipients of benefits are core to considerations”.

Let us have less complaining and less of the isn't-Westminster-awful attitude and maybe a bit of acknowledgement that we are all trying to do the best for the people of Scotland. We can start by voting for the Scottish Conservative amendment today.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Ruth Maguire. I can give you a very tight six minutes, Ms Maguire.

16:03

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** During the election campaign, social security was one of the main issues about which people came to speak to me. The message was clear: people are suffering and we need to do things differently.

The Scottish Parliament can and must do better, where we are able to do so. We need a system that is better than the one that the United Nations condemned as leading to “grave” and “systematic violations” of disabled people’s rights. It must be better than the one that gave rise to the UK Supreme Court’s ruling that the UK Government’s changes to housing benefits discriminate against disabled people. It must be better than the one in which people are wrongly found fit to work and are driven to despair and worse. It must be better than the one that has brought international shame on us, as people watch a film about the UK benefits system whose storyline is almost too awful to believe that it is real.

Colleagues across the chamber know that the horrors of the UK welfare system are all too real. We have taken disturbing evidence from groups such as the black triangle campaign, as well as from trusted MSP colleagues, about vulnerable individuals committing suicide as a result of distressing, inaccurate work capability assessments. The secretary of state expressed his distaste at the matter being brought up in committee, but that is the reality as set out in the DWP’s own inquiry reports as well as in people’s personal testimonies. He levied the charge of politicising individual tragedies, but let us be clear: this became political the second that the UK Government embarked on its programme of ideological austerity and made the decision to target the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society in the name of deficit reduction. It is those who are responsible, their apologists and their cheerleaders whom I find distasteful. Tory welfare reform is a horror show and a shambles. If we can learn anything from it, it is how not to do things here in Scotland.

Eighty-five per cent of welfare powers will remain under Westminster control, and even those that are being devolved are impacted by cuts. It is estimated that, by the time that the responsibility

for personal independence payments is devolved in 2018, a further £190 million a year will have been taken from claimants in Scotland. As a result, a smaller budget line will eventually be handed over. Despite that—and although I would rather have seen 100 per cent of power and responsibility sitting with our Scottish Parliament—I am pleased that the 15 per cent that is being devolved includes disability benefits, which will allow us to take a different approach to one of the groups that has suffered the most under the morally bankrupt welfare reform of the Tory party.

It is bad enough that the welfare reform is morally bankrupt but, to add insult to injury, it does not even work. Academic research has concluded that

“there is no evidence across Scotland that welfare reform has resulted in higher levels of employment or higher levels of labour market engagement.”

The Tories’ work programme has been a disaster. Figures show that people were five times more likely to be sanctioned in one year—2014—than to find a job between 2011 and 2014. That is one simple illustration from an abundance of research evidence that establishes that punitive sanctions are an ineffective way to get people into work. No financial incentive will cure disability or illness, but stress and worry will exacerbate most conditions. To put it bluntly, you cannot starve people into jobs that do not exist.

The more deprived the local authority, the greater the per capita financial hit from welfare reform. My area of North Ayrshire is the third worst hit, with claimants estimated to experience an annual financial loss of £380 per working-age adult by 2020-21, which penalises and alienates those who are already most disadvantaged in society. It also takes money away from our local economies—the economies that face the greatest challenges—compounding already difficult situations and heaping more pressure on our public services. The same areas that were devastated by Tory de-industrialisation in the 1980s are being hit again now. It is interesting, but probably of little surprise, that the places that are least affected by welfare reforms are those from which the Tory party draws its political support. As Professor Steve Fothergill says:

“There is an amazing coincidence involving the electoral geography of Britain and the impacts of the welfare reforms.”—[*Official Report, Social Security Committee, 17 November 2016; c 13.*]

Social security cannot be entrusted to the hands of the Tories. Their universal credit is currently five years behind schedule and has been fraught with administrative difficulties and errors that are causing real harm in our communities. Figures that were published recently by the Trussell Trust show that benefit delays were the most frequent reason

for referral to a food bank and that benefit changes were the third most common factor. The delays and changes have resulted in families being unable to eat—that is the reality of Tory welfare reform. Our priority must be the safe and secure transfer of benefits. Our Scottish Government must not let itself be pushed into false timescales or accused of fabricated delays by a Tory party whose own benefits reform is an absolute and on-going shambles.

I could not be more conscious of the weight of responsibility on us all to get this right for the 1.4 million people who are relying on us to ensure that no one falls through the gap and to create a social security system that they can trust—one that is based on dignity and respect. I am proud to support a Government with those values at its heart, and I will do everything that I can to ensure the success of this complex and most important of undertakings as we build our Scottish social security system.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call Neil Findlay, I remind members—in particular Mr Liam Kerr, who left the chamber immediately after his speech—that under the Presiding Officer's guidance there is a convention that you remain in the chamber for the next two speeches after yours. I expect Mr Kerr to explain his leaving to the Presiding Officers. This is not the first time that I have had to comment to members on the benches to my right and I very much regret that.

I apologise to Mr Findlay. You will get your time back.

16:10

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** I begin by probably doing Ruth Maguire's career no good whatsoever by saying that in the main I thought that she just made a tremendous speech. It was one of the best speeches on welfare that I have heard in this Parliament.

This debate gets to the very heart of what we are about. Are we a society that acts as individuals, in which people—no matter what misfortune life deals them—have to fend for themselves, left to the mercy of the market, or are we a society that believes in the principles of collectivism, empathy and social and economic solidarity?

The minister, before she abandoned socialism for nationalism, would have been familiar with the phrase, "From each according to his or her ability, to each according to his or her needs." That, to me, sums up what our social security system should be about. All of us, at any point in our lives, could experience a bereavement, illness, disability or lose our job. We could all be like Daniel Blake—or Katie, the young woman—in the film, and I

absolutely concur with Sandra White that we should bring the film "Daniel Blake" to Parliament as soon as possible. Personally, I would force every single member to watch it, whether they wanted to or not.

I want us to take the chance to create a system based on those principles that I set out. What we do is critical to the 33,000 children in Scotland who receive DLA; it is critical to the 103,000 people of retirement age who receive it too; and it is critical to the one in three people of working age who rely on the current social security system and live on benefits that are to be transferred to this Parliament.

I support the call from the Govan Law Centre to move the debate on from what they call "techno-speak", to what is really important—the eradication of poverty and inequality. I agree with the motion that social security is an investment in the people of Scotland and that it is the lived experiences of those who have experienced the system that should shape any new set-up. We have to use this opportunity to end the crude, dehumanising and dispiriting rules steeped in callous Tory ideology. I see at this point that Mr Tomkins rightly has his head down.

Last week, in a performance filled with arrogance and bravado, the minister blamed anyone and everyone for her Government's failure to bring in the new powers on time. All through the debate of the last five years the SNP made promises and raised expectations that the Government would use Scotland's new powers to reduce inequality. On social protection, the white paper on independence stated:

"We will ... work to ensure the transitional period is as short as possible,"

and will

"end in 2018."

Now we are told that those timescales cannot be met for another two years, extending people's misery. If the minister had a shred of humility she would stop lashing out at others for holding the Government to account for what it said, and would apologise for its previous claims.

**Jeane Freeman:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Neil Findlay:** Certainly.

**Jeane Freeman:** Mr Findlay, I am not lashing out at others, but people need to learn to count. The white paper talked about a transition period between 2014 and 2018; that is four years. We are talking about introducing the social security powers—the delivery as well as the legislation—in the lifetime of this Parliament. That will be slightly over four years, once the consultation is

concluded. I do not really understand the point that Mr Findlay is trying to make, unless it is just a political go.

**Neil Findlay:** We would never accuse the minister of trying to use the benefits system for political gain—God forbid.

We cannot allow technical barriers to get in the way of alleviating hardship. The Govan Law Centre suggests using local authorities in the interim. They already successfully distribute the Scottish welfare fund, discretionary housing payments, council tax and housing benefit. Why can we not exploit that expertise? Personally, I think that the reality is that this Government does not trust or respect local government and will do all it can to undermine it. That is a big missed opportunity, because the Tories are savaging our social security system now; people are suffering now. We need to implement solutions now, even if they are only interim solutions.

Some of the organisations that have provided briefings for today's debate, such as SCVO and Unison, have urged us not to use the phrase "claimants' charter". I agree with them, as I think that it strikes the wrong tone. Many of them favour a rights-based system; again, I agree. I hope that that will be up front and on the face of the bill, and I hope that the cabinet secretary will confirm that when she sums up the debate.

I also suggest that the new system should ditch the dogma of everything having to be digital. Not all people can or want to use digital systems and they should have a choice.

If the new system is to be target driven, can we have a target to ensure that all people who are entitled to a benefit get it and that payments are delivered accurately to ensure that carers, the disabled, families and the unemployed receive the support that they need? That is in line with the recommendation of the First Minister's independent adviser on poverty and inequality.

If we are genuinely to deliver on ending the poverty and inequality that blight our communities, there needs to be a concerted, long-term redistribution of wealth and power. Rather than tinkering with the council tax, we must scrap it and fund local government fully. There should be a right to food, and hard cash should be directed to areas of most need. We should end subsidies for companies that exploit workers and avoid paying their taxes, provide adequate funding for youth employment initiatives such as B.L.E.S Training in my region, whose budget has been slashed by Skills Development Scotland, and end the cuts to health and social care budgets.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** Would you close now, please, Mr Findlay?

**Neil Findlay:** I was to get a bit of extra time for interventions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No. Close now, please, Mr Findlay.

**Neil Findlay:** The previous Presiding Officer said that I would get the time back.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Close now please, Mr Findlay.

**Neil Findlay:** Fine.

16:16

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** What is the so-called "reformed benefits system" that the Tories have been celebrating as a means of covering up their vicious cuts to the incomes of the most vulnerable? It involves a Westminster culture of blame and punishment. Whether it is the disabled, the mentally ill, migrants, refugees or Muslims, the Tories have successfully fanned the flames of anger away from their own failures. A great many of the fundamental components that are built into the current system have more of a flavour of Dickensian patronage than they do of the 21st century.

I imagine that the just-completed Scottish Government consultation on social security will contain expert and end-user reports on how the existing system has made them feel diminished, humiliated, demoralised and helpless. That message is reiterated by groups such as Inclusion Scotland, the Glasgow Disability Alliance, Engender and the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, all of which are calling for the same main principles, which are guided by human rights standards, to be set in legislation.

Engender highlights the disproportionate effect that welfare reform has had on women. It cites the following figures:

"Disabled women are amongst those most affected by social security policy. Over the course of the current UK parliament alone, £4.4bn worth of cuts will come from disabled people, a majority of whom are women. In Scotland, 55% of those on personal independence payments ... are women, as are 65% in receipt of Attendance Allowance."

It is bad enough to be punished for being a claimant, but to be doubly punished for being a woman with a disability is frankly obscene.

**Adam Tomkins:** Christina McKelvie is a great and passionate advocate of human rights. What is her position on the right to work? Will she join me in celebrating the facts that there are more jobs in the British economy than ever before, more disabled people in work in Britain than ever before and more women in work than ever before?



