



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Thursday 12 January 2017**

**Session 5**



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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 12 January 2017

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

## General Question Time

### Sanitary Products

#### 1. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government what further consideration it has given to how it will address the affordability and accessibility of sanitary products. (S5O-00539)

**The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell):** Following a meeting on 22 November 2016, the Trussell Trust has agreed to gather data on people who access its network of food banks in Scotland requiring items such as sanitary products, soap, toothpaste and razors. I am happy to hear from other organisations that have evidence or experience to share.

We continue to take action to support people in acute income crisis and to address poverty in all its forms. Since April 2013, our Scottish welfare fund has provided nearly 217,000 low-income households with community care grants and crisis grants, and our fairer Scotland action plan sets out 50 actions that we will take over the course of this parliamentary session to tackle the underlying causes.

**Monica Lennon:** I welcome that update. The Trussell Trust has been a convincing advocate on this subject.

Yesterday, in the region that I represent, I had the privilege of visiting South Lanarkshire College in East Kilbride for the launch of their initiative to provide free access to sanitary products for all students and staff on their campus. I hope that the minister will agree about the importance of that initiative and will join me in congratulating South Lanarkshire College on showing leadership and on delivering a lesson on how to end inequality, as reported in today's *Daily Record*.

Will the Government consider looking further at the importance to health of providing sanitary products, including in education settings, for children and young people who do not have access to their own incomes?

**Aileen Campbell:** I thank Monica Lennon for her tenacity in raising the issue and I thank other members across the chamber who have a commitment to making a difference in this regard. We welcome the important work that South

Lanarkshire College is doing—it sends a positive message.

In relation to the subsequent part of Monica Lennon's question, there will be a great deal of learning from the college's findings from its work, which will inform any future work that we do to ensure that period poverty is not as prevalent as it is now around our country. My officials continue to work with the Trussell Trust and, along with it agreeing to capture data from its food banks, they are working with the trust to help it to understand that information.

A number of workstreams are in place and we will continue to work with members across the chamber to make a positive difference for women in Scotland.

### Superfast Broadband (Rural Areas)

**2. Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it encourages the enterprise agencies to consider alternative routes to superfast broadband in rural areas. (S5O-00540)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing):** The Scottish Government has set out a clear commitment to extend superfast broadband access to 100 per cent of premises across Scotland by 2021, building on the success of our current fibre broadband investment programme.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise has played a significant role in supporting the achievement of our commitment to provide broadband to 95 per cent of premises by the end of 2017 through community broadband Scotland. HIE will continue to play a similar role in supporting delivery of the 2021 commitment.

**Gail Ross:** In light of an article in the media yesterday that stated that

"some rural communities have already been told that they will not be included in the national roll-out",

will the cabinet secretary reconfirm the Scottish Government's commitment to all premises in Scotland, including in rural areas?

**Fergus Ewing:** It is useful to clarify that it is not the case, as asserted by a Conservative MSP in a press release yesterday, that any community has been told that it will not be included in the commitment to universal access to broadband by 2021.

I will not start the year by making a party-political point, but it is important to distinguish between delivery of the current contracts, which will reach 95 per cent of premises—and which are worth £400 million of investment—and the second phase, in which we seek to roll out broadband

access to all other businesses and people throughout the country. I hope that that clarifies what is perhaps an understandable misappreciation of the facts.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for his update on broadband. However, can he confirm whether a real-terms cut of 11 per cent in funding to Highlands and Islands Enterprise in this year's draft budget will have an effect on the inclusion of that area in the roll-out of broadband for the final 5 per cent?

In the draft budget, there appears to be no line for community broadband Scotland. Can the cabinet secretary clarify the future of that enterprise?

**Fergus Ewing:** I will resist the temptation—strong though it is—to respond in a political fashion, and I will stick to the facts. The HIE budget is entirely separate from the broadband budget; it is totally different and unconnected. Equally, it is wrong to assert that community broadband Scotland does not have a budget when it has had an increase in its budget. I am happy to inform Jamie Greene, who sits on the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee—at which, I recall, I had a prolonged evidence session—that this year alone an additional £51 million will be devoted to our commitment to roll out universal access to broadband by 2021. Those are the facts.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** In addition to current projects to roll out broadband to rural areas, there have in the past been projects such as pathfinder that have been publicly funded. What is the Scottish Government doing to look at the publicly funded fibre that is in place already and to ensure that people have the use of that as quickly as possible?

**Fergus Ewing:** We are working hard to ensure that as many people as possible in rural and island communities get access to broadband. There have been many successful schemes already. To go back to the question from Gail Ross, 25,600 premises in her constituency have been connected to the fibre network, and at least 20,000 of those are able to achieve superfast speeds. Most of her constituents will live in rural or extremely remote locations, and we are working closely with private contractors—British Telecom in the case of the Highlands and Islands contract—on the roll-out.

I am very pleased that Ofcom has recognised that the pace at which we are connecting people to access to digital broadband has been twice as fast as has been achieved in the rest of Scotland. We are not complacent, as those who are listening to these questions and who do not have access will understandably want to have it as quickly as

possible. I assure members that we are giving the matter the utmost priority for action, as well as devoting an additional £51 million this year.

**Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** There are community initiatives in rural areas, such as North Skye Broadband, which aims to develop ultrafast gigabit services to end the digital divide and future-proof digital infrastructure. Is the Scottish Government committed to supporting community broadband initiatives that seek to deliver such high-performance ultrafast solutions?

**Fergus Ewing:** Kate Forbes has made me aware of community initiatives in her constituency such as North Skye Broadband, which is aiming to provide gigabit services for residents on the island. Funding for community broadband Scotland is being provided to enable it to work with communities who are developing their own broadband solutions.

This is not a case of one size—or one technology—fits all. It is an extremely complex and challenging task, but we are entirely determined to achieve the roll-out within the deadline of 2021. As the breadth of questions from members across the chamber illustrates, broadband is really important to rural Scotland and to our island communities; I think that every single member is aware of that. I want us to start the new year by undertaking to do our level best, working with members of all parties, to achieve the targets as quickly as we possibly can.

### Review of Access to New Medicines

**3. Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I remind members that I am a pharmacist and registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council

To ask the Scottish Government how it will take forward the recommendations of the review of access to new medicines. (S5O-00541)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison):** Dr Brian Montgomery's independent review of medicines recognises that the Scottish Government has dramatically increased access to new medicines due to reforms and investment in recent years. The review makes a number of recommendations to build on that progress, which we are taking forward in collaboration with our stakeholders.

In addition to responding to the recommendations in the review, we will be making improvements to individual patient treatment requests to improve consistency further and ensure that patients in Scotland get access to the right treatment at the right time.

**Maree Todd:** I fear that, although the review represents welcome progress for patients in terms of access to new medicines, the impact of our departure from the European Union might result in a very large step backwards. Looking at the situation in Australia, it has a relatively small market and its own regulatory authority, but there is usually a time lag for access to new medicines compared with the situation in the US and the EU. During that time lag, individual patients in Australia are left to import and pay for their medicines from abroad.

Can the minister give any assurances that our place in the European Medicines Agency—and, thus, our access to new medicines—is secure?

**Shona Robison:** Maree Todd is right to raise that issue, which is another issue of concern that arises from the prospect of Brexit. Regulation for the licensing, safety and efficacy of medicines is currently reserved to the United Kingdom Government and is the responsibility of the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, which operates on a UK-wide basis. The MHRA has assured us that the UK Government is aware of the need to ensure that medicines licensed through the European Medicines Agency remain approved for use across the UK after exit from the European Union. The MHRA has said that that is not an issue that has to be part of any Brexit negotiations and that it will be within the UK's own competence. However, it is an issue of concern, as Maree Todd has highlighted, so I am happy to keep her informed as the issue is taken forward.

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I welcome Dr Montgomery's review, which recognises that there is a lot more work to do. Can the cabinet secretary give a guarantee that the arrangements around new medicines will guarantee that there will be no postcode lottery for patients in Scotland?

**Shona Robison:** As Anas Sarwar will be aware, major improvements have already been made to accessing new medicines. The approval rates via the IPTR have improved from 69 per cent in 2012–13 to 87 per cent last year for all medicines; and from 45 to 85 per cent for end-of-life orphan and ultra-orphan medicines. However, as I said in my original answer, there is more to do, which is why the replacement of the IPTR with tier 2 of the peer-approved clinical system introduces a national appeals panel that will bring consistency to access across Scotland. A principle of access to medicines available elsewhere in the UK will be a material part of consideration through PACS.

A lot of progress has therefore been made, but the review recommendations will ensure that there is further equity and fairness across the system. I am sure that that is something that everyone will welcome.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** What progress has been made on the sharing of information and moving to electronic patient health records, which has been called for by health professionals in their response to the new digital strategy proposals and which the Montgomery review recommends is prioritised?

**Shona Robison:** A new digital health and care strategy from 2017 to 2022 is being developed and the views of a wide range of stakeholders are currently being sought. We already have significant electronic patient records for the emergency care summary, which has details of patients' medicines and any allergies and is shared regularly between clinicians in hospitals and general practitioners. In addition, the hospital electronic prescribing and medicines administration is being rolled out across Scotland. I announced on 14 December that we will be taking forward the recommendations of the Montgomery review in collaboration with our stakeholders, so we will work to implement the recommendations as quickly as possible.

### **“Equally Safe” Strategy**

**4. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the implementation of its “Equally Safe” strategy. (S5O-00542)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** Yes. An update on implementation will be provided alongside the draft delivery plan for “Equally Safe”, which will be published for consultation in the coming weeks.

**Ruth Maguire:** The 2014 “Equally Safe” strategy designates commercial sexual exploitation such as prostitution as a form of violence against women. Different forms of violence against women will demand different and specific interventions. I understand from the strategy that joint working is required to reduce the demand for commercial sexual exploitation. Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on how that joint working to reduce demand has progressed?

**Angela Constance:** Ms Maguire's analysis of the situation very much conforms with the Government's view. “Equally Safe” makes it clear that our definition of violence against women and girls includes

“Behaviour that stems from systemic, deep-rooted women's inequality”

such as commercial sexual exploitation. We also believe that policy decisions on the issue of prostitution should be evidence based. That is why we commissioned research to consider the reliability of the evidence base internationally so

that we can understand its relevance to Scotland. That research will be published shortly and there will be an opportunity for stakeholders to comment on the findings of the research and to have a meaningful dialogue with the Government about it.

In the meantime, the Government will continue to support measures that can help to reduce the harm that is caused by prostitution and we will, of course, encourage the enforcement of existing laws against those who exploit others through prostitution. There are various initiatives to tackle commercial sexual exploitation, and two examples of joint working are the support that we give to the Women's Support Project to challenge demand for commercial sex and the funding that we give to Sacro for its another way service, which offers non-judgmental one-to-one support for women who are at risk of or involved in prostitution or other forms of commercial sexual exploitation.

#### **Fife Council (Meetings)**

**5. Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it will next meet Fife Council. (S5O-00543)

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** Ministers and officials regularly meet representatives of all Scottish local authorities including Fife Council to discuss a wide range of issues as part of our commitment to working in partnership with local government to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland. The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills met representatives of Fife Council on 20 December to discuss a number of issues relating to education.

**Jenny Gilruth:** Levenmouth is the largest urban area in Scotland that is not currently served by rail. Can the minister assure my constituents today that Transport Scotland will work with Fife Council to provide the much-needed clarity and guidance that are required in order to re-establish this vital rail link?

**Kevin Stewart:** I understand that Transport Scotland has now received from Fife Council a revised version of the Levenmouth sustainable transport study. Transport Scotland officials will provide further comments once they have had the opportunity to consider it in more detail.

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I support Jenny Gilruth asking the question today. Not only is Levenmouth not served by rail, but it is the part of Fife with the highest deprivation. Will the minister ensure that we have joined-up government and that different parts of the Scottish Government will push for the rail link and make it happen? It would be a great advantage in tackling the inequality and poverty in that part of Fife.

**Kevin Stewart:** Of course the Government works in a joined-up manner. I am sure that the Minister for Transport and the Islands heard what Mr Rowley has said. As I said to Ms Gilruth, the Levenmouth sustainable transport study is now with Transport Scotland. It will comment, and I am sure that the transport minister will take great interest in what it says.

#### **Local Government (Capital Budget)**

**6. Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what allocation of its budget has been given to local government for capital spending. (S5O-00544)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay):** I can confirm that the total local government capital funding allocation for 2017-18 will amount to £756.5 million. That represents an increase of almost £150 million or nearly 25 per cent compared with 2016-17.

**Gil Paterson:** Recent reports have said that schools down south that were built using the private finance initiative and public-private partnerships are being ripped off through the costs of teaching supplies as those supplies form part of the PFI/PPP agreement. Are any schools in Scotland that were built using PFI/PPP in a similar position? If so, what is the cost?

**Derek Mackay:** I can confirm that none of the standard contracts that were previously used for schools PFI/PPP deals included the cost of school teaching supplies.



## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Engagements

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

I wish everyone in the chamber and across the country a happy new year and offer them my best wishes for 2017.

To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-00712)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I wish you, Presiding Officer, members in the chamber and everybody across Scotland a happy new year.

Later today I will have engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

**Ruth Davidson:** We have heard a lot this week about performance in health systems. We should all agree that nobody should revel in the fact that sick people are struggling to be treated anywhere. Instead, we should all be focused on patients and how to improve care, which is why I welcomed reports this morning that the Scottish Government has brought in a team from the national health service in England to help out the troubled Queen Elizabeth hospital in Glasgow. How many other Scottish hospitals have benefited and continue to benefit from such arrangements?

**The First Minister:** There is not a team from the NHS in England helping in the Queen Elizabeth hospital; there is a support team, which is provided by the Scottish Government, helping the hospital deal with pressures in accident and emergency. There is input to that from a very small team—two people, I think—from a commissioning provider in the north of England, but it is a Scottish Government support team. It is making sure that the Queen Elizabeth hospital, like hospitals across Scotland, is dealing with the increase in demand for A and E services at this time of year.

It is worth saying that our A and E services face challenges, particularly in the winter months, and those challenges are faced not just in Scotland but across the United Kingdom. Our staff are doing a sterling job in dealing with those challenges. The most recently published figures, for the week ending 1 January, show that 92 out of every 100 patients were seen within the four-hour target, which is broadly similar to the figure for the same week last year despite A and E attendances being up by almost 3 per cent since then.

My concern and my responsibility are for Scotland, but it is important to say that, due to the actions that we have taken to support A and E

departments across Scotland, our NHS is coping better than the NHS in other parts of the UK. The chamber does not have to take my word for that. Derek Bell of the Royal College of Physicians said:

"Scotland is consistently performing 8 or 10 per cent better than England".

There is no complacency in the Government when it comes to A and E or any other healthcare service. I have visited three health boards this week alone. We will continue to support our health service and A and E departments to make sure that they continue to deliver the services that patients deserve.

**Ruth Davidson:** I asked how many hospitals were benefiting from such arrangements as the hit team that has been brought in for the Queen Elizabeth. As the First Minister chose not to answer, I am sure that members look forward to her updating us fully at her convenience on exactly how many have been so served.

We know that there has been a series of problems at the Queen Elizabeth since it opened and we know that the team, which brings in lots of different people, including people from south of the border, has been in place for a number of months. However, we do not know its precise remit, how long it has been asked to stay for and what cost to the Scottish Government has been incurred. What has been the total cost over the past five years of hiring specialist teams from other parts of the UK to help the NHS in Scotland?

**The First Minister:** We, as the Scottish Government, provide appropriate support to health boards so that they can continue to improve services and deliver better services to patients. Perhaps if the Government in the rest of the UK was doing similarly, there would be better A and E performance in hospitals in England.

As an aside, I say that the latest A and E figures for England have been published this morning. They show a further decline in performance and they now show a gap between performance in Scotland's A and E and England's A and E of 10 percentage points.

Let me say very clearly that the NHS in Scotland will continue to use and learn from best practice in the delivery of healthcare, wherever that best practice exists. Let me also say this very clearly: there is no complacency on the part of the Government. We will continue to see demand for A and E services increase during January and the winter, as we always do, and that will undoubtedly be reflected in performance.

However, if there is any best practice with regard to A and E to be learned right now in the NHS anywhere in the United Kingdom, it is best practice in the NHS in Scotland. I quoted

Professor Derek Bell earlier; I do not know whether Ruth Davidson has seen what he has written in this morning's *Scotsman*. He talks about the "consistently ... better" performance in Scotland compared with other parts of the UK, and says:

"This is in part due to the National Programme, 'Six Essential Actions to Improving Unscheduled Care', which shares best practice, and appears to be showing patient benefit."

He then suggests:

"The NHS in England should consider introducing a similar National"

plan to the one that is already operational in Scotland. We have best practice in A and E services, and it is being delivered in our hospitals here in Scotland.

**Ruth Davidson:** I simply asked for greater transparency on health spending. I would have thought that, as a former health secretary, the First Minister would have been happy to provide that information to the chamber. It seems not.

Of course, the Queen Elizabeth hospital is not the only new medical facility with teething problems. In 2014, the First Minister announced to much fanfare the opening of new trauma centres across the country. They were supposed to receive their first patients last year, but yesterday the Scottish Government announced that the new centres would be years late. The First Minister admitted that they would be at least three years late, and the only explanation offered was scale and complexity. Communities that have been expecting these centres for two years are now being told to wait at least another three, and I think that they deserve a fuller explanation than the one that has been given, as does the Parliament. Will the First Minister give us that explanation now?

**The First Minister:** Before we move away from the first part of Ruth Davidson's question, I note that she talked about transparency on health spending. Let me give her transparency on health spending in Scotland: we have record levels of health spending in Scotland as a result of decisions that have been taken by this Government; those record levels of health spending are delivering record numbers of staff working in our health service; and those record numbers of staff are right now delivering A and E performance that is 10 percentage points better than A and E performance in England and even further than that compared with Wales and Northern Ireland. We will never be complacent about the performance of our health service, particularly during these difficult winter months, and I want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of our healthcare teams across

Scotland, who are right now doing such a fantastic job on our behalf.

As for the trauma centres, which I was very proud to talk about yesterday—including the £5 million investment in the next financial year to support that commitment—we have rightly taken time to get them right. Ruth Davidson and others will be aware—indeed, they should be aware, given that her own members have been part of it—of the intense debate about the correct number and configuration of major trauma centres across Scotland. Ruth Davidson would have read in our programme for government, which was published in September last year, our commitment to conclude preparatory work by the end of 2016. That is exactly what we have done, and we will now get on with implementation.

However, it is important to be clear what we are talking about. We are not talking about creating from scratch four new facilities that currently do not exist; these four hospitals—in Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh—already provide excellent, first-class trauma care. What we are talking about is continuing to enhance what they do and to join up the services that they provide with services provided by other hospitals and the Scottish Ambulance Service in an integrated trauma network. That work will be done on an on-going basis over the next three years, but many of the improvements that are part of it, including key improvements to the trauma service that is provided by the Scottish Ambulance Service, will be delivered over the course of this year.

This is about on-going improvement to already excellent services that are being delivered by our trauma care staff across the NHS. Yesterday, I was delighted to talk to the staff delivering that service in Ninewells, and I take this opportunity to thank them for the first-class and outstanding job that they are doing.

**Ruth Davidson:** So not just late but significantly scaled back from the party conference announcements.

There is another point here. Yesterday, once again, we saw the Scottish Government bypass Parliament and go straight to the media about a major change. It has been reported that the health secretary is not due to update Parliament on the delay to the trauma centres until October, meaning that MSPs will not have a proper opportunity to fully question the reasons behind the decision for nine months. That is clearly unacceptable. The Scottish Conservatives have requested that the health secretary come to the chamber to give a full statement on the delay. I ask the First Minister to ensure that that takes place next week.

**The First Minister:** I point out to Ruth Davidson that I am standing in the chamber right now answering questions from her on major trauma centres. If she cannot get any or all of the information about the announcement that she wants, I suggest that that is about a deficiency in her ability to ask questions, not about any lack of information from the Scottish Government.

I will say two further things to Ruth Davidson about this. I did not go straight to the media yesterday; I went straight to Ninewells hospital to talk to some of the staff who deliver trauma centres across this country. Incidentally, as I did that, the answer to an inspired parliamentary question was published informing Parliament of the Government's position.

Secondly, Ruth Davidson clearly does not know much about this subject. She talks about "scaling back". The intense debate that I talked about concerning the number of trauma centres was about the fact that there were people who thought that we should have only two major trauma centres, based in Edinburgh and in Glasgow. We did not think that that was right, so we committed to four major trauma centres as part of an integrated network—further evidence of this Government getting on with the job of delivering first-class healthcare services.

Finally, I must say that it is a bit rich for Ruth Davidson to come to the chamber to talk about the health service in the week in which the Red Cross has accused her party of presiding over a "humanitarian crisis" in the health service in England.

I will get on with the job of supporting our healthcare staff in doing the great job that they are doing in providing health services across our country.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** I can see that members are in quite a rowdy mood. Please show some restraint.

### Engagements

**2. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** Happy new year, Presiding Officer. [*Laughter.*]

To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the week. (S5F-00732)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I have engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

**Kezia Dugdale:** Last year, I met leading consultants and surgeons at Aberdeen royal infirmary, who told me that a new trauma centre in Aberdeen could mean the difference between life and death for people in the north-east of Scotland. Whether they were talking about people who have been involved in car crashes or accidents on the

rigs, they were clear that access to world-class trauma care could be a life saver.

The Scottish National Party promised that the trauma centres would be open in 2016, but yesterday the First Minister announced a three-year delay, and looked as though she was celebrating that delay. Given what the experts tell us, does the First Minister accept that that delay could be a matter of life and death?

**The First Minister:** Aberdeen and Dundee major trauma centres will be fully operational before the ones in Edinburgh and Glasgow, probably over the next year to 18 months, so Aberdeen is getting that life-saving major trauma centre. Of course, some people thought that it should not get the centre at all, and that there should be only two such centres—in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

I will repeat the important point that I made earlier: the major trauma centres are not brand-new facilities that will be built from scratch; the hospitals are already providing excellent trauma care. The project that we are discussing is first about enhancing what the centres do, and secondly—this is the important part, which is perhaps not fully understood—about joining up what the four centres do with the work that is done by hospitals in other parts of the country and, crucially, by the Scottish Ambulance Service, in an integrated trauma-care network. One of the early parts of the implementation of that work will be the provision of a 24/7 trauma desk in the Scottish Ambulance Service, so that patients can be triaged more quickly and can get to definitive trauma care as quickly as possible. The work is not just about four centres; it is about providing a network of trauma care. It will deliver even better care for trauma patients than is currently being delivered—and let me stress that the hospitals are already delivering first-class care.

**Kezia Dugdale:** The life-saving medics whom I met told me what they are telling the Government: that more delays will cost lives.

I listened carefully to the First Minister's response to Ruth Davidson. In fact, I wrote it down word for word. Regarding the trauma centres, she said:

"we have rightly taken time to get them right,"

and added that the Scottish Government is ensuring

"the correct number and configuration".

Why, then, did her Government issue a press release on 2 April 2014 that says that

"The four bases will be operational from 2016"?

**The First Minister:** If Kezia Dugdale had looked into all the detail of the matter, she would know the

answer to her own question. After that press release, another report cast doubt on whether what we planned was the right configuration, so we had to look again in order to take account of all the clinical evidence to ensure that we were getting it right. That is why what I said is absolutely right: that we took time to ensure that we get it right.

The improvements are under way already. Aberdeen royal infirmary already delivers life-saving trauma care, and the improvements that will be made will enhance what it does and what the hospitals in Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh do. It is crucial that we ensure that the hospitals work together in a network with appropriate support from the Scottish Ambulance Service. They are the right changes and they are being made for the right reasons.

