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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Economy, Fair Work and Culture

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald): Welcome to this virtual meeting of the Scottish Parliament. The first item of business is questions on the economy, fair work and culture portfolio. I remind members to enter the letter "R" in the box if they wish to ask a supplementary. Supplementaries for questions 5 and 7 are grouped, and will be taken after I have taken both questions.

Ayrshire Economy (Support)

1. **Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the action that it is taking to support the Ayrshire economy, including the Ayrshire growth deal. (S5O-04509)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government has committed £103 million to the Ayrshire growth deal to protect existing jobs, create new jobs and extend economic opportunity to communities across Ayrshire. In addition, we have provided more than £77 million in grant funding to Ayrshire businesses as part of our response to the impact of Covid-19 on our economy.

We recognise the contribution that Ayrshire makes to the national economy, and are working with local authorities and other regional partners to ensure that the Ayrshire growth deal is signed as soon as possible.

Willie Coffey: The cabinet secretary will be aware that a number of businesses in my constituency have closed over the past couple of years and we are all eagerly awaiting the growth deal project being signed off next month. Will the Government consider additional support for Ayrshire, such as road and rail investments, or reprofiling the growth deal project over the shorter term to assist us to overcome the impact of Covid on the local economy?

Fiona Hyslop: I am aware of the closures that Willie Coffey referred to and acutely aware of the impact on local people and communities. That is why we want to get the Ayrshire growth deal signed as soon as possible. It will be very

important for the aerospace industry, for example, which is why we are keen for the deal to be signed sooner rather than later. With regard to the profiling of the new investment, our officials will need to be in regular contact with the three Ayrshire local authorities about it, and we will continue that dialogue and quickly take forward any action that has the potential to protect and create good-quality jobs across Ayrshire.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a brief supplementary from Brian Whittle.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Transport Scotland has suggested that the Ayrshire growth deal may be problematic around the Moorfield industrial estate in East Ayrshire if the Bellfield interchange is not updated. Has the cabinet secretary spoken with Transport Scotland or the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity to seek a solution to the potential increase in traffic flow?

Fiona Hyslop: As the member has identified, the transport issues are for the transport secretary, and, indeed, the growth deals are the responsibility of Michael Matheson, as the cabinet secretary with responsibility for transport and infrastructure. I will draw his attention to the member's concerns, and I am sure that Transport Scotland will already have let him know about the issue. However, the member's question underlines how all the agencies, as well as the local authorities in Ayrshire, have to work together, which is why we are keen to get the United Kingdom Government to agree to sign the Ayrshire growth deal as soon as possible. I understand that Scotland Office ministers, too, are keen for it to happen; I think the issue lies with the Treasury, so we will impress on the Treasury that it will improve the situation if we can get ahead with the Ayrshire growth deal and have it signed.

Covid-19 Restrictions (Impact on Night-time Economy)

2. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact the Covid-19 restrictions have had on the night-time economy. (S5O-04510)

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): We are fully aware of the impact that the coronavirus has had on Scotland's important night-time economy. As well as support provided to businesses through our in excess of £2.3 billion financial package, including specifically through business grants and pivotal enterprise resilience fund support, we have also cautiously lifted restrictions on the sectors where the evidence shows that it is safe to do so.

Our latest route map phase 3 update, published on 20 August, gives an indicative reopening date

of 14 September for certain indoor live events and indoor entertainment centres, following the enabling of hospitality to reopen, with precautions, from 15 July.

Pauline McNeill: I asked the minister specifically about the night-time economy, which generates £2 billion-plus for the Scottish economy. Many operators in that sector do not feel that there has been adequate communication with them about the long-term plans.

The ban on music in pubs and clubs is affecting patronage because it makes them less attractive places to be. Glasgow, the city I represent, is hugely dependent on the night-time economy and it is very scary to think that there might be huge job losses if there is not more support for the industry.

The situation will get worse if there is still a lockdown in October. I therefore must ask the minister whether he is aware that the night-time economy industries have said that up to 80 per cent of operators will have to make redundancies if there is no further direct support forthcoming. If the minister foresees that the night-time economy, including pubs and clubs, will be closed in October by Government decisions, will the Scottish Government supplement the furlough scheme before it comes to an end?

I would like to know specifically whether the minister has considered whether the Government will supplement the furlough scheme for the night-time economy. If it does not, tens of thousands of jobs will be lost.

Jamie Hepburn: Ms McNeill has raised a number of issues; I will try to cover as many of them as I can.

On the final, substantive point, we have already called on the UK Government to extend the furlough scheme. That is what we should be uniting to do. That is what the Scottish Parliament collectively should be doing. We recognise that the end of furlough could represent a potential cliff edge for businesses, in this instance in the night-time economy, but also in the economy as a whole.

The fundamental thing is that we do not want any sector to be closed for any longer than is necessary. We are in the grip of a public health crisis, so it is not safe to open certain sectors. We are working to ensure that they can reopen as soon as possible.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I encourage brief supplementary questions, please.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): As we have recently seen in Aberdeen, local lockdown restrictions have meant further pressure on local hospitality businesses.

Can the ministers advise what further support has been provided to businesses that have been affected by these temporary measures in Aberdeen? Does he agree that the UK Government could put emergency funding in place and facilitate flexible business support at short notice in the event of local lockdowns?

Jamie Hepburn: Not only do I agree with the member's final point, but we have already acted on it. Fergus Ewing wrote to the chancellor on 14 August seeking an extension to the eat out to help out scheme.