**Christina McKelvie:** I will be more than happy to join Mr Tomkins in celebrating that right if he signs my motion condemning the impact of the UK Government's welfare reforms on people with disabilities, as identified in the United Nations report. Quid pro quo, Mr Tomkins.

Our Scottish system must be more positive and must support a culture of change around social security. Our approach needs to be inclusive and to involve in co-production the people who access the system, and the whole package should be guided by international human rights standards and set in legislation.

As members know, I continue to campaign on behalf of motor neurone disease sufferers. The current MND Scotland campaign, "Let's get benefits right for people with MND", reveals the story of Yvonne Nee and her dad, Bill Lavery, who lived in Hamilton. Sadly, Bill died as a result of MND in 2014.

Yvonne says:

"I speak as the broken-hearted daughter of a great man who was taken from me by this cruel illness. My dad was diagnosed in July 2014 and passed away in September 2014.

I was involved in applying for benefits for my dad during this short time and he worried about the outcome of the application every day. This was horrible to watch and financially a terrible time as we tried to secure the best deal for our dad.

MND sufferers have enough to deal with, without constant fear of benefit review. Their condition will not improve.

The day before he died he was awarded his benefits."

There are many heartbreaking stories like that one, but are we to blame this man for being so inconsiderate as to have had a brutal, terminal illness? Are we, in his dying days, to worry him about whether he will get his benefit payments?

Is there some bizarre Tory rationale that generally asserts that illness and disability are something that people can control? I think that most of us would respond by saying, "Don't be ridiculous! Of course you can't blame people for having health issues." However, the truth is that that is exactly what the current system does. In effect, it says, "How dare you have a long-term health condition. Get on your bike."

We are going to receive the largest ever transfer of powers. Yes, it is still less of a transfer than I would like, and it will be challenging to redesign a social security system when you have access to only 15 per cent of the funds, but this is where we can really start to make a positive change to the lives of 1.4 million people in Scotland. That said, we need to recognise the context and the simple fact that the proportion of the Scottish social security budget that will be devolved to Scotland

amounts to only £2.7 billion of the total £17.5 billion spent here every year.

This Government—our Government—has worked hard to find out where the problems are, to consult with the individuals and the organisations involved, and indeed to consult with this place. We now have strong data to work from so that we can make the right decisions; we have set down five essential principles for moving forward; and we will have a national social security agency to administer payments. I say "payments" rather than "claims", as they are a right rather than something that has to be screamed for, and they are to be made from within a balanced society that recognises and appreciates our diversity in all its colours, shapes, races, disabilities, genders, sexuality and much, much more. Any one of us might have to reach out for that kind of support at any point in our lives; we should never assume that we will not be one of those individuals.

We know what we need to do. We need to ensure that this transition is efficient and seamless in order to deliver on fairness, dignity, equality and respect.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, Ms McKelvie.

**Christina McKelvie:** We will not be given lessons through a failed Tory policy.

16:22

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** At the weekend, I was reading a document that mentioned welfare in Scotland a number of times. It predicted a rosy future with increased "fairness" and healthy handouts for all who need it. Here are some of its claims. It said that there could be

"A halt to the rollout of Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payments in Scotland allowing future Scottish governments to develop reforms to our welfare system that meet our needs".

It went on to say that

"If we leave welfare in Westminster's hands, our welfare state is likely to be changed beyond recognition."

The document, which was produced before the independence referendum, also said:

"Following independence, the immediate priorities will be to reverse the most damaging and counterproductive of the UK welfare changes",

and concluded that

"If the result of the referendum is No, decisions on welfare, defence and foreign policy will continue to be taken by Westminster for Scotland, whatever the views of the Scottish electorate."

Those are some of the 211 mentions of "welfare" in the Scottish National Party's independence white paper. We should remember that this was

when it was telling us that we could be an independent country in just 18 months.

So—what of the claim that decisions on welfare would be taken by Westminster? Apart from the fact that Westminster is a district of London that no more takes decisions than Lambeth does, that has not proved to be the case, has it? Since September, the Scottish Parliament has had the power to create new benefits in devolved areas, to top up reserved benefits, to provide discretionary payments and assistance, to change employment support, and to make changes to universal credit with regard to the costs of rented accommodation and the timing of payments and receipts.

Unfortunately, Jeane Freeman did not want to take an intervention from me. I was going to ask what she intends to do with the first tranche of powers. Perhaps she will tell us that now. I see that she will not.

The party that told us that it could create an independent country in 18 months now says that it does not want to take control of any more welfare powers—all £2.7 billion-worth of them—until 2020.

**Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** Members of other parties need to get their story straight. Graham Simpson says that we are not dealing with the powers quickly enough and Mark Griffin agrees, while Liam Kerr says that it would be irresponsible to move too quickly. Which is it? Do members want to work together and take our time to try to ensure that we get it right, or should we just leap in and take charge right away?

**Graham Simpson:** I am always delighted to hear from Ms Evans. I point out that Mr Griffin is not a member of my party. If Ms Evans wishes to hear my whole speech, she will get the answer.

We have the carers allowance, the disability living allowance, personal independence payments, maternity grants and winter fuel payments. At the end of the process, the Scottish Government will be responsible for 17 per cent of benefits.

As Adam Tomkins pointed out, the request to go down the route of asking the UK Government to share the load until the SNP is ready came from left field, but the UK Government is helping. We should be grateful for that, so I hope that we will hear the words “Thank you” from the minister later. The situation reminds me a bit of the teenager who wants to fly the nest but still wants their washing to be done for them.

Let us ask what social security is for. It is a safety net—that much is obvious. Some people will need to be on welfare until the day they die, but for most people it should act as a financial cushion to help them to move on. The problem used to be that we had the benefits trap.

[*Laughter.*] I am sorry that George Adam finds this amusing: it is not.

With the benefits trap it simply did not pay to come off benefits and go into work, which was cruel, demeaning and bad for society. Employment must always reward people who are able to work, and the benefits system has to be simple and understandable. That is why we have the universal credit system and the work programme.

**George Adam:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Graham Simpson:** No.

More people are now in work across the UK than ever before. [*Interruption.*] I say to Mr Adam that I am not taking an intervention.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please sit down, Mr Adam.

**Graham Simpson:** If Mr Adam had not been chortling at the back, I might have taken an intervention from him.

Scotland’s employment rate remains lower than that of the UK, and it is lower now than it was when the SNP first came to office: it stands at 59.2 per cent, which is lower than it was in May 2007, when it was 61.1 per cent.

Adam Tomkins, whom I have never seen play football and never wish to see play football, rightly accuses the SNP of playing political soccer over sanctions with those who refuse to play ball. We need to get real. If the goal is to get people off benefits and into work and on the best route out of poverty, sanctions or incentives must be part of the system. We all need to pull together on that.

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No. It is too late, Ms Haughey.

**Graham Simpson:** I am in my final minute.

All parties and all Governments need to pull together. The time for game playing is over.

16:28

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** I pay tribute to the manner in which the consultation has been undertaken. Devolution of responsibility for some aspects of social security is a major change in Parliament’s powers. Those social security powers have a huge impact on the lives of more than 1 million Scots, and a new system will have to be created from the ground up. Accordingly, a serious, wide-ranging and open-minded consultation was required. For the most part, that is what we have had in the past few months.

We know that women are more likely to receive support through social security than men are. Benefits comprise 20 per cent of the average woman's income, compared with 10 per cent for men. With the gender pay gap, that means that women are more likely than men are to experience poverty.

Christina McKelvie, too, noted that some of the benefits to be devolved are significantly gendered. For example, 64 per cent of attendance allowance recipients are women, as are 68 per cent of carers allowance recipients. That is why I particularly welcome the increase in the value of carers allowance and the Government's efforts to administer the increase initially through the DWP so that the money can be paid as soon as possible.

The Scottish Government's own 2013 analysis of the gender impacts of welfare reform showed that the child benefit freeze impacts on women's income substantially, because 95 per cent of child benefit claims are paid to women. It is estimated that between 2011-12 and 2015-16 a family with two children would have received £1,100 less than they would have done had child benefit been uprated by the retail price index measure of inflation. By 2020, child benefit will have lost about 28 per cent of its previous value.

However, Scotland does not have to accept that. As of September this year, the Scottish Parliament can top up the value of benefits even if they are reserved to Westminster. As well as easing women's poverty, a £5 top-up would make significant inroads into child poverty by decreasing relative child poverty by 14 per cent and affecting positively the lives of 30,000 children.

With the Scottish Government wanting to put child poverty targets back into law, I was encouraged to hear from Jeane Freeman at the Social Security Committee that a child benefit top-up is being considered. I ask the minister to update us on that consideration and on progress that is being made on the commitment to providing a young carer's benefit.

I will now address devolution of benefits that assist people with costs arising from disability. Disability living allowance and the benefit that replaces it—the personal independence payment—and the attendance allowance for older people represent about 50 per cent of the value of benefits that are being devolved. Members will already be familiar with the harrowing stories of Scots who have lost thousands of pounds in the switch to PIP. I encourage those who are not familiar with the stories to watch the short films that have been made by the stop PIP campaign.

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** Does Alison Johnstone accept that many people are

transferred seamlessly from DLA to PIP? Their cases are not being heard simply because they do not correspond with us or with MPs. We have to take them into account when we are discussing the issues.

**Alison Johnstone:** I point out to Jeremy Balfour that 30 per cent of claimants who are reassessed get no PIP award at all, and that of those who qualify for a transfer to PIP, 46 per cent of DLA higher-rate claimants are moved to it at a lower rate, which is having a devastating impact. In the long term, that could result in approximately 46,000 disabled people losing automatic entitlement to concessionary travel.

We have heard from Adam Tomkins and Liam Kerr that we should celebrate the right to work, but what about the people who would very much like to work but now cannot get to work because of the blue-badge cuts and Motability car cuts that are leaving them isolated? For those who currently work, the cuts are making it much more difficult for them to keep their jobs.

The figures are even worse for new claimants, 58 per cent of whom get no award. With 40 per cent of claims being changed after an internal review and 63 per cent of applicants having claims reinstated on full appeal, clearly something is deeply wrong with PIP.

I very much welcome, therefore, the Government's pledge to establish a disability benefits commission and to move towards long-term awards for recipients who have long-term conditions. However, that will take time. In the meantime, more claimants will be subjected to the obviously flawed assessments, and those who have already been reassessed and had their awards reduced or removed entirely will continue to suffer.

I would therefore like the Scottish Government to consider the following three interim measures. First, that it requests of the DWP that all DLA-to-PIP reassessments be put on hold until the relevant part of the Scotland Act 2016 is commenced. I do not believe that it is in the spirit of the devolution settlement for such extensive changes to be made to a policy area that is scheduled to be devolved. Secondly, I ask that, from the point of devolution, new applications for PIP be made under the old DLA assessment until a new system can be developed. Thirdly, I ask the Scottish Government to seek to compensate the worst-affected claimants until they can be reassessed under a new system.