The other part of the announcement yesterday—which has not been talked about enough at any point—is the focus on rehabilitation. The measures are not just about saving lives; they are also about ensuring that people who suffer serious trauma get the rehabilitation that they need in order to have good quality of life, too. It is an integrated approach, and it is the right approach. The work is now based on the right evidence—the chief medical officer has taken forward the work to get us to this stage. We will now get on and implement the improvements.

**Kezia Dugdale:** I also listened carefully to the First Minister's response on the problems that face England's NHS. It is quite incredible to hear the First Minister say that we should celebrate the fact that the Red Cross has not condemned Scotland's NHS. What happened to the high ambitions that the First Minister had?

There is an unhealthy theme that follows the Scottish National Party and its NHS election pledges. Patients were promised world-class care at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital, but they are just not getting it. People in the north-east were promised a new trauma centre, but it is years behind schedule. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport promised to abolish delayed discharge, but we now know that 700 people have died while they were waiting to leave hospital. Targets are being missed and dedicated health service staff are telling us that they are under pressure like never before. Why is it that the only consistent thing that the SNP delivers is broken promises on the NHS?

**The First Minister:** Kezia Dugdale's comment about the Red Cross would be fine if it was actually what I had said.

I said—with no complacency—that we should be celebrating the fact that the performance of our hard-working NHS staff in our accident and

emergency departments up and down the country against the four-hour target is 10 percentage points ahead of the performance of hospitals in England, and is even further ahead of the performance of hospitals in Wales and Northern Ireland. I also said that members do not have to take my word for it: that is the view of the experts—I quoted Professor Derek Bell of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. We should be proud of our NHS staff for that work, but of course we should continue to support them, given the challenges that they face, and will continue to face throughout the winter.

Kezia Dugdale also mentioned delayed discharges. This morning we saw evidence of a steep rise in delayed discharges in England. We have much more work to do, but over the past year there has been a 9 per cent reduction in the number of NHS bed days that have been lost to delayed discharge.

I said earlier that I have visited three health boards this week. The people to whom I spoke in each of those three health boards talked about the improvements around the six essential actions in A and E. They also all talked about the benefits that are starting to be felt from integration of healthcare and social care, which means getting people discharged from hospital earlier. We are the only Government in the United Kingdom that stopped merely talking about integration of healthcare and social care. We have actually got on and done it, and the benefits are starting to be seen. Yes—there is much more work to do, but we will continue to support our NHS as it does that work.

Finally, I will say this to Kezia Dugdale. I know that she does not like it and that she is trying to pretend that it is not the case, but this Government was elected on a commitment to increase resource spending in the health service by £500 million more than inflation over this session of Parliament. Kezia Dugdale's commitment in that election was to increase health spending by the level of inflation. If Kezia Dugdale were standing in my place right now, the health service would have less money than it has, so she has a cheek to come and ask the questions that she has asked.

**The Presiding Officer:** We have a couple of constituency questions.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Yesterday, the Forth road bridge was closed for most of the day, which caused massive disruption to the lives and businesses of thousands of my constituents in Fife and further afield. I am sure that the First Minister would want to join me in commending all those who worked so hard in very difficult conditions to get the bridge reopened as quickly as possible. However, it will not have escaped my constituents' notice that if the new

Queensferry crossing—with its wind shielding—had been opened last December as the First Minister had promised, they might well have been spared the disruption. Will the First Minister tell my constituents when the new Queensferry crossing will be open?

**The First Minister:** To get to the facts of the situation, I say that if the driver had not ignored the warning not to take that heavy goods vehicle on to the bridge, the bridge would not have been closed yesterday.

The contractual completion date for the Queensferry crossing is, of course, June this year. We are on track to ensure that it will be open on time. In addition, it is being delivered under budget.

I thank all those who are working hard on the new bridge, just as I thank all those who worked really hard yesterday in the very difficult weather conditions that we see at this time of year to get the bridge repaired. It was a complex repair. They got it done and the bridge was reopened at 9 o'clock last night. All of us should say a heartfelt "Thank you" to them for that. *[Applause.]*

**Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** I put on the record that I am parliamentary liaison officer to the First Minister.

A number of my constituents are outside Parliament today, setting out their opposition to ship-to-ship oil transfers in the Moray Firth, at the mouth of the Cromarty Firth. I share their opposition.

The decision on ship-to-ship oil transfers is for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and the United Kingdom Government. Will the First Minister join me in urging the MCA to listen closely to my constituents' views and to pay close attention to the potential environmental impact of such transfers if they are allowed to go ahead?

**The First Minister:** Gail Ross rightly points out that the matter is not devolved, despite the Scottish Government's repeatedly making the case for the powers to be devolved.

On the basis of the current information, the Scottish Government is unconvinced that ship-to-ship oil transfers can, or should, take place at anchor in the Cromarty Firth without unacceptable risk to the marine environment—in particular the European Union designated area for bottlenose dolphins.

We will ensure that local communities' concerns are heard by the UK authorities while—as I said—we continue to press for the relevant powers to be devolved Scotland. We will also continue to support the Cromarty Firth Port Authority, which is a vital and valued part of the north of Scotland's economy. The MCA has a duty to listen to

concerns and to local people—who are, as Gail Ross said, represented at Parliament today. I warmly welcome the people who are outside—some of them may be inside—Parliament. I assure them that the Scottish Government absolutely hears their concerns and will continue to do everything we can to make sure that they are heard by those who take the decisions. It might be good advice to suggest that once they leave Parliament today they stop off at the Scotland Office to make sure that the UK Government also hears their concerns. I hope that their concerns will be listened to there, too.

**John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** The First Minister will be aware of the disappointing news that the Jim Clark rally in the Borders will not take place in 2017. There is a risk that the important event will be permanently lost from the motor-racing calendar, which would be a big blow to the Borders economy. I urge the First Minister and the Scottish Government to do all that they can to provide support to the Jim Clark rally. Will the First Minister clarify that the on-going inquiry does not, in itself, provide any legal obstacle to the holding of the rally? Will she urge the Motor Sports Association to look again at its decision not to grant a permit for the rally?

**The First Minister:** I am happy to write to John Lamont with a full answer to that question to ensure that he gets all the information that he needs, in particular on the legal position. My understanding is that the governing body took the decision not to hold the rally this year. I appreciate that that will be a great disappointment to the people who enjoy the event, although, given past incidents at it there are legitimate and understandable concerns about safety, which have been the subject of reports, as the member is aware.

We will continue to do all that we reasonably can to support people who want to ensure the safe conduct of the event in the future. Such events are not only sources of enjoyment to followers of the sport but can be beneficial to local economies. Therefore, I will ensure that further information on the detail of the decision is provided to John Lamont. The Government will continue to do what it can to liaise with the organisers of the Jim Clark rally and to ensure that it provides whatever reasonable assistance it can provide.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I add to the general wishes to everybody for a good new year.

To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S5F-00736)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The Cabinet will next meet on Tuesday.

**Patrick Harvie:** Some of the people who might not have a happy new year are the ones who will be affected by the United Kingdom Government's new benefits cap. Over recent months, we have lodged a number of questions about the households and families in Scotland who will be affected by that savage reduction in welfare, some of whom will lose well over £100 a week.

I know that the Scottish Government opposes that UK policy and shares our concern about it but, from the answers to those questions, it has become clear that the Scottish Government does not have a clear understanding of the number of households that will be affected. Its previous estimates suggested that the figure would be 4,000 households; Department for Work and Pensions figures suggest that it could be 5,000; and external organisations have put it at 6,700 or even up to 11,000, with some 20,000 children affected by the cuts.

Does the First Minister agree that it is vital that we get an accurate assessment of the number of people who will be affected by the cuts and the ways in which they will be affected if we are to have any chance of giving them the support that they need with the new powers that are coming to the Scottish Parliament?

**The First Minister:** Yes—I agree with that very much. Patrick Harvie is aware—I know that he is because it was part of his question—that the Scottish Government is seeking to do what it can to understand the numbers of people who will be affected by the benefits cap, but we rely to a large extent on information that is provided by the DWP to make accurate assessments of that. We will continue to do what we can and to seek information from the DWP so that we can give an accurate assessment and use it to plan our approach.

There are also other issues—in the interests of time, I will not go into them in detail—that we will have to ensure that we have an understanding of with the DWP and the UK Government. For example, when we have the ability to use the powers formally to abolish the bedroom tax, we will need to understand how that will interact with the benefits cap, because we do not want to give with one hand only for the UK Government to take away with the other on that or any other issue.

The issues are complex, but at the heart of the matter is a simple commitment on the Scottish Government's part. First, we want to continue to mitigate as far as we can the impact of unfair welfare changes that the UK Government is imposing. Secondly, we want to ensure that, as we take forward plans for the use of our powers, we

put in place fair systems that have respect and dignity absolutely at their heart.

**Patrick Harvie:** I understand the complexity of the challenge, but it seems that the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland and Sheffield Hallam University, which have conducted external assessments, are not limited to DWP figures, because they have shown that the impact will be much greater than the DWP puts it at. The Scottish Government needs to work with those organisations and any other organisations that can produce an accurate assessment.

Will the First Minister give us clarity about when the assessment will be conducted and when we will have an accurate assessment of who will be affected, how many households will be affected and how they will be affected? A child poverty strategy will be close to meaningless if we do not have a clear understanding of the impact of the changes on child poverty in Scotland. Will the Scottish Government reconsider the option of a top-up to child benefit? Research has shown that even a modest top-up of £5 a week to that benefit could lift as many as 30,000 children in Scotland out of poverty.

**The First Minister:** On the substance of how we will use the new powers, some of our commitments were set out in the manifesto that we were elected on. The Green Party put forward proposals that we will look at with interest, including the one that Patrick Harvie mentioned. We said in our manifesto that we would introduce the new early years grant and we are absolutely committed to doing that. It will provide increased and better support to families in the lowest-income households when they have a child, and we will continue that support for subsequent children. We are determined to use the new powers in a way that helps us to tackle child poverty.

In relation to the more general part of Patrick Harvie's question, I am happy to ask officials—with Angela Constance, who is the relevant cabinet secretary—to meet Patrick Harvie and his colleagues to give them a fuller understanding of the work that we are doing to get the assessments to which he referred. Experience tells me that Patrick Harvie is right that the DWP estimates for the number of people who will be affected by such changes tend to be at the lower end of the spectrum, and we often find that more people are affected. It is in our interests, as well as the interests of the Parliament and the country as a whole, for us to properly understand the situation. If it was helpful to Patrick Harvie, I would be happy to ask Angela Constance and her officials to meet him and his colleagues so that they can understand fully the work that we are doing to get us into that position.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**4. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S5F-00725)

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

**Willie Rennie:** The budget is coming up. The Scottish Government has received weekly warnings on the economy and on education. We have the risk of a hard Brexit. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said that Scottish education has gone from leading to just average. Just this week, the Institute for Public Policy Research issued a warning about skills. Small business confidence is falling.

We will have to do something about that. The First Minister needs to rise to the challenge by investing in education and skills to get our schools back up to being the best, to train our people for work and to boost the economy. Given that college funding has been cut in real terms by £90 million compared with seven years ago, would it not be right for us, considering all those challenges, to reverse that cut in full?

**The First Minister:** As Willie Rennie knows, we have put forward a draft budget that prioritises the economy. That is important at all times, and he is right to say that it is particularly important given the challenges that we face from Brexit. The draft budget also prioritises education. I could not have been clearer, and I will continue to be clear, about the importance that we attach to education, to raising standards and to closing the attainment gap. That is why our attainment fund will be £750 million over the parliamentary session.

However, the budget is a draft budget and, as is normally the case when the Parliament considers budgets, we will discuss with others who want to discuss with us ways in which we can listen to the suggestions that are put forward. I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution has been holding discussions with other parties, and we will continue to hold such discussions, but members should be in no doubt that continuing to advance the economy, education and our public services to equip Scotland for the challenges that lie ahead will always be at the centre of all our spending plans.

**Willie Rennie:** I am afraid that that answer fails to match the scale of the challenge that is before us. That is why the Scottish Government has no majority for its budget. The £90 million cut in colleges' funding has wiped out a whole sector of part-time courses. Today, the Royal Society of Edinburgh said that there has been a 48 per cent reduction in the number of part-time students in the past eight years. That has primarily affected women and those over the age of 25.

In England, the pupil premium has delivered change that allows everyone, regardless of their background, to participate in the economy. The Scottish Government's attainment fund plans are years behind and £70 million short of what is required to match that proven investment. Of course other budget changes will be required, but we have seen decline in schools and colleges. Will the First Minister reverse that decline and change her budget for the sake of our economy?

**The First Minister:** We will continue to discuss with Willie Rennie and others their suggestions for amendments to the draft budget. That is how we always conduct ourselves at this stage in the budget process.

What Willie Rennie asks us to change about the draft budget seems to change week in, week out. Before Christmas, he talked about mental health. I think that we agree that we require to do more in that area. Today, he has raised a range of other things.

We will continue to engage on such matters, and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution's door is open to anybody who wants to have a constructive discussion.

On the pupil equity fund, which was announced in the draft budget, the Scottish attainment challenge will provide £120 million directly to schools in the form of a pupil equity fund to deliver extra support to pupils who come from more deprived backgrounds. That is a signal of our determination to close the attainment gap.

We have put forward a budget that has the right priorities, but of course we remain open to discussing its detail with any party that wishes to engage in a constructive way. I know that Willie Rennie and the Liberal Democrats will want to do that.

### Drink Driving

**5. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on reports that there has been a record number of drink drivers stopped over the festive period. (S5F-00740)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** It is more than disappointing to see a rise in the number of drivers who flouted the law and put at risk their lives and the lives of others over the festive period. There is only one safe level of alcohol if a person is driving: none at all. Unfortunately, data shows that the vast majority of those who were caught were over not only the new lower alcohol limit but the previous higher limit.

Police Scotland is taking action to catch those who put lives at risk by drink driving and especially

the persistent hard core of drink drivers. That is why it increased the number of checks that were carried out over the festive period compared with the number the year before.

**Stuart McMillan:** Does the First Minister believe, as I do, that the figures highlight the effort and the resources that Police Scotland rightly directs towards road safety over the Christmas and new year period? Does she commend Police Scotland and our emergency services for making our roads and communities safer?

**The First Minister:** Yes, I commend the police for their work in that area, and I commend all our emergency services for the work that they did over the festive period to keep us all safe. There is no doubt that the results of the festive drink-driving campaign demonstrate that Police Scotland is absolutely right to focus clearly on those who drink and drive by taking the necessary action to catch those who put not just their own lives but the lives of others at risk by getting behind the wheel after drinking.

An average of 610 drivers were tested every day during the four-week enforcement campaign. That is a 15 per cent rise on the number of checks that were carried out the year before. Assistant Chief Constable Bernie Higgins said:

“Drivers need to take far greater personal responsibility, and also be aware that while this campaign is over,”

Police Scotland is still very focused

“on detecting and arresting drunk drivers.”

I absolutely agree with that.

There is no excuse for drunk driving. It puts at risk the lives of those who do it and the lives of others, as I have said. It is absolutely right that, during the festive period and at all periods, we all say how unacceptable drunk driving is and get behind Police Scotland's efforts to eradicate it.

### **Performance Athletes (Socioeconomic Background)**

**6. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the recent BBC report suggesting that 90 per cent of performance athletes supported by sportscotland come from a middle-class background. (S5F-00718)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Sportscotland and its partners in local authorities, the Scottish governing bodies of sport and clubs are committed to building a world-class sporting system for everyone that has inclusivity and equal opportunities at its heart. The Government has made very clear our determination to ensure that children from our poorest communities have the same opportunities as those from our richest

communities. That includes in sport at every level. Our investments in facilities and physical education in schools underline that drive and commitment.

**Brian Whittle:** Does the First Minister agree that performance athletes who have had the honour of representing their country in competition have done so because of hard work and dedication over a number of years, irrespective of background? Does she also agree that the figures highlight an inequality of opportunity that has yet to be addressed; that the answer is not to penalise those high achievers by withdrawing support, but to ensure that the same opportunities are afforded to all, irrespective of background or personal circumstance; and that that starts with physical literacy opportunities at the earliest possible age as an integral part of an educational framework?

**The First Minister:** Yes, I agree with that. This is probably a good opportunity to take a moment to congratulate Sir Andy Murray, Dame Katherine Grainger and, of course, Gordon Reid on their recognition in the Queen's new year honours list and everybody else who was recognised. They are shining examples of the success of Scottish sport.

So, yes, it is right that we continue to invest in elite sports. Just a matter of weeks ago, I had the great honour of officially opening the new elite performance centre at Heriot-Watt University, which is a sign of the investment in performance sport that is taking place in this country. It is also important that we support sport and physical activity at the grass roots. The amount of PE in schools has increased dramatically over the years that this Government has been in office. I am proud that we are supporting the daily mile in schools, which is a potentially transformational initiative for the health and fitness of our young people. It is right that we try to promote greater equality and opportunities for sport.

This might be the only discordant note in an area where I otherwise agree with Brian Whittle but, if we want to encourage more young people from deprived areas to take advantage of the opportunities of sport, perhaps reducing the circumstances in which parents have to use food banks or are subject to benefit caps and welfare cuts would help. Let us all get behind making Scotland an even fitter nation.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I note the First Minister's answer, but I do not totally agree. I refer to the report by the Health and Sport Committee of 2009 entitled “Pathways into sport and physical activity”. There is much to be learned from that report, but I will quote from paragraph 268, which states:



"The international evidence is that it is notoriously difficult to achieve a lasting legacy from sports events, in particular the transformation of grassroots sport and mass public participation."

Recent comments have proved that we were right all those years ago. However, I have concerns that there is still too much focus on and therefore funding directed towards elite sport. I recognise the achievements, but it is not all about medal count. We partially justify that focus with the supposed payback of a non-existent legacy. Will the Government and the First Minister therefore look at rebalancing funding more towards the grass roots and not relying too much on that legacy, which has not happened?

**The First Minister:** I suppose that it is a question of getting the balance right, but we should not reduce the support that we give to elite sports because, in many ways, the performance and success of our elite sportsmen and women will help to inspire young people to take up sport and physical activity. I know that Christine Grahame will agree with me that, in general, just because something is "notoriously difficult", that does not mean that we should not try to do it in life. I suspect that, over the past couple of years, many young people across Scotland have picked up a tennis racket because of the inspiration of Andy and Jamie Murray and Gordon Reid. Those young people may not become the world-class players that those three are, but, nevertheless, that inspiration will have been important to them. Therefore, it is right that we support our elite sportsmen and women.

However, Christine Grahame and Brian Whittle are right that we also have to support grass-roots facilities and participation. That is why part of the legacy of the Commonwealth games was about increased facilities across the country. The performance centre at Heriot-Watt that I spoke about is just one of many new and enhanced facilities across the country. It is about getting the balance right so that we do not just have the sporting success to celebrate but we support a population that is generally becoming healthier and fitter.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** How will cutting the sport budget, as proposed in the draft budget, encourage more people in working class communities to engage in sport?

**The First Minister:** We support sport in many ways, such as our investment in facilities, through school sport and through major events. The issue is about the different ways in which we support people who take part in activity. One thing that we have to do is to get young people into the habit of activity and sport at a much earlier age. That is why the daily mile, which I mentioned earlier and which is such a simple thing, is potentially

transformational. Not that long ago, I was at a school in Edinburgh where it was not the primary school kids but the nursery school kids who were doing the daily mile. All those things taken together are vital and, frankly, whatever our political disagreements, all of us in the chamber should be able to get behind that.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Treatment Waiting Times)**

**7. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to reports that hundreds of children with mental health problems have waited more than a year for treatment. (S5F-00727)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** It is unacceptable that any child has to wait a lengthy period for mental health treatment. The Minister for Mental Health has been very clear with health boards that it is not good enough if there are falls in their performance or if children are experiencing long waits.

This is not intended to take away from my previous comments, but progress is being made. According to figures for the latest quarter, the number of patients who waited more than 52 weeks has decreased. I have said much in this chamber before about the importance of mental health care, and no doubt I will say much more in the weeks and months ahead. There is much to be done, but progress is being made.

**Monica Lennon:** I thank the First Minister for her answer. I would have liked to have heard more about what is being done by the Minister for Mental Health and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills jointly to address this crisis, which cuts across classrooms and health boards.

I know that the First Minister is aware that many young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in schools are struggling with their mental health as a result of discriminatory bullying. According to research from the time for inclusive education campaign, 95 per cent of LGBTI people who have experienced bullying in schools say that it has a long-lasting impact on their wellbeing. What assurances can the First Minister give that providing resources and education to tackle mental health problems will be central to the forthcoming mental health strategy and that the strategy will include specific actions for named vulnerable groups more at risk of poor mental health, which is something that Barnardo's Scotland has asked for in its response on mental health? It is quite an important issue.

The First Minister has expressed support for the TIE campaign. Will she now give a commitment to the Parliament that she will introduce legislation in

this session of Parliament? This is a serious issue and there is support throughout the chamber, but there is just no action coming forward.

**The First Minister:** The member raises really important issues and has done so very constructively. It is not fair to say that no action is coming forward. I appreciate that the member thinks that we should do more and do it faster—that is legitimate. There is a great deal of consensus about what we need to do.

The member makes a fair point about ensuring that, although we—rightly—have a dedicated mental health minister, the issue is not solely that minister's responsibility. She also makes a good point about the linkages between mental health, education and health. Particularly in relation to education, the strategy will look at the level underneath CAMHS, which is as much about preventing mental health issues as it is about treating them.

The member is absolutely right to talk about the issues that LGBTI young people can face because of homophobic bullying. I have said it before and I will say it again: I am a supporter of the TIE campaign, not just because of its objectives but because of the spirited way in which it goes about ensuring that those objectives are taken forward. There is a commitment to take forward the issues that TIE has raised with the Government and we will do that in consultation with TIE.

There is a lot of substance and detail in this issue, across a range of areas of Government responsibility. It is important that we get it right in all those areas. The mental health strategy, which will be published shortly, will provide the direction of travel over the next period. The strategy is, of course, backed by significant additional resources for mental health. Spending on mental health services has increased dramatically over the past few years, but more funding is needed to support more services, not just in treatment but in prevention.

I genuinely hope that, while we will have a spirited debate about the detail of the issue, we can, as a Parliament, get behind the actions that we need to take in this session of Parliament to make really substantial changes that will be to the benefit of young people across our country.

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Do you consider it acceptable that inspired questions are used to make major Government announcements, or would you expect the Government to respect Parliament and allow proper scrutiny, including by back benchers, of announcements such as that on trauma centres?

**The Presiding Officer:** I thank Elaine Smith for the question. I do not think that it is a point of

order. However, she may be reassured to know that the Parliamentary Bureau is looking at the use of inspired parliamentary questions and will discuss that at its next meeting.

## Inequities in Palliative Care

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** I ask those leaving the chamber, both in the public gallery and on the main floor, to do so quietly. Thank you.

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-02197, in the name of Colin Smyth, on the Marie Curie report on challenging inequities in palliative care. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament welcomes the Marie Curie report, *Enough for everyone – Challenging inequities in palliative care*, which highlights the findings of a seminar held on 15 September 2016; notes that the seminar focused on examining some of the barriers certain groups face in accessing palliative care; understands that 11,000 people who need palliative care in Scotland each year are not accessing it, meaning that one in four people who die in Scotland miss out on the palliative care they need; further understands that certain groups of people receive less palliative care than others with a comparable need and that this is now the responsibility of health and social care partnerships; considers that more effort should be made to identify triggers for palliative care in older people, particularly those with frailty; further considers the need for planning, developing and commissioning services to identify and reflect the palliative and end of life care needs of black and Asian people and other ethnic minorities; understands that there is still a lack of data on the level of need for palliative care for LGBT people in Scotland; further understands that people living in socially deprived areas are much less likely to access health and social care services; considers that more research must be done to understand the obstacles to palliative care in socially deprived areas; notes the report's finding of the need for greater recognition of the issues relating to isolation, loneliness and spiritual needs in the delivery of palliative and end of life care; notes the view that more research needs to be done around certain groups who are less likely to access palliative care, and further notes the vision set out in the Scottish Government's *Strategic Framework for Action on Palliative and End of Life Care (2016-2021)* that everyone who needs palliative care in the South Scotland region and across the country has access to it by 2021.

