

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 29 June 2000

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## Scottish Parliament

*Thursday 29 June 2000*

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

### Economic Development

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Our first item of business this morning is a statement by Henry McLeish on "The Way Forward: Framework for Economic Development in Scotland".

09:30

**The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish):** Sir David, with your permission I would like to make a statement on the framework for economic development, because today we are publishing "The Way Forward: Framework for Economic Development in Scotland". It will be recalled that at the start of the year I issued an invitation to interested parties to take part in a consultation exercise aimed at devising a framework for economic development in Scotland. I know that the report has been eagerly awaited and later this morning the Deputy First Minister and I will host a press conference to launch the framework.

The document is a very substantial read, which is why I want to reassure members immediately that this will not be the only opportunity to discuss it. I am calling for a debate in the Parliament soon after the recess to allow everyone to consider the full report at greater length. That will make for what I hope will be a stimulating and creative discussion on the future of Scotland's economy. I am also planning to organise an autumn conference to take forward action flowing from the framework, the review of the enterprise network, the tourism strategy and other initiatives. That is critical to continue the dialogue with the many parties who have contributed to the framework and our thinking on other aspects of the economy. I have already had a brief discussion with the convener of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, Mr John Swinney, on that matter.

In recent months we have been taking forward individual aspects of the commitments in the programme for government, for example in "Social Justice... a Scotland where everyone matters", in which we set out what steps will be taken towards achieving our social justice objectives and towards eradicating child poverty. Today we move another stage forward with the publication of "The Way Forward: Framework for Economic Development

in Scotland". This is an important step that will help us to secure the economic opportunities that can deliver the Executive's vision. It will do that by defining the Executive's vision for economic development and by detailing the action-oriented steps that will help us to achieve that vision which, simply, is to raise the quality of life for all Scottish people by increasing economic opportunities for all on a socially and environmentally sustainable basis.

Long-term thinking about the economy is crucial. The UK Government has an overall economic strategy to guide its actions and national development plans have been a common element in the economic thinking of Ireland, Finland and Catalonia for a number of years. Of course, there are many more examples. This framework is the first framework for economic development that we have had in Scotland. It is a measure of our new political circumstances—and I would argue that there has never been a more pressing need for such a framework.

We are now one year into devolution, which has fundamentally altered the nature and visibility of government in Scotland. It demands that we raise the tone and quality of the economic debate. The framework can help us to focus the discussion. We have introduced a number of strategies on specific sectors of the economy—on the manufacturing and tourism sectors in the past year and important work is going ahead in many other areas, including the knowledge economy and digital Scotland. We need to ensure that they are well directed and part of a coherent overall picture. The framework gives us a basis for doing that.

The pace of change in the international economy is extremely rapid and we must understand the nature of the changes if we are to anticipate rather than react and respond optimally at all times. The framework sets out the context in which we can develop such understanding. The information age, or knowledge economy, poses unprecedented changes, challenges and opportunities in telecommunications and technology. The framework will help us to address those issues.

This is a framework for the whole of the Scottish economy. It is not narrowly focused on a part of the Scottish economy, a specific institution within the economy or a geographic area. It is intentionally very broadly focused; on the economy as a whole and on all the different players who influence the direction of Scotland's economy. The framework seeks to engage everyone with an interest in, and influence upon, Scotland's economy. It is, of course, crucial that the Executive prioritises its actions. The framework sets out specifically to guide our actions in that respect.

The framework is not, however, about the public sector alone. With the economy as the centrepiece, it is only natural that the framework highlights the vital and leading contribution of the private sector. I want it to be a framework for the business community which not only spells out to the business sector the Executive's thinking on the economy—helpful as that undoubtedly will be—but engages the business sector and provides us with common aims and objectives in working together on our economic development.

The framework is built on six key principles: it is inclusive; it is longer term—it looks to a five to 10-year horizon; it is dynamic; it is comprehensive; it is a partnership; and it is evidence based.

It is important that at the end of the first year of the Parliament and the Executive, and as we look towards the second year, we look at maintaining policy by ensuring that it is based on evidence and rigorous analysis, not on anecdote and ad hoc assessment. I suggest that all parties can be guilty of that, including my own. That said, I believe that these are sensible, progressive, pragmatic principles that will help us in creating a successful Scottish economy.

Overall, there are six key actions in the framework. I wish briefly to switch from the principles to what the framework will do. As I stated, it sets out a vision that we can all support, but it also identifies four key outcomes that we must secure. First, we need to secure economic growth through increasing international competitiveness—that is common sense, but it is vital. Secondly, we need to achieve regional development in our country, which will mean that we can overcome the social and economic barriers to everyone sharing in the prosperity. Thirdly, we need to foster social integration. Fourthly, we need to secure sustainability.

Crucially, the framework focuses in large measure on a range of factors that take us towards the outcomes and the vision—factors relating to the macro-economy; the economic infrastructure; enterprises; and to securing social, regional and environmental objectives through removing the barriers to development and focusing on environmental quality.

The framework highlights a number of policy statements to be driven forward quickly by the Executive but produced in close collaboration with all other key interested bodies, as we seek to go further in setting out the specific ways in which we can put the framework into practice and to focus firmly on the extremely difficult choices that will need to be made on allocating expenditure.

While the framework articulates our broad thinking on the economy, it identifies a stimulus to action, consistent with the aims and vision of the

framework. The policy statements that it proposes are absolutely critical and necessary; indeed, they will be the most crucial aspect of this project. It recognises the need for a sophisticated understanding of what drives economic development and it identifies the key areas where we need to develop our understanding. It sets out our thinking about how we in the Executive, and the Executive's agencies, can improve the effectiveness of our policies and our expenditure in areas affecting economic development.

The framework sets out many of the key issues affecting Scotland's longer-term economic future. The enhancement of productivity is crucial. It is the basis of Scotland's competitiveness in the global economy and a fundamental ingredient for our success. At present, Scotland has a productivity gap compared with many of the major advanced economies. A sustainable improvement in our productivity is, however, dependent on several factors. I shall list them briefly.

Our competitiveness is influenced by the macro-economy. Low and stable inflation, and the balanced expansion in demand that makes it possible, are essential. There will inevitably be debate in Scotland on the fine print of the macro-economy but the central concern of the framework is whether the overall macro-economic conditions are in place to foster private sector development and promote participation in economic activity.

Moving to supply-side areas, it is vital that we concentrate on Scotland's human capital. We will continue to promote the responsibility of employers and individuals in ensuring that appropriate lifelong learning skills development is accorded high priority. Put simply, the ambition of the chamber and the Executive should be to make Scotland a major European knowledge centre.

In addition, we need to ensure that our enterprises are more competitive. Of course, we need to ensure that we have effective transport and electronic communications infrastructure—that is vital. Because of the critical importance of the electronic infrastructure, the framework attaches high priority to the development of mechanisms whereby the Executive can understand the evolving challenge in that area and how it should respond on a continuing basis.

In closing, I wish to emphasise that the framework is another example of devolution making a difference to the lives of the people of Scotland. We have moved forward from the programme for government to some of the detailed thinking that impacts on all departments, ministers, businesses, individuals and the committees of the Parliament. By pursuing the priorities set out in the framework, I believe we will secure the economic opportunities that can deliver a better quality of life for all our people. I commend

this statement to the Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** I congratulate the minister on deleting large sections of his prepared text, so keeping us to time.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** I thank the minister for his usual courtesy in providing notice of the statement and copies of the document. I was surprised to see a preface by the First Minister. I cannot imagine that it was sent to him for light relief during his recuperation—although I am sure he has read it.

I welcome the minister's statement and the document, which is something we have long called for to structure the debate about economic policy in Scotland. I welcome the proposal for a debate in the autumn on these issues. A knee-jerk reaction to a very detailed 92-page document would not be appropriate; we will bring our comments on the document to the debate in the autumn. We have no difficulty supporting the vision outlined in the document—anyone would be hard pressed to disagree with it. The debate must be on—our contribution in the autumn and my questions this morning will focus on it—how the document will make a meaningful difference to how public and economic policy in Scotland is delivered.

I was glad to hear the minister acknowledge the importance of learning from the Irish economy and how it is planned. That is in contrast to one of his predecessors who had a different view of the Irish economy. I agree with the minister that the macro-economic climate is of great significance, but I do not see in the document much reference to the impact of fuel tax and the climate change levy on the productivity and competitiveness challenges faced by the Scottish economy.

Does the minister accept that arising from this framework a very clear direction will need to be given to a multiplicity of Government agencies to ensure that they are operating within its terms? I have real concerns that what the minister says today is not reflected in some of the work of agencies such as Scottish Enterprise, the Scottish Further Education Funding Council and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, which are vital in tackling some of the challenges set out in the document.

Will the minister tell us more about how he proposes to get real, concrete action arising from the document? The document is worthy but I would like to see how it translates into action. Will he tell us what reflection there has been in the Executive on the need to ensure greater value from its public expenditure and how it intends to deliver that?

Finally, one of the things that is missing from the document is that if we are to set out a vision and outcome and enabling objectives, we surely need

to have measures in place to show whether we are succeeding or underperforming. Some fairly stiff measures of the Executive's ambition for the future economy should have been part of the document.

**Henry McLeish:** I sincerely hope that the First Minister will be watching the game this evening with more enthusiasm and interest than for reading the 92 pages we have submitted to him. However he is very keenly interested in the economy and I am delighted that he wrote the foreword.

John Swinney's first question was on direction given to agencies. I absolutely agree and I hope that in the announcement of the review of the network next week we can link that in. When we have, for the first time in postwar Scotland, a framework for economic development at national level, that should feed through to what we do at a local level. It should feed through our national agencies such as Scottish Enterprise to the local authorities, the local enterprise companies and to all those who are participating in economic delivery. That is vital—there is no point in having a framework if it is not meaningful at local level.

Also critical—in relation to John Swinney's second question—is how we take matters further. I want first of all to see a set of policies that flow from the framework for economic development. There will be a further debate on how best we can focus. I have often talked about Scotland being smart and sophisticated. We must now learn from some of the countries and regional Governments that I have mentioned, because that is how they do it. That is how the Irish and Finns focus; that is what they do in Catalonia with huge success. I want that attitude and change in culture to ensure that we drive that forward in the policy details.

Thirdly, I too sign up to value for money. There is no point in the Executive having a budget of about £18 billion and my department having a budget of £2 billion if we do not examine every pound we spend. The crucial issue is adding value to the Scottish economy. I want devolution to be about adding value. One way that can be done, as John Swinney suggested, is to ensure that in relation to public expenditure we not only have joined-up government, but ensure that it is focused on returns.

John Swinney's final question was about what measures are in place to ensure that we are making progress and how we gauge success. That will flow from this document, which is not about targets or outcomes; it is a framework within which those vital issues can be further developed. Those four questions will be considered next week with the review of the network and will continue to be considered into the autumn. Those are important issues for the country.

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland)**

**(Con):** I thank Henry McLeish for the courtesy of making available the statement and the document.

The Conservatives, also, welcome the prospect of a debate in the autumn and a conference to discuss this issue further. We welcome the concept of a framework for economic development in Scotland. My principal concern is about what this all adds up to. I must say to the minister that although this document may make the briefcases of businessmen heavier, I am not so sure it will set business hearts beating.

I hold that view because from my brief perusal of the framework it is clear that it is a worthy document for its broad generalisations and sense of vision and because it gives some helpful indications of what the minister considers the key policy matters for enterprise in Scotland to be, but it seems somewhat short on specifics and I think that that is what the business community now seeks from the Executive, in particular from the minister.

The minister will have to start to pin his enterprise colours to the mast, because I detect that there may be a suspicion in the business community that he will be trammelled or cluttered by the political baggage of colleagues, in the sense that he might be impeded in giving a clear and essential message to enterprise in Scotland as to where he seeks to go, how he expects to get there and what measures he intends to put in place to assess how the journey is going.

If this framework is to be a meaningful guide and steer to the business community—that is what is being urgently sought from the minister—I would like the minister to explain how he plans to measure what is happening. Are there targets? Is there focus? What aspects of economic activity in Scotland does the minister feel are critical for the future?

In his statement, the minister said about policy statements that the Executive seeks

“to focus firmly on the extremely difficult choices that will need to be made on allocating expenditure.”

If the minister feels that one of the deficiencies in the Scottish economy today is a lack of inventive and innovatory skills and capacities to enable us to beat off challenges from other countries, is not it a matter of concern that 40 per cent of the research and development grants for our higher educational institution are devoted to social sciences?

In no way am I knocking social sciences; what I am trying to get at is that if this framework is to be sensible, it must be a cohesive picture and we must ensure that all the integral players, such as the higher education institutions, are tied into

whatever the steer to the business community will be. Clarification on that aspect would be helpful.

**Henry McLeish:** Annabel Goldie's comments were uncharacteristically ungracious. As I said to John Swinney, in a sense the document is not about targets or focus. It is about demand by the business and trade union sectors and members for a framework that provides coherence to the multiplicity of initiatives and activities in which we are involved. In one of Scotland's national newspapers this morning it was suggested that I enjoy initiatives. Maybe I do, but the time has come for a coherent framework in which those initiatives can be implemented. I take Annabel's point that providing coherence is essentially the aim of the framework.

Annabel is absolutely right that the agencies and universities are crucial to economic development. She asked what the framework might do for the hard realities in areas in which Scotland is not doing well, such as e-commerce, productivity, the skills gap and the commercialisation of science. If she looks further into the document—I appreciate that she has had only a short time to read it—she will find pages and pages about those areas in which we have to do much better, from the electronic infrastructure right through to learning involving universities and science.

My intention is that the framework should lead to a flow from principles to action points to details. It is then that we will have targets. I do not want a society in Scotland that is aiming for a vision but does not have any benchmarks, so that in 10 years' time we will say that the framework was there but we will have to ask where we have been and what we have achieved. The next step is to get into the issues. The whole of Scotland will be engaged in taking the process forward.

**Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):**

I join my colleagues in thanking the minister for making the statement available in advance. I welcome the publication of “The Way Forward: Framework for Economic Development in Scotland” and I look forward to reading it in full, which I certainly did not manage to do at breakfast this morning.

I wish to raise a specific matter to which the minister referred in his statement. Obviously, as we discussed in the Finance Committee debate yesterday, micro-economic policy should be evidence based and underpinned by robust data and rigorous analysis. Does the minister agree with several leading Scottish academic economists that there are significant gaps in our knowledge of the Scottish economy, which make sound policy making difficult? Those gaps include lack of data about service industries and Scottish education and training performance, and lack of information about the volume and value of exports

by commodity, destination and origin.

Will the minister respond to the specific point that, as a matter of urgency, we need to increase the number of staff who are available to the office of the chief economic adviser, who, I understand, has only four members of staff? Will he undertake to discuss with the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council the possibility of adjusting its incentive structure to promote policy-relevant as well as academic research? What is the current status of the panel of economic advisers to the Secretary of State for Scotland which existed in the days of the Scottish Office? Does the Scottish Executive have a similar panel? If not, does the minister intend to set one up?

**Henry McLeish:** Keith Raffan makes a good point about the gaps in our knowledge. I, too, have read Jeremy Peat's book on the Scottish economy, in which economists identified many gaps in the statistical information that is needed to have a useful debate. We have taken some steps in the past year to address some of the issues. Following from the framework, we are considering setting up a consultative committee on Scottish economic statistics. Keith Raffan is right: there is no point in having a vision and practical policies if we do not have the data to have an intelligent debate.

Keith Raffan spoke about the importance of the chief economic adviser. I think that a more prominent role should be given to the chief economic adviser in the work of the Executive and the Parliament. His contribution to the framework has been enormous. It is a solid, substantial document, which addresses some of the key issues. The role of Dr Andrew Goudie needs to be considered and I will certainly reflect positively on what Keith Raffan has said.

I also agree with what Keith Raffan said about research. Many countries that are smaller than Scotland are doing better than we are in the commercialisation of science, the application of processes and the development of products. We have to be much more focused about what we are doing in the economy. We need a balance between academic and practical research, but this is an on-going debate.

The panel of advisers the Conservatives had has disappeared—or, to put it more politely, is no longer in existence. The reason for that is that it had served its purpose. I am not sure whether it did or not. We now have a raft of business advisers on specific areas—the review, the knowledge economy and so on. We need to be a bit more cohesive and bring more of that expert advice from outside into the heart of what we do. That is another issue I take seriously.

**Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab):**

Like my fellow Labour members, I am at a bit of a disadvantage in not having a copy of the document to which Annabel Goldie and John Swinney referred. Nevertheless, I welcome the publication of the document. An economic framework was lacking during the 18 years of the Conservative Administration, which singularly failed to address that enormous gap. I look forward to the debate after the recess.

I want to ask about regional policy and its relationship to the framework document. If I may be somewhat parochial, it is extremely important to equip areas such as Ayrshire, which have long depended on traditional manufacturing industries, for the new economy through e-commerce and by addressing the skills gap to which the minister referred. How do regional selective assistance and the priority plus programme fit into the development of regional policy for areas such as North Ayrshire, which are excluded from the economic development to which the minister refers?

**Henry McLeish:** Allan Wilson raises an important point. Since the war, the debate in the United Kingdom has been about regional policy within the UK, in which Scotland was regarded as a region. The economic framework attempts to talk about regional policy within Scotland. It is clear that despite unemployment being at a 25-year record low and employment at a 34-year high, prosperity is not going to every part of Scotland. North Ayrshire is a key area where we want to make a difference. I see Dr Richard Simpson nodding—Clackmannanshire is another.

We want to ensure that we focus on regional policy, which will mean making the best of what Europe and Westminster decide and ensuring that we pursue the policies in Scotland. In mid-July, I will launch an employment opportunities for all package, which will address those issues head on.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** My question also is about regional policy. The document places much emphasis on regional policy or, to use the new term used on page 64, "peripheral sub-national economies"—new Labour, new jargon.

On Tuesday of this week, Dr John Reid indicated in an answer to David Stewart that the map showing the UK's proposals to the European Commission for those parts of Scotland and Britain that should continue to receive assisted area status has been resubmitted. Why has the map not been published? I presume that it will be published, given that the map submitted last July was. Does the minister accept that businesses in the Highlands are more concerned about funding than about framework documents and that they have a right to know what parts of Scotland, in

particular in the Highlands and Islands, have received the backing of the Governments at Westminster and Holyrood?

**Henry McLeish:** It is important to spell out that the Executive believes that every part of Scotland should benefit from the economy and everything that we are doing. The Highlands and Islands benefit as well. It is not right to say that businesses in the Highlands and Islands do not need a framework for economic development. The Highlands and Islands need hard-edged help and assistance where required. That is why there is a small business service in Highlands and Islands Enterprise and why we are giving the Highlands and Islands help with skills.

We want to ensure that the Highlands and Islands benefit from the new regional map, which is being finalised by the Government at Westminster and in Brussels. It is important not to keep talking down the Highlands and Islands, which is a prosperous part of the United Kingdom. There are areas that need additional investment and development, which is why we work as we do day in, day out. That coincides completely with the emphasis on regional development policy in the document. Why should not every part of Scotland benefit from what is happening? That is the aim and objective. We look forward to working with Fergus Ewing and his colleagues to ensure that that becomes a reality for every part of the Highlands and Islands.

**Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):** The minister referred to economic opportunity for all and improving competitiveness. Does he agree that Scotland's economic prosperity and opportunity can be enhanced by addressing the challenge posed by European enlargement, which will open up markets to Scottish business? Does he agree that a social and economic impact analysis of sectors expanding and contracting would assist Scottish business in preparing for that opportunity?

**Henry McLeish:** Irene Oldfather's first point is well made. The debate on Europe has concentrated on economic integration—on the euro and issues surrounding it—but there is another matter that is important for Scotland, which is enlargement. Scotland should be considering the exports situation and the intense competition that will result from the accession of many other countries. I have already discussed the export issue with Irene and I can assure her that we will consider it carefully.

Irene Oldfather's second point was about the analysis of companies in Scotland. Part of our programme is to ensure that Scotland takes advantage of worldwide competition and opportunity. That requires the key agencies to make assessments of what is happening and to

investigate potential opportunities. I have talked about economic opportunities for all in Scotland, but that will largely depend on how good we are at taking advantage of economic opportunities worldwide—there is a strong link between them.

**The Presiding Officer:** We have run out time but, as the minister said, we will return to the debate after the recess.

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** We now come to Parliamentary Bureau motions S1M-1060 and S1M-1061 on the approval of statutory instruments.

### *Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (Orkney) (Scotland) Order 2000 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the following orders be approved –

The draft Electricity Lands and Water Undertakings (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2000 and

The draft Docks and Harbours (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 2000.—[Mr McCabe.]

## Education and Training (Scotland) Bill: Timetable

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The next motion is S1M-1065, on the timetable for the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill.

10:01

**The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe):** If members have any concerns or questions about the motion, I am happy to try to address them.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that for Stage 3 of the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill, debate on each part of the proceedings, if not previously brought to a conclusion, shall be brought to a conclusion at the following times –

Amendments – no later than 1 hour 30 minutes after Stage 3 begins

Motion to pass the Bill – no later than 2 hours after Stage 3 begins.

10:02

**Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I do not intend to support motion S1M-1065. I have given Mr McCabe notice of that and I have raised the matter at the Parliamentary Bureau.

A very bad precedent is being set by automatically guillotining every stage 3 debate. No doubt, there are circumstances in which the chamber would want to curtail the stage 3 debate of a bill, and that might be opposed by any party. However, currently we do not hold any stage 3 debate without a guillotine. Sometimes that does not matter—last week, for example, we had too much time and we are likely to find ourselves in a similar situation today. However, if we get into the mindset that we cannot have a stage 3 debate without curtailing discussion, at some stage we will deeply regret it. Indeed, we almost reached that point some weeks ago in the stage 3 debate on the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill, and that should have taught us a lesson. There is no need for a guillotine today. The debate will not take a long time and there is no indication from any party or member that they will filibuster. Indeed, with the powers available to the Presiding Officer, that would not be possible.

It is clearly the intention of the Executive to have a guillotine on every occasion, but if we take that approach, at some stage, democracy will be damaged. I want to ensure that every time we are presented with a guillotine, we consider whether it is required. If we do not need such a guillotine, the motion to curtail the debate should not be brought

to the chamber. I oppose the motion and I ask others to oppose it, too.

10:03

**Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP):** I support Mr Russell's comments. The last time we opposed a guillotine motion, Mr McCabe said that the purpose of the motion was for the guidance of the Presiding Officer. If one examines the terms of the motion, it is clear that it is not about guidance, but is a precise instruction that debate will terminate at a fixed time. We should not go down that road.

10:04

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** The Conservatives concur with the comments made by Mr Russell. One of these days—although not this morning—the Executive's approach will cause difficulties. We must establish the principle that guillotine motions are unacceptable.

10:05

**Mr McCabe:** We discussed the issue in some detail last week. There is no great purpose to be served in repeating ourselves. However, I must respond to a couple of points made by Mike Russell.

Timetabling motions—particularly the one on today's debate—are not about guillotining or restricting debate, but are the exact opposite. Having a timetabling motion with particular knives that come down at specific times ensures that specific sections of the bill are protected for debate. Without those specific time insertions, it would be perfectly possible for members in the chamber to filibuster, to avoid debate on a particular section of a bill. As I said, a timetabling motion protects debate in the chamber. That very principle underpinned the consultative steering group's approach to the issue. *[Interruption.]* Presiding Officer, we are talking about the protection of debate in the chamber, and a rabble on the SNP benches continues to carry on when members are discussing the matter. You might wish to intervene on that. However, as I said, the motion is about protecting debate in the chamber.

This morning's situation is particularly ironic. This motion is simply a timetabling motion that allows the chamber to know when the debate will finish. No specific sections are mentioned, and the whole time is open for debate on the amendments, with 30 minutes at the end to wrap up the bill. There is no reason whatever for complaint other than people's wish to provide the chamber with no notice or indication of the structure to today's business. There is a very good reason indeed for the motion.

One specific point has been raised. During the stage 3 debate on the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill, the timetabling motion was agreed with the involvement of all the parties. On that occasion, the time allotted to each section was clearly too tight, and that has been fully recognised. If, when a timetabling motion is moved, there has been consultation with the parties, as is always the case, and we have tried to ensure that there is sufficient time for each section, I see no case whatever for moving away from the concept of a timetabling motion. It should always be agreed in a spirit of consensus. It is the Executive's intention to discuss the time available, and we will continue to try to do so. We tried on this occasion, and will do so on every other occasion in future.

**The Presiding Officer:** I must put the question to the chamber. The question is, that motion S1M-1065, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### AGAINST

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 54, Against 41, Abstentions 0.

#### *Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that for Stage 3 of the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill, debate on each part of the proceedings, if not previously brought to a conclusion, shall be brought to a conclusion at the following times –

Amendments – no later than 1 hour 30 minutes after Stage 3 begins

Motion to pass the Bill – no later than 2 hours after Stage 3 begins.

## **Education and Training (Scotland) Bill: Stage 3**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Before we begin stage 3 proceedings on the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill, I want to make the usual announcement about the procedures that will be followed. Members will be becoming familiar with them by now.

First, we deal with amendments to the bill, then we move to debate on the question that the bill be passed. For the first part, members should have the bill, which is SP Bill 14A as amended at stage 2, the marshalled list containing all the amendments selected for debate and the groupings as agreed by the Presiding Officers. Amendments have been marshalled in the order that the Parliament has agreed, and will be debated in groups where appropriate. Each amendment will be disposed of in turn; an amendment that has been moved may be withdrawn with the agreement of the members present. It is of course possible for members not to move amendments if they wish.

The electronic voting system will be used in all divisions, and as is common on such occasions, I will allow an extended voting period of two minutes for the first division in each group.

### **Section 1—Education and training: grants**

10:09

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to the marshalled list of amendments selected for stage 3. Fiona McLeod will move and speak to amendment 2, which is on its own.

**Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP):** In moving amendment 2, which is in my name, I want to make it clear to the chamber that the amendment is about targeting grants to new learners and people on low incomes.

The amendment is also about setting out principles—the flimsiness of the bill was debated at stage 1. The amendment is about the commitment of the Scottish Executive to lifelong learning and social inclusion, principles that everyone in the chamber supports and would want to see in the bill.

The Association of Scottish Colleges says that individual learning accounts should encourage into education and training those otherwise not inclined or able to take part, in particular, those from the most educationally and economically excluded groups, such as those in low-paid or casual employment or who are currently out of work. The Association of Scottish Colleges believes that

consideration should be given to a priority place system, to ensure that new learners and those most in need of support are taking up ILAs. The 25 per cent targeting that is suggested in the amendment would allow that.

A recent poll by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education found that 61 per cent of Scots who replied said that they were either unlikely or very unlikely to engage in any form of organised learning in the foreseeable future. That is a situation which we must address. If we believe in lifelong learning for all members of society, the chamber will welcome the amendment, which will ensure that 25 per cent of the funds will be targeted, in the first instance, towards new learners and those on low incomes.

Yesterday, I met a young woman from Who Cares? Scotland, who informed me of the frightening statistic that only 1 per cent of care leavers go on to any kind of further education. We have to overcome that, and the 25 per cent rule would help us to do so.

To illustrate why I felt the need to lodge the amendment, I will quote Nicol Stephen's reply to Margaret Ewing during the stage 1 debate. He said:

"The system will be demand led, based on the requests that are received."—[*Official Report*, 25 May 2000; Vol 6, c 1158.]

I do not believe that that is good enough to ensure that we capture everyone who needs to learn, especially those who are the most difficult to reach and are least likely to take advantage of ILAs without an extra incentive.

I take heart from Nicol Stephen's comments at the stage 2 debate in the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee. He suggested that, as some members of the committee had suggested, we might start to target individual groups for individual learning accounts or for priority treatment. He said that, once we have kick-started ILAs and started to change the culture and attitude towards lifelong learning, we might more closely target individual learning accounts or aspects of them on non-traditional learners and the socially excluded.

I say to Nicol Stephen that, by accepting my amendment, he will ensure that we do not have to wait until we have kick-started the process and that the principles of lifelong learning and social inclusion will be included in the bill.

I move amendment 2.

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen):** This could have been the first time that members would have seen a minister filibustering to fill the time allocated by the timetabling motion, but I will avoid the temptation to do so and make swift progress

through the amendments, while ensuring that there is full debate on every item. There will be adequate time for that, given the length of time that was allocated to stage 2 in committee.

Fiona McLeod questioned whether the bill makes it clear that we believe in lifelong learning for all members of society. The answer to that, clearly, is yes. That is what the bill is intended to achieve, which is why it has secured cross-party support. We want to reach all members of society. I will talk about the issue of targeting shortly.

10:15

The bill is aimed at achieving a major cultural change in people's approach to learning. Everyone must update their skills throughout their lives, and we believe that it is important that the individual learning account scheme is open to absolutely everyone aged 18 and over throughout Scotland. While we want to encourage new learners in particular, we also want to encourage existing learners to continue the learning habit throughout their lives. We do not believe that it would be appropriate to limit the availability of individual learning accounts at this stage.

We fully acknowledge that we must ensure that those who have the most to gain take full advantage of the initiative, such as those mentioned by Fiona McLeod: individuals with low skills, the socially disadvantaged and those who have, for whatever reason, not accessed training in the past. We will do all that we can to ensure that we reach those individuals.