Devolution of social security is a major test for this Parliament—perhaps the biggest test since 1999. Creating a fairer system will not be easy, particularly given the huge cuts that have come in recent years, but it is clear that the corrupting and

warping of our social security system that has taken place—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, Ms Johnstone.

**Alison Johnstone:**—has not been done in the name of or with the will of the Scottish people. If this Parliament is to retain credibility, we must challenge that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, Ms Johnstone.

**Alison Johnstone:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

16:34

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** The enduring test of this Parliament is how we answer the challenge of inequality in our society. So, newly empowered with the levers that are necessary to build a uniquely Scottish safety net, we must get it right for all the 1.4 million people on the fringes and in the mainstream of our society who are relying on us to do that. We must put aside our differences and seek to coalesce in the construction of a new system that is steeped in the values of compassion, simplicity and fairness. We need to use this opportunity to build a system that exists to catch the people who fall through the tears in the fabric our society: a system that is responsive, dignified, clear to understand, inviting, flexible and swift in its application.

My party leader, Willie Rennie, has spoken many times in support of the Government's approach to social security. Indeed, there exists an ideological symmetry across the progressive parties in Parliament, which makes it easy to support the Government's motion.

In the past, we have supported the Government's efforts to mitigate and correct the failures of the existing welfare system. I refer first to the DLA takeaway, which was an iniquitous loophole that was accidentally created in the corridors of Whitehall under the misapprehension that the parent of a disabled child who had to go into hospital for 87 linked or consecutive days was absolved of all caring responsibilities. However, if members were to ask any caring parent who has been in those circumstances, they would find that that is far from the truth. I congratulate the Scottish Government for taking action to remedy that loophole in the previous session.

We were full throated in our support of the fund for local authorities to mitigate the impact of the bedroom tax and we were unified in our commitment, which was matched by the SNP at the election, that the carers allowance should be given parity with jobseekers allowance. Let me take this opportunity to pay tribute to the silent

army of carers in our country—whom, in many ways, we exploit—who do what they do out of love for their families, and who in some cases are just one late-night hospital dash from surrender. We must not rest on our laurels after empowering them and giving them more money through the carers allowance; we must increase access and provision of respite.

We must also recognise the legions of young carers in our society. The minister joined me at the young carers festival in the summer; she could not have failed to be moved by the contribution that young carers make to our society.

The debate rightly shifts our focus to the art of the possible—the suite of powers that are now afforded to this chamber and the Government, and how best we might put into practice the ideological symmetry that I described. In and around administration of the housing benefit component of universal credit, we need to work with the DWP to reinstate the option for rent to be paid directly to landlords. Many families and third sector organisations are deeply anxious about that, and it may ring the dinner bell for unscrupulous elements in our society who see more disposable income in chaotic families.

While our gaze is on housing, we must address existing problems that fall under the powers of Parliament, including local authorities freezing benefit payments when there is a dispute about a claim. Sometimes we rely on the goodwill of social landlords not to evict people when they do not receive payments. I refer Parliament to my entry in the register of interests, which states that I am a social landlord.

The transference of powers over disability benefit offers us the opportunity to shape an empowering offer to those in our society who are affected by disability—a new offer that builds on the progressive approach that the Government took to the DLA takeaway and is based on evidence and the lived experience of those in our society who have faced repeated humiliation in an assessment regime that is based on suspicion and a drive to disapply their qualification.

**Clare Haughey:** Does Alex Cole-Hamilton accept that his party stood hand in hand with the Tories as architects of the austerity that has caused some of the worst benefit cuts in this country?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** In this country, we now see the effects on disabled people of a Tory Government that is unfettered and unmitigated by Liberal Democrat control.

In all 11 benefits that will pass to the Scottish Parliament, we have the opportunity to address the aspects of the system that the minister rightly described as “heartless” and to make it far simpler

for people to access the system. We would do well to heed the views that are given in the Poverty Alliance Scotland's briefing.

Throughout the debate, we have heard that transfer of the powers will be necessarily complex, and that they must be transferred with a degree of safety and an understanding of what the implications are for those who will receive them. I find it astonishing that nowhere in the dark vaults of Victoria Quay or SNP headquarters is there a position paper, blueprint or white paper that underpins the foundations of the new system. In the nine months since Scotland might have received full independence—during which time babies have been conceived, gestated and safely delivered—the canvas of our new social security system is still as blank as the Parliament's webpage for active bills.

I will finish on a slightly more conciliatory note. I applaud the steps that have been taken by the Scottish Government to address and mitigate the faults of our existing welfare powers using the levers of control that it has at its disposal. That is why the Liberal Democrats will support the Government motion, as amended by the Labour Party amendment.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I heard my colleague speak earlier about the Presiding Officer's written convention that members should be in the chamber for two speeches before their own and two speeches after. There are always exceptions to those things, so notes of apologies are grand, but it is even better if people let us know beforehand that they might be required elsewhere. Please be assured that we are aware of people leaving and coming back into the chamber, and do not need to be reminded too often by members.

16:42

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I can assure you that I am well aware of the rules and regulations with regard to chamber etiquette.

I am extremely pleased to be speaking and taking part in the debate for two reasons in particular. First, I have many constituents who can tell horror stories about the so-called Tory welfare reforms. Secondly, the powers that we will have in the future can and will make a difference to the lives of those constituents.

The first issue that we need to address is the safe and secure transfer of powers to the Scottish Parliament, because we are dealing with real people who, in many cases, live in very difficult and challenging circumstances. This is not some cold, academic debate; it is far more important than that. We need to ensure that, when the day

comes, the Scottish Government can ensure that everyone gets the payment that they are due at the time that it is due.

During this debate, the Conservatives have played a bizarre role. While their friends and colleagues at Westminster are cutting and slashing welfare budgets and their Westminster team is making ordinary people's lives in Scotland hell, they have the cheek to criticise the Scottish Government and not their own Government in London—or Westminster, or whatever Graham Simpson wants to call it.

I will give some examples of the devastation caused by Tory Westminster welfare reform and I will explain to Mr Tomkins why I am aggrieved. I am aggrieved about an unemployed man in Paisley who was sanctioned for not turning up to his required appointment at the job centre for employability training. He never turned up and he never even phoned them, but that might have been because he was in a hospital bed in the Royal Alexandra hospital following a major heart attack. However, he was sanctioned.

I am also aggrieved about the young man who was sanctioned for going to a jobs fair in Aberdeen, even though he had informed the job centre that that was what he was going to do.

Further, I am aggrieved about a woman in Paisley, who has a long-term condition and who went through the Tory PIP process only for the mobility part of her award to be taken away. She has given her car up this week. My constituent was encouraged by the DWP to not appeal the decision, even though 60 per cent of benefits are reinstated on appeal. When she decided to appeal, it was too late.

Those stories are the norm, but there are others that take a more tragic turn, such as the stories of people who take their own life after being forced through the Tory PIP assessments, made to feel as if they are nothing, a drain on society and not worthy. We all know that they should not feel that way. We know that that is not the country that we want to live in—the country that we want for the future—and we will work towards ensuring that we can correct many of the issues that the current system has created. How can people feel valued by a system that is designed to wreck their lives?

The UN report that was published on 7 November and mentioned by my colleague Christina McKelvie described the austerity policies introduced into welfare and social care by the UK Government as amounting to “systematic violations” of the rights of people with disabilities. The report condemned the UK Government for bulldozing through the changes to social security in the knowledge that they would have an adverse impact on disabled people and called on the UK

Government to carry out a study of the impact of all spending cuts on those with disabilities.

The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities began its investigation in 2012 after receiving evidence from disability organisations. The Tories refuse to accept the report's findings, claiming that they present an inaccurate picture of life for disabled people in the UK and saying:

"While the government continues to improve and build on the support available to disabled people, it stands by and is proud of its record".

This is a Westminster Government that is proud of the human devastation that it has caused. I will not—and, collectively, we must not—look to the Conservatives for any lessons.

That brings me to one of the groups of people for whom we must ensure that we create a better system: those living with long-term conditions. Many people know that my wife, Stacey, has multiple sclerosis and that she has been dealing with that challenge since she was 16 years old. Along with 11,000 other people in Scotland, she deals with the challenges of MS day in, day out.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Damian Green, who came to a meeting of the Social Security Committee, might think that he understands that condition because he employs someone with MS, but the situation is much more complicated than that. At the committee's recent evidence session, he showed how flawed the system actually is.

Some 80 per cent of people with MS need to give up employment within 15 years of diagnosis, due to their condition, which demonstrates the importance of disability benefits to people with MS. Ninety-one per cent found the process of claiming disability benefits such as PIP stressful, and stress is one of the main triggers of an MS attack. The current system does not work for people living with MS. The assessment process is wholly inadequate.

One respondent to a survey that was run by the MS Society said:

"With conditions like MS that have no cure, and don't just go away, there must be a fairer way for people to be treated throughout the benefits process. To be assessed less than a year since my original assessment makes me feel like a benefits scrounger, a cheat, as if they are trying to catch me out. Living with MS on a day to day basis is hard enough without being scrutinised by the DWP/ATOS".

When we design our new system, we need to prove that dignity and respect are more than just words; we must ensure that they are part of an ideal and a promise to make life better for those living with long-term conditions.

We must ensure that there is a safe and secure transfer of the powers, because 1.4 million people

rely on the benefits that are being devolved, and it is vital that the transfer ensures that everyone continues to get support.

Tressa Burke of Glasgow Disability Alliance said:

"I firmly believe that the Scottish Government having control over more social security powers offers more hope".

We need build on that trust and that hope, and work towards delivering for all the people of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I inform members that I have to cut the remaining speaking times to five minutes.

16:48

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** I declare an interest, as I am in receipt of PIP and, until May this year, was a tribunal member who heard PIP and DLA cases.

As a Scottish Conservative, I want to see three principles at the heart of a new welfare system. The system should support those in need; should be flexible and personalised; and should support those who can work and want to work.

Welfare must be there for those who genuinely need support and should provide a generous safety net for those who require it. However, it should not become an alternative to work. Instead, it should include incentive structures and practical assistance programmes to help people to live independently of the state. The Scottish Government should acknowledge where there have been elements of success in the UK Government's welfare reforms and stop decrying everything that has happened in the past few years. We have seen a work programme that has encouraged many people back to work, and those people are benefiting from that.

"For those who can, work represents the best route out of poverty."

Those are not my words but the words of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

A new social security system in Scotland will be welcomed and the Conservative Party will play its part, but the system must address some important questions. How do we ensure that it supports people into work and does not stop them going to work? How do we ensure that it does not create low-pay traps? How do we ensure that it is cost effective? How do we design a social security system that complements other anti-poverty and in-work strategies?

In 2014-15, just over 500,000 people in Scotland received attendance allowance, PIP or DLA. Social security is, therefore, vital to many disabled people, and any new benefit system that

we design must benefit people and help them to gain dignity and respect. I fear that, with all the debate, we will throw the baby out with the bath water in our design of the system.