For our own part, we have allocated £1 million directly to Aberdeen City Council to provide £900,000 of one-off grants to hospitality businesses that have been directly impacted by the restrictions, and a discretionary fund of £100,000 for businesses that have been impacted but were not directly specified in regulations.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): With the unprecedented challenges facing businesses in the night-time economy, I am concerned that we could see another race to the bottom on standards. Those businesses that have chosen to take on the extra costs of paying above the real living wage or to invest in staff training or have taken on additional costs, such as giving staff the cost of a taxi home in the early morning hours, must not be the businesses that we lose.

We must ensure that we support responsible operators. What can the Scottish Government do to ensure that those high-quality operators are not the ones that are pushed over the brink, with the result that we lose them? What can it do to make sure that nobody falls through the cracks? I am thinking of the comedy clubs that should be treated as arts and cultural organisations, but which at the moment are treated as purely commercial ones.

Jamie Hepburn: A range of support has been provided for comedy businesses through the funds that I mentioned earlier, but we are working with the Live Comedy Association to better understand some of the challenges that the sector faces and to see what other support might be available.

I agree with the thrust of Patrick Harvie's question. He knows that the fair work agenda is something that I and the Scottish Government—*[Inaudible.]*

Of course, we are encumbered by not having responsibility for employment law, but we have published a specific fair work charter for the current period, which has been signed jointly by us and the Scottish Trades Union Congress. We are calling on all employers to uphold fair work standards. If I get any examples of places where that is not happening, I will be very willing to take

that up directly with the individual businesses concerned.

Secure Employment Opportunities (Young People)

3. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to ensure that young people have secure employment opportunities. (S5O-04511)

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): The Scottish Government is taking a range of actions to support our young people. We have committed to investing £60 million this financial year in a youth guarantee, as part of the £100 million investment for employment and skills that we announced last month. The guarantee is one of the first actions—*[Inaudible.]*—and sets out our employer-led plan to give all young people access to work, training or education. We have recently announced that that will also include the spending of £10 million on measures to support and retain apprentices.

Gillian Martin: I welcome all those targeted actions.

The minister is acutely aware of the fact that young people are at risk of being the most adversely affected by the economic impacts—*[Inaudible.]* Last year and earlier this year, they took to the streets in climate strikes to make known their fears about the planet's future. How is the Scottish Government ensuring that their voices are heard, as it drafts its plans for a green recovery?

Jamie Hepburn: I certainly agree—and previous experience demonstrates—that young people are one of the groups who are most likely to be disproportionately impacted by the effects of a downturn.

That question can be linked to what I said in my original answer. We have asked Sandy Begbie to progress the work on our youth guarantee. He is ensuring that he hears the voices of young people as part of the dialogue on how to advance the youth guarantee. He met a group of young people directly on 11 August, and has met young people's organisations including Young Scot, the Prince's Trust, Action for Children and MCR Pathways. He is involved in that dialogue.

It will be essential that the youth guarantee and all our labour market interventions are geared towards the places where we need to have the right skill sets for the future. Ensuring that we have a green recovery very much forms part of the work ahead.

Economic Growth (Revenue from Online Retailers)

4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding using revenues raised from online retailers to support economic growth in Scotland. (S5O-04512)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop): Like the majority of taxes, the digital services tax and the proposed online selling tax are reserved, therefore any revenues will be collected at national level by the UK Government.

Her Majesty's Treasury does not hypothecate tax revenues, as members will be aware. Instead, through operation of the Barnett formula, the Scottish Government receives a share of UK Government spending on areas that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

To date, the Scottish Government has had no conversations on use of revenues from online retailers, but the Scottish Government has regular discussions with ministers and officials from HM Treasury, including as part of the budget process.

Kenneth Gibson: It is frustrating that such matters are reserved. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the impact of the pandemic has accelerated the shift towards online shopping, and that unless there is a balance between high street and online taxation, high streets will continue to decline, thereby reducing choice and employment and leading to falling revenue from non-domestic rates?

Fiona Hyslop: The pandemic and lockdown could have a drastic effect on businesses. We have seen variation between online businesses and those on the high street. We will continue to monitor the impact of the pandemic. There is a strong case for ensuring equity between online and high street retail. The pandemic has increased traffic to online retail. We urge the UK Government to consider all that as it considers the UK budget for 2021 to 2022.

Covid-19 (Additional Support for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises)

5. Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what additional support it is offering SMEs in light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown. (S5O-04513)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop): We have funded over 89,000 grants, exceeding £998 million, through the small business, and retail, hospitality and leisure support grants. That is in

addition to grants of £157 million to 4,023 small and medium-sized enterprises and 5,602 self-employed people, through our hardship and pivotal enterprise resilience funds.

That is on top of 1.6 per cent rates relief for all non-domestic properties and 100 per cent rates relief for properties in the retail, hospitality and leisure, airports, and news-publishing sectors.

We are also providing a £2 million resilience and recovery fund for towns and business improvement districts, and a £100 million emergency loan fund for SME house builders that are affected by temporary site closures.

Sandra White: In city centres, in Glasgow in particular, small cafes and takeaways continue to suffer because offices are not yet open. They have no footfall. I have spoken to a number of business owners, who tell me that they might not survive Covid-19 and the lockdown. Will the cabinet secretary look at their cases? She has mentioned the funding that is available. Can additional support be provided to ease the financial pressures on those businesses and, in some cases, to ensure their survival?

Fiona Hyslop: There is an issue for hospitality in general. We have concerns about support for that area. Members heard from the minister about the proposals that we have for the sector, and about our concern that the UK Government should extend the furlough scheme to that sector, in particular.

Sandra White has raised a point about city centres and businesses that rely on offices returning to work. People are aware that our decisions about the route map out of the pandemic are based on four harms. We must consider the whole situation; there is an impact on transport, for example. One of the most important factors in respect of offices getting back to work is the return to school, as has been seen in recent weeks. We must look at all such factors.