However, the initiative must be demand led—we are talking about adults, and learning cannot be forced on individuals. We must encourage, motivate and get the cultural change that is required to ensure that people access learning throughout their lives. It would be inappropriate to ration the supply of individual learning accounts to particular groups, and quite wrong to include in the bill a fixed percentage—the 25 per cent suggested by Fiona McLeod—which none of us, with hand on heart, knows is the right percentage.

We believe that demand is better tackled through the marketing strategy, which will ensure that the maximum effort is spent on getting the individual learning account message through to the right people in the right places. As Fiona McLeod said, that means reaching the socially disadvantaged and those who have not accessed learning in the past. It is more important to debate how much of that marketing effort is to be spent on the deprived and rural areas of Scotland, and on ensuring that people aged 18 and over know about the initiative and how it will be able to help them.

As I indicated during the earlier stages of the

Education and Training (Scotland) Bill, local enterprise companies will have the lead role in relation to the marketing strategy. They will try to ensure that we achieve those aims, but we will closely monitor the strategy. In future, having kick-started the scheme, to use Fiona McLeod's term, we can consider a targeting approach, if appropriate. Given that this is such a major scheme, with a target of 100,000 individual learning accounts over the next two years, everyone would agree that it would be dangerous to restrict the scheme in the way suggested by Fiona McLeod, as the message would fail to get through to individuals in deprived communities and would fail to reach the people whom it is most important to reach. At this stage, the universal approach is the right one.

We will give a targeted approach further consideration, but such an approach should not be included in the bill. We have the flexibility to amend the regulations if that is felt to be appropriate at a later date.

**Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab):** Will the minister give way?

**Nicol Stephen:** I am just about to close, but I will give way to Dr Simpson.

**Dr Simpson:** In rejecting amendment 2, despite its excellent sentiments, will the minister agree to discuss with the appropriate committee the details of the monitoring of the scheme? LECs may be able to demonstrate strong evidence that groups such as adults who were previously looked-after children and those emerging from prison, who are also often previously looked-after children, are being encouraged to take up individual learning accounts. If so, many of us would feel much more comfortable in rejecting this quite restrictive amendment.

**Nicol Stephen:** Absolutely—I guarantee that feedback will be given to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee. We will monitor progress, analyse how the marketing budget is being spent and identify whether disadvantaged groups and non-traditional learners are accessing individual learning accounts in the numbers that we wish. If there are problems, we will ensure that some of the budget for individual learning accounts is spent on trying to overcome those problems.

However, I believe that we should consider taking such action at a later stage, once individual learning accounts are up and running. I believe that neither amendment 2 nor the 25 per cent threshold should be part of the bill.

I ask Parliament to reject amendment 2.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I support amendment 2, in the name of Fiona McLeod. I

wish to declare an interest: in a previous life, as a consultant, I undertook a number of reviews of individual learning account programmes. One of the key conclusions of nearly all the studies of the pilot programmes that I have seen so far is that neither the benefits to new learners and to socially excluded people nor the penetration level have been as great as for other people.

I am disappointed in the minister's response. If he had said that he did not want the text of the amendment in the bill, but made some positive proposals to achieve its objectives, it would have been most acceptable. However, the minister has not come up with anything that in any way guarantees that the people from low-income groups and new learners will be targeted under the programme in the way that is required.

I can give some practical illustrations of why such targeting is required. The minister has mentioned a target of 100,000 people taking up individual learning accounts over the next two years, which is about 50,000 people a year. Achieving the numerical target will not be that difficult. One of the current problems in many training programmes, particularly as the end of the financial year is approached, is that, in every local enterprise company the length and breadth of Scotland, it is a case of getting bums on seats to achieve the numerical targets.

If the programme concentrates purely on the throughput target, it will not achieve its other, equally important, objectives, in particular that of encouraging a high proportion of new learners and people from low-income groups.

The other reason why amendment 2 is required is that the type of people who tend not to be volunteered by companies on a proactive basis are those in their middle age of working, particularly males over the age of 45. There is a special problem with the percentage of males over 45 who are becoming economically inactive, and who are finding it difficult to get retraining or to find alternative employment. That needs to be tackled. The individual learning account programme is one way to try to expand opportunity and to ensure that males over the age of 45 in particular, one of the highest unemployment groups in Scotland, can gain greater access to learning and training and, through that, greater access to employment or alternative employment opportunities.

The minister says that the individual learning account programme is to be demand led. If it is demand led, the usual suspects in every company will be the first to volunteer for the programme. They are the people who benefit from nearly all the existing programmes, and who will benefit most from this one. The people who are least likely to volunteer for such a programme are on low incomes; they might have families to look after

or might be a bit worried about going through the process of learning for the first time in perhaps 20 or 30 years.

If the programme is to be demand led, and if there is to be no proactive promotion of it among the target groups that I mentioned, the objectives that the Government has set itself will not be achieved.

The chances are that we will not win the vote on the amendment, but I beg the minister to produce something more substantial and to give us proactive proposals as to how the targets are to be achieved.

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland)**

**(Con):** We have much sympathy with Ms McLeod's amendment. The difficulty was whether to accept it at this stage or—as was alluded to by the minister—to face the prospect of inflexibility being brought into the bill.

One of the features that struck me in committee was the experience of the pilot scheme in Grampian. Clearly, an attempt to introduce a rigid template there had not worked. That was quickly recognised and, quite rightly, the scheme switched to a demand-led approach, with vastly improved marketing, to ensure that the people who could benefit from the scheme were aware of it and could then apply.

While there is sympathy for the amendment from Conservative members, I feel that to agree to it would lead to an unacceptable element of inflexibility in the scheme at its embryonic stage. Having said that, I believe that there might be an argument—as Dr Simpson suggested—for monitoring carefully the application of the scheme once it is in operation. Without a shadow of doubt, the scheme is good and worthy. It is an exciting prospect for Scotland, but it will be important to assess, after a due period, just what its practical consequences have been.

With some reluctance, Conservative members are unable to support Fiona McLeod's amendment. However, I hope that my comments show that we are far from hostile to the sentiment that it tries to express.

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** I, too, am far from hostile to the amendment, but I do not feel that I can agree to it. Individual learning accounts are one initiative in a whole spectrum of initiatives to encourage people to become involved in training and learning.

Although I sympathise very much with what Fiona McLeod is saying—indeed, as someone who used to teach adults, I am well aware of the difficulty of attracting back to the education system people who are alienated from learning—I am not convinced that the method that the amendment

suggests will be more successful. I am not convinced that saying that 25 per cent of the money will be set aside, which nobody else can access, is the way to ensure that the most educationally disadvantaged sectors of society come forward to take it up.

The way to ensure that people who do not traditionally associate themselves with learning regard the scheme as providing an advantage and an opportunity for themselves is by promoting the individual learning account and by being proactive about the opportunities for learning in disadvantaged communities. Regretfully, although I agree with the sentiments of what Fiona McLeod is saying, I cannot support the amendment.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):**

The original purpose of creating individual learning accounts was to provide skills, education and training to those who lacked them and who were on low incomes. That was the provenance of the ILA concept. The Moser report, which examined the situation in England and Wales, found that some 7 million adults in England—one in five adults—if given the alphabetical index to the "Yellow Pages", could not locate the page reference for plumbers. I would not argue that the picture is any less bleak, and frankly appalling, in Scotland. Members of all parties recognise the scale of the problem.

Given that the problem that is to be addressed relates to those who are least skilled and least well off, surely the bill must propose specific measures to tackle that. That was its original purpose. At stage 2, members of all parties were supportive of that principle; what we lack is any specific measure by which that worthy and essential aim is to be achieved.

I shall now address some of the arguments that have been advanced by other members against accepting the excellent amendment that has been lodged by Fiona McLeod. First, the quota that is being proposed by the amendment is not 80 per cent, nor 60 per cent, nor even 50 per cent. It is not even half: it is one quarter—25 per cent. That is all. Nevertheless, that was described by the minister as limiting. How is that a limit?

Secondly, I wondered whether the minister was going to say, in response to the intelligent intervention by Dr Simpson, whether there would be monitoring. If there was no monitoring, that would reduce the bureaucracy and the costs, as such a scheme would not have to be administered. However, the minister said that there will be a monitoring scheme. The costs will be there, but we will see none of the benefits.

Thirdly, Annabel Goldie mentioned inflexibility. With great respect, I do not feel that the case has been made that a threshold of 25 per cent would

create inflexibility. I do not think that that will happen.

10:30

**Dr Simpson:** The problem—certainly in the services that I have worked in—is that inclusion of figures such as the 25 per cent that is mentioned in amendment 2 means that those figures become the limit for which people will strive. That would happen despite the fact that the words “at least” are included in the amendment. It is inappropriate to include the figure of 25 per cent in the bill, however worthwhile the spirit of the amendment might be.

**Fergus Ewing:** The fact remains that 25 per cent is so small a threshold as not to create inflexibility. I understand that those who are administering the scheme would always have to have regard to that threshold and—as we heard in response to Dr Simpson’s earlier intervention—that that would occur anyway. Given Frank Pignatelli’s evidence to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee and his obvious enthusiasm for our shared aim of ensuring that those who are least skilled and least well off benefit from the scheme, I suspect that much effort will be applied to that.

Alex Neil’s point was not party political, but a commonsense point by somebody who has experience in the matter. He said that the people who will come forward to apply will be those who would have done so anyway. In many cases, the training that will be provided by excellent companies such as Scottish Power in 50 learning centres throughout the UK would have been provided by those companies anyway. The difference is that they will be paid by the state to provide the training. There is risk that the intended beneficiaries of the legislation will lose out.

In supporting Fiona McLeod’s amendment 2, I suggest to members that—after they examine their whips’ notices—they should, by agreeing to the amendment, decide to give a chance to those who have no chance.

**Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab):** It is important to make the point that the bill is an enabling measure to ensure that ILAs are introduced in Scotland at the same time as they are introduced in England and Wales, which will ensure that Scots are not disadvantaged.

It would be churlish not to welcome the nationalists’ conversion to support for ILAs, now that they have dropped their previous Luddite opposition to the concept.

I support what Elaine Murray and Annabel Goldie said about the amendment. Considerable changes have been made to the bill and to the

accompanying regulations as a consequence of the consultation exercise.

**Fergus Ewing:** Will Allan Wilson give way?

**Allan Wilson:** No, I will just continue, if Fergus Ewing does not mind.

**Fergus Ewing** *rose*—

**Allan Wilson:** Och, well—on you go.

**Fergus Ewing:** I am curious about the radical changes that Allan Wilson says have taken place. I might have been asleep when those changes were made in committee, but unfortunately—as members know—I tend to stay awake in committees; I know that that is not popular, but it is the case. There have been four changes, which have all been purely technical. Where are the radical amendments that Allan Wilson talks about?

**Allan Wilson:** There have been four amendments. That is a factual statement of the changes that have been made, but Fergus Ewing is also fully aware of the consultation exercise that took place before the bill was introduced. Annabel Goldie’s point was relevant and I am sure that Fergus Ewing will agree that the evidence from the Grampian pilot—on the failure of targeting as a system of introducing individual learning accounts—was compelling. The suggested switch to a demand-led approach, which agencies will be expected to introduce, is correct.

I agree with some of the sentiments that have been expressed, particularly those of Alex Neil on targeting the right people and ensuring that individual learning accounts reach out to those who would otherwise be untouched by the further and higher education systems. The demand-led approach as outlined by the minister is right. Although I agree with the sentiments behind the amendment, I cannot support it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister may, if he wishes, respond to points that have been raised.

**Nicol Stephen:** I hope that we are not in danger of snatching division from the jaws of consensus on the issue. I think we all agree that the bill is good and that individual learning accounts are to be supported. We also agree that we need to change the culture of learning in this country and to reach the socially disadvantaged, those on low incomes and people who have not accessed training in the past. However, it is difficult to agree to the detailed wording of amendment 2, although we understand the spirit and sentiment that lie behind it.

**Alex Neil:** I take Annabel Goldie’s point about the need for monitoring, but monitoring takes place after the event. What we need is a proactive initiative to ensure that the objectives in

amendment 2 are met. Will the minister therefore make some positive proposals to ensure that those who are on low incomes, or who do not have existing accreditation, will be given priority and will be targeted in the promotion and organisation of the programme?

**Nicol Stephen:** In the spirit of consensus, it is important that we should do that. We should explain how the marketing strategy will target the socially disadvantaged, non-traditional learners and those in more remote rural areas. As well as making monitoring reports known to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, I shall undertake to explain to the committee how the marketing strategy is to be carried forward.

At the moment, however, I do not think that anyone in the chamber could say whether meeting a 25 per cent target would be a success; perhaps the figure should be 30 per cent, or 20 per cent. As Fergus Ewing said, the figure does not, on the face of it, seem unreasonable, but we do not have the facts to know whether it is correct, so it should not be in the bill.

If the amendment were passed, would that guarantee that more individuals from deprived groups would access individual learning accounts? Again, I do not see how any of us can be absolutely confident that agreeing to amendment 2 would change the number of people from disadvantaged groups coming forward to access individual learning accounts.

Alex Neil spoke about the target. The target of 100,000 new learners is ambitious; I do not think that anyone should doubt that. In the early days of the pilot, we found the target in Grampian very hard to meet. As Annabel Goldie pointed out, some quite significant changes were made to the model to ensure that the uptake of individual learning accounts increased. Thanks to the changes that were made to the model, a significant turnaround was achieved. Working like that on the ground, on the detail of the model, is important.

I shall give two guarantees, because guarantees were asked for. First, I guarantee that the marketing effort will be targeted on the socially disadvantaged, on non-traditional learners and on the sort of groups that Fiona McLeod specifically refers to in her amendment. Those people will not be the sole target, but significantly greater emphasis will be given to those groups than will be given to the general public. Secondly, I guarantee that the monitoring and assessment process will be important, and that we will keep the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee informed about it.

**Fiona McLeod:** I have listened with great interest and I am glad to hear that members of

other parties are not hostile to the intent behind my amendment. Unfortunately, what I hear from the minister is talk about marketing rather than principle. My amendment is about ensuring principles rather than a marketing campaign.

The figure of 25 per cent was arrived at after careful consideration of the facts of the matter. Members may remember that just last month there was a report, on which Henry McLeish has commented, which stated that a million people in Scotland suffer from illiteracy. A million people is approximately 20 per cent of the population of Scotland. A target of 25 per cent would therefore ensure that those who are most in need of support would get the support that they need.

There was also talk about inflexibility, but the target in the amendment is not inflexible. The final part of the amendment indicates that, if less than 25 per cent of the money that has been allocated to an individual is paid in any one year, that money is not lost and may be redistributed as appropriate.

The change that was made in the Grampian Enterprise pilot was in better targeting. It ensured that people in Grampian who needed to be brought into the system were brought into the system. I regard that as targeting and as principle; I do not regard it as marketing. Why do we have to wait for a marketing exercise and for monitoring, when we have the chance to put into the bill the principle that those who are most in need of lifelong learning will get access to it?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment 2, in the name of Fiona McLeod, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)

Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 29, Against 70, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment 2 disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to amendment 1, which is grouped with amendment 3.

**Fergus Ewing:** The bill is about providing grants to help people to obtain skills, education and training. Amendment 1 seeks to ensure that we do not discriminate against people who live in parts of rural Scotland. How might those people be discriminated against? Well, let us consider how the system will operate. It is proposed that there should be a basic grant of £150 that the individual can use to cover the costs of obtaining skills, education or training. The individual contributes £25 towards the cost. Those figures are not huge—£150 does not buy a very long course or a complicated piece of training. Given that those figures are low, what happens if that individual has to spend £50 or £100 on travelling to the place where the training or education is provided? Plainly, a person in that situation is meeting costs and liabilities that do not have to be met by someone who can travel on foot or by bus to the local college, learning centre, in-house training centre at work, or other place where learning might be received.

10:45

I accept fully that there are many different types of establishment where learning will be received. My constituency covers an area five times as big as greater London, which has 90 members of Parliament. People who live in places such as Inverie and want to get to the nearest college have to take a ferry to Mallaig and then some vehicular transport—not public transport—to Fort William, along the only single-track trunk route in Britain. A person making that journey will incur substantial costs, for which the bill makes no provision.

Amendment 1 would give ministers the power to make such provision. I could have lodged an amendment that spelled out exactly what assistance should be received, but I accept that the matter is not straightforward. None the less, unless provision is made to help those who live in many parts of rural Scotland, they will be discriminated against. There is no doubt about that.

I understand that the minister is sympathetic to the problem. Originally, his response was that there would be no provision for transport costs. However, after hearing debate, he indicated that the Executive would consider matters further. That is appreciated. I also understand that there has been a pilot scheme in Lochaber, where a fund has been made available to the local enterprise company to deal with matters as they arise in practice. That is all well and good, but if the minister recognises that a pilot scheme is necessary, he must recognise that there should be provision in the programme itself.

Henry McLeish has announced that £8 million will be made available for child care; I believe that Fiona McLeod will say more about that shortly. I hope that the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning will indicate in his response whether we are correct in understanding that not one penny of that £8 million can be used for ILAs, but that it is all to be used for further education. If that is the case, the announcement appears to be a red herring. I hope that the minister will take that on board.

In the debates that we have had so far on this issue, the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning has said that a scheme to cover travel costs would be too complicated to administer. However, I do not see that the scheme that covers the travel costs of MSPs or civil servants is too expensive to administer. It is unlikely that the minister's argument will find favour with the many people in rural Scotland who will, I believe, be discriminated against unless amendment 1 is agreed to.

I move amendment 1.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have a tentative time line in my head for debate on the amendments, to allow fair discussion throughout. We are eating quite deeply into that, so I would be grateful if opening speeches could be limited to four minutes and other speeches to three minutes.

**Fiona McLeod:** Amendment 3 is about targeting. It would ensure that the grants provide for the associated costs of learning that are incurred by two particular groups—those who care for others and those who need care for themselves. The statistics bear out the fact that those two groups are under-represented in education and training courses.

The new section 1(2A) that would be created by amendment 3 relates to child care and other caring responsibilities. In a recent survey of women returners, to which my colleague Nicola Sturgeon has referred on previous occasions, it was found that the high costs of child care were still a disincentive to women's returning to work, training or education. In the stage 1 debate on 25

May, I asked the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning about the £8 million that Henry McLeish had announced for child care at further education colleges. At that stage, the minister was unable to indicate clearly that that £8 million would be accessible by people with individual learning accounts. I would appreciate it if the minister could take the time to clarify that.

I turn to carers other than those with child care responsibilities. The Carers National Association in Scotland reckons that there are 500,000 carers in Scotland, who save the Government a total of £3.4 billion per annum. It is unreasonable to ask those carers to bear the burden of providing alternative care arrangements so that they can go into some kind of education and training. If carers are saving the Government £3.4 billion per annum, it is only fair that the Government does not allow them to bear the costs of returning to training and education.

The NCA is asking the Government to make two pledges: to abolish the 21-hour study rule, which affects an individual's ability to claim individual care allowance; and to develop individual learning accounts for carers who receive long-term ICA. It is only reasonable that we write that onto the face of the bill; it is about principle, and ensuring that those who care for others have the financial ability to train themselves for the future.

We all know—the facts are there—that it is more costly for disabled students to enter education and training. They need their associated costs to be covered. Enable reckons that there are 50,000 people in Scotland with a learning disability. If we want to encourage those people into education and training, we must ensure that they do not pay a financial penalty for it.

**Nicol Stephen:** I refer first to amendment 1 from Fergus Ewing. As I explained in our earlier debate, travel costs and expenses are relevant to all learning. I want a more consistent approach to that issue, and to child care and the treatment of the disabled for all aspects of post-16 learning. We will not achieve all that we want through the bill, which is about the funding of individual learning accounts. In other parts of the UK, the funds for individual learning accounts will be used for that purpose only, and not for travel and expenses and child care.

We are taking seriously the concerns expressed by Fergus Ewing and others and—as he mentioned—as a result we have announced two pilot schemes, one in Lochaber and the other in the Scottish Borders. Those pilots will test different approaches to the funding of travel and child care for individual learning account holders. The extra funding for child care is mostly being made available to further education. Some of it will be available to higher education, but further education

will be one of the major sources of individual learning account courses. The pilots will be operated on the basis of a discretionary fund that will be available to assist with all the costs that I have mentioned. We will monitor the results closely and will consider how they impact on overall individual learning account policy. No doubt, the results will be examined with interest in all parts of the UK and we will take them into account when we review the regulations at the end of the first year.

We do not need the amendments on the face of the bill to do the things that Fiona McLeod and Fergus Ewing wish. It is a relatively short bill and the important part is the regulations. The detail, in terms of how individual learning accounts are to be delivered, will be contained in the regulations, which have been shown to members of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee. Those regulations have already been amended to take into consideration some of the issues that were raised by the committee.

It is unnecessary to have the amendments on the face of the bill. Indeed, it would be somewhat strange if the only points of substance in the bill referred to expenses, child care and travel costs, rather than to some of the other important issues to do with individual learning accounts, skills and training and education that are contained in the regulations.

On amendment 3, I want to address the issue of caring responsibilities and the difficulties associated with disability. Again, individual learning accounts will not provide all the answers, but we appreciate the need to make progress. The issue has been raised for the first time at stage 3—it was not raised at stage 2—so we want to be as helpful as we can. The matters that Fiona McLeod has raised are worthy of further consideration. I guarantee to look further at the issue, but at a later date. I do not want to raise expectations now, because the issue will not be resolvable by the time that individual learning accounts are launched in September. However, when the regulations are reviewed within their first year of operation, I would be willing to consider whether such costs should be met. If there were clear examples of need, the review would offer a suitable opportunity to consider the case for tackling such costs.

As for amendment 1, the existing powers in section 1(1) of the bill would be sufficient to introduce such a scheme for costs if it were justified.

**Fergus Ewing:** Will the minister give way?

**Nicol Stephen:** I have been asked to wind up, so I should not give way.

**Miss Goldie:** I feel seized with a slight attack of

schizophrenia; we are minded to support Mr Ewing's amendment, but feel unable to support Fiona McLeod's amendment—unless she takes umbrage that I am expressing a preference for the clean-cut virility of Mr Ewing, as distinct from her own manifest virtues. Let me explain further.

Mr Ewing's amendment was debated at stage 2, and I found that debate helpful. My recollection is that in view of the contributions that were made in committee, Mr Ewing revised his amendment slightly, and I now find merit in it. It is clear that the scheme could pose problems for applicants in remoter, rural areas of Scotland. The pilot schemes that are under way in Lochaber and the Scottish Borders may be instructive in that respect. Our support for Mr Ewing's amendment is principally in recognition of those parts of Scotland where problems could exist. It would be unfortunate if an applicant felt prejudiced or deterred from applying simply because distance and remoteness intervened. I do not need to say any more than that we find merit in Mr Ewing's amendment and we are minded to support it.

We are sympathetic to Fiona McLeod's amendment, as we were to the previous amendment. The distinction that we draw on her amendment is that the broader costs that she wishes to embrace within the scheme and put in the bill are just that—broader. At this stage, it would be premature to bring those costs into the bill. Having said that, although we are minded to oppose the amendment, I reiterate what I said earlier about the need to monitor the application of the scheme. If it were the case—either by virtue of operation of the pilot schemes or by the accumulation of evidence once the scheme is working—that persons in the classes mentioned in amendment 3 were being prejudiced or deterred from the proper uptake of individual learning accounts, that would be a matter for concern. At that point the issue should be revisited.

**Dr Murray:** Once again, I am sympathetic to the intentions of the amendments, but an enabling bill is not the place in which to address the issues.

Individual learning accounts should be one of a raft of lifelong learning opportunities. There are barriers to learning, some of which have been mentioned: travel, accommodation, child care, caring responsibilities and the costs associated with disability. There are a number of other potential barriers to learning for people in different communities, not just in rural areas; barriers to learning also exist for people in urban communities. Those issues need to be addressed. We need strategies that address barriers to learning at all levels of lifelong learning in our society. I hope that the Executive will develop plans to try to ensure that everybody has equal access to learning at whatever level is appropriate

to them.

Many rural problems can be tackled by new technology and distance learning, which will bring learning opportunities to learners in their community, in their home, in their learning centre and possibly in their local primary school. Those aspects of lifelong learning ought to be properly addressed—it is not just about the tradition of people going from home to college, but about taking learning out to people in their communities.

11:00

When the minister spoke to us, in the stage 2 debate, about the pilot schemes in Lochaber and in the Borders in rural southern Scotland, he said that the schemes would be reviewed and that ministers would consider the results after the regulations had been in place for a year. His concern was to identify areas where need and the size of barriers were likely to be greatest. There is value in waiting to learn from the results of those pilots—there is not much point in having a pilot scheme, then pre-supposing its results. Unfortunately, I will oppose both amendments.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** I make a brief contribution in support of amendment 1. The Parliament has experienced something novel today. We have not heard Fergus Ewing make a more reasonable speech to Parliament in his life than the one he made in the chamber this morning. It was a very persuasive speech. Fergus made a point that will recur during the consideration of the bill.

There is also a lesson that the Government should take from the bill's contents. We cannot put forward such slim pieces of legislation, which require Parliament to put so much faith in the comments that are put on the record by ministers, that we have to put additional provisions into the bill to strengthen its contents and to give real substance to the commitments that ministers gave in the stage 2 consideration and that have been reiterated by the minister today.

The point that has been advanced in amendment 1 is the importance of recognising that once we have all the regimes in place to support distance learning, and once a variety of other measures are taken forward, it will still be necessary for people in different parts of rural Scotland, in attending particular courses, to incur travel and accommodation costs. No matter what the technological developments and changes are, parts of Scotland simply will be unable to participate in the exercise. All that this reasonably expressed amendment is suggesting is that ministers are given power to change that.

I listened to Elaine Murray talking about giving the pilot exercises time. Of course, pilot exercises

are important to check what assistance is required, but all the amendment does is give ministers the power to act on the issues raised by the pilot exercises. Ministers would be doing consensus building in the Parliament a great service if they were able to respond positively to the amendment that has been reasonably put forward by Fergus Ewing.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I apologise to two members who, for time reasons, I cannot call.

**Nicol Stephen:** I respond in the spirit of John Swinney's contribution. Ministers, having considered this issue, are prepared to make an amendment to the draft regulations that have been seen by the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, to make it clear that there is the power to include travel and accommodation costs. The pilot schemes reflect that. We will put that on the face of the regulations to be lodged this summer. I hope that, because that effectively covers the issue that Fergus Ewing is driving at, he might be prepared to withdraw the amendment.

I gave the assurance in my earlier remarks that we would do what Annabel Goldie asks for, which is to monitor the issues raised by Fiona McLeod. We are prepared to come back to those issues during the first year of operation. We could not act quickly enough to ensure that those issues are properly covered in time for the launch of the scheme in the autumn.

I agree with Elaine Murray that this is not simply about the issue of ensuring access by individuals to traditional forms of learning in main centres. Part of the change of culture that we have to achieve is to bring learning out into communities by using the new technologies and by changing our attitude to the forms of learning that we provide at the moment. Learning tomorrow will be very different from learning today.

**Fergus Ewing:** I am pleased that the minister has made a partial concession and welcome it in the spirit in which it was given. However, I believe that it is important, for the reasons John Swinney gave, for the principle contained in amendment 1 not to be in regulations that we have not seen, but to be on the face of the bill before us today.

It is an important principle. Unless I misheard the minister, the concession did not apply to subsistence costs, so I am not sure if that aspect of the amendment will be covered in the regulations. The amendment contains an enabling provision and does not, as Elaine Murray suggested, presuppose anything. Quite the opposite—it confers on ministers the power to ensure that people in rural Scotland are not discriminated against.

**Nicol Stephen:** As Mr Ewing says, it is an enabling measure and does not require ministers

to include those issues in the regulations. I am saying that we will do so and that the final wording will include both travel and accommodation expenses.

**Fergus Ewing:** It is getting better and better; perhaps we should keep going. We have not seen the regulations and we look forward to seeing them. It is important for bills to contain principles—that is what they are for. The principle in question is that people in rural Scotland should not be discriminated against, and that principle should be contained in the bill.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment 1 be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)

Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 37, Against 60, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment 1 disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Amendment 3 was debated with amendment 1.

**Fiona McLeod:** In formally moving amendment 3, I would like to refute some of the comments that were made.

Nicol Stephen said that this was about funding of individual learning accounts. However, it must be about funding the associated costs as well. I raised those issues at stage 1, so they should not have come as a surprise. I would have thought

that the Government would have thought of those people in its social inclusion policy. We are leaving vulnerable people for another year before we deal with the associated costs that their caring and caring needs bring to them. Please vote for this amendment.

I move amendment 3.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am informed by the clerks that, since the minister spoke to amendment 3 in the previous debate, there can be no further response. We will therefore move directly to the vote.

The question is, that amendment 3 be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** On a point of order. Can I check that the voting machines are working?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Is there some doubt?

**Robert Brown:** Yes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We cannot have a point of order during a division, but my understanding is that the voting machines are working. When voting time has run out, we will see what has happened and you can raise your point then.

#### FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)

Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 25, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment 3 disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Brown, did you have trouble with your console?

**Robert Brown:** Yes. I am fairly certain that my vote was not registered.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Would you like to inform the chamber of your vote, so that we have you on the record?