12:51

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I was employed by Parkinson's UK when I was elected to Parliament. That employment has ceased.

I thank members from across Parliament for supporting my motion, allowing a timely debate on palliative care to take place today. It is just over a year since the Health and Sport Committee published its thorough and far-reaching report, "We need to talk about palliative care". That was followed by the publication of the Scottish Government's "Strategic Framework for Action on Palliative and End of Life Care", with its vision that

everyone in Scotland who needs such care has access to it by 2021; I know that all members share and support that vision. It is therefore an opportune time to take stock, to reflect on what progress has been made in achieving that vision and what more needs to be done over the next five years to ensure that it becomes a reality.

Marie Curie's excellent report, "Enough for everyone: Challenging inequities in palliative care" is an important contribution to that debate. The report brings together the key findings from discussions at a seminar held on 15 September 2016 by Marie Curie, where over 70 experts from across the country came together to talk about the challenges of inequities in palliative care and to seek solutions. The report highlights the research that was commissioned by Marie Curie and published by the London School of Economics in 2015, which estimated that one in four people who die in Scotland miss out on vital palliative care. That is an estimated 11,000 people in Scotland each year who need palliative care but do not receive it.

It is important to recognise the benefits of specialist palliative care, not just for those who require end-of-life care but for people with long-term conditions such as Parkinson's, and other progressive neurological conditions, from the point of diagnosis. It is clear that over the next five years, more than 55,000 people in Scotland may not receive the palliative care that they need if we do not ensure that the vision of palliative care for everyone who needs it is delivered.

By delving below these figures and highlighting the barriers for those who receive less palliative care than others with comparable needs, Marie Curie's work makes a significant contribution to the debate on how we can deliver that vision. Although it is not an exhaustive list, the report shows specific groups of people who are less likely to receive palliative care, including those aged over 85, those from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, those who live alone, and those who live in areas of deprivation.

If we look at each group in turn, we can see some of the reasons for those inequities. In Scotland, nearly 82 per cent of deaths occur in people aged over 65, yet older people are much less likely to receive the palliative care that they need at the end of life when compared with those in younger age groups. The Marie Curie report highlights a number of reasons for that, including the fact that all too often,

"older people may think their illness is just them getting old. There are also factors around the under-reporting of serious illnesses and under-identification of older people for palliative care".

This becomes more complex around the issue of frailty, with frail older people often dying without

a defined single terminal illness and without receiving the benefits of palliative care. The Marie Curie report makes a number of recommendations to tackle that, for example by providing clearer information for older people regarding the services that are available to them and how to access them. More effort is needed to identify triggers for palliative care in older people, particularly in those with frailty. Practitioners need the right training and support to ensure that those who require palliative care are identified from the point of need.

The challenge of inadequate training and support has been identified by Marie Curie as creating a barrier to palliative care for those from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. There are now more than 200,000 people living in Scotland from a BAME background—double the level in 2001—but many do not access palliative care when they need it. The Marie Curie report highlights the fact that, when people receive palliative care, it is not always sensitive to the different cultural and religious needs of BAME groups. There is also a fear of discrimination, a lack of translation services and a shortage of female doctors for Muslim women.

As well as more training and support for those who provide palliative care, Marie Curie highlights a need for more research at ground level in the field of palliative care to ensure that the needs of those in BAME communities are identified and that evidence-based solutions are found to meet those needs.

Research that was funded by Marie Curie into access to palliative care for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people found that discrimination and a fear of stigma were factors for LGBT people accessing palliative care.

There is also a clear disparity in access to health and social care services between those who live in the most and least deprived communities throughout the country. For example, the report highlights that those who live in the most deprived communities are 33 per cent less likely to die at home than those who live in the least deprived communities. In the Marie Curie report, a number of reasons are given for why people from deprived communities might not access palliative care, and the provision of far more public health and social care support in deprived areas is recommended as a way to break down those barriers.

It is clear from the Marie Curie report that there are significant inequities when it comes to the provision of palliative care across Scotland. If we are to meet the 2021 vision, we need to break down those barriers. The report highlights a number of recommendations and common themes that can help us to do that. One such theme is on research and data. Professor David Clark, who, as

members know, leads the University of Glasgow's end-of-life studies group based in Dumfries, stated in his report for the Health and Sport Committee in 2015:

"A serious information deficit needs to be filled on data relating to the provision of palliative care in Scotland".

There is a distinct lack of research on palliative care compared with other health issues. I am pleased that the Government acknowledged that in its strategic framework and I hope that, when the minister responds to the debate today, she will outline how the Scottish Government plans to support the development of an evidence base to show progress towards its 2021 vision.

The forthcoming national review of health and social care targets provides an opportunity to reconsider the indicators that are currently used by health and social care partnerships when measuring palliative care in order to ensure that better data can be collected to fully measure the inequities that exist, for example by measuring access by clinical condition and social economic group.

Breaking down the barriers that are highlighted by Marie Curie means providing personalised, effective palliative care in a setting that suits the individual. Therefore, it was encouraging to read in the Government's health and social care delivery plan that was published last month:

"The availability of care options will be improved by doubling the palliative and end of life provision in the community".

I hope that the minister will outline exactly how that will be achieved. For example, will it mean additional resources for integration joint boards to scale up their palliative care provision in the community?

The final theme from the report that I want to touch on is that talking about palliative care and dying does not come naturally to many—including myself—even though death is the most unavoidable event in our lives. Of all the areas in the Government's strategic framework, that is the one in which least progress has been made. The Health and Sport Committee wrote to the cabinet secretary on 16 November about progress in the implementation of the framework and, in her reply, she said that the Government did not plan

"to run a national campaign in relation to death and dying".

I am keen to know how the Government intends to deliver the commitment to support greater public discussion on death, dying and care at the end of life.

I am very conscious of time but, although I have been able to touch on only a fraction of the issues that are raised by the report, I know that other members will more than adequately fill the gaps

that I have left. I look forward to listening to those speeches and to hearing from the minister on the points that I have raised.

I thank Marie Curie not only for its work on the report that we are debating today, but for the outstanding care and support that it provides for more than 8,000 people and their families around Scotland. Those thanks extend beyond Marie Curie to all the organisations that are involved in the delivery of palliative care, including charities and our amazing national health service staff as well as local council and third and private sector social care providers.

I have focused in my speech on tackling the inequities in the provision of palliative care, but I know that tens of thousands of families benefit from the outstanding palliative care that is delivered across Scotland every year. However, we are ambitious, which is why we are all determined that the Government should ensure that care is there for everyone who needs it, wherever they live and whatever their background.

13:00

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** I thank Colin Smyth for bringing the debate to the chamber. I also thank Marie Curie for its excellent report on challenging inequalities in palliative care.

I was deputy convener of the Health and Sport Committee when its report was being drafted, and I am currently a member—along with Colin Smyth—of the cross-party group on palliative care. However, I want to speak today from a more personal perspective. In December 2015, my mum passed away. She was frail and elderly, and she had been admitted to a care home a year earlier. The underlying reason for her passing away was vascular dementia, and she passed away in hospital. In May 2016, my dad passed away at St Margaret's hospice in Clydebank; he had been diagnosed with lung cancer a few months earlier.

I mention my parents for two reasons. First, I like talking about them—I think that it is important that we continue to talk about the people whom we have lost, as that is part of dealing with grief. Secondly, they experienced two very different end-of-life pathways in relation to palliative care.

The motion before us today and the Marie Curie report both express the belief that more needs to be done to identify the triggers for when palliative care should kick in. I contend that, quite often, it kicks in but we do not call it palliative care. Indeed, there is no agreed definition of what palliative care actually is, which is a bit of a stumbling block.

In my dad's case, it seemed fairly clear—he had cancer, which was terminal. The first question,

“Can he stay at home?” is a non-starter when someone deteriorates in that way. The next step is to see whether a hospice place is available, and I will be forever grateful for the support that St Margaret's hospice in Clydebank gave to my father. However, for certain types of terminal illness, we must go beyond the traditional routes to palliative care. Cancer is an illness for which there is a clear pathway, but for other illnesses that is not so much the case.

Marie Curie's hospice is in my constituency of Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn. It does an excellent job—in the past year it has had 486 admissions, and it has only 30 beds. Marie Curie does a wonderful job not just in the hospice but across the wider community, with a lot of nurse specialists who provide a variety of support to my constituents and to others elsewhere.

Looking at my mother's situation, it was clear that staying at home was not an option for her and she had to go into residential care. At the time, we did not think that it was because of the vascular dementia—we just saw a frail elderly lady. However, vascular dementia is terminal. I have no idea whether my mother's care counted as palliative care. There was a well-intentioned murkiness around it, because care home staff do not like to talk about the fact that your loved one will eventually pass away.

There are questions to be asked such as, “What happens if her heart gives way?”—incidentally, that is not what happened—and “Do you want her to be resuscitated or not?” Those are very challenging conversations that are often had not just with clinical staff but with relatively low-paid staff in care homes, who have chats with families about what they would like for their loved ones.

The more general point that I want to make is that, every day of the week, amazing contributions to palliative care are happening with the support of care-at-home staff, care home staff, hospice staff and others. I do not think that we count all those contributions or define them, and nor do we always appreciate them, so there is a lot more to be done in that respect.

Professor David Clark's conclusions in the powerful report that he produced for the Health and Sport Committee were quite right. He said that we should remember that palliative care in Scotland is—this is not a boast, I have to say—probably still about the best in the world. Everyone else is playing catch-up, but there is still much more that we have to do. We have not even begun to scratch the surface.

I will make one final comment. Not everyone will get specialist palliative care, and not everyone has to go to a hospice. However, hospices have a huge contribution to make to the wider community.

Whether or not they become hubs for strong networks of local care homes and care staff who support the frail elderly at home, we should draw on their excellence and expertise, while also expanding what we do in the community. However, the biggest thing that we have to do in the community is to talk about death and dying, and to appreciate the fantastic work that is already being done.

Again, I thank Colin Smyth for bringing the debate to the Parliament and I look forward to all parties working collegiately with the Government to improve the situation in palliative care.

13:05

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I thank Colin Smyth for bringing forward a debate on an issue that is relevant to the shifts in how health and social care are delivered and the spirit of the on-going debate on how we deliver healthcare as a whole. In addition, I commend Bob Doris for his eloquent description of his parents' deaths. That frank recounting of his personal experience says far more than any dry statistics that I or others might recite.

I also thank Marie Curie for providing extensive evidence in advance of the debate, some of which has already been referred to and which includes in-depth analysis of a variety of minority groups who face particular challenges. I look forward to hearing other members' contributions to the debate.

I will talk about how palliative care is delivered in my region of the Highlands and Islands, and will concentrate on the role of hospices. Despite the obvious challenges that my region faces daily because of its rurality and relative remoteness on issues such as infrastructure, lack of clinical services and the struggle to attract professionals to take up jobs, we are lucky in that we have incredible and dedicated staff in the public and charitable sectors who provide quality and dignified end-of-life care to thousands of people each year.

In the Highlands and Islands, charities such as Marie Curie work in close partnership with our NHS and provide support to two hospices in my region: the Highland hospice in Inverness and the Bethesda hospice in Stornoway. Across Scotland, Marie Curie has four volunteer helper groups, which provide a vital befriending service that pairs some of the nearly 2,000 Marie Curie volunteers with those who require care and additional support. Such support is vital, and we can and must continue to improve what we offer to patients who require end-of-life care and to their families.

Twice since my election, I have had the privilege of visiting the Cowal Hospice Trust in Dunoon,

which is located within the Cowal community hospital, and have had the pleasure of meeting staff and seeing the facilities on offer. The hospice is small, but it provides incredible palliative care to local people, which means that they do not have to travel long distances to receive end-of-life care and can remain close to family and friends. The hospice has strong community backing, and its premises and equipment are largely funded through local fundraising efforts.

However, the reality is that that hospice is unique in my region and in Scotland as a whole. As Hospice UK notes in its briefing, access to hospice and palliative care in Scotland is not equitable and thousands each year miss out on the care that they need—the motion notes that the total is approximately 11,000. Those in rural and remote areas who require specialist palliative care often have to travel for it, which can entail a variety of additional problems, or have to rely on such care being provided at primary care level by a local general practitioner or nurse.

When I delivered my maiden speech to Parliament, I spoke about the need for a greater focus on delivering vital services to people, especially those who live on the periphery of Scotland—that is the challenge that we must face head on. We could improve accessibility to palliative care, for example, by piloting the partnership for excellence in palliative support—PEPS—scheme trialled by Sue Ryder in NHS Bedfordshire in England, which was supported in my party's manifesto for the recent Scottish elections. PEPS involves the creation a 24-hour phone line for access to all palliative care services and brings together 15 organisations in a hub-and-spoke model. That is just one example of how to integrate existing services better and massively improve access to vital specialist information.

Palliative care is a vitally important issue, and I look forward to contributions from across the chamber on how we can develop palliative care in Scotland and ensure that the issues that are raised in the Marie Curie report are given proper attention so that we can move towards resolving many outstanding issues.

13:09

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Scotland has many organisations and charities that focus on people who are either in need of palliative care or are coming to the end of their lives. This is a good opportunity to commend them and thank them all for the work that they do, as Donald Cameron has just done.

Today, thanks to Colin Smyth, we are looking specifically at Marie Curie's report "Enough for everyone", which has raised awareness of the

inequities in access to palliative care. Marie Curie nurses offer much-needed care and support, in the comfort of their own homes, to people who are living with terminal illness. I am sure that we have all, as politicians or personally, encountered their excellent work.

It is also important that we acknowledge the great work that is done in hospices throughout Scotland. An excellent example in my region is St Andrew's Hospice in Airdrie, which provides care to people who are living with life-limiting illnesses—free to all, regardless of age, gender or creed—and supports families. It is an example of the kind of care that the Marie Curie report calls for throughout Scotland.

As my husband and I have, the hospice has just celebrated its pearl anniversary. For the past 30 years many families in Lanarkshire, including mine, have experienced the exemplary care that it provides. I am proud to be an ambassador for the hospice's capital appeal, which needs to raise £9 million to refurbish the inpatient unit. That is quite a task, because that sum is in addition to the £4.6 million that the hospice needs every year to continue the work that it does in supporting and caring for patients and their families and loved ones. To help to raise funds, it has produced a little book called "Pearls of Wisdom", which contains inspirational and thought-provoking contributions. I will share with members one of the quotations in the book. It is from Cicely Saunders, who was the founder of the modern hospice movement. She said:

"You matter because you are you, and you matter until the end of your life."

I would now like to touch on a much underreported issue—the need for access to palliative care for babies, children and young people, which was identified by the "Children in Scotland requiring Palliative Care" study. It found that more than 15,000 babies, children and young people aged zero to 25 years live with diagnoses of life-shortening illness, and that two thirds of those who die each year do so without access to specialist palliative care and support. It is a very difficult issue to talk about—Colin Smyth referred to such difficulties earlier—but it needs to be addressed.

Overall, we must find ways to encourage people to access the palliative care that they need. The Marie Curie report tells us that people who live in socially more deprived areas are much less likely to access health and social care services. That includes children and young people.

I am sure that all members agree that it is unacceptable that people are dying in hospital while they wait for social care packages. It is imperative that people are properly supported to

live and die at home, if they wish to. Everyone who is affected by terminal illness should have access to all the care—including palliative care—and support that they need, regardless of their personal circumstances.

I finish by picking another pearl of wisdom from the book to share with members.

"Sometimes, what a person needs is not a brilliant mind that speaks, but a patient heart that listens".

I thank all the kind and patient-hearted staff and volunteers who provide palliative and end-of-life care. I urge the Government to make its vision a reality quickly so that everyone who needs palliative care has equal access to it. I thank Colin Smyth again for raising this vital issue in Parliament.

13:13

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** I, too, thank Colin Smyth for bringing this important issue to the chamber this afternoon, and I thank colleagues for their moving and well-informed speeches. I am very pleased to contribute to the debate. I especially thank Marie Curie, Sue Ryder, the Royal College of Nursing and Hospice UK for their excellent briefings.

Marie Curie's timely report on inequities in accessing palliative care highlights where our focus needs to be to ensure that our health service strives to allow everyone not only to live well but to die well. About 54,000 people die in Scotland each year. With an ageing population, that figure is set to rise—the Government anticipates a 12 per cent increase by 2037. The demand for end-of-life care will surely grow in response to that, as will the needs of those who seek palliative care.

Moving on from palliative care's 1960s roots in providing meaningful pain-management care and emotional support to people with terminal cancer, today's palliative care must meet the challenges of a wider range of conditions. Marie Curie's report outlines how health and social care providers need to recognise the needs not only of people with terminal illnesses, but of people who are living with increasing frailty in their later years. Today's care must also respect and—Colin Smyth spoke to this very well—respond to the cultural needs of the different groups in our society: people from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex. The report also notes that the challenges to accessing healthcare services that are faced by people who live in areas of social deprivation extend to palliative and end-of-life care.

The Government's strategic framework for action sets out the steps that we need to take to begin to set and measure indicators of palliative

care provision across the country, in order to ensure that by 2021 everyone has access to the support that they need. I now turn to the challenge of providing meaningful care.

In preparing for the debate, I saw that a common theme that has been raised across the third sector, the NHS, Government and our neighbourhoods and communities is the need for a more open culture around death and dying. Our healthcare workers will struggle to provide meaningful care if we are not ready to have frank and honest conversations about what a good death means to us as individuals, families and communities. The report "Grasping the nettle: What action can we take to improve palliative and end of life care in Scotland?" by the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care highlights that a cultural shift is needed in order for us to be willing to discuss those matters, and that everyone—not just care providers—has a part to play in bringing that about. The report says that

"Too often, our culture sees death as a 'medical failure',

thereby blocking discussions about what it means to die well and how our services can fulfil that need. Although current policy focus on increasing independence in old age is essential for our ageing society, that must be balanced with policies and actions that recognise that ill health and death are inevitable. I know that the Minister for Public Health attended the "realistic medicine" event that several members were at last night. Such shared decision making on big issues and the opportunity to have a positive discussion about quality of life and what it means are truly welcome.

We need to ensure that primary health workers have the training and support that are required to open up compassionate discussions about what treatment and emotional support a person may want at the end of their life. Everyone should have the opportunity to plan ahead and tell their carers what matters to them personally. The "Grasping the nettle" report and Sue Ryder recommend for patients a 24/7 helpline to palliative care professionals to ensure that people feel that they have a sense of autonomy and control in making important decisions about the end of their lives and the care that they would like.

I, too, would like to thank the people who work tirelessly in providing end-of-life care, including staff in centres for integrated care, hospice staff—as Bob Doris did, I have visited the excellent Marie Curie hospice here in Edinburgh, in my region—NHS professionals and all paid and unpaid carers in Scotland. I look forward to the minister's comments on how we can make progress.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** In view of the number of members who wish to speak in today's

debate, I am minded to accept a motion under rule 8.14.3 to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Colin Smyth.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

13:18

**Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** I welcome the debate on the Marie Curie report and—of course—I congratulate Colin Smyth on bringing this important topic to the chamber. I thank the Royal College of Nursing, Sue Ryder, Alzheimer Scotland and Marie Curie for their briefings. I pay particular tribute to the service in Lanarkshire that Marie Curie provides: 448 patients seen in 4,164 visits, a 24/7 planned nursing service, 61 nurses in Lanarkshire, and 93 per cent of patients who are supported by Marie Curie dying in their place of choice. Other agencies provide care in my area, but I know that Marie Curie supports the people of Lanarkshire well. Marie Curie lives up well to what I suggest is its mission statement:

"Marie Curie is here for people living with any terminal illness, and their families."

Palliative care is wide ranging. In relation to it, I want to focus on an area that is of particular interest to me: dementia. Bob Doris spoke very well about his mum's dementia; indeed, it must be noted that the increasing life expectancy of people in Scotland is likely to mean that more people will experience dementia and that the proportion of people dying with dementia will grow.

With that in mind, Alzheimer Scotland published in November 2015 "Advanced dementia practice model: understanding and transforming advanced dementia and end of life care" on providing integrated person-centred care to people who have advanced dementia and are at the end of life. The model responds to the complexity and intensity of advanced dementia and is due to be tested as part of the implementation of the Scottish Government's strategic framework for action on palliative and end-of-life care. I not only welcome that framework, but commend the Scottish Government for implementing it to ensure that we deal with this sensitive issue in the way that the Scottish people expect.

It is also important that we in the chamber recognise that many people who die with dementia have other conditions that require care responses. Where their dementia is not their primary concern, that will have an impact on their experience of other conditions and any treatment that they receive, so we must be prepared to deal with such situations.



For the remainder of my time, I wish to reflect on the Scottish Government's work in recognising the developing nature of how we address dementia, as it formulates health policy here in Scotland. In March 2016, the Scottish National Party Government published its "Proposal for Scotland's National Dementia Strategy 2016-19", which was framed as a result of stakeholder engagement in identifying the key areas on which the Government can deliver for people with dementia. It was identified through stakeholder discussion that, in the strategy, the Government should continue to focus on our national and local human-rights-based approach to improving dementia diagnosis rates, services and supports at all stages of the illness and in all care settings, and that that should continue to be underpinned by a rights-based approach to developing and upskilling the dementia workforce through implementation of what is in "Promoting Excellence: A framework for all health and social services staff working with people with dementia, their families and carers" and "Standards of Care for Dementia in Scotland". That is important, because framing our action on dementia in a rights-based approach is absolutely how we must take these matters forward.

That, I believe, brings us to the heart of what Colin Smyth's debate is all about: inequalities—which we must, if we are to adopt a rights-based approach, continue to address. As we know, the work on dementia and palliative care is deeply underpinned by the need to enshrine human rights as a fundamental pillar. That is why the Scottish Government's integration of the advanced dementia practice model into its strategic framework for action on palliative and end-of-life care is so important; it recognises that human rights is a fundamental aspect in understanding the citizenship and rights of the people whom we are discussing.

Once again, I thank Colin Smyth for bringing this important issue to the chamber and allowing me to reflect on the work that the Scottish Government is doing on dementia care, and on how we can continue to work together to improve approaches to this most important of issues.

13:23

**Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**

I, too, thank Colin Smyth for leading this important debate on Marie Curie and its report on challenging inequities in palliative care. Like Donald Cameron, I also thank Bob Doris for his personal and powerful contribution.

The debate gives us the opportunity to acknowledge and appreciate the invaluable work that is performed by Marie Curie nurses, staff and volunteers on behalf of everyone who has received their assistance, including people who

are living with terminal illness and their families and loved ones. Equally important, it gives us the chance to highlight some of the challenges that Marie Curie has to address, particularly the various barriers that certain groups in society face in accessing palliative care.

Despite the widespread recognition and deep appreciation of Marie Curie's palliative care services, the fact is that, each year in Scotland, there are 11,000 people who need palliative care but who do not benefit from it. In other words, as Colin Smyth highlighted, one in four people who die in Scotland does so without the end-of-life care that they need.