I have commissioned work on how offices might be able to get back in a way that makes sense for everybody; many businesses are saying that they will not come back at 100 per cent capacity. It is important to consider how we can do that and do it well, not only for the safety of office workers but, as Sandra White said, because of the money that they spend in city centres.

I have a meeting later today with Scottish Chambers of Commerce, in which we will discuss that matter and how we can work with businesses to ensure that we have sensible and practical ways to help them to return to their offices, and to support the hospitality and retail businesses that depend on people coming back into city centres.

Sustainable and Ethical Economic Growth (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises)

7. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it is working with SMEs to pursue sustainable and ethical economic growth. (S5O-04515)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop): Our aim is to build a stronger, fairer and greener economy. We therefore continue to encourage businesses of all kinds to sign up to the Scottish business pledge, and have supported initiatives such as Scotland CAN B, which helps businesses to assess their social and environmental impact. We are also supporting businesses to capitalise on the growth opportunities that are provided by growing green markets.

Alex Rowley: Recently, I read an article by one of the Scottish Government's advisers who said that 80 per cent of jobs in Scotland are in the private sector, and that 98 per cent of those employers employ fewer than 50 people. We can see that SMEs are the key part of the Scottish economy. However, I am asking myself where the jobs and growth of the future are going to come from, and what the strategy is.

Where is the Scottish National Investment Bank at? Will it pursue a clear strategy to invest in SMEs? What is the overall strategy for investment and growth in SMEs across Scotland? Do we have a strategy under which we are going to fund specific areas and sectors?

Fiona Hyslop: SMEs are the backbone of Scotland's economy—the numbers that Alex Rowley cited demonstrate that—so all of our economic response will have an impact on them and will support them. “Economic Recovery Implementation Plan”, which we published recently, demonstrates in which sectors we believe SMEs can develop. They will be supported in that transition.

We have doubled the flexible workforce development fund to ensure that SMEs can help their staff to retrain and upskill, and we have increased the digital boost fund to help SMEs to capitalise on the increasing digital and online market. Digital and green jobs are most definitely where we see opportunities for the future. We are also making sure that we maximise the opportunities for our SMEs to capitalise on procurement activity—in particular, with the health service.

There is a wide range of areas on which we are very focused, but Alex Rowley is absolutely right: whatever we do in economic support must focus on SMEs, because they are disproportionately important to the economy in Scotland, compared with the rest of the UK.

Consequentials (Allocation to Arts, Culture and Heritage Sectors)

6. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government how much of the £97 million in United Kingdom Government consequentials announced on 5 July has been allocated as packages of support for the arts, culture and heritage sectors, and when a decision will be made on allocation of the remaining funding. (S5O-04514)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop): The decision on the remaining funding will be made imminently.

To date, we have allocated £22.5 million from the £97 million in support packages, including £10 million for event organisers; £2.5 million for performing arts venues, on top of the additional funding that I announced earlier for performing arts and theatres; £2.2 million for grass-roots music venues; £3.8 million to save jobs at the National Trust for Scotland; and £4 million to support independent museums.

We have also agreed to provide additional funding to national culture and heritage bodies that are severely affected by the crisis, and we will continue to work with the sector to ensure the full distribution of the funding so that it reaches those who need it most.

Claire Baker: It is seven weeks since the fund was announced, but 75 per cent of the money is still to be allocated. I have two questions. First, once the plans for distribution of the money are announced, when will the money actually reach the recipients? Secondly, I note that, so far, money has been allocated to some specific sectors. Will there be further support for freelancers and self-employed artists who have not yet returned to work?

Fiona Hyslop: On the latter question, there absolutely will. That is why we want to make sure that we are working with all sectors and not just some. On freelancers and artists, if we were to restrict our funding to small packages for specific sectors, we might not reach everybody whom we need to reach.

On the questions of whom and when, we have had, and continue to have, discussions with a variety of the representative organisations of artists and the various sectors. With my Government officials and Creative Scotland, I am finalising decisions on how we can best act. I am very keen to make announcements as soon as possible, because we need to get those funds up and running.

As Claire Baker will be aware, we have moved rapidly. For example, the events fund has opened in the past few days; recipients will receive funds

quickly. Speed is of the essence. Many of the freelancers that she mentioned will have benefited from the original bridging bursaries, which Creative Scotland set up very swiftly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to Jamie Halcro Johnston, whose question has not been reached, and to members who had supplementary questions. That concludes portfolio questions on the economy, fair work and culture. I suspend the meeting until 2.30.

14:24

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Education and Skills

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): We are resuming. I am not receiving any video—I said that to the technicians. Can you hear me?

Can you hear me? No. What has happened? Hello?

Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP): I can hear you, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can now see you. Thank you. That was a bit of a blip. It always happens to me. Lewis Macdonald passes the blips to me.

The next item of business is portfolio questions on education and skills. I listened to the previous set of questions. In order to get in as many questions as possible, I would like short, succinct questions and answers to match.

Questions 2 and 3 are grouped together. If members have supplementaries to those, they can come in at the end of the third question.

Attainment Gap (Dundee)

1. **Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what further action it is taking to close the attainment gap in Dundee, in light of the challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5O-04517)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Our focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap remains central to the Government's agenda.

Dundee City Council has been allocated more than £11.6 million for 2020-21 via the Scottish attainment challenge, including pupil equity funding. In response to Covid-19, I have

committed a further £135 million to support the return to school. Of that, Dundee will receive almost £1.5 million to recruit additional teachers and support staff. Dundee will also receive more than £760,000 to tackle digital exclusion.

Education Scotland attainment advisers will continue to work closely with Dundee to accelerate recovery and tackle the attainment gap.

Shona Robison: I welcome those resources. More specifically, what actions is the Deputy First Minister taking to support care-experienced young people in Dundee, to break down the barriers that our most disadvantaged pupils face?