**Robert Brown:** Yes please. Thank you. [MEMBERS: "How did you vote?"] My vote was no.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The record is now correct.

### Section 3—Regulations

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to amendment 4, which is on its own.

**Miss Goldie:** I originally raised this amendment, with the support of Nick Johnston, at stage 2 of the bill. In the absence of my head being reduced to the pulped and bloody mass that I expected, I was encouraged to restate it for stage 3 of the bill.

There are two important issues. When this bill was debated in committee, it became apparent that the bill would not mean a lot to any external onlooker. If this Parliament is to acquire a reputation for clear and understandable legislation, there is a fundamental issue—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order. Conversations should take place outside the chamber, please, rather than inside.

11:15

**Miss Goldie:** The fundamental issue is, what quality of legislation do we want to promote within this Parliament for Scotland? This bill does not say anything that any person interested in this scheme would readily understand. In other words, there is nothing in the bill to tell potential applicants or employers how the scheme would work, whether applicants would be eligible or what they might expect from the scheme.

Those matters are covered by what are described as illustrative regulations. The committee expressed thanks to the minister for those illustrative regulations at stage 2. Interestingly, they allowed us to make total sense of the bill and enabled a proper debate to take place on how the statutory mechanism might work in practice. I think I speak for all the members of the committee in saying that the provision of the illustrative regulations allowed a meaningful debate to take place in the committee.

The gist of amendment 4 is to question whether it is appropriate or desirable that the Parliament should produce primary legislation that does not mean a great deal to anybody. Is it not preferable that regulations such as the illustrative regulations, which appear to be in just about their final form, are incorporated in a schedule, or whatever, so

that everybody knows what the law will be and they are fully debated? The bill provides that the regulations will come into force by negative procedure. It is intended that the bits of paper that make sense of the act will become available only later, by being laid before the Parliament and being

"subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution".

That means that the regulations could be produced at the height of the holiday period when nobody is around, and that by lying unchallenged they become law. That is an undesirable principle for the Parliament to embrace early in its life.

My amendment is intended to reverse the procedure. Ideally, when regulations are as far advanced as these illustrative regulations are, they should be included in the bill before it is passed. If that is not possible and the regulations will have to be introduced subsequently, the clear preference ought to be that they are brought into force by an affirmative procedure, which would require a positive resolution of the Parliament.

I move amendment 4.

**Nicol Stephen:** I sympathise with what Annabel Goldie says about the nature of the bill, which is a slim document. The approach that has been taken has been to include enabling powers in the bill and to have separate detailed regulations. However, her amendment will not change the bill, which will remain a slim piece of legislation, with only four sections, so I will focus on the question of whether a negative or an affirmative procedure is appropriate.

As I told the committee, a lot of information is available on the enabling powers and there is a full document on individual learning accounts. The draft regulations have been shown to the committee. The pilot schemes have taken place. The committee, if not the general public, has a good understanding of how individual learning accounts will work. The best argument that I can present on the issue of negative and affirmative procedures relates to the time scale: if we agree to amendment 4, we will not be able to launch individual learning accounts here at the same time as in the rest of the UK. That would be very unfortunate.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** The minister refers to time scales, as he has done in previous debates. Is it not the case that the Executive is pressuring the Parliament too much to push through legislation? I do not believe that time scale is a good enough argument for not acknowledging that there are deficiencies in the bill.

**Nicol Stephen:** Whether or not members regard my argument as good enough, I can only explain

that the consequence of passing the amendment would be that we would not be able to launch individual learning accounts in the autumn, at the same time as they will be launched elsewhere in the UK.

**Mr Swinney:** On Phil Gallie's point, at this stage I concede what the minister says about time scale. However, should the minister not also put on record that the bill has not been in the parliamentary precincts for long? If my memory serves me correctly, the bill was introduced by ministers only in late April. If we had had it a few months before then, the regulations could have been debated in Parliament and we would not have to go through the rigmarole today of having to seek assurances about what might be in the regulations, albeit that the draft regulations have been published.

**Nicol Stephen:** I appreciate that point. During the general debate, I will thank the committee and others for the efforts that they have made to progress the bill so quickly. The timetable has caused problems not only for the committee, but for ministers and civil servants. We would have liked to have more time.

The negative procedure is generally felt to be appropriate, provided that there are no significant or controversial issues in the statutory instrument—the regulations. I do not think that anyone would argue that the issues are significant; therefore, the only question is whether they are controversial. The draft regulations have been seen and amended—and further amended on the basis of the assurance that I have given to Fergus Ewing today. I hope, therefore, that they are no longer controversial and that, in the main, the committee and the Parliament are satisfied with them. On the basis of those reassurances, I hope that the bill can proceed unamended.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I must try to conclude stage 3 by 11.30 or time will be taken off Jackie Baillie's statement at 12.00, so I ask Donald Gorrie and John Swinney to give bullet points only, please.

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** I am perhaps being a bit slow in understanding, so I would like the minister to clarify why negative instruments get through quicker than affirmative instruments. Either one has to be laid on the table, or whatever the expression is, for a while. Affirmative resolutions take up some parliamentary time, but I do not see how they take any longer.

**Nicol Stephen** *rose*—

**Donald Gorrie:** I will give way to the minister.

**Nicol Stephen:** I am grateful. I will try to be brief. It is because there must be sitting days of the Parliament. There will not be sufficient sitting

days between now and the launch date in the autumn.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call John Swinney.

**Donald Gorrie:** I only gave way to the minister.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, Mr Gorrie, but can you be very brief, please.

**Donald Gorrie:** If what the minister says is the case, there is no opportunity for the Parliament to object. Nicol Stephen is an excellent guy and I am sure that he will handle the regulations honourably, but it seems to set an extraordinarily bad precedent. Negative resolutions are a bad thing anyway.

**Nicol Stephen:** That is not correct. Any member can object to the regulations once they are lodged. The hope is that they will not be objected to. If they were, it would delay the whole scheme. The negative procedure allows us to move forward within the timetable for the rest of the UK.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call John Swinney.

**Mr Swinney:** Donald Gorrie may be confused by the debate, but I am confused about who is speaking. I want to make a brief contribution.

There is no coherence in the minister's response to Mr Gorrie and to the chamber. We cannot have it all ways. The bill was introduced only a short time ago. The reason that we are not able to go through the affirmative procedure is that there is a time scale to coincide with UK legislation. The minister has given a number of assurances about what will be in the regulations and about the detail. We talked about them in committee also. Nevertheless, it is fair that members want to be assured that the regulations will provide adequately for individuals who want to take up individual learning accounts.

The minister has said that by going through the negative procedure, the only way, in effect, that members will be able to express any concern about any minute detail of the regulations will be to oppose the whole lot. That is totally unsatisfactory. None of us wants to have to behave like that. We want to have the opportunity to take part in the debate constructively and to add value. Some big yes-or-no option, which forces members to take the no position, is an unhealthy way in which to deal with the Parliament.

I appeal to the minister's reasonableness and ask him to take on board the amendment, which adds a great deal to the bill, perhaps not in terms of text, but in terms of consideration of the regulations.

**Nick Johnston (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I will be brief. I support the amendment for two

reasons. The bill is largely supported by regulation—regulation that we currently have to take on trust. The new legislation that we are debating today has been made with so little discussion that it is likely to require some changes. We have heard some of the arguments from Fiona McLeod on disability carers and from Fergus Ewing on rural issues. The argument about time scale is extremely weak—Donald Gorrie and John Swinney have summed that up adequately. Perhaps, in this case, Westminster should wait for us, so that we can approve the regulations using affirmative procedure.

The Conservatives are not happy with the fact that the legislation is being rushed through. I ask members to support the amendment if for no other reason than to indicate to ministers that Parliament will not stand such abuse in the future.

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** On a point of order. Presiding Officer, you may have noticed that, in the last division, the number of members from all parties not voting seemed to have increased. I have checked with the SNP members to ensure that they were in the chamber and pressed their buttons and they assure me that they did. I am not disputing the result of the vote, because there was such a big difference in numbers, but we need to ensure that the voting system is working for future divisions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Indeed. The flurry of activity in the past 30 seconds relates to just that point. We suspect that there are five or six consoles that are a little faulty. Given the size of the votes, I would be very reluctant to suspend proceedings while we sort out the problem. We will report back to members at the earliest opportunity. Do members agree that we should continue?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I ask Nicol Stephen to respond to Nick Johnston's comments.

**Nicol Stephen:** There is a lack of understanding of the procedure. I realise that it is complex. Under the negative procedure, if no member objects to the regulations, they go through. The advantage of that procedure is that Parliament does not have to be sitting to allow it to happen. If a member objected to the regulations, the matter would be debated in Parliament. That would happen under the negative procedure that is set out in the bill.

The affirmative procedure that Annabel Goldie seeks would mean that the regulations must be debated in Parliament. There would have to be an affirmative vote and therefore Parliament must be sitting. That would invoke a different time scale. The regulations must be lodged a certain number of days before the debate. The effect would be to delay the whole matter. There would not be an

opportunity to amend the regulations line by line under the affirmative procedure. The vote at the end of the day would still be either for or against the regulations as they are lodged. It is important to emphasise that point.

We do not want delay and we do not think that the regulations are controversial. We believe that there is consensus on the issue and I hope that when the regulations are lodged they will be agreed to.

**Miss Goldie:** I have listened with interest to what the minister has to say. I have heard an explanation, but I have not heard a compelling or cogent repudiation of my argument. I consider that my argument still stands unchallenged. The minister has told the Parliament that there is not enough time to allow proper scrutiny of the regulations. I must agree with the comments made by members of other parties: this is not a satisfactory way in which to attend to business in the Scottish Parliament.

I am minded to press my amendment. I hope that that will send a message to the business managers of the Executive. It is a fundamental issue and, for the sake of the credibility of the Parliament, it ought not to be overlooked.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment 4 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 39, Against 56, Abstentions 1.

*Amendment 4 disagreed to.*

11:30

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** On Bruce Crawford's earlier point of order, the flurry of activity on the consoles continues. Seven to nine consoles appear to be duff. I am very reluctant indeed to suspend proceedings, and looking to the Opposition whips, I hope that, given the size of the vote, we can just continue. That would be the most acceptable way. Otherwise, there will be some time difficulties.

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** That does not present any problems for the Conservatives.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Is that all right with you, Mr Crawford?

**Bruce Crawford:** Yes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Good. We move on to amendment 5, in the name of Fiona McLeod, which is on its own. As we are losing time, I ask the minister to indulge me. Could you make your remarks in conclusion, instead of having two cuts?

**Nicol Stephen:** I would be happy to do that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Fiona McLeod to move and speak to amendment 5.

**Fiona McLeod:** I thought that, with the guillotine, I would not be able to speak to the amendment.

Amendment 5 is in the same vein as amendment 4, and ensures that the Parliament and its committees have a positive role to play in the content of the regulations. It was worrying to hear the deputy minister say in committee:

"The advantage of the negative procedure is that it allows the regulations to be introduced during the recess. Only if a member of the committee objected to their acceptance would the issue have to be discussed further"—[*Official Report, Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee*, 12 June 2000; c 887.]

Those arguments were made about amendment 4, and we all understood them. I cannot believe that a minister would say that it is an advantage to bypass Parliament and its committees. Members surely cannot accept such a claim, and will insist on something so important to Scotland. As every member in this chamber is committed to lifelong learning and social inclusion, we will insist that the matter must be open to the fullest scrutiny and the participation of all elected members.

I move amendment 5.

**Nicol Stephen:** We are not seeking to bypass Parliament or the committees. We have been quite

open about this issue. However, we will simply be unable to meet the deadline if we do not adopt the procedures that have been set down. The negative procedure has been well used and is well known; and, because of the delays and the problems that would arise, this bill is not the place to introduce any change to the procedure, whether it be the affirmative procedure or some novel procedure, which is what Fiona McLeod's amendment proposes.

It is quite appropriate for the Parliament to consider these issues, and if change is required and is what Parliament wishes, we should introduce any change in the appropriate way, having duly considered the matter. However, in relation to this bill, please let us ensure that we trail-blaze in this area, that we are ready for the launch in the autumn and that, in regard to some of our innovative measures such as travel and other expenses, we are able to get on with things and offer people in Scotland the opportunity of 100,000 new ILAs as soon as possible.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Fiona McLeod, do you waive your right to respond?

**Fiona McLeod:** Yes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Good.

The question is, that amendment 5 be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
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Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### AGAINST

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Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 29, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment 5 disagreed to.*

## **Education and Training (Scotland) Bill**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is a debate, to last 30 minutes, on motion S1M-956, in the name of Henry McLeish, which seeks agreement that the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill be passed. The timing means that Jackie Baillie will be about eight minutes light on her subsequent statement.

11:38

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen):** It gives me great pleasure to move the motion. Today's debate, like the debates at the earlier stages of the bill, has shown the strong support for the initiative to extend lifelong learning to all. We all want to make the individual learning account initiative a success and to create a learning nation.

The level of support for the general concept confirms my belief that ILAs will make a major difference to lifelong learning in Scotland. We want to make learning relevant and accessible to everyone, regardless of where they live or what they do. To reassure Fiona McLeod and Fergus Ewing, I will say that we want to reach the areas of Scotland where learning is less accessible. ILAs present us with an exciting opportunity to reshape the culture of learning, so that people expect continually to upgrade their skills throughout life, something that will be essential to securing a job in the future. In that way we can ensure a more vibrant and inclusive economy for Scotland.

I have welcomed the helpfulness of the debate that the issue has engendered. I hope that that has demonstrated the Executive's willingness to listen, to be open to change and to provide assurances. That approach provides a model for us to follow when we review the success of individual learning accounts, monitor progress and make assessments. We will keep the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee involved in that work if it so wishes, as I am sure it does. I wish to thank all members of that committee, and John Swinney in particular, for their support. The pressures have been difficult and I appreciate very much their co-operation in meeting the tight timetable that we have all had to put up with.

I take this opportunity also to thank the many other people who contributed to the development of individual learning accounts, particularly Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the local enterprise companies, which implemented the important pilot projects from which we learned a great deal. As a result, several changes have been made to the individual

learning accounts scheme, and those changes will enable us to meet the ambitious target of creating 100,000 individual learning accounts. I also thank those organisations and individuals who took the time and the trouble to participate in the consultation process.

Individual learning accounts will be a major responsibility for learndirect Scotland, which is the new name of the Scottish university for industry. We look forward to monitoring progress after the launch of the scheme in the autumn.

The Education and Training (Scotland) Bill and the regulations that are to be introduced will give Scottish ministers the necessary powers to ensure that individual learning accounts continue to evolve and to reflect Scottish needs. The whole area of learning is evolving and it is important that I emphasise the changes that we are seeing in new learning centres, with learning being available not only on the high streets, but in football stadiums, shopping developments and the homes of individual learners.

During the passage of the bill, members have acknowledged the potential for individual learning accounts to help the transformation of Scotland into a learning nation—a transformation of the learning landscape in Scotland. I hope that we will all participate in that transformation over the coming months and years. I am pleased that all members of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee have given their support to this initiative.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill be passed.

11:42

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** It is fair to say that all parties in Scotland and all members of this Parliament have no difficulty whatever in supporting the aims and principles that the minister described. We must ensure that, in Scotland, skills are improved and education and training are provided. No one could disagree with that statement.

Today we are considering whether those laudable aims will in fact be achieved by the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill, which we are to pass today, and by the programmes that will be implemented by the bill. As the Opposition, we are concerned that there are 10 reasons why the bill will not succeed or will not succeed to the extent that it should. I will cover five of those reasons and Fiona McLeod will cover the remaining five.

First, we are concerned about the basic aim of reaching those who are on the lowest wages and

who have the lowest skills. We want the bill to reach the parts that other programmes have not reached. One witness, Bruce Armitage from Scottish Enterprise Grampian, described that as “the Heineken effect”. The Parliament’s decision not to support amendment 2, which would have provided an absolute guarantee that those on low pay and new learners would benefit from the scheme, means that the bill will fail the Heineken test.

Secondly, many of the witnesses who appeared before the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee expressed a serious concern that the £23 million—or, more accurately, the £16.5 million to be used for grants—would simply be spent on providing training that would have been provided anyway, except this time at the state’s expense. That serious, practical concern has not been addressed.

Thirdly, there is the problem of bureaucracy, an issue that has not been raised or emphasised today. We understand that the total budget line is £23 million, but that only £16.5 million will go to grants—to the individuals who are to receive the education or training. That leaves £4 million that will go to the customer services provider and £2.5 million that will be spent on marketing. That means that 28 per cent of the money will be spent on bureaucracy. In comparison, the costs of running the Scottish Parliament run to 0.2 per cent of the Scottish block, so there are concerns that the money will not be going towards meeting its intended purposes.

Fourthly, there are practical problems that we have not addressed. Will the database be ready? Frank Pignatelli has recognised that it will not be fully ready. What about the arrangements for the private sector training provider? Will they be too bureaucratic? That was discussed in committee, but I do not think that it was fully addressed. We now know that the scheme will be launched in August. That means that we have to take it on faith that all the arrangements will be in place. My feeling and my guess is that they will not be and that the scheme will start without the necessary database and arrangements. There will be serious teething problems, which may be inevitable at the outset. That is unfortunate, because we do not want the ILAs to be viewed with the same contempt as the youth training scheme that the Conservatives introduced some years ago.

Finally, much has been said about the fast pace of the bill’s passage through the Parliament. It was introduced on 28 April and it will have gone through all its stages in two months. I am concerned that there has not been a proper opportunity for scrutiny. More than that, my main concern is that the timetable of the bill has been entirely determined by two bills proceeding

through Westminster. That is entirely wrong. Today, this Parliament will be passing a bill that is simply a Holyrood train running to a Westminster timetable.

11:47

**Nick Johnston (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**

It is interesting that we should be discussing the bill after the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning's statement on the framework for economic development. As I said at stage 1, the Conservatives welcome the promotion of a culture where people take responsibility for their lives and where they reapproach learning and place it at the main point of their being.

As Fergus Ewing said, we have rapidly arrived at the final stage of a bill that enables the minister to introduce regulations. We are expected to trust that the final regulations follow the illustrative regulations. Questions still arise, which we hope the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning will address when he sums up. We are still not sure how the Executive intends to overcome the other barriers to learning, even if the funding issue is resolved. Those include the inflexibility of benefit rules, domestic responsibilities, part-time and shift working, inadequate transport and child care provision and the previous low achievement of the people who are likely to enter the scheme.

As we said at stage 1, we feel that it is essential that the Executive consults closely those bodies that have raised important issues in the plans for the implementation of ILAs, including the drafting of the final version of the regulations.

We are still not much the wiser on some of the other considerations, particularly on how employers' contributions will operate and whether they may be withdrawn if an employee fails to complete a course or leaves the employment that has partially funded the course. There has not been any movement on the part of the Executive on the practicality of small firms releasing employees for training. That is a particular concern, given the evidence from Scottish colleges on the poor level of participation and attendance in current schemes. We expect guidelines from the minister on the allocation of funds to employees from public bodies, such as local authorities, health boards, trusts and non-governmental organisations.

We repeat our assertion that we need to move to a unified system of funding for all post-school education and training—a view that is shared by the colleges—and to introduce a passport for education and opportunity that will chart an individual's way through life with their achievements there for all to see.

We still have to examine the role of the customer service provider, which is funded to the tune of £4 million in the first two years. We should also be aware of the provision for marketing, which takes up 10 per cent of the scheme's allocation.

The minister mentioned targets. We believe that there must be clearly understandable targets for progress and implementation and that simple procedures should be adopted, with minimum bureaucracy, to ensure participation by all target groups, especially small and medium-sized enterprises and the disadvantaged.

The devil, in this case, will be in the implementation and the detail. We will watch with interest how the initial phase proceeds. We wish the scheme well in its implementation. We will look out for ease of use, flexibility and user-friendliness in the introductory phase. We are pleased to support the bill.

11:50

**Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab):** I want to be positive in this debate. We must remember that the people who will benefit from the bill will not be concerned with some of the arguments that have been advanced today; they will be interested in the fact that they can achieve their goals and aims and start or continue with their learning process.

Individual learning accounts form a central part of the Executive's vision to stimulate a culture of lifelong learning in our society. That is no mean task. If we are to achieve that goal, there must be a culture change and a transformation of current attitudes. We must ensure that it becomes commonplace for everyone to learn and upgrade their skills continually. That is why I support the minister's universal approach. I worked in further and higher education for 16 years and know that the rate of change in the technology sector alone means that people need to upgrade their knowledge every 18 months. The scheme must be universal and open to everybody.

Low pay and a lack of skills go together. Scotland has suffered for too long from both unemployment and skills shortages. The concept of individual learning accounts will encourage individuals to take responsibility for their learning and will put the onus on employers to allow that learning to happen. The Education and Training (Scotland) Bill provides the statutory arrangements for the Scottish Executive to pay grants to individuals for their learning accounts.

ILAs are not just a way of distributing funds to assist with the cost of further education and training; they are much more than that, as they promote learning itself. In the long term, ILAs will

contribute to a better equipped, highly skilled work force and ensure that people have a personal stake in and greater control over their personal development. ILAs will raise individual expectations and will deliver the benefits that learning can create. We have talked a lot about social inclusion and exclusion. If people can start learning and upgrade their skills, they can take themselves out of the situation in which they find themselves.

Learning accounts are based on two key principles. First, they empower people to take greater responsibility for investing in their own learning. Secondly, that responsibility for investing in learning will be shared. The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, of which I am a member, has received positive feedback on the introduction of ILAs. We believe that the accounts have the potential to make a major contribution to the development of the culture that we have all bought into.

Learning accounts will help people to invest in their learning. Employers, trade unions and learning and guidance providers will all have a key role in encouraging and supporting individuals to participate. The target of 100,000 ILAs by 2002 is ambitious and will require local partnership working to be as effective as we all hope that it will be. The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee was impressed by the commitment and examples of good practice that were shown in the evidence that was given by those involved in the pilot schemes in the Grampian region and in Fife.

The aims of the bill are to overcome financial barriers and to widen access. We have heard a lot this morning about widening access; we know that we need to reach out to those who for whatever reason feel excluded from education. However, we must consider that in the round, given the many other schemes that can help people, such as the skillseekers scheme for 16 to 18-year-olds, the new deal, and further and higher education—those schemes are all part of the big picture. The evidence that we received from the Grampian pilot scheme supported a universal approach. After making many changes, the people who were involved in that scheme found workable and practical ways forward. That is what we need: workable and practical solutions.

Individual learning accounts are a groundbreaking initiative. They will play an important role in the big picture of combating social exclusion and allowing people from every sector of society to contribute.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson):** We move now to a brief open debate. Members should keep their comments to a maximum of three minutes.

11:55

**Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP):** We have heard many assurances and guarantees from Nicol Stephen—the SNP will ensure that those are honoured. We have also heard much about marketing and monitoring. I am concerned that we are leaving some principles behind and that there will be marginalised groups in society until the monitoring and marketing are done and there has been an annual review. I would like the Executive to acknowledge that concern.

A year ago—almost to the day—we heard Donald Dewar talk about

“Scottish solutions to Scottish problems.”—[*Official Report*, 16 June 1999; Vol 1, c 404.]

The debate on amendments 4 and 5 made it clear that the Scottish Parliament is running behind Westminster’s coat tails. That is not providing Scottish solutions to Scottish problems. It is an unhappy situation, which must not set a precedent.

If lifelong learning and social inclusion are important enough for Parliament to legislate on, they are important enough for the Government to produce a timetable that allows Parliament to scrutinise legislation effectively. The SNP looks forward to seeing the minister’s regulations—I hope that they will be more readily available than the draft regulations, which were delivered to me only this morning. We also look forward to the minister’s regular reports to Parliament on the take-up of ILAs. We look forward to as many people as possible in Scotland engaging in lifelong learning, education and training.

11:57

**Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** As a Liberal Democrat, I welcome the cross-party acceptance of individual learning accounts. I will agree on one thing with those who have criticised the use of regulations by the Executive—the devil will be in the detail.

It is up to Parliament to ensure that the Scottish Executive acts on the good intentions that have been expressed. The bill gives the Executive flexibility to deal with issues as they arise, rather than expecting that we should second-guess where we want individual learning accounts to be in three or five years.

The Executive should focus on how certain aspects of the bill will be implemented. We need special provisions for rural areas—handing one of my constituents on Skye £150 will not create equality of opportunity if that person is hours in travelling time away from the nearest college or learning establishment. Nicol Stephen has assured me that the Executive recognises the

costs of transport—we will all seek early action on that matter. Innovative projects such as the Robert Gordon University's internet learning scheme are part of the solution, but the overall solution is more complex and we should examine the possibility of synthesis of the provisions in the bill with, for example, the new deal.

We need solutions to the problems of child care, we need support for carers and we need support for the disabled. We need local delivery of services in our villages and in our deprived housing estates through initiatives such as learning houses. We need to ensure that learning opportunities are taken up by those who need them most. A demand-led strategy alone will fail to reach those who are most excluded.

I have been pleased to receive assurances from Nicol Stephen that action will be taken in response to pilot schemes and to issues that arise as the scheme rolls out. Action has already been taken to remove the requirement for bank accounts, which put off participants in the Grampian pilot.

Like many others, I accept that all knowledge is a good thing. The arts and culture benefit society as much as technical and computer skills do, so ILAs should encompass all forms of learning and should take local needs and circumstances into account. I fervently hope that many learners and institutions will consider opportunities to develop Gaelic learning.

I am greatly enthused by the fact that individual learning accounts are finally becoming a reality, fulfilling a long-standing Liberal Democrat agenda. I call on members on all sides of the Parliament to work together constructively to support the implementation of the ILAs and to ensure that the Scottish Executive takes account of the several important access issues that have been flagged up across party lines.

I look forward to the day when the new accounts will become lifelong learning accounts, with the individual, employers and the state all contributing to a fund that will follow people from job to job throughout their working lives. Perhaps then we will be able to say that we have a lifelong learning society.

12:00

**Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con):** The Conservatives have always believed that people should be able to access the training and education that is appropriate to their needs, and the bill goes some way towards achieving that.

The problem lies in access. I was disappointed that Fergus Ewing's amendment, which would have given assistance for travel costs to people

living in rural areas, was rejected. Waving banners of accessibility to wonderful courses is absolutely pointless. There may be opportunities all round, but it is tough if people cannot get to them; that is the message that people in rural Scotland will receive from the debate. I have had many letters of complaint about lack of access. Even if a small grant is available, there may not be public transport and the money does not stretch to pay for a taxi fare. The minister must consider that issue and I hope that he will come up with more positive proposals to tackle it. We must not leave out rural Scotland.

Many people have mentioned monitoring. Monitoring the pilots is one thing, but we need good, clear monitoring of the outcomes and delivery of the programme. We look to the Executive to report to Parliament on a regular basis. We are left to trust in the regulations and I was disappointed by the minister's unwillingness to explain fully some of his reasons for turning down the positive amendments that were proposed. The Parliament must not allow regulation after regulation to go through on negative resolutions; we must use this chamber to discuss things fully. That said, the Conservatives support the bill.

12:02

**Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** I am pleased that all parties welcome the bill, but they need to dampen down their enthusiasm. Fergus Ewing's typical attitude of looking on the bright side regularly cheers us all up.

We must remind ourselves that 100,000 people will take advantage of this initiative to start off on their learning journey. However, it is quite clear that the bill is not just about payment for training. We must establish a learning culture in this country; the new measures will ensure that the partnerships, in the workplace and in the community, that are necessary to bring about that learning culture will be established.

However, there are challenges. Members have talked about access. Whether or not someone is a shift worker or lives in a rural community, the college ain't open this weekend for people who work long hours—not much has been said about that. We must issue a challenge to our colleges to be accessible and to take advantage of the increased number of people who want education.

**Nick Johnston:** Will Duncan McNeil give way?

**Mr McNeil:** No, we hear from Nick Johnston often enough as it is.

People need access to those colleges. If the colleges do not meet the challenge, there are

other providers that will meet it, so they had better get their act together.

There is also a challenge for trade unions. Trade unions need to put training and education firmly back on their bargaining agenda. The bill gives them the opportunity to challenge those employers—the Conservatives have represented them for years—who have not provided the necessary training, education and time off that people need to escape low pay and dead-end jobs. I hope that employers will take advantage of the proposals and that many businesses will, for the first time, establish learning and training budgets in their companies.

Fergus Ewing has criticised big companies for delivering training. Companies such as Scottish Power, which have established a great record of providing training, have been sneered at by Fergus, who says, "Ah, they will just use the budget"—

**Fergus Ewing:** I did not sneer at those companies.

**Mr McNeil:** Yes he did. I hope that those companies will build on what is in the bill and that they will open up their resources to the families of their employees and to the wider community. I genuinely welcome today's initiative and the new rights that it will give people throughout Scotland.

12:05

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** I would like to place on record the thanks of the members of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee to its clerks for steering us through a piece of legislation that, although pretty straightforward, had to be considered within a tight time scale. I also place on record a point that I have made to ministers: committee members have been concerned about the time scale within which we were asked to consider the bill. It is fair to be asked to consider legislation quickly; however, it is not fair for ministers to argue, as they have today, about the restriction of parliamentary scrutiny of legislation when we are operating to a tight time scale that the Executive itself set. Ministers must reflect carefully on those points.

