

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 9 May 2002

Session 1

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 9 May 2002

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

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Before we begin this morning's proceedings, I have to inform the Parliament, under rule 4.8, that Her Majesty has accepted the resignation as minister of Wendy Alexander and made the appointments approved yesterday of Margaret Curran and Frank McAveety.

Voluntary Sector

The Presiding Officer: This morning's business is a Social Justice Committee debate on motion S1M-3063, in the name of the convener, Johann Lamont, on the committee's inquiry into the voluntary sector.

09:30

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I begin with something of an apology. I am suffering from a bad cold this morning. Although I thought that I would embrace the notion of having 20 minutes to speak rather than my usual four, when I have to speak like a steam train to get through the business, I am now beginning to feel rather wonky—I think that that is the phrase. I apologise in advance for any woolly words, and assure members that those woolly words do not reflect woolly thinking on the part of the committee but are entirely my own responsibility.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to present the Social Justice Committee's report to the Scottish Parliament and trust that it will provide important information, food for thought and challenges to all those who are involved in and with the voluntary sector. As the Presiding Officer mentioned, we have a new Minister for Social Justice and I take this opportunity to congratulate Margaret Curran on her new role and to congratulate and welcome Hugh Henry as the new Deputy Minister for Social Justice. I look forward to having the same productive working relationship with him that we have had with previous ministers and deputy ministers.

I thank the clerks, the Scottish Parliament information centre, the official report and all those who supported the development of the report. I also thank all those who gave evidence and contributed to the inquiry, both formally and informally.

The aim of the report was to establish the key

issues facing the voluntary sector in Scotland in 2001, to examine the response of the Scottish Executive and others to those issues, and to report and make recommendations, as appropriate, to the Parliament. The report of the inquiry was intended to update committee members and the Parliament as a whole on the current position of the voluntary sector in Scotland, to provide a snapshot of the voluntary sector upon which the committee could base future work, and to identify key issues and recommendations to be addressed by the Scottish Executive and key players in the voluntary sector. I trust that people will find that the report matches up to those aims and objectives.

I want to say something about the process by which we undertook our inquiry. We did not seek to take evidence from only the key players in the voluntary sector and the Executive—from organisations such as the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and key figures such as Jean McFadden—although their contribution was welcome. We also sought to reflect in our evidence taking the diversity of the voluntary sector that we often celebrate. We met a range of organisations throughout Scotland by setting up meetings in each of the eight regions, determined as we were to ensure that that diversity could be reflected in what we heard from people in the voluntary sector.

I thank the councils for voluntary services for facilitating those meetings, and all those who were engaged in the process. I acknowledge the consensual approach of committee members, who did not feel it necessary to ensure that all political parties were represented at each of those meetings, but were willing to delegate responsibility to two or three members. It was clear that all the committee members who were involved saw themselves as taking part in those meetings on behalf of the committee rather than pursuing the agenda that they might have pursued at other times. I congratulate all committee members who were involved in that process. I conducted an inquiry in my constituency, modelled on the same approach of going out and contacting local communities. I found that useful and I believe that our approach was very much in line with the vision of an open and transparent Parliament that we often hear about.

Reflecting on the evidence that we gathered, particularly at local level, we were struck by a number of things. We were struck by the willingness of all to engage in the process, because of their commitment to the sector and, perhaps more important, because of their commitment to the individual areas of work in which they were involved. We were also struck by the huge energy of those who were represented and by what they had to say and what they wanted

to communicate about the key role that they clearly play in their local communities. The most compelling factor in the evidence gathering was the consistency of comments across the country—in rural areas, in urban areas and everywhere in between—about the sector's key priorities and frustrations. The report is intended to reflect the depth of evidence and, in the priority that it gives to individual recommendations, it seeks to reflect the consistency of comments and concerns.

I cannot comment on all the points that are made in the report, but I am sure that all members are now extremely familiar with it. I shall select a few points for comment and I am sure that other members will highlight areas that are of importance to them.

I have no doubt that the experience of everyone in this chamber as an elected member will be the same as my own. In going about the business of engaging with our constituents, in pursuing issues in our constituencies and in seeking to represent our constituents, we have made contact with and worked with the voluntary sector in all its splendid diversity. There is no doubt that the voluntary sector is in an important position to deliver a social justice agenda. Indeed, voluntary organisations have proved that they have a key role in developing appropriate solutions to many of the problems that face our communities. We wish to celebrate that diversity and the capacity of the sector to drive policy developments. We want to recognise that the voluntary sector is very often ahead of the agenda in seeking solutions to problems in our communities.

Much of our current social justice agenda takes an approach that has been developed from the experience of people in local communities. Child care is a key example of that. Child care provision emerged from what was needed locally and has become the norm in relation to what the Scottish Executive and others see as important.

The report highlights key issues. We had an interesting session on charity law reform, when we heard evidence from Jean McFadden. It is the committee's view that it is essential that that matter is pursued, and we would like a commitment from the Executive and a timetable for addressing the points that are made in the report.

Important work was done on the social economy review, and again we expect the Executive to identify a timetable for moving that review onward. Our commitment to the importance of the social economy review is reflected in our view that there should be recognition of where the voluntary sector and the co-operative and mutual sector meet. In any review of the social economy, important work should be done on the role of the co-operative and mutual sector. Although that

sector is distinct from the voluntary sector, they clearly impact one upon the other and we would like a commitment from the Executive to consider that relationship in the review.

The strength of the voluntary sector is that many groups have evolved directly from an identification of local needs. The process is not top down, and that must be recognised in relationships between the voluntary sector and local authorities, other funding partners and the Scottish Executive. It is very much the view of the committee that those partnerships must be developed out of mutual respect. In our view, it is not appropriate for the Scottish Executive, or any other funding organisation, to use the voluntary sector as a means only of delivering its own agenda. Voluntary organisations should have a role in determining that agenda in the first place, particularly given their track record of being able to understand the key issues in their communities or areas of interest.

In acknowledging the role of the voluntary sector, we must ensure that we do not reduce the voluntary sector simply to being another service provider. In embracing the voluntary sector, we must ensure that we do not squeeze the life-blood out of it. For example, in seeking a more businesslike approach from those who are involved in voluntary child care, we may lose the flexibility that made that child care provision work for local communities and individual families. In demanding standards in training and regulations—which we all agree are necessary—it is essential that we do not simply develop a professionalisation of the voluntary sector that drives away volunteers and loses the very heart of what the voluntary sector contributes to our communities.

Many groups and organisations commented on the problems of consultation. We welcome real partnership, but it is clearly important that consultation, too, is real and not tokenistic. There must be an opportunity for feedback and what is said must be taken on board in a real way. If we think that the voluntary sector has something serious to say, consultation is all the more important. Real consultation makes it more likely that what comes out of the other end of the process will reflect what is actually needed in local communities. The committee recognises that we must avoid paralysis by consultation. Organisations that are already stretched and strained may see consultation only as a burden and not as a benefit.

It will be no surprise that the issue that was constantly raised and highlighted in our evidence taking and work was funding. There was a desire and demand at the heart of the discussion for honesty on all sides about what can be delivered

with the moneys that are provided. There was a sense that sometimes there was a desire to squeeze a dividend—a wee bit extra—out of the money that was given. There needs to be honesty about the training that is required and its cost implications. It is inappropriate for organisations not to have funding security. If important responsibility for service delivery is delegated to the voluntary sector, it is crucial that security is provided to allow organisations to plan, especially as we have made a commitment to giving the voluntary sector a key role in planning. The sector's opportunity to deliver a service must be built on strong foundations. I am sure that all members have horror stories of organisations that seek to pay their staff through having raffles. If something is unacceptable in the public sector, it should be unacceptable in the voluntary sector.

Another key issue in respect of funding relates to the frustration that is felt at the need for voluntary organisations persistently to reinvent the wheel. We must be clear. The importance of innovation is recognised and the voluntary sector can be an important test-bed for trying out new ideas and opportunities—indeed, the voluntary sector has an excellent record in that respect. However, it is nonsense that effective organisations should have to recreate and reinvent themselves and attach innovative approaches to effective work to secure new funding. There must be a means of getting the balance right.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): On that point, and on what the member said about a process that is not top down but bottom up, does she agree that there is an urgent need for the sharing of best practice and good projects so that we do not continue to reinvent the wheel? We must stimulate or help to stimulate a bottom-up process so that coverage is not patchy. It should not be good in some areas and not so good in other areas.

Johann Lamont: I absolutely agree. We have all experienced the frustration of tackling problems or issues in our communities as if no one has ever tackled them before—indeed, we may have started processes that have been proven to be weak elsewhere. I agree that the communication of good practice must be supported. Perhaps if there were less emphasis in funding on what is new, we could build up confidence around good practice. I emphasise that the voluntary sector is an important sector in which to test out new ideas. One is not absolutely thirled to such ideas at a later stage as a result of committing oneself to an approach.

We acknowledge the role of the voluntary sector in rural areas. Other members have more detailed knowledge of such work than I do, but it is clear that there are specific difficulties in rural areas in

sustaining, accessing and benefiting from the voluntary sector. Our report reflects the fact that much work needs to be done in that respect. It also acknowledges that many problems relating to accessibility, isolation and the capacity and confidence to volunteer are replicated in some of our most urban, deprived areas. There are issues relating to ensuring that we can engage as many of our communities as possible. The issue involves not simply geography but other exclusion issues.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Does Johann Lamont agree that rural poverty and deprivation are often exacerbated by the isolation of people from specific communities? In more urban areas, many more people live together and can help to support one another. In rural areas, there is the added perspective of isolation.

Johann Lamont: I do not want to diminish the importance of rural poverty, but I am not sure whether the argument is about the experience of poverty in one community as opposed to that in another. The issues relate to poverty. In urban areas, it might be contended that, where density of poverty, exclusion, problems with transport links and few people who are able to work exist, a different process operates. I agree that there are issues around rural poverty and accessing help, which our report sought to address.

I am happy to say that I will finish well ahead of time. The voluntary sector deserves more than cosy words—it deserves our respect. It is not the equivalent of the Women's Guild, or a cosy, let-us-all-get-together-and-have-a-hug sector. Many people who are engaged in the voluntary sector are involved in the hardest work and deal with the most difficult problems. They support people who are in the most difficult circumstances. People who go into volunteering activity do not do so because they think that it might be a good thing. They may do so because they have received direct benefit from other people giving of themselves for no other reason than that something needed to be done, whether in Marie Curie Cancer Care or any other organisation. People are involved for many reasons, which are not always easy. The voluntary sector deserves recognition for the hard job that it does in difficult circumstances. We should acknowledge and celebrate the importance of its work in our communities.

We should not patronise those who work in the voluntary sector, but build on the work that has been done and the work that has proven to be effective. We should take seriously what the voluntary sector in Scotland told us in its clear voice in giving evidence, particularly in relation to funding. The sector has a right to stable, realistic and consistent funding, not just for the opportunity

to innovate, but because of its capacity to consolidate.

We must build trust and an understanding of the pressures on the voluntary sector that are the result of regulation and training. We agree with the need for regulation and training, but we must acknowledge the problem and listen when what has been decided begins to have an adverse effect on communities. Local voluntary activists in my constituency have reported to me their anxieties that the level of regulation and training may mean that people will walk away. People in my community will be devastated if groups that are supported in that community lose important activists. There must be real engagement with such issues.

A voluntary sector that can be a significant engine room for the social justice agenda must be allowed. It should not only carry out our agenda, but develop and shape that agenda. That will benefit all our communities—rural and urban and those that are in between.

I thank all those who were involved in the report. I trust that all those who read it with interest will take on board what it says and adopt its points where they have influence. I welcome the Executive's response and commend the report to the chamber.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Social Justice Committee's 1st Report 2002, *Report on Inquiry into the Voluntary Sector* (SP Paper 531).

09:47

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I was going to congratulate Margaret Curran on her ministerial elevation, but she is not here. I congratulate Hugh Henry and welcome him to the social justice portfolio. I do not know whether he has been elevated or if the move is a side step. This is the fourth social justice team, so I wish him the best of luck.

As a member of the Social Justice Committee, I am pleased to have contributed to the report on the voluntary sector. Today, however, I am speaking on behalf of the SNP.

I want to pick up on something that Johann Lamont said, which is crucial to an understanding of the voluntary sector. She spoke about the diversity of the voluntary sector. There are too many perceptions about what the voluntary sector is. People can volunteer for an hour or two every week and do a variety of tasks, but there are also businesses that are run by voluntary committee members, which are also part of the voluntary sector. Being voluntary does not mean being amateur—it means being professional and

providing a good service.

Last night, I visited an after-school care project in Blacklaw. For 10 years, the project has been run entirely voluntarily by local people who act as employers and employ staff. The project has been totally self-funded. It should always be borne in mind that the voluntary sector is a professional part of our social economy.

Like colleagues, I received the Scottish Executive's response to the committee's report quite late last night. As the First Minister said, personalities go, but the work carries on. It is unfortunate if the unexpected departure of a minister prevented the earlier distribution of the response, which is important. I note that it took a full two months for the Executive, with all its resources, to respond to the committee's report. Ministers should reflect on the fact that voluntary organisations that have more limited resources must respond to many Executive consultations in two months or less. Johann Lamont said that some of the respondents to the inquiry spoke about consultation fatigue and I think that that question has to be considered.

The Scottish National Party is supportive of the report, the findings of which are broadly in line with what our members have been hearing from volunteers and voluntary organisations for some years. As someone who has spent most of her working life employed in the voluntary sector and working with volunteers, I can see from the report that many of the issues have not changed in the past five, 10 or even 15 years.

I do not have time to cover the full range of issues highlighted in the report but, of course, there are key issues of concern to which I would like to draw attention. The first is the biggy: funding. The distribution of Scottish Executive funds is a major issue for the voluntary sector. Particular concern was expressed about the lack of core funding and continuing funding for successful projects and also about the fact that there is little recognition of the difficulties that are faced by small organisations when the expected funding does not appear. Despite the supportive words in the Executive's response, all the evidence suggests that the situation will continue to be business as usual. Voluntary organisations have experienced yet another delay in their funding this year. I ask the minister to explain why the decisions on section 9 and section 10 grants did not go out until after the beginning of this financial year and urge him to try to understand the effect that uncertainty of funding has on voluntary organisations. It results in worry for and pressure on the volunteers and the service users.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Does Linda Fabiani think that the major problem for most voluntary organisations lies with the Scottish

Executive, as she appears to be suggesting, or with health boards, local authorities and other local funders?

Linda Fabiani: I accept the point that Robert Brown is making and I will deal with that element later. However, I point out that good examples and best practice have to come from the top.

Uncertainty in funding can lead to demoralised, overworked and frustrated employees. It is horrifying that many of those who work in the voluntary sector receive redundancy notices as a matter of routine. We heard about that in evidence that was given to the committee. Given that the Executive has an annual underspend of more than double the total funding that it gives to the voluntary sector, surely we can rectify the situation.

The evidence of the voluntary sector is that, even when the Executive wants to give away money, it cannot always do so. Would the minister please do what is now commonly known as a McConnell and pledge that that will never happen again? Voluntary groups should be told before the beginning of the year how much money they will receive and should be able to rely on that money arriving on time.

I found the Executive's response on the mainstreaming of voluntary issues a bit disappointing. I note that the Executive is

"committed to promoting and mainstreaming voluntary sector issues",

but what has been achieved? The response talks about working groups, review groups, an issues unit and a management board—and let us not forget that there is a leaflet that is updated annually. It seems that voluntary issues are no more mainstream now than they were in the Scottish Office. That has to be considered carefully.

If the minister wants evidence that nothing has changed, he need look only at the Executive's response to recommendation 6. The committee said that voluntary groups should not have to reinvent themselves to secure funding, as the convener of the committee and Keith Raffan said earlier this morning. The Executive responds to that point by immediately reinforcing the issue of innovation. It is that concentration on innovation in Scottish Executive funding that forces groups to reinvent themselves. We have to stop talking about innovation and start talking about best practice. Voluntary groups do some things better than the state does. They should be encouraged with consistent funding and a well-developed national and local infrastructure. The evidence is that voluntary organisations innovate because they are responsive to local and individual problems rather than because the public purse

dangles a carrot in front of them.

Local authorities now have three-year rolling budgets, so there should be no difficulty in providing a similar arrangement for the funding that local authorities provide to voluntary organisations. I am glad to see that the Executive says in its response that it has accepted that, and I am sure that we can look forward to local authorities providing that peace of mind.

As Robert Brown pointed out, voluntary organisations are funded by other sources, such as health boards, too. Recently, with regard to money from the Community Fund, many voluntary organisations have told me about the difficulties that exist in relation to the innovation that is required to secure those funds, too. I have also heard about the difficulty of getting information when grant applications are turned down. The Community Fund appears to say simply that a project has run its course, is no longer innovative and will receive no more funding. In East Kilbride, a wonderful project for adults with severe learning difficulties had to close its doors because it could get no more funding from the Community Fund. The galling part of that is that the Community Fund has not told the group why that happened. The letter that was sent to the group said something like, "There is no point in your contacting us because we do not have to tell you why we are turning down your further application." I ask the minister to examine some of those problems.

Mr Raffan: Does Linda Fabiani agree that we must find a way to bring together the statutory bodies, such as health boards and local authorities, so that we can avoid duplication and overlap? I think that we are beginning successfully to do that through initiatives such as drug action teams, which bring together all the interested bodies to ensure that all the funding is focused in the way that it should be for the local area.

Linda Fabiani: Mr Raffan is right. We need to find ways to cut the bureaucracy. We also need to cut out a lot of the buzz phrases. We can talk about community planning and partnership working, but we need to focus our efforts on the people who are getting the service and providing the service and take it from there. How can the needs of those groups best be serviced?

Before leaving the issue of local infrastructure, I want to comment on social inclusion partnerships. Increasingly, those bodies should be a source of joined-up delivery of support to the voluntary sector at a local level. It is important, therefore, that their decision making is transparent and can stand scrutiny. I have asked a series of questions recently on SIPs and it appears that there is still much to do in relation to establishing those bodies. For example, there was no requirement for a register of interest for members of SIP boards

before April this year. Having the register is a step forward, but there are still no sanctions for use against anyone who conceals an interest. The burden for keeping the registers has fallen on local authorities, who are obliged to ensure that all members declare any relevant interest.

It is disappointing that the Executive's response to recommendation 8 fails to address the issue of regulation. To be effective, regulation must be transparent, consistent and backed up by sanctions.

SIPs are perceived in different ways by different people and we have all heard anecdotal evidence about them. However, a perception that patronage exists or that there is a lack of accountability is almost as important as the problems themselves, whether they exist or not, because it puts people off and stops people benefiting from the project. The Social Justice Committee is considering examining SIPs more closely. I would welcome that and I would also welcome the Executive more closely examining the regulation of SIPs so that everyone can be confident that they are providing what they should be.

Johann Lamont mentioned the final issue that I want to touch on, which is the importance to the voluntary sector of the review of charity law. In 1999, when this Parliament was in its infancy, Wendy Alexander, who was Minister for Communities at the time, promised a reform of charity law in Scotland, which was welcomed across the chamber. She set up the McFadden commission, which reported a year ago. We now know that the commission rushed out its report unnecessarily and that nothing will happen, it would seem, until after the next election. Jean McFadden was clearly disappointed at the lack of action and was reported in *Third Force News* as saying:

"If we had known that nothing was going to happen the commission could have had an extra few months putting more details on to some of the recommendations."

She went on to say:

"I spoke to ... Jim Wallace and told him of my concerns ... He said there were certain aspects of the recommendations which were 'controversial' and needed more discussion."

If the McFadden commission had not been forced to rush out its report, perhaps that controversy would not exist.

I am reliably informed that work on the promised review of the social economy has not moved forward since Jackie Baillie's time in the social justice ejector seat, which seems a long time ago. It is a bit worrying that the minister who now has responsibility for the Executive's economic strategy showed so little interest in economic development in his previous role.

Members have been waiting for me to use the I-word: independence. My party and I believe that it will take independence for Scotland to have real control over its economy, social or otherwise. The key instruments for economic development in Scotland rest in London. However, it is clear that the voluntary sector has a key role to play in local economic development. I ask the minister to give us a commitment to put the review of the social economy back on track—or is the review another of Wendy Alexander's ideas that seems to have fallen by the wayside?

In conclusion—I am really coming to a conclusion this time—while we debate reports and responses, we must remember the importance of the voluntary sector to all Scotland's communities, both urban and rural. Each has particular problems, as Mike Rumbles pointed out, such as isolation. It is all very well to talk about population numbers and the level of poverty in one place in comparison with another, but for the individual who lives in poverty, it does not matter how many more people live in poverty around them. We must carefully consider how we deal with the voluntary sector in rural areas, which have their own problems with infrastructure. For example, transport is a basic need, with which the geographic SIPs can help.

Overall, the voluntary sector provides services that are locally controlled and that focus more clearly on the needs of individual service users and volunteers. The sector is more responsive than remote, bureaucratic organisations and is an important source of community leadership.

I thank all the volunteers and workers from the voluntary sector who took time to correspond with and meet the Social Justice Committee. They contributed greatly to the development of the committee's thinking. I ask the new ministerial team to consider more fully how to respond to the Social Justice Committee's report and to commit the Executive to taking action more rapidly than it has done to date. The SNP supports the committee's motion, which says that we should note the report, but I ask the minister to take notice of the report.

10:03

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): I put on record my congratulations to Margaret Curran on her promotion to the ministerial ranks. Unfortunately, she is not here to hear that for herself, but that is neither here nor there. Mr Henry has a hard act to follow. I also offer Iain Gray every good wish in his new portfolio as minister for everything.

We broadly welcome the findings of the Social Justice Committee report on its inquiry into the

voluntary sector in Scotland. As a member of the committee, I was party to much of the evidence and the deliberations that surrounded our long-running inquiry. I am pleased that today sees the fruition of many months of hard work and that we have the opportunity to debate the important issues that the inquiry raised. There is no doubt that those who work in the voluntary sector, either as paid members of staff in charities or as volunteers in local communities, carry out sterling but often unrecognised work. Their commitment should be applauded—there is little doubt about the value that it adds.

The inquiry threw up certain concerns, which more than deserve to be aired. First, I will address the independence of the voluntary sector, which witnesses raised time and again during the evidence-taking sessions. Historically, the voluntary sector has been independent from government, and that independence is the sector's main strength. Voluntary organisations require independence to achieve their aims, meet local needs and provide a personalised service to their clients. My party and I find it wholly inappropriate that the voluntary sector should become an extended arm of government. As I have suggested, that concern is not held by the Scottish Conservative party alone. As long ago as 1998, Neil McIntosh, the convener of the SCVO, wrote in his annual review:

"Of course we need to be aware of the dangers of the loss of individual identity—what makes the voluntary sector special is its diversity and pluralism which do so much to enrich our society."

During the inquiry, the committee made numerous visits to see voluntary sector work in action on the ground in all parts of Scotland. Members particularly strove to visit rural areas, because we were well aware of the dominance of committee members from the central belt. Our visits were highly effective, because they allowed people to speak more freely about their concerns than they might have done in the more formal environment of an evidence-taking session.

I vividly recall our visit to Paisley, where feelings about the funding partners ran high, culminating in accusations of favouritism and corruption in the local authority. As I am a Lanarkshire lass, that was all quite alien to me. People's comments on independence included the allegation that groups were

"led by the nose' by councils as they who pay the piper 'call the tune'. The attitude of councillors varies from co-operation to feeling threatened. As a result, services may be compromised."

Some observations were pretty damning. For example, it was said of the much-lauded compact that it is

"invisible' in the Highlands and 'may as well not be there'."

The role of partnership was also questioned. Local authorities might seek the views of voluntary sector organisations but the people to whom we spoke did not feel that they were regarded as equal partners. Consultation exercises were often conducted on the local authority's terms—if they were conducted at all.

Charities felt that it was not always easy to obtain access to local authorities to discuss funding, and that funding was available for

"topics 'of interest to politicians'."

It was felt that council funding could stifle the motivation of volunteers and affect the ethos of volunteering. Charitable organisations also suffer from what I will call consultation fatigue. Organisations that are united under umbrella organisations are often asked by the Executive to take part in public consultation exercises, but not all charities have the resources or time to meet regularly to discuss the issues on which their opinion is sought. Some consultation exercises have time scales that are as short as six weeks. In many cases, such time scales are too short to allow organisations to respond. In smaller charities, front-line staff are taken away from their priorities to collate information. It is not that those charities have no opinion on the issues raised; quite simply, they have neither the time nor the resources to cope with the constant round of consultations. That is what I mean by consultation fatigue, which must surely be counted among the additional burdens and challenges that face the sector and that we are discussing today.

Generally, the feeling remains that it is difficult for voluntary sector organisations not to feel beholden to various bodies, because of the way in which they are funded. There is far too much regulation and bureaucracy and organisations feel that they have to jump through hoops to satisfy conditions before a grant is awarded.

Participants in the fact-finding visit that I attended in the Mid Scotland and Fife region spoke of the trade-off between the independence of an organisation—which allows it to make its own decisions and follow its own agenda—and the reality of contracting with funders to deliver shared priorities. The report makes for disturbing reading when it examines the evidence of such threats to the independence of the sector, as opposed to the independence to which Linda Fabiani referred. That theme can be extended to independent schools. We must fiercely guard the charitable status of schools and I am sure that my colleagues will discuss that issue in greater detail later.

The second issue that I will address is that of charitable street collections. I am sure that many members will be familiar with the teams of face-to-face fundraisers—or tabard collectors—who have

become a familiar feature of the streets and main shopping areas of our towns and cities.

Although I appreciate that charities face a constant battle in their search for innovative mechanisms to raise funds, I and others share concerns about that style of fundraising. The teams of people collect on behalf of the larger, well-established charities. They are notable for saying, "Have you got a moment for Oxfam?" or, "Have you got a minute for Barnardos?" or for whatever charity they happen to be representing that day.

Many members of the public have been surprised to learn that the tabard collectors are not aligned to any charity and that they change their allegiance according to the week. They are also paid, which obliterates another preconception about those who collect for charity on the streets. They are not collecting money but asking people to give a small donation every month by direct debit or standing order. Jean McFadden stated to the Social Justice Committee in October last year:

"they are not regulated, and there is no limit to their numbers."—[*Official Report, Social Justice Committee, 3 October 2001; c 2552.*]

I was heartened by the fact that Mrs McFadden's report recommended that the new legislation should cover all types of cash and non-cash donations, and that people who are not volunteers should be identified as such. I am pleased that the issue has been highlighted and I hope that the recommendations of the McFadden inquiry that have been shelved will be taken on board in future.

I support the committee's recommendation that volunteering is to be encouraged in Scotland's communities, but that should not overshadow the fact that there are people who are suffering from volunteer fatigue. Those who become involved in voluntary activities are getting tired of the regulatory burdens that the Executive places on them and their organisations.

The Executive would have us believe that the voluntary sector's well-being is one of its priorities. but the Executive does not seem to be practising what it preaches. I am thinking of the eight care homes run by the Church of Scotland that face closure. The Church of Scotland does not run care homes to make money; it does so out of a selfless desire to care for others. Five homes have already closed and Dunselma in Fenwick is facing closure. That brings me back to my earlier point about the regulatory burdens that the Executive is introducing and which continue to stifle charities.

For older residents, the closure of all those homes will be traumatic and possibly damaging to their health. With the closure of Dunselma, the nearest care home will be in Patna in east

Ayrshire, which is 45 minutes away. Dunselma is—or, I should say, was—a fine example of all that the Executive claims to hold dear. All kinds of volunteering and community involvement took place there—meals on wheels, a lunch club, a volunteer-run health club for the residents and it was a home away from home for many. Many members would agree that Dunselma was a fine example.

Gordon Brown's recent decision to increase national insurance contributions will serve only to add to the voluntary sector's burdens. It is estimated that it could cost the sector approximately £15 million. That is an example of how the Executive flatters to help the voluntary sector while causing damage to it.

Added to that is the fact that the removal of advance corporation tax credits has hit charity and voluntary organisations. That has cost £400 million this year across the UK and costs approximately £40 million a year in Scotland. A shocking 15 per cent of all public donations to charities goes directly to the Treasury in unrecoverable VAT. That equates to £46 million a year in Scotland.