John Swinney: The focus of the attainment challenge is very much on meeting the needs of young people who are affected by a background of poverty. Schools will be focused increasingly on using pupil equity funding to meet the needs of care-experienced young people.

As part of the education recovery resources, we have made available resources to support the implementation of the promise, which was the commitment made through the independent care review to meet the needs of care-experienced young people. Those resources will, I hope, be taken forward in an approach based on the concept of holistic family support, to make sure that the best outcomes can be achieved for young people who face such disadvantage.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Prior to schools going back, Mr Swinney promised to produce an equity audit to ascertain the impact of school closure on the attainment gap and an action plan to address and mitigate that impact. When will we see them?

John Swinney: The equity audit will be developed as we see the experience that emerges from young people returning to school. One of the early indicators is that, as young people have returned to school, the number of referrals for assistance has increased. As a consequence—I expressed some anxieties about this to the Parliament's Education and Skills Committee—it looks likely that young people will need further support. Therefore, we will reflect on that practice as it informs the actions that we take forward. I will keep Parliament updated on the development of the equity audit and how it is reflected in the policy decisions that the Government makes.

Covid-19 (Outbreaks in the School Estate)

2. **Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assistance it is offering to local authorities to respond to Covid-19 outbreaks among young people in school estates. (S5O-04518)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Local outbreaks are principally managed by local health protection teams, which provide support to schools around incident management. The Scottish Government is providing a range of assistance in terms of guidance and resources, to support schools and local authorities in the return to full-time schooling.

Gordon Lindhurst: Thank you, cabinet secretary. Parents and pupils throughout Scotland, including in the Lothian region, are rightly concerned about safety as pupils return to school. On 27 July, I wrote to the cabinet secretary about that, but his reply did not answer my question about what inspections and tests have been carried out on school plant, equipment, classrooms and systems. Is he now able to respond to my question and confirm whether guidance has been implemented?

John Swinney: I reassure Mr Lindhurst about the approach that has been taken within schools because I recognise the importance of the question that he raises and the necessity of assuring staff, parents and pupils of the safety of schools on their return.

Individual schools will have been required to undertake a risk assessment, to satisfy the requirements of the education recovery guidance. They will also have been required to follow the mitigating measures within the education recovery guidance to produce a safe environment. That work has been undertaken and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education has reported to me on the steps that have been taken to ensure that that is the case. In addition to that, as is its statutory right, the Health and Safety Executive carries out surveys of schools to satisfy itself that the appropriate health and safety measures have been taken by schools. The Health and Safety Executive is undertaking that work and will continue to do so. I hope that the presence of that work provides reassurance to families the length and breadth of the country.

Pupil and Staff Safety (Funding for Local Authorities)

3. **Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what funding it has allocated to local authorities to ensure that, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, schools will have adequate resources to keep pupils and staff safe. (S5O-04519)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The Scottish Government takes the safety of pupils and staff in schools very seriously. That is why we have committed up to a further £135 million over the next two years to support the

reopening of schools. That includes making up to £50 million available to local authorities to support the costs that are associated with safely reopening schools in line with the guidance published on 30 July and £80 million for additional teachers and classroom staff. That is in addition to the £155 million in United Kingdom Government consequentials that we passed on in full to local authorities on 26 May.

Dr Allan: I thank the Deputy First Minister for his answer and I welcome the Scottish Government's on-going efforts to keep pupils and teaching staff safe. What action is the Scottish Government taking to discourage—for the moment—house parties, which we know are linked to a number of cases in secondary schools since their opening?

John Swinney: Clear guidance is available about the limited number of households who should be gathering for indoor household purposes. As Dr Allan correctly said, where we have identified pupils who have tested positive for Covid, a number of the cases have arisen out of connections between those pupils at house parties where more households were present than should have been the case. The general guidance relating to that is available to all, and we encourage compliance with that guidance just as there was exceptional compliance with the guidance in the immediate aftermath of lockdown.

The First Minister has been clear in expressing our concerns about indoor house parties and the danger of circulating the virus that is posed by such gatherings, which are not compatible with the regulations. In addition, the First Minister today set out further details of the powers and responsibilities that will be available to Police Scotland to deal with such incidents in the future, although we would rather that individuals decided not to gather for house parties, so that the powers did not have to be exercised.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I have been in touch with many sporting and youth work organisations that are unable to resume their work in schools due to the understandably cautious approach that local authorities have taken to interpreting the guidance on the reopening of schools. What support is the Scottish Government giving to local authorities to adopt improved policies that might permit such activities under the current guidance, or what revisions to guidance will be made to enable that vital education work to take place?

John Swinney: I recognise the importance of the work that Mr Johnson refers to, and I very much regret that we are not in a position to enable a lot of that work to be undertaken, due to the necessary and cautious approach that has been taken.

I assure Mr Johnson that all guidance in relation to schools is developed by the education recovery group, in which our local authorities are key participants. We work closely together to make sure that local authorities are fully involved in the formulation of that guidance, which has been supported by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. If there are any opportunities to revise the guidance in the light of the public health advice that is available to us, we will take them.

I recognise the importance of the points raised by Mr Johnson, and I have allocated additional resources to the youth work sector to support its activity, which is important in strengthening the opportunities that are available to young people in our society.

“The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community”

4. Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the action it is taking in response to the University of the Highlands and Islands publication, “The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community”. (S5O-04520)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The Scottish Government welcomes new ideas and opportunities to promote and improve the use of the Gaelic language. The UHI publication raises concerns about levels of Gaelic use in some island areas, and in July, I met the chair and the chief executive of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and policy officials to discuss the issues raised in the report.

At present, there is a range of important interventions in place, which we will continue to support. In addition, I will initiate a consultation to give community organisations on the islands the opportunity to give us their views on how to improve the use of Gaelic on the islands.