To address that gap in palliative care, research that has been commissioned by Marie Curie has highlighted the inequality of access to palliative care among certain groups in Scotland. The fact is that certain groups of people receive less palliative care than others with a comparable need. As others have mentioned, those groups include older people; black, Asian and minority ethnic groups; LGBT people; and people living in deprived areas. People who have mental health conditions are another group that does not receive the necessary palliative care. Vulnerability to mental health issues is significantly increased for people who are living with a terminal illness, and that can often go untreated and unsupported. People often develop mental health issues as a result of their terminal illness, and there are many people suffering in this area who are not getting the support that they need. That was highlighted to me as a major challenge when I spoke to people from Marie Curie earlier this week.

It is, therefore, increasingly important that we ensure that a range of support is available for those who need end-of-life support. That includes access to psychiatrists and counsellors as well as suitable medication. It is also crucial that there is more support for families and carers of people with a terminal illness and that health and social care services are further integrated.

On the issue of integrated health and social care services, I am pleased to highlight the success of the Marie Curie hospice at home pilot that has recently been implemented in Fife, which is the region that I represent. That pilot was introduced to complement existing Marie Curie services and it has three key elements. The first is a managed care service with nursing care for patients and carers, which is what most people associate Marie Curie with. The second element is innovative: a fast-track discharge service that includes emotional support and practical assistance following a patient's discharge from hospital. The third element is the Marie Curie helper service, which provides companionship, emotional support

and practical information, delivered by trained volunteers.

Those elements represent a powerful service which, last year, provided more than 4,000 visits and meant that many more patients were able to return home from hospital in their final days—I do not want to quote numbers, but it is important to highlight that 74 per cent of patients were able to leave hospital under the scheme, compared with 30 per cent previously, which I am sure that everyone will agree is a great improvement. The Fife hospice at home pilot is a great example of integrated health and social care, and I commend everyone at Marie Curie who is involved in it and hope that it can be expanded to other areas in Scotland. It is a testament to the hard work and forward thinking of everyone at Marie Curie.

I again thank Colin Smyth for bringing this important debate to the chamber. Like other members, I extend my best wishes to everyone across Scotland who is involved in providing palliative care and thank them for their invaluable support in this area.

13:27

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I echo colleagues in welcoming the opportunity to have the debate and pay tribute to my colleague Colin Smyth for raising this important issue.

The Marie Curie report on challenging inequities in palliative care is a welcome and sobering recognition of the problems that many patients face when accessing palliative and end-of-life care. I feel that I have learned a lot from colleagues' speeches today—I particularly thank Bob Doris—and from the briefings that we received from Marie Curie, the Royal College of Nurses, Hospices UK and others.

We know that, unfortunately, deeply entrenched inequalities exist in many areas of life across Scotland, and deprivation is often the major precipitating factor that affects that. People from deprived areas already suffer disproportionately from health concerns and face issues with access to health and social care services. Sadly, that situation is no different in relation to palliative care.

Despite the fact that people in Scotland's poorest communities are much more likely to have numerous hospital visits, to require palliative care and to die in hospital, areas with multiple deprivation have fewer referrals to palliative care services, even when similar diagnoses are made, than less deprived areas do. That is troubling, and I support the calls from Hospices UK and others for more support to be given to improving the data on the barriers to care that people experience.

It is equally concerning that, as Colin Smyth and others have mentioned, the report highlights that the existing patterns of discrimination that are experienced by black, Asian and minority ethnic people and by LGBTI people can contribute to the lower levels of palliative care that are received by those groups. There needs to be more research to enable us to better understand the problem and how it can be solved.

Elaine Smith made a very important speech, highlighting the particular needs of babies, children and young people.

Dean Lockhart has touched on this already, but I want to reinforce the point that the consideration of mental health is a significant issue in palliative care. The report notes that at least 10 per cent of suicides are linked to a terminal or chronic illness. In addition, those living with severe mental illness tend to die earlier than the average population and mental health issues can be made worse by physical illness. Mental health can affect those living with a terminal illness in a number of distinct ways. Mental ill health problems such as depression and anxiety can be triggered by the diagnosis of a terminal illness and can make physical conditions worse in turn.

There is also a wider issue regarding the mental health of family and carers through the course of their loved one's illness and the subsequent bereavement. Palliative care as a holistic treatment is well placed to be in keeping with approaches that give mental health parity of esteem with physical health. Any approaches to improve the inequity of provision should be mindful of such issues.

I hope that the Scottish Government will be mindful of Marie Curie's calls for a fourth stage in the mental health strategy—"Die Well"—to ensure that patients, carers, family and friends are given adequate support throughout the patient's condition and in their subsequent bereavement. Those with a mental health issue who are dying can often be overlooked as part of the conversation and I hope that the forthcoming strategy will change that.

In order to make those changes, there are a number of steps that can and must be taken if we are to achieve the vision that is set out in the Scottish Government's "Strategic Framework for Action on Palliative and End of Life Care", which is that by 2021 everyone who needs such care receives it. Many of those steps have been outlined by Hospices UK.

Although there is more that I wanted to say, I am mindful of the time and the fact that the debate has already been extended. I pay tribute to local hospices in my region. Kilbryde Hospice is my nearest hospice in South Lanarkshire, and Elaine

Smith has mentioned St Andrew's Hospice. We all appreciate their fantastic work and fundraising.

I close by thanking my parliamentary colleagues for their speeches today.

13:32

**The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell):** As other members have done, I welcome the Marie Curie report, "Enough for everyone". I thank Colin Smyth for securing the debate, and the other members of the palliative and end-of-life care cross party group—and other members—for their contributions to the debate this afternoon.

The openness of the debate contrasts with the fact that, as a nation, we are not often great at discussing death and dying. We are often reserved and private about such matters, which does not help us to face the certainty of the deaths of all those we know and love with the clear-sighted and practical compassion that is called for.

I would like to thank Bob Doris for his speech and his openness about the recent passing of both his parents. I also thank Alison Johnstone for her remarks. I agree that the debate fits well with the empowering discussions that our medical services need to have with people as part of a realistic medical approach.

The findings of the Marie Curie report are important and will help us all to move forward on our shared vision of ensuring that everyone, including those who have not been accessing it, gets access to palliative and end-of-life care. The demand for good person-centred care is growing. More people in Scotland are living longer, which is a good thing, but as we grow older more of us grow frail, with multiple long-term conditions that have specific palliative care needs. The report shows that those needs are not always being met. We want a fairer Scotland and the report reminds us of the challenges that we face and that we are taking concrete steps to address. I am talking about the rights-based approach that was described by Richard Lyle.

We are committed to understanding the needs of our different communities. We want to eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality, protect human rights and build good relations by breaking down barriers that may hinder and prevent people from accessing the care, services and supports that they need.

Our "Strategic Framework for Action on Palliative and End of Life Care" was published in December 2015. It sets out our vision that, by 2021, everyone in Scotland will have access to high-quality palliative and end-of-life care tailored to their individual circumstances. Support that

meets people at their point of need—whatever their personal situation or individual characteristics—is what each of us would want for ourselves and those about whom we care. That is why a tailored approach is essential if people are to have the benefit of high-quality palliative and end-of-life care, regardless of their age or mental health—points on that were made by Dean Lockhart and Monica Lennon—wealth or where they live.

Any response to the need that we face will require meaningful engagement with communities and Scottish society as a whole, and we will have to build on the undoubted assets and strengths that we have across our communities. It is therefore essential that we create the right conditions nationally to support communities in their planning and delivery of palliative and end-of-life care services, to ensure that the unique characteristics of each individual are met. That is reflected in our framework for action, which contains a series of commitments to improve palliative and end-of-life care in sustainable ways that work for the Scottish population as a whole and for the groups who are identified in the report.

We have already done much national work to facilitate and support local planning of palliative and end-of-life care services through integration of healthcare and social care, which is one of the most significant reforms since the establishment of the NHS. Integration authorities bring together NHS boards, local authorities and others to ensure delivery of efficient integrated services. Such services, including palliative and end-of-life care services, are commissioned in response to the needs and choices of people and communities, and are based on real local understanding and flexibility.

The key to the success of that work is the power of integration authorities to drive real change. They will manage more than £8 billion of resources that NHS boards and local authorities previously managed separately. That represents more than 50 per cent of territorial health board expenditure, and more than 80 per cent of local authority social care expenditure. With a greater emphasis on community-based and more joined-up care, integration aims to improve care and support for the people who use health and social care services. That will help to equip providers of local palliative and end-of-life care better in order to meet the unique needs of each individual in their community. That compassion is evident in the services that have been described today by Donald Cameron and Elaine Smith, and innovation is shown in Dean Lockhart's description of the fast-track discharge service.

As is set out in our "Strategic Framework for Action", we have asked Healthcare Improvement

Scotland to test and implement improvements in delivery of palliative and end-of-life care. That work includes developing better ways to identify all those who might benefit from palliative and end-of-life care, especially the frail and the elderly. To date, five integration authorities, including Glasgow City, East Ayrshire and the Western Isles, are collaborating with Healthcare Improvement Scotland's "living well in communities" and "focus on dementia" improvement teams to take that work forward.

Data are vital. Without data, we will not know whether people are getting the palliative and end-of-life care that they need. Bob Doris made that point well. Without data, communities cannot commission local services to meet their people's care needs, and care plans will remain hard to share. The data challenge is recognised in our "Strategic Framework for Action", which includes a commitment to support improvements in the collection, analysis, interpretation and dissemination of data and evidence about the needs, provision, activity, indicators and outcomes in respect of palliative and end-of-life care.

A working group is tasked with clarifying the data requirements, to ensure that they are valuable for individuals who are receiving care, and to assist integration authorities in planning, commissioning and improving their local services. Working with NHS Information Services Division, the data group is investigating a number of areas in which data collection can be improved, including exploring avenues for improving the available data on specific groups of people, including those who were identified in Marie Curie's report.

**Elaine Smith:** Difficult though it is to discuss, will that include a focus on children and young people from deprived areas who seem to form a particular group that does not access appropriate care?

**Aileen Campbell:** I will certainly take on board Elaine Smith's point. From my previous portfolio of childcare and the early years, I know that the issue might also be of interest to Mark McDonald, and I know that there is an awful lot of support from organisations such as Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland and others. One of the things that struck me in my time in that previous post was the support that siblings require when there is the death of a child. Oftentimes, they are the ones who are overlooked in terms of the support that is required.

There is probably a host of other areas that we need to focus our attention on—in particular, around child bereavement and death. It is difficult to talk about, but that is no excuse for shying away from the realisation that we always need to do as much as we can. The getting it right for every child approach is probably quite appropriate for that,

and relevant to the point that Elaine Smith raised, as well.

In the moments that I have left, I turn to the values and skills that people need from our health and social care staff. I started by saying how hard we find it as a nation to discuss death and dying—other members also said that. However, skill in having those difficult conversations is absolutely critical for anticipatory care planning conversations because having those conversations and sharing what matters to the person at the end of their life can make all the difference to how and where they die. That demanding and challenging staff development need is reflected in our framework, which contains a commitment to support the development of a new palliative and end-of-life-care educational framework. NHS Education for Scotland is working with the Scottish Social Services Council to develop a consistent approach to workforce learning and development, and to share practice across the country.

Lastly, I want to say a bit about palliative and end-of-life-care research, which was a big focus of Colin Smyth's remarks. As part of the programme of work that is set out in our framework, we have established a research forum that will complement the aims of the framework. We have provided funding to support the group to undertake a systematic review of over 400 relevant research studies to help us to develop a clearer picture of research and data gaps and to support improvement.

Uniquely in the devolved nations, the Scottish Government has also committed funding for a strategic collaboration with Marie Curie. That funding supports a call for research projects addressing priority areas that were identified in palliative and end-of-life care by the James Lind alliance's priority setting partnership. Two research projects to date have been successful in obtaining funding, and they will be announced shortly. All will be helpful in realising the vision for palliative care by adding to the existing evidence base on palliative and end-of-life care.

In closing, I again welcome the opportunity to respond to the report from Marie Curie and naturally welcome Marie Curie's support for the Government's strategic framework. I will close with words that were read by Elaine Smith, which we can all unite behind:

"you matter until the end of your life."

Our job now is to make that a reality.

13:42

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## **Education and Skills Organisations (Performance and Role)**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is a debate on motion S5M-03298, in the name of James Dornan, on behalf of the Education and Skills Committee, on the performance and role of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Education Scotland, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council.

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** This debate is happening today because the Education and Skills Committee was struck by the views that it received from front-line staff as part of its recent scrutiny of public bodies, in particular the Scottish Qualifications Authority, and wanted to highlight them to Parliament as a whole.

It is also an opportune moment to debate the role of the SQA, Education Scotland, the Scottish funding council and Skills Development Scotland, as they are all covered by the terms of a Government review. The Scottish funding council and Skills Development Scotland come under the enterprise and skills review, and the SQA and Education Scotland fall within the education governance review.

I start with a quick whistle-stop tour for non-committee members of how the committee sourced that valuable evidence. The committee decided that an early piece of work that it should undertake was an assessment of how well the key public organisations overseeing school education, further education, higher education and skills for young people were delivering. The ways in which we gathered views are not new, but the combination of them led to a very credible thread of issues for members to pursue.

From the off, the Education and Skills Committee made inclusivity a strategic priority in its work. To me, that means trying to make the ways in which we invite evidence as unthreatening as possible. Our focus in the public bodies work was to get candid views from front-line staff that we could use to challenge the big bodies. We wanted to ensure that there was a link between practical front-line experiences and the way in which those bodies function. In gathering views, we were aware that submitting evidence to Parliament can be very daunting. Even the language—"submitting evidence"—would, understandably, put a lot of individuals off. That barrier can sometimes prevent us from receiving

the most candid, and therefore most valuable, views.

The key to our work was offering anonymity through three means: first, a survey; secondly, anonymous submissions; and thirdly, a meeting with teachers. The meeting was with a relatively random sample of teachers who were coming to Parliament for another reason, as part of our education centre's work towards the professional development of teachers. That meeting, which I attended with my colleague Ross Greer MSP, was a valuable lesson for me. I had gone into the room with an idea of what I was going to hear, and the views of those teachers certainly rewrote my take on quite a few things.

What was stark from that meeting and from the submissions from teachers was that, especially with the promise of anonymity, there was an outpouring of views from some contributors. It has to be said that the real strength of feeling was about the functioning of the SQA. We need only read the submission from the Scottish Association of Geography Teachers, for example, to get a sense of that. What was even more notable was the extent to which the views on the SQA in teacher submissions and submissions from some academics and some other stakeholders were along very similar lines.

Perhaps most notable was the survey response on the SQA. As is appropriate, the Scottish Parliament information centre survey results summary highlights the limitations of the survey. The survey did not use a random sample and therefore is not representative of the views of all teachers. A total of 646 people, including 462 teachers, chose to respond on the SQA, compared with 340 people—including 211 teachers—on Education Scotland. It is telling that more than twice as many teachers chose to respond on the SQA. In the 646 responses on the SQA, 67 per cent of respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement by the SQA that its

"customers and users trust us to get it right for them".

Even if we acknowledge the limitations of the survey results, that result is hard to ignore.

All that evidence led to a very searching evidence session with the SQA, with detailed and varied comments from teachers' anonymous submissions adding resonance to the criticisms that committee members put to the SQA's chief executive. That ability for the committee to act as a mouthpiece for teachers gave the SQA a clear understanding of the challenges that it faces from those in the know—the teachers themselves.

At the end of the session, I made it clear that the committee would expect changes to be made, in particular given the amount of change under way

that the SQA is responsible for overseeing, for example changes resulting from the removal of unit assessments. The SQA left the meeting with the very clear message that it needs to make improvements and make them fast.

The committee heard some positive views on the SQA and the SQA highlighted to the committee the positive feedback that it has received through its own independently commissioned work, so there are of course other views out there. However, the SQA accepted the strength of the results that were generated when teachers were given the opportunity to speak freely to an independent committee.

SDS and the Scottish funding council had a positive report card from the survey—granted from a far smaller sample. SDS also reported on its progress on the delivery of the Government's aims for modern apprenticeships; it continues to meet its overall targets in that regard. Engagement and delivery at a local level and equalities considerations in the delivery of its work were raised in written evidence and therefore were a focus of the evidence session with SDS. I am sure that other members will pick up on these issues in more detail later.

The role of the Scottish funding council was explored in its evidence session, including the importance of being able to demonstrate to key stakeholders such as universities and colleges where it is performing a challenge function to Government. The discussion about its role highlighted the need for further clarity on the exact implications of the enterprise and skills review for the funding council, given that its board will be replaced by an overarching board, as recommended by phase 1 of the review.

The committee decided, having heard that evidence, that it would be prudent to take evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work on these issues. The committee then wrote to the cabinet secretary following the meeting to seek more information on which bodies had suggested the removal of the board of the Scottish funding council, to be replaced by an overarching board. As the committee stated in its letter, we are committed to testing the evidence base for that recommendation and we will undoubtedly give the phase 2 findings consideration in the spring.

The session with the fourth body, Education Scotland, included a focus on the dual role of the body, which members of the Royal Society of Edinburgh's education committee have been very prominent in commenting on. Education Scotland refuted the suggestion that there is a conflict of interest and suggested that the distinct roles were clear. Since then, a number of submissions to the

governance review have commented on that, so it is another likely theme for today's debate.

Specifically on Education Scotland, there was a focus on the types and frequency of inspection that would add value to schools, as some of the survey results from teachers suggested that their school inspections had not always added a lot of value from their perspective.

I will quickly comment on some of the themes that arose in relation to the curriculum for excellence. During their separate evidence sessions, the SQA, Education Scotland and education authority representatives acknowledged that the burden on teachers had been excessive, and work is under way at the behest of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to reduce that burden. However, the committee wants to look at how that burden arose in the first place and so, having heard from those bodies, we will hear from the curriculum for excellence management board next week to establish whether everyone is clear on who is responsible for what in order to ensure strong decision taking. That will include looking back at a number of key decisions that were taken in the evolution of the curriculum for excellence and the process of implementation.

In particular, I will be interested to learn whether those who should be acting as a challenge function to ensure that the cumulative amount of information that is produced is not excessive are fulfilling that role. Local authorities, in their role as education authorities and as responsible employers, should see part of their core role as protecting the wellbeing of their workforce and ensuring that the workforce is protected from excessive working demands. Local authority representatives on the board should be well apprised of the practical experience of teachers and other staff working in education through strong lines of communication with the various education authorities that they represent.

The focus of the debate is not education authorities, but I want to highlight the importance of the role that they play in acting as a challenge function to the SQA, Education Scotland and others on the curriculum for excellence management board. In my personal view, the evidence that we received from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities gave the impression that they had not performed the challenge function that teachers would expect of them in the face of excessive guidance going to teachers. In my view, that is not acceptable.

It is also not acceptable to prevent parliamentary committees from speaking to teachers to gather their views. That was the case when one of our members sought to meet teachers local to his area. His education authority

told him that he could not do that. I have every sympathy if teachers do not have time to meet members, but for an education authority to deny communication with teachers who are happy to engage is not something that the committee will accept. We have therefore written to the education authority in question for an explanation. It is fair to say that I await its response with some interest. I want to make it clear that the issue was encountered with only one education authority. Other members, including myself, undertook visits to schools in their local area to inform the committee's work without any issues. I thank the teachers and the support staff who made those visits possible.

I hope that my broad summary of the issues that we explored with the four bodies in question gives members who are not on the committee a sense of the areas that the committee has explored. I should emphasise that we are talking about performance and role today, and our members do not plan to cover details of the future budget provision for those organisations, as that would put us in danger of veering towards budget recommendations that are not yet in the public domain.

Rather, we are looking at the key issues in the paper that was circulated for the debate, which include whether the bodies are delivering on their core functions; whether the roles of the organisations or their structures should change as a result of the education governance review or the enterprise and skills review; whether those organisations are sufficiently mindful of equalities when delivering their functions; and whether those bodies respond effectively to the needs of stakeholders and to constructive advice.

The motion for debate mentions the importance of parliamentary scrutiny, which requires a joined-up approach from back benchers to have the greatest impact. When I became convener, I had not anticipated the number of other committees that would become involved in issues that cross over into our broad remit—on my last count, it was seven other committees. Do not get me wrong—the additional scrutiny is to be welcomed but, as part of my role, I want to ensure that it is co-ordinated and that progress that is made in other committees or in other parts of the Parliament's work is communicated to us and vice versa. For example, in follow-up work on Audit Scotland's overview reports on universities and colleges, the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee has undertaken valuable work scrutinising the Scottish funding council.

Co-ordinating scrutiny across committees will be particularly important when looking at the proposals that stem from Government reviews,

and how we do so effectively might be a matter for the Conveners Group to consider further.

Understandably, the Local Government and Communities Committee intends to look at any proposals from the education governance review that will impact on the role of local authorities in their role as education authorities and to look at any changes in the associated funding levels.

In addition, the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee took evidence at phase 1 of the enterprise and skills review, including from Skills Development Scotland, and it might look at proposals again at phase 2. The second letter that the Education and Skills Committee received from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work suggested that there would be further consultation at phase 2. Therefore, there is a further opportunity for parliamentary input, and there will be legislation to bring about the proposals that result from the education governance review and the enterprise and skills review.

I want to loop back to evidence gathering. I have placed a good deal of emphasis on the evidence from teachers, and I wish to also give my sincere thanks to those bodies and academics who have taken the time to contribute their views to the committee. It is sometimes a delicate process for organisations that have valuable working relationships with public bodies to provide constructive criticism about those bodies through a parliamentary consultation.

I specifically thank the organisations that we scrutinised, which have all been very accommodating in assisting the committee with its work. For example, a number of members, including myself, visited local SDS offices or projects in the fortnight leading up to the evidence session. The committee thanks SDS for facilitating those visits and, in particular, for tailoring each visit to the specific interests of each of our members. The Scottish funding council, Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority also arranged visits or attended informal meetings with small groups of members to give us more of a sense of their day-to-day activity. In some cases, that included the involvement of more junior staff than those who gave evidence to the committee, which provided a useful insight into the work of organisations at an operational level, as well as at a strategic level.

In future work, the committee will seek to build on its first experience of engaging the views of front-line staff, including on the education legislation arising from the governance review. Engagement with parents, children and young people will be crucial, too, so I will close with a general shout out to those who have something to say but who have a misconception that, before

they can express a view, they need to wait to see what a committee focuses on in its work programme, or wait to be invited to contribute in a formal format. That is not how our committee works. If you are a young person or a parent, or you work in one of our schools, colleges, universities or in an organisation that we scrutinise, and you think that things need to change to improve the opportunities and experiences of our young people, we want to hear from you.

One of the teachers who wrote to us stated that the committee's questioning of the SQA that was based on teacher views

"restored their faith in politicians".

I venture that we still have a wee bit more to do to convince other people in that regard, but this piece of work is a strong start.

I thank my fellow committee members for their contribution and support, I thank my fantastic clerking team—led by the inimitable Roz Thomson, who is brilliantly supported by Ned Sharratt—and, most important, I thank teachers and others for taking the time to share their valuable experience with us.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the evidence received by the Education and Skills Committee in relation to the performance of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Education Scotland, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council, and particularly concerns raised by teachers, the importance of parliamentary scrutiny of these organisations and of the Scottish Government's Enterprise and Skills Review and Education Governance Review which, combined, will impact on the role of all of these organisations.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Now that the committee has "restored ... faith in politicians", I call Mr Swinney to answer on behalf of the Government.

14:44

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** I welcome this afternoon's debate, which has been brought to the chamber by the Education and Skills Committee, on the issues that the committee convener covered in his introductory remarks. It is an opportunity for the Government to reaffirm our commitment to doing the very best that we can for children and young people in order to ensure that every one of them can fulfil their potential through their participation in the Scottish education system. That commitment is shared by Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish funding

council, which all play a crucial role in delivering and improving high-quality education in Scotland.