Although a reserved issue, the effect of Labour's abuse of the national lottery has been profound—£3.7 billion has been taken from the lottery to pay for pet projects, including education, health and environmental programmes, which should be funded by taxation. The losers are charities, the arts, sports and heritage.

Robert Brown: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

The Presiding Officer: The member is in her last minute.

Mrs McIntosh: I am in my last minute; the member should have asked earlier.

I will end on a more positive note. Volunteers week is due to start in less than a month, on Friday 7 June. It will start with a parade from George Square to the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. It is an opportunity for us to recognise and celebrate the work of volunteers as well as a chance for them to recruit new volunteers. No doubt other members and I will be recruited to do some work during that week. Last year, I found myself presenting certificates to volunteers and frying chips at a lunch club in Kilmarnock. That makes three generations of chip friers in my family—who would have thought it?

I conclude by sincerely thanking all the organisations and individuals that allowed us to visit their projects, those who came and met members of the Social Justice Committee, and those who gave written or oral evidence and who generally informed our deliberations. We were, of course, ably assisted by our clerking staff, one of

whom has moved on to bigger and better things, and their shepherding was much appreciated.

No one could claim that our inquiry into the voluntary sector was an in-depth study, but we hope that we have provided a snapshot of the sector's condition and of the opinions of those most closely associated with it.

10:15

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I start by adding my congratulations to the new members of the ministerial team, particularly Margaret Curran, who will make an excellent Minister for Social Justice. My congratulations to Hugh Henry are tinged with slight commiseration about the fact that he will have to burn the midnight oil to conquer a new brief and get up to speed on some complex issues. Nevertheless, I congratulate him.

I begin with some observations on my colleagues' contributions. I will do so across the board, in order to be fair.

I was interested in Lyndsay McIntosh's tax-raising agenda. That was why I intervened in the later part of her speech. I was also interested in Linda Fabiani's comment about the way in which local organisations constantly innovate. That comment was significant and related to Johann Lamont's comment about the way in which voluntary organisations should contribute to the agenda. There is a subtle difference between contributing to the agenda and organisations having the right to have their own agenda within the diverse and overarching issues that face the voluntary sector.

Can we imagine a Scotland without a voluntary sector? There would be no citizens advice bureaux, no Shelter Scotland, no credit unions, no independent drug addiction projects, no Alcoholics Anonymous, no after-school clubs or parent teacher associations, no Burns clubs or football supporters clubs, no women's guilds and no scouts. It would be a Scotland without colour or heart. It would be a dysfunctional and poorer Scotland.

No one can define the voluntary sector. As Dr Nicholas Fyfe and Dr Christine Mulligan put it in their research report:

"Having 'a policy' for the voluntary sector is a bit like having 'a policy' for the private sector. The private sector contains Microsoft and self-employed window cleaners and you would never dream of putting them together"

any more than we could put together the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and one of the smaller, locally funded service-providing organisations.

For all that, there are features that distinguish the voluntary sector from other sectors in society:

it is robustly independent; its activities are for the public good; and it is diverse in organisation, style, size and function. There is a Darwinian, survival-of-the-fittest air about it. Many of us would not survive if its people were not made of sterner stuff than most of us are.

It was interesting for the Social Justice Committee to hear evidence in Edinburgh and throughout Scotland, from Inverness to Lockerbie. Hearing and seeing at first hand the problems faced by local groups does enormous good for the prestige and standing of the Scottish Parliament. I am grateful, as are other colleagues, to all the people who gave their time.

The support given by the Parliament and the Executive to capacity building in the sector has been worth while. An increase in funding from £23 million in 1998-99 to £39 million in 2001-02 has helped to build the network of councils for voluntary services and local volunteer development agencies or volunteer bureaux throughout Scotland. The Scottish compact, the active communities initiative, the millennium volunteers programme and the establishment of social investment Scotland are all playing their part.

The Scottish Executive says that it recognises the voluntary sector as

"a key partner in policy development, service delivery and the development of community capacity"

and recognises that

"voluntary sector organisations have their own agenda, priorities and actions" —[*Official Report, Social Justice Committee*, 19 September 2001; c 2501 and 2504.]

I would go a bit further and say that we live in a pluralist society in which the voluntary or independent sector has a democratic legitimacy that is as valid as, if different from, that of the Parliament or local authorities. At a time when democratic politics are being challenged as never before, the sector is arguably one of the healthiest manifestations of local democracy.

Against that background, why do we so often fail to sustain local voluntary groups and impose additional burdens on them or regulate them with targets and objectives that are often inappropriate and load them with unnecessary bureaucracy? During the inquiry, we were commonly told that 30 per cent or more of the time of voluntary groups' paid officials is spent scrabbling around for funds. I recently heard of one small organisation in Cambuslang, in my constituency, that is dependent on 13 different funding sources.

The Parliament has done fairly well in dealing with the additional financial burdens that legislation has imposed. We took on the cost of Scottish Criminal Record Office checks, we got

round the problem of water rates for all but the largest organisations and the Executive is examining the cost of the regulation of houses in multiple occupation as it affects universities and Abbeyfield homes.

I will mention one new burden on which I seek the minister's assurance. Gordon Brown's budget this year will result in a rise in the national insurance burden on employers, including many voluntary organisations. I will pass over the fact that the problem was totally unnecessary and resulted from the Labour Government in London having to pretend that it was not raising income tax. If the Government had done the sensible thing and had funded the necessary investment in the national health service by an appropriate rise in income tax, for which the Liberal Democrats have argued for years, voluntary groups and small businesses would not have suffered the extra burden.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am not sure how the budget change will impact on the money that local authorities are able to provide, as the national insurance increase will obviously affect their budgets. Perhaps the Executive should take into account the fact that less funding will be available to local authorities because of the new national insurance burden.

Robert Brown: Christine Grahame is absolutely right. The feed-through issue must be acknowledged. In answer to my question the other day, the Executive said that voluntary organisations will be helped by a range of budget measures, such as tax relief for gifts of land and buildings to charities and changes to the rules for gift aid. Frankly, such measures are not especially relevant to most of the social sector voluntary groups to which the present debate relates.

It is necessary for the Executive to ensure that local authorities are funded and it is necessary for local authorities to ensure that the voluntary sector is funded to deal with the increase in costs. An organisation with two or three staff that operates on a local authority grant—in many cases such grants will have been fixed for five or six years—cannot absorb the extra cost without experiencing damage to its service. The Executive and the UK Government must give proper consideration to such matters before they put extra burdens on voluntary groups.

I will make a specific point about citizens advice bureaux, in which I have been involved over the years. CABx are perhaps uniquely affected by the activities of the Parliament. Twenty-three of the 40 acts that have been passed by the Parliament since 1999 have an impact on the service provided by CABx, which put a huge and vital emphasis on debt advice and debt management. The Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland)

Bill, which was introduced earlier this week, will have an even greater effect on their service.

Seventy-seven per cent of all Department for Work and Pensions forms refer specifically to the CABx, as does the Mortgage Rights (Scotland) Act 2001. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 also requires a major increase in housing advice from the CABx. My point is simple: anyone can see that the CABx are a special case and require adequate and increased funding. One can argue that local authorities should have a statutory duty adequately to fund independent advice services. The new burdens must be matched by proper resources, however that is done. CABx cannot provide their service on standstill budgets and can certainly not do so in the light of the cuts, of 40 per cent cut in Edinburgh for example, that they have experienced in recent years.

Mr Raffan: The CABx play a central role. Does the member agree that it is vital to increase their coverage in Scotland? They are not present or active in parts of Scotland where they are badly needed.

Robert Brown: Absolutely. On the Social Justice Committee's visit to Stonehaven, Cathie Craigie and I went to a former part-time CAB that had had to be cast adrift from the CAB organisation because it could not meet the service standards, premises arrangements and so on that were in place. We must find ways to deal properly with rurality, which Mike Rumbles mentioned.

All members have agreed that funding is the "biggy", as Linda Fabiani put it. Funding must be addressed at a local level, because often too little attention is paid to core funding. There is a case for an independent Scottish voluntary sector development fund, which—rather like the Department of Trade and Industry funding for Citizens Advice Scotland—would give muscle to local organisations in encouraging three-year partnership agreements with councils.

The Scottish Executive is right to say that councils are now being funded on a three-year basis and that there is no reason why councils in turn should not fund the voluntary sector organisations that they support on a three-year basis—not on a two-year basis, as Glasgow City Council is beginning to develop, or on the basis of a policy of no arrangements at all, which many councils adopt. Many councils' performance on funding agreements is quite lamentable—three-year agreements are as common as sightings of the yeti.

We must examine the contract culture, because what is appropriate for some organisations that deal with the public sector—as regards targets for delivery, for example—is not particularly appropriate for the voluntary sector, which

provides services in a different way. The voluntary sector's services have an additional dynamic, human element, which it is not always possible to measure in the way that Governments and civil servants desire.

There must also be a more even playing field with regard to the way in which local authorities approach the provision of services by voluntary sector providers and council departments. In many instances, voluntary sector provision can sometimes do a better job than local authority services can. That must be acknowledged and the voluntary sector must be dealt with evenly.

A change in philosophy is necessary. There must be a move away from constant innovation and reinvention of the wheel towards sustaining successful organisations. The idea that most organisations can become self-sufficient at the end of a three-year or a five-year period is a chimera and, as such, is a public policy tool that should be bucketed. In private business, a track record is highly desirable when one goes to see the bank manager. In the voluntary sector, a track record represents a handicap.

I do not have time to discuss the rural issue, but all members benefited from the meetings that the committee had with various rural groups across Scotland.

I will finish by returning to the extra contribution of the voluntary sector. I recently visited the Castlemilk Economic Development Agency and a project that is called Can Cycle, which was the brainchild of a man with a vision. The project repairs bikes for the local youngsters at no cost, renovates bikes for sale at a cost of less than £30 and provides youngsters with training in maintenance skills. A related tin-can recycling scheme helps to fund the project. It takes many swallows to make a summer and the Can Cycle project by itself does not magically solve the problems of poverty or family breakdown in Castlemilk. However, many youngsters who are enjoying the freedom of their bikes rather than annoying the neighbours are less frustrated and bored than they might have been without the project.

Along with the other 44,000 voluntary sector organisations across Scotland, the Can Cycle project gives life, hope and a sense of the future to many disadvantaged communities and people in our country. In backing the Social Justice Committee's report, let us make sure that the most dynamic part of our civic society is helped and encouraged by the actions of government, both local and national.

I support the committee's report.

The Presiding Officer: I thank the convener of the Social Justice Committee and all members

who have spoken, because we have finished the opening speeches ahead of time, which must be a record. We now come to the open debate.

10:27

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I add my congratulations to Hugh Henry on his appointment as the Deputy Minister for Social Justice. I know that all members of the Social Justice Committee will look forward to working with him.

I thank everyone who contributed to the Social Justice Committee's report on the voluntary sector in Scotland. In particular, I thank the committee clerks for their effort in assisting to produce a substantial and refreshingly direct report. I also thank all the voluntary and community organisations that participated in our inquiry. We heard the views and concerns of an incredibly wide range of voluntary groups, from Lockerbie to Orkney.

It is perhaps not surprising that, on many issues, those groups spoke with one voice. Funding, voluntary sector independence, the rural dimension, infrastructure and relationships with local and national Government became the central themes for each of our visits. The fact that so many organisations were able to participate in the process is further proof, if proof were needed, that our Parliament is delivering the kind of responsive, devolved government that those who shaped the Scotland Act 1998 envisaged.

During our inquiry, I valued having the opportunity to meet representatives of voluntary organisations from the Highlands and the Edinburgh and Lothian areas. I found their experience and first-hand knowledge helpful and I was impressed by the knowledge and commitment of all those who gave evidence. Scotland has a thriving and dynamic voluntary sector, of which we should rightly be proud, but which we should never take for granted.

During our visit to Inverness, the particular difficulties that the voluntary sector faces in rural communities were raised. Those included difficulties with transport, volunteer recruitment and communication. Indeed, the method of taking evidence from groups in Orkney—videoconferencing—provided a glimpse of the opportunities that information technology could offer to help to address some of those problems in future.

Groups in Inverness raised a number of concerns about funding. They highlighted the need to ensure that funders take account of the cost of training and of making funding applications. I am pleased that the Social Justice Committee's report has highlighted that point; I hope that the

Executive will take it on board. I note that, in its response, the Executive indicated its belief in the value of staff and volunteer training.

The evidence that Linda Fabiani and I took from groups in Edinburgh and the Lothians highlighted other concerns about funding. Particular concerns were raised about the financial impact of increased regulation on voluntary organisations; the need for longer-term, three-year to five-year funding to allow more strategic planning; and the need to move away from the obsession with innovation. As other members have pointed out, we do not always have to reinvent the wheel. Many projects and organisations out there have proved themselves during their initial funding period. They deserve to become mainstream services.

I am pleased to see that, in its response to the Social Justice Committee's report, the Scottish Executive has given a commitment, in its direct funding of the voluntary sector, to provide ongoing financial support in three-year tranches. I am also pleased that, in the most recent letter from the New Opportunities Fund to the committee, David Campbell has stated that the NOF is already implementing longer-term funding of three to five years.

The SCVO's briefing for today's debate commends the committee's long-running and detailed inquiry. However, our detailed inquiry managed only to scratch at the surface of the voluntary sector in Scotland. Our report marks the end of our inquiry but the beginning of a process of creating an environment in which voluntary and community organisations can flourish.

I commend and support the report.

10:32

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I welcome the report from the Social Justice Committee. It should come as no great surprise to anybody that my remarks will focus on the independence of the voluntary sector—a subject that I pursued before this Parliament was set up and that I have continued to pursue during various debates in the chamber.

The Social Justice Committee's report says that some organisations expressed concern about their ability fully to maintain their independence from their funding organisations. That is a very serious problem indeed.

The Third Age Group affair in Fife received much publicity and rightly so. It is the tip of a very large iceberg and the template for the worst kind of control—

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Tricia Marwick: Certainly.

Helen Eadie: Does the member accept that last week's Audit Scotland report gave unequivocal clearance to Fife Council?

Tricia Marwick: Helen Eadie should read the report for herself rather than believe the spin from the leader of the administration in Fife. The report is quite clear. It speaks of "wholly irregular" practices, "serious concerns" and "wholly inappropriate" actions by Fife Council employees.

The Third Age Group never actually existed as a voluntary organisation. Yes, it was an official charity, recognised by the Scottish Charities Office; yes, it had a management committee; but it was no more than a sham organisation—a front for Fife social work. As Douglas Sinclair, the chief executive of Fife Council, said in his second report,

"It was council made. Over the life of the project the dominant roles in the management were played by employees of Fife Council rather than by the volunteer members of the management committee."

Every significant person who was associated with the Third Age Group centre was a member of the Labour party. Angela McCallum, the first employee, was employed after she became a Labour councillor. Lynda Struthers, the second employee, was a Labour activist and Henry McLeish's election agent. Maureen Rodger, a social worker, was the driving force throughout the life of the centre, and was a Labour party election agent.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): Is Tricia Marwick suggesting that being a member of the Labour party should bar a person from taking part in any voluntary organisation or group? It has been the history of Labour party members to be involved in volunteering. In fact, up and down the country, members will find that the majority of people who are out there volunteering—certainly in the areas with which I am familiar—are all very much Labour party supporters. Tricia Marwick seems to suggest that Labour party people should not be involved in voluntary organisations. That is ludicrous.

Tricia Marwick: Cathie Craigie well knows that that is not what I am saying.

Cathie Craigie: Well, it very much sounds like it.

Tricia Marwick: The member well knows that that is not what I am saying. What I am doing is ensuring that the links between the Labour party and a sham organisation are well known to this chamber.

I will continue. Mary Cairns and Frances Howatson, who are social workers—

Karen Whitefield: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Would it be possible for you to comment on the appropriateness of Tricia Marwick's comments? The report that we are discussing is on the voluntary sector in Scotland. Our committee spent a considerable amount of time on the report and I would be grateful if members who participate in the debate would speak to the report.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The advice that I have been given is that Ms Marwick is in order at present. However, I am uneasy about the direction that the debate is taking. I wonder whether Ms Marwick would bear that in mind.

Tricia Marwick: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I draw your attention to my first remarks on the independence of the voluntary sector, a subject that was highlighted in the Social Justice Committee's report.

Mr Sinclair, the chief executive, quaintly referred to those links as "crossovers". The rest of us see the affair for what it is—good old-fashioned cronyism. Social workers purported to be office bearers, after the organisation wound up, to allow access to funds; documents were shredded by Fife social workers; and the remaining funds were transferred to another organisation by Fife social workers.

There have been a number of inquiries. There was a whitewash in December when Douglas Sinclair claimed that the council's actions with regard to the Third Age Group centre were "above reproach". After some dragging, kicking and screaming, a more detailed report was produced. Audit Scotland had, at my request, investigated the matter and provided an independent report—

Kate Maclean (Dundee West) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Would you rule on whether the member is actually talking to this report or talking to a specific situation in Fife? I would suggest that she is talking to a specific situation in Fife.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As I say, I have been advised that the member is in order—just. However, I have expressed my unease about the direction that the debate is taking. I wonder, yet again, whether Ms Marwick will bear that in mind.

Cathie Craigie: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Will you share the advice that you have received and tell us why the member is "just" in order?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The chair will not comment on that. I have given my ruling and that is all that I intend to say.

Tricia Marwick: There are continuing police inquiries into the matter. One organisation that has not been involved is the Scottish Charities Office—

despite having the power to be so. The silence has been deafening from the Scottish Charities Office. I have now formally asked the Scottish Charities Office to investigate the matter.

Charity law reform in Scotland is long overdue. The SCVO was led to believe that such reform would come in the first session of this Parliament, but a reply to me this week from the Deputy Minister for Justice has finally ruled that out. The Third Age Group affair has shone a light on the practices in Fife but no one is naive enough to believe that such practices do not exist elsewhere. The voluntary sector is vital to the well-being of our community life in Scotland. It is important to the sector and to us that the sector has proper regulation, proper monitoring—and independence.

10:39

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I congratulate the Social Justice Committee and I congratulate the new Minister for Social Justice and the new Deputy Minister for Social Justice on their appointments.

The committee's report tells us that there is an innate goodness and an innate wish in our society to help and to give. I wish I could say the same about Tricia Marwick after the damage that she has done to the voluntary sector in Fife.

I believe that we can celebrate the contribution of the voluntary sector throughout Scotland. I believe that the voluntary sector must play an equal part in developing strategy for volunteering in Scotland. We all know of, and are involved in, many voluntary organisations in our constituencies. Like others, I have been involved as a volunteer and as a full-time worker. Among the people who set real examples are those in their 80s who talk about helping "old people" who are about 10 years younger than they are. In my area it is a common for people in their 70s and 80s to want to continue to give their time.

As a Parliament we have a duty to promote and encourage greater voluntary and community involvement. We have a duty to raise awareness and inspire more people to get involved, increase opportunities for volunteering, make it easier for people to get involved and to support the development of active community up and down the country. That should not be seen as the Executive getting people to do something for nothing—that would not be an appropriate basis for Government involvement in the voluntary sector.

The report states clearly that involvement in the voluntary sector is about supporting and encouraging folk to contribute to their communities, to have a voice in the services that they receive and often help to deliver and to feel

that they are integral part of the society in which they live. It is all about empowering and engaging people and combating social exclusion. Volunteering can enrich volunteers' lives. I welcome the report's ideas about further codifying relations between local and central Government and voluntary organisations in a readily comprehensible fashion.

The Scottish voluntary sector has an annual income in excess of £2 billion, which is equivalent to 5 per cent of gross domestic product. It employs more than 40,000 people, who are involved in more than 50,000 forms of voluntary management. The charitable sector is a significant player in the economy of Britain. The sector is worth about £16 billion a year. It directly employs almost 250,000 people and is larger than the United Kingdom motor industry.

The Government spends about £104 million a year in the voluntary sector, local authorities add an extra £150 million and the national lottery adds £145 million. That is a significant sum and underlines the growing appreciation of what the voluntary sector can contribute, in partnership with the Government, to the life of the country. One only has to look at the voluntary movement in housing to realise what a singularly important task is taken forward, by and large, by a great deal of voluntary activity. The fact that so much public money is invested in that sector underlines the importance that we attach to the voluntary sector.

The report calls for mainstreaming. I urge the minister to go further. The process of proofing is important and all ministers in the Scottish Executive should be urged to remember that when devising their policies. If the minister's support for voluntary activity is to find a real place in the realms of Government, the Scottish Executive must develop—even more than it has already—an appreciation and understanding of the effect that its policies have on the voluntary sector. If proofing guidelines have not already been issued to all departments, I urge ministers to take that in hand. I ask the minister to remind colleagues to take into account that dimension of our public life when other departments are framing policies or legislation. That continual awareness can make a great difference in ensuring that the voluntary sector finds its place in partnership with Government in many vital areas.

I urge the minister to bear in mind the concerns that faith-based organisations have expressed about bidding for funds. Such organisations feel that whenever they deal with the Government or local authorities, they are forced to choose between being true to their religious integrity and complying with the policy of the local authority or Government department. Will the minister do everything in his power to simplify the funding

arrangements, bureaucracy and form filling with which voluntary organisations have to deal?

I support the report and all the work of the Social Justice Committee. I was impressed with the work of members and clerks—it was a very full report.

10:43

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the report, particularly because it gives us an opportunity to debate several important issues. I think that it was quite appropriate for Tricia Marwick to bring up the Third Age Group charity. Even if her points were unpalatable for some, it is clear that the debate provided an opportunity to raise such pertinent questions.

The pertinent questions that I would like to raise relate to funding and, in particular, to lottery support for voluntary organisations. Members will be aware of the New Opportunities Fund—in particular because the New Opportunities Fund was kind enough to write to us and tell us what a grand job it is doing. Indeed it also sent us the briefing that Mr Gibson is adeptly waving around.

I will quote from the letter:

"The New Opportunities Fund is the newest Lottery distributor, having been established in 1998 to make grants to health, education and environment projects, with a particular focus on promoting social inclusion. Our mission is to help create lasting improvement to the quality of life, particularly of disadvantaged communities in both urban and rural areas."

Amen to that. It sounds like a terrific and laudable aim.

However, the New Opportunities Fund is somewhat concerned about the report. It says:

"There appears to be an inference in the report ... that our funding is not accessible to the voluntary sector."

The NOF refers to paragraph 27 in particular. I would like to go further than the report and not infer but state that there is a problem with lottery funding for voluntary organisations.

I would like to draw members' attention to the cause of Scottish Centres. Scottish Centres provides facilities where school children can be given intensive outdoor education. In partnership with local authority child care and social work services, Scottish Centres provides specialist courses for young people with serious behavioural problems, including many who have already engaged in criminal activity. It is the largest provider of such services.

In order to improve its services, Scottish Centres wanted to access lottery funding through the New Opportunities Fund. However, the difficulty for an organisation such as Scottish Centres is that, because it is national, it has to apply for funding

through local authorities. The funding from the New Opportunities Fund has been disbursed and devolved to the 32 local authorities. The four centres across Scotland run by Scottish Centres are not able to apply to one fund—Scottish Centres must apply to the 32 local authorities that use its facilities. I am sure that members will appreciate the difficulties and the burden that places on the organisation.

I call on the New Opportunities Fund to recognise that while devolving grant disbursement is a laudable aim, it is inappropriate for an organisation that operates on a national level to have to go through 32 local authorities to put together a bid for a centre in Meikle in Perthshire that services children in great need from Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dumfries. Local authorities in those areas will not be easily persuaded to award money to centres that are outwith their boundaries.

I suggest that the New Opportunities Fund puts aside a set amount for national projects. If we are to deliver social inclusion across the nation rather than just locally, Scottish Centres must be able to access such funds to ensure that it can deliver the voluntary service that would otherwise cost the public purse a great deal more.

10:48

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): As many members will know, I have a background in the voluntary sector and I remain involved in several organisations that are listed in the register of members' interests. The voluntary sector plays an important role in our communities. The sector has evolved and expanded and is now an integral part of many aspects of modern life, often providing services, support and solidarity where the public sector cannot.

The areas in which the voluntary sector is engaged have also changed. Although the sector is still delivering meals on wheels and hospital trolleys, it is also involved in advice, care of the elderly, child care, youth work, education, adult learning, the social economy—things like credit unions—housing, arts, community action organisations, such as those fighting drug abuse, and so on. The voluntary sector has changed substantially over the past 20 years. Voluntary and statutory bodies are able to work together in ways that complement each other's strengths.

The major issue for the voluntary sector has always been the struggle for sustainable funding and resources. Many funders offer short-term funding for new ideas and projects. That is important, but we need to look beyond seedcorn funding for voluntary organisations to core funding that provides resources for running costs, training,

consolidation and strategic planning. Many people in voluntary organisations become skilled at reinventing their organisations to meet the latest criteria. Often, funding becomes the main focus in organisations. That is a diversion of time and effort from the primary objectives of organisations.

Matched funding can also be a nightmare, in particular when it is paid in arrears, and it is even more of a nightmare when it is paid late, as is often the case. We need to recognise that if a project is good and meets continued need, it should not be forced to close simply because a funding stream has dried up. In my experience, the voluntary sector is the only sector in which staff fundraise—whether through jumble sales or by filling in endless application forms—for their own salaries. That is not appropriate.

In recent years, the relationship between government and the voluntary sector in Scotland has improved, but I look forward to continued improvement. Many voluntary organisations work closely with local authorities, and trust and mutual respect can develop. That can be positive, but not all voluntary organisations share that experience. There needs to be a compact at local level that is based on a national model but tailored to local needs.

A lot remains to be done in the development of voluntary sector infrastructure at a local level, in particular with disadvantaged groups. For example, the Equal Opportunities Committee heard from the black and ethnic minority communities, which stressed the need to develop voluntary sector infrastructure at a local level. Much work has still to be done on voluntary sector issues. Local councils for voluntary services can play a key role in that essential development by working with local groups to facilitate participation and the active citizenship of people in their communities.

I welcome the report, and commend the Social Justice Committee on it. I look forward to continued work and debate in the Scottish Parliament on the voluntary sector.

10:51

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Like many other contributors to the debate, I welcome the report and its many positive recommendations. However, I wish to address a rather dangerous trend in the way in which the Social Justice Committee and the Executive identify the ways in which social inclusion and poverty in Scotland can be tackled.

The Social Justice Committee's report states on page 13:

"The Committee encourages the Executive to increase targeting of volunteering initiatives in deprived

communities. However, this must be accompanied by support to meet the additional burdens present in such areas, such as transport costs."

I want to challenge an attitude of mind. I well understand the wishes of the authors of the report to tackle poverty and social exclusion in what they see as obvious and well-defined communities, especially those in the constituencies that they know well. The members of the Social Justice Committee represent constituencies in Glasgow, Cumbernauld, Airdrie and the Central Scotland region, but—from a geographical perspective—it is not what one might call a representative committee drawn from the whole of Scotland.

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): Does Mr Rumbles accept that members of the committee visited every region of Scotland including, of course, his own?

Mr Rumbles: Absolutely. I know that two members of the Social Justice Committee visited my constituency, but I would have liked to know about their visit beforehand.

There are many parts of Scotland where deprivation is not so easily identifiable, and where the less well-off in society do not live in so-called deprived communities. For example, in my constituency of West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, 15 per cent of my constituents live in poverty, and they do so among some of the most well-off in our society. If it is assumed that deprived communities must be targeted, by definition those who are most in need of help—those who live not only in poverty but in isolation from the rest of the community, which is perceived to be relatively well-off—will be failed. I get more than a little fed up when, time after time, funding is targeted in that way.

Recently, I examined the funding announcements of the Community Fund, which Linda Fabiani highlighted. The fund has a remit to tackle social exclusion. We heard about the New Opportunities Fund as well. The figures that I have show that last year, Aberdeenshire received more than £0.5 million less than its fair share of Community Fund awards. Despite there being 14 applications, only six were successful. The average grant in Aberdeenshire of £100,000 was also well below the Scottish average of nearly £150,000.