Next week, we will further reflect on the issues at a discussion that I will host on the progress on implementing the range of measures that arise out of the five-year national plan for Gaelic, as part of the annual update.

Donald Cameron: Since the report was published, there have been informal cross-party discussions among MSPs, councillors and others about the vital next steps and what might be done at a local community level. Will the cabinet secretary today commit to attending an urgent meeting or summit of elected representatives and other stakeholders, so that we can address the various issues raised in the report and determine a viable way forward to ensure the long-term future of the language?

John Swinney: I welcome the constructive contribution that Mr Cameron has made to the important debate, and I recognise the cross-party support for the development of the Gaelic language, which he rightly records. It is critical to take forward a range of steps that are broadly supported in the political community in Scotland.

As I indicated in my original answer, I will initiate a consultation involving community organisations. I would prefer to allow the consultation to take its course and hear the voices of communities directly, so that they can influence and shape the agenda. Thereafter, I would be happy to take part in discussions with members of all political parties, local stakeholders, council representatives and communities to address how we respond constructively and imaginatively to the thinking that emerges from the communities that are most interested in the development of the Gaelic language.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is just over six minutes left, and there are three more questions, so it will be difficult to fit in supplementaries.

Decisions about Schools (Views of Young People)

5. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how the views of young people will be taken into account in decisions about schools over the next few months. (S5O-04521)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): In June, I met a panel of learners to discuss their experiences of school closures and the coming school year. I will continue to take opportunities to listen to the views of young people and to ensure that those views are considered fully in decisions about schools.

Young people will be consulted during the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development review of curriculum for excellence, Professor Priestley's review of the awarding of the 2020 qualifications and the Scottish Qualifications Authority's consultation on the 2021 qualifications. We are also working closely with Young Scot on the promotion of essential messages, particularly on school safety and the wearing of face coverings.

Lewis Macdonald: The cabinet secretary will know that a minority of young people feel that their grades are lower than they should be on the basis on their teacher assessments, but do not meet the fairly narrow criteria for appeals, as set out by the SQA. What should young people in those circumstances do?

John Swinney: I encourage young people who have any concerns about the grades that they have received to discuss them with their schools. That is the appropriate channel for taking forward such concerns. I am confident that there is sufficient scope in the appeals criteria that have been set out by the SQA to enable any issues that require to be addressed to be addressed. The starting point for such discussions is dialogue between young people and their schools.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Previously, I have asked the cabinet secretary why the education recovery group does not include any young voices. Young people have shown time and again to be deserving of a seat at the table, but their voices were not heard before decisions were made on the 2020 exam diet and the return to school. Will the cabinet secretary now invite young people to join such discussions?

John Swinney: As I hope that I set out in my original answer, I am very happy to hear the views of young people as part of that process. We tend to do that through channels in which we can gather the views of a range of young people, rather than taking the view that one young person being represented on, for example, the education recovery group satisfactorily addresses all the different perspectives that we will hear from young people.

I assure Beatrice Wishart that we take particular care to listen to the views of young people in a number of forums. We listen carefully to the survey findings that come from Young Scot, which is very effective in reaching young people in our society, to enable us to reflect constructively on their points of view and the aspirations that they set out.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 6 was not lodged.

Social Distancing (Schools)

7. Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the required social distancing measures in schools. (S5O-04523)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The guidance on the reopening of schools that was published on 30 July provides detailed advice on physical distancing in schools. On the basis of scientific advice, and subject to all other risk-mitigation measures being appropriately implemented in schools, the guidance provides that there is no requirement for physical distancing between children in schools. Physical distancing of 2m should be maintained between adults and between adults and children and young people who are not from the same household.

As the guidance also makes clear, the implementation of the guidance on the return to full-time schooling is being monitored closely, and I am committed to ensuring that it is kept under review and updated when necessary, in line with the on-going scientific advice.

Jeremy Balfour: I have been contacted by a number of parents and school councils in Edinburgh who have concerns about children being kept away from school with colds, runny noses and sore throats. The children have no other symptoms, yet the schools say that they cannot attend because of guidance from the City of Edinburgh Council. Will the cabinet secretary consider giving fresh guidance to local authorities, to ensure that children can go to school if they have only a small cold or cough without lots of staff and teachers being prevented from entering the building?

John Swinney: I recognise that it is a finely balanced issue and that there will be anxiety in the school system about the presentation of symptoms that we would all recognise as being those of the routine colds that circulate at this time of year, when schools return. Care must be exercised. At today's lunchtime briefing, the First Minister set out some of the data on the level and prevalence of Covid among children and young people in our society—it is very, very low. There has been a massive increase in the number of young people being tested for Covid, and the number of positive cases is significantly less than 1 per cent.

There is a lot of anxiety. I encourage parents and schools to exercise care when making judgments about the routine colds that circulate that this time of year and to try to maximise the opportunities for young people and children to access learning.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask all members to be very brief.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Earlier in the week, I mentioned concerns about photographs of a school in my area. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that although the guidance on face masks is welcome, other elements, such as social distancing and hand washing, are equally important to ensuring that we minimise the risk of the virus spreading?

John Swinney: I take the opportunity to make it crystal clear—as I did in Parliament earlier this week—that there are a range of mitigation measures to be followed, one of which is the wearing of face coverings in communal areas. However, by far the most effective technique in reducing the spread of the virus is ensuring physical distancing and cleanliness in hand washing and the cleaning of surfaces. Those are

the fundamental elements of the approach that we are taking. All those measures must be pursued.

Impact of Lockdown (Recruitment of Additional Support Teachers)

8. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how many additional support teachers have been recruited in light of the impact of the lockdown on pupils' studies. (S5O-04524)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills: We are ring fencing £80 million for the recruitment of an estimated 1,400 additional teachers and 200 support staff this year to bring much needed resilience to the education system, and to support children and young people who have suffered loss of learning during lockdown.