When I went for my assessment—a process that everyone decries—I could not have been treated better or more respectfully. That is what I hear from many people, too. My PIP was increased, not decreased, because of my disability. That, too, is the experience of many people. Of course people who have had bad experiences will contact us; they should do that, and we should put their cases. However, there is a large number of silent people who have benefited from PIP, whose award has gone up and who have been treated well by the system. Without acknowledging that, we misrepresent the system.

The law is very clear: if someone has a condition that is likely to continue for a number of years, they should not have to be reassessed. An award is meant to be for life unless the person is going to improve.

**George Adam:** Is the member aware that that does not happen in reality? My argument is that the whole PIP process is flawed. The previous DLA process involved a desk-based exercise 70 per cent of the time and fewer than 1 per cent of cases were found to be fraudulent. What was wrong with that system? Why did the Westminster Government have to change it to the PIP system, which is expensive and puts people through pain?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have 30 seconds, Mr Balfour.

**Jeremy Balfour:** Under DLA, people still had to go through an assessment, fill out forms—which was stressful—and come to tribunals. I benefited from DLA for 20 years. Suddenly to say that DLA was perfect is simply to misrepresent the situation for many people in Scotland. PIP has improved many people's lives.

I appreciate that my time is ending. When we consider the matter, we need to think about how to get disabled people back into employment, because we are simply missing a trick on that. The figures are going in the wrong direction, and we need to challenge that.

16:53

**Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** I mention for the record that the First Minister has appointed me as the parliamentary liaison officer for the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities.

This is the first time that the Parliament has been tasked with building an entirely new public service—one that will deliver the 11 benefits that have been devolved to Scotland. The social

security system that we set up and the benefits that we deliver will not only directly affect the lives of a huge number of people across Scotland but determine the standards by which we hold ourselves accountable and enshrine our values as a country. That is why I am proud that the standards and values that we look to adopt as the foundation of the new system in Scotland are the fundamental values of dignity, fairness and respect—fundamental values that are sorely lacking in the current system.

The impact of welfare cuts and reforms, of the completely abhorrent sanctions regime and of the cuts to tax credits that have been driven by the Tories' austerity agenda has been well outlined in the debate. To be perfectly frank, it is hard not to feel completely outraged when we examine the cumulative outcomes of those acts.

Report after report on poverty in our country has been published, and those reports make for sobering reading. In June this year, the report of the independent working group on food poverty outlined the food poverty that we face. Trussell Trust figures show that, in Scotland in 2012-13, 14,000 referrals were made to food banks. Jump to this year, and 133,000 referrals were made, including referrals for 43,000 children.

This month, we were given the Scottish child poverty estimates by the End Child Poverty coalition, which found that 22 per cent of our children live in poverty. Only this week, another study was published—this time by Policy in Practice. That study found that welfare cuts have left those families who have been patronisingly deemed JAMs—the families who are just about managing, as the Prime Minister likes to call them—£2,500 a year worse off.

All those reports highlight the severe poverty in our country, and all of them point to Tory policies having a direct hand in developing the problems and making them worse.

It is the disabled and their families who are disproportionately affected by the cuts and changes. I welcome Alison Johnstone's comments about DLA and the transfer to PIP, with many people having already fallen through the cracks. The starkest statistics were highlighted in the briefing paper that we received from Inclusion Scotland. As Alison Johnstone said, 30 per cent of DLA claimants, when reassessed for PIP, received no award at all, and only 42 per cent of new claimants get any sort of award.

There is also a particular issue with the mobility component of PIP because of a change in eligibility, as a result of which thousands upon thousands of people have lost out on concessionary travel, the blue badge scheme and Motability schemes. That is a particularly pressing

problem in rural constituencies such as mine, where people often have to depend on their own transport and where Motability really is a lifeline. Those who fail to meet the new criteria can have their vehicles repossessed within a matter of weeks, leaving them little time, if any, to arrange alternative transport. That not only increases social isolation but prevents those who can work from getting to work and attending appointments.

If all that was not enough—and if dealing with debilitating illness or disability was not enough—there is also the wider impact and stress of the cuts in benefits and payments. Given the sheer volume of contacts that we have received from different organisations, we can see how many people the debate touches. They show in stark terms the reality that many people face.

From HIV Scotland, we learn that 39 per cent of the people struggling with HIV it surveyed struggled to buy food, 45 per cent struggled to pay for their utilities, 48 per cent had poorer physical health, and 58 per cent described having poorer mental health.

The MS Society Scotland found that 30 per cent of MS sufferers have had to reduce spending on food. One third of them do not claim any benefits because of stigma—a stigma that was created and very deliberately fostered by the Tory Government to demonise those in need of help and support and to justify its relentless cuts.

To deliver benefits in Scotland and to do it right will take time, because it is absolutely vital that we get it right. We have seen what can happen through bad policy choices and poor delivery: the impacts on poverty, food poverty, child poverty, social isolation and stigma, and the links to poor health, to increasing rates of poor mental health and to suicide.

In Scotland we have the chance to do something different and to mitigate some of the damage that the Tories have done, and I look forward to the powers becoming fully operational.

16:58

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** It is striking that most of the briefings that have been produced by organisations for the debate highlight the need to keep emphasising the importance of treating people with dignity and respect. I say that it is striking because I was brought up in the mining village of Kelty, where treating people with dignity and respect was the normal thing to do. Indeed, most people today, I think, would say that treating people with dignity and respect is still the right thing to do.

In those briefings, people refer to the Tory welfare reforms, which, far from treating fellow

human beings with dignity and respect, instead stigmatise and demonise. Very few of us can ever say that we are absolutely certain that we will never be in a position in which we need some form of help or support, either for ourselves or for family members or friends. Driving people into despair and, for the first time in almost a century, bringing about absolute poverty in communities up and down Scotland—that is what the Tory welfare reforms have achieved.

Today the message to Ruth Davidson's Tories in this Parliament must be that they should show some backbone and come out and oppose any more of the welfare reforms that are creating such misery in communities throughout Scotland.

It is because of the Tory attacks on the most vulnerable, the disabled, the mentally ill and the poor that I say to the Scottish Government that it must seek to take control as soon as possible over the powers that are being devolved.

The Poverty Alliance says:

“The current social security system is failing people every day and we should not delay any opportunity we have to improve the lives of people on low incomes”.

I agree. The Child Poverty Action Group makes the point that the Government needs to get the introduction of those powers right, but it goes on to say:

“there are elements of the new social security powers that can be utilised more quickly.”

We should explore the various areas to see which powers might be brought forward more quickly. CPAG also argues that the Government should seek now to make arrangements with the DWP on the way in which PIP is structured and delivered to claimants in Scotland. Again, I agree.

Another area that the Government can act on now is benefit take-up. We know that almost £0.5 billion pounds in tax credits is not being claimed and that £170 million for 53,000 carers remains unclaimed in Scotland. Councils and third sector welfare groups should be given support now to increase their work on benefit take-up. The Government should sign up to Labour's proposal for a legal requirement on the new social security agency to do all that it can to ensure that people get the support to which they are entitled.

Marie Curie states that carers allowance should be a benefit in its own right, rather than being tied to a person who is in receipt of other benefits.

There are also top-up powers, which have not been considered in the consultation. CPAG is asking the Government and the Parliament to consider a child benefit top-up payment of £5 a week, which it says is projected



“to reduce child poverty in Scotland by 14%—meaning 30,000 fewer children in poverty than would otherwise be the case”.

That proposal must be investigated further.

Many organisations take the view that the administration and delivery of benefits should not be contracted out to the private sector, and I agree.

Engender Scotland is calling for the development of pilot schemes for a citizens basic income in Scotland in the next session of Parliament. I believe that we, as a forward-looking Parliament, should be willing to consider that. This weekend, at a meeting in Govan, an association will be set up to look at the idea, and a similar meeting is taking place in Fife this week. The fairer Fife commission and Fife Council have said that they would support such an idea. I am very keen to look at those proposals, which are not in the consultation but should be examined.

Ultimately, Ruth Davidson’s Tories need to show some backbone and reject the welfare reforms that are causing such damage in our communities throughout Scotland.

17:03

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** I echo the minister’s statement that we all have a direct stake in social security. It is a collective and Government responsibility to provide security to all our constituents. In doing so, we should consider what security means in that sense. It is about human solidarity and creating a society in which fewer of our fellow citizens suffer from fear and distress, unnecessary pressure and negative circumstances. It is a system that we believe in together, in which we see social security payments as payments—as Christina McKelvie powerfully said—rather than claims. In that context, we can think about the current system, the insecurity around it and how people are treated within it.

There have been several mentions of the film “I, Daniel Blake”. I do not know which members have seen it but, for me, watching it brought back the faces of so many constituents who have sat in front of me in surgeries. Constituents have been badly treated by the approach and the culture of suspicion and judgment in the current assessment process. They have had to go through huge six-week waiting periods while being reassessed for employment and support allowance. As Alison Johnstone appropriately said, they have suffered cuts to their mobility capacity in the transition from DLA to PIP.

As I watched the film, I also thought about the outcomes in the current system and the fact that the UN has concluded that disabled people are

suffering a “systematic” abuse of their human rights due to UK Government benefit cuts. I thought about the fact that DWP statistics revealed that, in the period from December 2011 to February 2014, more than 2,000 people died after claiming for employment and support allowance because work capability assessments found them fit for work. I thought about the fact that there has been so much suffering for those with mental health conditions and fluctuating conditions.

As we think about that failure in the status quo and the current system, we must look forward, with a huge sense of responsibility, to what we can do in the Parliament through the powers that we are getting in this new stage. We must consider what the Scottish Government is proposing and what will come after that in years ahead.

It is important to emphasise the environment that we are in and the wider problem of austerity and the social and economic damage that it is doing. It is ideological austerity. Sheffield Hallam research has illuminated that, by 2020, there will be cumulative cuts in the welfare system of £2 billion a year. That will have an effect not only socially but economically, as Ruth Maguire powerfully articulated.

**Neil Findlay:** I am listening carefully to the member, and he is making a number of good points. However, does he agree that the Parliament could do so much more with the powers that it has? For example, we could tax the wealthy using the new tax powers and we could scrap the council tax and make it much fairer. There is a host of other things, but does he support even those two initiatives?

**Ben Macpherson:** The wider point about the fiscal situation is of course correlated with the current system of welfare provision.

As we look forward to how we evaluate the implementation of the new social security powers, we also need to think creatively. Alex Rowley rightly mentioned that an interesting debate is taking place on the potential for providing a universal citizen’s income in the years ahead. I am proud that the Social Security Committee will look at that issue in the course of this parliamentary session.

We also need to think clearly and carefully about delivery. We must ensure that our focus is on what we can deliver within the current constraints and on how we implement and create an effective system for that delivery. That is why I welcome the statements from Inclusion Scotland and the Child Poverty Action Group in evidence to the committee that they agree that setting up the various systems and the new agency will take time and we should do it responsibly.

My time is coming to a close, so I will finish by saying that the process will be a collective investment in ourselves and each other as members of the Scottish Parliament and as individuals, and we should work together to get it right for all of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the closing speeches.