Johann Lamont: Will the member give way?

Mr Raffan: Will the member give way?

Mr Rumbles: I will not. I have only a minute and a half left.

Mr Raffan: This is supposed to be a debate.

Mr Rumbles: Exactly, but there is no debate about this.

Despite having nearly 5 per cent of Scotland's population, Aberdeenshire received just over 2.5 per cent of the main and medium-sized grants.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will tempt you with an extra minute, Mr Rumbles.

Johann Lamont: Will the member give way?

Mr Raffan: Will the member give way?

Mr Rumbles: I will give way to the convener of the Social Justice Committee.

Johann Lamont: I trust that Mr Rumbles will agree with me that he is making a false distinction. The report specifically addresses rurality. I ask him to reflect on the fact that all the evidence shows that because poor communities do not have the infrastructure and expertise to support applications, they are doing extremely badly in relation to lottery funding success.

Mr Rumbles: I am addressing another issue, which is exclusion in rural areas and which I see for myself. Aberdeenshire has been excluded, ironically, from the Community Fund's fair share initiative, because there are no defined deprived communities there.

By targeting communities, effectively we ignore the excluded in areas such as the area that I represent. To be fair to the Social Justice Committee, three paragraphs of its report identify the problem of rurality, which Johann Lamont mentioned, but that is only three paragraphs. The Social Justice Committee makes two recommendations on page 17 of the report. While the report asks the Executive to explore alternative ways of providing services in rural Scotland, I am disappointed that it does not recommend to the Executive specific ways of providing services differently. If I had time, I could go into that.

Cathie Craigie: Will the member give way?

Mr Rumbles: I would love to give way, if I have more than a minute left.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you another minute, Mr Rumbles. There is time.

Cathie Craigie: I hope that you are not showing favouritism, Presiding Officer.

Mr Rumbles might be correct that the report devotes only three paragraphs to rural issues, but I am sure that he agrees—if he has read the report—that the issues that were raised, whether in the Borders or Lanarkshire, were broadly similar. For example, the transport and access issues that were raised were similar throughout the country.

Mr Rumbles: That is exactly my point. Rural areas are ignored if recognised deprived communities are targeted, because many people

do not live in the targeted deprived communities.

I am sorry to say that this report is a missed opportunity for the less well-off in my constituency, and does not adequately address how to tackle social inclusion in isolated parts of rural Scotland. Put simply, we must avoid the easy option of tackling poverty only in clearly identified deprived communities. We must not forget that we need to be people orientated, and that we must tackle poverty where and when it occurs in every location, urban and rural. That means not forgetting those who need help most—those who are isolated and excluded from communities.

10:57

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Do I have five minutes or four minutes, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let us see how we do.

Christine Grahame: I see. There are rules for some and rules for others.

First, I associate myself with Robert Brown's remarks on the role of citizens advice bureaux. When I was a practising lawyer, I spent much of my time recommending that clients go to the local citizens advice bureau, in particular for benefits information. Citizens advice bureaux need financial support.

Secondly, on rurality, I note the recommendations of the Social Justice Committee. I draw the Deputy Minister for Social Justice's attention to the first recommendation on page 17 of the report:

"The Scottish Executive should clarify how the problem of rurality is dealt with in funding arrangements for the Voluntary Sector."

I would like to know when an answer is received on that. I hope that it will deal with some of the issues that Mr Rumbles raised about defining deprived and impoverished areas.

I will focus on something that mystifies me, but for which there may be a simple answer, and that is how funding is allocated. I will provide an example with regard to the recently announced £5 million package for special educational needs. I note that grants will be given

"to a range of national and local organisations across Scotland, including Enquire, the national SEN advice and information service."

That is worthy, but I do not understand how a voluntary organisation such as ISEA Scotland—ISEA stands for Independent Special Education Advice—which is a Scotland-wide organisation, does not get any money. I make the distinction for this reason: ISEA Scotland does the hands-on

work. Phone calls go to Enquire, but ISEA Scotland does the work. In fact, Enquire sends out a leaflet with information on ISEA Scotland on the back of it.

The organisation has 1,056 live cases. The two women who run ISEA have children with special educational needs—

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP):

The situation that Christine Grahame describes is not confined to the Borders. Recently, I made a visit to Facilitate (Scotland), which is a suicide prevention centre in Glasgow that provides counselling services. I discovered that, because Facilitate was not going to receive the funding from the Greater Glasgow NHS Board and the Executive that it had anticipated, it was to lay off people. That was despite the fact that the Executive helpline Breathing Space, which opened a couple of weeks prior to my visit, was referring people to Facilitate. Such incoherence in funding has to be addressed by the minister.

Christine Grahame: That point is similar to the one that I was making, which was not meant to be contentious. I do not understand why an organisation that represents people at educational appeal tribunals and committee hearings does not get funding. ISEA is to receive temporary funding only until the end of the year and it states in its leaflet that, because of funding, its advocacy service is

"restricted to providing support to parents who are about to embark on or are in the process of going through an appeal or taking legal action. However exceptions will be made depending on individual circumstances".

It is all very well to create an advice line, but if the people who are delivering the advice are not getting funded—

Cathie Craigie: I do not wish to be personal, but on a number of occasions in the chamber, Christine Grahame has advocated the case of different voluntary sector groups. Surely strategic decisions have to be taken about whether a group is providing the right service for its area. Perhaps other more established groups are providing the same service.

Christine Grahame: ISEA is not a Borders-based service—its advice line covers the whole of Scotland. I made the point to give an example and members have heard another example from my colleague Adam Ingram. I may be wrong, but I think that ISEA is the only voluntary organisation in Scotland that is doing that work. I am asking the Social Justice Committee to consider that discrepancy.

I also ask the committee to be good enough to proceed to undertake an audit of the organisations that are receiving funding through the Scottish Executive or other bodies. That would allow us to

see who is getting the money and what they do for that money. It may be that there are examples other than ISEA in Scotland, but I ask the committee to consider the position of ISEA. It is all very well to have advice lines, but not if the front-line voluntary organisations that provide them do not get support to deliver the services.

11:03

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I congratulate Hugh Henry on his move to the post of Deputy Minister for Social Justice. I hope that between now and the end of the debate Margaret Curran returns from being sworn in as the new Minister for Social Justice. I offer her my congratulations.

Like other members who have spoken in the debate, I welcome the opportunity to debate the Social Justice Committee's findings and recommendations, which resulted from our inquiry into the voluntary sector. I thank the committee clerks, past and present, for their efforts. I thank especially the voluntary sector groups from all parts of Scotland who gave of their precious time to make our visits meaningful and informative. I give special mention to the Stonehaven Advice and Information Resource project for the welcome that it gave Robert Brown and me, and for sharing with us its scarce resources—annual general meeting biscuits—on the day of our visit.

Every committee member was impressed with the quality of the evidence that the inquiry received. Volunteers and full-time workers up and down the country voiced similar experiences, whether they were working in communities in Aberdeen, Perth or the Borders. People took different approaches and had different ideas about improvements that they wanted to see in urban and rural areas. However, their opinions on, and suggestions for, improved relations with the Executive and for delivery and management of their services were basically the same.

Scotland's third sector has a key role to play in helping to deliver social justice. Voluntary and community groups are in close touch with marginalised groups. They are pleased to identify and to respond to changing needs. Every day, volunteers make a tremendous contribution to the lives of many people throughout Scotland. Indeed, many people who make such contributions do not consider themselves to be volunteers; they see themselves as people who are active in their communities and who simply help their neighbours.

As members have said, the committee met organisations from the eight regions of Scotland. The consensus that was reached as a result of evidence was that relations between the voluntary

sector and the Executive had improved greatly since devolution. An important tool in those improved relations was the introduction of the "Scottish Compact". To the credit of all, the compact was prepared in a partnership between the Executive and the voluntary sector. The enthusiasm and drive behind the compact was because of Labour in the Executive. The Executive has given the voluntary sector a place at the policy development table, which will make policies more responsive to the sector's needs and potential. Robert Brown listed the many areas of service delivery. I will therefore not repeat the list.

Lyndsay McIntosh and Johann Lamont spoke about consultation. They also spoke about the concerns that were expressed up and down the country about the time that is involved in consultation and the work that it generates for staff and their volunteers. We heard that the time scales for consultations meant that full-time staff could not consult their members. Every committee member took that evidence seriously; we are concerned about it. The voluntary sector did not express those concerns by way of complaint; rather, it wanted to highlight the need for the Executive to review and examine ways of improving the methods that are used to consult and the time scales that are allowed for responses.

Mrs McIntosh: Does the member agree that difficulties arise when volunteers become involved in other voluntary groups? Does she agree that they can end up further and further away from the group with which they got involved in the first place? There are many ways of networking and volunteers are becoming fatigued as a result.

Cathie Craigie: That concern was expressed. From my experience, that is a problem for people in management positions. The Executive should not find the problems with consultation to be insurmountable. I hope that we can arrive at a better method of consulting and involving the sector.

The compact is a great step forward. I hope that we continue to encourage local government to prepare local compacts in consultation with the voluntary sector in their areas. The sector is developing. It employs about 100,000 people and involves hundreds of thousands of volunteers. The Executive has shown commitment. I hope that it continues to do so and to work at the same speed to improve the situation for the voluntary sector in future.

11:08

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): The report is interesting. I congratulate the people behind it who have worked hard on it.

While I was a member of the Finance Committee, along with Adam Ingram, I produced a report on behalf of the committee that looked at funding of voluntary organisations. Various members have spoken about that subject, but it might be helpful for me to recapitulate some of the points that were made to me by voluntary organisations.

I will start with a political point. Successive Governments, including the present Executive, have grossly underfunded the voluntary sector. That is an absolute disgrace. Funding for the voluntary sector must be managed much better than it is. That is such a disgrace not because of the wickedness of politicians, but because many central and local government officials regard the voluntary sector as a competitor and possibly even as an enemy. Officials do not like the fact that the voluntary sector is uncontrollable. We politicians who believe in the voluntary sector must crack that open. I hope that the new ministers—whom I welcome—get a grip on the subject. If voluntary organisations do not receive adequate national and local funds, many will collapse.

As other members pointed out, sustainable core funding is especially needed. The current project-funding mania is extraordinarily foolish and means that people cannot secure continuing core funding for their basic activities. The local government changes in 1995 in particular harmed many groups that were usually funded locally. However, the same problem is evident at national level. For example, in 1986—under the wicked Tories—50 per cent of Youth Scotland's turnover was covered by grant; now however, under an enlightened coalition Government, it receives only 16 per cent. That is just not acceptable.

We must also maintain successful projects. With short-term funding, a project spends a year getting itself organised, does something for the next year and then spends the third year scrabbling about for funds to keep things going. That is a ludicrous waste of everyone's time, money and energy.

We must combat the idea that "new is good"; actually, "new is good" is bad. Although many people are doing many things well, they do not receive support for keeping them up. Instead, they receive support for fanciful new projects and must compete in ludicrous competitions. In certain cases, they are not even allowed to use existing staff who know about the subject. As far as I can see, the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Natural Heritage give out no core funding whatever. Although SNH is allocated £40 million, it passes only £2 million on to voluntary organisations.

I want to highlight a number of examples. The Lochaber Music School, which came to me for help with core funding, receives no such funding from the SAC. However, it does receive project

funding. If it suggested teaching the clarsach and fiddle on top of Ben Nevis, it would secure funding for such an imaginative project. However, it gets nothing if it simply carries on teaching those instruments in Lochaber High School. The whole project is in dire straits. Furthermore, Rural Forum Scotland received project funding worth £2 million; however, because it could not secure £120,000 in core funding, it collapsed. We must address the issues of core funding and of keeping successful projects going.

The Executive and other people are keen on sport. However, although national sports bodies receive standstill grants, many local clubs receive no grant at all, despite often having budgets of less than £1,000. We are not talking about big money, but about reasonable amounts of money being sent in the right direction. Because of publicity, sport has particular problems with getting coaches, officials, referees and so on.

I want to touch on one or two other issues. Although I bore people endlessly with this issue, I will point out that there is excessive paperwork in the voluntary sector. There are too many unrelated initiatives from well-meaning Government departments. Moreover, staff conditions in the voluntary sector must be as good as they are in local government. Finally, committees need professional support from lawyers and other personnel, because they can often be tripped up on various issues.

Although the quantity of support in the chamber this morning is disappointing, we have heard some good speeches. I hope that the ministers will get a grip on the subject, and that we can get a grip on them.

11:14

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

For a moment, I thought that Donald Gorrie was about to cross the aisle and join the Conservatives. However, that will clearly have to wait for another day.

I welcome the Social Justice Committee's report. I am sure that all members are familiar with the vital role that voluntary groups play in their areas. Groups that I have come into contact with recently include: the Perthshire Association for Mental Health; the Samaritans' hospital car system, which provides elderly and ill people and their carers with transport to hospital; the Princess Royal Trust for Carers in Blairgowrie, which provides day care for those who suffer from Alzheimer's to ensure that their carers can have a much-needed break; and the young folk from Kirriemuir and Forfar who, with the support of their communities, are actively raising funds for a skateboard park. If we look at any local paper on any typical day, we will find

many stories about what the voluntary sector is doing.

In echoing something that Donald Gorrie highlighted in his speech, I want first to mention the situation that faces Youth Scotland, which is the umbrella group for Scotland's youth clubs and whose representatives I met last Friday. Six hundred and nineteen groups from throughout Scotland, involving 42,000 youngsters and 4,200 adult volunteers, are affiliated to Youth Scotland. Every town in Scotland has a youth club, which provides a valuable resource of activities for young folk. At a time when we hear so much in the chamber and elsewhere about youth crime and disorder, we should value an organisation that promotes diversionary activities.

After inspecting Youth Scotland in September 2001, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education stated that Youth Scotland was a very effective organisation that had purpose and direction. Furthermore, it said that Youth Scotland showed a creative approach to attracting funding, was highly valued by its membership and made very good use of external expertise to facilitate that process. However, following that glowing report, Youth Scotland was shocked to discover that its headquarters' core grant funding from the Scottish Executive was cut. It will receive £5,000 less in 2002-03 than it received in 1985-86. It will not have escaped members' attention that, as Donald Gorrie kindly pointed out, we had a Conservative Government in 1985-86, whereas we now have a Labour-Liberal coalition.

Worse still, Youth Scotland's HQ training grant, which has been paid for the past 20 years, has now been withdrawn without any consultation or warning and after the organisation had drawn up staff and board development policies. It goes without saying that—given its good report from HMI and that it feels that it has done everything right—Youth Scotland finds that decision inexplicable. I invite the minister in his winding-up to comment on those points and to tell us whether the Scottish Executive is committed to the youth voluntary sector.

My second point relates to quite a different matter: faith-based social projects. The largest provider of social services in Scotland outwith the state is the Church of Scotland Board of Social Responsibility, which my colleague Lyndsay McIntosh mentioned. At this point, I must declare an interest, as my wife works for the organisation. A few weeks ago, it was forced to close eight care homes and other projects because of inadequate funding from the Executive.

However, it is not just funding issues that affect faith-based providers. A couple of months ago, I had the opportunity to visit the Bethany Christian Trust with the shadow Home Secretary, Oliver

Letwin. Bethany is one of the largest providers of social services in Edinburgh, and concentrates on the disadvantaged, rough sleepers and drug abusers. Some might see such people as the lowest level of humanity and beyond hope, but it was impossible not to be moved by meeting people who had once been in the gutter and who are now leading fulfilling lives because of Bethany's help. Bethany offers an holistic approach and never turns people away. The commitment and care of its staff are second to none. It works because it is a Christian organisation, with an added value that comes from its workers' beliefs. However, the Christian ethos that makes Bethany so attractive and effective also acts as a barrier to its accessing council funding. The Labour-run City of Edinburgh Council will not fund certain Bethany projects because the organisation will not, for faith reasons, sign up to the council's equal opportunities programme. The result is that political correctness is preventing the best standard of care from being given to the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society.

If the Parliament is serious about having a thriving voluntary sector in Scotland, we must treat the sector seriously. As Donald Gorrie said, that means having proper core funding, which must be signalled well in advance. It also requires the removal of barriers to faith-based welfare projects. I trust that the minister will address those points.

11:19

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Before I come to the nub of what I want to say, I will comment on a few speeches. I add my support to Brian Monteith's comments on Scottish Centres, which provide an excellent standard of outdoor education; to Cathy Peattie's remarks on funding; to Robert Brown's remarks on citizens advice bureaux; to Murdo Fraser's remarks on the Bethany Christian Trust, with which I have worked in the past and which provides help swiftly and efficiently to people who need it; and to Adam Ingram's remarks on Facilitate (Scotland), the opening of which I attended last year and which provides an excellent service for depressed people.

I will not, as members might expect, launch into a speech on environmental organisations such as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Community Service Volunteers Environment and the Woodland Trust.

Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP): You mention them only in passing.

Robin Harper: Yes. I would have liked to have found time to pursue the enormous advantages—which are being wasted—of developing the area waste plan, which could accrue if the Executive and local councils paid more attention to the huge

number of voluntary recycling projects, many of which are socially inclusive.

Instead, I will address an issue that came to my notice fairly recently, which is the hidden economy of voluntarism in Scotland—child and adult carers. Murdo Fraser mentioned the Princess Royal Trust for Carers, to which I pay tribute. I alert members to the fact that a new child centre will open in Aberdeen, in advance—I hope—of the Parliament's temporary move to Aberdeen. The work of the Princess Royal Trust for Carers involves huge sensitivities. The reason why we know so little about carers' problems is the sensitivity of carers in revealing their problems.

The Ca(i)re project is a unique project that has come to my notice recently. Eric Liddell won a gold medal at the Olympics while at university in Edinburgh and, incidentally, my auntie Dorea used to cut his hair in prison camp. The Ca(i)re project is run at the Eric Liddell Centre at Holy Corner, which is home to many voluntary organisations. The project aims to provide a social life for adult carers who otherwise hardly ever meet other people. Week in, week out, month in, month out and year in, year out, such carers feel that they must stay at home to take care of adult children or elderly relatives who need constant care and attention. The Ca(i)re project is run by the carers; they decide what they need. Interesting things to do and opportunities to socialise are brought in from outside. The project is unique and immensely valuable. I attended a meeting that was held to discuss its first report. The project is of value for both carers and the cared for, because the carers return to caring with renewed spirit and vigour.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh): You have one more minute.

Robin Harper: The Executive should do everything that it can to help such projects. At the moment, a minimal level of respite care is available. We should be concerned that such an important project is unique. The project deserves to be replicated throughout Scotland, which is why I want to draw members' attention to it.

Donald Gorrie mentioned competition between local authorities and voluntary organisations. I have examples of such competition, particularly in relation to the provision of a valuable, socially inclusive recycling project. I will not go into detail now—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You do not have time.

Robin Harper: We should be aware that such conflicts exist.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the closing speeches. Keith Raffan has five minutes. We are slightly behind time, so I would appreciate

it if members could pick up the pace a little in the closing speeches.

11:25

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

I congratulate the Social Justice Committee on its report and the convener on her introductory speech on the report. The report gives a snapshot of the voluntary sector in Scotland. As it points out, evidence was taken almost exclusively from the voluntary sector. As a continuation of the committee's excellent work, it should take evidence from statutory agencies. It is important to integrate statutory agencies and the voluntary sector.

The voluntary sector should not be a way to finance core services on the cheap. From my political and philosophical point of view, that method of financing core services is intrinsically wrong and places unacceptable burdens on volunteers, which leads to what Johann Lamont rightly described as the professionalisation of the voluntary sector. Robert Brown introduced his speech colourfully by giving examples that showed the variety of the sector. I view the voluntary sector more as involving ancillary or extra services—which are crucial—but not core services.

I will give a few examples from recent visits that I have made. Murdo Fraser also did so and it is helpful. The Guide Dogs for the Blind training centre in Forfar is the second biggest employer in the town; Body Positive Tayside does a lot of good work to support HIV and AIDS sufferers; the Sanctuary in Glenrothes helps people with drug misuse problems, particularly problems related to heroin or a combination of heroin and methadone; and Simpson House in Edinburgh, which is run by the Church of Scotland, does tremendously valuable work in helping prisoners who have drug problems and providing throughcare for prisoners when they come out of prison. The voluntary sector has a key and central role in such additional or ancillary services.

As Linda Fabiani eloquently put it, funding is "the biggy". [*Interruption.*] I am sorry, but the chatting on my left is distracting me. I would like the convener of the Social Justice Committee to listen to this point, because I think that she will agree with it. The lack of stability and security in core funding prevents effective planning and distracts those who are trained and those who are experienced from what they want to do and what they should be doing, which is not scraping around for money. In Kirkcaldy, the Clued Up Project does excellent work in schools to help those who have, or who potentially have, drug and alcohol problems, but it always has to think about whether it has enough money to take it beyond the end of

the financial year.

We must address that kind of problem. We need three-year funding. It is not easy for local authorities; they must deal with limited resources, competing demands and ring fencing. When authorities are under pressure they often have to cut what it is easiest to cut—which often means voluntary sector projects. Christine Grahame made a valid point about national insurance increases having a serious impact on local authorities, which only aggravates the problem.

Cathy Peattie rightly referred to the lack of co-ordination between public sector bodies such as social work departments and other local authority departments and health boards. As the report says, it is difficult to get a clear picture of what is funded and by whom, which leads to duplication and overlap. I said earlier, in an intervention, that I believe that the drug and alcohol action teams might be a suitable model. They have successfully brought different public sector bodies together around one table to identify local needs. More important, they have brought the resources around one table in order to target those needs accordingly.

Robert Brown spoke about the need for a voluntary sector development fund, which I support. Such a fund could disburse money through those voluntary sector action teams—for want of another phrase—to ensure that local needs are met. As Johann Lamont said, the voluntary sector must not be top down, but bottom up; or—as I would prefer to put it—the sector should not be Government down, but community up. The best and most successful projects emerge from communities. The danger with that is patchy coverage; in other words, good projects in one area and nothing at all in others. That is why we need the sharing of best practice and of successful projects.

I recently attended a Robertson fund conference on vulnerable children whose parents are being treated for drug misuse. There was a presentation from a Wrexham councillor—a distinguished member of the Labour party, Councillor Malcolm King—who, 20 years ago, founded an adventure playground in one of the most deprived council estates in Wrexham. I knew Malcolm previously. That project has been extraordinarily successful and has led to a 28 per cent reduction in juvenile crime in the town. That is precisely the kind of project that emerges from the community and which we need to stimulate, nurture and support. We do not need to reinvent the wheel; we need to support projects such as this and the Dundee youth project's drop-in centre, The Corner, and Off the Record in Stirling. Those are the projects that we must support, finance and replicate elsewhere.

11:30

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): I congratulate the Social Justice Committee on a job well done. It is especially pleasing that the committee took the time and trouble to go around Scotland taking evidence, although it seems to have rubbed Mike Rumbles up the wrong way by visiting his constituency without giving him notice. I suggest that Cathie Craigie might have called on him in the early evening; however, it would no doubt have been suggested to her that she had had her tea. Not to worry.

I also congratulate the fourth ministerial team in four years to deal with social justice. I understand that Margaret Curran cannot be with us this morning as she is being sworn in. It occurs to me that people in her role usually end up being sworn at. As they sip from the poisoned chalice of the social justice remit, I wish them well.

This has been a good debate and many good points have been made. Johann Lamont properly noted that many voluntary sector organisations have grown out of an identified need. She also stressed that, although consultation should not be tokenistic, it should not be exhaustive. Those were sound points, which we should all take on board.

Linda Fabiani stressed the problems of funding. I agree with her that it is not good enough that there are difficulties with section 9 and section 10 grants. There is something fundamentally wrong with the system if, even with the advent of three-year budgeting, redundancy notices are issued to staff as a matter of course as the end of the financial year approaches.

Lyndsay McIntosh and others paid tribute to the voluntary sector. It is right to reflect on the fact that 500,000 people regularly volunteer for the 44,000 organisations that are active in the voluntary sector in Scotland. The income of those organisations is between £1.6 billion and £2 billion and they employ 100,000 full-time staff. That is the contribution that people in Scotland make to the voluntary sector, and we should all be proud of it. Lyndsay McIntosh also underlined the problems that arise with taxation. Policies are sometimes not thought through. When the Chancellor of the Exchequer decided in his recent budget to increase the level of national insurance contributions, he should have thought of the impact that that would have on charitable bodies, which Lyndsay McIntosh quantified at £46 million.

Robert Brown catalogued the contribution that the voluntary sector makes, although I question whether football supporters clubs should be viewed as either charitable or voluntary. He did well to highlight the degree of bureaucracy that inhibits action on the part of voluntary bodies.

Johann Lamont: Does not the member congratulate the Executive on its support for Supporters Direct? As volunteers and people who are committed to their football clubs, those people are the best hope of saving some of our smaller football teams and ensuring that our larger football teams have more appropriate direction in future.

Bill Aitken: There are issues of funding. I would have been better disposed to congratulate the Executive had more of its members signed my motion congratulating Partick Thistle. However, that is another matter.

As Karen Whitefield rightly said, we must never take the voluntary sector for granted. We must recognise the tremendous amount of good work that those organisations do. It is a little distressing that one of the themes to come through in the evidence that the committee took is the fact that local authorities seem to regard charities and voluntary sector organisations as competitors rather than as allies in doing good. Some thought must be given to that problem.

Donald Gorrie also highlighted that and told us what we already knew—that, in general, people were better off under the Conservatives. He was correct to do so. There seems to be a funding bias against established and successful projects. What is new and innovative is not necessarily always effective, and what Donald Gorrie said had wisdom in it.

Murdo Fraser underlined the contribution that is made by the faith groups, and—despite protestations that he was not going to spend much time dealing with environmental issues—Robin Harper managed to spend 60 per cent of his speech doing so. Finally, Keith Raffan was correct to highlight the fact that the voluntary sector is not about the provision of public services on the cheap, although that is largely what it has become.

This has been a good debate. The committee report is worth while and has given us all the opportunity to recognise the massive contribution that the voluntary sector makes to Scottish society.

11:36

Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP): I thank the committee for a very good report.

The propellant for ejector seats is manufactured at Bishopton. If Hugh Henry can hang on for a little while, there will be none left and the Executive will have to find another way of putting him out the door when his time comes.

I say to Cathie Craigie that, where I come from, most volunteers are not in the Labour party—most are not in any party. Volunteering is widespread throughout society.

We must stress the need for charity law reform. Linda Fabiani mentioned that and the fact that there has been some delay in introducing that reform. Tricia Marwick emphasised the need for a rapid implementation of charity law reform.

Funding is obviously the key. Most of us have been involved with voluntary organisations and recognise sustainable funding as an absolute priority. Linda Fabiani and Johann Lamont made that point. Year-by-year allocations and delays in decisions on funding simply will not do. The last thing that voluntary organisations need is for gaps in funding to occur or for the decisions on the forthcoming financial year to be made so late in the day that the delay creates unnecessary concern and erodes confidence both in the cash provider and in the ability of the voluntary activity to continue. Such indecision saps the willingness of volunteers to continue.

When so many people are prepared to volunteer, the last thing that we want to do is to put unnecessary obstacles in their way. I had experience of an organisation in the east end of Glasgow, which began as a summer society and became an all-year cultural society. Every year, it was dogged by chronic anxiety over whether people's jobs would continue, in an area in which there were few jobs. I therefore welcome the Executive's three-year programme of funding and I hope that the approach will be passed down to local authorities, so that they will take the same view and guarantee funding for projects that they believe are worth while in themselves or which contribute to social inclusion or other objectives.

It is disappointing for many volunteers that they spend a lot of time applying for funds from different organisations, jumping through all the hoops and meeting all the criteria only to submit their application and get no money despite the fact that the next published list of funded organisations includes other projects with plans that are almost identical to theirs. I have in mind a healthy living project in Port Glasgow that applied to the Community Fund. We must try to find some way of avoiding such inconsistency.

Probably the most important issue is the relationship between the donor and the organisation that gets the money. The relationship must be one of genuine partnership, not one in which there are subordinates who get little handouts from time to time. There have been instances of voluntary organisations having mainstream services dumped on them simply because the council had no more money to continue those services. Stand-alone trusts or other organisations have been put off to the side and have then got less money from the council than they received before.