In its stage 1 deliberations, the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee covered many of the issues that Duncan McNeil raised—for example, on barriers to access, on ensuring that the bill targets those who are least likely to learn, and on ensuring that, out of this venture, additionality is delivered into the Scottish economy and the Scottish learning environment. Most of those points came out of evidence to the committee from useful and helpful pilot exercises. I hope that ministers will listen carefully to the evidence that has come from those pilots and from other

exercises. I hope that they will benefit from all the evidence that has been gathered in the process of considering the bill, because issues have been raised to which ministers have not been able to give full and final answers. We have taken a lot of good evidence. Pilots in Grampian and Fife have highlighted a number of lessons that have to be learned—for example, on the way in which the accounts are marketed and on the people towards whom they are targeted. If we can learn some of those lessons, some of the aspirations that Duncan McNeil and others have talked about will be realised. That will happen only if we learn the lessons from those pilots and implement what we learn.

12:08

**Nicol Stephen:** Dark and gloom-laden though the language has at times been, this debate has been generally positive. I thank Fergus Ewing for his support, which was indeed inspiring and uplifting. I also thank Nick Johnston and the Conservatives for their support. Nick Johnston raised many points of detail; I do not think that I would be thanked if I responded to them individually at present.

The bill represents a massive new initiative. It will inject £23 million of new funding into lifelong learning, and 100,000 individuals across Scotland will benefit. I should tell Fergus Ewing that there are already 40,000 learning opportunities on the learndirect Scotland database that will go live this autumn. All that marks a watershed in our approach to lifelong learning; we are starting to change the culture in Scotland towards learning and skills.

We can pick apart the detail or we can be positive and prepare for success. Yes, we will monitor and, yes, we will assess. It is important to put on record our willingness to make changes as monitoring and assessment require. Even more important is that we do not delay, that we are determined to deliver and that we can be distinctive in the delivery of a scheme for Scotland. That is what we will achieve by passing the bill today.

## Active Communities Initiative

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson):** The next item of business is a statement by Jackie Baillie on the active communities initiative. The minister will take questions at the end of the statement, so there should be no interventions.

12:10

**The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie):** I am conscious of the time, so I will try to be brief.

Voluntary action, volunteering and community action are essential to the Scottish Executive's vision of creating an inclusive and mutually supportive society. We want to empower our communities, to make it easier for people to get involved, to strengthen their desire to get involved and to encourage more and higher-quality opportunities for participation.

The active communities initiative is a UK cross-Government programme first launched by the Prime Minister in January last year with the aim of promoting a step change in public involvement in the community. Scotland was represented on the UK working group by Liz Burns, the director of Volunteer Development Scotland. I welcome Liz to the public gallery today.

At the time of the launch, ministers agreed that there should be a clear and distinctive identity to the programme in Scotland, building on existing work and taking account of our social justice agenda. As a result, the Scottish active communities working group was established to advise on the development and implementation of the strategy in Scotland. Chaired by Laurie Naumann, it brought together an extensive range of expertise from across the public and voluntary sectors.

The working group identified four key objectives that underpin the strategy: first, to bring about a change in attitudes towards community activity; secondly, to increase the number of volunteers; thirdly, to draw in people from a wider range of backgrounds; and last, to act with other initiatives to promote a community empowerment approach. That provides us with a focus and a starting point. It assesses where we are and where we want to get to.

We wanted a strategy that would take account of particular Scottish circumstances, such as the better developed infrastructure of the voluntary sector and our compact with the sector. We wanted a strategy that would be cross-cutting, recognising the role of central and local

government and the voluntary and private sectors. We also wanted a strategy that would be widely understood and disseminated and capable of commanding broad ownership and support.

The culmination of the working group's considerable time and personal effort—the report “Supporting Active Communities In Scotland”—was published earlier this year for consultation. At this point, I wish to record my personal thanks, and the thanks of the Scottish Executive, to members of the working group for their efforts.

Aside from the written consultation, which generated 140 responses—a summary of which is available on the Executive's website and from the Scottish Parliament information centre—there was a convention in Edinburgh and consultation roadshows in Castle Douglas, Dundee, Glasgow and Inverness. Many voluntary organisations held their own consultation events to discuss the strategy and I am grateful for their efforts. Overall, the responses were generally positive. At one event that I attended in my constituency in Dumbarton, I heard someone remark that it was refreshing and long overdue that a strategic approach was finally being taken to developing active communities.

The responses highlighted a number of issues: the need to cast the definition of volunteering and community participation as widely as possible; the need to balance a grass-roots or bottom-up approach with driving change through Government and voluntary sector networks; the need to ensure that we set realistic targets and time scales and monitor progress; the need to co-ordinate and link with other initiatives; the need to engage the public, private and voluntary sectors in taking forward the strategy; and, of course, the need to ensure adequate resourcing.

Although the strategy focused in the main on excluded groups, there is a need to recognise and support the voluntary and community work that is carried out by Churches and faith groups and in areas where volunteering is strong, such as sports and the arts.

In responding to the active communities strategy, the Executive is not starting from ground base zero. There is considerable commitment and support for the voluntary sector and volunteering on which we will build. In Scotland, we already have a strong and firm foundation, with some 600,000 people regularly giving of their time and effort, but we know that there are as many people again wanting to get involved, waiting to be asked. We need to harness that potential and to provide opportunities for more people to participate in their communities.

The Executive is committing some £6 million in support of the voluntary sector and volunteering

infrastructures, with core funding for national bodies such as Volunteer Development Scotland and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations as well as support for the networks of CVS Scotland and volunteer development agencies.

We are also supporting the millennium volunteers project, a programme for government commitment that will see 1,000 young people each undertake 200 hours of voluntary work that will enhance their self development and benefit their communities. Other programmes that assist the development of volunteering and community activity include the unemployed voluntary action fund and the ethnic minority grant scheme. Last year, to support the active communities initiative, we funded five demonstration projects on volunteering, covering ethnic minority volunteering, rural volunteering, volunteering by disabled people and volunteering among older people. Those projects will help us to learn how best to involve people and to remove barriers to participation.

Yesterday, I was particularly pleased to meet Mrs Pettigrew at CSV Scotland. Mrs Pettigrew is a rather remarkable woman. She is 106 years old and Scotland's oldest volunteer. I can safely say that she was more alive than some of us. The project with which she volunteered involved older people and younger millennium volunteers doing reminiscence work and developing photographic archives.

The Executive endorses the draft strategy. We have been much impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of those who have responded and we will match that. The Executive is the subject of a number of the action points, one of which is that a Scottish minister should be the active communities champion. I am delighted to have been asked to take on that role and it is my intention to report progress to Parliament annually.

While I commend the strategy to public, private and voluntary sectors alike, I am conscious of the need to provide guidance and support to make it a reality. Equally, a number of salient points that we wish to take on board were made by organisations during the consultation phase. For that reason I am announcing the establishment of an active communities forum that will oversee the implementation of the strategy and advise ministers of progress. Details of the composition of the forum will be provided to Parliament shortly.

In addition, I am pleased to announce an initial package of measures totalling £650,000 to move the strategy forward. It consists of £100,000 to establish an active communities development unit, based in Volunteer Development Scotland, which will be tasked with taking forward many of the practical action points. Secondly, £100,000 will

promote volunteering and community action among older people, building on the work of CVS Scotland and Age Concern. A further £130,000 will support the Scottish employee volunteering initiative, the production of the media resource kit and TimeBank's campaign work in Scotland.

I said that the active communities strategy is aimed at involving excluded groups. One of the most excluded groups in society is people who are housebound. We shall fund a feasibility study to examine ways of enabling those who are housebound to participate in volunteering and in other community activities.

The package of £330,000 I have outlined is a first step in taking forward the strategy and a measure of the Executive's commitment to developing active communities. We shall announce the allocation of the remaining £300,000-plus for further projects during the year as ideas on taking forward the initiative develop.

Active communities, of place and of interest, are important across the whole range of areas for which the Executive has responsibility, whether it is education, health, housing, our cultural heritage or sport. The strategy will help us to build on the tremendous contribution that has already been made by the voluntary sector and volunteers across Scotland to build strong and active communities and bring about a positive view, at all levels, of volunteering and community action.

The benefits to the individual and to society are self-evident. Every man, woman and child has something to offer their community. The challenge for us all is to build strong and active communities that support our vision of a Scotland that is characterised by social justice and opportunity for all.

I commend the active communities initiative to Parliament.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I intend to allow up to 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business.

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** I thank the minister for her courtesy in providing an advance copy of her statement and I welcome her appointment as the active communities champion because I know of her personal commitment to the voluntary sector.

As the minister said, volunteering has always been an important part of community life in Scotland; from those who help out in charity shops to those who offer specialised help to voluntary organisations, or those who simply go for the messages for an elderly neighbour. The active communities scheme is about more than just

individual action; it is about how people get involved in all areas of community life.

One of the criticisms of the draft strategy was that it took a top-down approach that focused particularly on the role of statutory organisations, and that the majority of those on the working group were not from the voluntary sector. I am pleased that the minister has announced that she will set up an active communities forum to monitor the progress of the scheme, but will she guarantee that the forum will have a majority of voluntary sector participants on it?

The minister also announced funding of £650,000 to take the strategy forward. Will she confirm whether that is new money?

Finally, there was much criticism that the lines of communication between London and Scotland were not clear. What is the minister doing to address that criticism?

**Jackie Baillie:** I congratulate Tricia Marwick on her new responsibilities. I look forward to working with her in future. She raises the essential point, which is that volunteering and community action are very much part of the fabric of community life in Scotland.

We were concerned to involve people from the voluntary sector and directly engage volunteers—and, equally, to involve people from the public sector organisations that need to learn that message. The active communities forum will have a balanced composition, but I am happy to give an assurance that the majority representation will come from the voluntary sector.

The £650,000 is part of the £6 million that we commit to supporting the voluntary sector and the volunteering infrastructure. Today, we are announcing the detail of how that money will be committed in line with the action points that were raised in the strategy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Many members have indicated that they wish to ask questions, so it would be helpful if questions could be as brief as possible.

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** I welcome the statement. Does the minister agree that local development agencies, like councils of voluntary service and local volunteering agencies, are vital to achieving a bottom-up approach in supporting communities, that they encourage those who are excluded to participate and that they have a key role in developing active communities?

**Jackie Baillie:** I can assure Cathy Peattie that we are clear on the need to ensure that there is a bottom-up approach to taking the strategy forward. An important part of that is building the capacity of the voluntary sector on the ground. Key to that will be local volunteering development agencies

across Scotland—which we support to the tune of £1 million a year—and councils for voluntary service. As Cathy will know, we are undertaking a review of councils for voluntary service with a view, first, to completing the network to ensure that there is one in every area of Scotland and, secondly, to putting them on a stable funding regime. The review presents an opportunity to consider the role and the potential of councils for voluntary service in local communities. That also feeds into the strategy.

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** I too am grateful to the minister for the pre-release of the statement and I generally welcome the announcement. We welcome her appointment as the champion of the voluntary sector. While that is undoubtedly at lightweight, we have no doubt that she will punch her weight.

In generally welcoming the statement, we note especially that the £100,000 earmarked to promote volunteering and community action among older people is worthy of some praise. I am sure that the formidable Mrs Pettigrew would agree. However, I ask the minister to confirm that the £100,000 allocated to the active communities development unit is the only sum allocated to what is in effect a bureaucracy and that the rest of the funding will go to projects that support the sharp end of community activity.

**Jackie Baillie:** I am curious about how long it took Bill Aitken to work out his joke.

**Bill Aitken:** It was entirely spontaneous.

**Jackie Baillie:** It was spontaneous? He should not give up the day job.

The £100,000 for the active communities development unit is essential. I take issue with Bill Aitken when he says that it is simply for bureaucracy. The work of the unit will be strategic in putting forward guidance to a number of public sector agencies and to the private sector, to try to progress the essence of the strategy. The success of the strategy will depend on how successful we are in progressing the detailed action points around that, but equally around the media strategy group that will be set up to take forward some of the work. It is £100,000 that is well invested—the unit could not be described as a bureaucracy.

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** I too welcome the minister's statement and the resources. There had been serious concern at one stage that there would not be a distinctive Scottish approach, so we welcome that.

I wish to take up the point about active communities being not only about volunteering and to ask what steps the minister will take to ensure that the strategy expands into more active communities. That point has been made to me by

volunteers in the community working on social inclusion partnerships. The problem, especially in the network, is that volunteers who get together to exchange information have a limited budget to allow them to do the vital work they need to do, for example to take part in SIPs.

I wish to ask about the TimeBank campaign. It is run by the Home Office, with a lot of co-operation from Scottish organisations, but there is concern that people who registered in February still do not have places allocated to them.

Finally, will the minister ask the forum to consider the perceived problem that people on benefits have difficulty volunteering because they have concerns about the impact volunteering would have on their benefits? What representations and monitoring will she undertake to ensure that everybody can volunteer and that we do not have selective volunteering?

**Jackie Baillie:** We are keen to consider active communities beyond the concept of volunteering, which is why we are taking a community empowerment approach to the matter and why we are trying to put it within the wider social justice agenda.

Fiona Hyslop will be aware that over the summer, culminating in a seminar in the late summer or early autumn, we will discuss directly with social inclusion partnerships and the community representatives on them what additional support they require, not only in travel and child care, but to be equal partners at the table. That feeds into the strategy—close connections will be made between the two.

Fiona Hyslop is right—our negotiations with TimeBank were not all that we would have wanted them to be. Negotiations have continued and there is a much better relationship now. Indeed BBC Scotland is keen to take forward some of the volunteering initiatives and to present volunteering as new, exciting and part of the fabric of Scottish life. I am convinced that the minor difficulties that existed have been resolved.

Although benefits are reserved, I understand that the Department of Social Security is keen to encourage voluntary work because of its value to the individual and the community. Steps have been taken at an operational level and more can be taken. Jobseekers allowance, income support and incapacity benefit permit unlimited voluntary work, within certain conditions. We need to consider whether those conditions present barriers. That is one of the action points arising from the strategy that the active communities forum will take on board.

**Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab):** Will the minister seek to involve organisations such as the excellent Mark Scott Foundation—a foundation

born from past tragedy that attempts to give hope for the future? As well as providing young people with the opportunity to volunteer it seeks to develop their leadership potential.

**Jackie Baillie:** I entirely support foundations of that kind that engage young people in learning, volunteering and developing a range of life skills. To a large extent, such foundations exist because of charitable giving. In recent budget announcements on gifts of money, Gordon Brown has made us one of the most favourable countries in Europe for the voluntary sector. There is now more encouragement through taxation for people to dig deep and dig often in their pockets and to support foundations such as the one Hugh Henry refers to.

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** I join in the welcome for the statement and the minister's appointment—there is no one more suited to that role.

Does the Executive have a strategy to secure longer-term and more stable funding for the large number of voluntary sector groups that are funded through local government? Will the Executive be able to support such groups? Will the minister elaborate a little on how she sees her role as active communities champion—what does it mean in a practical, day-to-day way?

**Jackie Baillie:** Robert Brown will be aware of our compact with the voluntary sector, which clearly sets out the responsibilities of the Executive and its agencies on funding. To supplement that, on 13 June we published good practice guidance notes. It is of course one thing to issue guidance and another to monitor and follow up progress. There is an opportunity, as we report progress on the compact to Parliament annually, to see how we have done and to look at areas for improvement.

I see my role as champion for the active communities initiative as working alongside those with expertise who will be represented on the active communities forum. It will be about saying that volunteering has a special place in Scottish society, not just in its traditional and well loved forms but as a wider approach based on principles of community empowerment. We know that strong communities give rise to stronger individuals. That is the kind of vision that I will be promoting as the champion.

**Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** I too welcome the statement. From what the minister said, she clearly agrees with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations that a radical shift is needed from the top-down culture pervading public service delivery towards a community-led and empowered ownership of the means to address community needs and issues. However,

will she accept that at present there is little evidence that such a policy shift is being implemented or even considered comprehensively? Will she actively champion such change in her exciting new role?

**Jackie Baillie:** I cannot take the excitement, Kenny.

I assure Kenny Gibson that the Executive is committed to a bottom-up approach. Community planning represents one opportunity. Another opportunity that we are piloting is locality budgeting in communities such as Easterhouse and Wester Hailes, where the community is sitting down alongside all the agencies providing services in their area to have a discussion about priorities within that area and the reallocation of budgets. I am happy to champion something that is already going on.

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** I welcome Jackie Baillie's comments on how we take volunteering and active communities forward. I draw her attention to uniformed and non-uniformed voluntary youth organisations that make a vital contribution to Scottish communities. They are concerned about the financial implications of implementing police checks, which may threaten their viability and deter volunteers—especially those from deprived communities who might be put off volunteering if it has a cost. Does the minister agree that it is essential to recognise and address those concerns if we are to ensure that the voluntary youth sector is supported and volunteering is to be encouraged to be inclusive?

**Jackie Baillie:** I recognise, as Karen Whitefield outlined, that many concerns have been expressed by the voluntary sector, Churches, faith groups and uniformed organisations. That is why we set up a review group that included Volunteer Development Scotland, the SCVO, YouthLink Scotland—which represents the uniformed bodies—and the Scottish Churches to examine part V of the Police Act 1997. The group was set up to examine the costs of the proposed checks and to consider the administrative burden that would have to be borne by small voluntary organisations to comply with the code of practice.

Our current deliberations focus on whether there is a possibility of establishing a central register body to assist the voluntary sector, which would be similar to the pre-employment consultancy service model in Northern Ireland. At this stage we have not covered the topic of the cost of checks, although it is in the forefront of our minds, because we must scope the likely demand from the voluntary sector.

I assure Karen Whitefield that we are mindful of those issues. However, I stress that having a Scottish Criminal Record Office check does not

replace the need for the voluntary sector to have robust and effective child protection policies.

**Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** I too welcome the minister's statement, the strategy and her appointment as champion—which just confirms what we already knew.

If we are going to ensure a bottom-up approach, what action will the Executive take to end the artificial bureaucratic structural division between voluntary organisations and volunteering? Will she agree that what we ideally need—I know this already happens—is that in each community, not just each local authority area, there is a one-stop shop for voluntary organisations seeking advice and for those who want to volunteer to find out more about volunteering?

I will reiterate, in a slightly different way, the point Robert Brown made. What action is the Executive taking to diversify the income stream of voluntary organisations so that they do not become too dependent on any one source? That hampers organisations in many areas, especially those that are dependent on finance from local authorities.

**Jackie Baillie:** What is important is not the structure, which in some senses was Keith Raffan's first point, but how we operate on the ground. We must recognise that volunteers are the lifeblood of the voluntary sector. Keith Raffan alluded to the point that co-location of services often exists. There is great co-operation in communities between volunteering interests and voluntary sector interests—whether it be a one-stop shop or one organisation collaborating with another to provide the same services in different parts of the community, which is a model that I have seen elsewhere and which we could usefully examine—because they are mutually dependent.

Diversity of income is critical. The voluntary sector recognises that and has done a lot of work on donated income; the SCVO set up a working group to examine how to maximise it.

The Executive is setting up a community investment fund of £10 million, which will enable social economy organisations with income to tap into a source of loan funding so that they can grow their organisations. We will constantly search for diverse methods of funding. We regularly meet the National Lottery Charities Board, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and other funders to agree ways forward.

**Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab):** I, too, warmly welcome the minister's appointment as a champion—if anyone deserves that title, she does. Fiona Hyslop, who is a fellow member of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, and I recently met community activists from social inclusion partnerships in the Dundee

area. They stressed the importance that they attach to the establishment of a national association or network of community activists which would allow them to become more equal partners with government.

Can the minister assure the Parliament that when she meets community activists she will take on board their criticism that the £50,000 that has been allocated to set up the network is inadequate and that more resources will have to be found to create a genuine national network that will allow them to become equal partners with government?

**Jackie Baillie:** That is why we want to talk directly to community representatives in social inclusion partnerships over the summer. I recognise that experience has varied. Some of the older established partnerships are functioning very well. Those with dedicated resources for community representatives are functioning very well, but elsewhere there are struggles, which we want to address.

Last year, we gave funding to the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum with a view to supporting and sustaining networks of this nature. In recognition of the issues that John McAllion raises, we gave additional funding to the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations to develop that network further. We see this a starting point. I hope that in our dialogue with community representatives we can identify key issues that we can address for them.

## Business Motion

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S1M-1062, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out the business programme.

**The Deputy Minister for Parliament (Iain Smith):** Before I move the business motion for the final week before the summer recess, it is worth noting that this will mark the end of the first year in which the Parliament has had its full powers. It is worth putting on record that we have passed six acts of the Scottish Parliament; that two further bills are awaiting royal assent; and that subject to agreement to the business motion and decisions of the Parliament, another three bills will have completed stage 3 by the end of the first year. That is a substantial achievement, which it is worth marking.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees

Wednesday 5 July 2000

9.30 am	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Stage 3 Debate on the Bail, Judicial Appointments etc. (Scotland) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Stage 3 Debate on the National Parks (Scotland) Bill
2.30 pm	Continuation of Morning's Business
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business – debate on the subject of S1M-756 Allan Wilson: West Kilbride: Scotland's Craft Town

Thursday 6 July 2000

9.30 am	Ministerial Statement
<i>followed by</i>	Executive Debate on Modernisation in the NHS
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motion
2.30 pm	Question Time
3.10 pm	First Minister's Question Time
3.30 pm	Continuation of Executive Debate on Modernisation in the NHS
<i>followed by</i>	Motion on Government Resources and Accounts Bill – UK Legislation
<i>followed by</i>	Motion on Witness Expenses and Allowances Scheme
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business – debate on the

subject of S1M-1009 George Lyon:  
University of the Highlands and  
Islands

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** Today, the time that was allowed for a bill was again inadequate. Some members who wished to speak were not allowed to and others were asked to be extremely brief. We still have lessons to learn.

On Wednesday, there will be debates on two bills. When we know what amendments have been lodged, if necessary, will the time for debates extend beyond 5 o'clock, as has happened in the past, so that there is adequate time to debate them?

**Iain Smith:** As I said on a previous occasion, decision time at 5 o'clock is marked as a requirement of standing orders. The Executive intends to lodge a timetabling motion for both bills next week, which will take into account the length of time that is expected for debate. It is possible to reduce the time that is allocated for lunch, which is two hours, or to move that decision time be held later. It is certainly intended that there should be adequate time in which to debate both of these very important bills.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The question is, that motion S1M-1062 be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

12:45

*Meeting suspended until 14:30.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Before we start, I inform members that, in view of the problems that we encountered this morning, all the consoles have been checked and should be working this afternoon. I take this opportunity to remind members that we have issued notices in the business bulletin asking members not to allow any parties into the chamber during the last half hour before we meet, to enable our staff to check the electronic equipment. I am afraid that members have not been obeying that rule. I repeat, the last party has to be clear of the chamber by 2 o'clock.

Members have been allowing schoolchildren greater access to the seats and the voting equipment than we had planned. I ask that school parties be kept in the middle of the floor or at the back of the chamber and not be allowed to tamper with the equipment as that is causing problems.

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Fife Schools

**1. Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will meet the request made by Fife Council to provide extra money to tackle its estimated £70 million repair costs for Fife schools. (S1O-2054)

**The Minister for Children and Education (Mr Sam Galbraith):** We have received no such request from Fife Council.

**Tricia Marwick:** In that case, does the minister agree that Councillor Helen Law has asked the Scottish Parliament to discuss getting extra resources from the Scottish Executive?

I am sure that the minister will want to take this opportunity to welcome to the Parliament teachers and pupils from Auchmuty High in Glenrothes, which has a repair bill of £2 million over the next five years. Will the minister explain why some of the £89 million that was saved last year from underspend in education and industry could not have been used this year to meet the £1 billion repair costs for all of Scotland's schools? Will he also explain why he is prepared to sit back and watch Scotland's schools crumble to the ground?

**Mr Galbraith:** I was not quite sure what that question was all about, but I assure Tricia Marwick that I always welcome school parties to the Parliament. I also inform her that what this Parliament discusses is its business and nothing

to do with me.

Several sources of money are available to councils for school building repairs. The allocations are agreed with the councils. There is new deal money; there is the capital allocation—which is up by 11 per cent this year and which the councils agreed to target on school buildings—there is the public-private partnership option; and there is basic revenue. Sums of money are available and it is up to councils to use that money appropriately. It is not for me to make their decisions for them. I greatly condemn those who try to usurp the powers of councils.

**Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** I also welcome the pupils and teachers of Auchmuty High, the school that I was fortunate enough to attend in the 1970s.

Does the minister agree that Fife Council should be complimented on its current building programme, which includes the replacement of Queen Anne High in my constituency and Anstruther Wester Primary in the east neuk, and the upgrading of Beath High in Cowdenbeath?

**Mr Galbraith:** I congratulate Fife Council on its building programme. It is good to hear a member of this Parliament support a local authority rather than trying to usurp its functions as the nationalists always want to do.

Yesterday, I was at Hyndland Secondary, a school that will be replaced in two years' time because of a public-private partnership. I congratulate Glasgow City Council on its foresight in refurbishing its schools and I hope that every council will use it as an example of the way forward.

**The Presiding Officer:** Unfortunately, the question was about Fife.

### Fraserburgh Harbour Commissioners

**2. Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what changes it proposes to make to the constitution and structure of Fraserburgh Harbour Commissioners and what the reasons are for any such changes. (S10-2049)

**The Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr John Home Robertson):** Fraserburgh Harbour Commissioners is considering its response to the guidelines that we published in January. The guidance reflects the principles of openness and accountability that we wish to see applied in all trust port matters.

**Mr Davidson:** Does the minister agree that Fraserburgh Harbour Commissioners has a fine record over many decades—indeed, centuries—of renewing the port facilities to meet the changing needs of the port users? A good example of that is

the new ship lift that will be opening shortly.

Does the minister further agree that such success, over such a long period, has not depended on Government interference and that, on the contrary, it has come about because the commissioners have made their strategic plans without the dead hand of ministerial interference?

**Mr Home Robertson:** I have visited the Broch and I acknowledge the excellent work of Fraserburgh Harbour Commissioners. I know that Alex Salmond, as the local MSP, takes a strong interest in the board's work.

Mr Davidson may not like to be reminded of the fact that the previous Tory Government was in the business of privatising trust ports. This Scottish Executive has a different agenda—we want to build on the principle of local control by modernising trust orders, to make the management of harbours more effective and accountable.

Scottish Executive officials are discussing the new guidelines with all harbour trusts, including Fraserburgh, and will be happy to help draft amendments to harbour orders, which will be subject to approval by ministers, who are accountable to the Parliament.

**Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** On that point, will the minister confirm that this Administration will have absolutely nothing to do with the privatisation proposals of the previous Conservative Government, which would have sacrificed and jeopardised the success of both Fraserburgh and Peterhead?

Will the minister acknowledge the substantial success, and, indeed, the elected base, of both Fraserburgh Harbour Commissioners and Peterhead Harbour Trustees? Will he confirm that community interest has been one of the reasons for the outstanding success of both ports over the past few years? Will he give an assurance that nothing in the consultation document will undermine or jeopardise in any way that community interest and democratic base?

**Mr Home Robertson:** I acknowledge the success of both those important Scottish fishing ports.

The boards mentioned by Mr Salmond are certainly representative, but not entirely so. Fourteen of the 16 harbour trustees in Fraserburgh are elected by various interest groups, and properly so, but the other two trustees are the feudal superior—I think that we just voted him out of office—and his factor. That situation must be changed.

We want quality management, accountability and representation—that is the way forward.

## Crime

**3. Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what research it is currently undertaking into levels of crime against elderly people. (S1O-2066)

**The Deputy Minister for Justice (Angus MacKay):** The Scottish crime survey 2000, which has been carried out this year on behalf of the Scottish Executive, will provide detailed information on the level and nature of crime experienced by older people in Scotland.

**Ms White:** I thank the minister for his answer.

Is the minister aware of the concerns on that issue of groups that represent the elderly? He may mention that document, but the lack of published research is a cause for great concern.

**Angus MacKay:** Direct representations have not been made to me, but we will publish the results of the research that I mentioned in, I believe, August this year—at the latest, they will be published in the autumn. That information will be freely available to all relevant groups.

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** Will the minister confirm that that research will include research into the offences committed by those aged 16 and 17 against the elderly section of the population, given his intention to take those youngsters out of the criminal justice system altogether?

**Angus MacKay:** It is disgraceful that appalling scaremongering of that sort is used time and again in a way that I can describe only as either wilfully malicious or deeply ignorant. The fact of the matter is that we will consult on how to treat that group. Mr Aitken will have the opportunity to express his entirely unhelpful opinions in the course of that consultation.

**Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab):** Has there been an improvement in police response times since September 1999, when I raised a question following an incident when it took one and half hours to respond to the mugging of an elderly person in Glasgow?

**Angus MacKay:** I do not have to hand the information that Mr Martin seeks. I will look into the situation and will write to him. I hope that that will answer his question.

## National Lottery Funding

**4. Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer to question S1W-4663 by Mr Sam Galbraith on 31 May 2000, what measures it is taking to ensure that all constituencies receive more even distribution of lottery funding in future. (S1O-2041)

**The Minister for Children and Education (Mr Sam Galbraith):** We are monitoring the distribution of lottery funds and, with the distributors, we are addressing measures to encourage applications from areas of social and economic need.