The Education and Skills Committee has undertaken considerable scrutiny of the performance of those national agencies, as the convener explained in some detail. It has questioned them on specific criticisms that were raised through its online surveys, and it has identified issues on which it has challenged the SQA and Education Scotland in particular in relation to performance, communication and guidance.

I make it clear to the chamber that I welcome feedback from anyone who has a stake in Scottish education—indeed, I spend a great deal of my time engaged in exactly that pursuit. I will always expect the highest standards from the national bodies that are charged with improving outcomes for young people in Scotland. However, I also want to make it clear—without questioning the importance of holding those agencies to account—that I believe that they contribute a significant amount of positive benefit to the delivery of Scottish education. In the most recent survey, which was undertaken independently on behalf of the SQA and the report of which was published in January 2016, 84 per cent of respondents believed that the SQA had high credibility and 91 per cent believed that it could be trusted as an organisation.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in its assessment of the implementation of curriculum for excellence, said:

"Education Scotland has been a linchpin in providing the guidance resources and quality assurance"

for the implementation of curriculum for excellence.

As well as acknowledging the criticism that can be levelled at organisations—of course, there can be criticism—it is important that we place on record the fact that there is significant strength in those organisations that contributes towards the delivery of Scottish education and the performance that we experience in Scottish education. It is important, at the outset of this debate, that we focus on the question of what all this produces: on the impact and outcome of all this activity. I will go through a number of examples that highlight the current performance of Scottish education.

The overwhelming majority of children in our education system are performing well in school under curriculum for excellence. At least 84 per cent of pupils are achieving the expected level or better in literacy and numeracy by the end of secondary 3. The number of advanced higher passes reached a record high in 2016, while the



number of higher passes was second only to the record high in 2015.

More of our population is educated beyond school than is the case in any other European country, and a higher percentage of young people now leave school for positive destinations than at any time on record. We have seen annual increases in the proportion of school leavers who are reaching at least Scottish qualifications and credit framework level 5, from 73.2 per cent in 2007-08 to 85.2 per cent in 2014-15. The gap between the 20 per cent most deprived and the 20 per cent least deprived pupils who achieve that level has reduced from 36.8 percentage points in 2007-08 to 20.9 percentage points in 2014-15. While school leavers from our 10 per cent least deprived communities are around twice as likely as those from the 10 per cent most deprived communities to achieve at least one qualification at higher level or above, that is a notable improvement on the position in 2007-08 when they were almost four times as likely to do so.

The gap between those from the most deprived and those from the least deprived communities in positive follow-up school leaver destinations continues to narrow. For 2014-15, the gap was 10 percentage points—down from 20.2 percentage points in 2009-10, which is the earliest year for which comparable data exists. Finally, in 2014-15, 14 per cent of Scotland-domiciled full-time first degree entrants to Scottish universities were from Scottish index of multiple deprivation 20 districts, which was up from 11.2 per cent in 2006-07.

Although there are legitimate grounds for us to consider and challenge, and to press for improvements in, performance in Scottish education, there are very strong foundations on which we are building at this time.

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Is the cabinet secretary aware that Universities Scotland and a number of individual universities have questioned the efficacy of using SIMD on its own and not with other indicators? Their concern is to ensure that it is the most deprived pupils who are getting into university rather than more affluent pupils who happen to live in an SIMD postcode.

**John Swinney:** There might be issues that have to be considered in that regard, but we have appointed a commissioner for widening access to ensure that such issues can be thoroughly considered. However, it is important that we record on a comparative basis the progress that has been made on the important SIMD indicator and demonstrate the strength of the improvements in performance that have been achieved.

As the Government embarks on its reform agenda in education, based on very solid foundations, we have to be mindful of some of the

data that we heard about prior to Christmas, which was extremely challenging data about the performance of the education system. Our reform agenda is designed to address those issues, and one of its key aspects is the review of governance, which closed last Friday. At its heart is the presumption that decisions about children's learning and school life should be made at school level. We will look closely at the responses that we have received, and we will consider the roles of Education Scotland and the SQA, as I indicated at the outset we would do.

However, the delivery of success in Scottish education is not just down to the work of the SQA or Education Scotland; the performance of Scottish education is influenced by a range of organisations, including the Scottish Government and, most significantly, local authorities, which carry the statutory responsibility to deliver effective education for all. The purpose of the governance review is to ensure that every element of the system fulfils its role to the highest standards that we can expect. The Government will bring relevant proposals back to the Parliament in due course that are based on the outcome of the research in the governance review.

Excellent education is vital for our society; it is vital not just for our economy but, most important, for the individual life chances of every child and young person. Our education and training system must support every one of those individuals to make their contribution to our economy. The enterprise and skills review that is highlighted in the motion will help us to achieve that. I welcome the Education and Skills Committee's scrutiny of that process and the committee's support for the review's ambition to take fresh action towards achieving our long-term ambition, encapsulated in Scotland's economic strategy, to rank in the top quartile of OECD countries for productivity, equality, wellbeing and sustainability.

The focus and purpose of the enterprise and skills review is to establish how, by creating greater alignment and cohesion between the work of Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish funding council, we can ensure that we take the necessary collaborative and cohesive steps to improve Scotland's economic performance and build on the strong foundations established in our education system. As the committee convener correctly said, phase 2 of that process has commenced. The Government will be delighted to engage with Parliament and parliamentary committees on the progress of phase 2 of the review.

Together with improving the learner journey, which we will commence in due course, and the school governance reforms, that work will help to

create a more seamless and focused education and skills system in Scotland that will give every young person not only the best opportunity that they can have to prosper through our education system but the greatest opportunity to make a contribution to the economic life of Scotland.

The Government welcomes this opportunity to debate and consider the role of the four agencies concerned, but I stress the significant point that education and its success are a consequence of the work and participation of a range of different organisations, not just the four organisations that we are considering in this debate. I look forward to reflecting on the debate in my concluding remarks later this afternoon.

14:54

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am grateful to the convener of the Education and Skills Committee for setting out the parameters of this debate. He was quite correct to say that we have to scrutinise the public bodies concerned and measure their respective performances against the Scottish Government's national performance framework, including how they evaluate the quality of their delivery and manage change in terms of the Christie commission and so on.

Good-quality scrutiny is of course entirely dependent on the availability and effective analysis of evidence, and I will examine those aspects. I will do so in the light of my 10 years of attending committee meetings in this Parliament, which I believe are the most important forum for establishing the detail that members and indeed the public need to know before they make political judgments on specific issues and before policy is developed.

As the convener rightly intimated, the committee held four lengthy evidence-taking sessions. That was a result of two things. The first was the volume of the responses that we received, some of which were from an anonymous position to allow free expression, as the convener pointed out. Secondly, the Scottish Government has put such store on education that it was right and proper that there was a comprehensive and wide-ranging review. As such, it is difficult to know where to start, but I will begin with what happened in the committee sessions.

As Parliament is well aware, there were some extraordinary exchanges during the sessions in November and December, which made it all too clear that each of the four public bodies currently faces significant problems, albeit to varying degrees, and that, as such, they have in some cases lost the confidence of some key people in the education profession.

What struck me most of all was the issue of communication within and between the four public bodies. Far too often, the committee was faced with jargon instead of plain English, the irony being that this is at a time when the country is trying to improve literacy and numeracy. As such, the evidence was often muddled and open to different interpretations. At times, it was actually unintelligible and, therefore, the lines of responsibility were unclear. All those issues were matters of concern, and they are slightly different from the fact that we received conflicting views from the agencies and the professionals on the ground—something that is quite normal within the committee system.

The committee convener reflected on the strong views among teachers, and he was right to do so. That matters because, as we tried to reconcile completely contrasting views, it became increasingly apparent—through, I may say, the evidence that was provided by more than one of the agencies—that the criteria by which the evidence was being produced were not consistent, and in some cases it was incomplete. I will come back to that in a minute.

My colleagues will concentrate on specific areas of the evidence, but I want to develop some important general principles—four in particular. First, there are clearly issues about strategic decision making and the respective timescales in which that takes place. More than once, reservations have been expressed about the fact that strategic decision making is compromised by the lack of a longer-term approach. I use as an example the concerns among colleges and universities that their longer-term sustainability, which is so important to the maintenance of their competitive advantage, is threatened by the fact that the Scottish funding council appears to live from year to year rather than looking at a three-year or perhaps a five-year term. That point has been raised by Audit Scotland and it was raised at the Parliament's Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee on 1 December.

Lack of effective strategy is also the main reason why there have been so many changes to policy and guidelines within the SQA and Education Scotland—the cabinet secretary recognised those changes when he announced his bid to declutter the CFE landscape. The OECD mentioned that crucial point, too, when it flagged up the long list of CFE capacities, attributes, capabilities and levels, and the 1,820 outcomes and experiences. They have all been changed and amended several times, and they have now been replaced with new ones, albeit that they are simpler and fewer in number. We should be clear that it is not the teachers who asked for those edicts, but the agencies. When we hear that the excuse for mistakes being made in exams—we

have had some—is that there has been an overburden of workload, it is little wonder that that does not inspire confidence amongst teachers.

What I worry about most, and what I am sure parents are worried about, is the effective delivery of curriculum for excellence, which is the single biggest educational reform in a generation, and the impact on qualifications and on subject choice in the senior phase. Those are really serious issues and the committee is right to be concerned.

Secondly, we heard on several occasions that there are question marks over whether the agencies have sufficient resources and can deploy them properly. Colleges and universities raise the question about the Scottish funding council, asking not about the skill set of its staff but about whether there are enough staff with the skills to ensure that Scottish funding council officers have in-depth knowledge of the institutions and the outcome agreements for which they are responsible. The question is asked about the SQA when it comes to finding sufficient markers at the right time with the right knowledge for the wide diversity of qualifications that are now being sat. The question also needs to be answered by Education Scotland. How does it feel able to take on the dual role of being judge and jury as the main body that implements education policy and also inspects our schools?

On that theme, we had issues about the accuracy of data. In the session with Education Scotland, there was a complete lack of clarity when the organisation came to comment on its table that was supposed to show the number of school inspections. We were left unclear about whether the statistics included projections and, in one case, when arithmetic appeared to tell the committee that the number of inspections had fallen, there was a contorted attempt to say that it had actually risen. That is simply not acceptable and we need to do something about it radically and quickly.

A wider issue about data was picked up in committee evidence and by the OECD: namely, Scotland does not have sufficient relevant baseline data from the start of CFE and therefore is not in a position to do enough proper analysis of exactly what progress is being made.

Questions have been asked about the links between the Scottish Government and its agencies—are the latter, in fact, arms-length bodies or are they being drawn more and more into Government direction? What the management board of curriculum for excellence has been doing for the past nine years is completely unclear, and therefore there are questions about its responsibilities.

The Education and Skills Committee's November and December meetings were an eye-opener. However, they were also deeply worrying, as the sessions collectively showed exactly why the education and skills brief is providing the Scottish Government with so many headaches.

We whole-heartedly support the work of the convener and we thank the clerks for their work.

We have an awful lot of work to do to bring the education agencies to account. They are simply not doing well enough, and that is a matter of great concern to this Parliament.

15:01

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

Scotland's education system is critical to the future of our country and vital to our young people's ability to fulfil their potential, yet our once lauded system is falling behind on international measures. The Education and Skills Committee's work compounds those concerns, as it found serious issues with the organisations that are responsible for our exams, inspections and curriculum. The conclusions point clearly to what we need to fix in Scotland's education system.

I thank colleagues on the Education and Skills Committee for bringing forward this debate, and I thank the convener, James Dornan, for his thorough summary of the evidence that we looked at. I also thank the clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre for preparing the reports and the information that has been provided to us, specifically the very helpful paper that was sent to all MSPs this week. One thing that marks out the seriousness of this debate is the fact that that paper needed to ask such fundamental questions as whether our educational bodies deliver on their core functions.

I know that not every member was glued to their television screens while the committee was taking its evidence, so the questions might come as a bit of a surprise. I will read from the *Official Report* of the meeting at which the head of the SQA said that the negative views around qualifications were because of

"the way in which the qualifications have been designed and implemented and the way in which they have worked".—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 23 November 2016; c 46.]

When a chief executive says, "Don't worry; the only problems are how we plan, how we operate and how everything works," we have to conclude that something is seriously wrong.

The significance of the problems was emphasised by a survey that was conducted for the committee, which revealed a crisis of confidence in the agencies among teachers. The

committee's evidence indicates that teachers no longer have trust in the SQA or Education Scotland. Just 20 per cent of survey respondents trusted the SQA to "get it right". Teachers pointed to unclear documentation, change fatigue and inconsistency. The majority of teachers expressed criticism of Education Scotland's guidance and support, and more than half expressed reservations about the independence of the evaluation of education provision.

Those initial concerns were compounded by the evidence that we received from the organisations themselves. There has been a failure not only in how the organisations are interacting with teachers but to explain how the organisations are accountable, responsible and delivering what is needed.

The evidence that the committee received showed the SQA's faults in relation to particular exams, such as the higher maths paper in 2015 and geography last year. It questioned whether, with teaching time of a single year, each exam was possible and who had responsibility for that. Neither the SQA nor Education Scotland was able to explain how the curriculum and the examination system were meant to work together, or, indeed, who was responsible for that integration.

The narrowing of the curriculum as a result of the new exam system was called into question. Moreover, Education Scotland failed to explain the fall in inspections and indeed, could not give an explanation of its independence in that role, given its other functions.

When we reel off that litany of failures by these key organisations, surely we must conclude that instead of the Government's plans to shift power around, between schools and local authorities, what we need is reform of this part of the system and these government agencies.

The Government has not presented sufficient evidence that its plans will help to improve standards; in the words of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, it

"has not made"

the

"case".

Moreover, Children in Scotland, which represents 500 bodies across the public, private and voluntary sectors, said that there was "virtually no evidence" to support the view that changing governance will reduce the attainment gap.

Most worrying is the respected worldwide study by the programme for international student assessment—PISA—that came out last month, which showed that after a decade of Scottish National Party stewardship of the education

system, we have seen standards go backwards. Across the core measures of reading, maths and science, Scotland has gone from being one of the best to being merely or, indeed, barely average. The children in the study have spent their whole school lives in curriculum for excellence under the guidance of the SNP.

**John Swinney:** I am interested in Mr Johnson's point about curriculum for excellence and the experience of young people. Am I to deduce from what he said that he is no longer a supporter of curriculum for excellence?

**Daniel Johnson:** No. The point is the way in which curriculum for excellence integrates with the examination system. The SQA and Education Scotland were entirely unable to explain who has taken responsibility for the core points of integration of the two elements of the junior and senior phases in senior school. Such a conclusion is highly worrying.

The OECD report published in December 2015 said that curriculum for excellence was at a "make or break moment". Reading the report one year on, we can see how it imagined the negative scenario, saying:

"A context of criticism and cuts could lead to micro management from the centre and growing tension between government and councils."

People will rightly ask whether the SNP is walking down that exact road of cuts and centralisation that the OECD so clearly warned us against.

At this make or break moment, surely the focus must be on Education Scotland and the SQA, the bodies responsible for making curriculum for excellence work. Given the body of evidence before us, surely we must conclude that that is where reform must lie. Where is the ambition and, indeed, the effort to—as the OECD put it—unleash curriculum for excellence's potential?

The First Minister has said that her top priority is education, and the Deputy First Minister has come to his new role, saying that he has got the answers and that his governance review is the thing that will fix education in Scotland. Indeed, he is using the fact that Scottish education is facing the issues that have been highlighted as justification for his preferred reforms. However, these failures are the result of his party's time in government. It is the SNP that created Education Scotland, which now cannot explain who is responsible for curriculum for excellence; it is this Scottish Government that created the exams that our teachers are struggling to make work; and it is this Administration that is overseeing these bodies, which are experiencing a catastrophic loss of trust from the teaching profession.

Before this debate, we knew the legacy of 10 years of SNP Government: 4,000 fewer teachers in our schools—

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Daniel Johnson:** No. That legacy also included 1,000 fewer support staff and Scotland's fall from being world leading to being barely or merely average. However, today's debate shows us that the Government is failing not just to fund education properly but to run it properly, given the dysfunction in the two main education agencies, the problems with the way our curriculum and exams work and the crisis in confidence among our teachers.

Yes, we need reform, but the SNP should look to its own record and fix the mistakes that it has made.

15:09

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** As a member of the Education and Skills Committee, I have great pleasure in contributing to this debate, and I want to start my contribution by paying tribute and giving thanks to the many, many teachers, assistants and various other staff who work tirelessly, day in, day out, in our schools and in the wider education system, including in some of the bodies that have been mentioned by the convener and other speakers.

Members might remember that it was in June 2014—less than three years ago—that the Office for National Statistics showed that Scotland was the most educated country in Europe. It is important to keep that in mind as we go through the debate.

As the convener has said, our scrutiny has been tough at times on witnesses and members. It is important to remember that we have the basis of a world-class education system that is renowned.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Sorry to interrupt, Mr MacGregor. Are members finding that the sound through the microphones is not so clear?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask the people who are responsible for the recording to do something about the microphones so that the sound is clearer.

I am sorry to stop you in your stride, Mr MacGregor, but we want to hear you properly.

**Fulton MacGregor:** Thanks, Presiding Officer.

On 16 November, I visited the SQA offices in Glasgow, along with my committee colleague Ross Thomson. Therefore, I think that it is fair that

I use my time to talk a wee bit about the SQA, especially as it was, after all, our evidence session with the SQA that brought about this debate.

Ross Thomson and I met Janet Brown and a number of senior officials. We heard about the day-to-day work of the SQA, engagement with teachers and schools, the development of awards and how performance is generally measured. We also had the privilege of meeting some of the staff and heard about customer management, the particular difficulties on results day and how those are handled.

Further to that, we must now take into account the far-from-complimentary evidence that has been received, which the convener has talked about. Teachers have taken time to contact us with their concerns about the SQA and to raise questions about the functioning of the SQA and the pressure on teachers and the organisation, with some questioning whether the SQA is fit for purpose. However, it is worth noting that the survey size was around 400-plus out of 50,000-plus teachers. Over the past few years, we have heard a lot about the silent majority—I had not heard that term until a couple of years ago. What can we say about the 49,500 or so teachers who did not respond? Are they happy or satisfied, or do those who responded speak for all? I cannot say with any certainty, and I do not think that anyone else here can; I merely pose the question. I know that there may be colleagues in the chamber to my left and right who will think that by raising the validity of the study I am somehow not scrutinising the situation. Far from it. I have a slightly different view, in that I do not believe that when we scrutinise, we need to say that things are bad, bad—dare I say it—hashtag bad. I come at things from a different angle, believing that it is possible to scrutinise something through a positive framework. That is how I will continue to proceed—as, I believe, will my colleagues in this party and the Scottish Government.

I do not think that our teachers and other people want us to be negative all the time when we are scrutinising things. I think that Mr Johnson's approach was particularly negative.

**Liz Smith:** The member makes an important point when he says that scrutiny is not always about something being bad; it is about something being good, too. However, given some of the good questions that he asked of the education agencies, he will acknowledge that the key point is that we were given muddled and confused evidence that did not allow us to carry out scrutiny effectively. Does he accept that?

**Fulton MacGregor:** I would like to continue and to develop my point further, and I thank the member for making that intervention. I was going on to say that the views of those who contributed

must be taken into account—I do not think that anyone would deny that. I was merely putting those views into the context of how many people responded to the survey.

For the avoidance of any doubt, I would like to quote what I said to Janet Brown and the SQA during the committee's evidence session. When I read it again, I thought that it was quite balanced. I said:

"There is no escaping the fact that the submissions ... are very damning for you—indeed, you have reflected that view ... Can you convince me and this committee that you will seek to change the nature of the relationship between the SQA and teachers? I would like to get an answer that would make me think that, when you come back next year, things will have changed. I think that you are capable of doing that. Indeed, the team whom we met last week are fantastic ... Your opening statement and your previous two responses have covered the facts, but I want to feel convinced."—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 23 November 2016; c 10-11.]

I hope that the improvements that we seek will be made and that we will be able to discuss them in the Parliament at some point in the future.

As members know, I have some excellent educational facilities in my constituency and I take every opportunity to praise them here during debates. Indeed, just yesterday, during an excellent members' business debate that was secured by Liz Smith, I was pleased to be able to highlight the excellent work that is being done through the curriculum for excellence framework by four primary schools in my constituency in relation to physical activity and the daily mile. Each of those schools tweeted and commented on the debate last night.

However, as the convener mentioned, it was disappointing that North Lanarkshire Council put up significant barriers to prevent teachers from being involved in the committee process—even more so as I have good relationships with each of the schools and some of the senior staff at North Lanarkshire Council headquarters, including Isabelle Boyd, who did not seem to have any significant objections to the process.

I was not going to comment on the issue, but given that the convener mentioned it in his statement, I point out that unfortunately the decision appears to have been political in nature. As it is a local matter and given that both the convener and I have taken it up with the council leader, I will leave it at that. I believe that the council leader will not be satisfied with the way in which the situation was handled.

I will finish off where I started by thanking those involved in the system for the amazing job that they do. Education is the most important part of any society, so the commitment of the Government and the cabinet secretary to make

education in Scotland the number 1 priority is important. As we have heard, the Government is committed to funding to reduce the attainment gap.

As other members have said, there is a lot of work to be done in education. Everyone in the chamber, every local authority and anyone who is involved in education, from nursery to university, should be prepared to work together, constructively and in a positive, upbeat manner, to make sure that Scotland retains its status as a world-leader in education.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have some time in hand, so I can give members a minute or so more to accommodate interventions.

15:16

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** On 16 November 2016, Dr John Kemp, the interim director of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, appeared before the Education and Skills Committee. He stated that the Scottish funding council's ambition is that

"Scotland will be the best place in the world in which to educate, learn, research and innovate."

He added that the SFC's task is to

"care for and develop the whole system of colleges and universities, and their connections with and contribution to Scotland's educational, social and cultural life."—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 16 November 2016; c 22.]

I do not doubt it—nor do I doubt that its dedicated staff are committed to those ambitions.

However, despite its position as an arms-length non-departmental public body of the Scottish Government, there is significant concern, which has been articulated well by the National Union of Students Scotland, that the SFC must not

"simply implement Ministerial guidance"

but should be

"more than a vehicle through which funding is delivered".

The line between ministers and the SFC is becoming increasingly blurred. What is more, the people at the SFC and those who are in charge of our higher education system are aware that the public and our education professionals are losing confidence in how education is being managed in our country.

One of the major initiatives of the SNP Government in further education has been the creation, through mergers, of regional colleges. To say that the reaction has been mixed—not least in the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee meetings—would be to put it mildly. In November 2015, the Educational Institute of Scotland published a survey of college lecturers,

in which it had found that 89 per cent did not believe that their merger had improved learning and teaching quality, 91 per cent did not believe that their merger had improved management of their college and 94 per cent did not believe that their merger had improved staff morale.

**Gillian Martin:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Liam Kerr:** I will not, because it is important that members hear this. If Gillian Martin wants to write to me afterwards, I undertake to respond.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that that is rather pompous, but go for it. *[Laughter.]*

**Liam Kerr:** I want to make sure that I get all my words in, Deputy Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I would give you an extra minute if you were to take an intervention, but it is up to you.

**Liam Kerr:** Oh, go on, then. *[Laughter.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That was not very graciously put—but there you are, Ms Martin.

**Gillian Martin:** I am grateful to Liam Kerr for allowing me to make this intervention. He will know that I used to work in one of the colleges that he is talking about. He is a member for North East Scotland: has he visited North East Scotland College and asked the board or any of the staff directly about the merger in our area?

**Liam Kerr:** I thank Gillian Martin for her intervention and I thank the Deputy Presiding Officer for allowing me the opportunity to say, “Yes—I have”.