That is not the role of volunteers. It is not their

function to pick up services that councils cannot afford to run. The important principle was stated earlier that the best of the voluntary organisations grow from the ground up. That must be encouraged and watered with money.

Transparency and declarations of interest in social inclusion projects have been mentioned. I do not have huge experience of social inclusion projects, but a very reputable friend of mine in the west of Scotland has been deeply involved in all sorts of social inclusion projects. He stood up at a public meeting and innocently suggested to the voluntary organisations present that they might have more freedom of action if they applied for lottery money, as that would keep them out of the clutches of councillor patronage. As a result of that, he lost much of his social inclusion partnership funding. If any members want to know where that took place, I will tell them later.

In the Parliament, we all subscribe to the principle of subsidiarity. That principle must apply at all levels. Political parties should not be able to manipulate voluntary organisations or set up front organisations as covert deliverers of their interests. The Parliament has done well on subsidiarity. The Local Government Committee, of which I was a member, assured councils that it offered no threat to their independence. The Parliament must persuade councils to apply the same principle. Those who are confident in the exercise of their power are not afraid to devolve it. To devolve power is to trust the voluntary organisations to which money has been given. As long as the appropriate financial safeguards are in place and an organisation is fulfilling its objectives, it should be allowed to get on without interference. The volunteers will grow in confidence as a result and will exercise more initiative.

The enormous economic benefit to society of the work done by all the unpaid volunteers throughout society has been mentioned. We cannot discount that work and we must do nothing to discourage it. As members know, we could all name organisations endlessly. The day after the general election last year, I went out with meals on wheels in Johnstone—that was an antidote to the night before. I learned a lot about a system in which people were going out to deliver a service and were making contact with people. They were doing a job that would otherwise have to be paid for. We owe the voluntary sector an enormous debt in cultural, social and sporting terms at every level of society. I toast the volunteers of the voluntary organisations.

11:43

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Hugh Henry): I say to Bill Aitken that I believe that, far from being a poisoned chalice, social justice is

every bit as much of a challenge as health. It is a privilege to make a small contribution to the work of many important people throughout Scotland. I take seriously Colin Campbell's advice about propellants and ejector seats. Unfortunately, he speaks from first-hand experience, as he told his friends in the SNP in west Renfrewshire about that and they removed him and replaced him with another candidate.

On behalf of the Executive, I welcome the Social Justice Committee's inquiry into the voluntary sector. We recognise the importance of the voluntary sector to Scottish society and, as Helen Eadie said, to the Scottish economy. I am pleased to publish today the Scottish Executive's response to that inquiry.

The Executive sees the voluntary sector as a key social partner. During the debate, many members mentioned the importance of partnership. This is not about one sector threatening another; it is about people working together for the benefit of our communities.

Mr Raffan: On a practical matter, could we receive the Government's response to a committee report earlier next time? It would be helpful if members were able to study it carefully before we spoke in the debate.

Hugh Henry: I will feed that comment back. Keith Raffan probably saw the papers at about the same time as I did, given the events of the past few days, but he makes his point well and I will pass it on.

As many members said, voluntary sector and community groups are in close touch with many parts of Scottish society and they are well placed to identify and respond to changing needs. The sector is uniquely placed to tackle many of the challenging targets that are set by the Executive and it is already a major provider and innovator in housing, child care—which Johann Lamont mentioned—and community care. If it were not for the contribution that is made by many of those organisations and individuals, our society would be much poorer. I know that Margaret Curran has played a huge role in taking that agenda forward and that she has welcomed the comments made by the Social Justice Committee. Unfortunately, as has been mentioned, the minister is not able to be here today because she is being sworn in. She has taken a close personal interest in the issues that we are discussing.

We want the sector to input fully to policy development and to the delivery of services. Working in partnership is the best way in which to meet the challenges that the Executive has set.

We, too, value the independence of the sector. Lyndsay McIntosh said very specifically that there is a need to retain the independence of the sector.

We recognise the outstanding contribution that is made by many thousands of people, who give of their time to serve on management committees and boards. They bring good governance and, in most cases, high ethical standards to the work of their organisations. They have made a contribution to the debate on improving standards in our society.

The Executive is committed to working in partnership with the voluntary sector. That commitment is embodied in the Scottish compact. Cathie Craigie was right to raise the issue of compacts. The partnership between the Executive and the sector must be strengthened and compacts could also make a local contribution.

The Executive's experience of the Scottish compact has been positive—although no doubt it can be improved—and we recognise the value of such arrangements. We know that a number of local authorities have agreed local compacts with the voluntary sector and we think that more local authorities should do the same. We welcome the extension of compacts and the development of volunteering policies by many local authorities and NHS boards.

From contact with groups in my area, I know about the contribution that volunteers make. There is still bureaucracy at local authority and health board level that needs to be examined and challenged in order to make it easier for people to get services. That is not about providing services “on the cheap”—as Keith Raffan said. Rather, we should recognise that the voluntary sector can make a difference in a different way. It is about complementing and supporting, rather than replacing.

We believe that the community planning process will enhance the relationships between local authorities and public agencies operating at a local level. We are committed to working together with the voluntary sector, local authorities and others to strengthen and deepen those relationships.

We acknowledge some of the comments that have been made about infrastructure. We need to strengthen the infrastructure. As several members—including Johann Lamont, Linda Fabiani, Karen Whitefield, Cathy Peattie, Keith Raffan and Murdo Fraser—have said, core funding and stability of funding are critical if good organisations are to have the assurance to plan for the future and the ability to deliver consistent services.

We have made a commitment to strengthen the infrastructure of the sector; to review funding principles and processes; to promote volunteering, in particular by young people but also by older people—as Helen Eadie said, we should not forget the important contribution that many older people

make to helping others in our society; and to support measures to promote the use of new technology in the voluntary sector, including the establishment of a web-based portal.

We are strengthening the voluntary sector infrastructure, for example by doubling the funding to the national networks of councils for voluntary services and volunteer centres, and by funding key organisations such as the SCVO and Volunteer Development Scotland.

Helen Eadie raised the issue of mainstreaming. We are committed to promoting and mainstreaming voluntary sector issues across departments. That process will be reinforced and supported by a number of mechanisms and structures that are aimed at improving policy making. Those include the Scottish compact, to which I have referred, and the Scottish Executive/voluntary sector forum, which plays a crucial role in improving dialogue and understanding between the Executive and the sector.

The provision of a broad range of funding schemes, both direct and indirect, is critical. The Executive's schemes are publicised in our leaflet “A Guide for the Voluntary Sector to Scottish Executive Grants”, which is updated annually. Linda Fabiani asked about section 9 and 10 funding. Section 9 grants are being reviewed and no money is available for new grants at this time. Existing projects have been continued for one year. Generally, we are committed to making decisions on grants three months before they are due to begin. The system is not perfect, but we are working to improve it. We will bear in mind the points that Linda Fabiani made.

We are sponsoring Volunteer Development Scotland to manage free SCRO checks—which were mentioned during the debate—for volunteers in the voluntary sector. A number of speakers—Lyndsay McIntosh, Robert Brown, Karen Whitefield and Donald Gorrie—referred to problems with regulation and bureaucracy.

Robert Brown rose—

Hugh Henry: Unfortunately, I do not have time to take an intervention.

Johann Lamont raised the issue of regulation and training. We need to avoid having excessive regulation and interference, but we must impose minimum acceptable standards to ensure that organisations have an infrastructure that is capable of giving security not just to those who volunteer and provide services, but to the recipients of services. A balance needs to be struck.

Providing financial resources for the services that I have mentioned is one of the main ways in

which the Executive supports the voluntary sector. We have made available increased resources across the board. We have increased funding for voluntary sector infrastructure from £4 million to £10 million, and for direct grant funding from £23 million to £39 million annually. That money is in addition to some £304 million that is made available indirectly to the voluntary sector through Communities Scotland, NHS boards and local enterprise companies, for example.

We have made a commitment to funding for the voluntary sector. We recognise that there is a problem with short-term funding and that more stability and longer funding cycles are needed. We hope that local authorities and others will emulate our example. We need to take a strategic view of funding.

Today, we are publishing our response to the consultation on our review of direct funding of the voluntary sector. That response sets out our plans to reform the arrangements for direct funding of the voluntary sector in Scotland. We shall adopt a number of principles and processes to make it easier for voluntary organisations to apply for funding.

Because of lack of time, I will unfortunately have to skip some of the issues that have been raised. Those include crucial issues such as the funding and supporting of organisations in rural areas. Johann Lamont, Linda Fabiani and others referred to the contribution that is made by the social economy and we will consider that issue closely. I have worked in the social economy, know what contribution it makes and have a personal interest in it. I will be pleased to follow that through. Members have referred to the need to provide support for volunteering and I will not repeat the points that have been made.

The Executive has an ambitious but realistic vision for the voluntary sector and we are making a firm commitment to back that vision with active support. The sector is vital to our shared social justice agenda. It engages people in society and provides opportunities for the expression of active citizenship. We now have the opportunity to build on a good working relationship with the sector.

I will finish by putting on record my appreciation, and that of colleagues such as Margaret Curran and Iain Gray, for the hard work, commitment and energy that the voluntary sector has brought to our work. We thank the sector for that. The committee's report has played a major part in giving proper recognition to the sector's very valuable work throughout Scotland.

11:54

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): I pay tribute to Johann Lamont for valiantly introducing

the debate, despite the fact that she is feeling rather wonky today. I welcome our Shug to the social justice team and welcome back Margaret Curran from her swearing-in session. It has been a long, slow struggle to the top for her, but she has finally made it.

Like other speakers, when taking evidence from around Scotland I was impressed by the passion, enthusiasm, commitment and professionalism of people working in the voluntary sector. As Johann Lamont indicated, the sector is diverse and flexible. Despite obvious financial constraints, it delivers first-class services through trained and highly motivated staff. As Johann added, the heart of the sector is vital. It must not be patronised, but it should be celebrated and taken seriously.

The issue of funding played a major part in today's debate. Johann Lamont talked about the need for honesty when considering what the sector requires to function effectively. Real costs must be considered and core funding is crucial. I was heartened by much that the minister said on that issue.

The voluntary sector's need for moneys to cover salaries, training, security, sick pay, pensions, heating and lighting costs, and, of course, inflation must be recognised. Keith Raffan talked about not reinventing the wheel and not—*[Interruption.]* It would help if I could read my writing—I should have been a doctor rather than a politician. Keith said that the voluntary sector does not exist to fund the statutory sector "on the cheap". He went on to say that we need to share best practice in the voluntary sector to avoid duplication and to ensure continuity. I am sure that all of us echo those sentiments.

Linda Fabiani raised the issue of section 9 and 10 grants, and Hugh Henry dealt with that adequately. She also talked about the worry and pressure that voluntary groups feel when funding periods draw to a close and redundancy notices have to be sent out. Funding streams are too insecure and in many cases funding is unrealistic. Time scales for funding bids are unrealistic and great strain is placed on resources and the skills of people who work in the voluntary sector. Although innovation and new initiatives should not be the sole criteria for funding, groups should not be funded just because they always have been. That point was made in evidence that the committee took at Inverness. A balance needs to be struck.

Concerns were raised in evidence that funding streams are too insecure to guarantee loans and benefit from the social investment Scotland scheme. I hope that the Executive will consider that issue in more detail.

Cathy Peattie talked about groups having to reinvent themselves and develop skills in

response to continual changes in criteria for funding. I hope that we will tackle that waste of resources.

Donald Gorrie said that funding was “an absolute disgrace” and that the sector is often seen

“as a competitor and possibly even as an enemy”

by organisations in the statutory sector. We must take that point seriously.

Robert Brown proposed the establishment of a voluntary sector development fund. That seems like a robust idea.

Brian Monteith touched on the New Opportunities Fund. It is heartening to see that the fund intends to implement the committee's recommendation that three to five-year funding periods be introduced, to enable realistic planning and the establishment of management provisions. Of course, the fund could have gone further to ensure that the poorest communities benefit disproportionately from resources. Later in my speech, I will take issue with Mike Rumbles on that point.

A number of members referred to the independence of the sector and I am pleased that the minister recognised that. There will always be a trade-off between an organisation having the independence to follow its own agenda and the reality of contracting with those who fund groups. The role of an effective and efficient management committee is important in ensuring that statutory agencies are aware of the voluntary sector and the culture in which it works.

It is fundamental that there should be equality of esteem between the sector and the Parliament. The Parliament has already established a compact with local government to ensure equality of esteem between both parties. Perhaps that should be widened to include the voluntary sector.

Lyndsay McIntosh expressed concern about the possibility of parts of the voluntary sector being absorbed into government. She talked about how the sector could become beholden to public agencies. I echo the point that voluntary organisations should be seen as partners, rather than subjects.

In Inverness, the comments were made that the compact is invisible, that it might as well not exist and that it is not worth the paper that it is written on. That concerned me and other committee members; we should address how the compact is working on the ground. The concern was emphasised that if a project is successful, local authorities or other agencies might take over the work when funding is exhausted and might take the credit for success.

Mike Rumbles talked about rurality. He seemed to have the hump about not having been notified of the Social Justice Committee's visit to his domain. However, I have here a copy of a letter that was sent to Mr Rumbles on 9 October. The letter says:

“Dear Mike Rumbles

Social Justice Committee – Voluntary Sector Inquiry – Site Visits

You may be aware that the Scottish Parliament's Social Justice Committee is undertaking an inquiry into the Voluntary Sector ...

A series of fact-finding visits is planned to each of the 8 Parliamentary regions and I am writing to advise you that members of the Committee will be visiting **Aberdeen on Monday 22 October** to meet with local groups and experience what is happening “on the ground” ... This letter is to inform you that this visit is being held in your area.”

It supplied details of who to contact if Mr Rumbles wanted further information—sorry, Mike.

In the Highlands and Islands, but not in Aberdeen, the concern was expressed that peripherality was not recognised. In Inverness, the sector was described as

“woefully inadequate to meet the demands of the region.”

Concern was expressed that a flat rate of £60,000 for strategic planning—divided into eight or nine groups because of the geography of the Highlands and Islands, compared with two or three groups in less rural areas—made it impossible to fund the sector Highland-wide.

Concern was also expressed that the committee was a central belt group and was not concerned about rurality. I would like Mike Rumbles to focus on the committee's recommendations on page 17 of the report, which state:

“(i) The Scottish Executive should clarify how the problem of rurality is dealt with in funding arrangements for the Voluntary Sector.

(ii) The Scottish Executive should explore alternative ways of communication for voluntary sector organisations in rural areas, and whether there are more suitable ways of providing services in these areas.”

Mr Rumbles: I am happy to come to the substantive point of my speech. I was making the point that the report was a missed opportunity. Although the report says that the Scottish Executive should “clarify”, it does not make any suggestions arising from its investigation. It has come up with nothing, except to ask the Executive to investigate.

Mr Gibson: With respect, we based the report on the evidence that we took. We wanted to give the Executive the opportunity to come back on it. That does not mean that the subject will be done and dusted for all eternity. I am sure that other committee members will take on board the

comments that Mike Rumbles has made. There are no problems with considering the matter further.

Robert Brown focused on the regulatory burdens that are imposed on the sector and the burden that the national insurance increase will have on smaller organisations. He talked passionately—as he has done many times before—about the impact of legislation on citizens advice bureaux. He made a plea for legislation on debt advice services.

Other members talked about the lack of transparency in the regulatory framework, which we must address. Smaller organisations might find it difficult to be good employers that adhere to employment law. Staff in the voluntary sector often work longer than they are paid for and we must address that.

Positive comments were made regarding the voluntary issues unit; people said that there were good relations with the Executive. However, some felt that the local infrastructure was often weak, that resources were inadequate and that organisations were being dragged away from the objectives for which they were founded. The sector is keen to know not just what decisions local authorities make—particularly regarding funding—but why they are made.

Linda Fabiani mentioned social inclusion partnerships and Cathy Peattie talked about the need for black and ethnic minority people to be included in discussions on infrastructure.

Volunteering is not cost free and it is important to review the level of expenses that are provided to volunteers to attract people from socially excluded and far-flung rural areas—I address that point to Mike Rumbles. In many places volunteers are in short supply, not only in remote areas but in Lothian, which was mentioned in evidence-taking sessions.

The needs of disabled volunteers are not considered as much as they should be and we have to consider the possible divides between paid staff and volunteers and the fear that some paid staff have of litigation for negligence. We have to raise awareness of the benefits of volunteering and make an effort to retain as many experienced volunteers as possible.

The minister will be aware that there are concerns about the apparent lack of progress of the Scottish Charity Law Review Commission. The front-page headline of last Friday's edition of *Third Force News* said:

“Sector demands progress on charity law reforms”.

Councillor Jean McFadden, who chaired the Scottish Charity Law Review Commission, has made clear her frustration that a year after its report, which contained 114 recommendations,

was published no proposed legislation is in place. The SCVO echoed those concerns. Johann Lamont mentioned a timetable for making progress on that and Linda Fabiani echoed that point. I hope that the minister will take that on board.

At the Social Justice Committee's meeting on 12 December, the then deputy minister said with reference to the social economy:

“Stephen Maxwell from the SCVO is carrying out that review and will report to the minister later this month. The review will look at the contribution of the social economy to service provision and economic prosperity.”—[*Official Report, Social Justice Committee*, 12 December 2001; c 2722.]

Although the committee made it clear that it does not doubt the Executive's commitment to the review, concerns continue to be expressed by the committee, the SCVO and others about the continued delay in its completion and publication. As Johann Lamont pointed out, the co-operative and mutual sector is important.

In conclusion—you are giving me the cold stare, Presiding Officer—I will mention just one other thing. We must, as Johann Lamont said, avoid paralysis by consultation. Evidence suggests that realistic time scales are needed for organisations to canvass opinions. Linda Fabiani echoed that and said that it took the Executive, with all its resources, two months to respond to our recommendations.

On behalf of the committee, I thank Johann Lamont, for convening it so well; the witnesses, who gave up so much time, effort and energy to provide evidence; the ministers, for responding so positively to our recommendations; and Uncle Tom Cobbleigh and all.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The member did everything but declare the fête open.

New National Qualifications

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We come now, slightly late I am afraid, to the important statement by Cathy Jamieson on the new national qualifications. I ask those who wish to ask questions to press their buttons during the statement.

12:07

The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson): I should have realised on entering the chamber that any hope that we might be early was likely to be short-lived.

I am pleased to be here today. It is almost a year since Jack McConnell, as Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs, announced that he would take forward the recommendations that were made in the review of the initial implementation of the national qualifications. He announced that the Executive would consult on the future of assessment in the new qualifications and he also announced the setting up of the national qualifications task group to oversee the implementation of the recommendations.

Today, I intend to announce the outcome of the consultation on assessment within the new national qualifications and provide an update on how we are implementing the other recommendations. I will also talk about progress on preparations for this year's examinations.

It is helpful to remind ourselves of the principles of the national qualifications that the review identified. Those included: improving attainment across the curriculum; supporting equality of opportunity; enabling and promoting a high-quality learning experience; providing an integrated system of nationally recognised qualifications; providing qualifications that are matched to students' abilities and the requirements of users; enabling qualifications to be built up over time; and encouraging students to progress to the highest level that they can achieve.

The principles were strongly supported by those who responded to the consultation. In the consultation process, respondents were asked to consider two main options. In simple terms, option A suggested removing the compulsory internal assessment, although it would remain for those who wanted it. Option B removed the end-of-course exam, although again it would remain for those who wanted it. People were also asked to consider whether any other fundamental change was required or indeed whether they rejected all the options. An independent analysis of the responses has been undertaken and a report will be published as soon as possible. Everyone who

responded was keen to see the work load and undue pressure on candidates reduced, although there were different views about how that should be done.

Only a third of the responses, including very few from organisations and institutions, were in favour of option A. A small percentage favoured option B, or options A and B combined. We were therefore left in a situation where around half the responses favoured neither option. It was clear that respondents felt that the burden of assessment on candidates and teachers could be sufficiently reduced without changing the formal status of internal or external assessment. There was also a call for stability in the system and time to allow the new system to bed in. Many suggested the need to re-establish credibility in the exam system and to avoid changes that could cause any risk to the system. Many also said that, rather than introducing major change, we should allow the subject reviews to be implemented and improve the provision of support to schools and colleges. The view from young people who contributed to the consultation was that they wanted internal assessments to provide better information about their progress and a reduction in the total time spent on assessment.

Having considered all the views, I believe that we need to find a solution that significantly reduces the burden of assessment while maintaining standards of both internal and external assessment. Like many of those who responded, I recognise that the system will work only if we make substantial improvements to it and make significant reductions in the work load on candidates and teachers. I am determined to ensure that we make those changes. Work has already started and we intend to complete it. I am asking the national qualifications task and steering groups to carry out work along with the Scottish Qualifications Authority and stakeholders to deliver on our commitment to reduce the burden of assessment on teachers and pupils.

The work in progress will lead to a system that is rigorous and robust but also manageable for those who participate in it. The SQA has completed thorough reviews of the assessment arrangements for all new national qualifications courses. Its proposals have now been carefully reviewed by the national qualifications task and steering groups, which include representatives from teachers associations, further education, education authorities and employers. We have agreed to place strict limits on the time spent on each element of external, and particularly internal, assessment. In many courses, that will result in a reduction of well over 50 per cent in the time required for assessment. Particular care has been taken to identify and eliminate unnecessary duplication. For example, in science subjects, the

same practical skills were previously tested in every unit, whereas they will now be tested only once during each course.

Ministers have already endorsed the changes proposed for the first two batches of subjects. I am pleased to announce today that we endorse the proposals for all remaining subjects. Seventy subjects covering more than 200 courses have now been reviewed. We are working with the SQA to agree a programme of work to implement the necessary changes as soon as possible. Significant changes have already been made for this session and for courses starting in the summer. Those changes are all designed to reduce unnecessary demands and to simplify arrangements, while maintaining and improving quality.

In 17 subjects, the reviews have identified the need for more fundamental work to be done. Short-term improvements are being made where possible, but we have agreed with the SQA that it must take a careful look at course content and structure as well as at the relationship between courses and the details of assessment. That work will require time, but I want to get on with it as a matter of urgency. In geography, for example, the number and length of internal assessments at higher level will be reduced for next session.

We need to build in thorough scrutiny and review of all courses to ensure that we never again reach a point at which teachers and candidates cannot cope with the assessment demands that are placed on them. We will agree new arrangements with the SQA and work with key stakeholders to ensure that lessons have been learned and are acted on.

Assessment work covers more than just unit assessments and final exams. Teachers also carry out assessments to prepare evidence for appeals, prepare estimates of final awards and give feedback to candidates about their progress. In the responses to the consultation and the seminars that were run as part of the consultation process, the message came out loud and clear that we need to address that area.

We will continue to produce national assessment bank items to test whether individual units have been achieved and we will work with the SQA to provide support and advice to teachers on how to use those items. We will also work with the SQA and the task and steering groups to develop a toolkit of assessment items and support materials to help teachers to minimise the work that is associated with other aspects of assessment. The toolkit will include exemplar materials, marking schemes and advice on how to avoid duplication of effort, for example.

The national qualifications review also identified

the need to establish a better common understanding of standards. Examples of what has been delivered so far include exemplars of candidates' work, marker guidelines for seven subjects, including on-line training for markers, and feedback on appeals. Much has been done, but there is still more to do.

This year, the SQA, schools and colleges have worked hard to eliminate many practical administrative problems that are associated with assessment, such as ensuring that the data that are held by the SQA about each candidate are accurate. Centres have already reported a substantial reduction in the number of problems, but work on streamlining and improving systems and data exchange will continue. Much work has also been done on the recruitment of markers and markers' fees. A review of fees has taken place, which included a survey of markers.

I want to say a few words on the SQA's progress towards this year's exams. The exams started a couple of days ago—we all wish the candidates every success. Over the past few months, in the run-up to the exams round, the SQA has engaged with all key stakeholders—schools, colleges and candidates—and has listened and acted on concerns or issues that have been raised. The process has enabled the SQA to plan the arrangements for the exams round much earlier than ever before. All the required markers are in place.

Standard grade has been the subject of much press speculation over the past couple of weeks. Standard grade provides a wide range of high-quality courses that are suitable for secondary pupils of all abilities and interests. Access and intermediate courses provide a wide range of courses and units that are designed for learners of all ages, abilities and interests. Both types of course are suitable for secondary school pupils. Some schools are taking advantage of the new flexibilities to make careful decisions about which courses and units best meet the needs of their learners. That in no way undermines the value of standard grades. The consultation called for stability in the system. It is important for stability to be applied to standard grade as well as to the new national qualifications. Therefore, I do not propose to make any changes to the system of standard grades for the time being.

The consultation exercise showed that many people recognise the positive aspects of the current qualifications system, but significant improvements are needed to reduce work loads, while maintaining standards. We have already made major improvements. Today, I have confirmed the principles of the national qualifications assessment system and outlined the further work that will need to be done. We have

listened to and will continue to listen to teachers, lecturers and the management in schools and colleges who are at the front end of teaching. We have also listened to the young people who are at the front end of learning. Through working together, we will deliver improvements to benefit all those who have a stake in Scottish education.

The Presiding Officer: I have quite a long list of members who would like to ask questions, so we will move on briskly.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I thank the minister for her statement, which is in the way of a progress report on the normalisation of the Scottish exams system.

It is incredible that, having had a consultation exercise, the minister can come up with the conclusion that

“we need to find a solution that significantly reduces the burden of assessment while maintaining standards of both internal and external assessment.”

That was the conclusion of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's report on the SQA two years ago. We did not need to have another consultation in order to reach that conclusion.

I welcome the fact that progress is being made, but some key questions need to be addressed, three of which I will ask. First, as Ian Jenkins pointed out several times in the inquiry, one of the key problems with introducing the new exams was that teachers' fears about a range of difficulties were not addressed. Given that, how are we making sure that parents, teachers and young people are fully involved in the changes? Previously, changes took place despite the views of individuals in consultation exercises.

Secondly, given that we need to see the benefits of the changes rapidly—because, as the minister's statement admits, we still have an examination system that over-assesses and is not properly attuned to the needs of young people—when will that process be concluded? When will the Scottish exams system do what it should do?

Thirdly, on the question of the standard grade qualification, does the minister accept that one of the key issues in examinations is to make absolutely certain that employers, parents and young people understand what the certificates mean? The variation in the type of certificate that young people get is now wider than ever, so it must be right to ensure that we have a standardised approach. If experimentation is taking place in a number of schools, we need a national examination of the way in which that can move forward. Simply to say that we propose to do nothing means that the confusion will get worse. Will the minister consider examining the Scottish examination system closely to ensure that the present confusion about what results mean is not

made worse?

Cathy Jamieson: In responding to those points, I remind Mike Russell that I was a member of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee during the SQA inquiry and was aware of people's feelings at the time.

I hope that what I have outlined today will have addressed the concerns of pupils, parents and teachers. We have taken views from all the key stakeholders. The clear message to come from that process was that people wanted the burden of assessment reduced. In certain subject areas, we have been able to reduce the number of assessments from 12 to three and to reduce the amount of time spent on those internal assessments from around 10 hours to three hours.

We will see the benefits of those changes, which are taking place at the moment. We will continue to make progress in those areas. It is important that we reflect on the situation as we continue, which is why I want the steering group to continue to examine the areas in which there is further work to be done. More must be done on the relationships between the various levels of courses. In some subject areas, that will take some time to put right.

Mike Russell asked when the Scottish examination system would return to a degree of normality. For the vast majority of young people who are sitting their examinations, the system is providing a good-quality service that will provide the outcomes that they require. It is important that, at a time when young people are sitting their standard grade exams, which began only two days ago, we send a clear message that the work that they and their teachers have done to meet their expectations and their parents' expectations has not been in vain. The standard grade is an important qualification. Of course we will continue to review matters, but it is important to ensure that we get all the other elements correct, including the assessment processes, before we make any fundamental changes. I hope that Mike Russell will accept that.