17:08

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** Introducing the new Scottish social security system might be the most significant thing that the Parliament has ever done, if we get it right. We will have 11 benefits, and 1.4 million people could have a new experience with the new system. As many members have said, we have the opportunity to design something completely different with a different ethos from that of the UK system. That system has made people feel shame about claiming and it has put people off because of its complexities. As Neil Findlay said, people are sometimes unable to speak to a human being and cannot get access to a computer to get their benefits.

Those are the factors that characterise the current welfare system. It makes people feel stressed about claiming and they feel that it is onerous. For the most part, they feel that it is anything but a right. The SCVO says that we must get away from the current culture that people are, de facto, almost guilty until they are proven innocent.

Scotland has a chance to create a new system, and many of us agree that it must be based on insisting that people actually get their benefits. That is covered in Labour's amendment. We believe that people's entitlement to their benefits should be a basic right that is enshrined in law and that the system should work to get them those benefits.

We also need a system that is based on advocacy and face-to-face contact. I know that the minister has talked about that in the past. There is a good quote from the Poverty Alliance, which says:

"People need people to help them in their time of need, not machines".

We know from the briefings that we have received that thousands of people do not claim benefits that they are entitled to. Some 100,000 Scots do not claim working tax credit or child tax credit, to the tune of £428 million, and 56,000 carers in Scotland do not receive the benefits that they are entitled to. We need the new system to have a legal duty to assist claimants, as that will maximise the benefits that are claimed. As well as helping people, that will maximise the total

benefits that people get before the date on which the powers are transferred over. The amount that is spent in the previous year will determine the budget that the Scottish Government will get to administer its welfare system, which is another good reason to ensure that we recognise the full entitlement of those claimants who are going to have their benefits administered by the new Scottish system.

As the Social Security Committee heard from many of its witnesses last week, on the devolution of the new powers, we will inherit a lump sum. We will not be bound to replicate all the current benefits but will be able to design new ones if that makes sense. Professor Kirstein Rummery said that we are getting powers over only 15 per cent of the welfare budget, and we have heard that in many debates, but the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government will have control of the administration of how that budget is delivered, which is important. That is potentially far more powerful than we realise, because it is the administration of the scheme and not the sums of money involved that causes the most damage to claimants.

I want to say a word or two on why Labour believes that it is important to take the powers sooner than 2020. The Government's motion makes no particular reference to the matter and it is not asking us to vote on its position tonight, but it has arrived at its decision. The committee received the minute of the joint ministerial working group some weeks ago but, as Adam Tomkins said, it would be helpful if, in future, we could receive a formal letter. The committee's attention should have been drawn to the Government's decision. I would like that to be the format in future so that, when the Government makes decisions, we are clear about that and the information is not simply contained in minutes. However, that is a side point.

Alison Johnstone asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Damian Green, whether, with the devolution of employability programmes, it will be voluntary for claimants to participate. I am clear that I heard him say that it will be, but I fully support the Scottish Government pursuing that once again so that we are clear that programmes will be voluntary and not compulsory. However, that is on the official record.

Sandra White accused Labour of frightening people by asking the Government to reconsider its position. I would like to respond to that point. Members might not agree with us, but we have a rationale for what we are saying. Many people have talked about the migration from DLA to PIP, but we know that at least 150,000 people will be reassessed in that period, and those people will be exposed to the UK welfare system; it will not be

administered by any new Scottish social security system. We feel a sense of responsibility to make that point in the debate.

Brian Whittle made the point that there are many cases where there are no problems, but he seems not to recognise that, as many of the witnesses that the committee has heard from have said, time and again there are deliberate decisions to reduce public expenditure by taking people off DLA and putting them on to PIP. I close with that point, and I hope that it is taken on board.

17:15

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** I absolutely understand and appreciate the need for a structured period of transition, and in the context of last week's revelation I understand the slightly defensive tone of the Scottish Government's motion. I recognise that Scotland needs to take time with its new legislative competences and must set up new, bespoke mechanisms and agencies that meet its social security needs.

We encourage such an approach, but if we are to accept the transition period, I sincerely hope that the SNP will accept that it should be used constructively to consider what the Scottish Government can do rather than to continually talk about what it perceives the UK Government is getting wrong.

As Graham Simpson said, the SNP's white paper, whether or not it was intended to set out a "transition platform", was incredibly ambitious in its aims. What happened last week just shows that governing is not always plain sailing, by the SNP's own admission. The SNP Government cannot blame us for being a little suspicious about last week's revelation that it had requested split competence over a number of new welfare powers until 2020.

I welcome the amendment in Adam Tomkins's name, which rightly acknowledges that social security is now the shared responsibility of the UK Government and the Scottish Government. The novelty and complexity that arise from the new arrangements are such that politicians should be wary of creating confusion about how benefits and conditionality will work.

New and extensive powers are coming to the Scottish Parliament. When the devolution of powers is complete, the SNP Government will have complete responsibility for a third of all working-age social security expenditure, which equates to around £3 billion. The Scottish Parliament will have complete control over a number of benefits, including DLA, PIP, attendance allowance and carers allowance. It will have the ability to create new welfare powers in devolved areas and, most important, it will have

the ability to top up any reserved benefit, including universal credit, tax credits and child benefit.

Should the onus therefore not be on the Scottish Government to tell us today how the new system will alleviate poverty in a way that is sustainable in the long term? How will employment programmes that are delivered on a voluntary basis be balanced with the need genuinely to help the long-term unemployed while providing a cost-effective system for the taxpayer?

Of course, a new system should have fairness at its heart and protect the most vulnerable in our society. It should be flexible and it should be tailored to the needs of the Scottish people. It should also support people who can and want to work—that is important, and I will talk more about that.

The Scottish Conservatives have championed the use of new devolved benefit powers in Scotland. In our manifesto this year, we proposed that carers allowance be aligned with jobseekers allowance to support the hard work of the 60,000 carers in Scotland. I very much welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to the policy.

We have not proposed changes to the social security payment that is made to the largest number of people in Scotland—the winter fuel payment—other than to reconsider at what time of year it is paid.

**Neil Findlay:** Can the Tory party stop this act in which it purports to be the new, cuddly Tory party and the benefit claimant's friend? The Tories have supported every single cut that has come down the line over the past five years and they should be ashamed of themselves.

**Annie Wells:** I thought that this debate was about the future of social security in Scotland, and I want to ensure—

**Neil Findlay:** You are making cuts that are happening in Scotland. Have some humility.

**Annie Wells:** I want to ensure that my party and I consider what we can get right for the people of Scotland. That is where I am coming from. I am making a constructive contribution to a debate on the future of social security in Scotland.

When it comes to reserved benefits, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Damian Green, has spoken of taking a "hard-headed" rather than a "hard-hearted" approach. The Government announced last month that it would bring an end to health assessments for the chronically ill, which will benefit more than 100,000 people across the UK. That move was praised by charities. Only today, in the autumn statement, chancellor Philip Hammond announced a change to the taper rate for universal credit that will benefit 3 million households across the UK.

However, positive announcements will not stop the SNP's charge against even the mention of conditionality when it comes to social security. As Adam Tomkins pointed out, when it comes to conditionality, the Scottish Government has created confusion over how conditions that are attached to reserved benefits such as JSA and universal credit will operate within Scotland's newly devolved employment services.

**Ruth Maguire:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Annie Wells:** I am sorry, but I am about to conclude.

The UK Government has been fair on the issue, and Damian Greene stated explicitly in a letter addressed to the convener of the Social Security Committee that the UK Government would not stand in the way of new employment programmes being voluntary in their operation. Despite the SNP's open admission that it could block the passing of claimant information to the DWP on the issue, the UK Government rightly maintains that claimants will still need to demonstrate that they are looking for work—and that is only fair. As Jeremy Balfour pointed out, it is right that we create financial cushions, not welfare traps. For those who can work, it will always provide the best route out of poverty—I cannot stress that enough.

I welcome the Scottish Government's announcement of a £14 million work first Scotland programme to assist those with disabilities into work. However, I urge the Scottish Government, in considering future announcements of a Scotland equivalent of the work programme, to reflect on the chancellor's announcement today of the devolution of employment services to London and think about whether a similar deal could be struck in Scottish cities such as Glasgow. After all, devolution should not stop at Holyrood.

17:21

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** We have heard some substantial speeches this afternoon. I single out Ruth Maguire and Alex Rowley for the heft that they added to proceedings.

When she opened the debate, Jeane Freeman said that we all have a stake in the future of social security in Scotland. That was reiterated by many members including Jeremy Balfour, who spoke of his own positive experience of the process of migration from DLA to PIP. I am not going to detract from Mr Balfour's personal experience, but I will draw some parallels. I am a woman in politics: I have the privilege of holding one of the most senior positions in Scottish politics, but that does not mean that we do not have a problem with

underrepresentation of women in the Scottish Parliament. I say to Mr Balfour and other members that this is not about me or them; we have to look outside this place, at society and the broader experience. Members and I must always remember that that lived experience is not about them or me.

Jeane Freeman also pointed out that it is no exaggeration to say that the safe and secure transfer of new devolved benefits represents the biggest and most complex programme of change in the history of devolution. I did not hear anyone demur from that this afternoon. It is a unique journey and we are taking unique approaches, which gives us some unique opportunities. We have the opportunity to build a new system from the ground up, not from the top down, in a spirit of co-production with Parliament, civic Scotland and—most of all—the people who have lived experience of the current benefits system.

We must learn from the mistakes of the UK Government. Universal credit was meant to take four years to roll out, but it will now take a minimum of 12 years to roll out. I say to Mark Griffin that we do, indeed, look at the calamitous process of migration between DLA and PIP. The Scottish Government has repeatedly called on the UK Government to stop the roll-out. Maybe the difference between Mark Griffin and me is that I want the power to do more than just write letters calling on the UK Government to stop something iniquitous.

**Pauline McNeill:** I appreciate that the cabinet secretary has never rested for a minute in calling on the UK Government to change its position on how it deals with claimants. However, she has not really expressed any concern so far about the fact that we could bring the powers here before 2020 and at least have claimants being assessed not by the UK welfare system but by the social security system that we all want in Scotland.

**Angela Constance:** It is unfortunate that Pauline McNeill and others, along with the Tories, have perhaps not paid as much attention to committee proceedings as they should have. We have repeatedly said that transfer of the powers is not an event but a process.

I am on the record as saying that for very good reasons we are not going for a "big bang" approach, in which at some point in the near future we will go into a building, switch on the lights and deliver all 11 benefits at once. It has to be a safely managed process. We have repeatedly explained at committee and in the chamber that there are three broad processes to undertake. First, there is commencement of the powers, along with the very important consultation, then there will be legislative competence and introduction of our legislation, which I am quite sure will be debated

and tested to the point of destruction, after which we will move to the delivery phase.

We are also on record as saying that we can look to deliver some of the benefits soon, but that we will need to take considerable care with some of them—in particular, the most complex ones. I will not play fast and loose with the lives and livelihoods of the people who rely on the benefits.

I say to Alison Johnstone and others that it is absolutely imperative that we work together to turn words into actions. Specifically on the point about the young carers allowance, we are looking at introducing a package of measures, including financial support, and we are discussing the matter with the various young carers organisations.