**Irene McGugan:** Given that eight out of the nine constituencies in the north-east received less than the average sum of £1 million out of the total of £80 million in Scotland, and that Aberdeen South, which has significant pockets of disadvantage, received the lowest award of all, £38,500, does the minister accept that it can be harder for smaller charities and for charities operating in poorer areas to compete, that steps need to be taken to address that and that deprived areas should be getting more than their fair share of money, not less?

**Mr Galbraith:** There is certainly a problem with the distribution of lottery funding to deprived areas. The National Lottery Act 1998 and the subsequent directions seek to address that matter. They allow the distributors to seek applications from areas for the first time, and the distributors have to fulfil their obligation to social inclusion. There is already evidence that that is having an effect, which I hope will continue so that we can redress what is an unfair balance.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Yes, but does the minister recall his opposition during the progress of the Tories' national lottery legislation and his opposing any such directions at the time? What brings him to a changed conclusion today?

**Mr Galbraith:** Being an old-fashioned, hardened Presbyterian, I was totally opposed to any state form of gambling; the Tory party was much in favour of gambling organised by the state. It was successful, and I accept the reality—my job is to ensure that it works.

## Opencast Mining

**5. Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that the implementation of national planning policy guideline 16, in particular the 500 m cordon sanitaire between an opencast working face and neighbouring communities, is sufficient protection to ensure public safety. (S1O-2074)

**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** NPPG 16 sets a robust planning policy framework for opencast coal developments. Planning authorities have scope within the guidelines to consider projects on their merits. Complying with that and with other regulations should be sufficient to ensure public safety.

**Mr Ingram:** In the light of a landslip that occurred at Garleffan opencast site in Ayrshire,

and which travelled in excess of 500 m, and in the light of East Ayrshire Council's proposal to reduce rather than extend its exclusion zone between opencast workings and communities, in order to come into line with NPPG 16, is the minister satisfied that NPPG 16 is still protecting coalfield communities, or will she commit to extending exclusion zones to safeguard our citizens?

**Sarah Boyack:** It is the job of authorities, in interpreting NPPG 16, to work out the local characteristics and to make their interpretation of safety, location and topography factors.

**Mr Ingram:** That is not what they are saying.

**Sarah Boyack:** NPPG 16 on its own is not the full story. The regulations and the monitoring of sites by the Health and Safety Executive are a critical part of ensuring safety, both for communities and for the work force at opencast mines and similar sites.

**Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab):** The minister will be aware of my keen interest in the matter, and will know that I wrote to her and to the HSE about the Garleffan landslip.

The minister may not be aware that there was a fatality at another opencast site in my constituency yesterday—it was not caused by a landslip but, sadly, the fatal injuries resulted from a truck accident. Does the minister take the view, as I do, that the way to deal with opencast safety is to involve the opencast operators and East Ayrshire Council—and other local authorities—in working towards ensuring that safety procedures are reviewed, and that training on health and safety becomes a main feature of all the work done at opencast sites?

**Sarah Boyack:** The points that Cathy Jamieson raises are extremely relevant. I am aware of the tragic accident that occurred in her area. I know that Strathclyde police and the Health and Safety Executive are examining the matter. It is important that the subsequent report and information are acted upon.

It is critical that the operators of the sites follow best practice and work with the local authorities, and that we have regular inspections by the HSE, to ensure that operations on all such sites are carried out to the right standards, and that best practice is applied across the country.

### Civil Liberties

**6. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what safeguards for civil liberties are contained in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Bill. (S1O-2092)

**The Deputy Minister for Justice (Angus MacKay):** The Regulation of Investigatory Powers

(Scotland) Bill will, for the first time, provide statutory regulation for the use of surveillance techniques by public authorities in Scotland, to ensure compliance with the European convention on human rights. The bill will safeguard civil liberties in that respect. The use of that surveillance will be overseen by the chief surveillance commissioner, who will be a senior member of the judiciary.

**Donald Gorrie:** Will the minister lodge amendments to the bill to address the civil liberties issues arising from its wording, which means that ministers may specify any purpose for surveillance, that conduct by a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose may be a serious crime, and that the rights of third parties may be caught up in surveillance operations?

**Angus MacKay:** No. We will not lodge any such amendments. The bill does not give powers to ministers in the way that Donald Gorrie is suggesting. Any purposes that are specified by ministers would have to be compatible with the European convention on human rights, and would have to come before the Parliament on an affirmative resolution.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** As the Deputy Minister for Justice is aware, a person has no right to know whether they have been under surveillance, even if they are as clean as a whistle. That issue was raised at stage 1. I refer the minister and the Parliament to today's business bulletin—this is a plug. On page 25, my substantial and comprehensive amendment seeks to redress that imbalance. Given that that amendment has cross-party support, as he is aware, will he now support my amendment in principle?

**Angus MacKay:** I have not yet had the opportunity to read Christine Grahame's substantial amendment. However, I shall do so with interest. As she knows, at stage 2, I undertook to discuss directly with members of all parties the possibility of amending the legislation as proposed, to take account of those concerns. At that time, I indicated that I was willing to enter into those discussions, but I am now pessimistic about the possibility of finding a way forward that will satisfy all the concerns.

### Countryside Premium

**7. Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive how many farmers affected by the double payment situation in relation to the countryside premium scheme have applied for compensation. (S1O-2053)

**The Minister for Rural Affairs (Ross Finnie):** One.

**Alex Fergusson:** I would like to point out to the

Parliament that it is not me. *[Laughter.]*

I thank the minister for his answer. I thought that that would be the case. Does the minister agree that, as about 120 farmers are affected, this is a deeply regrettable situation, given that the fault never lay with the individual farmers? Will he undertake to simplify and speed up the compensation process for the farmers involved and instruct the Scottish Executive rural affairs department to take a proactive role in progressing that process? Will he also undertake to ensure that full compensation is given for stock disposal, which is at the heart of this whole sorry mess?

**Ross Finnie:** I share the disappointment about the fact that the number of applications for compensation has not been greater. I announced the compensation twice in the chamber and we referred to it clearly in our statement to the National Farmers Union. I also gather, from its regular dissemination of information, that the union was aware of the compensation. I have made it clear to the many members of this Parliament who have farming interests that we have been prepared to pay compensation. That is why there has been real disappointment at the low number of farmers who have applied for compensation so far.

Recognising that only one farmer has applied under the scheme that is mentioned in Alex Fergusson's question, in relation to an environmentally sensitive area, we will do what we can to increase the number of applications.

Mr Fergusson is well aware that, for full compensation, loss must be demonstrated. I have already made it clear that that does not include the repayment of any payment that has been rendered illegal by the proper interpretation of the rules. We have made it clear, however, that we will listen to all claims that are made for full compensation.

**Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD):** In view of the advent of modulation, will the minister relax the criteria for qualification for the countryside premium scheme?

**Ross Finnie:** That is not within my powers. I do not think that there is any need for that, as it is quite clear that what is intended by the regulations under which the scheme is set is that, if someone opts out and takes the compensation, for the purposes of the environmental scheme, they are not allowed to receive a second payment—especially in these cases—for the sheep quota that has been frozen as a consequence. It would be illogical for someone to receive payments under the sheep quota as well as the compensation. There is no logic in saying that someone should receive both payments.

## Gaelic

### **8. Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):**

To ask the Scottish Executive whether it intends to bring forward within the next 12 months a bill to provide secure status for Gaelic. (S10-2044)

### **The Deputy Minister for Highlands and Islands and Gaelic (Mr Alasdair Morrison):**

There is no such plan for the forthcoming year, but we are aiming to secure the future of the language through our programme of support for Gaelic.

**Michael Russell:** The provision of secure status was a manifesto commitment of the Labour party, the Liberals and, indeed, of the SNP. Given that, perhaps I should simply ask the famous question: why not?

**Mr Morrison:** Mr Russell is right—the Executive has committed itself to working towards secure status for Gaelic. He will recall that significant steps have been taken, for example, in education. I can cite the example of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill, which requires education authorities to report on their plans for provision for Gaelic in their annual improvement objectives. That statutory provision will help to improve the situation. That is one example, but I could cite many more.

**Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** The minister will be well aware that a cross-party group on Gaelic has been established and has received formal approval. Will he indicate his support for that welcome initiative by attending the group's inaugural meeting? I am assured that the occasion will be celebrated by the dispensing of generous measures of a well-known Highland elixir.

**Mr Morrison:** Of course I welcome the establishment of the cross-party group on Gaelic, and I am delighted that Mr Munro has confirmed that it has been formally recognised by Parliament. I congratulate Maureen Macmillan, who was the prime mover in that initiative and who has been installed as convener of the group.

I am not sure about the date of the group's first meeting, but given that adequate provision of appropriate refreshment will be made available, I am sure that I will be able to attend it.

**The Presiding Officer:** I must remind the minister that this is an alcohol-free chamber. *[Laughter.]*

### **Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):**

Does the minister acknowledge—in the context of achieving secure status for Gaelic—that Gaelic-medium education is the most important means of securing the future of Gaelic? Will he ensure that Gaelic-medium education is made a national priority in education, and will he take steps to address the shortfall in teachers who are trained in

Gaelic-medium education?

**Mr Morrison:** Lewis Macdonald raises two important points. As my colleague knows, a consultation is under way on national priorities, which ends in August. Those priorities will be presented to Parliament. I am very hopeful that Gaelic will be regarded as a national priority in the new system of national priorities.

We are actively addressing the shortfall in the number of Gaelic teachers. We hope that in forthcoming years the establishment of the University of the Highlands and Islands will be an excellent opportunity to provide more Gaelic teachers for an ever-growing number of Gaelic schools throughout the country.

**Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Can we have an explanation from the minister—along with all his fine words—as to why he and the Lib-Lab Government disgracefully voted as they did on that matter? All but two Liberal and Labour members voted with the Executive.

**Mr Morrison:** I remind Mrs Ewing that we voted against the SNP amendment on the matter because—as was ably demonstrated by Peter Peacock—the amendment was not competent.

### Children's Health

**9. Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how it is promoting better children's health, particularly in relation to preventing heart disease in later life. (S10-2037)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon):** Child health and the prevention of heart disease are two of our top health priorities. This autumn we will launch major national health demonstration projects in both those areas, backed by a total of £9 million over three years. This week, I announced the creation of a new national child health support group to help drive and co-ordinate a wide range of efforts in children's health.

**Elaine Smith:** I am pleased to hear that response on a vital issue. Will the minister join me in commending the British Heart Foundation on its excellent poster campaign, which is helping to raise awareness of the issue? Does she agree that a hallmark of the Executive's approach to tackling ill health and child poverty has been its ability to cut across departmental barriers? Does she further agree that a good example of interdepartmental working is the positive promotion of play as a way of improving the health and well-being of Scotland's children?

**Susan Deacon:** I agree with Elaine Smith's important points about the future health of our

children. I was pleased to join the British Heart Foundation last month for the launch of the "Get Kids on the Go" pack, which raises precisely that issue. We must work together to ensure that our children take more exercise as a normal part of their lives, and that families build exercise into their lives. Otherwise, sadly, we are storing up enormous problems—particularly in relation to heart disease—for the future. We will continue to work together across the Executive, considering what can be done to encourage play and physical activity, involving sportsScotland, schools and other bodies, to ensure that we make an impact on heart disease in the years to come.

**The Presiding Officer:** Many members want to ask questions on this point. If exchanges are kept short, we should be able to fit quite a few in.

**Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I was pleased to hear the minister mention the importance of healthy lifestyles for children in the battle against future heart disease. Will she tell the Parliament, as well as local authorities around the country, how much of the £9 million that she just mentioned will be available to reverse the cuts that hard-pressed local authorities continually have to make to leisure and sports facilities?

**Susan Deacon:** The £9 million that I mentioned is part of a total of £15 million, which the Executive is allocating to four national health demonstration projects. The essence of those health demonstration projects is that they involve a multi-agency approach, bringing together health boards, local authorities and the voluntary sector to make an impact on the health of our people. I am delighted that local authorities have become involved in all those projects, and we are investing in them.

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** The last time—indeed the only time—I was fit was when I was at school, because I had to play hockey and tennis, and even, on one memorable occasion, run a relay race. Is not it a matter for huge concern that Susan Deacon's colleagues in the Executive are content with such variable provision of sports and athletic activities in our primary and secondary schools?

**Susan Deacon:** I am still trying to collect my thoughts; I am reeling from the image of Annabel Goldie running in the school relay race. I agree with her that exercise among children in our schools is important. This Executive, more than any other previous Administration, is working together to ensure that exercise is developed in our schools and elsewhere. Later this year, we will be coming together across ministerial and departmental boundaries to take forward the work of the national physical activity task force. We are already working together on health-promoting activities in schools, and we will continue to work

together in that way. I do not know how much clearer I can be on that point.

**Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West):** Does Susan Deacon agree that children's health might be better if the Scottish Executive had not underspent last year's national health service budget by £135 million, but transferred only £101 million of the underspend to this year's budget, resulting in a loss of £34 million, which could and should have been invested in our national health service, instead of being spent elsewhere by Jack the lad?

**Susan Deacon:** I thank Dennis Canavan for giving me the opportunity to put the facts of the matter on the record. Fact 1: almost half a billion pounds more is being spent on health this year than was spent last year. Fact 2: that record level of investment is being targeted to the right areas, with more staff and more investment in hospitals and community health services to make an impact on the health of our people. Fact 3: a sum of approximately £135 million has been carried forward from last year's health budget into the current financial year, out of a budget of some £5 billion. Fact 4: more than—

**Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Answer the question.

**Susan Deacon:** If Andrew Wilson cares to listen, he might learn something. Fact 4: more than £100 million—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. Let us hear the answer.

**Susan Deacon:** More than £100 million of that sum carries forward directly into the health budget, because it represents continuing areas of spend, such as capital projects that span from one year to the next.

Fact 5: approximately 0.5 per cent of the health budget has—along with percentages of the budgets of other departments—contributed to a contingency fund, which is good financial management by the Executive. Part of that fund may be directed towards specific health activity, and some of it already has been directed towards cross-cutting priorities of the Executive, so that we can make the best possible use of the resources that are available to us. While the Opposition parties have been successful in spinning on the issue, we are spending on the issue for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** I suspect that that argument will continue with question 10.

### National Health Service

**10. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to ensure that the highest standards of clinical care are available in all parts

of the NHS throughout Scotland. (S1O-2088)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon):** The Scottish Executive works closely with the NHS and with the medical profession to ensure that the highest standards of clinical care are provided in the NHS in Scotland. The new system of clinical governance in the NHS in Scotland, the creation of the Clinical Standards Board for Scotland, the Health Technology Board for Scotland, the work of the Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network, and the Clinical Resource and Audit Group, which is headed by the chief medical officer, are all examples of work that contributes towards driving up quality. I intend to publish a full report on Scotland's leading-edge work on clinical quality later in the year.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I welcome the recent developments in clinical governance, which should lead to the early identification of any problems that arise with standards of clinical care. I also welcome the continuing work of the Clinical Standards Board for Scotland, which I recently visited to find out the way in which it is systematically auditing standards of care throughout Scotland. Is it possible for those important new initiatives to be widely publicised so that public confidence is enhanced? People should understand that there is a distinctive Scottish agenda on these important matters.

**Susan Deacon:** Malcolm Chisholm raises some important points. In the light of some of the cases that have been reported in the media in recent weeks, his points are also timely. The Clinical Standards Board has been one of the major developments in recent months to put in place arrangements that are right for the health service and right for the medical profession in Scotland—it will ensure that the highest possible standards are developed in our health care system. The clinical governance arrangements that NHS trusts have been bound to follow since April last year are designed to achieve the same thing.

I agree with Malcolm Chisholm: it is important that the public know about those developments and about the work that is taking place to drive up standards and to identify problems that can then be resolved. That is the way in which public confidence can be restored and maintained in the future.

**Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP):** In view of the fact that the length of time that people have to wait for surgery depends on their health board area, does the minister agree that health service delivery by postcode is unacceptable? The time that people have to wait for surgery should not depend on where they live. Is it not high time that the minister took steps to rectify the situation?

**Susan Deacon:** It is precisely because we

believe that it is important to reduce waiting times and the inequity of waiting times across the country that we initiated the work that I announced in this chamber last December to put in place national maximum waiting times for the three clinical priorities of cancer, coronary heart disease and mental health. One of the priorities that has been identified for the £60 million extra that has been allocated to health boards over the past couple of months has been the reduction of waiting times. Yesterday, I attended a major NHS conference. Much of the discussion, and many of the comments that I made, concerned the importance of linking reform in the delivery of service with the record levels of investment to ensure that waiting times are reduced.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

How can clinical standards be raised in Scotland when the man who invented keyhole surgery cannot even get a reply to his letters, let alone the recognition that would allow advances in technology in that field? A leading consultant has today stated that, due to your funding cuts, cancer patients in Tayside are dying more quickly than would be expected.

**The Presiding Officer:** The cuts are not mine; they are the minister's.

**Susan Deacon:** In an earlier reply, I set out very clearly the record increases in funding that are taking place in the health budget. It is important to note that one of the priority areas for that additional investment is cancer care, and that includes £13.5 million specifically for much-needed cancer equipment. We will continue to invest in that as a priority area, we will continue to improve services and we will continue to drive up clinical standards, in partnership with the medical profession.

**Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab):** I fully accept that more than £100 million will automatically carry over into this year's NHS budget and will be available to health boards and health trusts to spend on improving health care standards across Scotland. However, will the minister assure me that any remaining part of that carry-over that comes under the direct control of the Executive will also be reallocated to initiatives to improve health standards? In particular, I make a plea for some of it to be allocated to Tayside, to help with the necessary shift from acute to primary sector care, which will require time and additional funding for both trusts in the Tayside area.

**Susan Deacon:** I am pleased to repeat the point that I made earlier and that my colleague Jack McConnell made on several occasions yesterday—the contingency fund that has been established within the Executive will be directed towards priority areas. Those may include health-specific issues and will, I am sure, include a range

of cross-cutting priorities, such as public health, social inclusion, homelessness and other areas in which we work together across the Executive.

As we have discussed on many occasions in this chamber, a range of issues—not just financial—have caused particular difficulties in the NHS in Tayside. I recently received the report from the task force that I appointed earlier this year to investigate those issues. I will publish the report shortly and will at that time announce in full the Executive's response to it.

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP):** Will the minister give us an absolute assurance that age discrimination plays no part—and should play no part—in clinical decisions concerning patients? Will she dissociate herself completely from the remarks of those doctors who claim to make clinical decisions based on age?

**Susan Deacon:** I have already dissociated myself from the remarks made at this week's British Medical Association conference by one doctor, who argued that decisions on clinical care should be taken solely on the ground of age. I am pleased to say that the BMA overwhelmingly rejected that view.

More and more health care is being delivered to our older people. That will continue to be the case, as people are continuing to live longer. Doctors will always have to make judgments on what care and treatment individuals will benefit from and on the implications of that treatment for individuals. They will take into account a wide range of factors, but they should not take a decision solely on the basis of an individual's age. The NHS stands four-square behind that view.

## Road Traffic Accidents

**11. Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it intends to carry out any research on a comparison of urban and rural risk factors for road traffic accidents. (S10-2096)

**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** At present, the Scottish Executive has no plans to conduct such research. The Executive's transport research programme is reviewed regularly and includes topics such as tourist road accidents in rural Scotland and evaluation of Scottish home zones.

**Dr Jackson:** Does the minister agree that although urban areas may have more obvious problems with speeding traffic—as is the case in my constituency at Cornton in Stirling—there are also real needs in rural communities, where narrow bridges, heavy forestry vehicles and a lack of footpaths can make rural schools, such as Stratheyre Primary School, needy candidates for funding from the safer routes to school initiative?

**Sarah Boyack:** I agree that it is appropriate that local authorities should identify their priorities and survey their local circumstances. Last month, I announced that Stirling Council will receive £86,000 from the safer routes to school project. That will enable it to set its priorities, whether they relate to rural or urban schools. The key thing is that local authorities should identify the right schools and do so in the context of the guidance on best practice that we have given, which is intended to help them.

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** It is an unfortunate fact that most road traffic accidents, whether rural or urban, involve people who have recently passed their tests. Although this may not be a devolved matter, will the minister agree that it might be worth looking at the scheme in Northern Ireland that provides for a probationary period for people who have passed their tests during which their cars must have plates that are recognisable to other drivers?

**Sarah Boyack:** I am aware that we need to survey the causes of accidents. One of the research projects that has not yet begun, but which is programmed, is an evaluation of driver improvement schemes in West Lothian. We are keen to raise driver standards and to find opportunities to focus on that. If there are specific local matters of which Mr Stone has experience, I will be happy to address them if he writes to me.

## First Minister's Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Prime Minister (Meetings)

**1. Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister when he last met the Prime Minister and what issues were discussed. (S1F-456)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):** I last met the Prime Minister on 16 June in Glasgow at the joint ministerial committee on health. Surprisingly enough, we discussed health.

**Mr Salmond:** I suggest that the acting First Minister has another summit with his health minister and with his finance minister. Last week, the acting First Minister told us that Jack McConnell would never fiddle budgets—I remember the gasp of surprise in the chamber when he said that. On 30 March, Jack McConnell told us that there would be a 7.3 per cent increase in health spending in Scotland this year. Last week, the health minister told us that the increase would actually be 4.3 per cent. Yesterday we found out that £34 million may be reallocated out of the health service altogether. Will the acting First Minister give us an assurance, not that that £34 million may be spent on the health service this year, but that he will overrule the finance minister and say that it will be spent on the health service this year?

**Mr Wallace:** I am told that Mr Salmond once had a reputation for being something of an economist. If that reputation is to remain intact, he ought to know that one does not spin figures. If he is going to make comparisons, he should compare like with like. The 7.3 per cent increase that was mentioned is a 7.3 per cent planned increase in this year's health service spending over last year's planned health service spending. That is an increase of almost half a billion pounds, of which I am quite proud.

If Mr Salmond were anything of an economist, he would also know that it makes sense in prudent financial planning to have a contingency reserve. We have £35 million going to reserves for contingencies and it is almost inevitable that the health service will have some call on that money. As we have seen over the past 12 months, pressures on the health service come mid-year—such as during last winter, or when it was suddenly possible to have a meningitis C vaccination. That makes it prudent to have a contingency reserve. It is time that Mr Salmond got involved in some joined-up arithmetic and

accepted that health spending this year is half a billion pounds more than it was last year. That is something of which I am proud.

**Mr Salmond:** That is less than Jack McConnell told us about in March. If the acting First Minister were anything of an acting First Minister, he would recall that his explanation of planned spending is exactly the same discredited explanation that the Tories gave us through 18 discredited years.

The acting First Minister is, as I am, a constituency member. Is there not a discrepancy between the facts as given to us by the health minister and the reality that is faced by my constituents? Is he aware that a patient from Cruden Bay has been waiting for a triple bypass since September 1999; that a patient from Peterhead has been waiting for a heart transplant for more than a year; and that a disabled man with special needs from Maud has been waiting for a hernia operation for a year? Is that not the reality that constituents are facing around Scotland? Given that reality, and given the fact that 82,000 people and therefore their families are on the waiting lists of Scotland, will he answer the question and tell us whether that £34 million will be allocated to and spent in the health service this coming year?

**Mr Wallace:** I ask Mr Salmond to do some joined-up arithmetic and acknowledge that almost half a billion pounds of additional money will be spent in the health service in this current year. [MEMBERS: "Answer."] Of course that is to address the kinds of issues that he has raised on behalf of his constituents and to ensure that we make an impact on waiting times. This year, that money will fund the recruitment of 1,000 more nurses, almost 300 more doctors and a hospital building programme of eight new hospitals. We will double the number of one-stop clinics to ensure that we get much speedier response times. Those are the things that Mr Salmond asks for and those are the things that we are doing, to make an impact on the health service and to meet the needs of patients. Does he or does he not welcome half a billion pounds more money?

**Mr Salmond:** The acting First Minister is now a total prisoner of Labour spin. Yes, 100 new doctors were announced yesterday, but the NHS in Scotland has lost 1,400 doctors in the past four years. Yes, 200 new nurses were announced yesterday, but there are 1,600 fewer nurses in the NHS in Scotland than there were four years ago. Is not the acting First Minister aware—has nobody told him—that capital spending on equipment in the health service is half what it was four years ago? Does not he understand that the number of people on waiting lists has risen by 17 per cent to more than 82,000 during the past year? Given that 82,000 families might be listening to the acting

First Minister, will he now answer—at the third attempt—this question: will that £34 million be spent in the health service or will it not?

**Mr Wallace:** A lot more than £34 million more money is being spent on the health service this year. More than 10 times £34 million extra is being spent on the health service this year. Mr Salmond is the one who is spinning, because he knows full well that, with the advent of more community care and the movement of resources from the health service into that, nurses have been moving from hospitals into nursing homes and residential homes. He is the one who is spinning. We have no need to spin, because the facts speak for themselves.

So that the people at home are aware of the proper comparisons, let me make it clear that, whereas this year we are injecting—on planned expenditure—9.6 per cent more in cash and 7.3 per cent more in real terms, under the SNP's proposals last year in "Economics for Independence", those figures would have been 7.3 per cent in cash and 5.5 per cent in real terms. Over the current spending review plans the SNP wanted £83 million more; we are putting in more than double that. That is why the SNP cannot be trusted on health spending and why it has shown today that it cannot be trusted on prudent financial management either.

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Before I call question 2, I must say that there is too much noise in the chamber. I ask the Deputy First Minister to move his microphone towards him, because that will help.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con):** To ask the acting First Minister what issues were discussed at the most recent meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S1F-465)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):** The Cabinet discussed several matters of significance to the Executive and to the people of Scotland.

**David McLetchie:** We know from our earlier discussions today that one of the subjects that must have been discussed at recent Cabinet meetings was the £435 million underspend in various Government departments. We have heard a lot today about the health budget and how our tree-hugging Minister for Finance, lumberjack Jack McConnell, is robbing the health service for the benefit of the Forestry Commission. On another priority area for the Scottish public, can the Deputy First Minister explain, as Minister for Justice, why he did not spend £48 million of his budget last year, especially against a backdrop of two years of rising crime and in circumstances in which the

Scottish Police Federation has said that our forces are 1,000 officers below strength?

**Mr Wallace:** Question time is turning into a tutorial on basic economic financial management. What David McLetchie fails to recognise is that in setting budgets—I will deal specifically with the justice budget—it is impossible, when dealing with items such as legal aid, compensation payments and the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, to make an exact estimate of what will be spent, particularly under those demand-driven expenditure headings. Therefore, spending is not always up to the limit. Of course, that expenditure is being carried forward. In previous years, that justice department underspend would have had to go back to the Treasury. At least in this case it is continuing to be spent, and David McLetchie will be the first to acknowledge that I announced just last month an additional £8.9 million more for Scotland's police forces, which will help them to recruit up to 300 additional officers.

**David McLetchie:** I happily acknowledge that announcement last week, which of course will finally take us back to the levels that were inherited from the Conservatives in 1997. Indeed, the announcement is long overdue, given the rising crime rates that people in Scotland have to cope with.

The acting First Minister keeps talking about planned spending. The fact is that he ain't spending it. Will he acknowledge that £435 million underspend is equivalent to approximately 2p on the basic rate of income tax? If he cannot wisely spend taxpayers' money as planned, instead of hoarding it up for short-term advantage, why does he not tell Jack McConnell, the Minister for Finance, to use the Parliament's tax-varying powers and give us our money back? If he cannot use it, he should give us it back.

**Mr Wallace:** Tories want tax rises—well, that one will be marked down.

If Mr McLetchie reflects on his question, he will accept that, of a total budget of some £17.7 billion, the £430 million to which he has referred is a relatively small percentage. It is almost impossible to get this exact. I well recall my days in the Faculty of Advocates when—depending on the then justice department's budget—whether the floor of the main hall in the Court of Session was sanded in the third week of March depended on whether people were rushing out to spend money in the last two or three weeks in March. No proper consideration was given to how that money would bring the best return. The Finance Committee report, which was endorsed by the Parliament yesterday without a vote—I assume that it was endorsed by every member of Mr McLetchie's party who is on that committee—said that what we are doing now to tackle end-year flexibility makes

far more prudent financial sense.

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** Will the Deputy First Minister assure us that the meetings of the Scottish Cabinet are conducted in an atmosphere of co-operation and constructive discussion, in stark contrast to that which pervaded last weekend's conference of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party? Will he agree that that conference demonstrated the depth of division between that party's warring factions, as represented in the chamber—

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. I am sorry, Dr Murray, but the minister is not responsible for the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party conference. [*Interruption.*] Order. Did you detect a question there, Mr Wallace?

**Mr Wallace:** There was a first part to the question—whether our meetings are cordial and co-operative. I confirm that they are. I am grateful to you, Sir David, for pointing out that I am not responsible for the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party—that comes as a mighty relief. However, as we approach the anniversary of the Parliament, it is interesting that it is the Opposition parties that are divided and the partnership parties of the coalition that are united.

### Local Government

**3. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** To ask the First Minister when the Scottish Executive will issue its formal response to the recommendations of the renewing local democracy working group. (S1F-464)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):** The Scottish Executive is extremely grateful for the work of the renewing local democracy working group, which was led by Mr Richard Kerley. The Executive will now consider its findings. That consideration will be taken forward initially by a ministerial working group, which will report to the Cabinet. The Cabinet's conclusions will be announced in due course.