The Government and the SFC point to savings of £50 million, but Audit Scotland’s report from August 2016, “Scotland’s colleges 2016”, which was scrutinised at the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, says that the savings

“arise mainly from a real-terms reduction in funding to the sector as a whole and not just merged colleges.”

Audit Scotland says that it remains

“unclear how much of these savings are as a direct result of college mergers”.

The same report also raises serious concerns about the SFC policy of cutting funding for part-time courses. Audit Scotland states that that has led to a decrease of 53 per cent in female part-time student numbers. It is that level of parliamentary scrutiny and openness that is mandated if Parliament and the people of Scotland are to have confidence in the system.

**John Swinney:** Will Liam Kerr give way?

**Liam Kerr:** I would rather not, thank you, cabinet secretary.

Universities Scotland put it well when it said that the SFC should be an independent

“expert body at arms’ length from government that can develop detailed policy on how to support the ... sector’s success within broad overall strategic guidance from government.”

However, as Dr Kemp told Johann Lamont:

“When we speak to ministers, we speak to them in private, because that is the ... way to give advice.”—*[Official Report, Education and Skills Committee, 16 November 2016; c 23.]*

Are private discussions really how an arms-length organisation should operate? As Liz Smith pointed out at the same meeting, Audit Scotland is increasingly of the view that the SFC’s long-term strategy lacks transparency and sufficient scrutiny.

That leads neatly on to the motion’s focus on the Scottish Government’s enterprise and skills review. So many organisations, individuals and MSPs find the proposals that are outlined in phase 1 of that review concerning, particularly in relation to the

“creation of a new super-board”.

The Government proposes that it will

“create a new Scotland-wide statutory board to co-ordinate the activities of HIE and SE, including SDI, SDS and the SFC.”

The proposal will possibly—or probably, with a minister in the chair—make the SFC more political. There will be another arm of Government accountable to Government ministers. That will have a detrimental impact on the vital academic independence of our universities and higher education establishments.

**The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Will Liam Kerr give way on that point?

**Liam Kerr:** No, I will not.

In November 2016, Universities Scotland rightly said that we need to make sure that

“universities are independent actors—that we are working in partnership with government, but we are still working as autonomous charities, that we are another force of initiative in society and not being brought in to a directive relationship from government.”

What of the impact of a new superboard? The Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee was concerned to hear from Alastair Sim that

“the more we come into the sphere of influence of and direction from Government, the higher the risk of being reclassified”—

for Office for National Statistics purposes—

“which means that we cannot earn entrepreneurial income or hold reserves”.—[*Official Report, Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee*, 1 December 2016; c 21.]

That aside, what would be the impact of being under the governance of a superboard that has as its remit enterprise and skills rather than the full range of further and higher education institutions’ missions?

In summary, further education and higher education are under immense strain. Audit Scotland has expressed concern that the SFC’s relationship with Government lacks transparency. The Education and Skills Committee is concerned that decisions on the funding and future of our educational establishments are too often taken in private. The merging of colleges has led to a slashing of part-time courses, which is having a detrimental impact on female students—

**Gillian Martin:** Will Liam Kerr take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is in his last minute.

**Liam Kerr:** It remains unclear to the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee and to Audit Scotland whether the apparent £50 million of savings that were promised as a result of mergers have been achieved because of the mergers or simply through budget cuts.

Perhaps most troubling to anyone who believes in open and transparent governance and to those who cherish the independence of academia are the blurring of the line between the arms-length SFC and the Government and the possibility that the independence of our institutions may be put at risk through the proposals in the enterprise and skills review.

15:23

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I am an elected member of South Lanarkshire Council.

I am pleased that Parliament is getting the chance to give closer scrutiny to the important evidence that the Education and Skills Committee has gathered, during its pre-budget scrutiny sessions, from the SQA, Education Scotland, SDS and the Scottish funding council.

Some of the evidence that has been given to the committee during recent meetings is troubling. Concerns over the SQA’s effectiveness, alongside concerns about the role of Education Scotland and the funding council, are deeply worrying. It is imperative that Parliament takes them seriously.

The education system faces significant challenges, which is borne out by the spate of

damning statistics that have been released over the past few months. When our Education and Skills Committee is now also exploring key issues that question the very core functions of the key education bodies that deliver and regulate the education system, it seems to me to be clear that there are serious challenges that must be addressed.

Last month’s damning PISA statistics tell us that after a decade of this Administration we have seen Scottish education go backwards, with falling standards in reading, mathematics and science, while the attainment gap between pupils from the richest and pupils from the most deprived backgrounds persists. Meanwhile, we have 4,000 fewer teachers than we had when the SNP came to power. The number of pupils with identified additional support needs has substantially increased, but the number of additional support needs teachers fell by 13 per cent between 2010 and 2015, according to the Scottish Government’s statistics.

**The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald):** Because the argument has been well rehearsed in the chamber, Monica Lennon will know that although additional support needs teachers are trained to deal with pupils with, for example, autism or dyslexia, the definition of additional support needs was expanded to include, for example, periods of bereavement and other short-term needs that require support above and beyond that which is normally delivered in the school setting. Therefore, the two are not necessarily directly analogous.

**Monica Lennon:** The fact remains that we now have more information about the needs of children, but there has been a decline in support. The children’s charities are telling Parliament and the Government that they fear that there will be a lost generation when it comes to opportunities for young people with additional support needs. I hope that we can continue to debate that.

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** Will Monica Lennon give way on that point?

**Monica Lennon:** I will make some progress, if I may. [*Interruption.*] I will make way for Christina McKelvie.

**Christina McKelvie:** Will Councillor Lennon tell us how many special educational needs teachers were sacked by South Lanarkshire Council last year?

**Monica Lennon:** Christina McKelvie needs to reflect on the comment that she made. I have never heard her raise any concerns about the budget pressures that South Lanarkshire Council faces. In fact, we hear from SNP members that councils are receiving fair settlements but what is



happening in local government and their communities is not at all fair. Christina McKelvie can, perhaps, clarify her position at another opportunity.

The cutting of resources means that hard-working teachers are forced to pick up extra workload, which puts the sector under ever-increasing strain and means that the educational experience of our young people ultimately suffers.

The teacher submissions to the committee regarding the SQA show beyond doubt that the authority and the Government have lost the full confidence of teachers. When teachers express their experience of the SQA as being that it is—to quote some of the submissions—“entirely negative”, “hugely inconsistent” and “not fit for purpose”, it is clear that there is a serious problem, although others may choose to ignore that.

Rather than addressing those real problems, the Scottish Government and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills are, I fear, looking in the wrong place for solutions to the challenges. The school governance review puts the emphasis on reforming where power lies in relation to schools, in a misguided attempt to restructure local government responsibility for education that only risks creating yet more layers of bureaucracy and confusion for parents and pupils, and will do little to affect outcomes. Our education system needs more resources. That means more teachers and more support staff so that our children have the support that they need to succeed. That means using the Parliament's powers to invest in our schools and protect education budgets, not rushing into wrong-headed reforms.

The Government should listen to the experts about its education governance review. The Scottish Parent Teacher Council is right to have expressed concern about how accessible the consultation was to parents. It is telling that the majority of respondents skipped the questions about the governance review. That highlights where parents' real priorities lie and should be a signal to the Government that it is focusing its attention in the wrong place.

As Daniel Johnson said, Children in Scotland is among the latest organisations to have questioned the plans this week by expressing concern that the current proposals for governance reform will have virtually zero impact on educational attainment. The view of parents, teachers and education professionals across the sector is clear: lack of proper resource, not school governance, is where the problem lies.

It is concerning and, perhaps, telling that there is a common thread of critique from teachers and parents across the education system about miscommunication and complex, inaccessible

information, whether that relates to experiences of dealing with SQA documentation or attempting to access the governance review. We must remember that the most important thing about the debate is that we improve outcomes for our children. We can all agree on that, even though we may disagree on the best way to go about it.

Behind the statistics on cuts to staff numbers, cuts to support staff and falling attainment are the individual experiences of teachers who are under pressure and pupils who are not getting the experiences that they deserve or the support that they need to fulfil their potential.

To close the attainment gap and tackle inequality, I believe that we need to take a broad view of what support our education system can offer to pupils. A fully rounded education has to be about more than just attainment, important though it is. It must also be about ensuring that our children have a rounded experience and that their health and emotional wellbeing are considered. The provision of counsellors in every school would be a huge step in the right direction.

I believe that we must take a whole-system view with regard to improving the educational experience of our young people, and that that should be included in any considerations of what the roles and functions of our education bodies are, or should be.

15:30

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** I would like to raise two key issues that have arisen out of the Education and Skills Committee's scrutiny of the education and enterprise agencies: the proposed new superboard that would replace the boards of the Scottish funding council, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Enterprise, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the performance of the SQA and the breakdown in teachers' trust in the authority. I am disappointed that the Scottish Government has insisted on pushing ahead with its centralisation agenda, despite the concerns that have been expressed across the political spectrum, by local authorities, by our partners in education and by experts including the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

The Government has insisted that the review of enterprise and skills is premised on evidence and focused on a step change, but the proposed new superboard meets neither of those principles. The Education and Skills Committee has been acutely aware of the fact that there is little evidence to support the idea of a new superboard replacing the existing boards for the education and enterprises agencies. When we asked Keith Brown to produce such evidence, he highlighted four submissions out of the more than 300

responses that we received to our call for evidence. On inspection, it turns out that those submissions do not actually call for the existing boards to be abolished. They call for clarity and consistency in the direction of Scotland's economic strategy—I am sure that we all share that concern—and they highlight the potential for a Scotland-wide strategic board, but they do not call for the existing boards to be abolished.

In the case of the Scottish funding council, the fact that the board of the funding council is the funding council has been the subject of much discussion by the committee. It appears that the cabinet secretary has been rather liberal in his interpretation of the evidence that has been provided, in that he has interpreted legitimate concerns about the complexity of the existing structures as an endorsement of the Scottish National Party's push for centralisation and closer Government control.

The evidence—to me, at least—seems to suggest the opposite; it seems to suggest that there are concerns and opposition to the Government's superboard plans. The Royal Society of Edinburgh, the University and College Union, the NUS and Universities Scotland have all raised concerns about the independence of the Scottish funding council following the creation of a superboard. The proposed superboard also goes beyond the step-change remit of the governance review.

The Government has so far refused to rule out the new board being chaired by a minister. Such a step would significantly enhance Government control over the agencies in question and would potentially end their status as arm's-length bodies. It would also severely endanger the independence of Scotland's universities, which is absolutely vital to their world-class competitiveness and their ability to attract funding.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I reassure Ross Greer and Liam Kerr—who did not give me the opportunity to do so earlier—that the Government will do nothing to jeopardise the independence of the higher education institutions or, indeed, to risk their reclassification by the ONS. We are categorical about that, and we have said so to Universities Scotland.

**Ross Greer:** The minister raises an issue that I am just about to come to. The Government seems to have reached a conclusion and will now assess how it can make that conclusion work, despite the fact that it has not assessed what the effects will be.

In their appearances before the committee, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills were unable to provide anything

approaching evidence of the effect that the superboard proposal could have on, for example, research funding. There is significant concern about the risk of higher education institutions being reclassified as public bodies, as the minister mentioned.

I have been left with the distinct impression that regardless of the conclusions, which I feel are misguided, the process has been flawed in the extreme. It seems that the Government has reached a conclusion—one that I expect it would have reached regardless of what evidence was submitted—and has decided unequivocally to press ahead with that conclusion, and will only now assess what the impact is. In phase 1 a conclusion was reached, and in phase 2 the Government is going to assess what its impact will be. That is not the right way to proceed; it is not evidence-based policy making. It is not acceptable.

There are further concerns about the suitability of a superboard that would, according to the Government, be tasked with bringing

“greater integration and focus to the delivery of ... enterprise and skills”

and would oversee further and higher education funding. Scotland's colleges and universities are certainly important for the skills of the nation, but they are also much more than that, and the agencies that are involved in the proposals have remits that go far beyond enterprise and skills.

Education and research is a goal in itself. The freedom to pursue lines of inquiry even where they do not appear to contribute directly to economic development is absolutely vital to the freedom of our universities. None of us questions that. Many of humanity's greatest discoveries have occurred quite by accident—for example, the Scottish scientist Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin by accident during his research at St Mary's hospital. Our funding for colleges and universities cannot be dictated, diluted by or have its focus taken away by a focus on enterprise and skills goals. I ask for assurances from the cabinet secretary that he will rethink the Government's proposals to abolish the existing boards and at the very least ensure some level of independence for our universities by guaranteeing that any new superboard will not be chaired by a minister.

In the Education and Skills Committee's scrutiny of the education agencies, it has become increasingly apparent that an alarming breakdown in trust has occurred between the SQA and the teachers whom it works with, and that, crucially, the SQA does not seem to recognise that breakdown in trust. The development of new qualifications under the curriculum for excellence has contributed to unsustainable workloads and a

lack of clarity for both teachers and pupils. I appreciate that the cabinet secretary recognises that and has worked towards workload reduction, but we have seen that there are issues. Exam scripts that have contained significant errors have been used—we have discussed them in Parliament—and there has been a significant variation in the quality of the marking of some exams.

It is apparent that teachers do not always feel comfortable about openly raising and discussing the problems that face the SQA and implementation of the curriculum for excellence. The convener of the committee mentioned the value of the anonymous submissions that we received. The fact that we received so many submissions with such consistency from so many teachers was informative and deeply alarming, as was the discussion that the convener and I hosted in the Parliament with a group of primary and secondary teachers. The evidence is unlike any other evidence that I have seen in my short time in Parliament.

We need to consider how to improve oversight of the SQA and repair the trust of teachers. The Scottish Government should consider the proposals that the EIS has made for greater teacher representation, including on the boards of education agencies, and particularly the SQA.

Scottish education is world-renowned. However, we know that although staff and students put in incredible effort, something is not working, at present. In reviewing the four agencies, the committee has uncovered a number of areas in which clear improvements can be made and in which the Scottish Government's current efforts are perhaps misguided. I hope that the Government will carefully consider them.

15:37

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** On Ross Greer's central point about evidence, it strikes me that there is a slight disconnect between the argument that there is no evidence for the proposal to have a superboard and abolish the other boards—I am talking not about the principle that the cabinet secretary outlined but about the argument that Ross Greer made—and the argument that people have made that there is something slightly wrong with the number of representations that the Education and Skills Committee received from teachers, which raises the question whether that evidence really reflects teachers' views and concerns about the SQA and some of our other bodies. We cannot have it both ways. There has been evidence to the committee, whereas evidence failed to be presented for the superboard. I want the Government to at least

reflect on that in the phase 2 considerations, as it has not taken Parliament with it on the proposal.

I will address a slightly wider issue, but I first apologise to members for having to leave early. The weather is such that I am going to try to catch an early flight to Sumburgh, although snow may stop that.

I thank James Dornan for the careful and, indeed, cheerful way in which he convenes the Education and Skills Committee. That is not an easy task, given the varied quality of its members—I very much include myself in that.

I will address a point that the cabinet secretary made in his opening remarks. He was right that teachers are at the core of the debate; that, as Liz Smith and Daniel Johnson also said, our biggest educational challenge is implementing curriculum for excellence; and that we as a committee have established that there is concern—one's views about the level of that concern are open to interpretation—about how curriculum for excellence has been implemented and, crucially, about the role of the curriculum for excellence management board, which includes the SQA, Education Scotland, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and local authorities and which is chaired by the Government.

As the convener said, we will take further evidence on that in due course, but any objective assessment of the evidence that we already have, by the Government or any outside body, would have to say that something has not worked; otherwise, the Royal Society of Edinburgh would not have said in its briefing for today's debate:

"In our view, coherent strategic leadership, especially at an educational professional level, has been virtually non-existent, and implementation of CfE has suffered profoundly from inadequate attention having been given to how change should be managed."

Maybe the royal society is overdoing it but, even if it is half right or a quarter right, that is a profound finding about what has been going on in the past nine years. The Government must reflect on that in the review that is under way.

The cabinet secretary rightly set out some changes that have taken place in relation to Scottish education and performance, but he also has to reflect on the PISA findings, as he did, and on the new focus—it is new—on literacy and numeracy by him and his Government. They are right to do that but, if nothing else, that is an admission that not all has been well and that the implementation of curriculum for excellence has not gone as it should. That means that we need to ask some fundamental questions, in particular about Education Scotland and its structure.

The OECD report that the cabinet secretary cited said some fairly damning things about

Education Scotland in relation to the implementation of curriculum for excellence. At page 45, the report talked about the comprehensibility of curriculum for excellence. At page 77, it described the “scattergun approach” to strategic planning, and on page 109 it cited the need for “simplifying the simplification process”, if that is not an oxymoron.

There are fundamental questions about Education Scotland’s effectiveness. A study of the employees’ views of the organisation has recently been published. The most damning point in it is on Education Scotland’s woeful performance in the key category of managing change, which is what the process has been all about. In 2016, only 11 per cent of Education Scotland’s employees thought that change was well managed by Education Scotland. If the education secretary or a local authority leader were to find a school with such results, the demand for change would be clear. The headteacher would probably be looking for a new position, or there would certainly be lots of continuous professional development and so on.

I suggest to the cabinet secretary and his colleagues that we cannot ignore the reality of what has happened and the need for change. The change that I advocate is simple. I strongly believe that Education Scotland should be split to reflect its two functions. The inspection of not just schools but other parts of the education regime is a profoundly different function from giving policy guidance to ministers, which Education Scotland must do. I say to Liam Kerr that some of that guidance must be private. I take his point, but Education Scotland should brief any cabinet secretary in private. That is a very different function from conducting the inspection regime and, if I may be so bold, I point out that the two are quite separate.

My committee colleagues have provided a range of evidence on the SQA. It seems to me that the challenge function and the scrutiny of how the SQA has co-ordinated its activities on exams, their design and the assessment process with Education Scotland and the other bodies that are involved in the management board have not worked. It is difficult not to come to that conclusion in the first instance. I hope that the Government will reflect on that and find a way in which the management board can start not to bring the organisations round the table—by definition, it has been doing that—but to get them to concentrate on what needs to happen to make the lives of our teachers much more straightforward and their ability to teach successfully much more powerful.

My final point is on the Scottish funding council. Ross Greer, Liz Smith and Daniel Johnson among others have made the case for leaving that

organisation well alone. I believe the Government when it says that it does not want to interfere with the independence of higher education institutions or the university sector more broadly, but it should therefore do the sensible and logical thing based on that position, which is to leave the board alone. Alice Brown and her board provide the required challenge function to the chief executive and the executive team. That should stay that way, and I urge the Government to ensure that that is exactly what happens.

15:44

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):**

The profession with responsibility for our country’s teaching and learning is one of the best and most important professions out there. Teaching is the career that I previously chose—I was a college lecturer—as did my husband, who is a secondary school teacher. I know how hard those on the ground worked over the years to implement the curriculum for excellence; if I forget, my husband will surely remind me. The cabinet secretary rightly points out that the curriculum for excellence is a collaborative enterprise between teachers, local authorities and all the various agencies.

I say honestly that scrutiny of our education system from the confines of a committee room in Parliament has been a challenge for me, particularly given my knowledge of the tremendous work that is going on in the schools and colleges that I know from personal experience. I am always mindful of that when levelling any criticism.

I found it quite distressing at First Minister’s question time today to hear Willie Rennie say that our schools are failing, particularly when pupils and teachers from Balwearie high school in Kirkcaldy—one of the top-performing schools in Scotland—were sitting in the public gallery. Our schools are not failing. We should never lump the whole school system in with any comments on individual agencies, although those comments are absolutely valid. Anyone who says that our schools are failing should think about how that is received out there in our schools. I got a text later from a friend who is a teacher, who was watching FMQs in their lunch hour, which said, “Cheers, Willie.” How does what was said make them feel?

An education system must always be in development to apply to changing times. That is why we must always reach out to practitioners to see where the system can be improved. It is noted that we are just at the end of the first whole cycle of the new system. My son left sixth year last year and is a living and breathing product of the first cycle of curriculum for excellence. The curriculum has worked well for him. The whole person, broad curricular approach allowed my son—who I do not

think would mind me saying is not particularly academic in the traditional, bookish sense but is driven in other ways—to find out what he is good at. It equipped him with skills that I see him using at his college—I mention to Mr Kerr that it is a top-performing Scottish college. This might be a good point for Mr Kerr to intervene on me and give me more detail on the conversations that he has had with my former colleagues on what they think about the merger process. No? Okay.

My son's experience, if I can use it as an example, does not equate with the bad press that the education system has had in the past couple of months. In fact, let us put that bad press into perspective. More school leavers are reaching positive destinations than ever before. Higher pass rates last year were very high, and college and university application numbers are at an all-time high. This week, we heard from the Institute for Public Policy Research that youth unemployment is at its lowest level since 2001 and has been consistently lower than the overall United Kingdom unemployment rate. The cabinet secretary outlined an awful lot more.

Modern apprenticeships are providing positive destinations all over Scotland and industry is getting more involved in learning. Colleges are, rightly, focusing on courses that lead to employment. Let us nail the part-time course thing once and for all—although I doubt that I will be able to, because I feel that I am on my feet defending it every single week. I will not accept the well-worn line from Opposition members that the level of part-time courses is to the detriment of people's education. We now have more people going into work as a result of their experiences in colleges.

The work of SDS on early intervention to identify pupils who might not reach a positive destination is crucial, as is a refocusing on achievement that is not just aligned with academia. If we recognise the diversity of skills that children have an aptitude for and which have career opportunities, that will benefit our society and economy as a whole.

I note that some chambers of commerce and economic development agencies have urged SDS to be more mindful of diversity and to adapt to local needs, particularly in rural areas. The report from the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce cited gender stereotyping as an issue and wanted improvements in the involvement of black and minority ethnic, disabled and care-leaving young people in modern apprenticeships. At the Education and Skills Committee on 9 November 2016, I highlighted to SDS the issue of involving more small and medium-sized businesses in modern apprenticeships, which is a concern that has been raised with me.

It is true that, in reaching out to stakeholders, we have seen issues with the education agencies consistently raised. Teachers pointed to things that hindered rather than helped them. The SQA is still struggling to rein in the copious amounts of guidance materials, which we were told were often impenetrable and used confusing and contradictory language. Serious instances of a lack of consistency between the curriculum guidance and exam papers are well documented and are simply unacceptable.

The inspections system at Education Scotland also came in for criticism. Teachers told us of the stress and pointlessness of working during evenings and weekends to print evidence and documents for the inspection. Education Scotland assured us that it is working hard to change inspections. My exchange with Alastair Delaney of Education Scotland on 30 November 2016 outlines the commitments that Education Scotland has made on that.

I have seen evidence of such work by Education Scotland. I recently visited a primary school in my constituency that did not do well in a stressful inspection years ago, which meant that staff morale had been low. It was recently reinspected and the headteacher told me that that inspection was an entirely new experience for the school—a positive experience. It focused on support rather than judgment; on teaching and learning rather than paperwork; and on professional development and ideas rather than box ticking. I congratulate Newburgh Mathers primary on how it has turned its inspection report into one that it can justly be very proud of. However, the inspection culture change is not complete, as is evident from responses to our committee consultation.

The implementation and development of a curriculum is a work in progress. The committee has identified where more work is urgently required, and the agencies that have appeared in front of the committee have been left in no doubt as to where our correspondents think that their attention should be focused.

15:51

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** I welcome the debate and thank the convener of the Education and Skills Committee for bringing it to the chamber. I am not a member of the committee; I come as a local councillor and as a parent. I waded through the different reports over the past couple of evenings with an interest in seeing where we are, particularly in regard to Education Scotland.

I am sure that most members, as they woke up with a clear head on 1 January, reviewed the previous year and then looked forward to making

resolutions for the year ahead. The same could be said as we start a new year in relation to looking at Education Scotland. This is a good time to review its function and operation to see what is working and what needs to change.