Mike Russell also asked about people's understanding of the qualifications. Although I understand that the Confederation of British Industry has said that it is relatively relaxed about the range of examination certificates, there is an issue, particularly in relation to certain areas of employment, about the lack of understanding among parents and others who are confronted with examination certificates that differ from what they are used to. Clearly, we want to do as much as we can to give people information and advice about the qualifications. However, that is not to suggest that the fundamental principles of what we are doing with the examination systems are wrong.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): I thank the minister for providing me with an advance copy of her statement. I associate myself with Mike Russell's initial comments about the nature of the statement, which was more of a progress report than an announcement to the chamber of earth-shattering news.

The statement is welcome all the same. I welcome the progress that is being made in reducing the element of assessment, not just for pupils, but particularly for teachers. That reduction will be crucial if we are to attract more people into teaching. I also welcome the recent announcement—which was not mentioned in the statement—on returning examination scripts, which will contribute to greater faith in the national qualifications.

I have two questions for the minister. First, does she agree that it is crucial that those who leave school at the age of 16 are given the opportunity to obtain qualifications that are of real value? In that respect, external assessment has a key role to play in maintaining standards that will be recognised not only by those who gain qualifications, but by employers. There should be no diminution of external assessment in standard grade or higher still, which are now called national qualifications.

My second question is on the description and understanding of the national qualifications, which Mike Russell rightly asked about. I am troubled by the fact that most people—who are not involved in education circles and have not heard the minister's statement—will probably find the language of the national qualifications to be full of the jargon of an anorak. I am concerned about the morass of descriptions of our qualifications system: foundation, general and credit in standard grade; and access, intermediate 1, intermediate 2, higher and advanced higher in higher still. I would not be surprised to learn that not only pupils but many employers find those descriptions confusing. Although it is important to allow things to bed down and to get the processes right, does the minister agree that tidying up the language and synthesising the qualifications might be beneficial? That approach would allow intermediate 1 and intermediate 2—if they overlap with standard grade—to become standard 1 and standard 2. It would also clarify the qualifications that are available. That would help the credibility of our examination system and benefit pupils and employers.

Cathy Jamieson: Brian Monteith said that my statement was, in a sense, a progress report. The nature of the SQA's problems, which we all witnessed not so very long ago, was such that it was important for me to give a progress report at this time. I hope that people will accept that the

appropriate way for me to do so was by way of a statement and that that approach was part of being accountable, which is important.

It is important for young people who leave school at the age of 16 to do so with qualifications that they and their parents, potential employers and colleges know the value of. Part of the reason why I believe that it is important for me to give a statement while young people are sitting their exams is that it allows me to give the clear message that the qualifications that they leave school with are valuable and are understood by employers and others. We are not seeking to undermine the examination process in any way.

I take on board Brian Monteith's question about whether we are all anoraks for understanding the national qualifications. I have found in my discussions with young people that they are invariably far more informed about the qualifications and use the jargon much more often than even those of us in the chamber who are anoraks. As I am keen to try to eliminate jargon, we may have to consider how we explain the processes in future. That is an important point.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I welcome the direction that the statement takes. It was a big statement and its details require more consideration than we can give them today.

I am pleased that the consultation is producing results. I especially welcome the repeated commitment that the burden of assessment and administration will be reduced further. As has been said, the minister has given us a progress report; she has acknowledged that it is a progress report and it is important that that should be recognised.

I also welcome the acceptance that, as far as subjects are concerned, one size fits all is not what we are about and that some subjects need further consideration. The minister has accepted that the approach should not just be a global one without real consideration of the issues.

I am still worried that we have a system in which assessments get in the way of real teaching and learning. We will have to wait and see how the system works, but there might still be inappropriate and superfluous unit assessment. I hope that that can be reconsidered. We have made a step in the right direction and I hope that the issue will be part of the continuing national debate on education.

My question is simple and I know the answer before I ask it—the answer will be yes. Will the minister guarantee that she will listen in person to teachers and pupils in their response to the statement? There are always glitches and there are always times when we think that we have done the right thing but it turns out that we have

not. Will she listen carefully and be prepared to shift on the issues? I hope that she will not rely solely on advice that is channelled through organisations, but listen to the people on the ground. Will she confirm that the statement is a stage in a continuing process that will make a difference in the classroom?

Cathy Jamieson: I am happy to reassure Ian Jenkins that I will listen to teachers and young people. He knows that, when I visited his part of the world yesterday, I took considerable time to listen to a range of people who are involved in education, including some talented young people. I assure him that we will continue to progress in consultation with all stakeholders.

I also reassure him that assessment is for a purpose. One of those purposes is to aid a young person's learning. Young people were clear that they wanted feedback from assessment that would aid their future learning. We will attach importance to that view.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I welcome the statement and agree with the minister that the work has to be advanced as a matter of urgency.

I have two points to raise. First, I agree with the minister that a qualification has to be seen as valuable. The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee is carrying out a review on the Scottish credit and qualifications framework. Does the minister agree that qualifications have to be portable as well as valuable? People have to be able to carry their qualifications into the next level and into lifelong learning. It is important that all young people feel that their qualifications can be taken with them as they progress up the ladder. What are the minister's views on that?

Secondly, will the minister be a wee bit more specific about the work on markers' work loads and how recruitment is progressing?

Cathy Jamieson: Again, I am happy to reassure Marilyn Livingstone about portability. Obviously, it is important that we try to set a framework for children in school whereby they can move into lifelong learning at various stages and build on the work that they have already done. I am happy to discuss that further with the member as we progress.

It is useful to note that this year the SQA has been able to recruit the required number of markers earlier in the process than was the case last year. The people are in place. We gave a commitment to review the markers' work load and to consider their fees. This year, we are considering the work that markers undertake during the year and, on the basis of what we find, we will make proposals that will have implications for the future. We must do that in a considered

and studied way so that we can get things right in future.

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Given the recent recognition of the stress levels that many teachers face, what priority is being given to agreeing the new arrangements with the SQA so that, in the minister's words,

"we never again reach a point at which teachers ... cannot cope"?

Cathy Jamieson: I am happy to reassure Irene McGugan on that issue. On my visit to the Borders yesterday, I found it interesting to note that some young people identified that it was not in their interests to have stressed teachers. I hope that I have given a clear message, but I will state it again. We are trying to reduce unnecessary burdens and to avoid duplication of effort, as that causes problems for teachers and young people.

A considerable amount of work is going on. My colleague Nicol Stephen has been progressing several issues with the SQA and he will continue to do that. We seek to ensure that we all work together and that the improvements that we desire are delivered. We will keep a close watch on that.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I welcome the statement about the reduction in assessment, particularly the reduction in internal assessment. I want to ask about the relationship of assessment to teaching and learning, which is an issue that I have raised before. I noted Brian Monteith's remarks about the return of marked scripts. I urge the minister to proceed with the use of marked scripts for the professional development of teachers. As a former marker, I know how much the study of marked scripts helped me to teach in the classroom by helping me to identify the kind of errors that pupils made.

Cathy Jamieson: Sylvia Jackson's contribution was helpful. I know that she takes a keen interest in the matter and I will be happy to pursue it. I would be keen to hear from her about any other issues that we might want to consider.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I was interested in the minister's comments on standard grades. Will she confirm that she is content for individual schools to decide for themselves which exams—whether higher still or standard grades—to present candidates for?

Cathy Jamieson: The flexibility that schools have means that that option is available to them. A number of schools have taken up the option over a period of time. That has often been done on a subject-by-subject, rather than on a whole-school, basis. I expect that any decision to pursue that option will be preceded by a full consultation with young people and staff, so that the decision is made in the knowledge that it is in the best

interests of the young people at the school in question.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I remind the minister that one of the main areas that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee identified in its consideration of the SQA was a lack of communication between the SQA and teachers. I ask that teachers be listened to and kept up to date with any changes, so that they will be ready for them when they occur. The consultation process is important because it is a significant element of communication. I also ask the minister to confirm that implementation will take place in time for this year's examinations, so that we will not experience a repeat of the fiasco that we had in the past.

Cathy Jamieson: Cathy Peattie has been closely involved in consideration of the SQA through the work of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and I know that she takes a particular interest in the consultation process. Consultation is important, because if we do not include all the key stakeholders in consultation, problems will arise, as has happened in the past. I give an assurance that the consultation process will continue.

We have kept a close eye on SQA developments and we have confidence that the mistakes that were made and some of the problems that were experienced have been addressed. A number of systems have been put in place and we are in a much better position than we were in at the same stage last year. We are well on track to deliver in this year's exams process.

Point of Order

12:38

The Deputy Minister for Parliamentary Business (Euan Robson): I understand that one or two members' votes were not recorded last evening. I have asked those members to check their cards, but I would like the system to be checked before this evening to ensure that it is working correctly.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): If you will be kind enough to provide the names of the members concerned and to indicate where they were sitting, I will make sure that the system is checked over lunch time. I do not wish to be unkind to Liberal Democrat members or to members of any party, but past experience has shown that human error rather than equipment error is usually responsible.

Business Motion

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is business motion S1M-3080, in the name of Patricia Ferguson.

12:39

The Deputy Minister for Parliamentary Business (Euan Robson): Before I move the motion, I inform members that it relates to business for the weeks that begin on 13 May and 27 May respectively. The later of those weeks is the week that the Parliament meets in Aberdeen. Although there is no plenary business for the week that begins on 20 May, I emphasise that that week is not a recess week. It is important to make that point in view of recent media coverage. To compensate for the absence of committee meetings during the week beginning 27 May, when the Parliament meets in Aberdeen, extra time is being made available for committees.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 15 May 2002

2.30 pm	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Executive Debate on the Scottish Fire Service of the Future
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business - debate on the subject of S1M-3076 Michael Russell: Scottish Criminal Record Office

Thursday 16 May 2002

9.30 am	Executive Debate on Investment and Reform in Health and Community Care
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motion
2.30 pm	Question Time
3.10 pm	First Minister's Question Time
3.30 pm	Motion on the Golden Jubilee
4.00 pm	Executive Debate on National Waste Strategy
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business - debate on the subject of S1M-2622 Marilyn Livingstone: Cross-Party Support for a Review of the Construction Industry in Scotland

Tuesday 28 May 2002

9.30 am	Time for Reflection
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followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by

Executive Debate on the Modernising Government Fund

11.30 am

HM the Queen's Address

2.30 pm

Executive Debate on Oil and Gas Industry

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

Wednesday 29 May 2002

9.30 am

Executive Debate on Alternatives to Custody

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm

Scottish National Party Business

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

Thursday 30 May 2002

9.30 am

Ministerial Statement and Debate on the Executive's Programme

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by

Business Motion

2.00 pm

Question Time

3.00 pm

First Minister's Question Time

3.30 pm

Executive Debate on Implementing the Cancer Strategy

5.00 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business.

Motion agreed to.

12:40

Meeting suspended until 14:30.

14:30

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Before we begin question time, I am sure that members will want to welcome the chairman and members of the House of Commons Select Committee on Procedure, who are in the gallery. *[Applause.]* I am sure that they are here to learn something to their advantage.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Research Parks (Ayrshire)

1. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to establish a research park in Ayrshire. (S1O-5136)

The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Iain Gray): This is a matter for the enterprise network. I understand that Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire is currently working with Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, Scottish Enterprise Lanarkshire, Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire and Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire to review market demand and supply of research-based accommodation for the biotech sector in support of Scottish Enterprise's biotech cluster. The outcome of the review will determine what additional physical investment is required to support the west of Scotland biotech industry, and it will help to position Ayrshire's Hannah research park in the regional market.

John Scott: The minister will be aware of the recently announced joint venture, called CHARIS, between the Scottish Agricultural College at Auchincruive and the Hannah Research Institute. Does he agree that those two distinguished institutions working in partnership can form a basis for the development of a research or bioscience park in Ayrshire? Given the significant number of job losses in Ayrshire, is he prepared to support that idea and to enter into constructive dialogue with all the partnership agencies involved to bring that about?

Iain Gray: We are already supporting the project. In fact, the Scottish Executive environment and rural affairs department is contributing more than £1 million to the CHARIS food technology centre. I am pleased to say that, only this morning, the Hannah Research Institute received a proof of concept fund award, which will be used to support a study of the preparation of novel milk protein fractions from skim-milk, acid or cheese whey. I am told that that process is likely to be of interest to dairy food, beverage, health care, biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies, so it is fair to say

that the work of the Hannah Research Institute is already supported.

I take Mr Scott's point about job losses. Nobody could describe Ayrshire MSPs as either shy or unassuming. At least three of them, including Margaret Jamieson and Irene Oldfather, have already been in touch with me on the matter. As I was plodding through my correspondence the other day, I discovered that Mr Scott himself has already written to me reminding me that my predecessor had agreed to visit Ayrshire to discuss those matters. I am happy to say that I will follow through on the commitment that she made.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the new minister to his post and wish him more support inside the Cabinet in undertaking his duties than his predecessor had.

Given the central importance of research to the success of the economy in Ayrshire and throughout Scotland, does Mr Gray recognise the fact that one company in Finland, Nokia, invests more in research and development than the entire Scottish economy, public and private? When does he anticipate that the Government's plans for research and development will bridge that gap?

Iain Gray: The point that I have made—perhaps not directly to Mr Wilson, but more or less on the same round of media interviews that we followed throughout the weekend—is that we are absolutely clear that Scotland's future lies in science and skills and in building on research and development.

We have the high-level strategy in place and we must examine what is required to ensure that the pipeline between the ideas and the marketable product is clear. The proof of concept fund is an excellent start and an example of the kind of thing that we must do. One of my priorities will be to consider what else we must do to make the research-based science and skills agenda a reality in the months and years to come.

Ayr United Heathfield Stadium

2. Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what the current position is on the Ayr United Heathfield stadium planning application in light of the passing of the 4 April deadline it set for the receipt of responses in line with court requirements. (S1O-5139)

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Hugh Henry): The six replies that have been received in response to the Scottish ministers' request for parties' views are currently under consideration.

Phil Gallie: I am disappointed that the minister cannot be more positive. Will he advise me what discussions the Executive has had with East Ayrshire Council and Enterprise Ayrshire on the

provision of a business retail park in north Kilmarnock? Will he explain to me the differences between having a business retail park in Kilmarnock external to the town centre and having such a business retail park in Ayr, which he opposes?

Hugh Henry: In the couple of days that I have been in post, I have not had the opportunity to go into all the planning applications that have been considered throughout Ayrshire. *[Interruption.]* I will get that done by the weekend. *[Laughter.]* I have no doubt that all the information will be considered properly when we come to make a decision. I am sure that Mr Gallie would not want an over-hasty decision.

Phil Gallie: It has taken 19 months.

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Hugh Henry: I have been in post a matter of days. I am sure that Mr Gallie recalls the criticism that he levelled at the then Minister for Environment, Sport and Culture about the short time that he was in office before the Scottish ministers took the original decision. The process will reflect careful consideration of all the available information. I will consider the matter properly with my colleague Margaret Curran and we will come to a considered conclusion.

Bell Baxter High School

3. Mr Keith Harding (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what issues the Minister for Education and Young People discussed with staff and board members on her recent visit to Bell Baxter High School, Cupar. (S10-5161)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson): Our discussion focused on the major building work that is under way and that will result in the school being located on one site.

Mr Harding: I thank the minister for that reply: that will be at some time in the future. She is aware of the deplorable state of the school at the Westport site and the traffic dangers that face pupils when moving between the two sites. Will the Executive consider a spend-to-save scheme to bring about a single-site school at an earlier date?

Cathy Jamieson: Mr Harding is aware that the matter was the subject of a members' business debate some time ago. He is also aware that a considerable amount of work has been done since then on the proposals to locate the school on one site. At a meeting on 29 April, the council confirmed its continuing commitment to doing that. My understanding is that most of the work that is required will be done in the next year or so. It is hoped to have most of the facilities on one site during 2003.

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): I thank the minister for fulfilling the commitment to visit Bell Baxter High School that one of her predecessors—Sam Galbraith—made to me. I am sure that, during that visit, she saw the huts and buildings at the Westport site, which are in pretty much the same awful condition that they were in when I started there 30 years ago. Will the minister join me in congratulating the teaching staff and other staff at Bell Baxter High School on continuing to provide a high standard of education despite the appalling conditions in which they work and the problems that are caused by being on a split site? Does she agree that the completion of the project to put the school on a single site is essential to provide the best possible education and safety for the pupils?

Cathy Jamieson: I will reassure Iain Smith, who is the constituency member and who has campaigned on the issue for a number of years. The conditions under which the young people and staff are working are less than tolerable. That is not the quality of school environment in which we want people to learn and work in the 21st century. That is why we are committed to doing what we can to improve the school buildings.

I was pleased to hear about the work that is going on in the school and was impressed by the level of academic achievement and the work that is being done to support young people in the school who have particular difficulties. I commend the staff for working under those difficult conditions.

Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (Education)

4. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking on the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 as it affects education in schools. (S10-5180)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson): We are working in partnership with the Commission for Racial Equality, the Centre for Education for Racial Equality in Scotland and other relevant organisations to raise awareness of the duties of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and to ensure that schools and education authorities are able to carry out their new duties under the act.

Jackie Baillie: The minister will be aware of the view that, in order successfully to promote race equality in schools, a consistent approach to the monitoring of racial incidents across Scotland needs to be taken. At present, some authorities record racial incidents under other categories, such as bullying, so the true extent of the problem remains hidden. Will the minister commit to ensuring consistent monitoring across Scotland in order that we might properly address race equality in all our schools?

Cathy Jamieson: The member will be interested to know that I have met representatives of the Commission for Racial Equality in the past couple of weeks. We considered how to take forward a range of issues to ensure that racism has no place and cannot be tolerated in our education system or in our schools and that we continue to do whatever we can to end it.

From 30 November this year, education authorities will have to comply with certain things. They will be required to have a written policy for promoting race equality and to ensure that that policy is monitored and acted on. Through those measures, I am sure that we will be able to address the significant issues that Jackie Baillie raised.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Given the need to ensure that Scotland is a modern, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society, will the minister disassociate the Scottish Executive from the recent comments made by David Blunkett about asylum seekers and immigrants "swamping" schools and medical practices? Such comments are reminiscent of the racist remarks of Margaret Thatcher 20 years ago.

Cathy Jamieson: I am happy to reassure the member that the Scottish Executive will continue to work where it is appropriate to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers are given the services that they require in the relevant local authority areas. We recognise, however, that that is primarily a matter for the United Kingdom Government. I am of course in close contact with my Westminster colleagues on that issue.

Criminal Justice (Crimes with Knives)

5. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has plans to review the law in relation to crimes involving knives. (S1O-5142)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): Scots law has always regarded an attack with an offensive weapon as a serious aggravation of assault. Successive legislation has introduced tighter and more specific controls to tackle the carrying of knives and therefore to help the prevention of crime. A wide range of powers is now in force.

Existing legislation is robust and flexible in responding to the illegal use and carriage of knives. Where new types of offences emerge that are not covered by existing legislation, we are prepared to consider extending the statutory powers available to tackle the threat of violent crime.

Alex Neil: The minister says that the existing law is effective. Is he aware that in the Strathclyde police area during the last three years of the

period for which figures are available the incidence of crimes involving knives rose by 46 per cent? Is he aware that the justice department does not centrally collect statistics on the levels of prosecutions, fines and sentences relating to such offences? Will he now review the law, and will his department at least collect the statistics so that we can measure the success—or otherwise—of the existing law?

Mr Wallace: I am aware of the level of offences involving the carrying of knives in Strathclyde. Strathclyde police reported in January that recorded violent crime involving knives had increased substantially between October and the end of December 2001. In that period, 44,185 searches were carried out, resulting in 1,072 people being reported to the procurator fiscal. It is fair to say that that is the success of the spotlight and safer streets initiatives. Strathclyde police force has taken such initiatives to tackle the malaise of young people carrying knives.

I can assure Mr Neil that, because the carrying of a knife is an aggravation of an assault, any assault involving a knife tends to attract a higher penalty when a court sentences a person convicted of such an offence.

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (Ind): I can confirm that Strathclyde police force has been vigorous in acting against crimes involving knives, but it needs more backing from the minister. It is not just the carrying of knives, but the sale of the most aggressive types of knife that is the problem. Panga knives and miniature samurai swords are still sold, for example. Even if they are not overtly marketed as aggressive weapons, people can get away with having them. When they are arrested, some criminals claim that the weapons are simply collectors' pieces. Why not ban all such sorts of knife completely?

Mr Wallace: The Criminal Justice Act 1988 includes a power to ban the manufacture, sale and importation of specified offensive weapons. Fourteen such weapons have been banned in that way including sword-sticks, push daggers, death stars and butterfly knives. As I said earlier, I can assure Dorothy-Grace Elder that, if new problems emerge with specific kinds of knives, we are prepared to extend the categories if necessary. One reason why the law has been reformed on a number of occasions is that the attempt has been made to tighten up on the abuse whereby people carry knives. We are determined to tackle that part of the culture of violence.

National Health Service Boards

6. Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it next intends to review the future of unified national health service boards. (S1O-5173)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): Unified NHS boards were established as recently as September 2001. We do not, therefore, expect to spend the coming months reviewing their future. However, a longer-term review of management and decision making in NHS Scotland is now under way.

Mr McAllion: The minister will be aware that, during the acute services review, a number of health boards across Scotland simply ignored public opinion and imposed what they believed were unpopular but justified decisions. Given the fact that the minister becomes involved in such decisions only in limited circumstances, such as a hospital closure, has not the time come to introduce a breath of democracy into the running of the NHS? Should not we make those who sit on the boards directly elected and accountable to the Scottish people?

Malcolm Chisholm: Several important developments are relevant to that point. First, with the creation of the new NHS boards, we have extended the range of people on the boards. Secondly, last week we issued new draft guidance on increased public involvement in decisions about local health services. We have a whole agenda around patient focus and public involvement that we are determined to progress quickly so that we have far more effective public involvement. Thirdly, part of the review will be to consider how we can improve the accountability of local health systems to the Parliament and the Executive and to local communities. Those are the areas in which most people think that we should have a more effective engagement with the public.

The reality is that acute services reviews are inherently controversial. Sometimes people in one part of an area will want one solution and people in another part of the area will prefer a different solution. Simply having elected health boards would not get round some of those dilemmas, which any NHS board would face.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for the health service in Scotland? Will he give early and favourable consideration to holding a public consultation on Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board's innovative proposals for a single integrated health service organisation?

Malcolm Chisholm: Clearly, I have already given approval for the developments that are taking place in Dumfries and Galloway and we will all take a keen interest in what is happening. That is exactly the kind of model that the continuing longer-term review will want to consider. However, the fundamental message from us—and, I believe, from the public—is that we do not want structural upheaval and top-down imposition. We want to ensure that we involve patients and front-line staff

in leading change. That is the centre of our reform agenda.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I agree with the minister that the last thing that we need is permanent upheaval. Does he agree that the existing structure must be allowed to settle down?

In view of the increasing drugs bill—£5 million in Tayside this year, over £4 million in Fife, and similar experiences in all health boards throughout Scotland—will the minister consider the proposal that has been made by some health board chief executives about the central funding of the drugs bill? That proposal, which has been made because of the high increases, might avoid an increase in postcode prescribing.

Malcolm Chisholm: At the moment, the drugs bills are part of the general allocations to boards. That fact was welcomed during our very positive debate on primary care two weeks ago because that allows connections to be made between the drugs budget and other developments in primary care. I do not think that there would be widespread support for the proposal that Mr Raffan mentions, but I will consider it further if it is a definite suggestion.

Child Poverty

7. Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking in order to reduce child poverty. (S10-5165)

The Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): We are taking steps to tackle the causes of child poverty through our early intervention policies to ensure that every child has the best start in life. We are also taking steps to reduce child poverty by giving parents real opportunities to increase their incomes. We are getting more parents into work through support for new deal programmes, by providing affordable child care and by supporting education and training programmes. That is underpinned by the work of the UK Government, which is modernising the tax and benefits systems to make work pay.

Mr Gibson: I thank the new Minister for Social Justice for her reply. Will she explain why, given that the Executive uses the same definition of poverty as do other European Union nations, child poverty stands at a scandalous 30 per cent in Scotland, which is an increase on last year? That compares with 2 per cent in Sweden, 4.5 per cent in Denmark and 8.3 per cent in Finland. Our figure is higher than that of any other EU nation. Will the minister concede that unless the Parliament gains the fiscal clout that is needed to eliminate child poverty, the Executive will remain powerless to ensure that every Scottish child grows up in a poverty-free environment?

Ms Curran: Kenny Gibson asked several questions to which I can give detailed answers, but I will begin with his last point. I have heard nothing from the SNP that could challenge the work on child poverty that the UK Government, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Executive do.

I will deal with Kenny Gibson's statistics, because an important point in the child poverty debate must be understood. From 1996 to 1997, the figure fell from 34 per cent to 30 per cent—Kenny Gibson referred to that figure. However, he did not draw out two points that should be understood. The gap is in the context of rising incomes. Incomes in Britain have risen by 13 per cent since 1997. That context explains why we still have a gap.

We are making even greater progress with the poorest children and the figure has fallen by another 5 per cent. The absolute figures have shown a 13 per cent fall since 1997. In absolute terms, we are making real progress. We are benefiting all Scotland, but we acknowledge the gap. We will take determined action to tackle child poverty.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): Does the minister agree that, in tackling poverty, it is not enough to improve family income alone? We must also widen the opportunities that are open to families. Will she tell us the Executive's proposals for doing that?

Ms Curran: Child poverty is not just about a lack of income. The grip of poverty is so severe that it shows itself in other places. That is why we have invested £1.6 billion in housing in Glasgow to begin to tackle dampness, which affects people who are in poverty. That is why we have record levels of investment in the health service, because poverty affects health. That is why literacy and numeracy are part of our four key educational priorities. We have taken decisive action on several fronts to tackle poverty.

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): Would not it be more beneficial to seek to reverse Gordon Brown's decision to increase employers' national insurance contributions to allow businesses to grow and to employ more people, which would have the knock-on effect of reducing child poverty?

Ms Curran: No. That would be inappropriate. We are working in partnership with the UK Government on the working families tax credit, the new child tax credit, and the minimum wage, and we are taking action on several fronts. We are taking action on the absolute number of children in poverty. Child benefit is being increased. We are turning the situation around and reducing the gap. We will continue to reduce the gap through the

chancellor's work and the Executive's work.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Given that the rate of reduction of child poverty is woefully unacceptable—I hope that the minister has the honesty and integrity to accept that—will the minister join me in condemning the suggestion from Tony Blair's office that the child benefit of families whose children are apparently or allegedly persistent offenders should be cut? Does she reject that idea as completely and utterly unacceptable?

Ms Curran: Mr Sheridan has pre-empted a question that I am to be asked later, but I will be happy to deal with the matter later, too.

No one in the Executive will be satisfied while any children live in poverty. I give my absolute commitment as the new Minister for Social Justice that that will be one of my top priorities. It is absurd to dismiss all that the Executive does, all the action that it has taken and all the improvements that it has made, but that does not mean that we are complacent about the existing numbers.

I understand that we have no firm proposal on the idea that is in the media. I do not know how we would pursue the matter. We will need to see proposals.

European Union (Scottish Representation)

8. Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will be represented at the meeting of education ministers from European Union countries and applicant states, which is to be held in Bratislava in June. (S10-5137)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson): At the Bratislava conference of European ministers, the interests of all parts of the United Kingdom will be represented by the UK delegation, which will comprise the Minister of State for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education and the Minister for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland.

Michael Russell: Perhaps the minister could remind the delegation that Scotland has a different educational system. The minister could also get out a bit more—for example, she could learn from a delegation from the Parliament in Bremen, which is visiting the Scottish Parliament today. The delegation is here to look at the experience of Scotland and the European city of culture work that has been undertaken in Glasgow. Would the minister not find it appropriate to go to Europe to talk and learn about education, rather than to be spoken for?

Cathy Jamieson: Once again the SNP has embarked on its usual rant and is attempting to

make a constitutional issue out of children's education. It is absolutely clear that the Scottish Executive has an input into all the delegations that go to Europe. In the past, the delegation has included members of the Scottish Executive and I have no doubt that it will include Scottish Executive members in the future. I receive regular updates and am in regular contact.