Local authority recruitment of additional teachers is under way, informed by on-going assessment by schools and local authorities of the needs of children and young people during the first few weeks of their return to school. Once that process has concluded, we will be in a position to provide the number of additional teachers that have been recruited.

Finlay Carson: As we know, young people have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus. The Scottish Children's Services Coalition has referred to a "lost generation". Given the Scottish Government's record of having 1,000 fewer additional support needs teachers in Scotland than there were in 2010, does the cabinet secretary believe that one ASN teacher to more than 70 special educational needs pupils is an acceptable level of support? What target would he like to meet for ASN teachers in post in Scotland?

John Swinney: In addressing the statistics given by Mr Carson, it is important to recognise that the definition of pupils who have additional support needs has changed dramatically over the past 10 years. It is important that all staff are able and equipped to meet the needs of young people who will have a range of different support needs. In Scotland, the number of teachers in the profession is at a 10-year high. We have made provision for an additional 1,400 teachers to be brought into the education system in the light of Covid, as well as for other opportunities for us to supplement the scale and size of the teaching profession. A range of measures is being taken to ensure that the needs of all young people can be properly and fully met as part of the work that is undertaken in their schools.

14:54

Meeting suspended.

15:00

On resuming—

Health and Sport

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We resume with the final portfolio question session, which is on health and sport. As ever, if members wish to ask a supplementary to another member's question, they should enter "R" in the chat function, please. I am keen to get in as many members as I can, so please keep questions and answers as succinct as possible.

Care Home Workers (Weekly Covid-19 Testing)

1. Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making in meeting its commitment to carry out weekly Covid-19 tests on all care home workers. (S5O-04525)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): As Alison Harris knows, I advised members in the chamber on 19 May that all care home staff would be offered Covid-19 testing, regardless of symptoms, and that that would be undertaken every seven days. I can confirm that all care home staff in Scotland now have access to weekly testing. Of course, not all staff are available every week; staff may well be on holiday, off sick, or on maternity leave or other leave. Therefore, our agreed aim is to test 70 per cent of available staff.

The latest statistics show that 36,986 staff were tested in the week commencing 14 August. That was over 75 per cent of staff available. All care homes have had access to the United Kingdom social care portal since 8 June, and we have secured 67,900 tests per week. Over 90 per cent of our care homes have ordered through the portal.

Alison Harris: Despite the 70 per cent aim, which—granted—has been met, last week 17,000 of 53,000 staff failed to be tested. In the five weeks prior to that, the numbers ranged from 16,872 to 19,000. The figure remains high at a constant level of slightly over a third of staff. Surely all those staff cannot fall into the holiday, sick pay or maternity leave categories. What other explanation can the cabinet secretary offer for those failed and missed tests?

Jeane Freeman: So that we are factually accurate, I note that the percentage of available staff who have been tested in the past six weeks went from 69 per cent to 72 per cent to 75 per cent to 76 per cent two weeks in a row. In the week

commencing 14 August, the percentage was 77.7 per cent.

In that time—this is one of the explanations—the number of staff who declined to be tested reduced from just over 2,500 in a week to 1,014 in the most recent week for which we have figures. However, not all our care homes participate in the weekly testing in any one week, and we do not have all their results back in any one week. In every week, there will be some missing results, but I am pleased to say that there is also a declining number of staff who are declining testing and a declining number of care homes not participating in testing.

Regular participation in weekly testing has now been made one of the criteria that care homes must meet in order to take part in the extension of visiting through the designated indoor visitor for each resident, for example, and I am sure that we will see an increase in the number of care homes and the number of staff participating in the weekly testing regime.

We have addressed some of the issues with staff, as the member knows, particularly through the social care fund. With the co-operation and at the initiation of Ms Lennon, that fund addresses the poor terms and conditions of some staff who were only receiving statutory sick pay if they tested positive and were therefore fearful of being tested at all, lest that positive test be returned, because the reduction in their income would be so significant and so harmful to them and their families.

We have a group working with unions, my officials and Scottish Care; it looks every week at the particular issues that might be preventing staff from participating in testing or a care home from participating in the programme and we are looking to resolve those issues in real time.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Is the cabinet secretary able to provide a brief update on the work of the short-life consultation group that was established with union and care home management reps to better understand the concerns about staff having weekly testing?

Jeane Freeman: The short-life working group has met on six separate occasions and, as I said earlier, it has looked at a number of key operational issues. It is very task focused and looks at how we can resolve those issues. Most of the issues have now been addressed. Actions have included the introduction of four-weekly ordering of test kits to make the ordering burden on care homes less onerous, the bulk uploading of tests once completed and amendments to the user guidance for the social care portal. We have also produced a video encouraging staff to participate

in staff testing. The group will continue to explore any issues that are raised, either from the unions concerned, through their membership, or from care home managers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a further brief supplementary from Jackie Baillie.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be aware of my repeated requests for local testing facilities for care home staff and for local residents in my area. Last week, I had parents and their children being told to travel to Dunoon, Stirling and Edinburgh. This week, it was even further afield, to Belfast and to Carlisle. Will the cabinet secretary tell NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to provide local facilities in Dumbarton, the Vale of Leven or indeed Helensburgh for care home staff and for sick children, so that they do not have to travel hundreds of miles?

Jeane Freeman: Ms Baillie raises an important point. As I am sure she knows, our testing regime is currently facing a number of challenges. We undertake that testing regime through two main routes. The first of those is the UK portal, where people can book a test. The tests are processed through the Lighthouse lab in Glasgow. That Lighthouse lab is part of a network of three UK Lighthouse labs and there has been an upsurge in demand over the whole of the UK.