The first function of Education Scotland is to develop policy, but it is interesting that teachers gave evidence to the committee that it is failing in that role; teachers are confused and do not understand what is put before them. When evidence was being taken by the committee, there were 20,000 pages on the Education Scotland website. How is a local primary or secondary school teacher with a busy life meant to find information?

I accept that the number of pages has been reduced, but we have to ask how we got to that situation in the first place. Who allowed that? Who was monitoring and scrutinising the situation so that they could see that it was not acceptable?

If Education Scotland failed to develop policy, it certainly failed to do quality assurance. It is there to scrutinise what is going on, and that brings us to a very interesting question that we all have to look at as politicians. Is Education Scotland there fundamentally to help and support teachers or is it there as an arm of the Scottish Government?

The Scottish Government might be clear on that, but I do not think that teachers and others who gave evidence to the committee are. It is difficult to be judge and jury. I would love to have gone to university, sat my paper and then marked it myself, but that would have been unacceptable—yet that is what we ask Education Scotland to do.

**John Swinney:** That gets to the nub of one of the key points, because that is precisely not what Education Scotland is asked to do. Education Scotland supports the development and delivery of policy in communities, but it then inspects the delivery by schools of that policy. It does not judge itself and is not judge and jury of itself; it judges the implementation of agreed policy by individual schools to help to drive improvement in education. That is the fundamental error that is at the heart of Mr Balfour's argument.

**Jeremy Balfour:** That might well be the cabinet secretary's understanding, but it is not what came out in the evidence. If that is the case, why is Scotland one of only four countries in the world to have such a system? Almost every other country has two bodies to do the two separate functions. Why do we not have that system?

Another issue that is important to raise is the decline in inspections. Whatever the figures are—I admit that, in the end, I gave up trying to work out the exact numbers—it is clear that there are fewer inspections in our schools today than in 2010.

**Gillian Martin:** That does not necessarily correlate. If there are fewer inspections, the quality of inspections actually improves. We do not have to have lots of inspections—in fact, they are very time consuming for teachers to undertake.

**Jeremy Balfour:** I accept Gillian Martin's point, but my point is that, if there are fewer inspections, fewer children and parents know whether their schools are acceptable. I totally accept that that does not deal with inspection quality—that is a separate issue—but fewer schools are inspected now, so people who live in a certain area will not know how schools there are doing.

I would have thought that, as the curriculum for excellence has been implemented across Scotland during the past years, there would be more, not less, need for inspection. However, as far as I can see, no evaluation of the curriculum for excellence is going on. Before anybody from the Government benches jumps up, I say that we are not against the curriculum for excellence.

**John Swinney:** Mr Balfour has been extremely generous in taking interventions and I am conscious that I am popping up from the Government benches. The Government invited the OECD to evaluate the curriculum for excellence. That has been done and we could not have been more open about that.

**Jeremy Balfour:** However, that is not the baseline. What has come out of that and the PISA results is that we do not have a good system at the moment, yet nothing is being done about it.

The final issue is subject choice. A number of parents, particularly from Edinburgh and the Lothians, have contacted me about that. They feel that their children are being pushed too early down paths that they do not want to go down. There is a lack of subject choice and, depending on the school and the region that they live in, people are not being allowed to do subjects that they want to study. If we are not careful, we will end up with a lottery that depends not only on regions but on catchment areas in cities, towns, villages or other areas.

My time has gone, so I cannot answer the many questions that I have asked. We need to come to those questions not just so that we can scrutinise Government agencies and fill up two or three hours of parliamentary time. Far more important than that is the fact that, if we do not get it right for parents, pupils and teachers, we will be failing not only a generation but Scotland in the 21st century. My fear is that Education Scotland is not doing what it should be doing.

15:59

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** As a member of the Education and Culture Committee in the previous parliamentary session and of the Education and Skills Committee in this session, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the motion today.

As members will have noted from the motion and from the convener's opening speech, part of the committee's recent remit has been a focus on scrutiny and evidence gathering on the roles of four national organisations: the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Education Scotland, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish funding council. The committee secured answers to the following questions. Are the core functions of those bodies correct or are there alternative approaches? Are the bodies delivering on those core functions? Should the roles or structures of the organisations change as a result of the governance review or the enterprise and skills review? Can the organisations demonstrate their performance, reflecting the best use of taxpayers' money? Are they sufficiently mindful of equalities in delivering their functions? Are they sufficiently independent of Government, acting as a sufficient advisory and challenge function to Government? Do they respond effectively to the needs of stakeholders and to constructive advice?

It is clear to me—and, I hope, to my colleagues—that the process was both rigorous and effective in identifying the present situation in each organisation. In particular, the process allowed a wide range of stakeholders to express their opinions. To allow for a maximum range of opinion, the evidence gathering took a variety of forms. The online surveys that ran from 2 October to 1 November provided a total of 1,171 responses from teachers and lecturers through to parents and pupils. Those surveys were widely disseminated through social media as well as through the Parliament's education services newsletter, which is widely read by teachers, and they were sent to political correspondents at major Scottish media and educational establishments. The success of those methods is evidenced by the substantial range and number of responses.

Evidence was also gathered in person when the committee held an informal meeting with teachers. To build on that evidence, committee members individually arranged to visit a local educational establishment to speak directly with stakeholders. I visited Newbattle high school in Dalkeith. I was keen to canvass the thoughts of the teachers at Newbattle, as the school is located in a catchment area that covers three of the most socially deprived areas in Scotland. Around 69 per cent of pupils at the school are sourced from areas of

multiple deprivation. The staff and teachers at Newbattle high do incredibly well under those circumstances and, in meeting them, I was able to understand at first hand whether our local and national institutions are providing the required amount of support and guidance and to feed that back directly to the Education and Skills Committee.

To return to the surveys, they included questions that were designed to reflect how each organisation contributed to a range of the Scottish Government's national outcomes. While some of the surveys had fewer participants than others—there were 646 respondents to the SQA survey in comparison with 83 respondents to the colleges and universities survey—the responses were enlightening, and they revealed clear mismatches in understanding in respect of the work of each organisation.

On the national outcome that states,

“Our young people are more successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens”,

colleges and universities were thought to make a valuable contribution, with almost half of respondents saying that they contributed “a great deal”. The modern apprenticeship scheme was also valued, with roughly a third of respondents rating its contribution similarly. Conversely, Education Scotland was highlighted as an organisation that did not contribute as well to the national outcomes that were listed in the survey. In the case of the above outcome, 62 per cent of respondents felt that Education Scotland's guidance and support contributed either “a little” or “not at all”, while 63 per cent responded with similar answers for Education Scotland's inspections. Those responses were broadly similar to those for Education Scotland regarding the second national outcome in the survey, which states:

“We are better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our research and innovation”.

The surveys and the evidence that was gathered shed light on a range of issues surrounding the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Generally, participants were on the fence in responding to the above queries on outcomes, but more than two thirds of respondents disagreed with the SQA's values statement that

“Our customers and users trust us to get it right for them”.

The differences between how the SQA perceives itself and how its work is regarded by end users is clearly an issue, even though the SQA is a valued organisation. Almost three quarters of survey participants agreed that SQA qualifications

“enable learners to access and progress within further and higher education”.

The survey picked up a variety of issues with the SQA, including the fact that its documentation is unclear; its assessment standards are not well understood; marking is inconsistent; and—to put it simply—there are too many changes. The anonymous submissions included the following comments:

“SQA has not been able to communicate information in a clear concise manner”;

“There have been so many mistakes ... that we no longer trust anything that comes from them”;

“SQA has lost the respect and trust of Scottish teachers”;

and, perhaps most pertinently,

“I cannot communicate strongly enough how discouraging it is to see keen, talented, hardworking pupils walk away from my subject with a C when they deserved an A or decide not to continue with art because they cannot deal with the physical workload.”

Those opinions were reinforced by others that I heard in my discussions at Newbattle high school, with teachers stating that qualifications and assessments had been dictating the curriculum in recent years and, in particular, what teachers concentrated on delivering in the classroom to get the pupils through examinations.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** Can you close, please, Mr Beattie?

**Colin Beattie:** I thank all respondents for their participation and the committee clerks for their hard work. I look forward to being part of the next steps that the committee takes on the issue and seeing how that work informs the roles of other committees.

16:05

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I am not a member of the Education and Skills Committee, so I have not been privy to all its evidence sessions. However, I will offer my reflections on an issue that is close to my heart, and I thank the committee for the important scrutiny that it is undertaking.

When I was listening to the opening speeches by the committee convener, Mr Swinney, Liz Smith and Daniel Johnson, I was extremely worried to hear about the confusion and lack of confidence in our key education agencies. We should all legitimately be very concerned about that, because we do not have to look that far back to remember a time when the SQA was seen as a real hallmark in Scotland and a benchmarking institution with rigorous standards—I like to think that it was so when I passed my highers, but I think that the SQA was generally thought of in that light.

The SQA has not been without its problems since devolution, under different Governments, but

the lack of confidence in the SQA among teachers that the convener outlined earlier in the debate is of concern to me and—I think—every member of the Parliament and to parents across the country. Of more acute concern to me, however, is how that is contributing to education in every school in this country and to the performance generally of education, which is the lifeline for opportunities in our communities.

It was with great sadness and a bit of despair that I read the PISA results at the end of last year, and the statistics released by the Scottish Government on 13 December caused me and many colleagues further grave concern and confusion. I will make two points on that. Liz Smith outlined concerns about the rigour of data, and I think that she was referring to Education Scotland and the SQA. I was confused and perplexed by the data that was released on 13 December, as I think many colleagues, journalists and other people were, and I will give an example to illustrate that. The data showed that 20 to 30 per cent of pupils at Fintry primary school in Dundee achieved the expected levels of writing at primary school but that, by the time they reached secondary school, their writing achievement levels had shot up to 90 per cent. Even council officials in Dundee have indicated to me that those statistics should be taken with a pinch of salt, which leads me to question the efficacy of that work and ask how, if it is just an experiment, it will improve.

Of graver concern to me than the bare statistics, however, is that they are another clear indicator that our education system is struggling more than it used to. The PISA and 13 December statistics represent a trend in the wrong direction. The more statistics we have monitoring that trend, the less we can ignore it or be complacent.

On 13 December, I was reflecting on those statistics and my mind wound back to a discussion that I took part in at the University of Dundee during the Scottish referendum campaign. I hope to be excused for making a political point in this committee debate, but I said during that referendum debate that we should be concentrating our political energies on domestic concerns such as education, because education in Scotland was not as good as it used to be. Shona Robison immediately dismissed my concerns as talking Scotland down, but I note now that this stuff has come home to roost and that, especially since the publication of the PISA data, the Scottish Government has had to wake up to the realities and the funding decisions that are being made.

Dundee City Council will have to make budget cuts of £12.5 million in February, after paring budgets back year after year. Teachers in attainment schools in Dundee tell me that they do



not know how they can be expected to raise attainment when classroom assistants have gone from their very classrooms; when all the early years practitioners who are trained in literacy support were stripped out of those schools in deprived areas to cover the Government's childcare hours commitments in nurseries; when Dundee has seen a 28 per cent reduction in additional support needs teachers, which is twice the national reduction; and when, to my confusion, none—not one penny—of the £4.8 million attainment money that was allocated to Dundee has been spent on additional specialist teachers in literacy and numeracy. Instead, a handful of modern apprentices have been employed, but I am not really sure what qualifications young modern apprentices have in raising attainment and raising standards of literacy and numeracy in our schools.

The new secondary school building in Dundee, Harris academy, which Mr Swinney opened in December, is already scores of children over capacity and overcrowded after the SNP closed and merged Menzieshill high school last year.

I wish the Education and Skills Committee all the best with its scrutiny of a critical issue for the future of Scotland. Shedding light on the efficacy of the SQA and Education Scotland must bear fruit for our pupils in our schools across the country as we seek to reverse the downward trend that the statistics report.

16:11

**Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP):** As a member of the Education and Skills Committee, I begin by congratulating our convener, James Dornan, on summarising very well in his opening speech the issues that arose from the evidence that we took on the agencies.

In my few short months as a member of the committee, I have been struck by the myriad factors that impact on the ability of children in Scotland to learn and the quality of education that is delivered in our schools, universities and colleges and through the other agendas. They are enormously complex. Today, the focus is on the agencies and the role that they play, and I will refer to many of the issues that arose from our taking evidence on the SQA and Education Scotland. However, it is worth saying at the outset that education is about a lot more than agencies. Gillian Martin touched on an important point in that regard.

Recently, I visited Speyside high school and Keith grammar school in my constituency. I have visited many schools over the years, as many other members have. When I go in and speak to the teachers, the other staff and the pupils, they

talk about the future of education. They do not say to me that we should scrap the SQA or Education Scotland. They talk about many of the wider issues in our society and the impact that they are having on our children's ability to learn. They talk about how the children who are coming to school with empty stomachs can have a proper ability to learn. They talk about the chaotic lifestyles that many of our families have and the impact that that has. Of course they talk about issues that can be linked to the performance of the agencies, such as teachers' workload, which I will move on to, but we have to recognise that the agencies are just one small part of a wider jigsaw and ensure that we keep the other issues in focus as well.

This afternoon's debate is focusing on the results that we got from the survey of 211 teachers out of the 50,000 who work in Scotland. It is also important to keep that in perspective. That is not to demean the concerns that were expressed by the 211 teachers, because all members know from speaking to constituents and visiting schools that the burden on teachers, teachers' workloads and some of the other issues that we are discussing today are common concerns for teachers right across Scotland—for many of the 50,000 and not just the 211. However, we must keep that statistic in perspective.

As an Opposition member of the Parliament between 1999 and 2007—like the cabinet secretary, John Swinney—I regularly raised the issue of teachers' workload with the education ministers at the time. It is not a new issue. Many of the issues that we are discussing today are not new, but they are the subject of a new focus because of some of the statistics about the direction that Education Scotland is taking and some of the global statistics that members have highlighted. We now have a golden opportunity to address some of the issues, and that is why I welcome the fact that the education secretary has made doing that such a focus.

Over the past few years, the agencies have had to cope with the implementation of curriculum for excellence, which has soaked up a huge amount of time and energy, and now we have the Scottish Government's welcome and bold commitment to close the attainment gap over the course of the current session of Parliament.

As I said, the agencies alone cannot close that gap. We cannot focus too much on schools in the debate; we must look at the factors in wider society that I was referring to. When I speak to educationists, as I have been doing today, they reiterate that we must look at pre-school education and our pupils' ability to learn when they come into P1. The issue is not just about our primary and secondary school education systems; it is part of a much wider debate. Local authorities, the Scottish

Government, Parliament and our leadership in schools must all work together to wrestle the big challenges.

In the evidence that it received from the SQA and Education Scotland, the committee identified issues such as the complexity of guidance, the lack of clarity, the constant changes and revisions, and the burden that those things put on teachers' ability to teach, and those issues must be addressed. We got some very welcome commitments from the agencies that they are being addressed. We know that the cabinet secretary and the Government are determined to address them as well, which is very important.

We must address the jargon. One of the big issues is ensuring that the debate takes place not only in this chamber among MSPs. It must be a debate that is understood by the people of Scotland, particularly parents and pupils—and teachers, of course—and everyone else who has a direct interest. We cannot have transparency and openness if we have to concentrate on so much jargon; we must move away from it.

In the committee, I learned what “Es and Os” stands for: it is—for the purposes of the *Official Report*—“experiences and outcomes”, not the song by Ellie King that I have been listening to recently called “Ex’s and Oh’s”. I keep getting the title of that song wrong because of the Es and Os phrase being used at the Education and Skills Committee far too often. When she appeared before the committee, Janet Brown, in answer to one of our questions, spoke about associated personalised areas. I still do not know what that means. It is important that the leaders of all our agencies with a role in education—we are not picking on the SQA or Education Scotland—speak in language that can be understood by people, not just MSPs, politicians and the Government.

In my last minute, I will address the teacher crisis in Moray. We have a shortage of teachers, which will affect the ability to close the attainment gap. I have been told today that 23 adverts will be placed in the press tomorrow for teachers to work in Moray, but overall there are 33 vacancies. That shortage is causing big problems in our schools in Moray and other places, including some of our cities but mainly rural areas. Workforce planning is important and I welcome the steps that the Government is taking to address the issue. Clearly, the number of vacancies means that the remaining teachers in our schools have to carry an extra workload burden, and it will affect the ability to teach some subjects from August 2017. I urge the cabinet secretary to continue to speak to Moray Council and other local authorities that are affected, because it is now a matter of urgency that must be addressed.

I thank the committee and my colleagues for all the work that they have done to highlight these important issues and I wish the cabinet secretary well in grasping what is a big issue for the future of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The time for the last two speakers will have to be very tight.

16:18

**Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** I remind members that I am the parliamentary liaison officer to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. I also declare an interest as a former marker for standard grade and higher modern studies at the SQA and as a national qualifications development officer while I was seconded to Education Scotland.

I recall one of my first meetings at Education Scotland. My line manager at the time followed me out of the meeting, took my face in her hands in a motherly fashion and said to me, “Jenny, you’ve got to stop showing what you think on your face.” I am well aware that my face gives me away in this place every single time I get up to speak about schools, because when it comes to our schools, we politicians have to be extremely careful of the narrative that we use in Parliament, as my colleague Gillian Martin so eloquently said in her speech. Right now there are pupils sitting their prelims in our schools, and right now teachers are preparing assessments, entering grades into reports, planning their lessons for tomorrow, sorting materials, photocopying handouts and marking jotters. Make no mistake, Presiding Officer: how we talk about the work of our teachers impacts on staff morale.

**Ross Greer:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Can I make some progress, please?

If we are serious about closing the attainment gap, then we all, regardless of political persuasion—even Daniel Johnson, although I see that he is not here now—need to get serious about how we motivate professionals who for too long have been booted about like a political football. We have excellent teachers in Scotland, and they need our support as MSPs and the support of organisations in order to get it right for every child.

Today, I want to focus on the role of Education Scotland and the SQA in that context. As my colleague James Dornan said in his opening remarks, the Education and Skills Committee’s survey results showed that 67 per cent of teachers disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement that the SQA’s

“customers and users trust”

it

“to get it right for them.”

As the only MSP in this chamber who has ever delivered the new qualifications, I cannot begin to explain how removing the outcome and assessment standards would reduce workload. We do not often talk about the specifics in the chamber, so I will do just that.

In my national 4 and national 5 modern studies class, I had 30 pupils. Every pupil has to sit 13 unit assessment standards at national 5 level, while those at national 4 have to pass 18. I should point out that that is before the final exam for national 5—national 4 pupils do not sit a final exam. That meant that I had to track at the very minimum 390 assessments for one class in one academic year. As most classes were mixed ability, the truer figure would probably have been closer to 450—and, as I have said, that was for one class alone. Therefore, the cabinet secretary was absolutely right to move on the matter by removing unit assessments at national 5, higher and advanced higher levels. The bureaucracy associated with the outcome and assessment standards detracted from learning and teaching, and it caused the profession unnecessary stress.

Conversely, we cannot allow a narrative of failure to be presented unfairly when it comes to the exam board. Indeed, my experience as an SQA marker was perhaps the single most valuable piece of professional development that I ever undertook. It allowed me to go back to my department and share what I had learned; it meant that I could focus my pupils on developing their responses and gaining credit accordingly; and it developed my teaching style as a professional.

However, I know that professional development is currently being hindered as a result of some headteachers' reluctance to release their staff to attend CPD, because they cannot afford supply staff. The Government must look at how the SQA provides funding to schools for supply teachers in order to promote staff development. If we are to close the attainment gap, we need teachers who understand the requirements of the final exam; we do not need a profession that is scared to ask out of school. Indeed, we know that collaboration is key to driving up standards, as per the recommendations from the OECD—in other words, collaboration that is underpinned by relevant CPD opportunities for all staff.

As for the role of Education Scotland, the organisation was formed in 2011 from the amalgamation of Learning and Teaching Scotland and Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education—a move that I was not surprised to hear Tavish Scott lament earlier. While seconded to Education Scotland, I spent an inordinate amount of time

writing course support materials for the new national qualifications, something that the previous cabinet secretary, Michael Russell, had committed to with support from the unions. Course support materials for every national 4, national 5 and higher course now sit on glow, the intranet for teachers and pupils in Scotland, but to access those resources, teachers need a glow password and an account to log into. On the other hand, Learning and Teaching Scotland had a front-facing website that allowed staff to access support documents more freely. If we are serious about our teachers engaging with the requirements of the new qualifications, Education Scotland needs to think strategically about how it reaches out to the profession and gets them to engage with those resources.

Although the Parliament was founded on the principles of openness and transparency, our education system had not been operating in such a fashion for too long a time. The SQA was the gatekeeper of the exam system, while HMIE would send its boxes to school offices across the country—the calling card of an imminent visit. Things have changed, and we now have a reformed and more supportive approach to school inspections. In Education Scotland, we have an organisation of professionals who should be readily able to engage with and support the teaching profession. Indeed, that is where most HMIE development officers and senior education officers began their careers—in front of a class of children.

In his evidence to the committee, Education Scotland chief executive Dr Bill Maxwell stated:

“How we implemented CFE was a collective decision.”—  
[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 30 November 2016; c 23.]

Let us now work collectively and collaboratively to ensure that we have organisations that are fit for purpose in supporting our teachers and enabling them to get it right for every child.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I now call Jamie Greene, who is the last of the speakers in the open debate. Your speech must be under six minutes, please, Mr Greene.

16:23

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** I will try my best, Presiding Officer.

First of all, I thank the Education and Skills Committee for bringing this debate to the chamber. Although it is not my committee or indeed my brief, I have a substantial interest in the subject matter.

The debate is topical and timely, too, given that in First Minister's questions, mention was made of

the recent IPPR report highlighting an emerging skills gap in Scotland that needs a clearer national focus. I think that all of us in the chamber want Scotland to achieve the highest standard of skills training and, for that reason, I want to focus on the work of Skills Development Scotland, whose very important mission is to grow our economy by ensuring that the workforces of today and tomorrow are equipped with the skills that market conditions dictate and require.

SDS has people working in schools, careers centres and partner locations across the country to fulfil its colossal and important remit. It employs more than 1,200 people and has a grant of more than £180 million. It can influence career choices in schools, although I understand that there is some debate about whether it has people in schools and offices. I noted Tavish Scott labouring that point in the *Official Report* of an Education and Skills Committee meeting that I read with interest—I thought the committee I am a member of was quite lively until I read that *Official Report*.

It is fair to say that SDS has a lot of staff in various places, and that modern apprenticeships and career choices in schools account for pretty much the lion's share of its spend. However, in evidence given to the Education and Skills Committee last year, the Aberdeen and Grampian chamber of commerce said of SQA that

"it is unclear what they are really trying to achieve and what the impact of their activity is."

Of course, that is just one view, but it is one that was echoed by other people who made submissions.

In a previous debate on skills, I pointed out Audit Scotland's comments on the bigger picture and noted that it had said that there is a significant absence of measurable targets and clear strategies set by the Scottish Government for its economic development agencies. It is useful to heed that observation in this debate. It is hard to scrutinise an agency or hold the Government to account without a clear measure of successes and failures. I note that, in a meeting of the Education and Skills Committee, Daniel Johnson asked SDS whether it would consider having a more focused set of performance indicators or a more balanced scorecard and suggested that that might be a better way of presenting its research and the vast amount of data that it accumulates.

The purpose of my speech today is not simply to list criticisms of SDS but to raise points that have been made to the Education and Skills Committee. It is important to pick out a few critiques, because they might point to some of the solutions to issues around improving the work of the agency.