I say to Alex Cole-Hamilton that we are designing an assessment process that prioritises the needs of the disabled person and not of the people who will conduct the assessment. I also point out that Alex Neil, my predecessor, published back in March this year the document “A new future for social security in Scotland”. That was the start and the blueprint.

I say to my friend and colleague Christina McKelvie that we will look very closely at long-term conditions and lifetime awards. We are on record as making commitments to such people because we want to stop the revolving door: we want to replace the present inhumane, expensive and error-ridden regime.

We will support the Labour Party’s amendment tonight. Unlike the Government at Westminster, we do not see social security as a source of easy cuts; we see it as an investment. It is very much to be regretted that the UK Government has not taken the opportunity that has been afforded it by the autumn budget statement to reverse the highly damaging cuts to ESA and so on.

I reiterate to all members across the chamber who spoke of the powers that we have to top up reserved benefits and to create new benefits that there is a debate to be had about how we use our new powers to full effect. I, for one, will not at this important time be closing down that debate. However, members have to acknowledge that we have a manifesto to deliver—I am sure that we will be held to account on that. We also agree with the Labour Party that we must increase take-up rates of benefits, which will have a financial impact.

Graham Simpson—as did others—talked glibly about topping up reserved benefits or creating new benefits, and then had the audacity to accuse Jeane Freeman and I of acting like teenagers. Oh, I wish! He seems to expect that it will be the women in this Government who will run after his Tory pals in the UK Government to clear up their mess and the mistakes of all their broken

promises and disastrous cuts on the poorest people. I say clearly to them that at the end of the day, people will well and truly show the Tories the door. Of course, there is only one way to do that.

I want to end where I started. We all have a stake in the future of social security in Scotland, we all want to build a system that we can all be proud of and we all want to turn words into actions. As we go on the journey together, we will all need challenge and we will all need to work together to build consensus. We in the Scottish Government want to do as much as we can as quickly as we can, but I reiterate that we will not be blown off course and we will not be bullied into providing timescales, because we will not compromise on the need to get the system absolutely right. I repeat that I, for one, will not play fast and loose with the lives and livelihoods of the sick, the disabled and the dying.

I will end with a quote. Tressa Burke of the Glasgow Disability Alliance said:

“I firmly believe that the Scottish Government having control over more social security powers offers more hope.”

Although contributions to the debate have varied in content and tone, I firmly believe that, in our own ways, we all believe that the new powers offer hope to Scotland. Scotland is leading the way in creating a fairer system, and we can all be proud of that. If we work together to make it happen, that will represent the Scotland that we seek and the country that we truly want to be.

## Business Motion

17:31

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-02680, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 29 November 2016

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Implications for Culture, Creative Industries, and Tourism following the EU Referendum

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Celebrating St Andrew's Day

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 30 November 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
Health and Sport

*followed by* Scottish Green Party Business

*followed by* Legislative Consent Memorandum: Policing and Crime Bill – UK Legislation

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 1 December 2016

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: Recognising 16 Days of Action to End Violence Against Women and Girls

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Support for Scotland's Renewables

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 6 December 2016

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 7 December 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
Communities, Social Security and Equalities

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 8 December 2016

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Decision Time

17:31

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S5M-02651.2, in the name of Adam Tomkins, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02651, in the name of Jeane Freeman, on the future of social security in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 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, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)

Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (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-02651.3, in the name of Mark Griffin, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02651, in the name of Jeane Freeman, 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, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (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)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (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)  
 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 final question is, that motion S5M-02651, in the name of Jeane Freeman, on the future of social security in Scotland, 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)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (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)  
 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, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (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)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (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)  
 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 agrees that social security is an investment in the people of Scotland, by the people of Scotland; expresses its thanks to all the individuals and organisations across Scotland who responded and engaged with the recent consultation on the future of social security; notes that the Scottish Government will continue that engagement and will harness and use the lived experience of people across Scotland as the social security system is developed; recognises the considerable work that local government and third sector welfare rights organisations do across the country to support people to maximise their incomes; believes that an extensive public information campaign, complemented by a well-resourced welfare rights network, can further this work in advance of the transfer of social security powers; agrees that a statutory duty on the new social security agency to maximise people's incomes is necessary to ensure increased take-up by those who are eligible; understands that this is the largest transfer of powers to the Parliament and will require a major programme of transition and implementation in order to ensure that Scotland's future social security system meets the needs, expectations and ambitions of its people; recognises that this transfer will affect 1.4 million people and that therefore the safe and secure transfer of benefits must be the priority, but believes that the complexities of devolution must neither undermine or impede the delivery of real changes for Scotland's most vulnerable, and that devolution must be realised before 2020 to allow the Parliament and the Scottish Government to halt and reverse the worst effects of Tory social security cuts, and agrees that reform of the benefits to be devolved is necessary in order to build the fair, accessible and dignified social security system that Scotland needs and deserves.

## Year of the Dad

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-01243, in the name of Bob Doris, on year of the dad. I wonder what that is about. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament welcomes the projects being developed by Home-Start in the Maryhill and Springburn constituency and in Glasgow, as well as in Dundee, Fife and Argyll and Bute, which will leave a lasting legacy for the first ever Year of the Dad in 2016, a celebration of fathers and the importance of fathers in child development and parenting; considers that Home-Start is well placed to make a great success of such projects given its track record in helping families with young children; acknowledges its work to develop a greater focus on supporting dads through volunteer and group support; welcomes funding from the Scottish Government's Children and Young People's Integration Fund for Home-Start to lead the development of more work with dads across its network in Scotland; further welcomes other funding opportunities to develop Year of the Dad activities, including the STV Appeal and the Cattanach Trust; recognises the importance of such projects in supporting dads across Scotland, and believes that such work should continue to be developed to ensure that fathers are included whenever possible in the design and delivery of children and families' support work beyond 2016, which will benefit not just dads but children, mothers and wider society.

17:36

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** Thank you very much, Presiding Officer, for your kind introduction.

I am pleased to welcome to Parliament this afternoon volunteers, staff and families from Home-Start Glasgow North, as well as representatives of Home-Start projects across Scotland and beyond. I have had the privilege of working with Home-Start Glasgow North for a number of years now; this year it celebrates its 15th birthday, and I know very well the benefits that it provides to vulnerable families across my Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn constituency.

It is fair to say that Home-Start volunteers and the families supported tend to be predominantly made up of women—wonderful, strong, resilient and inspirational women. However, I was led to ask the question: what about dad? Aware that 2016 was the year of the dad, I was particularly keen to find out more about the subject.

I have been influenced by two personal events this year. In January, my wife Janet gave birth to our first child, Cameron, and on 5 May, the day of our Scottish Parliament elections, my dad passed away from terminal cancer. I am still working through how both events have changed me.

Becoming a dad has certainly been a life-affirming joy, while losing my own dad has produced—and still produces—a flurry of emotions that I grapple with.

Of course, these two events will be very common and familiar to many men both in this chamber and across Scotland. Becoming a father can be as scary as it can be wonderful, but many of us are lucky to have strong support networks made up of family and friends and work colleagues and a range of social and community networks that we plug into to gain peer support and advice. What if those networks are weak or change? Who offers support to dads who feel isolated? Of course, the year of the dad is a celebration of fatherhood. I commend Fathers Network Scotland for its significant contribution to the year, and I hope to work with it in future.

However, the fact that it is the year of the dad made me interested in finding out what kind of support or services exist in communities for dads who find themselves in the sort of challenging circumstances that I have outlined. How do we engage with dads who might need assistance and offer support in a respectful, meaningful and relevant way that is of benefit to the most important thing of all—their children? How do we celebrate fatherhood in more challenging circumstances and ensure that dads build strong lifelong relationships with their children, particularly in the very important early years? There are various organisations out there, most notably Dads Rock, which many of us will have heard of, but I wanted to know what the organisation that I knew best—Home-Start Glasgow North—thought about my questions with regard to how the dads in my constituency who find themselves in challenging situations might benefit.

I met Nikki O'Hara, who runs Home-Start Glasgow North along with a number of her colleagues, and was pleased to find out that Home-Start is already actively looking at working with dads across Scotland, and not just in north Glasgow. My motion notes that projects are being developed in south Glasgow, Dundee, Fife, and Argyll and Bute. We should put on the record our thanks to all the volunteers and staff members who are making a success of those projects.

My constituency is Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn, of course. I am delighted that Nikki O'Hara and the Home-Start Glasgow North team are now set to launch a dads group locally. Iain MacDonald, who has joined the Home-Start team, and Mary McConnell, who is a group worker, are developing a new dads group to focus on supporting dads with children who are under four. Although Home-Start will provide information and training sessions to dads, the group will do what

Home-Start Glasgow North and the Home-Start network do best: it will work with dads, have fun, build trust and relationships, and provide practical activities. In doing so, the aim is to strengthen father-child relationships, reduce isolation and build support networks for dads. Home-Start will help dads to become more confident and resilient, and aid children's social and emotional development. The group will run in Maryhill on a weekly basis. It hopes that it will run for three eight-week blocks over a three-year period.

I thank the STV appeal and the Cattanach Trust for their financial commitment to the dads project, and Home-Start UK for helping to fund the initial scoping exercise. The project has set clear outcomes that can be measured. Those are not just for dads; they are for children to make progress with their social and emotional development through participation in age-appropriate activities with their dads. It is important that we evaluate those programmes. A strong evidence base and demonstrable success are important. I believe that that will be achieved and that those projects across Scotland can play an important role in the health and wellbeing of dads and their children in the years ahead.

That presents both a challenge and an opportunity to local authorities, our national health service, health and social care partnerships, and the Scottish Government to consider how to ensure the long-term, sustainable funding of such projects. I am sure that Home-Start Glasgow North and the wider network would welcome an on-going dialogue with the Scottish Government and partners to identify sustainable funding opportunities in the years ahead, and I hope that the minister can commit today to opening up that dialogue.

Today is about a celebration of fatherhood with the year of the dad. Every day, the vast majority of dads do a great and wonderful job. A recent Fathers Network Scotland survey found that 59 per cent of dads read to their children every day or most days, and that 82 per cent of dads cook for their kids at least a few times a week. That is pretty good, but there is definitely room for improvement there for dads—and I include myself in that.

My favourite time every day is around 5.30 am. That is when dad's time with Cameron begins, and he has his first feed, smile, play and nappy change of the day. That is our time together. However, I have to say that Cameron did not get the memo this morning. That time was around quarter past 4. I am feeling slightly tired.

Let us be proud of the role that dads play each and every day in building loving relationships with their children that last a lifetime. Being a dad is new to me, but it is not new to many in the

chamber and many who are watching across Scotland.

Let us also acknowledge that, just like mums, sometimes dads need a helping hand and additional support. Home-Start does that very well. It is a privilege to have highlighted its excellent work and the part that it is playing to develop a lasting legacy for the 2016 year of the dad.