I am delighted to be out and about in Scottish schools, finding out about the good work that is going on. I work with my colleagues to make continual improvements to the standard of education in Scotland.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

At any future meeting of European education ministers that the minister might attend, will she take the opportunity to discuss with the Danish education minister the scheme that operates in Denmark, whereby any group of parents can come together to establish a school, which—provided that there is a minimum of 28 pupils—receives state funding? Would the minister consider a pilot scheme for Scotland along those lines?

Cathy Jamieson: I am interested to hear of any initiatives that are taking place in Europe, or in other parts of the world, which would help us to examine the future of education in Scotland. That is why we launched the national debate. I am sure that various people will submit their views in the course of that debate.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):

Does the minister agree that the role of our young people is central to the European education agenda? Will she join me in welcoming the hundreds of schoolchildren who have attended the Parliament today to celebrate Europe day? Does the minister agree that by involving our young people in our work, the Scottish Parliament can play an important role in promoting Scotland in Europe and in promoting Europe in Scotland?

Cathy Jamieson: I am delighted to welcome the young people who are here. I commend the Parliament's European Committee on its initiative. I am particularly delighted to welcome the young people from Ardeer Primary School, which is my local primary school and which provided my son with a good education. Such initiatives will produce young people who are interested not just in the Scottish Parliament, but in world affairs. We will be able to leave Scotland in their hands in the future.

Supervision Costs

9. Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to recover the supervision costs in respect of Steven Beech from the appropriate authorities in England. (S1O-5151)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):

The overriding consideration in such cases must be the protection of the public and I am satisfied that the arrangements that have been put in place are robust. That consideration underpins the reciprocal agreement on the cross-border flows of offenders that applies in the present circumstances. Our view is that Scotland does well out of the current funding arrangements and there are no plans to change them.

Brian Adam: Is the minister satisfied with the appropriateness of an arrangement that allowed Cambridgeshire police to export the problem of Steven Beech to Scotland for the sum of £80, as a result of which costs were incurred that allegedly reached £200,000? I am disappointed that the minister thinks that the current arrangements are appropriate. There must be scope for further discussion with the minister's colleagues south of the border about how we deal with persistent sex offenders.

Mr Wallace: It was not a case of Cambridgeshire police exporting anyone. Steven Beech is not subject to any statutory supervision requirement and is therefore free to reside wherever he chooses in the United Kingdom. It is fair to point out that in accompanying Steven Beech on his journey to Aberdeen, Cambridgeshire police acted in the best interests of public safety.

The immediate response in Grampian of the taking out of an appropriate order in Aberdeen sheriff court was also an appropriate response. The protection of the public is the important consideration. I am satisfied that the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire authorities and the Scottish Executive have acted properly in discharging our responsibility to look after the safety of the public.

As I indicated—although perhaps Mr Adam was not listening—there are cross-border flows and when an offender in similar circumstances goes south of the border, the Scottish Executive does not pick up the tab. In our assessment, the reciprocal arrangement is working well.

I would be interested to learn whether the policy of Mr Adam and his party was that we should have done nothing to address the interests of public safety that arose when Steven Beech came to Aberdeen.

VisitScotland (Meetings)

10. Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met VisitScotland and what issues were discussed. (S1O-5163)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mike Watson): I meet regularly with representatives from VisitScotland to discuss

various issues relating to Scottish tourism. I last met the chief executive at the Confederation of Passenger Transport conference on 2 May.

Ian Jenkins: What resources were made available to VisitScotland to help the tourism industry to recover from the crisis caused by foot-and-mouth disease? When the minister next meets representatives of VisitScotland, will he urge them—when they distribute their funding, whether directly or through targeted project funding—to recognise the impact that the disease has had, and continues to have, on the Scottish Borders Tourist Board and Dumfries and Galloway Tourist Board areas?

Mike Watson: The Executive made a considerable amount of money—about £11 million—available to VisitScotland as a result of the foot-and-mouth crisis. In the current year, we are making £4 million available and there will be a further £3 million next year. That money is for VisitScotland to distribute as it sees fit. I understand that, following representations from the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway tourist boards, VisitScotland is in discussion with the boards on how the money should be disbursed.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): In the context of the golf tourism strategy, will VisitScotland support the Scottish women's open golf championship?

Mike Watson: That issue is being considered. We are putting together a new major event strategy—with professional advice from a company called Objective Performance Ltd—which I announced in the chamber during the debate on tourism on 27 March. No decision on the Scottish women's championship has yet been made, but I will bear in mind what Mrs Brankin has said. If she wants to make separate representations to me on the issue, they will be welcome.

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): The minister will be aware of the discord within the golf sector over the eTourism joint venture partnership. Will the minister confirm that VisitScotland was not given any opportunity to consider any scheme other than a public-private partnership? Why was it forced to go down the route of a PPP scheme when that does not necessarily represent best value?

Mike Watson: It is not true to say that VisitScotland was forced to go down that route. The issue was mapped out in the tourism strategy that was published in February 2000. Discussions with SchlumbergerSema, the company involved in the joint venture partnership, have taken place on that basis ever since.

I had a meeting with VisitScotland's golf

promotions unit this week. On Sunday, I am meeting representatives of a golf promotions agency to hear their concerns. Everybody across Scotland who is involved in the joint venture partnership in tourism will benefit from the new website when it is established later this year. Many if not all of the problems that have been raised with me have been dealt with. The Scottish Tourism Forum, having considered those problems, has issued a statement fully backing the partnership.

Special Educational Needs

11. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has identified any benefits from awards made by the special educational needs innovation grants programme and how it intends to recognise and promote good practice in the education of children and young people with special educational needs. (S10-5158)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson): The SEN innovation grants programme has funded over 80 projects across the SEN spectrum. They have promoted good practice and delivered benefits through improving access to the curriculum, providing advice and support for children and families and producing SEN resource materials for schools.

I recently announced funding worth £5 million for a further 42 projects from April 2002. Those projects will promote positive partnerships between local authorities and the voluntary sector, help to develop inclusive practice in schools and assist children and young people with SEN, and their families, to be involved in the decisions that affect them.

Rhoda Grant: The minister will be aware of my concerns about the education of children and young people with autism. Will she undertake to ensure that SEN training for teachers in mainstream education is available and accessible so that they can better understand the needs of children with autism? Can she indicate how readily available to staff such training provision will be so that education is geared towards the needs of the child?

Cathy Jamieson: I am aware of the member's interest in autism. I am pleased to say that, as part of the announcements that were made, a total of £697,000 has been used to develop autism services. The National Autistic Society is running a project to examine training for professionals working in autistic spectrum disorders. The project will review the current training provision in Scotland, identify the gaps and develop a targeted national training framework. That project is in addition to the work that is already going on in schools throughout Scotland.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): Can the minister say where the Scottish Executive stands in relation to its policy to withdraw direct financial support to grant-aided special needs schools? Will she give a commitment that a decision on that will be taken before May 2003?

Cathy Jamieson: I am pleased to say that I can give the member information about where the Executive stands in relation to that issue. On taking up my post, I stated my wish to consider the proposals in detail. I am currently considering a report on those proposals. Information will be conveyed to the schools as quickly as possible. However, I want to have face-to-face discussions with the schools to ensure that we make the correct decision.

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands)

(SNP): Is the minister aware of the fears of the Dyspraxia Foundation and those working in developmental co-ordination disorders that such conditions are often ignored? Will she tell us how many of the grants that have been made went to projects in that field? Will she outline—either today or by letter if that is more appropriate—the Executive's strategy on dyspraxia, which affects children and their families?

Cathy Jamieson: I am well aware that Duncan Hamilton has taken a particular interest in dyspraxia. We have already taken steps to ensure that dyspraxia is addressed. We have produced a teacher's pack jointly with the Dyspraxia Foundation and we have held a training event for staff working with pupils with dyspraxia. I will provide the member with further detailed information on all the grants that have been made available and how they will affect those with dyspraxia.

Child Benefit (Truancy)

12. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive—with a sense of déjà vu—what impact any plans by Her Majesty's Government to cut child benefit for the parents of truants will have on child poverty. (S10-5169)

The Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): I understand that the matter is being considered by the UK Government but that, as yet, there is no firm proposal. We will monitor developments carefully.

Robert Brown: Does the minister agree that populist solutions to complex problems are no substitute for tackling the root causes of truancy and child poverty, whether they are peddled by the Prime Minister or even the SNP, which occasionally decides to muddy the waters? Does she agree that targeted action to support individual families and children with problems is required?

Can she say whether ministers are making any progress in ensuring that education authorities make speedy and effective educational provision for excluded children?

Ms Curran: Robert Brown makes some interesting points. I note that he referred to populist action, but we must be careful that we take popular action—we must listen to what communities tell us and be prepared to take decisive action. The poverty agenda is linked intrinsically to tackling crime. Poorer communities suffer disproportionately from crime and we must take action on their behalf.

We must also recognise that we will not serve the interests of vulnerable young people at all well if we do not take decisive action on truancy. Universal compulsory education is one of the great advantages of our society and is in the best interests of children. We should never collude with anything that implies something other than that. That is not to say that we cannot develop preventive measures and take comprehensive interventionist measures across education and social work to assist young people who may be slipping into trouble. We must be clear that sanctions may be appropriate at times, although they should not cut across child poverty measures. However, we must be prepared to consider all the options.

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)

(Lab): Will the minister join me in recognising the serious concerns of communities across Scotland about issues of public disorder, including youth disorder? Will she reflect on the fact that the main victims of youth disorder are other young people? Will she confirm that the Scottish Executive will consider any proposals, including financial sanctions, to protect communities from disorder?

Ms Curran: I re-emphasise that we would not do anything that we thought would cut across our child poverty measures, but we must take decisive action to tackle youth crime. As many people—Glasgow MSPs in particular—know, youth crime is a serious issue that we must tackle. Young people will be helped if we take action on youth crime. Brian Fitzpatrick is right to highlight that issue in the Parliament.

First Minister's Question Time

Cabinet (Meetings)

1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S1F-1879)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Next week, the Cabinet will discuss our programme of record investment in schools, hospitals, roads, courts and other public services.

Mr Swinney: On 31 March, Wendy Alexander said:

"I love my job. I'm committed to it."

Five weeks later, she resigned. What did the First Minister do to her?

The First Minister: First, Wendy Alexander did love her job, and she did it very well. Secondly, her reasons for resigning were spelled out clearly in her letter to me of last Friday morning.

Mr Swinney: That is all very well, but is not the real reason why Wendy Alexander resigned the fact that the First Minister overloaded her because she was not one of his cronies? Is the First Minister aware that his decision to create an enterprise, transport and lifelong learning post was described by a board member of Scottish Enterprise—Mr Ian Ritchie, who is one of the most respected businessmen in Scotland—as "completely and utterly barmy"? As a result, in a week of record business failures—with 240 businesses lost in Scotland so far this year—Wendy Alexander told *The Herald* that she

"can't get the growth issue on the agenda"

of the Cabinet. Is not it the case that the First Minister is more interested in settling old scores than in governing for the people of Scotland?

The First Minister: First, there are serious inaccuracies in that question. The leader of the nationalist party should refrain from inaccurately quoting anyone in this chamber, never mind an ex-minister of the Government.

Secondly, it is also wrong for the leader of the nationalist party to run down Scotland quite so much. There are figures that might have been entirely predictable as a result of last year's downturn in the electronics, farming and tourism industries, and because of difficulties in other sectors. Yesterday's figures on some business failures in Scotland might have been entirely predictable, but there have also recently been record figures for business start-ups in Scotland. There have also been much better growth figures than were predicted by the nationalist party, which has been trying to run down Scotland into a

recession for the past 12 months.

The strategy "A Smart, Successful Scotland" was championed by Wendy Alexander and supported by two Cabinets—the previous Cabinet and the current Cabinet—and is being applied consistently with the support of businesses and other organisations in Scotland. Last Monday night, Wendy Alexander and I met a number of senior managing directors, chief executives and chairs of companies who support that strategy. They said, above all, "Don't change the strategy. Keep it going. Make sure that we build a better Scotland tomorrow." Those people are right. The strategy is right. We intend to continue with it. All MSPs in the partnership on the coalition benches are committed to supporting that strategy in the years ahead.

Mr Swinney: That would all be very well if the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning had not decided to resign within the past seven days and question the whole direction of the Government. I remind the First Minister of some of his own words. He described Wendy Alexander as a minister with "commitment and expertise". What makes someone with commitment and expertise act in the manner that she did? Why did she decide to resign, then conceal that information for four months? Why did she make it public in a way that was so damaging to the Executive? Is it because Wendy Alexander is a uniquely spiteful person, or is it because she knows that there is something rotten at the heart of the McConnell Government? Is not it because she knows that the First Minister is a man who is more interested in operating like a cynical machine politician than he is in governing in the interests of everyone in Scotland?

The First Minister: Mr Swinney cannot hide the fact that he does not have an economics strategy behind that kind of abuse.

We have a strategy in Scotland to build the sort of smart, successful Scotland that will ensure that Scotland's growth rate rises in the way that it should in the years to come. The strategy involves boosting Scottish companies to ensure that they receive from public agencies the capital funds and back-up that they should have had a long time ago. The strategy involves ensuring that Scots have the training, development and skills to help them to cope and succeed in the 21st century. With 20,000 modern apprentices and over 50 per cent of our young people going into further and higher education, the strategy is on course.

This week, we launched the new science advisory committee, which will ensure that Scottish science and laboratories are up to date and that Scottish science is out there working in the economic community. In the past year, we launched Scottish Development International to

promote Scottish products internationally. In recent weeks, we have seen chambers of commerce and others praise the new business start-up strategy of Scottish Enterprise and the Executive. Chambers of commerce and others have said that the strategy is exactly what Scotland has needed for a very, very long time.

Politicians' jobs are not important; we are elected for a four-year term to carry out a job. Other people's jobs are important. Every member of the Cabinet and, I hope, everyone in the chamber, has a difficult job to do. However, the people who have the really difficult jobs to do are those who work on night shifts throughout Scotland, who earn minimum wages and must try to feed their families. Our job in the Scottish Parliament is to ensure that their jobs are more secure and better in the years to come. That is what we will set about doing.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): The First Minister might not be aware of the fact that last Friday, when other things were happening, business people gathered in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth to celebrate the 100th new business start-up in the area. Despite what other members are saying, will the First Minister note that business people in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth view the linking of transport, enterprise and lifelong learning as important to their businesses and to the future of the Scottish economy?

The First Minister: For months before I created the position, SNP members were calling for the Executive to link transport and enterprise more closely. I agree entirely with Cathie Craigie. We must ensure that Scottish businesses that are starting and that are trying to build up and develop their products, markets or work force have the support—not the interference—of this Government, to help them to grow and grow and grow. Those businesses need more than anything a stable policy and economy that will allow them to predict the future. The biggest challenge to those companies' stability is not changes of Executive ministers; rather it is the taking of Scotland out of the single market and the United Kingdom. We need to support Scottish businesses, not provide them with threats for the future, and that is exactly what we will do.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Question 2 has been withdrawn.

McCrone Agreement

3. Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether the implementation of the McCrone agreement is proceeding satisfactorily. (S1F-1893)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Yes. Good progress continues to be made with the

implementation of the agreement. The agreement is for the long term and has a completion date of August 2006. Successful implementation requires cultural change throughout the education service. The combination of investment and reform is already making a difference throughout Scotland.

Cathy Peattie: Can the First Minister give some assurance that all probationer teachers, including last year's probationers, will complete their probation?

The First Minister: I suspect that I need to cover three different categories of probationer in the answer to that question. There are those who, because they have recently graduated, will start their probation this year. The guarantee for them is that the new probationary system will work to secure them a place in a school, with a proper contract to go with that. They will complete their probation on time. Others are on the current two-year probationary period.

One of the great tragedies in education over the past decade is that a large number of young people and others have had to carry out their probation over four, five and sometimes six years in a variety of schools and at a variety of times. Others will have done a bit of their probation, but they will not have finished it. The agreement allowed for a subsequent agreement to ensure that those probationers get a special arrangement. I understand that that special arrangement is almost in place. It will involve those young people and others not having to complete the full two years, but having to see through some other conditions in the new agreement in order to complete a reduced time period.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I thank the First Minister for that assurance. However, people who are presently working on probationary contracts have been told that they will lose their posts so that new teachers can be brought in during the induction year. I would like to ask again the question that I think Cathy Peattie asked. Is there a guarantee that those individuals will be allowed to finish their probationary period and qualify instead of being turfed out to make room for teachers on the induction scheme? It would be absolutely wrong for them to be turfed out.

The First Minister: I thank Mr Russell for thanking me for my first answer. Indeed, I hope that he heard what I said, because I made it clear that we have been involved in discussions to secure that very agreement, to ensure that local authorities can deliver it in schools, and to ensure that Executive and local authority funds are available so that the agreement's implementation can be properly seen through. We understand that that agreement is almost in place. When it is, members will be the first to know.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): The First Minister said that implementation of the McCrone agreement is satisfactory. Surely he is aware that in the Labour-controlled East Lothian Council, £306,000 of the £512,000 that was delivered to implement McCrone has been diverted to another budget. Given the circumstances in East Lothian and in other local authorities that say that they do not have enough money, would it be helpful to meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and review the delivery of finance to support McCrone?

The First Minister: I am grateful to Mr Monteith for asking that question, because it gives me an opportunity to clarify the current position. As he knows, the deal that was reached early last year was never only about teachers' pay. It also involved significant change to and modernisation of the education service. That includes decentralised, more flexible and streamlined management; a new probationary and training system for teachers throughout their lives; new standards and a new system of teacher discipline to ensure that those who cannot teach any more are no longer in the classroom; a new system to supply more support staff to reduce bureaucracy for teachers; a significant increase in teachers' hours; and new flexibility in our schools. The agreement is being delivered in all those areas. I checked this morning and found that the negotiating team has not missed one deadline in securing implementation of the agreement. Local agreements between management and teachers unions are now in place in all the 2,900 to 3,000 schools in Scotland, which will ensure the decentralisation of the work and conditions of service and the flexibility of contracts that are so essential for the cultural change in the profession.

I am sure that East Lothian Council can explain its situation for itself. Indeed, Cathy Jamieson and I were very keen to hear about the position there and were both reassured this morning that that council has not missed one deadline and is on track to deliver the agreement. It is absolutely convinced that it will implement every element that it is required to implement. I assure Brian Monteith that I, Cathy Jamieson, the whole Executive and the local authorities and teaching unions at national level are all committed to ensuring that everyone complies and that the whole agreement brings about the revitalisation of Scottish education that it was designed to achieve.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian)

(Lab): From his visit to my constituency in January, the First Minister will recall that East Lothian Council is taking enormous strides in raising educational standards through annual education budget increases that average 9.7 per cent over the past five years and through a £35 million public-private partnership to upgrade all the

high schools in the county. Although I am grateful for his acknowledgement of the council's unequivocal commitment to the McCrone agreement, will he further acknowledge the council's close partnership with the teaching profession locally? Furthermore, does he agree that it is right and proper that services that are provided for children by different local authority departments should be fully co-ordinated, notwithstanding last night's hatchet job by BBC's "Newsnight Scotland" programme?

The First Minister: I do not wish to comment on any television programme: if I started doing so, I could be here all day. As everyone knows, the agreement was very important for Scottish education. It is vital not only that it is applied consistently throughout Scotland, but that it delivers the flexibility in our schools that will revitalise professionalism and improve teaching.

I know the quality of education in East Lothian. Indeed, I have sometimes been jealous when I visited some of the very high-quality schools in the area. One of the main reasons why a large number of people work in Edinburgh and live in East Lothian is that they have the opportunity of sending their children to some of those high-quality schools. I hope that East Lothian Council is aware of the concerns that have been expressed in the past 24 hours and that it will do all that it can to reassure local parents that the agreement is being implemented in East Lothian, just as it is being implemented everywhere else.

"A Smart, Successful Scotland"

4. Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland)

(Con): I should mention that my colleague Mr McLetchie regrets that he cannot be in the chamber. Sadly, he is dealing with the bereavement of a close personal friend.

I want to ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive's vision of "A Smart, Successful Scotland: Ambitions for the Enterprise Networks" will be affected by the resignation of Ms Wendy Alexander as Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning. (S1F-1891)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I thank David McLetchie for giving advance notice that he would not be here this afternoon.

In reply to Annabel Goldie's question, I say no. "A Smart, Successful Scotland" remains central to our vision for Scotland. We will continue to work with the business community and others to secure higher growth rates and sustainable levels of high employment for Scotland.

Miss Goldie: I thank the First Minister for his response although, unfortunately, given where it comes from, it has all the ringing conviction of me expressing a desire to enter the Miss World

contest. As an aspiration, that might fair take the breath away, but as an implementable strategy, it is utterly incapable of attainment. However, unlike the Scottish Executive, I know my limitations.

Will the First Minister explain how his intended implementation of "A Smart, Successful Scotland" will reverse the fragile state of Scotland's economy, given that since publication of the vision 15 months ago, business start-ups are, sadly, at an all-time low, the Scottish economy lags behind the rest of the United Kingdom and company failures have soared since the end of 2001?

The First Minister: I will resist the temptation to respond to the earlier part of Miss Goldie's question. [MEMBERS: "Go on."] Obviously I resist at the risk of seriously disappointing members.

It is important to recognise two things. First, members all know—anyone who denied this would be a fool—that last year was particularly difficult for the Scottish economy, especially in relation to agriculture, tourism and electronics, although other sectors were affected. It is important that we grow out of that difficult year and ensure that Scotland is stronger as a result. We must ensure that, in the long term, Scottish growth rates are higher, Scottish employment is more sustainable and that Scotland has the kind of culture in which people are prepared to take risks.

Secondly, if we want more business start-ups and we want our young people and other people who have to change employment to take more of a risk and have a go at starting businesses, coverage such as is given to those who fail in that enterprise is unhelpful. We must ensure that in Scotland we have a culture that encourages people to be confident enough to set up their own businesses. If they do that and we support them, they will sometimes fail, but when they get it right, our economy and society will be stronger as a result.

Miss Goldie: I applaud the First Minister's sentiments and agree that we should encourage such a culture. The difficult question that confronts the First Minister is whether the business community has confidence in his Executive to achieve that. Is the First Minister prepared to take real action by restoring the uniform business rate, reducing business regulation and effecting immediate investment in transport infrastructure, which would at least be an indication that the First Minister is capable of doing something better?

The First Minister: The uniform business rate is, quite correctly, pegged at the rate of inflation and we should maintain that position. We invest in—and we plan to increase investment in—the transport infrastructure. We do not have a direct role in some of the taxation and employment bureaucracy with which firms must deal, but the

Chancellor of the Exchequer dealt with many of those matters in his recent budget. I did not hear Annabel Goldie welcoming that, but I am sure that she did, then and today. We are doing what we can to ensure that there is minimal regulation, but we must be honest and say that sometimes regulation is right. For example, it is right and proper to regulate on health and safety matters to ensure that all firms look after their employees and their own interests in the longer term.

It is possible to ensure that we have successful companies in Scotland. It is important that we do not give the impression, either here or abroad, that that is not possible. It is possible to support companies that have been in Scotland for a long time, such as Rolls-Royce, which operates in the high-quality end of the market and produces a product that can be sold overseas. In recent weeks, we have announced that we are going to do that. It is also important that we attract smaller companies from abroad, such as Vestas. On Monday, I visited Vestas-Celtic Wind Technology Ltd in Kintyre. The company is creating high-quality jobs in that disadvantaged rural community and it is providing long-term stability that will make a difference. Those are positives in the Scottish economy. Let us talk them up instead of talking Scotland down.

Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): Following yesterday's announcement of the closure of the Grampian Country Foods chicken processing factory at Newbridge, with the loss of 547 jobs, will the First Minister outline what actions the Executive will take with local agencies to secure alternative employment for the work force in an area that has already been hit by job losses at Continental Tyres, Grampian Foods and Motorola?

The First Minister: I express my regret at the announcement of that closure and my concern—which I am sure is felt by all members—for the people who worked there and who will have to find alternative employment. Our immediate task is to ensure that they have full support in that endeavour. Executive officials are meeting the company at this very moment and will meet the trade unions soon. The normal, successful arrangements—the partnership action for continuing employment strategy—will be put in place early to secure the advice for the work force that will, I hope, give those people the new opportunities that they need.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes question time.

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): On a point of order. I do not think that the Procedure Committee at Westminster would be very impressed by the fact that, although six questions were lodged and in spite of the unfortunate

absence of the Conservative leader, we got through only three questions in 20 minutes. My colleague, Gil Paterson, had a very important question to ask. I suggest—as other members have suggested—that you should reconsider the time that is allocated to questions at First Minister's question time.

The Presiding Officer: I have some good news for members. When we move to Aberdeen, a slightly longer period will be allowed for questions. We will see how that goes. I also say—looking generally at ministers—that it would be helpful if we had shorter answers as well as shorter questions. They are full of good material, no doubt, but they could be crisper.

Nurses

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-3078, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on action to recruit, retain and value nurses, and two amendments to that motion.

15:33

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): The delivery of health services for patients requires a combination of sustained investment and reform—investment in staff, equipment, facilities and new treatments, and reform of ways of working and service organisation in collaboration with patients and front-line staff. Often, in recent weeks, I have seen and read commentators suggest that investing in capacity and investing in reform are two alternative strategies for improving the national health service. Investing in staff has even been portrayed as investing in a bottomless pit that would leave few resources over for reform. That is nonsense. At the heart of that nonsense is a real misunderstanding of what we mean by reform in the NHS. I shall say more about that in next week's debate.

Investing in staff is central to investing in reform. Front-line staff know their patients best; they know what their patients want and how they could make changes to improve their patients' experience. The key to reform is allowing them to do that. By "them", I refer to the whole health care team, and I thank and pay tribute to the invaluable contribution of every member of that team.

However, this is international nurses week. Nurses and midwives are central to the delivery and reform of both health care and health improvement. The central message to nurses from today's debate is, "We value you and we will seek to value you more and more in the weeks and months to come." There is no doubt that we need many more nurses in the NHS. Since 1997, there has been a rising trend in the number of qualifying nurses. I hope that that trend will continue when new national work force statistics are announced tomorrow. However, we must step up our efforts and ensure that we listen and respond to the needs of the thousands of nurses already working within the NHS.

That is why it has been so important to me to meet hundreds of nurses at the national convention that we held last November and at the six local conventions that we have held throughout Scotland during the past two months. That is why it is so important to me to continue to talk to nurses throughout Scotland. In the past few weeks, I have met emergency nurse practitioners

in Aberdeen; nurse endoscopists in Ayr; infection control nurses in the Borders; sexual health nurses in Edinburgh; nurses working with the homeless in Perth; and nurses on medical wards, surgical wards and in primary care throughout Scotland.

Tomorrow, in Inverness, I will have the privilege of joining others to celebrate the success of Scotland's first 11 family health nurses. That is an example of partnership at an international level, as the World Health Organisation is helping to test the delivery of a new model of care, which incorporates disease prevention and health promotion as well as caring for those who are ill. That offers exciting potential for the development of community health services in Scotland.

Following the national nursing convention in November, we drew up an action plan called facing the future, which is based entirely on views that were expressed at the convention. We established a strong national implementation group, called partnership in action, which I am honoured to chair. At the November convention, we announced £1.5 million for recruitment and retention initiatives. That was increased to £5 million at the first local convention in Glasgow at the end of February. At the Glasgow convention, I also announced the immediate funding of six return-to-practice schemes, which will enable 150 nurses to return to work in NHS Scotland. The funding will cover costs, expenses and child care; 60 of those nurse returners are already in place.

We are aware of the need to repair the damage that was done by previous short-sighted decisions to cut student nurse intakes; those are the life-blood of future supply. We have driven up student intakes; 10,000 more nurses will qualify in Scotland by 2005, which is 1,500 more than previously planned. As part of the facing the future initiative, I have increased intakes yet further. There will be another 250 extra students in this academic year. We have increased student bursaries by 10.4 per cent and there will be a further increase later this year.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Will Malcolm Chisholm give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: In a moment. I need to make more progress first.