Aberdeen and Grampian chamber of commerce and the Scottish local authorities economic

development group—SLAED, which represents the economic development officers of 32 local authorities across Scotland—gave some excellent submissions to the committee, which I thoroughly recommend that everyone read. Both of those organisations mentioned the difficulties that they have had in getting in touch with the right people due to the size and complexity of the SDS structure.

In its submission to the committee, CBI Scotland said that

"Challenges include the potential bureaucratic nature of interactions"

with SDS, that there was a risk of duplication and that there were opportunities to simplify the way in which people deal with the agency. In its submission, Colleges Scotland agreed with that, saying that

"the skills landscape would benefit from ... a less complex and administratively burdensome system to monitor activities."

SLAED also made a number of comments about the lack of a tailored approach that takes account of different local authorities, specifically with regard to rural authorities. It commented on the lack of co-ordination between local authorities and SDS, which is best illustrated by the fact that there is little face-to-face communication, something that can surely be easily fixed. Some local authorities that made submissions to the committee noted that SDS is, quite simply, highly centralised.

The committee highlighted that more needs to be done to evaluate initiatives so that strategies can be applied differently at the national, regional and local levels. In defence of SDS, its chief executive, Damien Yeates, offered a robust written response to the committee on 12 December, saying that SDS had

"taken a huge number of measures to get in front of people who face redundancy in the north-east,"

despite criticism of the agency's reaction to the downturn in the gas and oil industries. That point is topical, as in the past few hours another set of job losses has been announced in those industries. The work of SDS is now more important than ever.

The issues that I have raised are complex and are more than I can illustrate in a short speech, but I think that there is a commitment among the leadership team of the agency to continue to improve its work. Nonetheless, as I have said before, the Scottish Government must offer a detailed skills strategy for Scotland that shows how all agencies interweave and connect with each other as they play their constituent parts in the overarching strategy. That said, we must make best use of what we already have and, sometimes,

it is the simplest changes that have the biggest effect.

I hope that SDS and the Scottish Government are open to constructive criticism because, as today's motion makes clear, parliamentary scrutiny offers a vital sounding board.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to closing speeches. I have to be very strict with time.

16:29

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** It is traditional to congratulate the committee on the work that it has done leading up to the debate and on the debate that has taken place. I want to do that today because it has been an important debate and the work undertaken by the committee in taking evidence has been very important indeed. I have to agree with the convener, that that is not because the committee has found a way to restore faith in the entire political class—that is perhaps too much to ask. However, the committee has clearly uncovered some very significant home truths about what is happening in our education system.

A number of members have talked about going into schools. We would probably all agree that when we go into schools we find great teachers, doing a great job with very engaged young people, and pupils who are keen to learn and want to do well.

I think that we are entitled, however, to believe and argue that we have a problem in our education system. The cabinet secretary heroically mined the education statistics to find some positive numbers. He is entitled to do that, but he must acknowledge that, objectively, in recent months we have seen a faltering performance in our education system and in schools, with reductions in standards in writing, reading and maths and a drop down the PISA tables. In the Scottish Government's literacy and numeracy survey we have also seen reductions in enrolment and attainment in national 4 and 5. I would argue that we saw that feeding through into highers last year, with a drop in pass rates there as well. There is a problem.

The problem is not one of failing teachers. Gillian Martin and Jenny Gilruth both spoke about teachers being hindered in their work. That is right. Teachers are succeeding in spite of the circumstances in which they find themselves working. Those circumstances include budget cuts, which mean that there are far fewer teachers, fewer support staff, bigger classes to teach and less investment in resources per pupil.

What the committee discovered and evidenced pretty comprehensively is that those teachers are also hindered by the very bodies that are supposed to be supporting them in working effectively: Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. The evidence cannot be denied, particularly the evidence of the committee's survey. That survey showed that 36 per cent of respondents did not believe that Education Scotland contributed at all to building a world-class curriculum. That is astonishing.

Earlier, the cabinet secretary asked Daniel Johnson whether we in the Labour Party support curriculum for excellence. Of course we support curriculum for excellence. It is because we support it that we are so concerned that the very body charged with ensuring the effective delivery of curriculum for excellence commands so little support amongst teachers, parents and others in the education system. As Tavish Scott—who is not here now—pointed out, as a body, only 24 per cent of Education Scotland's own staff thinks that it is well run. That has to be a serious problem.

In some ways that point was overshadowed by the evidence on the SQA that was gathered by the committee. Two thirds of the respondents to the survey said that customers could not trust the SQA to get it right. Colin Beattie ran through a number of the quotes, which were trenchant and telling. I will not repeat them.

Tavish Scott made the important point that the cabinet secretary and the Government are obliged to try to respond to the problem, for the obvious reason that they are responsible for our education system, but also because Education Scotland and the SQA are both creatures of the SNP Government. Education Scotland was formed as a body by the SNP Government, and although the SQA predates any SNP Administration, the exam system that has caused so much difficulty does not. It is important that the cabinet secretary listens to the committee's evidence and acts on it. His governance review may refer to Education Scotland and the SQA, but only rather peripherally.

To Fulton MacGregor, who asked us to be positive in our scrutiny, I say that the body that came out of the committee's work most positively was the Scottish funding council, yet that is a body that the Scottish Government proposes to abolish. That move is supported by nobody—it is not supported by universities, colleges, students or, indeed, staff in those bodies. The proposal is a manifestation of a narrow, utilitarian view of what our universities and colleges are about.

The debate is important, but its importance lies in the degree to which the cabinet secretary listens to it and changes direction in his reforms.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Ross Thomson. I would appreciate brevity, please.

16:35

**Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con):** I, too, extend my thanks to the Education and Skills Committee convener for opening the debate, and recognise the contribution of all committee members who, since May last year, have worked extremely well together to scrutinise the public bodies and agencies responsible for delivering Scottish education.

The thrust of my speech will be on the SQA and Education Scotland.

I, along with Fulton MacGregor, had the opportunity to visit the SQA in Glasgow to discuss a range of issues with officials prior to our formal evidence session in the Education and Skills Committee on 23 November. That was extremely helpful.

From both the visit and the evidence that the committee heard from Dr Janet Brown, it is clear that, with the SQA going through an intense period of assessment redesign for diet 18, on top of its programme of transformation—which is beyond the commercial activity that it undertakes and business as usual—there are quite serious resource issues.

In answering my question on that very issue, Dr Brown confirmed that the SQA fully expects “to require additional resources” and that, in developing and delivering the new qualifications, it “will be a challenge” to engage with teachers—the very people who we expect to deliver the qualifications. As both Daniel Johnson and Ross Greer mentioned, that comes at a time when the committee has received a substantial body of evidence from teachers that communication from the SQA is poor and that there has been a clear breakdown in trust.

One submission stated:

“I am afraid that my current experience of the SQA is almost entirely negative ... Documentation is highly complex, repetitive and difficult to access”.

To quote my committee colleague Johann Lamont, the SQA is living in a “parallel universe” if it thinks that it has a “strong working relationship” with teachers.

Similarly, in responding to the Education Committee’s survey, a majority of teachers expressed a view that Education Scotland does not improve schooling and that it either contributed “not at all” or “a little” to building a world-class curriculum, improving performance or promoting high-quality professional learning.

The committee’s evidence has pointed to teachers being swamped by guidance and documentation. One teacher cited 81 pages of guidance in five different documents across three different websites. The amount of bureaucracy has caused committee members to warn that the SQA is

“in danger of sinking in a sea of jargon”.—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 23 November 2016; c 20.]

That is almost identical to the concerns raised in relation to Education Scotland, which prompted action to remove 90 per cent of 20,000 pages of examples and case studies in a move to reduce and to clarify guidance.

Further, there was serious criticism from teachers that some exams were the worst they had ever seen. Mistakes and inaccuracies plagued national 5 computing exams and higher maths and geography. In his evidence to the committee, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills stated:

“It is intolerable if there are errors ... in exam papers”.—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 2 November 2016; c 20.]

Dr Janet Brown stated:

“We should not have errors in our exam papers”.—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 23 November 2016; c 9.]

yet those errors are happening. Teachers raised concerns with the committee, saying that

“There have been so many mistakes—from the exam to the UASP”—

a unit assessment support package—

“and ... we no longer trust anything that comes from”

the SQA.

That issue has been touched on by members, particularly Fulton MacGregor. I have to admit that I draw a slightly different conclusion on exams overall, because there is powerful and consistent criticism from teachers about the lack of effective scrutiny and transparency. The SQA believes that mistakes are happening because

“people are working extremely hard”—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 23 November 2016; c 9.]

and that there is a need for it to have “appropriate engagements with institutions” in place to improve quality assurance.

From the evidence, it is clear that the resource issues and failings in leadership need to be addressed. The fundamental fact is that the SQA and Education Scotland have lost the trust and confidence of teachers and that should raise the most serious of concerns for us all. If teachers do not have faith in them, how on earth can we expect parents to have faith in those institutions

and to have faith that the system provides quality education to their children?

**Fulton MacGregor:** Will Ross Thomson give way?

**Ross Thomson:** I would like to make progress because I have a tight six minutes.

That situation highlights the urgency of the action and intervention that is needed to restore trust and confidence.

The committee's work since May has uncovered a number of serious issues that require urgent resolution. If we are collectively to achieve our ambition to close the attainment gap and provide the best possible education to our young people, there is a lot of work to do. It is clear that the committee is playing a critical and constructive role in that on-going education debate. It could not be clearer that the decisions that have to be taken must be based on a sound foundation of evidence. That point was extremely well made by Ross Greer during his contribution on the SFC and the Scottish Government's enterprise and skills review.

Conservative members look forward to continuing to work constructively to propose new ideas. That is why we will support the motion in the convener's name.

16:41

**John Swinney:** Three of my colleagues have made important points about the narrative that underpins the debate and the importance of ensuring that it is correctly and effectively described. What members of the Parliament say in parliamentary debates has consequences and implications in a wider audience.

Gillian Martin rightly and fairly raised the comment that Willie Rennie made at First Minister's question time. His comment was that our schools are in crisis. I utterly refute that point, so I am glad that she called him out for it.

Jenny Gilruth talked about the fact that, while we are considering all the issues in the debate, others are preparing for prelims or setting coursework and making important judgments on those matters. Richard Lochhead made the point that, while we are having the debate, local authorities will be trying to recruit teachers to fill the vacancies that I acknowledge we have in schools around Scotland. Does it look like an attractive profession to come into when some of the narrative is as negative as it is?

Iain Gray said that I had heroically mined all sorts of things to come up with data. Yes—I have presented data that is representative of Scottish education. To complete the picture, as I said in my

speech, I made two statements to Parliament before the Christmas recess about the PISA statistics and the performance data, which I acknowledged was uncomfortable reading. However, Daniel Johnson's characterisation of Scottish education was atrocious. I am all for a balanced and fair debate about it, so I invite members to make considered contributions.

Ross Thomson has just talked about effective scrutiny. I am all for effective scrutiny. I can take criticism—I have taken it for nine and a half years as a minister—but we must be conscious of the consequences and implications of what members of Parliament say to a wider audience.

**Ross Greer:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Daniel Johnson rose—**

**John Swinney:** I will take Mr Johnson first, because I named him.

**Daniel Johnson:** It does not get more brutal than the chief executive of the SQA saying that the issues that we face are to do with the way that the agency plans and implements matters and the way that the examinations work. I am not plucking that from the air; the SQA's own chief executive is raising fundamental questions about the way her agency and the exams work. Is that not fundamental and brutal? Does it not justify the concern?

**John Swinney:** I invite Daniel Johnson to go back and read the speech that he delivered at the start of the debate, and to judge whether that it is the type of contribution that helps us to have a constructive debate about the direction in which we are moving to progress Scottish education. That is what I am interested in, and I am interested in having an open debate about how we do that. I accept that all members of Parliament want Scottish education to be successful, but we will have difficulty turning around the teacher shortage problem that Richard Lochhead rightly highlighted if the narrative on Scottish education is presented as dismally as it was by Daniel Johnson earlier in the debate.

In the independent survey on SQA performance—a survey is carried out annually by an independent third party—84 per cent of respondents said that they believe that the SQA has high credibility and 91 per cent said that they believe that the SQA can be trusted. I am not saying that there is no need to improve performance. Ross Greer has properly raised with me issues to do with the accuracy of exam papers. I have given him honest and open answers in which I have said that that is not acceptable and must be addressed, and I have addressed the issue face to face with the chief executive of the SQA. However, we must keep—as Richard

Lochhead did—a sense of perspective about some of the data and information that are presented.

I want to move on to address some of the issues that Tavish Scott raised. I am very sorry that he is not here, although I understand why he is not here. He talked about implementation of curriculum for excellence. Curriculum for excellence has been implemented by a management board. I want to read out to Parliament a list of the members of the curriculum for excellence management board: the Association of Head Teachers and Deputies in Scotland, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, the College Development Network, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Educational Institute of Scotland, the General Teaching Council for Scotland, the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, the National Parent Forum of Scotland, School Leaders Scotland, the Scottish Council of Independent Schools, the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association, the Scottish Teacher Education Committee, the SQA, Skills Development Scotland, Universities Scotland, Education Scotland, the Scottish Government and Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland.

That body is responsible for advising ministers on the implementation of curriculum for excellence. A flick through all the responses that I have received in the governance review reveals that they are littered with people saying to me, “Don’t disturb the consensus,” and, “Make sure that there’s always a consensus.” That board has operated by consensus. I can find only one occasion on which ministers overturned a recommendation of the board. In fact, it was not a recommendation of the board; a majority view was taken when the board could not operate with unanimity.

**Iain Gray rose—**

**John Swinney:** Criticism has been levelled about the implementation of curriculum for excellence. Members know me well enough to know that I will take criticism on the chin—I am well able to do that—but I and my predecessors acted to work in consensus with that range of bodies to make sure that we took people with us in implementing curriculum for excellence. Therefore, some of the criticism that has been levelled at our bodies, which suggests that they have acted unilaterally, is unwarranted.

I will let Mr Gray intervene, if he still wants to.

**Iain Gray:** The point that I was going to make relates to the fact that the cabinet secretary has about 40 seconds left. Is he going to address the issues that have been raised by the work of the

committee, or is he just going to read out another big long list to fill up the time?

**John Swinney:** That was a pathetic intervention. Of all the pathetic interventions that I have had from Mr Gray, that is at the top of the list. The point that I am making is that education involves taking a range of organisations with us in a cohesive fashion, and that is how curriculum for excellence has been implemented.

**Liz Smith:** I have made a submission to the governance review that might not be quite as consensual as some of the other ones.

Although the board has been operating on a consensual basis, the delivery mechanism that the committee has been scrutinising is blurred and there is a lack of clarity about the data that have been presented. The fundamental question that the committee is asking is about the fact that, at this stage, we cannot properly measure the delivery of curriculum for excellence. That is the problem.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have only seconds left, Mr Swinney.

**John Swinney:** There are many issues in all that. I will look carefully at all of them as part of the governance review. I hear what the committee says, and I have reflected on all of those issues in my opening remarks. I simply make the significant point that we have operated by consensus in taking forward curriculum for excellence and have involved a wide range of bodies in an implementation group that is a subset of the board, to take forward changes. That has been the model of operation that we have used.

The Government will, of course, look at the issues carefully, because what drives our determination is improving Scottish education and ensuring that education can deliver the best for the life chances of young people in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Johann Lamont to wind up the debate. You have a very tight 10 minutes, please, Ms Lamont.

16:50

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** I suspect that it will feel a lot tighter for me than it will for you.

I thank the Presiding Officer for the opportunity to contribute to the debate in my role as deputy convener of the Education and Skills Committee. That role provides me with a number of challenges. I have 10 minutes to speak, and it has been quite a while since I have had the opportunity to speak at such length in the chamber. That is something of a challenge for me, although I suspect that it will be a greater



challenge for the rest of the members in the chamber.

Given the importance of the issues that we are discussing, they inevitably generate partisan and robust exchanges, as we have already heard. Unusually, it falls on me to be the voice of reasonableness and consensus. I am sure that my fellow committee members will draw it to my attention pretty quickly if I fail in that responsibility.

I intend to do a number of things, and I shall resist the temptation to respond in the way that I would perhaps normally do. In particular, I want to highlight the important issues that need to be explored and to emphasise the degree to which there was consensus in the committee on scrutinising the critical roles of the SQA, SDS, the Scottish funding council and Education Scotland. The purpose of the debate is to highlight to the Parliament and the Government evidence on the performance of those bodies and to bring those issues to the attention of non-committee members. It is a pressure on all of us as elected members to understand what is happening in our education system, and we should not operate in the silos that are created by our committee membership.

The debate is an opportunity to highlight and prompt further debate on the Government reviews of those bodies and how those reviews will assist rather than hamper Government policy, and to inform the work of other committees. If ever there was a need for joined-up working, it is in education and how it relates to the economy, economic and social opportunities, and equality. Scrutiny should not be a series of episodes; it needs to be robust, far reaching and coherent.

As Richard Lochhead pointed out, education is not just about the curriculum; it can be about the many things that children bring with them into school or the many things that we experience as adults. That does not mean that we should not drill down on the specifics in the Education and Skills Committee, but I urge other committees and members to look at the broader questions and how they impact on people's capacity to learn.

I put on record in particular my thanks to the convener of the Education and Skills Committee, James Dornan, for his great good nature and capacity to bring the committee together, to other committee members, and to the clerks. We have proved to be an effective team in drilling down into the evidence and producing compelling reflections on the challenges ahead. As the convener did, I emphasise that that work remains an act in progress, and our commitment to all those who have taken the trouble to respond individually and all the academics and organisations that care passionately about education and have taken the time to engage fully to provide their expertise and thinking that we shall persist with that work.

We need to reaffirm the importance of education and skills in the work of the Scottish Government, local authorities and the agencies that we scrutinise, and to reflect on why that matters. A coherent approach to education and skills is fundamental to any notion of a fairer society, a strong economy and shared prosperity. Education matters in ensuring that individuals can achieve their full potential, no matter where they are. The challenge in education is to provide that opportunity, but we have to be alive to the possibility that it may compound inequality rather than address it if we get things wrong.

We know that a highly skilled and educated population is an important factor in economic opportunities. That is why the bodies that are charged with delivery need to rise to that challenge. We need to reflect on the concerns about their capacity that have been expressed. It is essential that there is confidence in the education system. Much of our evidence identified the need for leadership and many concerns about the apparent lack of leadership in those agencies.

At a time of significant curriculum change, there needs to be confidence in those delivering it if confidence in the change itself is not to be undermined. That means that, if we believe that the curriculum for excellence is the right way forward, we need to address issues that may suggest to people that it is too much hassle and is not working, so we should try something else.

I say to the Government ministers and to others that we ought not to shoot the messenger when people raise concerns. As a teacher of 20 years' standing, I understand the fear that a number of members have articulated that raising concerns about the system could be seen as an attack on teachers and young people. However, there was a consensus in the committee about the need to serve the interests of teachers, young people and educators by insisting that those who work for them are doing their job.

I will make a number of observations on the committee's considerations that I hope will inform the chamber further. The response of teachers when given the opportunity to comment anonymously was profoundly thought provoking and ought not to be underestimated. Of course, we might choose to explain that away, but we do no one a service in doing that. In all my years serving on committees of the Parliament, I have never been so struck by the number of responses and the passion and compelling arguments of those responding. I think that the SQA's instinct was to say that they were the usual suspects. I worked with the usual suspects when we introduced standard grade, but what comes out from the responses is a passionate commitment by teachers and professionals to make curriculum

for excellence work rather than comments from those who are so conservative that they do not want the trouble of it.

The frustration of committee members when hearing evidence from the SQA and others about responsibilities, workload and advice was evident. The committee is concerned not just about who is responsible but about how that responsibility is being delivered. There is a lack of clarity in that regard. Of course there is a concern about the cluttered landscape and the complexity. These things are difficult, but that landscape and that cluttering were person made. I recognise the work of the cabinet secretary in addressing the question of workload, but there has to be a rigour in addressing that cluttered landscape and making the system work for people who care about education. There needs to be an energy in the bodies that we are scrutinising to sort out the problems rather than to use them as an alibi.

Another significant theme that I want to highlight is the question of evidence in underpinning Government action. An important example of that is the phase 1 review of enterprise and skills and the action on an overarching body, particularly in relation to the Scottish funding council. The committee may or may not have been persuaded on that, but it did not have the evidence to make that decision.

We understand that there is no baseline evidence to help to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum for excellence. That is a significant problem, because the danger is that we conflate issues and think that the falling standards may be explained by the curriculum for excellence when that might not be the problem at all. Through the statistics, we need to know what is actually happening. That question also relates to school governance.

In my remaining time, I will emphasise the committee's strand of work on equalities and identify a number of issues that are worthy of further consideration by the Parliament and the Government. First, although we all know that there was a general commitment to the curriculum for excellence, one of the questions that the committee asked was who decided that there should be no external examination for national 4. To me, that is a question of equality, and I doubt that I would have supported that decision if I had been asked. In all our evidence, we could not get clarity on who made the decision and why. Indeed, on being asked about the advisability of such an approach, Janet Brown told us:

"That is one of the conversations that Scotland as a whole needs to have."—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 23 November 2016; c 42.]

If Scotland needs to have that conversation, somebody needs to initiate it, and pretty soon, too.

Secondly, concerns were expressed by the NUS and others about the decision to cut part-time places in the college sector by 48 per cent, as we were advised in evidence. The issue is not whether there are successful learners coming out of colleges under the new policy; it is that the policy chooses disproportionately to disbar women, carers, adult learners and people with disabilities. The Government cannot ignore that impact if it is committed to equal access.

The issue of access also came up in the committee's discussion on modern apprenticeships. It was a concern to the committee that Skills Development Scotland did not see itself as having a role in ensuring access to modern apprenticeships for different groups in our communities. If public money that has been identified for improving skills is less likely to be spent on women, people in the black and minority ethnic community and disabled people, there is a problem. It is not good enough for Skills Development Scotland to say that it is a societal problem and therefore not to address the fair distribution of public funding.

In its work, the committee explored education policy and whether policy choices make sense. In this debate, the committee has reflected on the challenge of putting policy into action. It is reasonable to seek clarity on the progress of policy delivery and how it is lived by teachers and students, and not just to discuss the issue from a theoretical point of view. There is some anxiety that SDS and other agencies are not in control of the agenda. The committee convener wondered whether we had increased the credibility of politicians. I think that this issue shows a gap between politics and the real world; in this debate, the committee has sought to bridge that gap.

I trust that members and the Government will reflect on the committee's evidence and that, rather than picking holes in it or explaining it away, will view it as a significant contribution. We must draw on that evidence to ensure that our commitment on education is delivered fully by the agencies that are given that responsibility and given voice to by the Scottish Government. I commend the report and the evidence of the committee to Parliament and look forward to continuing this work in the next stage.

## Business Motion

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-03396, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for next week.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Wednesday 18 January 2017—

after

2.00 pm                      Portfolio Questions  
Education and Skills

insert

*followed by*                Ministerial Statement: Delivering an  
Enhanced Trauma Network for Scotland

delete

5.00 pm                      Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm                      Decision Time

(b) Thursday 19 January 2017—

delete

2.30 pm                      Scottish Government Debate: The  
Future of Funding for Rural  
Development

and insert

2.30 pm                      Ministerial Statement: Draft Climate  
Change Plan

*followed by*                Scottish Government Debate: The  
Future of Funding for Rural  
Development—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Decision Time

17:02

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** There is one question to be put as a result of today's business. The question is, that motion S5M-03298, in the name of James Dornan, on behalf of the Education and Skills Committee, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the evidence received by the Education and Skills Committee in relation to the performance of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Education Scotland, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council, and particularly concerns raised by teachers, the importance of parliamentary scrutiny of these organisations and of the Scottish Government's Enterprise and Skills Review and Education Governance Review which, combined, will impact on the role of all of these organisations.

*Meeting closed at 17:02.*



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

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