**Donald Gorrie:** Will the acting First Minister ensure that a bill reforming Scottish local government is introduced and passed as soon as is practicable, even if some of its provisions take some time to be put into effect?

**Mr Wallace:** If Mr Gorrie is referring to provisions relating to boundary commissions, that would be the normal practice; indeed, I wonder whether the Boundary Commission for Scotland would be able to take any steps without legislative authority for them. We indicated in the partnership agreement that we wanted to make progress on that matter. Wendy Alexander set up the Kerley committee almost immediately after the McIntosh committee reported. Richard Kerley's report is

another milestone on the way and the fact that the Executive has responded quickly in setting up the working group shows that we are determined to continue making progress.

**Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will the acting First Minister explain why first-past-the-post voting was not included for consideration by the Kerley committee? The implication is that a decision has already been taken to introduce a type of proportional representation in local government elections.

**Mr Wallace:** If Mr Harding cares to cast his mind back almost exactly a year to the publication of the McIntosh committee report, he will remember that the committee overwhelmingly recommended electoral reform. The Kerley committee was set up to take forward that recommendation on electoral reform, which by definition did not include first past the post.

**Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** It is a shame that Keith Harding did not read the McIntosh report before he asked that question. Given that the working group on renewing local democracy recommends adopting the single transferable vote for local government elections, and given that that is Scottish Liberal Democrat policy, will the acting First Minister press his Executive colleagues to ensure implementation of STV in time for the next local government elections in 2002? Alternatively, as with tuition fees, will it be left to the SNP to remind him of which party he is a member?

**Mr Wallace:** I confirm that, as Mr Gibson said, STV is Scottish Liberal Democrat policy. We made a submission to the Kerley committee on that. The Kerley report will be examined by the working group of ministers. If we had waited on the SNP to deliver the abolition of tuition fees, we would still be waiting. The Executive has abolished tuition fees. No Scottish student going to university in September will pay tuition fees.

### **Scottish Parliament (Anniversary)**

**4. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Executive will mark the anniversary of the opening of the Scottish Parliament. (S1F-470)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):** There are no special plans to mark the anniversary. The Scottish Executive, working together, will be carrying out its business as usual—delivering on our commitments to the people of Scotland.

**Helen Eadie:** Will the Deputy First Minister agree that the real achievements of the coalition parties in the Parliament, Labour and Liberal Democrats working together—the help for increased access to higher education, the

establishment of the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency, the largest-ever increases in spending on schools and hospitals—are what should mark the anniversary of the establishment of Scotland's Parliament?

**Mr Wallace:** I thank Mrs Eadie for mentioning but a few of the many achievements of the Executive and, it is fair to say, of the Parliament over the year. We have passed a substantial number of bills, including the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Bill, which will bring meaningful help to around 100,000 families in Scotland. We have abolished the feudal system, which is something that even the old Scottish Parliament did not get round to. The Parliament has done many things in which it can take pride. I am particularly pleased that we have done them in a spirit of co-operation in the Executive, as I think that the people of Scotland are heartily sick of parties fighting one another and welcome the parties that will sit down and co-operate.

### **Budget**

**5. Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the acting First Minister whether the Scottish budget will fall as a share of the UK budget in the next four years. (S1F-469)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):** The total Scottish Executive budget for the next three years will be known after the chancellor has announced the conclusion of the 2000 spending review. Per head of population, Scotland will benefit pound for pound the same as the rest of the UK.

**Andrew Wilson:** I think that it would be of interest to acknowledge that, like Alex Salmond's question, that question was not answered. I point out that the answer that the acting First Minister gave to Alex Salmond's question contradicted what the Minister for Finance said yesterday. Is the acting First Minister aware that, according to page 92 of the Treasury red book, health spending in the UK will rise next year by 7.4 per cent, whereas, according to Susan Deacon, health spending in Scotland will rise this year by 4.3 per cent? That to me is a fall, relative to the UK figure. Does he agree with me on that and will he confirm it?

**Mr Wallace:** Andrew Wilson is suffering the same confusion as Alex Salmond. The 4.3 per cent—

**Andrew Wilson:** It is in the written answer.

**Mr Wallace:** I have a copy of that written answer here.

**Andrew Wilson:** Is it right?

**Mr Wallace:** The 4.3 per cent real-terms increase to which Mr Wilson refers is the planned

expenditure for this year over the expected outturn expenditure for last year; 7.3 per cent is the planned increase this year as against last year's planned health service spending. Mr Wilson is not being wise if he is trying to fudge that. He ought to accept that, pound for pound, health spending in Scotland will increase by the same amount as it will south of the border and that we in Scotland already start with higher spending on health per head of population than is the case south of the border.

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth)**

**(Lab):** Does the acting First Minister agree that not only does Scotland receive, as he put it, a pound-for-pound share of total UK spending through the Barnett formula, which the SNP would jeopardise, but that this year Scotland has received much more money through the budget than we would have received through the nationalists' rejected penny for Scotland tax?

**Mr Wallace:** As I indicated last week, the Barnett formula, on which we—including the SNP—agreed and campaigned in the referendum, brings stability to the funding of the Scottish Parliament. I also confirmed last week that the expenditure that has come through as consequential is more than would have been produced by the penny on income tax, which Mr McLetchie now seems to be advocating.

**Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland)**

**(Con):** Will the acting First Minister confirm the Executive's continuing support for the Barnett formula and that the important issue is the maintenance of the current per capita spending in Scotland, regardless of spending in the rest of the United Kingdom?

**Mr Wallace:** As I have indicated, the Barnett formula allows us to plan each year, because it automatically allocates the amount of money that the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive receive. It would be a recipe for disaster, especially in these early days of the Parliament, if we had to have an annual haggle with Westminster. We want the Parliament to work; we want a stable Scottish Parliament within a stable United Kingdom. That formula, which we all supported in the referendum—with the exception of Mr Davidson's party—is one that provides that.

**Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP):**

On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Rule 15.3 of the standing orders allows the Parliament to regulate who enters the chamber. A subordinate regulation limits the number of advisers who may enter the chamber. I know that it is clear from this afternoon's performance that the acting First Minister needs all the help that he can get, but the Executive has today breached that rule and exceeded the number of advisers. Will you please look into that?

**The Presiding Officer:** I can assure Michael Russell that I gave permission for an increased number of advisers. If there is a request for an increased number from Opposition parties, I will also give permission for that.

**Michael Russell:** Now that we know that such a facility exists, I am sure that we will not require it, but the Executive will need more and more advisers.

**The Presiding Officer:** I do not think that that is really a point of order.

## Agriculture Strategy

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** We now move to motion S1M-1051, in the name of Ross Finnie, on a forward strategy for Scottish agriculture, and amendments to that motion.

15:32

**The Minister for Rural Affairs (Ross Finnie):** It is with pleasure that I move this motion welcoming the steps being taken by the Scottish Executive to promote a debate on the development of a long-term strategy for Scottish farming.

The Executive has already clearly demonstrated its commitment to the future of the agricultural industry in Scotland as part of the social, economic and environmental fabric of rural Scotland. I will say a little more about that in a few moments, but I will begin by putting this debate into its proper context.

It has been acknowledged by all concerned that we must move away from the past. We cannot afford to lurch from one crisis to another, casting about for short-term solutions, without making a serious attempt to address the fundamental problems facing the farming industry.

That is why we published a discussion document, entitled "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture", early in April with the intention of opening up a full, but I stress brief, debate during the summer and autumn on the issues which underlie the future of agriculture. As I said in this chamber in April, this issue is of fundamental importance to Scotland. It has perhaps been too easy in the recent past to understate the contribution of agriculture to the rural economy. Our document demonstrates its substantial and continuing significance.

Around 75 per cent of our land area is given over to agricultural production. In direct employment alone it accounts for some 8 per cent of the rural work force, and gross agricultural output in Scotland is valued at around £2 billion per year. Some percentage figures highlight its importance in parts of Scotland: agriculture accounts for 15 per cent of gross domestic product in the Orkney islands; 12 per cent in the Scottish Borders; and 11 per cent in Dumfries and Galloway. Of course, these figures increase when one applies the multiplier effect and takes into account the industries that are linked to agriculture.

As members are aware, the farming industry remains under exceptional pressure for a variety of reasons.

First, there are economic pressures. The

agriculture industry has faced a tight squeeze from the exposure of European agricultural production to falling world market prices, a weak euro and rising costs. Despite the support that has been given, the level of farm incomes has continued to fall. There are long-term changes in the world trading economy and also temporary and cyclical reasons for that fall. At the same time, agriculture support regimes are changing in ways that will probably reduce production-linked subsidies. The future costs of the common agricultural policy in an enlarged Europe will also have an impact on the level of agricultural support.

Secondly, we face inescapable regulatory pressures and a regime that now—rightly—gives priority to public health issues. We have an independent UK Food Standards Agency, and it is likely that there will be a European agency. The focus is on traceability and identification. We will argue for rules that minimise red tape. We will apply them as economically and efficiently as we can, but those pressures will remain.

Thirdly, the market is putting exceptional pressures on the industry. Rationalisation in the retail industry is putting a huge pressure on costs and margins and falling world prices are adding to that pressure. Consumer habits are changing and farmers can no longer assume, if they ever could, that the simple act of producing their goods will secure buyers and profitability.

Fourthly, we face significant environmental pressures. I know how seriously farmers take their responsibilities for the preservation of Scotland's environmental heritage. Like other sectors of industry, they are under pressure to play an even fuller part in delivering clean water and avoiding pollution. That is a significant burden. I am aware that many farmers feel that they are not adequately rewarded for the work that they already do to enhance the environment, and that many of them would wish to do more if they could afford to do so.

The Executive on its own cannot devise or implement a strategy for agriculture. We need to work in partnership to ensure that agriculture continues to sustain the social, economic and environmental fabric of Scotland. In my first year as Minister for Rural Affairs, the Executive has tried to take steps to inject new thinking into policies for Scottish agriculture and the rural economy. I also pay tribute to the work and effort of the industry to improve its efficiency and innovation.

I will give some examples of the opportunities for innovation in which the Executive and the farming industry have already started to invest, but in which a great deal more needs to be done.

First, on markets and products, a substantial

part of our industry is already exploiting the value of Scotland's reputation in the food and drinks industry for quality, integrity and service. The Executive has given clear support to marketing and business development, has encouraged an increased awareness and understanding of the food chain, and has heavily emphasised the commitment to quality in Scotland through our support for the food industry strategy and the development of Quality Meat Scotland.

**Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Is the minister aware that when the French ambassador kindly visited us yesterday, he said that there was a proposal in the French presidency to set up a European food security agency? As we have always tried to attract a European institution, will the Executive fight to get that agency? That would help the problem that we face with the reputation of our beef.

**Ross Finnie:** I am aware of that. Dr Ewing will be aware that, even under the Portuguese presidency, proposals for a Europe-wide food standards agency are emerging.

I think that such an agency would be hugely beneficial, provided that its objective was to create a level playing field in standards across Europe. I fear that experience tells us that adding another layer of bureaucracy creates additional burdens and costs. Although I would support wholeheartedly any attempt to secure a level playing field and to promote an agency that would achieve that, I would not support any attempt to add further layers of bureaucracy or cost on the industry.

I want us to focus every part of the food chain on the consumer, and on making the most of our innovative capacity to do more processing and manufacturing in Scotland, and to do so in an atmosphere in which the integrity and quality of our products is assured. I hope that that will increase returns to producers and processors through high-quality products.

Secondly, there is the question of organisation. Organisation is a sensitive issue, but any industry with thousands of individual businesses at one end of the chain supplying ever fewer retail buyers at the other end is at risk unless it co-operates and organises. Scottish farmers have made great strides in developing co-operatives, which reduce costs, enhance marketing opportunities and increase returns. There are, however, opportunities to do more in that field.

Thirdly, there is a major new opportunity for our agriculture industry to embrace technology. The Executive is doing what it can to drive forward the adoption of technology in farming to simplify administration. We can make the whole business of meeting regulatory requirements much easier through the use of technology such as electronic

cattle identification. New technology is also being deployed to research new products and services for the farming industry. We must make that one of our priorities for the future.

Fourthly, the opportunities that arise from the environment are at least as great as the challenges. The environment is a great public good and we must expect farming to be carried out in as environmentally sensitive a way as possible. The environment also contributes hugely to tourism, recreation and sustainable sources of income from which many farmers in many areas continue to benefit. Our strategy must take full account of that.

I commend all that activity, but there is a long way to go. That is why the Executive is promoting this debate on the future of Scottish agriculture. We cannot continue to sustain an industry on the basis of subsidies that form substantially more than 100 per cent of incomes. We need to build on what we have achieved and to develop a new vision for farming in Scotland, which will influence policies and thinking not just in Government but in the industry and in the wider community.

The Executive wants a farming system that is economically sustainable, that is integrated with the rural economy as a whole, that sells what people will buy and that preserves and enhances the rural environment. That vision must be set firmly in the context of our distinctive Scottish farming structure, acknowledging the fact that 85 per cent of our agricultural land has less favoured area status and that hill farming is central to our livestock farming system. That vision must also acknowledge that there is a significant social and community dimension to farming in rural areas.

Our discussion document has set in train that process which, I intend, will lead to the production of an agricultural strategy early next year. I make it clear to the chamber that I want the process to be concluded by the end of this year. We cannot wait indefinitely for a strategy—it is vital that we have one.

Last Wednesday, before the opening of the Royal Highland Show, the debate was kick-started with a conference involving 170 people, including representatives from more than 70 organisations intimately involved in Scottish agriculture. We listened to a range of speakers with distinct perspectives on the future of agriculture, addressing a number of key questions. Today's debate is another important marker in the process, affording members the opportunity to outline how they want the strategy to develop and to highlight the areas of concern that they want addressed.

Let me indicate how I intend to take the process forward, to allay the concerns of some people, particularly on the Conservative benches, about

the lack of speed or urgency. I have set up a steering group, under my chairmanship, with a wide membership from throughout the industry, which, over the next few months, will keep on top of the dialogue with those who contribute to the process.

As part of that process, sectoral issues will be considered by experts. We will meet and have discussions with a wide range of farmers throughout Scotland. We will take evidence, if necessary, from abroad. We have had early indications from Ireland and Spain that they may have experiences on which we can draw. The Andrew Dewar-Durie report will also be published imminently, and I believe it will provide some helpful pointers. Officials will have detailed discussions with groups—I hope that they will be flexible and informal gatherings—to get input from the widest possible range. We have also invited written comments on the discussion document by the end of September.

Some people have questioned the wisdom of encouraging discussion on this topic rather than jumping to instant conclusions. I looked back and was astonished to discover that it has been a very long time since there was a policy statement and a strategy document on Scottish agriculture. I find it staggering that the department that I now have the pleasure of running has been distributing vast amounts of money under the overarching common agricultural policy, without a clear view of what we are trying to achieve for the benefit of Scottish agriculture. That is why I believe that, before coming up with different policies and ideas, it is vital that we have an overarching strategy around which we can coalesce in the best interests of Scottish agriculture.

Finally, I am conscious that we do not have a huge amount of time for today's debate. I remind any members who have not had the chance to express all their views as fully as they might today that the process will allow them to make their views known to me and that those views will be fed into the full process of consultation and discussion.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the steps being taken by the Scottish Executive to promote a wide-ranging and constructive debate on the development of a long-term strategy and plan of action for Scottish farming following the recent publication of the discussion document *A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture* in order to secure a sustainable future for the agricultural industry as part of the social, economic and environmental fabric of rural Scotland.

15:46

**Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP):** The minister has quite rightly

put agriculture into context as a very important Scottish industry. The industry is even more important to the fragile rural economy. Scottish agriculture has had a great deal of attention during the past few years, in both the Scottish Parliament and the UK Parliament. It has also been the subject of much public debate—not necessarily about its future, but about its present. The minister has alluded to the problem that so much attention has been paid to examining the day's crisis that we never really begin to consider the medium or long term. I welcome the chance to debate the subject in the context of the document.

Recently, some people have said that agriculture needs less strategy and more action. I do not know whether I completely agree. One of the problems that we have faced is that, perhaps understandably, there has been far too much short-term action. Politicians and farmers may be equally to blame for that. There has not been enough willingness to sit down and try to work out a long-term solution.

In the foreword to "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture", the minister said:

"The days of rural areas and agriculture being synonymous are long gone".

However, it is important that we try to reinforce the connection between rural areas and agriculture. While acknowledging the importance of agriculture for rural Scotland, we should also be aware that our actions and strategies should be directed not only at primary production in agriculture, but at related industries.

Our amendment alludes to the point that the future of Scottish agriculture—and through it the future of our rural economy—cannot be taken in isolation in the context of events in the UK, but must be considered in the context of events in the wider Europe and the world at large. Over the next decade, those events will significantly affect Scottish agriculture. The last renegotiations of the common agricultural policy failed to make the radical changes that many states sought. There is no doubt that, in the next set of renegotiations, close as they will be to the accession of the relatively poor states in eastern Europe—all of which have substantial agricultural sectors—there will be significant pressure for a reduction in the amount of money spent in western Europe under the common agricultural policy. That will have significant consequences for our farmers. Regardless of that situation, there will be considerable pressures from the World Trade Organisation to reduce the level of subsidy in western Europe to equate with levels in the rest of the world.

It is not just within the institutions of Europe that agriculture will begin to feel the pressure. In the

document, the department refers to the currency situation and the euro exchange rate and to

"the need for the farming industry . . . to do what it can to make their fortunes less susceptible to exchange rates. This may include developing products which are less price sensitive or targeting markets where exchange rates are less of a problem".

I must say that I find that statement extraordinary. It seems to boil down to saying that, for whatever reason, the Government has landed us with a strong pound against a weak euro and that the solution for the farming industry is effectively to forget sales in Europe. There is no mention of the reluctance to pay agrimonetary compensation to make up for the fact that the level of support prices is dependent on the level of the euro, nor any mention—or hint—that the Government itself might take some responsibility for dealing with this problem. No one in the agricultural community who read that statement could have taken much comfort from it.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** Does the member agree that the development of strong local markets would mean a far more sustainable—and environmentally sustainable—future for Scottish agriculture?

**Alasdair Morgan:** Yes, indeed. In fact, I will briefly mention local markets later in my speech. However, the suggestion is somewhat unrealistic, because we trade in a global environment. As exchange rates affect both products that we export and that we import, the problem is still a significant one.

In the document, the section headed "Opportunities Ahead" highlights certain areas where Scottish agriculture could benefit from targeted investment. Such areas include the development of new markets for Scottish produce; retail trends; exploiting the demand for new products in our shops and among our consumers; the development of direct or local markets; the use of new technology; increased co-operation between farmers; and increased development of tourism and recreation.

I suspect that one of the problems is that investment in and development of those areas are not sufficiently achieved by the current structure of the funds that are going into agriculture. Although farmers and farm businesses obviously welcome the substantial payments that go into the direct subsidy regime, they do not necessarily develop the industry for the future.

That brings us to modulation, or the top-slicing of direct support payments to put cash into the rural development regulation that can target payments at items as diverse as training, early retirement, agri-environment schemes and the improvement of marketing and processing. The

Government currently proposes to reach a fairly modest 4.5 per cent of top-slicing over five years, as opposed to the maximum 20 per cent allowable in the European Community. It is a matter of concern that, because Scotland is not a member state, we are tied to the same modulation percentage that is decided at UK level. The National Farmers Union of Scotland is not particularly happy with the modulation proposal. However, although we can understand why anyone in receipt of direct support payment would not want to see it diminish, we need a wide and well-informed debate about the options and possible consequences.

I have referred to the WTO, in which context the barbarians are well and truly at the gates. In Geneva yesterday, the US delegation tabled proposals for today's negotiations that would effectively end the so-called blue box system that has protected the level of EU farm subsidies up to now. Those proposals will receive the support of the Cairns group, a group of 18 agricultural exporting nations led by Australia which is campaigning for big subsidy reductions. It is not a question whether the current direct support system will be drastically changed, but a matter of when.

**Ross Finnie:** Does the member agree that, although there are proposals for moving out of the blue box, no one is attacking the green box? Furthermore, does he agree that in so far as the rural development regulation, which includes the modulation proposals that he mentioned, is acceptable, we can make a very serious case for sustaining levels of support within the green box?

**Alasdair Morgan:** There are certainly levels of support that need to be sustained and I recognise that not all support is under attack from the WTO. However, in the current situation where the level of subsidy will reduce over what might be a fairly short period, we have to think now about how we use that money while we have it to the best advantage and for the best future of the Scottish agricultural industry.

We have to put Scottish agriculture in a position to compete in an increasingly global market, whether exporting or importing. If we can take action to achieve that aim, perhaps we should be talking about modulating more of those direct subsidy payments while we are able. Whatever the answer is—and I see members shaking their heads—there should be debate about it. We need some answers about where we can place Scottish agriculture to ensure that it survives and competes not only for the next five years, but for much further into the future.

I move amendment S1M-1051.2, to insert at end:

"but recognises that the re-negotiation of the Common

Agricultural Policy will be a major factor affecting the future of Scottish agriculture and regrets that, under the current constitutional settlement, Scotland will not have its own voice in these negotiations."

15:55

**Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con):** I welcome the minister's placing of agriculture at the heart of the rural economy. I declare an interest in this debate with the same feeling of guilt that I am told accompanies those who escape from a fatal accident or who cancel their booking on an aeroplane that subsequently crashes. I am not someone who is usually noted for being ahead of the game but, given the recent advice of the president of the National Farmers Union to his members that they should get out if and while they can, perhaps I have been fortunate in finding another occupation before it is too late.

The fact that the president of the NFUS feels forced to give that advice to his members is indicative of the desperate—and I use that word advisedly—state to which farmers have been reduced. The income of producers has halved year after year since the Labour party came to power and their collective borrowing is now much more than £1 billion. Producers used to borrow for innovation and investment but now borrow simply for survival. Those individuals cannot be accused of complacency in the face of their increasingly desperate situation, for well over 70 per cent of Scotland's farmers derive a significant part of their income from non-farming activities. While I applaud the innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit that enables them to do so, I have no doubt that the vast majority do not do so voluntarily.

What has the agriculture industry had in return from the Labour Government since 1997 and from the Lib-Lab Executive since last year? I link those two bodies because all the discussion documents that are issued by the Scottish Executive seem to be regurgitated versions of those issued earlier by Lord Sewel.

The Labour Government came to power with a catchphrase of "Education, education, education", but that has been reinterpreted in relation to agriculture as "Consultation, consultation, consultation". While I welcome the minister's talk of urgency, our amendment highlights the time that has been taken so far. How could it take 10 months to produce this discussion document? How could it take 10 months to come up with the profound statements that we find on page 3?

We are told that

"Scotland is a significantly rural country."

We are further informed that

"The nature of farming itself varies."

The best statement of the lot is that

"The size of farms also varies."

I assure the minister that, if those pearls of wisdom are designed to set the farmers' minds at rest, he is in for a major disappointment.

How could it take a further two and a half months to set up the steering group to take the process forward? The document and the steering group should have been in place long ago. That would have sent a message to Scotland's farmers that their plight was as high on the list of priorities as they were promised that it would be before the election for this Parliament. Instead, the minister has to deal with an industry that feels let down, unwanted and undervalued.

The minister is not being helped in that respect by his departmental officials. It gives me no pleasure to say this, but those civil servants are becoming neither of service nor civil in their zealous pursuit of the rigorous interpretation of regulations. Why else would a farmer who wrote to me recently have had his application for the beef special premium scheme refused after he had voluntarily given the information that he had mistakenly claimed for a heifer? Why else would the Scottish Executive rural affairs department be reclaiming an entire year's sheep annual premium and hill livestock compensatory allowance from another farmer because the officials did not like his method of record keeping, despite the fact—as SERAD confirmed—that he consistently had a higher number of sheep on the farm than he was claiming for? The attitude that SERAD has towards its farming clients is nothing short of disgraceful.

**Ross Finnie:** Is Mr Fergusson seriously telling me that he is drawing a conclusion about the whole department on the basis of two claims? Is he suggesting that that is a serious way of dealing with the problem that he perceives to exist? Is he telling me, as a matter of European law, that the claims to which he refers have been wrongly dealt with?

**Alex Fergusson:** If only time permitted, minister.

I am seriously saying that the size of my postbag is increasing on this issue and that, if we are to address a long-term strategy for agriculture, we need individual producers as willing participants in the discussion. If the attitude problem continues—it is becoming more prevalent, at least in my mailbag and, I believe, in others—we will not achieve that willing participation, and the whole exercise will be a waste of time. I have had more than two cases.

**Alasdair Morgan:** On the wider point that Alex Fergusson makes about the crisis in agriculture,

does he accept that that crisis did not start on 6 May 1999 or, for that matter, on 1 May 1997? To the extent that his criticisms are valid, they could be levied equally well at, say, the last 10 years of the previous Conservative Administration.

**Alex Fergusson:** Alasdair Morgan will be surprised to learn that I do not accept that at all.

**Ross Finnie:** Surprise, surprise.

**Alex Fergusson:** Quite.

I contend that the crisis accelerated considerably in 1997. I would love to find a farmer who would not prefer to be in the position in which he was in 1997 rather than in the position in which he is now.

**Alasdair Morgan:** Including Alex Fergusson?

**Alex Fergusson:** Yes, including myself.

The minister may be pleased to hear that we whole-heartedly welcome the desire to address the long-term situation, with the aim of maintaining a viable and sustainable industry—of course we do. However, unless we address the short-term issues as well, there is a genuine danger that only the rump of an industry will be left to sustain.

I ask the minister to answer the following points when he sums up. Why are we in Scotland so far behind the rest of the UK in establishing a sheep tagging scheme that we are endangering what is left of our export market? Is money available for the establishment of the electronic cattle tagging scheme, which the minister trumpeted as a means of cutting bureaucracy, and what is the latest timetable for its establishment? Does he agree that the industry simply cannot afford the so-called modulation proposals, even at the rate at which they are set currently, never mind the rate of 20 per cent that Alasdair Morgan proposed? If the modulation proposals are implemented, does the minister agree that they must be implemented without any significant sectoral or regional disadvantage?

I could put another 100 questions to the minister, but I am sure that the chamber will be grateful that I do not have time. I conclude by repeating that, while we welcome the desire to seek a long-term solution, there is an overriding and urgent need to address the short-term situation, which cannot be resolved by more words and consultation.

I move amendment S1M-1051.1, to leave out from "the steps" to end and insert:

"steps being taken to secure a sustainable future for the agricultural industry as part of the social, economic and environmental fabric of rural Scotland; recognises agriculture as the main economic driver in rural Scotland; deplores the lack of urgency being shown by the Scottish Executive in addressing the short-term problems of Scotland's farmers, and calls for a speedy conclusion to the

series of consultations on an agricultural strategy so that action can be initiated to protect the future of the farming industry."

16:02

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** According to recently published figures from the Executive, 60,000 people were employed directly in agriculture in Scotland in 1998, contributing about 1.4 per cent of the Scottish gross domestic product. Unsurprisingly, given that 75 per cent of Scotland's landmass is rural, those figures are significantly higher in rural areas. Eight per cent of the work force in rural areas is employed directly in agriculture, which is the third largest source of employment after the service sector and public services. In Dumfries and Galloway, about 11 per cent of GDP relies on agriculture.

As the discussion document "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture" states, each agricultural job is reckoned to sustain another job in downstream industries, such as the production of farm machinery, animal feedstuff and so on. The food and drink sector in Scotland, which is heavily reliant on agriculture, employs another almost 60,000 people. The total number of people whose jobs are either wholly or significantly dependent on the survival of the Scottish agricultural industry is about 180,000, or nearly 8 per cent of the Scottish work force. Agriculture is clearly an important industry in Scotland, and I have no difficulty, either as a Labour politician or as an MSP for a rural constituency, in defending the need to consider the long-term interests of that important industry.

We discussed briefly the document when it was published on 6 April, but today we have an opportunity to discuss in more detail the issues that must be tackled. Like Alasdair Morgan, I was rather disappointed by the response of the NFUS at last week's conference, when there was a demand for action, not strategies. It was interesting to note that, although the press release that was put out by the NFUS contained a demand for action, there was no indication of what action should be taken.

Some of the MSPs who have joined the cross-party group on agriculture and horticulture met representatives of agriculture-related industries at the Royal Highland Show last week. I took that opportunity to ask each representative which two actions they felt would help turn round their current problems. There was only one common theme: that we should join the euro at the appropriate rate—that was quite interesting.

Each representative also suggested actions that would assist their own industries and interests, but that would not have any particular value to other sections of the industry.

**Alasdair Morgan:** As we are on the subject of the euro, could Dr Murray clarify whether she supports Helen Liddell's point of view or Gordon Brown's point of view on the issue?

**Dr Murray:** I do not think that there is a difference between Helen Liddell's point of view and Gordon Brown's. The Labour party's view is that we should consider joining the euro when the conditions are right, but that the final decision will be put to the people of the United Kingdom.

One of the problems in the past has been that actions have been taken without accompanying strategy. Actions may assist with a particular problem or may help the industry to get over a crisis period, but they do not do anything to solve the underlying problems. When the discussion document was published on 6 April, the minister referred to such actions as a sticking-plaster approach, which was a rather good analogy.

That is not to say that there are not times when short-term actions and injections of cash to deal with specific problems have been required. The Downing Street summit in April, at which a £39 million support package was announced for Scottish farming, was an example.