We want all those who qualify to secure employment within NHS Scotland, if they wish to do so. We have therefore announced that we will guarantee a year's employment on qualification, from autumn 2002. There are potentially 1,500 newly qualified nurses due to graduate across Scotland by October; they will be the first to benefit from that guarantee. The most noticeable recruitment difficulties for nursing and midwifery are in certain specialities and geographic

locations. We know that those difficulties could be addressed largely by a more sophisticated approach to work force planning. In January, the Executive issued a consultation paper on our proposals for new work force development centres, as part of our positive response to the report of the Scottish integrated work force planning group, which is mentioned in the Scottish National Party's amendment. Of course, we are supporting that report and carrying forward its recommendations.

The centres will establish work force plans based on solid research and will deliver integrated work force planning, effective recruitment activity and better collaboration throughout the service. That is a central part of our wider work force planning strategy, which is now centre stage for us. A fundamental part of improved work force planning must be a better understanding of nurse work loads. I have announced plans to establish a group to undertake a thorough study of nurse and midwifery work loads, which will ensure that future work force planning is well informed and that the developing role of nurses is not accompanied by an ever-expanding work load.

Tommy Sheridan: My question relates specifically to nurses' bursaries. Given his experience of speaking at various conferences, the minister will surely accept that the biggest deterrent to recruitment of nurses is the level of remuneration and the penalties that young nurses face when trying to qualify. Ten per cent of very little is still quite little. Will the minister today commit himself to considering further increases to nurses' bursaries?

Malcolm Chisholm: There will be a further increase in bursaries this year. I am aware of the issue that Tommy Sheridan raises, and I am sure that it will come up at the special convention for student nurses that we will hold in June.

As well as improving recruitment and increasing future supply, we are delivering other improvements that will help to retain nurses and midwives in the service. We have doubled the number of nurses who will participate in leadership programmes, to ensure that every health board in Scotland will have nurses trained in clinical leadership who can provide effective leadership in clinical teams.

Our introduction of nurse consultants not only improves nurse career prospects, but ensures that nurses have more influence at a higher level in clinical settings. In recognition of the fact that nurses and midwives should be at the heart of planning and decision making for the NHS, I announced a few weeks ago that a nurse director should be appointed to each of the 15 NHS boards. I expect that to be achieved by the end of next month.

Nurses are important leaders of change. That is why we are doubling the number of nurses on leadership programmes. Today I can announce further measures to develop and support nurses throughout their careers. There will be a £1.75 million boost to NHS investment in skills development for nurses and midwives. That extra investment, on top of the money that is already being spent at local NHS level, will be a major step towards ensuring that all nurses get the continuing professional development that they deserve through their careers. We will consult nurses on the best possible use of that money in the interest of staff and patients.

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: Time will not allow me to take an intervention. I have only one and a half minutes left.

Flexibility is another key issue that has been raised at nursing conventions and elsewhere. Flexibility is about the NHS providing the care that patients want, at the time and in the place that they want it. It also about staff—in this case nurses—being able to find work that they want to do, at the times they want to do it, and in roles that they want and to which they are dedicated. We are committed to driving forward that agenda through training, spreading best practice and ensuring that the partnership information network guidelines on family-friendly working are implemented effectively.

Last but not least, I will address the issue of pay. Many of the hundreds of nurses around Scotland to whom I have listened in the past few months have raised the issue of pay. However, they have also mentioned continuing professional development, working conditions, work load, career structures and flexibility as issues on which they would like to see action. I, too, am concerned about pay. I am pleased that, since 1997, we have made some progress in that area through sustained above-inflation pay awards. However, I want to see further sustained progress on pay.

The agenda for change negotiations are taking forward the issue at United Kingdom level. I believe that most nurses support that. Nurses want progress to be made on pay alongside progress on service development. I agree with them. They certainly do not want the local pay that is supported by the SNP, which would set nurse against nurse and do nothing to solve the problems that we are addressing today. Because I know what the SNP's pay agenda is, I will not support the SNP amendment; nor will I support the Conservative amendment.

I move,

That the Parliament pays tribute to the vital contribution

made by all members of health care teams across Scotland but, in this International Nurses' Week, recognises the central role of nurses and midwives in delivering high quality patient care and supports the significant investment and action to recruit, retain and value nurses and midwives being delivered through Facing the Future and other initiatives.

15:44

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I thank nurses, midwives and health visitors for the enormous contribution that they make to patient care and the national health service. I also pay tribute to the Royal College of Nursing for its value nurses campaign. The wording of the Scottish Executive motion that we are debating today is a testament to the effectiveness of the RCN's consistent lobbying on many of the major issues that affect the nursing profession. I congratulate the college on placing the issue of recruitment and retention of nurses firmly on the political agenda.

Recruiting, retaining and rewarding nurses must be a key priority. Today there are 1,000 fewer nurses working in our health service than in 1995. There are 11,500 registered nurses who no longer work in the NHS. There are 2,000 nursing vacancies in Scotland—an increase of more than 500 since March 2000. The drop-out rate among nursing students is 25 per cent.

It is interesting that the minister raised the spectre of local pay bargaining. I spoke to nursing students at lunch time today and they expressed their real concerns about the number of newly qualified Scottish nurses who are lured away to England or further afield by the promise of more money and better career opportunities. That is the reality and the scale of the challenge that we face.

To be fair, the Government has taken some very positive initiatives. The announcement of the free return-to-practice pilot scheme for 150 nurses is a step in the right direction, but the scheme is open to only 1 per cent of the 11,500 nurses who could benefit from it. If we are to avert the crisis that primary care and acute care face in attracting nursing staff, free return-to-practice courses should be available to all nurses who wish to return to the profession.

The pledge to put a nursing director on every NHS board is a positive development, of which I know that nurses in England and Wales are envious. That step marks progress for nursing and the NHS. The minister is to be congratulated on abandoning the somewhat intransigent attitude of his predecessor on that issue.

There are issues on which much more progress needs to be made. If it is clear—and it certainly is—that the public value nurses highly, why do we reward nurses with pay scales that are lower than those of other professions? Their starting salary is

10 per cent lower than that of police constables and 11 per cent lower than that of teachers. When nurses are in education and training that prevents them from supplementing their income with part-time employment, which other students routinely do, why are they expected to survive on bursaries, which, despite increases, are unable to support a decent standard of living?

Why do qualified nurses face often inflexible working patterns with long shifts and unsympathetic rotas, which force them out of the NHS and into agency nursing where they can access the part-time working and flexible hours that they need? Why do many qualified nurses choose not to return to nursing practice?

Only today, the general secretary of the RCN said:

"to attract nurses and keep them for the long term, the government needs to invest seriously in the workforce through pay, careers structure and employee friendly practices."

We must work to increase pay rates for nurses to reward them properly for the work that they do, to level the playing field with other professions and to give us a competitive edge in our ability to recruit and retain nurses. Tackling low pay in the nursing profession is fundamental to addressing the crisis that it and the NHS face. That, and nothing else, is the SNP's agenda on pay—to improve the quality of pay that we give our nurses and to attract more people into the profession.

Nursing is a low-pay profession. A nurse's starting salary of £16,000 remains below the national average of £17,000, and the low-pay culture that exists at the start of a nurse's career continues even as promotion and length-of-service awards come into play. The majority of consultant nurse posts, of which there are fewer in Scotland than there are south of the border, are advertised at the bottom of the pay scale. If valuing nurses is to be more than rhetoric, it must mean tackling low pay in the profession and rewarding nurses for taking on expanded roles and increased responsibilities. I am sorry that the minister has chosen to see a hidden agenda in the SNP's amendment, because it is quite simply about rewarding nurses better for the work that they do. Without that commitment, I fear that the Scottish Executive's commitment is nothing more than rhetoric.

Flexible working is another issue on which the Executive has had too little to say, but which is a huge issue for many nurses who are in practice or seek to return to practice. Trusts find it difficult to offer flexibility, yet many nurses cannot practise without it. The huge increase in the number of agency nurse staff reflects that. Options such as self-rotas, in which nurses organise their rotas collectively to accommodate child care or other

difficulties, should be encouraged. In a profession that is 95 per cent female, many nurses need a level of flexibility that is not available. The flexibility initiative is a crucial strand of the facing the future initiative, which must seek meaningful practical solutions to the issue if we are to enable nurses to remain in or return to the NHS.

More must be done to improve opportunities for nurses' professional development. A third of nurses get no financial support from their employer for continuing professional development and nearly half get no time off for training. The fact of the matter is that the NHS needs nurses. It needs their skills, their input and insight, and their invaluable contribution to patient care, and it needs many more of them. Nurses are fundamental to the effective running of the health service. It is the Government's job to make nursing an attractive profession to draw new recruits into and to enable nurses to continue their career where they want to continue it—in the national health service.

Tackling low pay and delivering flexible working for nurses are not options; they are absolutely essential elements of a successful strategy to value nurses and value the NHS. I hope that we can reach some consensus in the chamber this afternoon on all those issues, because we owe nurses a great deal and all of us in this Parliament have a duty to start delivering for them in action, not just in words.

I move amendment S1M-3078.1, to insert at end:

"; notes that a newly registered nurse's salary, at £16,005, is 9.7% less than that of a newly qualified police constable and 11% less than that of a qualified teacher; believes that addressing low pay levels is central to addressing the problem of recruiting and retaining nurses; further welcomes the work of the Scottish Integrated Workforce Planning Group, and notes that the development of an adequately resourced workforce planning strategy is essential if NHS employers are to offer nurses the flexible working patterns and meaningful career paths that they are entitled to expect from a 21st century employer and that will enable them to continue working in the NHS."

15:50

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

Another week, another health debate, and this week another health minister, too. I welcome this debate on recruiting, retaining and valuing nurses, given that nurses provide 80 per cent of direct patient care. I must apologise, Presiding Officer, because I have to leave early to catch a train for the three-and-a-half-hour journey to Inverness, so I am afraid that I shall have to leave after my speech.

In speaking to my amendment, I note that the information and statistics division figures for 2000 show that nursing and midwifery staff numbers

have fallen by 244 since Labour came to power and that hospital nurse numbers are down by 740. It is interesting to note that the new nurse numbers are due out tomorrow, as the minister said, and it would have been more appropriate to have this debate next week in the light of the latest figures.

Understaffing and sickness levels lead to even more pressure for existing staff, which affects nurse retention and morale. That problem is exacerbated by the fact that half of school nurses, practice nurses and health visitors are eligible to retire within the next decade. That is serious in itself, but it is even more serious given the predicted demographic patterns for elderly people and the need for more care at home.

Too often we hear, as we heard from the SNP today, that the NHS is too rigid in employing staff, and nurses are no exception. However, I give credit to Highland NHS Board, which seems at least to be facing up to the issue. In last week's *Inverness Courier*, I noticed an advertisement for a research nurse at grade E for 15 hours a week, staff nurses at grade D for 15 hours and 20 hours a week, and a nursing auxiliary for 15 hours a week. That is the kind of flexibility and family-friendly policy that we have all been asking for to bring back the many trained and experienced nurses who are not currently working in the NHS.

I also noted the pay scales for a nurse at grade E—from £17,000 to £20,000—and I could not help noticing the post that was advertised at the bottom of the group, for an audio typist

"providing secretarial cover throughout the Directorate, moving between the General Office, Medical Secretaries Office, Clinical Genetics Department and Nursing Administration."

The salary for that full-time post was £9,000 to £11,000. Although I fully support the emphasis on recruiting, retaining and valuing nurses, let us not forget the whole NHS team, including essential administration, secretarial and laboratory staff. Let us bear it in mind that one of the Beatson consultants cited the fact that he had to do his own typing as one of the reasons for walking out. Nurses are at the forefront of breaking down restrictive practices and old-style professional boundaries. They are prepared to take on more responsibilities and are capable of doing so, but we should not take advantage of their good will and commitment to care.

Recently, more emphasis has been placed on specialist nurses for multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, asthma and diabetes. At a recent Health and Community Care Committee meeting, Dr Roberts, a neurologist from Ninewells hospital, stressed the need for more specialist epilepsy nurses for counselling and support. That would also help to free up consultant time for crucial diagnosis and assessment of new patients. However, it is a

matter of concern that 20 per cent of specialist asthma nurses do not hold the appropriate qualification. I welcome the additional money that has been allocated today for training, because we cannot expect nurses to take on more responsibilities without giving them the training and support that they need to carry them out.

Last week, nurse shortages in Orkney led to the proposal to close Macmillan House, which caters for terminally ill cancer patients, and St Magnus day hospital, which offers rehabilitation for patients such as stroke victims. In a large city, there is a larger pool of qualified staff for bank and agency nursing. In Orkney and other remote areas and islands, the flexibility simply does not exist.

The proposed closure has been averted temporarily, but the decision arose following staff resignations and retirements that coincided with training sessions for five nurses on family health nursing. I have spoken to the local member, who has stated his concerns and, I understand, has spoken to the Minister for Health and Community Care. I quote from *The Orcadian* on 25 April, when the Stromness doctors said:

"The staff retention, recruitment, job security, educational needs and working conditions have been consistently ignored by senior management of NHS Orkney with the inevitable results that we now see."

Ironically, there was no shortage of Macmillan nurses, but they were moved to acute wards.

The Orkney crisis could be replicated elsewhere in Scotland if we do not tackle nursing shortages. All parts of the NHS team need to be valued, not only nurses.

I move amendment S1M-3078.2, to leave out from "and supports" to end and insert:

"notes with concern, however, the recent decrease in nurse numbers; acknowledges that better staffing levels and conditions will lead to better morale and therefore higher levels of nurse retention, and therefore urges the Scottish Executive to promote a more flexible system that would recruit and retain appropriate numbers of nurses and midwives to serve Scotland's needs."

15:56

Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I am pleased to speak in the debate to acknowledge the work that Scotland's nurses do in international nurses week and throughout the year, and to highlight what we need to do to recruit, retain and retrain Scotland's nursing work force.

Nurses account for one half of the NHS work force and deliver 80 per cent of the care that it provides. They are the backbone of the NHS and must be valued as key members of the NHS front line. I am glad that the minister has agreed that nursing directors will be on the new unified NHS

boards to ensure that the nurses' voice is heard at every possible level in the service.

I congratulate the RCN on its successful value nurses campaign. Over the summer recess, I took the opportunity to support the campaign by spending time shadowing some of our nursing staff as they went about their work with homeless people at the Access Point project in Edinburgh, with a community detoxification nurse in Bannockburn and with a nurse manager on a night shift at the Royal hospital for sick children at Yorkhill in Glasgow. From the comments that members have made so far, it is clear that nurses undertake an incredible range of tasks and duties on our behalf.

On those occasions and many others, including yesterday when I met nursing sisters from Forth Valley NHS Board, I have found that nurses are keen to talk about their professional needs and how we can recruit more nurses. Pay and conditions remain major issues. Although pay remains a matter for the United Kingdom independent pay review body, I hope that the Executive will do all that it can to press the case for progress to be made.

Brian Adam: Will Margaret Smith give way?

Mrs Smith: I will not give way. I have no time. I have only five minutes.

Brian Adam: There will be no debate if she does not give way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Order.

Mrs Smith: In areas in which the Scottish Executive has the power to make a positive difference to conditions, it has been listening to the RCN's campaign and has made some progress. The minister outlined that progress today, which includes studies of work loads and new work force development centres. Over the past months, Susan Deacon and Malcolm Chisholm have made welcome announcements that will impact positively on nurses. The minister has announced £5 million for nurse recruitment and retention initiatives this year. That will cover return-to-practice schemes, 250 more student nurse places and a guaranteed minimum of one year's employment for 15,000 newly qualified nurses and midwives.

Scotland has the highest attrition rate for nurses in the UK. A quarter of nursing students will not finish their courses. We must ask ourselves why that is and put in place mentoring schemes, as well as better information for potential nurses about what the job is really about. A 10 per cent increase in student bursaries, which was announced last July, and an end to the anomalies between degree and diploma students are both

welcome and should go some way towards encouraging people to go into nursing training. However, as Tommy Sheridan said, there is still a long way to go.

Nurses work against a backdrop of increased work load for a number of reasons. With people spending less time in hospital before being discharged into the community, the average in-patient is in need of greater acute care than ever before. A shortage of nurses also means that nurses have to do extra shifts to cover the gaps.

We welcome the work of the Scottish integrated work force planning group. We need innovative approaches to make working more flexible, and we must do all that we can to encourage nurses to remain in the NHS team, either as contracted members of staff or as members of NHS banks. We must learn from the practice of nursing agencies so that we can offer staff the flexibility that they need at certain times in their lives, for example when they need time out or reduced hours to care for children or elderly relatives. Initiatives such as the acute trust nursing bank in the Forth Valley NHS Board area are to be applauded.

Susan Deacon held a nursing recruitment and retention convention last November, which I was pleased to attend. That spawned the facing the future implementation group and a series of meetings, the purpose of which was to examine specific areas of concern for nurses, including recruitment and retention. Continuing career development and training were the main issues that nurses consistently raised. In particular, 40 per cent of nurses have to pay the cost of continuing professional development themselves, while a further 40 per cent have to attend courses in their own time. Other nurses may be supported financially by their trust or board, but they know that organising cover so that they may attend courses is difficult, particularly in remote and rural areas.

We should do more to encourage career development. There are far more consultant nurses in England than in Scotland. We should give some thought to the fact that, when nurses embark on a career path, for example with NHS 24 or in specialist nursing grades, general ward nursing is possibly being left short of nurses at G grade and other senior staff.

One of the most welcome statements that the Executive has made recently was on the return-to-practice pilot courses. We need to roll out those courses across Scotland and reach out to the 10,000 qualified nurses who are currently not working in the NHS.

The success of all the policies that are set out in "Our National Health: A plan for action, a plan for

change" and in Executive document after Executive document relies on nurses. Freeing up general practitioners' time, delivering on waiting times, improving public health, increasing nurse prescribing and providing nurse-led clinics are only a few of the things for which we rely on the flexibility of nurses.

I value this opportunity to say yet again how much we rely on nurses, and I look forward to the Executive making further progress on the issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now come to the open debate. We are obviously tight for time, but I will allow speeches of four minutes with some extra time for interventions.

16:02

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I agree with other members that it is highly appropriate for us to hold this debate during international nurses week.

Since 1997, Labour has delivered 20,000 new nurses across the UK and has scrapped the two-stage pay awards. However, it takes time to encourage more people to become nurses and, while new nurses are being recruited, we are still losing existing nurses from the profession. The RCN has identified three issues that we must address:

"better pay, better resources to do the work and improved promotion prospects".

That chimes exactly with the representations that I have received from nurses and midwives in my constituency. I want to share with members some of the pressures that those nurses and midwives have shared with me. They have written to me about the pressures and stress of working in wards that are not fully staffed; the lack of training opportunities; the lack of financial support, which makes it difficult to take up training opportunities; and the struggle of studying and training while holding down a responsible and stressful job at the same time.

There is general dissatisfaction with the level of pay and a sense of disappointment at the lack of career development opportunities and the lack of recognition of the new competencies and medical procedures that many nurses are now undertaking. Nurses are also worried about the impact of vacancies not being filled. There is strong concern about the use of bank nursing, about the insufficient number of fully staffed wards and medical teams and about temporary nurses being brought in to fill the gaps.

Financial support for nurses and midwives during their training is a big issue and, as Malcolm Chisholm will know, I have received many letters from student nurses at Queen Margaret University

College, who are disappointed that they have missed out on the recent bursary improvements. However, they will benefit from access to the guaranteed year's employment on graduation.

A common thread runs through the representations, based not just on individuals' self-interest but on concern about how the day-to-day pressure on nurses affects patient care. Every nurse who has contacted me has raised that issue.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will Sarah Boyack give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, thank you, Ms Sturgeon.

Those concerns are a legacy of what the Tories did to the health service. The recent pronouncements of Liam Fox show the Tories' real agenda. First, they want to break the link between the NHS and health care. Then, they want to cut public spending. The statistics show that the Tory Government cut nursery and midwifery training places by 23 per cent in Scotland. Under Labour, the number of places has already risen by 8 per cent.

Gordon Brown's budget will give us a wonderful opportunity to sort out the NHS and to raise morale across the service.

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: I will take a brief intervention.

Ben Wallace: How does Ms Boyack reconcile her fine words and the fine words of the Scottish Executive with the fact that the chancellor will take £5.8 million out of the pockets of Scottish nurses through his increase in national insurance contributions?

Sarah Boyack: I have not met any nurse who is unhappy about the massive increase that everyone recognises is going into the NHS. We need to talk up the fact that the money is coming to help to raise morale in the NHS.

It takes time for new recruits to come through the system. While the key changes are being put in place, we must acknowledge the day-to-day problems in the nursing profession. It is vital that nurses are able to see real improvements taking place. I agree with Margaret Smith that the return-to-practice pilots are vital throughout Scotland. The improvement in bursaries for student nurses is a great start, but those who are switching career or who have a family to support while they go through training still face a real challenge.

Like others, I welcome the fact that the unified NHS boards contain a nursing director, which is absolutely critical if we are to change the long-term culture in the NHS. Change is happening. I know that within Lothian there is a much bigger focus on tackling low pay across the health

service, and I welcome that development. It is absolutely vital that we invest in our existing and future nurses as a key part of the NHS family. It is important to say to nurses and patients that we have listened to them and that the improvements that they need are coming soon.

Let us support the motion and send a message of confidence to nurses and to the NHS across Scotland.

16:07

Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP): Nurses now take on greater roles and greater responsibilities than ever before, but the average age of nurses is increasing. The average age in Scotland is now 47. The situation is particularly acute among nurses in general practitioner practices, as fully one third of them are over the age of 55. The profession has major problems with recruiting and retaining young people. Valuing nurses would assist retention and reduce the need to recruit in ever increasing numbers.

Nurses in different parts of Scotland have different priorities: rural nurses may pay more in travel expenses; city nurses may fear violence at work when they do night shifts. I highlighted that issue in the debate initiated by Margaret Smith last September. Nurses work excessive hours for pay that is considered to be low for public service workers. The independent review's recent 3 per cent award was considered disappointing by Unison and the Royal College of Nursing.

Although the return-to-practice programme is welcome, it is merely a pilot scheme. As Nicola Sturgeon indicated, the programme needs to be much wider in scope to attract back to nursing the number of nurses that is required to fill vacancies in the long term. The return-to-practice programme will bring more qualified staff into nursing, but it will not solve the demographic problem of our more experienced specialised nurses leaving for other jobs or retiring.

The United Nations has opposed the importation of health care professionals from third-world countries. Nations such as the Philippines—where some 75 per cent of doctors who qualify and some two thirds of nurses emigrate—are denuded of professional expertise. With fewer people entering the labour force in future years, we must encourage more of our own people into the nursing profession. In fact, we could persuade people from other parts of the United Kingdom—or, indeed, Europe—to take up nursing as a profession in Scotland.

If the current reliance of NHS hospitals on agency nurses is maintained, newly qualified nurses who work in NHS hospitals may be enticed to leave the NHS and work for agencies because

of the better pay and conditions that they offer. In a survey of 6,000 nurses, the RCN identified the key areas that would enhance the productivity and quality of nursing, thereby reducing absenteeism and reliance on agency nurses, lowering nursing turnover, improving morale and nurses' safety and reducing stress.

Promoting the well-being of nurses would show that we value them and would create a happier work force. We need good employment practices under which flexible working hours are promoted and the needs of nurses with families are accommodated. Employee-friendly policies that help to promote a good work-life balance for nurses are essential. Where nurses are particularly stressed, psychological help and counselling should be available. We should also ensure that bullying and workplace harassment become things of the past.

The RCN's most recent annual survey shows that dissatisfaction with nursing centres on key issues, including work load, staffing levels, hours, roles and responsibilities, having to undertake non-nursing activities and pay. The First Minister has said on the record that the SNP's idea of paying more money to attract nurses from outwith Scotland to Scotland is daft. I understand that nurses in London receive a London weighting allowance. Is not that intended to attract nurses to London from other parts of the United Kingdom? I am sure that if the minister checked, he would find that several hundred Scottish nurses work in London and that Scottish nurses work in other parts of the UK. Surely we should retain such people in Scotland.

Throughout Europe, different countries have different rates of pay. In the United States, different states pay different rates. There is no reason for us not to create a competitive edge in Scotland by providing better pay than is provided in the rest of the United Kingdom. Nicola Sturgeon has mentioned in previous debates the difficulty in replacing NHS consultants at the Beatson oncology centre, because we have no competitive edge. That competitive edge should be not only for doctors, but for nurses. If we are to have the health service that everyone wants in the 21st century, we must compete, do better and pay the rate for the job. Scotland must lead health provision in the UK and to do that, we must pay the rate for the job.

Let us attract people from throughout Europe and the United Kingdom into nursing. Let us retain the nurses we have. Let us ensure that the profession is valued as we would like it to be valued.

16:11

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): The contribution that our nurses make to our health care system is phenomenal. They are the backbone of the NHS and without them the NHS would crumble. Therefore, ensuring that nurses are happy and motivated is vital for good patient care and the efficient running of our health service. If things go wrong, nurses are the first to experience the problems. While we may sit in our ivory towers, they are in direct contact with patients every day. They work tirelessly to help others for comparatively little reward.

The problem is that the nursing work force is too small. Recruitment and retention problems are huge and are caused by many factors. A demoralised work force leads nurses to leave the service and does not encourage many to enter it. Understaffing leads to overworked staff who can put up with only so much for so long. Continual change leads to continual uncertainty and instability. Lack of involvement in decision making leads to feelings of being uninvolved and undervalued. The constant pressure of dealing with patients who have waited too long for treatment leads to futility and anger.

Last September, I visited Lorne and Islands district general hospital in Oban, where nurses kindly gave me their valuable time to describe the pressure. It is intolerable that a huge number of nurses are being forced out of the NHS because they can no longer take the pressure. Nurses are hugely committed to a caring, vocational profession. We can only imagine what it takes to destroy that commitment.

Some of the Executive's initiatives are good, but they do not address the fundamental problem. They are akin to rearranging deckchairs on the Titanic. Nurses are leaving because they are not being allowed to do their jobs properly. Patients are waiting far too long for admission, which leaves them more severely ill and needing more intensive treatment. That leaves them weaker and more susceptible to hospital-acquired infection, which prolongs their stay. By that stage, many patients must be exasperated with the NHS, deeply frightened and perhaps in pain. Nurses bear the brunt of all that. Their job becomes infinitely more difficult if they see too many people needlessly suffering and dying. They must continually apologise for a system over which they have no control.

Many nurses are not leaving the health service and are simply moving to more flexible and responsive systems. England appears to be the prime beneficiary of that movement, along with other European countries and Australia. It does not take a genius to work out why. In Germany, nurses are happy, well trained and content. They

work in clean hospitals and see patients when they need to be seen—almost immediately. As a result, the recovery rate is faster and greater, and nurses feel that, rather than just stemming the tide, they are having a positive impact on the health of their patients. That contrasts dramatically with the situation in our NHS.

The issue is not money. Germany puts only a small percentage more of public funding into its health service than we do, and soon, Scottish health funding will be higher than that in other European countries, including Germany. The difference is that Germany has a flexible, responsive system in which a happy work force provides patient-oriented care. There is no excuse for Scotland not to have that same quality.

I look forward to the day when there will be no waiting lists, when waiting times will be short, when there will be clean hospitals and when patients will be cared for by the appropriate number of well-qualified, highly motivated nurses. The nursing profession is full of wonderful people who are doing their best under impossible circumstances. Although some of the measures that the Scottish Executive has brought in seem to be good ideas, I ask how successful those measures will be and how they will improve patient care and nurse morale when our entire NHS system is working against them.

16:15

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)

(Lab): Jamie McGrigor's contribution—or perhaps what was omitted from it—speaks volumes about the lack of consensus in Scotland on sustained and rising investment in the NHS. We will return to that theme in the months and years to come.

I welcome what the minister said in a debate that is of particular importance as it falls in international nurses week. It is obvious that ministers are aware that nurses and other health professionals are wholly thrilled to investment in skills and people, so the investments in training and skills that the minister has announced are most welcome.