That demand means that some of the testing facilities where people can go to be tested have been capped at a UK level; the Lighthouse lab in Glasgow has been processing more tests from south of the border than from Scotland. All of that has created some of the difficulties that Ms Baillie's constituents and others have faced. We are working hard with the UK Government to resolve those issues and we are also working hard to increase our national health service capacity for testing, which is the other route that we use, so that we can divert some of those dedicated testing routes to the NHS route if that is what we need to do. That includes testing of care home workers, teachers, NHS staff and others. All that work is under way.

An additional point that might help Ms Baillie in this instance is that walk-in centres have been introduced, the first of which will open in St Andrews next week. Another 10 will be rolled out across Scotland that will focus initially on our university student population, which as you know will grow considerably over the coming weeks. Following those, a further group of walk-in centres will be introduced and I have already made it clear to my officials that I want to see those centres pick up on areas such as Ms Baillie's Inverclyde area and other parts of the country where there is a high population but limited access to local testing facilities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind all members of the need for succinct questions and answers.

Closure of Fitness Facilities and Services (Physical and Mental Health Impact)

2. **Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has carried out of the physical and mental health impact of closing fitness facilities and services during the COVID-19 pandemic. (S5O-04526)

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): The Scottish Government recognises the impact of indoor sport and physical activities being closed, and we appreciate the co-operation that has been shown by the public and the industry, which has allowed us to ease restrictions and permit indoor facilities to open from 31 August, with physical distancing and enhanced hygiene measures in place. We will shortly be publishing detailed impact assessments of the impact of restrictions on a range of activities, including fitness facilities and services.

Maurice Golden: Many activities—for example, grass-roots football—have been dealt a huge blow during the past months. The third sector resilience fund can help, but it is short term. The physical and mental benefits of local football clubs, especially youth clubs—[Inaudible.]—targeted support to ensure that our national game survives at the local level?

Joe FitzPatrick: I missed some of the question, but I think that it was basically about grass-roots sport in general and football in particular.

Maurice Golden is absolutely right about the importance of grass-roots sports for the physical and mental health of our population. We have been working closely with the Scottish Football Association and other sports governing bodies through sportscotland in order to maintain as much work as possible from those governing bodies to support on-going physical activity.

We have seen some amazing examples of innovation, and not just through the use of technology. However, what has been most notable is how various sports governing bodies have used technology to encourage their members to keep physically active. That said, I recognise the challenge in catching up on the time that has been lost because of the lockdown.

Covid-19 (Health Inequalities)

3. **James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle health inequalities arising from COVID-19. (S5O-04527)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): We are taking a number of actions but, for the sake of brevity, I will list only two or three.

The first is the setting up of the independent expert reference group on Covid-19 and ethnicity, which brings together experts, representative groups and academics in that field to look at the data and evidence on the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on those from minority ethnic communities. The group has already made recommendations that we are featuring in our board mobilisation plans, and we have asked that it is specifically ensured that those plans consider how we proceed with health inequalities.

We have also provided additional support to protect some of our most vulnerable people, with over £2 million to ensure additional help and support for those at risk as a result of drug and alcohol use, and over £1.5 million to third sector organisations to provide emergency hotel accommodation and support for people who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, homelessness during the pandemic.

Further actions will be planned by the Scottish Government in response to what we have learned from the equality and fairer Scotland impact assessments that have already been carried out in the development and implementation of our route map measures. As I mentioned earlier, the board mobilisation plans that are currently being looked at and assessed will be part of the discussion at the recovery group, which, as James Kelly knows, I chair.

James Kelly: Yesterday's report from Public Health Scotland highlighted the fact that high excess deaths over lockdown could result from the health service not being used by those who most need it. Given the high rate of deaths in the poorest communities, is the cabinet secretary concerned that a slow reopening of the health service will further escalate health inequalities?

Jeane Freeman: James Kelly raises an important point about how well we can improve the access to healthcare facilities, health screening programmes, and primary and community-based care for those who are most in need of that access and care.

The reopening of our national health service services and the pace at which we are safely able to do that are not the dominant factor; the dominant factors are how well we can roll out community link workers, how much we can learn from the evidence and the impact of deep-end practices, for example, and how we can ensure that our focus in remobilising our NHS is very much on primary, community and social care, and not exclusively on hospital-based care. That is part

of the commission that each of our health boards was set by me. That work is under way. It includes a subgroup of the mobilisation recovery group, which is looking at primary and community healthcare in particular.

Contact Tracing (Aberdeen)

4. **Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government for what reason reportedly only one of 30 bars in Aberdeen has been asked to provide its contact tracing list since the implementation of the local lockdown. (S5O-04528)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): The detailed decisions on how to respond to any cluster of cases, or an outbreak that follows it, are led by local incident management teams. The response will be informed by a team's understanding of the trigger case, the circumstances around it, where the other cases have come from and how one case is linked to another.

For example, if Peter Chapman looks at how the Dumfries and Galloway IMT responded to the outbreak in that region and compares it with the IMT response in Lanarkshire or Aberdeen, he will see that there are core actions that run through all the responses, but also that each team has applied its expert knowledge and understanding of health protection to its individual circumstances.

The local IMT in Aberdeen looked at what it needed to know, starting with the Hawthorn bar, from which the team secured contact details in paper and digital form. The team could then see and trace individual contacts, which led it to understand the number of premises in the night-time economy that were impacted, without having to ask each of those premises for the specific contact details that they might have been collecting.

The IMT debated more than once how best to deal with those premises. As Peter Chapman knows, it concluded in the end that the right way to make sure that everyone who might either have been affected, or was concerned or anxious about the cluster of cases, knew that the team was publishing details of all the premises that it knew might have had an individual who was a contact from the people on the original case list who had been in those premises. However, those people might not have been in the premises for long enough or in close enough contact with another person to qualify as a close contact.