I very much hope that everyone will be able to join me at a parliamentary event that I will host after the debate, at which we will find out much more about the work of Home-Start UK and how it is answering the question that I started with: what about dad?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Fulton MacGregor and say to him that the bar has been set high on feeding and nappy changing.

17:44

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. It gives me great pleasure to speak in the debate, and I thank Bob Doris for lodging the motion for members' business and giving us the opportunity to discuss it here.

When I first noticed the debate in the *Business Bulletin*, I thought that I just had to speak in it. That was because, as many of my colleagues know, earlier this week I was able to share with them the news that my partner and I are expecting, in May next year, our second child. [*Applause.*] Thank you very much.

In mentioning that, I would also like to mention my wee boy, Ceard, who is now two years old and, it is fair to say, is my whole world. He was born on 2 March 2014 and changed my life completely. I cannot really remember what life was like before that—people used to say that to me and I thought that it could not be true. Most parents will recognise that.

In everything that I do in politics—the decisions that I make and the things that I think about—I have his future in mind. Without straying too much into a political element during a members' business debate, I remember clearly the night of the independence referendum in 2014, when Ceard was only about six months old. I returned from the count knowing that my side, yes, had lost. I broke down in tears when I faced coming back to him and not being able to give him a normal independent country to grow up in. That was the way I saw it; I know that other parties have different views.

I return to the present. I have now talked about my son here in the chamber. I am proud of that and I will be able to show the *Official Report* to him and his younger brother or sister when they are

older—probably much to their embarrassment. I am sure that the parliamentary authorities will have calls from them, wondering how the archives can be deleted.

It is important to remember those who, for a multitude of reasons, have not been able to become dads or who have been dads but, sadly, have had that taken from them—again, under many different circumstances. Of course, we should remember all the mothers and children affected by those situations too. We should take any opportunity that arises to note such situations and the bravery that is shown by the people involved.

Yesterday's debate in the chamber was on adoption and permanency, and let us give some thought to the adoptive and foster dads across Scotland who are so selfless and contribute so much to our society. That was a fantastic debate, across the chamber and all the parties and members who contributed.

I am pleased to hear about the initiatives in Glasgow that Bob Doris mentioned. As a member of the Justice Committee, I want to mention some current initiatives that promote the role of dads in their children's development—for example, Barnardo's, working in Polmont. A couple of months ago, I attended a reception at which we were shown a video of some of the staff in Polmont and from Barnardo's, working with young men there who were reading their children, "The Gruffalo". The Minister for Childcare and Early Years, Mark McDonald, spoke at that event. It was fantastic to see the effect that being able to interact with their children had on those young men's lives.

Families Outside, which I met this week and had the pleasure of speaking to at its steering group, is doing invaluable work promoting contact between children and parents in custody—and we have to say that that is mainly young men.

In my constituency, I have been contacted about a group called MacFun—the "Mac" stands for men and children—which encourages dads who do not live with their children to become more involved in a fun environment.

I can see that my time is nearly up—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** It is up. Thank you very much.

**Fulton MacGregor:** Okay, sorry. Thank you.

17:48

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** For many reasons—not least because I am the father of three young children—I am more than happy to support Bob Doris's motion today and the

year of the dad campaign in general. Recently, my six-year-old son had to fill in a school questionnaire about his dad's appearance. In the section where he was meant to enter the colour of my hair, he wrote, "He has no hair."

Debates such as this rightly prompt those of us with children to reflect on how we act as parents, but they also allow us all to consider our own childhood and how we were supported by our fathers and/or our mothers. I have been incredibly fortunate to have been given endless support and encouragement by my parents to this day, and I hope in some small way to pass on that experience to my children.

I was lucky—very lucky—but there are many who have not been. Across Scotland today there are families with young children that are struggling with a range of issues such as isolation, post-natal depression, physical health problems, bereavement and many others. Those are families with young children who need help and support. We can do many things to support those families, and the fathers, mothers, carers and even grandparents within them.

For that reason, I am delighted that Bob Doris highlighted the work of Home-Start in his motion, not least because, as the motion states, Home-Start operates in Argyll and Bute, in my region of the Highlands and Islands. As the motion notes, Home-Start has a great track record in helping parents; in particular, it has done a lot of work in developing a greater focus on supporting fathers when stress is placed on them. I applaud the crucial work of Home-Start in helping families through the use of a combination of volunteers and groups, which in turn assists the development of our young people at a critical stage in their lives, and goes some way to tackling many of the problems that I mentioned a moment ago.

Indeed, that kind of campaign is very important. As Fathers Network Scotland highlights, it is very much the case that the tired old stereotypes of fathers being breadwinners and mothers being caregivers are long outdated and out of step with modern life. More women are in work than ever before and more men are dedicating time to parenting. Fathers Network Scotland notes that fathers gave a mere 15 minutes of parenting time on average in the 1970s, yet now dedicate more than three hours a day, with extra time on weekends. In fact, more dads stay at home than ever before, with 6 per cent of married households having a working mother and a stay-at-home father. The figure was less than 2 per cent in the 1970s, so the trend is small but growing.

Although there is a disproportionately large number of single-parent households in which a woman is the primary parent, 10 per cent of single-parent households across the UK have a

male primary parent. There is very little or no focus on that group, but we ignore it at our peril so I am pleased that there has been wide cross-party support for the motion. When men's issues come up in politics, they tend to be seen by some as being of lesser importance than other issues. International men's day, which was held only a few days ago, regularly receives unjustifiable scorn from some commentators.

I commend Bob Doris for championing this cause and I am happy to attach my name, and the support of members on the Conservative benches, to his motion. This is the first-ever year of the dad and I am certain that it will go from strength to strength. I am glad that the Parliament is recognising it. Regrettably, I cannot attend the reception tonight—not because of a competing parliamentary or social event, but because it is my children's bath time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Well, we cannot criticise you for that.

17:53

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** I thank Bob Doris for securing tonight's debate, which gives me the opportunity to bring a message of solidarity to the year of the dad from Scotland's grandpas section.

It also gives me an opportunity to say a few words about a charity that I value highly, which is Home-Start. We do not get the opportunity all that often to sing Home-Start's praises. It is not the type of charity that pursues a big national profile and it does not bother us here as often as some charities do. Yet I venture to suggest that pretty much every member of this Parliament will be aware of its work in their constituency, because what it does is so valuable and practical. It spends its time on that work rather than promoting itself.

Its work goes to the heart of families' needs. It supports and befriends families that are under stress, and its great strength is that it is prepared to do anything that a family needs, in order to support it. It is not about what Home-Start thinks would be good for a family; it is much more about what that family needs.

Not surprisingly, the Home-Start that I know best is Home-Start East Lothian, which is led by Mary MacLeod in the chair and Katy Pollock, who is the senior co-ordinator. They organise around 40 volunteers, which allows them to support 75 families, and to provide support and to reach out to around 169 children. Home-Start has been doing that very valuable work in East Lothian since 2000. Being so embedded in the heart of family life is probably why the organisation understands the importance of fathers and why it understood

the importance of the first year of the dad, picked up the idea and ran with it.

There is plenty of research that backs up the importance of fathers. For example, there is a strong correlation between children not seeing their fathers and childhood depression. More positively, there is a whole list of benefits that come from having a confident, hands-on dad as part of a family, which include children having a higher IQ, fewer behavioural problems and a lot less stress, and them being much happier. That is proven by research, but also by the practical experience of the volunteers and staff of Home-Start.

I have already said that Home-Start is very practical and it does not surprise me that its involvement in year of the dad has led to the creation of projects, which—as Bob Doris's motion says—will be the legacy of the first year of the dad, at least in some parts of Scotland. I hope that Home-Start in East Lothian is listening and considering whether to do that, too.

In passing, I should mention another charity—Dads Work—that does tremendous work with dads in my constituency.

One of the themes of the year of the dad is: what did your dad teach you? I thought about that prior to speaking this evening, although I thought more about what my dad did not teach me. My dad was a car mechanic to trade and he could take any vehicle—car, bus, lorry; in his time, he did all of them—to pieces, put it back together again and make it work. He could also rewire and replumb a house. He could use wood to make anything that you could think of, he was a pretty good gardener and I even remember him building a garage.

He taught me none of that. He was determined that I would earn my living with my head, rather than with my hands. He left me as a highly qualified, but completely cack-handed young man. However, he taught me that you never let your family down and that you always get engaged in your community—as he was, whether that was through his church, through the Boys Brigade or through his trade union at work. He taught me that you put your family first, you put your community second and you put yourself third. That was the lesson that my dad taught me and that, in my own curious way, I have tried to live by.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That was lovely. I enjoyed that.

17:58

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** It gives me great pleasure to speak in this debate on the year of the dad. The debate was secured by

my colleague Bob Doris, a relatively new dad. I had good notice of Mr Doris's intention to hold this members' debate as we chatted about it before the summer recess. I challenged him—perhaps he has forgotten this—to conduct the debate with his then brand new son, Cameron, attached to him in a sling. Mr Doris has secured the debate slightly later than I anticipated when I threw down the gauntlet, so he is off the hook now that Cameron is probably past his more portable and docile stage. However, I also love the idea of a wee one having a wee crawl about the chamber.

Modern fatherhood to me means shared parenting and dads playing a full role in their children's lives. I am married to a modern dad—John—whose hands-on parenting and shared role in the care of our children has enabled me to do the work that I do. If it were not for the interchangeable roles of mum and dad in my house, I would not be able to spend four nights and three days a week away from home as I do in this job. I certainly would not have been able to spend a week away on a job on an offshore installation, as I used to do—far too many times to count—when I ran my business.

Things have certainly moved on since our grandparents and even since our parents were in the baby business and, these days, there are provisions in place for men to take a more nurturing and active role in a child's daily life. Dad is no longer just someone who a child sees coming through the door, tired at the end of the day as the kids are being put to bed.

Mr Gray has made me think about what my dad taught me. I want to put on record an apology to my dad. He tried his very best to teach me the bagpipes, but I was a nightmare student.

There is a long way to go until things even out, but that is not because of any reluctance on the part of dads, new and old, to play a fuller role in their children's upbringing. Last week, I led a members' business debate on flexible working, during which we heard testimony from some of our speakers that dads often felt that they were unable to ask for family-friendly hours or flexible working, that they faced a great deal of expectation that they should have a more traditional role than their female counterparts and, in some cases, that they faced derision for asking for flexibility in the first place. One member told of a chap who left a law practice to go elsewhere as his practice would not be flexible enough to accommodate his taking his daughter to school—a great business decision there.

It seems that, in some cases, the wishes and needs of dads are secondary to those of mums when it comes to issues around the workplace. The low take-up of shared parental leave is perhaps an indication not of the lack of willingness

of dads to take it, but of a concern about the negative attitudes of employers and fellow employees if they were to exercise that right.

Of course there are other reasons for the low take-up, and it is proven that pay rates are a huge issue. The gender pay gap extends its reach even further, it seems, and affects the full role that dads are entitled to take when their baby is just new in the world. It makes economic sense that the highest earner will be the one who goes back to work and, if that is overwhelmingly the dad, then dads will miss out on that opportunity to take leave in that formative and wonderful time of bonding with their child. Actually, I have to say that I would jealously guard my maternity leave, but that is a side issue.