Everybody agrees that support packages do not make the problems go away for ever. Whether or not the National Farmers Union likes the term "strategy", the actions that we take, in order to be successful, have to be set in the context of a long-term strategy that aims to consolidate the Scottish agricultural industry.

Like any other industrial sector that aims to survive, agriculture has to have a vision about its future—its strengths and weaknesses, which market it will aim for, how it supports and is supported by other indigenous industries, what new products might be developed and how it can best utilise new technologies. We may soon come across the term e-farming. We have e-everything else—why not have e-agriculture?

Like any other business, farming needs to be supported by good advice services. That means business development, financial services and, I believe, assistance with product and process development, especially if we are to raise value by developing food products rather than just selling raw materials. That is highlighted in the discussion document. I believe that SERAD and the enterprise and lifelong learning department will both have an important supportive role. We cannot expect people to develop new products or new markets in a vacuum.

I shall cut out the rest of my speech and conclude by saying that, even in my constituency, Dumfries, which is largely rural and dependent on agriculture, people sometimes ask me, "Why are you so bothered about farming anyway?" Some

people still see farmers as over-subsidised and always complaining about things. It is a great pity that we have that perception of agriculture, because it is such an important industry to Scotland. I look forward to a time when everybody sees agriculture as one of our crucial industries and a successful contributor to both the local and national economies.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Speeches should now be of a maximum of four minutes.

16:08

**Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I welcome the debate and give credit to the Executive, at least for having the discussion in a constructive manner. In the short time of four minutes that I have been allotted, I wish to consider two issues: first, strategic direction, and secondly, currency, on which we have not had a great deal of satisfaction in this debate or previous debates.

The Executive has identified, correctly, that agriculture is about a great many more people than those who are directly involved in it; it is about rural communities. If that is recognised, I find it strange that we have reached this point in the debate with no mention of the additional costs that are imposed in rural communities through the fuel tax or other charges on rural living. Those costs have an impact on people involved in agriculture, as on everybody else who lives in rural Scotland.

Although it is good to have a conversation about this, and a consultation, I am slightly disappointed with the Executive's timidity in not being particularly bold in putting forward its strategy. It is fine to have the debate, but I want to know what the Executive thinks, and what its strategic vision for the industry might be. "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture" is full of questions and contains very few suggestions, let alone answers. The debate is meant to be about the forward strategy; I would like to know the Executive's forward strategy on consulting widely in Scotland.

Page 18 of the document says it all:

"The shape of the agriculture industry in Scotland is changing constantly as farmers respond to technological and market trends. The size of farms changes, as does the type of farming".

So far, no one could disagree. It continues:

"That will no doubt continue, but some thought may need to be given to whether certain trends should be encouraged or discouraged. By and large, the Executive is unwilling to take a view on the merits of such changes, driven as they are by decisions of individual businesses, but through its various support policies it will often have an effect on structures."

It is fair to ask the Executive to do more than that—to come off the fence and give us an idea of where it wants the debate to go. Otherwise, there is no strategy, simply an absence of leadership. I am a member of the Health and Community Care Committee, and when we ask the Minister for Health and Community Care for her opinion we can barely get her to stop talking. However, there is an uncharacteristic silence from the Executive on this matter.

**Ross Finnie** *rose—*

**Mr Hamilton:** Until now.

**Ross Finnie:** Is Duncan Hamilton suggesting that his preference would be for the Executive simply to state its policy—its view of the way in which Scottish agriculture should proceed—in a top-down way and not engage with the industry? That is a very old-fashioned way of dealing with things and is not the way to embrace a community in a strategy.

**Mr Hamilton:** In my short parliamentary career I have been called many things, but old-fashioned has not been one of them.

The minister has missed the point entirely. I am asking for a middle ground to be reached—an idea that should appeal to him, as a Liberal. I would like the Government to produce Government proposals, Government thoughts and Government leadership—not to impose them, but to discuss them. The fact that someone could read the entire document without having the faintest clue where the minister stands on many of the important issues that he has highlighted is regrettable.

I turn briefly to the issue of currency. I thoroughly enjoyed the dexterity with which the minister picked his way through his own speech, concerning the problems of the “weak euro” and its relative position to the pound. There was no mention of the strong pound, only of the “weak euro”. It is important that we have an honest debate. Even the Scottish Parliament information centre document that we have been given talks about the problems of the strong pound and finishes by saying:

“The strength of the pound has compounded agriculture’s problems . . . UK adoption of the Euro would remove some of this uncertainty.”

I suggest to the minister that, if we are to have an honest consultative process, we should be honest about the problems that he has identified on previous occasions, and about the unbelievable impact on exports of the strong pound, which he identified in his speech in Brussels.

Alasdair Morgan highlighted the fact that, rather than addressing that issue head on, the minister said that the responsibility lay with farmers to ensure that they moved into areas in which their

farms and fortunes were less susceptible to exchange rates. It is not enough to pass the responsibility. Perhaps the idea is old-fashioned, but I thought that responsibility lay with the elected Government. I would like to hear a lot more about the Executive’s strategic direction.

16:13

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** I begin by declaring an interest in this subject.

In writing my speech, I set out to try to be positive, but the list that I compiled of the Government’s achievements and successes was much shorter than my list of the problems that are still facing agriculture. I welcome Ross Finnie’s acknowledgement that Lord Sewel’s review, which was carried out less than three years ago, was meaningless and valueless. That is a worthwhile admission on the minister’s part.

Once again, I draw to the Executive’s attention the plight of dairy farmers, especially in Ayrshire, where small farm sizes dictate that the benefits of economies of scale cannot be achieved. Despite the new generic milk advertising campaign, milk prices are at a 60-year low. Consequently, many dairy farmers are going out of business in Ayrshire—a picture that is being mirrored throughout Scotland.

The problem that is affecting all farmers at the moment is the cutting back in production.

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** Would John Scott not agree that it was—alas for him—the previous Conservative Government that deregulated the milk industry, and that that is what produced the problems that we have today?

**John Scott:** I would also point out that, at that time, milk prices were at a record high and rose subsequently to a high after deregulation.

The result of the cuts in food production is that we are losing the strategic ability to produce food for ourselves, which was built up over two generations. In the mid-1980s, this country was 75 per cent self-sufficient in food. Last year, that figure fell to 68.4 per cent. That is because we have a de facto Government policy of importing food as cheaply as possible from abroad. Farmers are continually exhorted to co-operate, collaborate, diversify and become more efficient, but they must compete with their hands tied behind their backs.

In Europe, there is no hormone-treated beef. I am not saying that that is what we want, but virtually all beef in America is hormone treated. That is reckoned to put our farmers at a 10 per cent cost disadvantage in world beef production terms. In Europe, we have no milk that is

produced by cattle that have been fed the milk production enhancing drug bovine somatotrophin—BST; that also puts producers at a market disadvantage in world terms. We do not use genetically modified grain and maize seeds, and my guess is that it will be a long time before Britain and Europe are prepared to use GM grain and oils in our animals' and, indeed, our own diets. That puts us at a competitive disadvantage in world terms.

The reality is that we in Scotland, the UK and Europe are handing our world food markets to America and to the Cairns group of countries, which are prepared to adopt change and lower their food production costs.

That is one side of the equation—the other is that our costs in Scotland are higher than most places in the world and agrimonetary compensation has not been paid. We have huge meat hygiene costs—the BSE taxes—which cost about £60 for every bovine animal that is sold. The cost for pigs is about £5 and for sheep it is £2. Scottish farmers also bear welfare costs and bureaucracy costs. The cost of fuel—mentioned by Duncan Hamilton—is the highest in Europe. Distances from markets in Scotland, especially in the Highlands and Islands, and all the other factors that I have mentioned combine to result in producers in Scotland having greater production costs than producers anywhere else in the world.

The effect of that—the bottom line—is that Scottish farm borrowing exceeds £1 billion, but Scottish net farm income is only £73 million. Profitability is a thing of the past for most Scottish farming businesses, the income from which does not even service their borrowing. Farmers are caught in a pincer movement of rising costs with shrinking support and an inability to compete in world markets with the prospect of enlargement of the EC.

The minister's hands are tied by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and by Nick Brown's inability to lead effectively in Europe on behalf of the UK and Scotland.

I urge members to support the amendment in the name of Alex Johnstone.

16:18

**Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** I declare an interest as a working Wester Ross crofter. Other members will put their feet up on Saturday after surgeries in their constituencies, but—poor me—I will be outside mending the fences and trying to keep the goats out.

The minister said correctly that the Executive cannot on its own devise or implement a strategy

for agriculture. He talked about the need for partnerships, the UK policy framework, European matters and world prices. All that he said was true and appropriate. He offered many warm words and good intentions, but as Rudyard Kipling said:

“Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.”

I want to look beyond the words and focus instead on some of the issues that will soon be faced by all our farming communities. There is great concern among crofters and hill farmers who rely heavily on the hill livestock compensatory allowance payments. The majority of highland farms qualify for those payments, but new European regulations demand a change in the rules on that allowance from January 2001. From that date, payments will no longer be based on livestock headage, but on the amount of land that is farmed.

A straightforward transition from head counts to land counts will result in a huge redistribution of payments from small marginal crofts to the larger estates. I understand that, under current proposals, farmers will be paid 80 per cent of their headage payments next year, 60 per cent the following year, and 40 per cent the year after that. I would be interested to know exactly what our strategy will be to protect the incomes of small crofters and farmers. If a solution is not found, I anticipate a huge exodus from our farming communities. It is not over-dramatic to say that HLCA funds are literally putting food in children's mouths.

Modulation—or top-slicing, if you will—has been mentioned, and that is another vital issue. Farmers can ill afford to have their grants cut by as much as 4 per cent, and regard modulation as daylight robbery. It is their money, so why should they lose another 4 per cent? I understand that moneys will be channelled into schemes to encourage farm diversity. That may be a noble cause, but why should the farmers suffer to pay for the scheme?

We need long-term strategies, such as the French have. In France, young people are encouraged, and financially supported, to take up farming. We also need a funded retirement scheme to make way for new blood.

I hope that the minister will address the problems of the clerical and computer systems in his department. Every week, I receive angry calls from constituents who face delays and unnecessary bureaucracy, causing needless added financial and personal strains. I am sure that other members also receive such calls. No one doubts the minister's sincerity about improving the lot of our agricultural and rural communities, but let me offer him some sound advice from the book of Ecclesiastes:

"The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.

The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies".

Words are all very well, and we know that the minister's heart is in the right place, but words alone will not save our farmers from financial ruin. I look forward to seeing our farmers benefit from the substance that will emerge from the rhetoric of today's debate.

16:22

**Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab):** I am not sure how to follow John Munro's speech. I should start by declaring an interest—which might surprise some members—partly because of my long involvement with the Co-operative Wholesale Society, which is one of the largest farming operations in the UK. I am also a member of T&G Scotland, which represents low-paid agricultural and horticultural workers.

I am a vegan, so I do not eat dead animals in any shape or form, but I have a son who is a committed carnivore. Indeed, he was distraught at John Scott's election to this august institution, as he feared that that would mean the demise of the Ayr farmers' market and that I would no longer be able to bring home any Ayrshire bacon for him.

On a more serious note, I generally welcome the thrust of the report, which tries to put a strategy in place and recognises that things have been difficult. Contrary to suggestions from the Conservatives, all was not well in the world before 1997. There is a long history of things that were wrong, so let us be honest about that. As for my colleagues on the SNP benches, I think that for Duncan Hamilton to suggest that Labour is coming up with lots of questions and few answers is a case of the kettle calling the pot something.

**Mr Hamilton:** Will Cathy Jamieson give way?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I will not accept an intervention at the moment, as there are a number of points that I want to make.

I want to focus on consumer concerns that have arisen about agriculture and the food industry. Some of it will make fairly interesting and thought-provoking listening for those involved. I do not profess to be an expert on the technical side of farming, but I can certainly make some points from the point of view of the consumer.

The Co-op recently surveyed 30,000 consumers, and 87 per cent of those surveyed said that they disapproved of the use of growth-promoting antibiotics and pesticides in agriculture and the food industry. Surely we can say that in this country we are proud to be producing food

without the use of such products. Ninety-one per cent disapproved of GM foods and were concerned about the contamination that could arise. Eighty-two per cent were concerned about animal welfare issues and felt that animals would suffer as a result of intensive farming methods. They were especially concerned about poultry—for example, the force-feeding of geese for products such as foie gras, not that I have ever tried it. They were also concerned about the use of human sewage as fertiliser and about the possibility of animals being fed their own species, animal blood, or other animal by-products.

People I know who work in the farming industry have raised a number of other concerns. In reply, either today or at a later date, perhaps the minister could give me some indication on the current proposals for the use of organophosphates. That has been a long-term issue for members of my trade union, who were concerned when such products were used in sheep-dips and are currently concerned about plans to reintroduce them. For the information of members, the Co-op has decided that it will ban the use of lindane in any of its own-brand products. People have been concerned for many years about the possible effects of that product.

I would like the minister to make some reference to the future of the Agricultural Wages Board, which is of relevance not only to those who work directly in the farming industry, but to people in the wider horticultural sector. The board is under review. If we are working towards a strategy for the rural economy, it is vital that the working conditions of people in the industry are secured. I suggest—as do many of my trade union colleagues—that the future of the Agricultural Wages Board is one way of ensuring those conditions. I would be grateful for an indication of when a decision might be made on that.

I welcome today's report. Obviously, a lot of consultation is still required. I ask members to note the gender interest from the Labour members. There are many women here—and two men on the front bench. John Munro was perhaps suggesting that he was the only member who would be doing any work during the recess; I can assure him that most of us here may take the opportunity, as consumers, to visit a few shops and to cook some dinners.

16:27

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** I give my whole-hearted endorsement to everything that Cathy Jamieson said—it was brilliant.

When the common agricultural policy was introduced, it had two main aims: to guarantee food security for Europe and to keep small farmers

on the land. Since then, we have gone into overproduction, and food security for Europe is no longer a problem. The problem for Britain—for many farmers as well as everybody else—has been in the application of the CAP, which seems to have left small farmers far worse off than they have ever been. One of the Sunday newspapers gave an example of that: in the south of England, small farmers are selling up and going to France—a country that has already been mentioned—because in France they receive far more support. As far as I know, there is no essential difference between Britain and France, except that the French take every opportunity they can to support their small farmers, whereas we do not.

Duncan Hamilton made a plea for the Executive to come off the fence. Will the Executive come off at least one fence and say whether it agrees with the original intention of the CAP? We need a clear statement of the Executive's position.

In the rest of my remarks, I will restrict myself to talking about the targets that I would like to be incorporated in any strategy. A target should be set for developing import substitution, for developing innovative marketing arrangements, and for developing local markets as much as possible.

A target should be set for reduction in herbicide, pesticide and chemical fertiliser usage. In particular, we need a target for reduction in marine pollution. The minister is aware of the concerns that are being expressed by a large number of environmental organisations about pollution resulting from salmon farming on the west coast; I am aware that at least 6,000 jobs are at stake, but we must address that issue if it is a real problem. I want to hear about it from the minister.

Farmers need encouragement and education. The Scottish Agricultural College has only a small number of staff to send out to farms, either to give normal advice or to give specialist advice—on organic conversion, for instance. There should be a target for increasing the number of people whom the SAC can spare for that important work.

The minister is aware that we are working on an organic targets bill. I would be happy to work with him to bring it together with the strategy that the Executive is producing.

I am alarmed by the criticisms of modulation that have been expressed. The arguments for addressing that issue sensibly, sensitively and positively are very strong. Modulation has been used to the advantage of farmers in other parts of Europe, so why do we see it as a threat rather than as something extremely positive? I, along with everyone else, recognise that farmers are responsible for the beauty of the Scottish landscape. Modulation would allow them to take

on that responsibility in a way that would benefit them as well as our landscape.

We also need targets for agri-environment schemes of all kinds. I would like those to be incorporated in any document that is produced. As Duncan Hamilton said, the Executive must come off the fence; we must have a document that contains realistic targets that people can understand.

16:32

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** Ten days ago, with two other members who are here today, I attended an NFU panel debate in Inverness at which many hill farmers were present. As members appreciate and as the minister understands, the average income of hill farmers is around £1,750 a year, which is impossible to cope with. In this debate, perhaps for the first time, there is a growing sense among all members of the crisis that faces the farming community.

I would like to mention two matters of considerable importance. The first concerns the future of Claymore Dairies in Nairn. I imagine that the minister is aware of the background to the referral to the Office of Fair Trading last year, which led to a further referral to the Competition Commission. I hope that the minister is aware of the statement of potential remedies that was made just yesterday by Denise Kingswell of the Competition Commission. It indicated that Robert Wiseman and Sons dairies may be forced to sell off its milk-processing plants in Scotland and may be stopped from hiking its milk prices for three years. I take care to point out that that was merely a statement of potential remedies, rather than a finding in the case, and that no decision or report will be made until November.

I raise this issue because concern in the Highlands about the future of the creamery is extreme. I hope that the minister will be aware of the very serious allegations that are circulating in the farming community in the Highlands concerning practices pursued by Robert Wiseman. I hope that he will agree that this is a matter in which the Executive must intervene now. I say that having chosen my words carefully.

The second issue that I would like to raise was touched on by Alex Fergusson. It concerns the treatment of farmers who make mistakes when completing their forms under the integrated administration and control system. As I have said before, I believe that the approach the Scottish Executive has taken for a number of years is unnecessarily harsh. There occasionally appears to be undue zeal in the enforcement of penalties when they need not be imposed.

The effect of imposing a penalty is, in many cases, the confiscation of the whole year's income. It is possible under particular schemes—whether the beef suckler cow premium scheme, or whichever particular scheme the farmer applies for—to lose the whole year's income from making a simple mistake. In one case, the penalty was over £10,000. As a solicitor, I occasionally appeared in court representing clients accused of crimes. Somebody would have had to have committed a particularly heinous crime to be fined £10,000. I raise this question—not for the first time in this Parliament—in the hope that there will be a rethink.

Having studied the relevant Commission regulation at great length, it is my view that the rules do not require the imposition of penalties. There is a series of guidelines, of which the minister is aware, headed "Obvious errors in aid applications submitted under the integrated system". The minister will be aware that when the member state is convinced that the farmer acted in good faith—that there was no risk of fraud—and that the mistake was made innocently, there is no need to impose penalties.

I think that the rules are being interpreted in an unduly harsh way. In some of the individual cases that I have dealt with, it seems that the Scottish Executive's approach is to cast the blame on Europe and to imply—quite wrongly—that there is no discretion to the rural affairs department, to the Scottish Executive or to the Scottish agricultural officers at the top of the civil service. Quite plainly there is a discretion, and it should be exercised in many more cases. I urge the minister to rethink this extremely important issue.

16:37

**Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD):** I welcome both the statement and the discussion document, which is clear and succinct and addresses the problems. We must move quickly, because the collapse in farm incomes is having a detrimental effect throughout local economies such as that in the Scottish Borders. There, agriculture's direct contribution—as the minister said—is 12 per cent of gross domestic product, but many other businesses are suffering because of the lack of purchasing power in the farming community.

Three issues are frequently raised by my constituents. The first is, of course, the differential between the pound and the euro and the lack of competitiveness resulting from that. Furthermore, time after time I get complaints about the differences in implementation of animal welfare and hygiene standards across the EU. It is time we insisted that other countries applied the same standards as we apply.

I also hear complaints about modulation and how farmers are to take advantage of it. We need to embark on an education process to assist every farmer to have a plan ready to take advantage of modulation. The minister can assist with that by advising the parameters and the types of criteria that farmers could adopt. There is work to be done there.

I welcome all the initiatives in annexe C of the discussion document. They are correct and move in the right direction. I agree with what Alex Fergusson and Fergus Ewing said about IACS forms—although not quite with Alex Fergusson's strength of feeling. Ministry officials should assist the farmer, not put roadblocks in front of the farmer. It is high time we got rid of some of the disproportionate penalties that Fergus Ewing mentioned. We must ensure greater flexibility.

My final point is that the way forward for the industry is for farmers to move en masse into distribution and retail businesses. I heard of a good example in my constituency in Berwickshire the other day. Eyemouth Freezers Ltd is freezing the vegetables produced by Borders Produce Ltd, a ring of 40 farmers. That is great, because the farmers control the economic process apart from one stage; they have not yet moved into retailing the peas and other vegetables they are producing and freezing. That is the way forward.

For too long, farmers have decided that they can leave their produce at the farm gate for somebody else to deal with. It is now time for farmers to go further down the distribution chain so that they get economically active in distribution and retail and therefore get the rewards from each part of the chain that goes from production to consumer purchase. That is the way forward for many organisations. I know that it is being developed in several parts of the country. If we can facilitate that we can assist farmers in obtaining a better income, because that is what is really required.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson):** We now move to the closing speeches. I call Rhoda Grant to speak for the Labour party. You have four minutes.

16:41

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** It has been good to debate the way forward for agriculture, but I am a little disappointed that some members have wasted the opportunity. We are all aware of the problems that the sector has faced for the past few years. The Rural Affairs Committee spent the first few months in this Parliament dealing with various crises. We appeared to spend all our time fire fighting. That was also true for the chamber. That is why the Labour party welcomes this consultation.

I agree with Alasdair Morgan and Elaine Murray, who said that for too long we have been involved in crisis management and have never looked forward for a future strategy. A strategy should have been looked for a long time ago. We need to put priorities in place now—priorities that will protect the farming industry, not just the status quo. We need to have an industry that will provide us with competitive produce for this century. To do that, we have to learn from experience. We have to look at other countries and their farming industries and to learn from our own success stories.

Cathy Jamieson again gave her support to the Agricultural Wages Board. The Labour party—the party that introduced the national minimum wage—also supports the retention of the Agricultural Wages Board. Over the years, it has protected the terms and conditions of agricultural workers. We need to sustain agriculture for owners and employees.

I was particularly pleased to read in yesterday's *The Herald* that the demand for crofts is outstripping availability. There is much to be learned from crofting. Outside the crofting counties, agriculture policy has done nothing to keep people on the land. Much of the best farming land in Scotland has been used to form large farms, which has pushed people off the land in much of rural Scotland. As Robin Harper said, the distribution of CAP funding does nothing to discourage that. In my view, it encourages it, because there is no capping on the amount that one person can claim, therefore the bigger the farm, the more is gained. That encourages landowners not to rent small farms, but to form large concerns.

We should look at the example of France. It has succeeded in keeping people in rural areas and has a buoyant farming sector. Agriculture and the availability of land keeps people in rural areas. If there are no opportunities, they must move away, which means that the rural economy suffers. Crofting has stopped that happening in most of the fragile areas of Scotland. We must see whether we can use good practice in other areas.

Agriculture must also change to meet the needs of the consumer. There is no point in producing something that nobody wants to buy. Cathy Jamieson mentioned some of the concerns of consumers; they must be taken on board. By processing produce locally, we can meet those needs, selling it in a form that appeals to consumers, which will lead to an increase in our market.

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** On local markets, does Rhoda Grant agree that a lot of hill farms produce store lambs and store cattle, which are not finished products? That

is an argument against organic production, because unless one can find certified organic farms to buy them, they might as well not be organic in the first place. What would she do about stock sold as stores? How would she get it into the food chain?

**Rhoda Grant:** I agree that there are huge problems, but I do not agree that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is beyond our wit to find solutions. That is why we need the consultation process to look at how we can finish products locally and sell them locally. That would add value, provide jobs in rural areas and maximise the sale of produce from farms.

We must consider all those objectives, to create an industry for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Labour party supports the strategy to address the long-term needs of the industry.

16:45

**Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con):** In declaring an interest, I would also like to make a small apology to the minister. If I sound negative during my speech, it is largely because, as a farmer, I like to have a good moan sometimes.

However, I begin by being positive and declaring my support for the document. I took the opportunity to welcome it during the discussion after Mr Finnie introduced it to Parliament and I continue to welcome it today. However, I wish to explain my concerns about the broad strategy it introduces. First, I am slightly concerned about its title. It is not so much a forward strategy for Scottish agriculture as a search for a forward strategy. At the same time, it is not so much a discussion document as a questionnaire. If we look through it, that is what it is full of: questions.

I am concerned that the document led to criticism from the National Farmers Union this week. A press release from the NFU says:

"We continue to seek fair competition but so far neither 3 years of a new Westminster administration or 1 year of a Scottish Parliament have actually tackled these tough issues head on."

I made a public statement about how that criticism was addressed. My concern is that the NFU chose to criticise the Scottish Parliament. I would far rather it had criticised the Scottish Executive. The concerns of the NFU appear to have brought disrepute on the whole Parliament rather than on those whom I may choose, for political reasons, to blame for the problems farmers face. There has been consultation after consultation. I can understand the disappointment that the NFU chose to express.

I wish to highlight the problem we face with the hill livestock compensatory allowance—John

Munro and one or two others have mentioned it. I am sure that the suggestion that we change from a headage-based system to an area-based one has sound reasons in the structures of Europe, but the damage that it may have on the structure of the farming industry in Scotland is quite extraordinary.

I live in the margin between the Lowlands and the Highlands. While I, as a dairy farmer, am not affected by the HLCA, many of my neighbours are. They tend to be smaller farmers who, although they farm marginal land, farm it intensively. They have come to depend on support, not least the HLCA.

There are, I believe, a large number of farmers who are in a critical position. If the change is carried out in such a way that a headage payment becomes an area payment, a huge number of marginal farmers in Scotland will find themselves in an impossible economic position almost overnight. That is why I urge the minister to take the opportunity to reinforce further the view that I know he has expressed, in conjunction with others in the Parliament, that that change cannot be carried out overnight.

In supporting the principle that lies behind the document, I can assure the minister that not only will the Conservative group support the Conservative amendment today, but we will support the minister's motion, when that opportunity comes along.

I am mildly concerned about the nature of the Scottish National Party's amendment. The principles that lie behind the problems of Scottish agriculture require a degree of unity. I am particularly disappointed to find that the SNP's amendment contains, once again, the independence clause. It would have been a great pleasure for the Conservative group—and for me—to be able to vote for the SNP's amendment, but it is disappointing to discover that by supporting it we would be supporting independence.

In the interests of the farming industry, I invite the SNP to take the opportunity to decide not to put in such a clause next time and to show the farmers of Scotland a united Scottish Parliament whose members are willing to work together to fulfil farmers' desires—and their interests in the longer term—without allowing simple party politics to get in the way.

16:50

**Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** As the Minister for Rural Affairs is aware, the Rural Affairs Committee is concluding an inquiry into changing employment patterns in rural areas. Our findings are fairly similar to those of other studies

of the current economic structure of rural areas: not only is there an overall decline in the amount of labour employed in agriculture, but there is a shift from full-time often hired workers to part-time often family workers.

The low level of hired workers and the structural changes suggest that agriculture will never again represent the economic mainstay of rural areas. Indeed, it is no longer the economic mainstay of farming households, because in more than a third of families farming income is less than a half of the total household income.

In a recent survey, Scottish Enterprise Grampian concluded that reorienting the rural work force to be forward facing will require substantial reskilling. I want to draw the Executive's attention to an area where intervention could have a very positive impact. Objective 4 funding provides for subsidised training and applies to almost all of Scotland. The present scheme ends tomorrow and the new scheme, objective 3, should have taken over immediately but will not now be commissioned until December at the earliest, leaving a funding gap.

For the next six months, no trainees will benefit and there will be no subsidised training for farmers who are trying to improve their business performance. With the financial difficulties they face, they need the 45 per cent subsidy that the European funding provides. A further difficulty is that although there is bridging funding, only the voluntary sector is eligible for it, so the Scottish Agricultural College, the most significant training provider to agriculture, in common with all other colleges, is not eligible. The minister will know that when they are in crisis, farmers cut out what is seen as non-essential—such as training. This is the wrong time to do that.

I strongly urge the Executive to make appropriate representation so that the funding can be extended until the new arrangements are in place. That would have no cost implications for the Executive but it would keep options open for farmers who want to reskill, diversify or just operate more efficiently.

Farmers are food producers, but we all know who makes the profit on food sales. In the food supply chain, the agriculture sector receives only a fraction of the return received by supermarkets. The Executive's discussion document accepts that there will be

"a continuation of the squeeze on producers' margins".

Some farmers are beginning to see advantages in shortening the supply chain, for example through farmers markets, which have been mentioned as an opportunity to sell direct. In Perth and Forfar, they attract a loyal following. The markets show that there is a need for greater

product variety and some farmers are now trying to expand their range. That ties to remarks made by the communications director of Safeway Stores last week at the launch of the strategy document. He said that while, in addition to meat, they sell £35 million-worth of Scottish products, that is from a very narrow base. He said that the main potential for growth was in convenience foods, which allows producers to capitalise on the added value.

It is very difficult to promote innovation and investment in the current economic situation. Does the Executive plan to help Scottish farmers participate fully in that sector? The document says that there is not much of a tradition of Scottish consumers buying local produce. The problem is that it is difficult to find or identify local produce. In some supermarkets it is difficult to find any Scottish produce. Supermarkets must be encouraged to be less rigid about buying policy and to negotiate with local producers.

Likewise, there are niche markets that command a premium. The best current example is the organic market. Sales of organic foods rose by 140 per cent in 1999 but 80 per cent of the produce was imported—a missed opportunity for farmers. Since the sales of organic produce are set to increase, the Executive must continue to support farmers who want to convert to organic farming.