Peter Chapman: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, but I do not accept it. Many bars in Aberdeen that were connected to the Covid outbreak have reported that no one from environmental health or NHS Grampian has

attempted to contact them or to gather their contact lists. That is a complete dereliction of duty that further highlights the failings of the Scottish Government's track and trace system. I now believe that that, inevitably, has meant that the lockdown has lasted for longer than was necessary.

Can the cabinet secretary give a commitment to the Parliament that lessons have been learned, and that businesses will be involved in future contact tracing, instead of being left in the dark, as they were in Aberdeen?

Jeane Freeman: It is regrettable that Mr Chapman has absolutely no evidence for the assertion that he has just made.

The national health service test and protect programme is proving itself to be highly effective in a range of outbreaks—from Dumfries and Galloway, around Gretna and Annan, through to the complex outbreak in Aberdeen, to the current one that is being successfully managed in Tayside. All are different and all are complex. All of them are being managed effectively, because we do not take a blanket national approach; rather, we rest on the expertise of public health professionals, through the IMT and work with local authorities, NHS boards and other colleagues.

I do not at all accept what Mr Chapman said, and I will give no such guarantee, because I think that politicians should not overrule the professional expertise of clinicians, health protection experts, public health academics and people who know their local areas. That is why our test and protect programme works so successfully. That combination of national support and local expertise is, so far, proving to be a very effective test and protect system.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 is from Murdo Fraser.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): [*Inaudible.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that Mr Fraser's question has not been heard. I am looking at the cabinet secretary, and I think that she has had the same experience.

We will move on. We hope to come back to Mr Fraser, if time allows. We will take question 6 now.

Impact of Covid-19 (Analysis by Drug Deaths Task Force)

6. Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what analysis the drug deaths task force has made of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5O-04530)

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): The task force and I

were both acutely aware of the risks that the pandemic and changes in how services are delivered, that were made as a result of lockdown measures, could pose to people who are reliant upon treatment and support. The task force has continued to meet regularly throughout the pandemic, and has taken forward a range of work to mitigate the risks. That work has included the rapid development of a series of recommendations, which have been implemented by the Scottish Government and others.

Bill Bowman: Fake Valium and drugs from so-called pill presses have, anecdotally, had a crippling effect on health in Dundee, where etizolam-related deaths rocketed by 500 per cent in 2018. The drugs death toll for 2019 will not, I understand, be known until December at the earliest, and experts fear the worst. Can the minister indicate whether the task force believes that Covid will have affected the numbers of deaths that are caused by such drugs?

Joe FitzPatrick: That is a hugely important question. Fake Valium is something that really concerns me, and we are hearing, anecdotally, increasing concerns about it from across Scotland. It is one of the areas in which I hope that we and our United Kingdom Government colleagues can work together.

Right now, a person can go online—I will not name particular websites—and buy, for a relatively small amount of money, a pill press that can churn out those lethal pills by the thousands. I cannot understand the justification for such devices. I hope that the Scottish, UK, Welsh and Northern Irish Governments can work together to regulate sale of pill presses, which are potentially responsible for producing a large amount of the really dangerous street Valium and other pills that are circulating in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will see whether Murdo Fraser is now able to ask his question.

I am afraid that Mr Fraser remains uncharacteristically silent. We will move rapidly to Joan McAlpine. I offer my apologies to Mr Fraser.

Cumberlege Review

7. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will fully implement the recommendations of the Cumberlege review regarding children damaged by sodium valproate and, if so, what the timescale will be. (S5O-04531)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): Before I answer Joan McAlpine's question, I should say that I will provide Murdo Fraser with a written answer to his

question. If he has more questions for me, I would be happy to respond to them offline, as it were.

On Joan McAlpine's question, I have welcomed Baroness Cumberlege's report, "First Do No Harm: The report of the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review". I know that a number of patients in Scotland provided evidence to the review. Although the review related primarily to NHS England and processes in England more generally, there are lessons and implications for us in Scotland. We are carefully considering all the recommendations in the report, and we will shortly respond to all of them.

Our sodium valproate advisory group, which is chaired by our chief pharmaceutical officer, met earlier this month to discuss the review and the next steps to be applied at Scotland level. This week, our officials met with representatives of patient groups to listen to their concerns, in order to inform our future action and response. As we finalise the detail of that response, we will certainly ensure that all members—not only Joan McAlpine—are aware of how we intend to take forward the recommendations, and of the timescale in which we will do so.

Joan McAlpine: My constituents Charlie and Lesley Bethune contacted me for help, because their adopted daughter Autumn, who is aged seven, has foetal valproate syndrome that was caused by her birth mother having taken the drug to control seizures during pregnancy. Mr and Mrs Bethune are members of the newly formed "First do no harm valproate Scotland" campaign group. The cabinet secretary did not mention that she had met with patients' groups. Will that parents' group be represented in any task force that is formed to take forward the Cumberlege report recommendations? The group could then help to shape a package of care and support for children such as Autumn, who have very considerable needs.

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to Joan McAlpine for her additional question. Whether or not there is a task force as such will be primarily for the United Kingdom Government to decide, as part of its response to the Cumberlege report.

As part of the Scottish Government response, we have, as I said, already been speaking to people to ensure that we hear patients' voices. The sodium valproate advisory group will ensure that it reaches out so that it can hear about patients' experiences and engage them in helping to form our recommendations. We will seek to do that across all areas of the Cumberlege report, as we respond to it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I offer my apologies to Murdo Fraser and Mark Ruskell, and to other colleagues who wished to ask

supplementary questions. We really are out of time. That concludes portfolio questions on health and sport.

Meeting closed at 15:29.

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