That is a new part of the debate and is yet another reason to see the gender pay gap eradicated, because equality works both ways. Dads need the same rights as mums to play a full role in their children's lives and we must look at bringing down the societal and economic barriers to that.

The people of this generation are the pioneers of shared parenting. C'mon the modern dads! Lead the way for future generations, for whom parental roles will be interchangeable—as far as biology will allow.

18:02

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** I thank Bob Doris for securing the debate.

As a son and now a proud dad—of Hugh and Vicky—I welcome the opportunity to celebrate and recognise the role of dads and to reflect on their importance in a child's development.

Like many men, I do not get—or, perhaps more accurately, do not take—the opportunity to tell my dad how I feel about him. My dad recently celebrated his 90th birthday. He was born in 1926 and still lives on the same farm in Galloway. My dad has always been a hardworking man, farming during a time that witnessed an agricultural revolution, with farms changing from using horses to using tractors and from having byres to having automatic milking parlours.

I came along in 1967, when my dad was still working six-and-a-half days a week, with one week off once a year, after the tattie holidays. I used to see him briefly in the morning before school, and then in the evening, when I would watch him fall asleep in his armchair, tired after a day of physical labour that started at 5.30 in the morning and finished at 6.30 at night.

Sometimes, making a living and making a life point in different directions, but my dad always made a living with his family at the heart of it.

Many nights we would play chess. Between moves, he would tell me off for watching the television and not concentrating, and then I would tell him off for falling asleep and snoring.

My sister and I loved when my mother was out and we would bully my dad into getting the old reel-to-reel tape recorder out to record us reading school plays or him singing some Andy Stewart or Will Fyffe song.

On a Sunday afternoon once a fortnight, we would draw lots to decide where we would go on my dad's half-day off. We might go to Stranraer to see the ferries or Prestwick to see the aeroplanes, or perhaps we would do what mum and dad wanted to do and go to the Sunday barras in Dumfries or to Logan gardens. Unsurprisingly, it was always the ferries or the planes, because my sister and I would never put our mum and dad's choices into the draw—we thought that they did not know, but I am sure that they did.

It was only a few years ago that I was able to really understand half of the father/son relationship. Mark Twain once said:

“When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.” [*Interruption.*]

I am sorry, Presiding Officer; I have knocked my papers onto the floor.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is okay. We are enjoying your story.

**Finlay Carson:** Oh well, that is not so bad.

As children or teenagers, we do not take time to cherish the little moments in life. It is a skill that we learn as we get older, when it takes more than one sweetie to cheer us up. When I became a father 19 years ago, I found myself remembering and happily reliving all the moments that my dad and I shared. Not a day goes by that I do not think about what he has done for me.

Much of what I did with my son Hugh and daughter Vicky was similar to what my dad did with me. When I coached my son Hugh at football, I thought about all the times that my dad took me to Stranraer ice rink when I was first learning to curl. Every time I play, I still hear his encouraging words of wisdom. I know that he enjoyed coaching me, and I enjoyed coaching Hugh just as much. When my father was interviewed by John Beattie just after I took the oath for Parliament, he was asked if he was proud. He said, “Oh yes,” and added, “just like when we won the curling together.” That simple comment meant so much more to me than my father could ever know.

He taught me a lot about which I often reminisce: carving wooden boats, building everything from sheds and decking to go-karts and

installing kitchens. He gave me the confidence to try those things myself but, unfortunately, did not pass on the necessary do-it-yourself skills. Even now, at 90, when the rabbit hutch needs urgent renovation, he is still there with a hammer in one hand and a bucketload of enthusiasm in the other.

Often, what we become depends on what we learn from our dads, not when they are trying to teach us but in unconscious moments when we are informed by little scraps of their wisdom. My dad seems to have never-ending patience that I am sure I tested regularly.

My father and I worked in partnership on the dairy farm for a number of years. Unlike many farming fathers, he passed over decision making to me as soon as I joined the partnership. He made sure that he was always there for advice but never interfered and let me make my own mistakes when I was determined to make them.

I spoke of the huge advances in agriculture. Those changes are echoed in the ones that have taken place in the home and workplace over the past 50 years. As stated on the year of the dad website,

“society hasn't yet caught up with the striking cultural changes ... The old stereotype of married breadwinner and disciplinarian no longer serves us in an age of increasing diversity and gender equality. It's time to celebrate and support the key contribution fathers make to child development, family and community life.”

We need to ensure that organisations such as Home-Start have the resources to promote and enable equality at home and flexibility in work to enable a better work-life balance for dads, who overwhelmingly want more involvement in the lives of their children. The value and quality of a dad can be seen in the goals, dreams and aspirations that he sets for not only himself but his family.

18:08

**The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald):** I pay tribute to Bob Doris for bringing the debate to Parliament and to all the members who have taken part in what has been an appropriate celebration of the role of dads in Scotland in general, in our own lives and in the lives of our children. In my interview in *Holyrood* magazine, I have given my own reflections on the impact that my father had on my upbringing and what I hope to achieve as a father. Those experiences will help to shape some of the work that I do in my role as a minister.

The Scottish Government is clear that supporting dads to play a full role in family life is an important part of making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. We provide support in a number of ways, including chairing the

national fathers advisory board and funding and working directly with a range of organisations.

This year, the key way in which we have demonstrated our commitment is by providing funding and direct support for the year of the dad, which is a campaign that recognises and celebrates the difference that a great dad can make, in particular to child development. Fathers Network Scotland deserves particular praise for leading the campaign, which is a notable achievement for a small charity. I thank it for its efforts and commend it for what has already been achieved. For example, nearly 100 events have been held, attended by nearly 10,000 people, and around 150 organisations have signed up to the campaign, along with around 3,000 individual supporters.

Mr Doris referred to how we would develop an evidence base on the role of fathers as a result of the work on the year of the dad. I can advise the Parliament that we are hoping to introduce a dad-specific survey as part of our growing up in Scotland study, which we hope will build on the work of the year of the dad and ensure that the role of fathers is more widely acknowledged in Government policy in future.

The year of the dad is inclusive and emphasises the widespread benefits of the involvement of dads. A strength of the campaign is the recognition that families come in all shapes and sizes. When we talk about celebrating dads, we are also talking about stepdads, adoptive dads, granddads and a whole range of other male role models. That touches on the point that Iain Gray rightly made about being a flag bearer for the granddads in the debate and about the absence of dads in some children's lives. It is also about the positive male role models who can influence those children's upbringing.

As Bob Doris rightly notes in the motion, the year of the dad is about benefits not just to dads but to children, mums, families and wider society. That is vital.

We can always spot the new dad when he tells you how enthusiastic he is about waking up at 5.30 in the morning. As the parent of an eight-year old and a six-year-old, I can advise Mr Doris that the novelty wears off.

I am delighted that Home-Start is supporting the year of the dad. I whole-heartedly agree that Home-Start is well placed to support dads and their families, given its strong track record in working with families with young children. Indeed, Home-Start is an organisation that I know and admire. I am particularly aware of the great work of Home-Start Aberdeen in my area, and I am continually impressed by the range of services on offer, the quality of the support that is provided



and the commitment and enthusiasm of staff and volunteers. Donald Cameron rightly highlighted the importance of the work of those volunteers, and it is important that we recognise that today. The Scottish Government has shown our belief in the work of Home-Start by awarding £197,000 for 2016-17 through our new children, young people and families early intervention fund. I am delighted that that funding is enabling Home-Start to work with dads across Scotland, in particular through the projects that have been referred to in the debate. This evening, I will be at the parliamentary reception that Bob Doris is hosting, when I will be looking to speak a little bit more about that work.

The success of the year of the dad has been a collective effort. With that in mind, it is important to recognise the contribution of a range of partners. First, there are organisations that do great work directly with dads: organisations such as Dads Rock, Families Need Fathers Scotland, Midlothian Sure Start and One Parent Families Scotland. I could list many others, all working diligently to support fathers.

Secondly, there are services that are leading the way in involving and supporting dads. South Lanarkshire Council and a Fife Council and NHS Fife partnership are doing particularly fine work to ensure that services are designed and practitioners are trained to include dads.

Fulton MacGregor highlighted work that is being done in our prisons. I am aware of a number of projects that are taking place across Scotland's prison estate, which has been recognised as leading the way in providing a link between fathers who have been incarcerated and their children to ensure that those children maintain a link and a bond with their fathers.

Thirdly, as Bob Doris noted, it is important to recognise the value of funding from other sources. In the case of Home-Start, that is the STV appeal and the Cattanach Trust. Unfortunately, the Scottish Government cannot always provide all the funding that is necessary to support the good work that is going on, so it is pleasing that there are other funders out there that are able to help organisations and projects that benefit children and families across the country. Bob Doris asked for a discussion about funding in future; I am more than happy to consider that further and to look at how best we could take something forward in that area.

Finally, we should recognise the employers that demonstrate excellent practice in supporting dads. That is hugely important, as evidence shows that work can be a major issue for many dads when it comes to family life. We know that men have traditionally struggled to secure flexible working arrangements that allow them to be as involved at home as they want to be, but employers

increasingly recognise the importance of supporting dads, not least because it makes business sense. Research shows that dads aged between 25 and 35 are among the most disengaged and disaffected employees, so supporting them is important for recruitment, retention and productivity.

As part of my portfolio, I am lead minister for family-friendly and flexible working, on which I work closely with my ministerial colleague Jamie Hepburn. That is a clear signal of our recognition that working patterns and family wellbeing go hand in hand. Gillian Martin discussed that last week in her members' business debate and again this evening. I point out to her that, as part of the year of the dad, we have produced 24 short films, most of which are about dads who have taken a flexible working package to spend more time with their family. We hope that those films will encourage other dads to take flexible working packages, and perhaps encourage employers to consider providing more flexible working packages for their employees.

Our work in the area includes running the Scottish top employers for working families awards each year in recognition of the importance of supporting dads. One of our award categories is the Fathers Network Scotland best for all stages of fatherhood award. Last year, the winning organisation was Barclays, while the Scottish Parliament was of course highly commended. We are working with employers to increase the use of shared parental leave, which allows parents flexibility in deciding how leave from work is taken in the first year following their child's birth. As part of the year of the dad, workshops for new dads have been piloted in Police Scotland and the Scottish Government with a view to rolling them out to other organisations from next year.

In conclusion, I want to pick up on a key phrase in the motion: "a lasting legacy". There have been a few references to legacy in today's debate. In recent weeks, Fathers Network Scotland and the Scottish Government have been seeking feedback on the impact of the year of the dad. I am advised that, just yesterday, we received an email from someone in Australia who thanked Scotland for leading the way on this issue. The year of the dad has focused debate on the importance of dads in child development and in family and community life. We should be proud that Scotland is leading the way in supporting dads and their families. It is a fantastic start, but it is only a start. We need to maintain our collective efforts in order to deliver equality at home and at work. The valuable work of organisations such as Home-Start is vital to leaving that lasting legacy.

*Meeting closed at 18:16.*

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