Concern has been expressed that the standards for certification applied in some overseas countries fall short of those applied here. Unless we want to perpetuate the unlevel playing field in yet another sector, I suggest that that issue be addressed soon.

A survey earlier this year by Lloyds TSB established that 67 per cent of respondents considered that substantial reform of the CAP was necessary for the long-term future of Scottish agriculture. It is vital that there is a strong voice negotiating on Scotland's behalf. I urge the minister: please do not let Scottish farmers down.

16:55

**Ross Finnie:** I thank Alasdair Morgan for his typically thoughtful and constructive speech. It is a hallmark of this Parliament and helps enormously on matters on which we seek to find a long-term solution and promote a serious debate on a serious subject that although he indicated several areas of disagreement he set a helpful tone for this debate. I hope that that will continue to mark the way in which we discuss the important matter of Scottish agriculture.

Alasdair Morgan pointed out—I obviously do not agree with everything he said and will reject the SNP's amendment—that the European dimension

is important. I do not believe that we are necessarily suffering from the fact that the United Kingdom operates with a single voice. Whether we have a reformation of the sheep regime has been discussed recently and we have made it clear that this is the wrong time to be moving in that direction. I am satisfied that my colleagues elsewhere share that view.

Alasdair Morgan mentioned the World Trade Organisation and the pressures that it will create. In our exchange, I think we agreed that it is important for us in Scotland to argue in Europe so that we are able to ensure a continuing high level of support, especially within green box measures—specifically the rural development regulation which, if it is to be developed into the second pillar of CAP reform, could be important to us here in Scotland.

To articulate which matters we want to pursue and which longer-term policies we wish to engage with other regions and nations in Europe to develop, it is important that I, the Executive and the Parliament are much clearer about what we want for our Scottish agriculture policy. That is why I wanted to open up this process.

I must tell Duncan Hamilton that this is a complex area. I was unhappy about indulging in an exercise as a result of which I might be misconstrued as suggesting that there might have to be some adjustment in social, economic and environmental terms to sheep farmers in hill areas without hearing their views on how they saw their future. I was unhappy to pursue a policy in some rural areas of Scotland where they can clearly no longer compete on proper terms with world commodity prices, but where they can continue to have specialities in their own areas. Yes, I will have to come off the fence, but the correct way of starting seemed to be to assess the situation in conjunction with the industry and to consult experts. I will have to come off the fence and people will either agree or disagree. I will have to promote the strategy. The correct process is to engage with the industry first.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before the minister continues, I ask members to keep the noise level down so that they can hear his speech.

**Ross Finnie:** As for Alex Fergusson's comments, it is not enough to say that there are a few short-term problems and that, generally, the Conservatives welcome this. He mentioned red tape, as did Fergus Ewing and others. I do not want to get into legalistic debate with Fergus Ewing, but I do not share his interpretation that we are misreading and misapplying European regulations.

I am deeply concerned—I have made this clear publicly before—that our staff in the Scottish

Executive rural affairs department have, with the increasing burden of regulation, progressively become more policemen than genuine assistants to the industry. I have made it clear—and they have accepted—that this is not the position that they wish to be in. In discussions in the European Commission, there are clear efforts to change the regulations so that the disproportionality of current penalties will be changed. That would be the biggest single change that could help.

Members should read the conclusions of the red tape review that was conducted by the industry. The industry group that took evidence to find out whether regulations were being disproportionately applied in many areas found that that was not the case. Sheep-tagging proposals will be announced shortly. They will comply with all the requirements of European regulations. We are going ahead with measures to promote the use of electronic data and absorb technology into the industry.

The one area of contention that surprised me was modulation. It is a question not of taking subsidy from the farming industry as a whole but of using an instrument within European regulations to direct subsidy toward areas that might assist the industry in restructuring. Given the fact that the Treasury is going to match pound for pound the amount that is modulated, John Farquhar Munro should be aware that it is not a question of taking money away. Not even Ecclesiastes would allow me to do that; I have to stick by Zechariah, because I am the shepherd looking after the flock. I can tell members that that took a bit of research—in the inner and deeper recesses of my mind.

These are serious issues. I tell members who asked about the Agricultural Wages Board and others who are concerned about it that we have completed our consultation, but an independent social impact study is also being carried out. It seems appropriate to wait for the outcomes of the consultation and the study. I expect the study to end in July, so my announcement is reasonably imminent.

I will briefly address the matter of the euro. I do not want to get into an argument about strong and weak currencies—I think that we use those words a bit glibly. I am fairly clear that it is the case that the euro is weak, but if Duncan Hamilton tracked movement between the pound and the dollar and considered dollar-denominated business, he would realise that the pound is not exhibiting particular strength. I am interested that he would wish to perpetuate a situation that is deeply damaging to our industry. I make no attempt to hide the fact that the present euro situation is causing deep damage, although I think that he would accept that there is not a chance that we would enter the euro at the current exchange rate.

It is important for the future of agriculture that there is a serious recognition of how we would enter the euro.

I was puzzled by John Scott's speech. I was not entirely sure why accepting hormone beef, introducing bovine somatotrophin and having a general relaxation on GM produce would be greatly helpful to Scottish agriculture, but no doubt some in the chamber understood. We are certainly not driven by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

I continue to recognise that less favoured areas are a key issue, but it is not just a question of less favoured areas.

**John Scott:** Will the minister give way?

**Ross Finnie:** No, I want to make my point about LFAs.

We must also understand the economic structure of LFAs. Members representing remote Highland constituencies will be aware of the enormous difficulties that prevent farming there from making a full economic return. The strategy must address how we get the balance right between economic activity, environmental activity and the social cohesion that agriculture brings to remote Highland communities.

I will deal with some of the points that Robin Harper made. Of course it is important to have regard to environmental considerations. In my opening speech, when I talked about the four pillars that had to be considered, I made it clear that environmental considerations are at the heart of things. I welcome his support for the proper use of modulation.

This is the beginning of short sharp process. The issues are complex and enormous and go right across the food chain. We have to consider those in LFAs and those who may find it difficult to make any economic return. We have to examine the areas of Scottish agriculture that can and should make a return and ensure that our strategy best fits them. We also have to understand better the impact on the other end of the food chain.

Also, while I warmly support the introduction and creation of farmers markets, we must recognise that in a country that produces four times the sheepmeat it requires, such markets will not be the answer to all our needs. We must also examine mechanisms to deal on a much wider scale, which we desperately need.

As I have said, I do not want the consultation process to be a talking shop that goes on and on ad infinitum and ad nauseam; I want to bring the process to a swift conclusion. I want all members to put their points for the medium and longer term. I take many of the points about immediate issues, but they, frankly, are being addressed. What we

need is a longer-term strategy to allow us to fashion our policies more adequately to represent the needs of the farming community in Scotland.

I am absolutely determined that the general drift out of agriculture, which demeans the importance of agriculture to Scotland, should come to an end, but I will be able to ensure that only by fashioning policies that fit within a strategy and framework that more properly represents the needs and aspirations of Scottish agriculture, whose importance to Scotland's rural community must be recognised and sustained.

## Decision Time

17:06

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** There are six questions to be put to the chamber today.

The first question is, that motion S1M-1060, in the name of Tom McCabe, on the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (Orkney) (Scotland) Order 2000, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (Orkney) (Scotland) Order 2000 be approved.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank goodness for that.

The second question is, that amendment S1M-1061, in the name of Tom McCabe, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the following orders be approved –

The Electricity Lands and Water Undertakings (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2000 and

The Docks and Harbours (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 2000.

**The Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that motion S1M-956, in the name of Henry McLeish, which seeks agreement that the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill be passed, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill be passed.

**The Presiding Officer:** The fourth question is, that amendment S1M-1051.2, in the name of Irene McGugan, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1051, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the forward strategy for Scottish agriculture, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**FOR**

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)

Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)

Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)

Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)

Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)

Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)

Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)

McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 31, Against 78, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The fifth question is, that amendment S1M-1051.1, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S1M-1051, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the forward strategy for Scottish agriculture, be agreed to.

**Members:** No.

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

#### FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**AGAINST**

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**ABSTENTIONS**

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 21, Against 61, Abstentions 28.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The sixth question is, that motion S1M-1051, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the forward strategy for Scottish agriculture, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament welcomes the steps being taken by the Scottish Executive to promote a wide-ranging and constructive debate on the development of a long-term strategy and plan of action for Scottish farming following the recent publication of the discussion document *A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture* in order to secure a sustainable future for the agricultural industry as part of the social, economic and environmental fabric of rural Scotland.

## Emergency Calls

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The final item is a members' business debate on motion S1M-999, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on 999 emergency calls. The debate will be concluded without any question being put after 30 minutes.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament urges all members of the public who believe themselves to be in danger to contact the relevant emergency service by dialling 999 without hesitation; expresses concern that the recent campaign to minimise use of the 999 emergency call system may deter members of the public from contacting the emergency services on legitimate grounds; expresses its support for a full examination of the implications for the emergency services of the continuing expansion in forms of communication such as mobile telephones, and urges the Scottish Executive to initiate discussions with all interested parties to identify a means of responding to this challenge, in particular the setting up of a central call system which could connect callers to the local police station.

17:10

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Before speaking to the motion directly, I would like to outline the current situation with regard to contacting the emergency services.

The current system is somewhat centralised. There are call centres that handle 999 calls all over Britain. When a call is placed, it goes to an operator who determines the service that is needed and rings the appropriate agency. On pick-up, the call is the responsibility of the emergency services. On average 26 million emergency calls are made every year in the UK and 50 per cent of those calls are screened out as being non-emergency. In some areas of Scotland, nearly 10 per cent of 999 calls are abusive, nonsense, malicious or a hoax. That affects all three emergency services. Only this month, the Parliament's Audit Committee reported severe problems with hoax calls to the Ambulance Service. Such abuse has expanded over the past five years as mobile phone ownership has increased.

However, not all non-emergency calls are malicious. The increase in ownership of mobile phones has caused specific problems to the emergency services, which have been much publicised lately. Non-emergency calls may be the result of 999 being dialled accidentally, if, for example, a phone is stuffed in a bag or a pocket—999 calls can be made from mobile phones even if the number lock is on. Lothian and Borders police deals with up to 50 unintentional calls a day. That is the background to the substance of my motion.

As a response to the problem, individual police forces are carrying out their own campaigns to minimise the number of non-emergency calls. Some members will have heard the recent commercials on radio, publicising the campaign that is being jointly managed by three of Scotland's police forces. I can understand why the police feel it necessary to educate telephone users in the proper use of the system, just as I can understand the frustration that operators must feel when they are dealing with a potential hoax, a silent caller or a routine inquiry, knowing that someone else may be genuinely at risk and is not being dealt with.

That raises two issues. First, surely in this day and age the technology exists to deal with such calls quickly, perhaps by diverting them to a non-emergency line for call tracing. Secondly, we must consider the individual who telephones 999. Whatever the rise in the number of hoax calls, unintentional calls and so on, most people who ring 999 do so for genuine reasons.

Although the stark definition of an emergency as "threat to life or limb, or an ongoing serious incident requiring immediate police assistance"

may be logical in the cold light of day, in times of stress or danger such logic is unlikely to be applied. One of the great strengths of our police force lies in the fact that people who are in danger, or who perceive themselves to be in danger, automatically want a policeman. Whatever criticism is made of our police—justified or unjustified—we should do nothing to jeopardise such a relationship between the public and the police.

Members may have seen the reports of my recent experience in which I encountered road rage at first hand. Indeed, that was the incident that sparked off this debate. I shall say what happened in brief: 999 was called and the response that was given was such that we felt uncomfortable about having made the call. The point is that I felt threatened and in the circumstances it was impractical to look up the number of the local police station in a telephone book or to phone directory inquiries. Since the event, I have received correspondence that suggests that several other people have had similar experiences.

It must be recognised that, when a caller feels threatened and calls 999 to ask for the police, for that caller the situation is real and an emergency. It worries me that, in our attempt to minimise hoax and meaningless calls, we will discourage genuine callers, who may now feel that they will be assumed to be stupid for making such a call.

With the advent of the car telephone, people can more easily call the police if they feel that

something is worth reporting, such as a situation or incident where police action would be advantageous. I recently had a conversation with a constituent who, driving on the A71 on a stormy night, noticed that a temporary traffic light had blown over and felt that that could have caused a road accident. He did not know the number of Strathaven police station and admitted that he had not phoned directory inquiries because that would have cost £2.50 on his mobile phone. He spent the rest of the evening worrying that he should have reported the incident and that an accident might have occurred that he could have averted.

In such situations, it would be an advantage to have a national contact number for the police to enable call diversion to a local police station. That service would be fairly easy to implement and, given adequate advertising, would not only assist the general public but, in time, lessen the number of non-emergency calls to the emergency police service. Many years ago in Glasgow, all police stations had the phone number 1113, preceded by the appropriate area code, which made it easy to telephone those stations. Many police officers to whom I have spoken support the idea of such a central telephone point. Lothian and Borders police has suggested a national police inquiry line and the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland supports the idea, despite understandable reservations about funding.

My motion—which, for the record, is motion S1M-999—is therefore clear. It asks the Parliament to urge any

“members of the public who believe themselves to be in danger to contact the relevant emergency service by dialling 999 without hesitation”.

There should be

“a full examination of the implications for the emergency services of the continuing expansion in forms of communication such as mobile telephones”.

Finally, the Scottish Executive should initiate discussions with all interested parties on the

“setting up of a central call system which could connect callers to the local police station”.

I look forward to the minister's response.

17:17

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** I should first declare that I used to work for British Telecommunications plc, as I want to speak from my own experience.

BT and other companies that provide the 999 service welcome people who want to sit in on calls that come into the operator service so that they can see and hear how operators deal with such calls. It is an incredibly illuminating experience. Linda Fabiani's motion is well intentioned and,

when she spoke to it, it sounded more positive than it might have read. However, something has to be done about a situation in which 50 per cent of emergency calls are not really emergency calls.

As the largest number of hoax calls come from children, a big job clearly has to be done in schools to make children understand the seriousness of phoning the 999 service. Even if such calls usually start off with the operator being asked the colour of their underwear—I apologise for using unparliamentary language—they can include gross obscenities. Unfortunately, the matter does not just involve children in this country. I was amazed to find that, after a national newspaper paid for free phone boxes to be used by British servicemen in Bosnia, Bosnian children phoned the 999 service and abused the operator. Although hoax calls are a big problem with children across the world, it is a problem that parents do not accept. I have had to play many parents the tapes of their children abusing operators in the 999 service before they would accept that their children were involved.

We also need to deal with people who do not grasp the concept of the 999 service. Although I do not think that anyone would have a problem with the examples that Linda Fabiani gave, they might have problems with someone who uses a phone that takes only 999 calls and asks to be connected to so-and-so. They have a problem with people who phone 999 for bus times, their own mobile phone numbers and police addresses.

**Linda Fabiani:** Would Mr Mundell accept that, if people became used to the idea that there was a national police line that they could call and be diverted to a local police station, that problem would be alleviated?

**David Mundell:** I am coming to that, because the use of the 999 service on a non-emergency basis is a serious problem that must be addressed. It is important to raise the issue in schools so that children realise that making time-wasting calls—not just hoax calls to report fires that do not exist, which is a serious matter—is wrong. We must also ensure that the public have a better understanding of how to contact the police on a non-emergency basis. Indeed, the last time that I listened in to calls at work, I heard people calling up to ask for the address of their local police station. The public do not know how to make contact with the police or other services. We have to do as Linda Fabiani suggests and develop an alternative way in which to connect with the police on non-emergency matters. That must be combined with a greater understanding of what an emergency is.

The other aspect of the matter is that the system is two-ended. At one end are the operators—BT and others—who provide the front end of the

service, but behind them are the systems of the police, the fire brigade, the coastguard and so on. Those systems are a bit of a patchwork and are not as high-tech as they might be. There is no point in having the best front end in the world if all the calls are funnelled into a low-tech system. I ask the minister to deal with those points when he winds up the debate.

17:22

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** This debate is helpful as it concerns a number of issues that are fairly intractable. Many years ago, when I was a councillor, the police had a big educational effort in one of the tougher parts of Edinburgh about not vandalising telephone boxes. Children were told that the next time that their granny fell ill, she might not get the ambulance that she desperately needed because the local telephone box had been vandalised. The net result of this campaign in the schools in the area was a marked increase in the vandalism of telephone boxes. The issue is complicated and human nature is a funny thing.

Wearing another hat, I visited Hewlett-Packard in South Queensferry. Hewlett-Packard is a world leader in the electronic subtleties of the business of tracking telephone calls. It was clear to me that effective systems could be put in place to track calls and get back to the people who made them. That could be developed and, despite what happened to the telephone boxes, combined with an educational programme to try to point out to children that abuse of the 999 service is dangerous to people.

We have to pursue the question of mobile phones. I will reveal my prejudices and say that I am sort of anti mobile phones. Mobile phones could be equipped with some sort of locking device to prevent the owner buzzing 999 accidentally.

I recently opened a telephone arrangement that is run by Hanover housing association for a number of different housing associations and councils and acts as a helpline for people in sheltered housing. That idea could be extended in the light of what Linda Fabiani said about non-emergency but quite serious phone calls. The police and social work services could be involved in the scheme, as well as the support services for the mostly elderly or handicapped people to whom the service is available. The development of such a system would be helpful. The house in Corstorphine provides a good service to quite distant parts of Scotland, and therefore systems can be set up in such a way that one is still helping local communities. The idea of having a massive call centre for the whole of Scotland is pretty daunting and unattractive.

There is scope for developing another service to relieve the pressure on the 999 service. I am quite happy to support a motion that we should encourage people who have a real emergency to use the 999 service, and we should do what we can to take other people away from that line. We will have to learn from our mistakes and experiment with genuine educational schemes that reduce misbehaviour.

It has been useful to debate this issue and I hope that the minister will mull over the ideas that have been suggested.

17:26

**Nick Johnston (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I thank Linda Fabiani for securing this interesting debate. It is apposite that, at this time, when we are just coming up to the first anniversary of the Scottish Parliament, we are able to concentrate on some issues that might not be immediately apparent. I heard Linda on the radio three or four weeks ago and her comments raised doubts and questions in my mind. I suppose that I am more a perpetrator of road rage than a victim of it, but I am conscious that many women who are less formidable than Linda must be put in a state of fear or alarm by such incidents. In the minds of the public, the 999 service must be considered sacrosanct.

Yesterday, we received a news release from Fife constabulary that said that extensive areas of Fife have no 999 cover because of a fault. I say to David Mundell that, unfortunately, that fault is due to BT. That raises the situation of people who find themselves in a similar position to Linda Fabiani: being terrorised on the road and unable to phone 999. The point of Linda's interview was that there was some reluctance on the part of the police to take seriously the incident in which she was involved. I found that profoundly disturbing.

As a member of the Audit Committee, I want to raise a couple of issues about the abuse of the 999 system for calling ambulances. It was alarming, to say the least, to note that the Ambulance Service is used as little more than a taxi service. That situation is extremely prevalent in Glasgow, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights, when the service has its regulars who phone them from pubs and clubs to be collected by ambulance, only to get out as it approaches their homes, so that they can walk around the corner. Until the Audit Committee's inquiry, I was unaware that all 999 calls are handled on a non-priority basis and that the Ambulance Service cannot use its discretion not to take people to hospital. The Audit Committee will follow through on its inquiry at the end of the year.

We are also seeing more cases of police

stations being unmanned at night. I live in Kinross, where the police station has no service after 10 o'clock at night, and it is a myth that someone can phone their local police station and get a response.

I support the idea of a national police non-emergency number. When I telephoned Direct Line the other day to sort out my insurance, I thought that I was phoning Glasgow, but I was put on to Yorkshire and ended up in Kent. Although I am not an expert, given modern technology, this problem is not insoluble and it should be examined as a matter of priority.

17:29

**Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I want to ask the minister a brief question. Following this debate, could we commission research, or have research produced by the Scottish Parliament information centre, on this subject? We have heard statistics such as that 50 per cent of 999 calls are non-emergency calls, and I want to know if that is the case. We also heard that children make most of those calls and, again, I want to know if that is the case. There is not much point putting into place detailed education programmes for children if they are not causing the problem.

We should commission research to ensure that the facts and figures that have been quoted are correct, and then we can have a full and frank discussion. I believe that Lothian and Borders police proposed a 555 number a few years ago. The possibility of having such a system would be backed up by research on the use, or misuse, of the 999 number.

17:30

**Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con):** I support David Mundell's point that something has to be done, given such a high percentage of wrong or inappropriate calls, and I also support Linda Fabiani's proposal for another national number. If British Airways, the Automobile Association and other services can have a national number, why cannot a basic, non-essential police line be set up? That exists in Northern Ireland—bearing in mind other issues there.

Would the minister consider following up some of the pilot schemes in England, where closed-circuit television cameras in town centres monitored 999 calls from telephone boxes where fake calls were habitually being made? Those schemes effectively slashed in half inappropriate calls in those town centres, through very quick prosecution of the individuals involved. If anyone saw the TV programme on that subject, they would have seen a number of children who were

regulars and who were caught. Some were as young as three or four years. They might have been taken along by their big sister or big brother to make a nuisance of themselves. I wonder if the minister might consider similar pilot schemes in city centres across Scotland.

17:31

**The Deputy Minister for Justice (Angus MacKay):** I congratulate Linda Fabiani on lodging her motion on 999 emergency calls, which has enabled us to have today's discussion on what is an important issue, particularly given the resources available to the various emergency services. I fully endorse Linda's comment that any member of the public who believes that they are in danger and in need of assistance should contact the relevant emergency service by dialling 999 without hesitation—that is absolutely right. That 999 facility is a critical and valuable service for the general public. It should be, and is, cherished.

I am concerned about Linda Fabiani's contention that a recent campaign aimed at reducing the abuse of 999 calls might be construed as discouraging the use of the emergency call system on legitimate grounds. This is certainly not what the campaign does, and I take this opportunity to set the record straight. It is a joint publicity campaign by Lothian and Borders police, Fife constabulary and Central Scotland police, under the heading of "999: use it, don't abuse it". I think it unlikely that those three police forces would be participating in a campaign that was not going to be of benefit to the public whom they serve. The campaign, sponsored by BT Scotland, commenced on Wednesday 7 June and is to run for four weeks. During that time, more than 300 commercials will be broadcast by Scot FM.

The objective of the campaign is simple. It seeks to encourage use of the 999 system for genuine emergency calls. It also seeks to protect that important lifeline between the police and the public for its primary purpose. I am sure that all members would support that objective. The benchmark for a genuine emergency is properly defined as

"any situation where there is a threat to life or limb or a serious ongoing incident which requires immediate police attendance."

It is not unreasonable to ask members of the public to form a judgment against that background when considering making a 999 call.

The reason behind the campaign is that, in the past 12 months, the number of 999 calls received by police forces has increased dramatically. For example, the number of 999 calls received by Lothian and Borders police has risen by 31 per cent. This means that Lothian and Borders police is now handling more than 10,000 999 calls each

month. There are a number of reasons for the increase, the most obvious of which is the significant and rapid growth in mobile telephone ownership. Although mobile phones are of great advantage in that more people are able to contact the emergency services quickly, that is also increasing the pressure on the 999 system. A recent scrutiny of 999 calls showed that only 32 per cent of all calls received related to genuine emergencies, as set against the definition that I have just read.

Of the rest of the calls, the majority were genuine, but were non-emergency calls. They included people seeking advice that could have been dealt with by contacting the local police station, requests for information about minor incidents or accidents that had happened some time ago and calls for general information, travel news and weather updates. There were also silent calls, which were accidentally activated, with no speech on the line. Between 9 and 10 per cent of calls received, as I think David Mundell indicated earlier, were of an abusive, nonsense or malicious nature.

It is worth giving some examples of the type of non-urgent 999 calls made to the police. In one case, a person called 999 to report that their partner had left their wallet on the bus. Someone else called 999 to say that someone had stolen their lunch. Another person called 999 to say that his next-door neighbour was cutting the garden hedge between the two houses and throwing the clippings into the caller's garden. Yet another person called 999 to say they were travelling to Manchester the next day and wanted to know what the roads would be like with regard to weather and traffic. Those are perhaps extreme examples, but they are not atypical and the list is endless.

Consequently, two thirds of the calls that are received on 999 lines are unnecessarily engaging the emergency lines and taking up critical control room staff time. Combined with the increase in 999 traffic, they make it a real possibility that a genuine emergency call might not be responded to in the appropriate time or with the proper resources, which could have dire consequences for the people who are involved.

Those problems are common throughout the country. All forces are recording similar increases in 999 calls and similar percentage figures for non-emergency calls to control rooms. As more than 22 million 999 calls are made to the emergency services each year in the UK, it is essential that something is done to reduce the number of non-emergency 999 calls that are made.

The "use it, don't abuse it" campaign was initiated by BT Scotland, which deals with the majority of emergency calls through its

switchboard operators. Scot FM was engaged to front the campaign. The Scot FM listening area covers the three police force areas that I mentioned earlier, and those police forces enthusiastically agreed to participate in the campaign because they recognised the potential benefits. Great care was taken with the wording that was used in the commercials for the current campaign to ensure that the public were in no way discouraged from using 999 for genuine emergencies.

Considerable positive press coverage has been generated by the campaign, and I hope that the message is coming across that people are not to be discouraged from making proper use of the emergency call system. The "use it, don't abuse it" campaign is an attempt to educate telephone users to exercise care with their phones and to think about the consequences of making inappropriate calls to the police on the emergency 999 line, and will have genuine benefits. The effect of the campaign will be evaluated, with monitoring of before-and-after statistics providing a way of judging whether it has been successful. A similar campaign that was conducted by Cleveland police, in England, was successful and resulted in a 25 per cent reduction in non-emergency calls to the control room.

One important objective of this campaign is to get people to make more use of their local police stations instead of dialling 999. The telephone numbers of the local police stations are being published in local newspapers and in routine council publications.

There is a particular problem with silent calls, that is, 999 calls in which no one speaks at the other end of the line. The vast majority of those come from mobile phones, but they have to be treated seriously by the police and control room staff in case there is a genuine emergency. The public are being asked to take more care with their mobile phones, to prevent accidental activation when the phones are being carried in pockets or handbags. People are also being asked to keep their phones out of the reach of children who are too young to understand their use. A small number of people make malicious or abusive 999 calls, and the message is being put across to them that their actions constitute a criminal offence and efforts will be made to trace and report them.

Linda Fabiani raised an important point about the provision of a central call system. That is a complex matter, which is currently under consideration by the Police Information Technology Organisation. That organisation is a UK body that is responsible for developing and implementing information and communications systems for the police. The Scottish police and the Scottish Executive are represented on that body.

PITO has been examining the requirements for a comprehensive police call handling strategy, to alleviate pressures on the 999 service and to provide a prompt and professional response to non-emergency calls. An initial scoping study has been carried out, and PITO is developing a strategy and a programme of work for its implementation. We have signalled to PITO our wish to be involved in this project and, with the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, we will consider the way forward for the police service in Scotland.

While I am talking about adjusting the present system, I shall take the opportunity to respond to some of the points that were made in the debate. The discussions over joint control rooms for the emergency services are under way, and there may be some progress on that in the future. It is within the power of local police forces to use CCTV appropriately throughout city and town areas in Scotland, and in other areas in which they have access to the facilities, not only to monitor the active response to criminal activity, but to be proactive about targeting difficult areas—999 calls could be a part of that. There is no restriction.

The last point to which I want to respond was made by Nick Johnston and was about the priority dispatch of ambulances. Susan Deacon has allocated an additional £100,000 for the Scottish Ambulance Service to carry out an investigation into a priority-based dispatch system. I am hopeful that a more logical system of responding will emerge at some point in the near future.

Members might recall that the Scottish Executive announced earlier this year that it is committed to assisting with the funding of a new police radio system in Scotland. That will be taken forward in conjunction with forces in England and Wales. It is important to note that the Public Safety Radio Communications Service will provide all forces with a national, digital, mobile radio communication service. The consequence of that will be a modern, reliable communications system that will operate throughout the country. The new communications infrastructure will also—this is important in terms of today's debate—provide an opportunity to customise the ways in which we deal with communications to, from and between police forces. That addresses some points that were made by members today and we look forward to developments.

In closing, I emphasise again that the public expect, rightly, that the emergency services will respond quickly to incidents and provide assistance to those who are in difficulties—that is appropriate. The emergency services accept that responsibility readily and the police service in particular will continue to respond positively and professionally. Effective policing and effective

responses require partnership between the police and public in protecting the community. The current campaign—which I am happy to advocate—is about recognising that every second counts in genuine emergencies. The public's co-operation is being sought to make the most effective use of the valuable 999 service.

I commend the campaign to Parliament and ask members to support it.

**Ben Wallace:** On a point of order. On 12 May I asked a question of the Scottish Executive about whether it will publish a report into Tayside Health Board's task force. I have received information that that report might be published imminently, but I have yet to receive a reply to my question of some six weeks ago. Could you, Presiding Officer, provide me with guidance on whether the minister would be treating Parliament with contempt and would, therefore, be deserving of a rebuke if that report were published before I received an answer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** That is an interesting point to have thrown at one so late in the evening. I will reflect upon it and endeavour to provide a response by letter tomorrow.

*Meeting closed at 17:43.*



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