We have a world-class reputation for excellence in nursing, in midwifery and—increasingly—in health care education. I mention the benefits that arise nationally, across the UK and internationally from the work that is being undertaken at institutions such as Glasgow Caledonian University, which is in the constituency of my colleague Pauline McNeill. That institution is making a particular contribution to supporting the developing skills and training agenda. The programmes of its innovative department of nursing and community health, which are delivered by a multidisciplinary group, operate

through the use of controlled learning environments, including skills learning laboratories. The facilities—which I urge Malcolm Chisholm and other ministers to visit if they have not yet done so—allow nursing students and nurse returners to respond to and learn from their participation in complex nursing case studies in the context of a simulated learning environment. This week, the benefits of such programmes are being discussed as far away as Jordan.

I want to mention the importance of providing nursing staff and others with designed-for-purpose buildings, which co-locate diagnostic, out-patient, day patient, casualty and day surgery services with the professions that are allied to medicine. Such buildings allow as much as possible to be done in a single visit and avoid an unnecessary series of repeated visits. Developments of that kind must be good for patients and staff, as they offer enhanced opportunities to develop new skills and allow medical and nursing staff to work together in multidisciplinary teams to meet patients' needs more effectively and to deliver convenient and seamless care.

My colleague Paul Martin and I are determined that early progress should be made on the same-day hospital at the Stobhill health campus, which is in Paul Martin's constituency. We will continue to discuss in-patient beds with Scottish ministers and the minister will have our full support in encouraging Greater Glasgow NHS Board to expedite work as soon as possible at the new £60 million facility.

I welcome the progress that has been made on nurse practitioner prescribing, which was in currency as long ago as 1987. That idea was kicked about by the Tories, just as they kicked about the NHS as a whole. Nurse practitioner prescribing has been delivered under Labour only in the past three years. Such career opportunities for nurse practitioners are part of the process of rebuilding Scotland's national health service.

16:19

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Members of all parties have produced statistics on a variety of issues, such as the number of nurses who leave the profession, the number of nursing students who leave before completing their courses, nurses' ages and nurses' pay. In my opinion, the principal issue is the individual nurse and what the nurse represents in terms of hospital care.

Last week, when I visited someone in Hairmyres hospital, I found that there were major problems in the contracts for catering and cleaning. I was in a ward where the food was absolutely abysmal—I would not have fed it to a pig, never mind to a patient—and where the bathroom had been

cleaned only once in a whole week. The person who stood up for the patients and who caused the most fuss was the nurse in charge of the ward, supported by her staff. She was prepared to put her neck and her career on the line for her patients. We have to recognise that kind of dedication.

The nursing profession does not just want lip service from the Parliament and the Executive about how much we value our nurses. We will have to take action to prove that we value them. Until we do, all the figures on the student drop-out rates, on the lack of retention and on morale problems will continue to get worse.

The major, although not the only, bone of contention for nurses is undoubtedly pay. The major bone of contention between the Executive and the Scottish National Party is over how we should deal with the issue of nurses' pay. The Executive believes that there is only one solution, which they allege to be a United Kingdom solution. That solution is to pay every nurse the length and breadth of the UK exactly the same.

That fails to recognise that, south of the border, special rates are already paid. Ever since the health service was created, special rates have been paid in London in recognition of higher living costs. There are also special allowances to boost recruitment and retention in areas of staff shortages—for example, among low-paid nursing auxiliaries, nurse consultants and matrons. Discretionary points will also be given to entice those who have reached the top of their field in nursing to remain in the NHS. All that proves to me that differential pay structures are not new. We should not automatically react against the idea.

We face a particular situation in Scotland. If we do not solve the nursing shortage and the morale problem, all the money that we spend on the health service will not cure its ills. That is why we believe that it would be perfectly fair and acceptable to have a differential pay structure to recognise the special problems in Scotland. Until we have one, the problems of the health service will not be properly addressed. I hope that when the minister winds up—whichever minister it is—we will be told why it is okay to have differentials south of the border but not north of the border.

If figures are coming out tomorrow, why can the minister not give them to the chamber today, rather than making us wait for the *Daily Record* or *The Herald* tomorrow morning?

16:23

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I will concentrate on two points—job satisfaction and prisons.

Three things make a job worth having and attract people to it: pay and conditions; the public esteem, or otherwise, in which it is held; and job satisfaction. In the Parliament, we are okay on job satisfaction and pay and conditions, but we get zero for public esteem. As for nurses, we are beginning to address their pay and conditions. The Executive is to be congratulated on that, although there is a long way to go. In public esteem, nurses rate very highly. However, in job satisfaction, we are failing them.

The solution is not just a question of money; it is about a revolution in the health industry, if we can call it that. Because of their experience, nurses are much better than doctors at performing many duties and they should be encouraged in that. For example, the western general hospital in Edinburgh has for some years had a minor injuries clinic, which is run by nurses. I owe them a lot because they helped to save my bacon when I was taken in on Christmas eve—not on account of drink, I assure members. Other nurses looked after me very well over Christmas and the new year, when they might have been pretty grumpy. They sorted me out and now I am once again full of fight against the powers that be.

Greater job satisfaction comes through greater responsibility. We need a career structure in nursing that offers more promotion and more worthwhile jobs that still involve nursing, rather than paper shuffling. We need more in-service training. We have heard evidence from the nursing profession that it is difficult for many nurses to get in-service training.

Another issue is agency nurses. I am sure that individual agency nurses are excellent people, but I am also sure that they get less job satisfaction than nurses who continue to look after the same people in the same ward. The situation would be like MSPs being told that one week they were the MSP for Dundee East and the next week they would be the MSP for Argyll and Bute. We would not like that at all. That is the position that agency nurses are in. I hope that ministers will consider the important issues of creating a worthwhile career structure, improving training and expanding nurses' responsibility.

My second point relates to jails. The Justice 1 Committee has become the jail visiting committee—every Monday we visit a different jail. So far, to my wife's relief, we have always been let out for good behaviour. It has become apparent to me that serious efforts are being made to turn prisoners around; the issue is not just about locking people up. The health centre plays an important part in sorting out prisoners, partly because so many prisoners are on drugs. Barlinnie is the largest dispenser of methadone in Scotland, closely followed by Saughton—150 and

120 prisoners respectively get regular supplies. Drug taking is a huge issue in prisons and the nurses and the health centre have to deal with it.

Increasingly, prisons are becoming mental institutions. Many prisoners have serious mental health problems that must be attended to. The health centre is a vital part of the whole enterprise. However, such centres find it difficult to get staff. All the centres that we visited are seriously understaffed. I ask the minister to talk to his colleagues in the justice department to help to provide the important nursing services that add to the team aiming to turn prisoners around. If we do not address that issue, it will cause great problems in the future.

16:28

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I declare an interest as a member of Unison. As a nurse, I am delighted to speak in today's debate. During my years in the health service, I considered myself first and foremost to be a member of the health care team. That is why I am particularly pleased that the motion pays tribute to all members of the team.

I am pleased to welcome the Executive's commitment and efforts to recruit, retain and value nurses, given that that has proved difficult in the past. "Facing the Future", the report on last year's convention on recruitment and retention in nursing and midwifery, states:

"the career journey for nurses and midwives is often ill defined and ambiguous".

I concur with that point. Perhaps the main reason for the problem is that, now, the only route into nursing is academic. Some members will know that the issue is a particular hobby-horse of mine. I believe that we are disfranchising many people who would make excellent nurses but who are unable to or choose not to follow the academic route into nursing. If we are to take the recruitment and retention of nurses seriously, we must consider making other choices available.

Over the years, one of the most important issues facing nurses has been their extended role in health care. The minister mentioned some of the specialist nurses who were recently recruited to work in our communities and to make things better for a host of people with specific illnesses.

Nursing as a career has changed and developed and nurses have been flexible enough to welcome the challenges that have been offered. However, payback for that willingness has not always been forthcoming. Career structures often leave a lot to be desired; if pathways are not clearly marked out in work force planning arrangements, that can lead to frustration. I am pleased that the minister mentioned the extra £1.75 million for skills

development. That is an important area, which I hope will lead to better career pathways and more satisfaction with career development.

Flexibility is another important issue. Family-friendly policies, such as child care provision and flexible working arrangements, are sadly lacking in some workplaces, although many trusts are now working towards implementing such policies. I am particularly pleased that the Executive is monitoring the situation and will publish evidence later this year. Actions must be demonstrable. We should not just have paper policies.

Another issue that all NHS staff face is employment stability. Acute services reviews—my colleague Brian Fitzpatrick mentioned them in the context of the proposed ambulatory care and diagnostic facilities at Stobhill hospital and the Victoria infirmary in Glasgow—are much needed, but they have led to uncertainty about future workplaces and staff have not always been involved in consultation. That does not help recruitment. I know that to be the case from personal experience at the Victoria infirmary in my area. Hospitals facing closure have great difficulty in attracting staff in the short term. That must be borne in mind when acute services reviews or any changes in service provision are planned.

Attracting people into nursing in the first place is probably the most important issue. Recruitment campaigns must be imaginative and targeted at young people and those who wish to have a career change later in life. However, that applies to a large number of careers in the health service. How many people today aspire to be medical laboratory scientific officers, occupational therapists or radiographers? Probably not many, unfortunately. There are national shortages in a host of occupational groups in the NHS. We must channel our energies into addressing that problem.

I urge the minister to examine seriously the way in which we train our nurses and to consider offering a non-academic route into the profession. I am happy to support the motion and I welcome the Executive's commitment to value nurses, particularly as this is international nurses week. However, I emphasise that nurses are only one part of the team and I look forward to the day when we celebrate international porters week or the international week of medical secretaries.

16:32

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I promise to be brief. I shall frame my contribution in the form of several short questions.

The Minister for Health and Community Care has been made aware of looming problems with financial support for third and fourth-year

academic nursing students. Will that situation be addressed in the near future?

The incidence of surgical intervention at birth is increasing throughout the western world, but is that of concern to the Executive? The minister mentioned nurses and midwives in his speech several times, but he made no specific reference to midwifery. He did not say whether he has met midwives—he has met many other organisations. If he has not, will he meet them in the near future? Will he guarantee support for them and for the continued development of midwifery services in Scotland?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Several names are left on my screen. One member is not here, so I can give Tommy Sheridan two minutes.

16:34

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): I will be quick. We must make the point when we discuss the value of nurses that, although it is questionable whether an MSP is worth one newly registered nurse, it is unquestionable that we are not worth three. It is from that point of view that we must address the central priority of improving the pay of nurses in our hospitals—that is the number one priority in relation to retention, recruitment and job satisfaction. Of course, other factors contribute to job satisfaction, but pay has to be a central one.

In considering nurses' pay, we must not forget the team ethic. Medical secretaries, midwives, radiographers, porters and auxiliaries are all essential parts of the team. The yawning gap between the pay of many of those team members and that of others in our hospitals is unacceptable and has to be bridged.

The other point that I want to address in my final minute is the use of agency nurses. Audit Scotland's report into the use of agency nurses, "Temporary measures: managing bank and agency nursing staff", was published in February 2000. The commission instructed health trusts across Scotland to examine the use of agency nurses and to employ permanent staff instead of agency nurses. At the time, 562 agency nurses were employed every day in the health service; today, however, I hear that the figure has risen to 725. That means that, despite Audit Scotland's report, more and not fewer temporary agency nurses are being employed. I hope that the minister will address that issue when she sums up. How will we get more permanent nurses employed in the health service? Hospitals need to use fewer agency nurses and to stop relying on the bank hour system, which often undermines morale and lessens the desire to recruit and retain nurses.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh): We come to the closing speeches. I call George Lyon to close for the Liberal Democrats.

16:36

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I put on the record my appreciation of the role that our nurses play in delivering health care. Over the past few months, as a father, I have had the misfortune of having to attend hospital three times, as my youngest daughter has gone through a Calamity Jane phase in her life. First, she was run over by a car. Secondly, she swam back-stroke into a swimming pool wall and had to be taken to hospital. Thirdly, during a fun night at the local swimming pool, someone jumped on her and she had to be taken to hospital with a suspected broken vertebra in her neck. On all those occasions, the nurses were truly wonderful not only in dealing with my daughter's concerns, but in calming the fears of the parents, especially on the last occasion. As I said, I, too, want to put on the record how much I value and appreciate the work that our nurses do.

I will highlight some of the problems that we face in rural areas in trying to retain and recruit nurses. Many of those problems are identical to the ones that we face in trying to recruit and retain rural GPs. Nurses are required to undertake out-of-hours commitments and they have to work longer hours than is the norm in an urban situation. In places such as the isles of Lismore and Gigha, nurses live in the local community and are on call virtually 24 hours a day, seven days a week. No other health care is available; if something goes wrong, they are the ones who have to come running regardless of the time of day or night.

In many rural communities, the shortage of bank nurses exacerbates working problems. A shortage of bank staff means that less cover is available for illness, holidays or emergencies. Nurses who work in rural areas are required to be multiskilled; they need a greater range of skills in both primary and acute care work. When an accident happens, no matter how serious, nurses are the front-line staff who have to deal with the patient in the first instance. An accident in a rural area often means a flight out by helicopter or plane to get the patient to the acute hospital where they will be seen by a consultant or a doctor.

Nurses carry a huge and a heavy responsibility on their shoulders. There is a feeling among the nursing staff to whom I speak that the current reward structure fails to recognise the extra burdens and the heavy responsibilities that many of them have to carry. I hope that the Executive will look seriously at how to address that issue.

There is no doubt that the coalition has done a substantial amount of work to try to improve the recruitment and retention of nurses in Scotland. In setting up the remote and rural areas resource initiative in Inverness, the Executive has tried to address some of the specific problems that are

involved in delivering rural health care. It was hoped that RARARI would come up with new and sustainable models of delivering health care in rural areas. However, after three years, health professionals feel that RARARI is not delivering on the high expectations that its introduction created. The initiative has failed to come up with a truly sustainable rural model for delivering health care. There is a feeling that too many pet projects are being funded and that there is a tendency to work with individuals instead of with organisations, which leads to a disconnection between RARARI and the Highlands and Islands health organisations. I ask the minister to examine RARARI's work and whether it is delivering on what was expected of it—that it would formulate a sustainable rural health model to overcome some of the problems that I have just highlighted.

16:40

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): I join other members in paying tribute to the RCN's value nurses campaign, which was successful in raising the priority of nursing and lifting the onus that we place on nurses in society.

Although the Scottish Conservatives welcome today's opportunity to debate and highlight the nursing profession, we should not forget that there are other members in the health care team. Before I go on, I should point out that we support the Executive's measures to better the lot of nurses and improve their training. There is a consensus in the Parliament that the Executive has introduced some good measures, and we wish them luck.

However, we must also remember that over the past couple of years the Scottish Executive has presided over a decline in the number of nursing posts. We have lost nurses to the south for a number of reasons. Someone has to take responsibility for that situation.

The changes to the NHS have produced a service that is more centrally controlled and suffers from more political interference than before. Although Labour boldly says that it is pro-NHS, that does not always follow. Who could forget Susan Deacon's claim that people within the service itself were exaggerating and scaremongering to get more resources? Indeed, what about Tony Blair's speech about the scars on his back?

When I was asked to take part as the Conservative speaker in the Unison hustings during the general election campaign, I found that every party except Labour had sent a representative to address Unison members. Of course, I did not get the best welcome, but at least I turned up and put my money where my mouth was.

Tommy Sheridan: I bet that the Unison members were not cheering at the end.

Ben Wallace: I think they thought I was new Labour, which put them off a bit.

Sarah Boyack says that nurses are delighted to pay increased national insurance contributions. Are they really? The nurses I have spoken to will not be delighted at the prospect of losing 30 per cent of next year's pay rise because of the increase in NI contributions. Indeed, as the employer, the NHS will have to find another £5.8 million to cover that increase. I do not think that nurses are unanimous in their support for that measure.

I also find Brian Fitzpatrick's comments in that respect interesting. He did not have the same principles when he voted himself a 13 per cent pay rise. Although I do not always agree with Tommy Sheridan, I agree with him on this issue. If we are going to value our public servants—

Brian Fitzpatrick: Will Ben Wallace take this opportunity to say that the Conservatives would match Labour's commitment to sustained and rising investment in the NHS? In other words, would the Conservatives match our budget booster?

Ben Wallace: The Scottish Conservatives recognise that there needs to be more investment in health care, but we do not necessarily agree that it should be funnelled into the current NHS system.

Brian Fitzpatrick: That is a no, then.

Ben Wallace: No. Why does Labour not consider taking advantage of the 1.1 per cent increase in gross domestic product in Scotland that has been completely ignored by the NHS? Other countries do not ignore private funding streams and end up with better results, morale and staffing levels. The onus is on people such as Brian Fitzpatrick to come up with proper imaginative ideas for better outcomes.

We do not believe in using nurses as a human shield when a debate on the NHS comes up. Instead, we believe that if we depoliticise the health service and leave service workers to get on with their job, they will do much better. Alan Milburn—the odious Alan Milburn, as I think John McAllion called him last week—has returned to devolving responsibility for health care decisions, with the result that there is now better retention and recruitment of nurses in the NHS in England, and often at the expense of nurses in Scotland.

The Scottish Conservatives want to go further on certain issues. We want better mapping of the location and number of specialist nurses. When I asked the minister how many nurses who specialise in epilepsy there are in Scotland, he

could not tell me. How can we develop a managed clinical network, if we do not know what assets are at our fingertips to help to support it?

I urge members to support Mary Scanlon's amendment. We will support the motion but not the SNP's amendment. We believe that nurses should be valued and left alone to nurse.

16:45

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I, too, should declare an interest: I am married to a nurse. One of the main problems that nurses face is the significantly anti-social hours. There must be an attempt to address that problem because such hours are not family friendly. When my wife returned to work, she started off by working what is called a twilight shift. For members who do not know what that is, I say that it means that one's wife returns home at 2.30 in the morning with cold feet. She leaves for work at around quarter to 9 at night and comes home at half-past 2 in the morning. It is not only nurses but whole families who have difficulty with anti-social hours.

Sometimes, after a late shift, my wife sets off for what is known euphemistically as an early shift. She works from half-past 1 in the afternoon to half-past 9, which means that she gets home at 10.30 and is up again at 6 in the morning to go back to work. That is not an unusual work pattern. It is little surprise that nowadays people are not so willing to accept such arrangements. There must be much more flexibility because there are often very rigid ideas about how to deliver. That reflects the management culture.

I am delighted that the minister is willing to consider that point and to fund leadership training. That should not just involve training people to sit on the management board; it should involve training people to manage staff throughout the nursing profession. Too few resources have gone into training people how to manage. For many years, managers in the NHS have been ready targets for politicians. The service must be managed effectively, but I do not think that that happens. To have staff who are content in their work and to deliver better work patterns, skilled managers are required. Resources must be put into that.

The minister mentioned the £1.75 million of new money for skills development. I assume that that is to go towards continuous professional development—not everyone wishes to be a manager. One big gap is that nurses, because of their dedication and commitment, do continuous professional development in their own time and at their own expense for the benefit of patients and the service. I want a significant shift in that. Less discretion should be left to local management.

People who are employed in skilled jobs should have the right to access training. Time and money will have to be made available for that. I hope that the ministerial team will take that on board as part of the new skills development programme.

I have a great deal of sympathy with Janis Hughes's point that there should not be only an academic approach to nursing and the other professions in the NHS in which there is a significant skills shortage—many of which she named. We should not insist that all those professions must be graduate professions. I have no problem with professions wishing to raise their skills level, but there are many professions in which the skills required are not solely academic, if they are academic at all. It must be possible to enter professions through a route that is not exclusively academic. Janis Hughes mentioned medical laboratory scientific officers.

I will finish my remarks with a comment about pay. Kenny Gibson rightly pointed out that differentials exist throughout the country. What we have not heard about in the debate is the grade drift and de-skilling that goes on. To enhance pay rates, some nurses in London will be on a grade that they would never be on in Edinburgh. They are on that grade just because they happen to be in London, and they also receive a London weighting allowance. That happens across the professions. Those of us who have worked in the NHS are well aware of that approach.

The ministerial team has the power to address such issues. It is possible for ministers to find innovative ways of addressing the pay difficulties. Donald Gorrie was totally wrong to congratulate the Executive on its contribution to changing pay for nursing staff, because the Executive has made no contribution to that. That is dealt with at the UK level, although there is scope for dealing with it here—not for the sake of making Scots nurses and midwives different, but for the sake of ensuring that the nurses and midwives who work in Scotland are satisfied.

16:51

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mrs Mary Mulligan): Everybody who has spoken in the debate has recognised the fact that nurses are playing a growing role in the NHS. They are increasingly pivotal in driving our health reforms, improving services to patients and playing a major part in the development of public health and care in our communities.

Getting the right number of nurses and midwives in the right place is vital and we are taking steps to ensure that they have the right skills to meet the rapidly changing needs of the NHS today and for

the future. As nurses and midwives take on expanded roles, we must ensure that we support them by helping to create the additional capacity that will be required. Action is under way to establish a framework to deliver better work force planning, which will be based on sound research into nurses' work loads.

We have already delivered significant improvements in the recruitment and retention of nurses in Scotland. We have recruited more nurses for specialties such as intensive care and cancer and more nurses in primary care and in our communities. Brian Fitzpatrick recognised the role of prescribing nurses. Up to 3,000 had been trained by April 2001 and all district nurses and health visitors are now eligible. We have also recruited more nurses in new areas such as public health, family health nursing, infection control and NHS24.

Brian Fitzpatrick: I take issue with Alex Neil's uncharacteristically intemperate accusation about the release of national statistics tomorrow. Does the minister agree that Mr Neil failed to recognise the work that has been done to restore faith in the integrity of national statistics? Does she agree that it would be wholly inappropriate to reverse agreed procedures for the release of official statistics simply to give some seeming advantage to ministers in today's debate?

Mrs Mulligan: I was going to say to Mr Neil that we are not delaying the release of the numbers as he may have been suggesting. We do not have them. When we asked for the debate to be held today, we were not aware that they were going to be released tomorrow.

Although there is much going on, there is still much more to do. We know that because we are listening to nurses and front-line staff who are telling us what else needs to be done. Through the national and the six local nurse recruitment conventions, we have brought together some 800 nurses and midwives and given them the opportunity to be involved in shaping the policies that affect them. Nurses in Glasgow are considering return-to-practice schemes; nurses in the Forth valley are defining flexible working; and nurses in Tayside are working to improve education and training.

One further convention is planned specifically for nursing and midwifery students, to help to identify and address issues surrounding pre-registration training. That will dovetail with other work concerning nurse cadets and the future role that health care assistants and other support workers could play in helping to create additional capacity in the service. We want there to be a consistent and managed approach to that important issue throughout Scotland.

I will pick up the point that Janis Hughes made about enrolled nurses. The reason for the withdrawal of the position of enrolled nurse was the dissatisfaction and frustration on the part of many enrolled nurses at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. They felt that their position was being abused and patronised within the profession. However, I recognise the points that Janis Hughes made and we will need to discuss with the nursing profession the matter of a less academic route into the profession.

Janis Hughes: I thank the minister for her comments. However, I was careful when I raised the matter not to say that there should be a return to enrolled nurses. I am an enrolled nurse and I understand the point about the lack of career progression. However, I think that we could come up with some form of agreed career structure that would give a non-academic route into the profession but would also allow job satisfaction.

Mrs Mulligan: I recognise that Janis Hughes is making a positive contribution to the discussion; I want the discussion to be continued with nurses.

We have added to the package that makes nursing more attractive as a career option. The package includes increases in pay for all nurses and increases in student bursaries; the pay increase for nurses is 3.6 per cent. We accepted the recommendations of the nursing pay review board, with no staging, for the fourth year. We are committed to improving pay in the short term and the long term and to modernising the pay structure.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am the first to recognise that all the initiatives that the minister is talking about are welcome. However, will she respond to these points that student nurses made to me at lunch time? The key thing that they wanted to talk about was that many of them feel unable to stay and work in Scotland because of the low starting salaries here and the lure of better salaries and career opportunities south of the border. How will the Scottish Executive tackle that problem, so that the greater number of people that it is putting into nurse training places are not lost south of the border as soon as they qualify?

Mrs Mulligan: I will come to pay and the differentials that Nicola Sturgeon mentioned, if she bears with me for a moment.

We are also considering action on career and role development. Donald Gorrie mentioned the nurses who work in the minor injuries unit at the western general. I met them yesterday and know that they are developing their skills. We also see action on career progression and development and on leadership training. The Minister for Health and Community Care announced that there will be £1.75 million for skills development.

Through "Facing the Future" we have recently announced action that will lead to a further 150 experienced nurses retraining and rejoining the NHS, a further increase of 250 in the student nurse intake and a guarantee of one year's employment in NHS Scotland for all newly qualified nurses who want that. I think that Nicola Sturgeon would agree that that is a further move to ensure that nurses continue their training here in Scotland, which is important to all of us. There will be a doubling of the number of nurses participating in leadership programmes and action will be taken to give nurses and midwives a greater say in decision making, through an increase in the number of nurse consultants and through membership on the 15 NHS boards. That was welcomed by many members who spoke in the debate.

Robin Harper mentioned the role of midwives. Mr Harper will be aware that I am chairing a review of maternity services. Central to that is the safety of mother and babies. I assure Mr Harper that I will be taking forward the positive role of midwives in leading that service.

The nurse shortages that are experienced in certain specialties and in certain areas of Scotland are more to do with the need to be more effective in work force planning than they are to do with pay. That is why local pay bargaining, which has been suggested by the SNP this afternoon and has previously been rejected by staff, is not the solution.

We are working to improve the pay, conditions and morale of all nurses, not just a minority of nurses. We are playing a full part in UK talks to modernise the NHS pay system and we have made it clear that we are willing to invest in that reform.

We recognise that our health service is delivered by people in a number of professions and roles, all of whom display dedication and care. The motion refers to that and the Parliament recognises that. However, I cannot imagine that anyone will object to us taking some time today, during international nurses week, to recognise the central role of nurses.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions: one on the appointment of a committee substitute, one on committee membership and one on the designation of a lead committee. To save Euan Robson's breath, I suggest that he move all three motions together.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that Karen Whitefield be the nominated committee substitute for the Labour Party on the Education, Culture and Sport Committee as permitted under Rule 6.3A.

That the Parliament agrees that the following Members be appointed to Committees—

Cathy Peattie to replace Frank McAveety on the Education, Culture and Sport Committee;

Paul Martin to replace Frank McAveety on the Standards and the Procedures Committees;

Wendy Alexander to replace Angus MacKay on the Justice 1 Committee; and

Kenneth Gibson to replace Tricia Marwick on the Local Government Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Justice Committee is designated as lead committee in consideration of the Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Bill and that the Justice 1 and 2 Committees and the Local Government Committee be secondary committees.—[*Euan Robson.*]

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): There are seven questions to be put to the chamber at decision time. [*Interruption.*] Order. Last week the Deputy Presiding Officer miscalled a vote because neither he nor the clerks could hear. I ask members to concentrate on the question that is being put and on the results of divisions.

The first question is that motion S1M-3063, in the name of Johann Lamont, on behalf of the Social Justice Committee, on the committee's inquiry into the voluntary sector, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the Social Justice Committee's 1st Report 2002, *Report on Inquiry into the Voluntary Sector* (SP Paper 531).

The Presiding Officer: The second question is that amendment S1M-3078.1, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, which seeks to amend motion S1M-3078, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on action to recruit, retain and value nurses, 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)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (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)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
MacDonald, Ms Margo (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)
Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (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)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (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)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (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)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (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)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (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, John Farquhar (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)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs 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)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)

Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 31, Against 64, Abstentions 15.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is that amendment S1M-3078.2, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S1M-3078, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 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)

Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
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)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (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)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (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)
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (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)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (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, John Farquhar (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)
Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Mrs 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)
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 45, Against 64, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is that motion S1M-3078, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on action to recruit, retain and value nurses, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament pays tribute to the vital contribution made by all members of health care teams across Scotland but, in this International Nurses' Week, recognises the central role of nurses and midwives in delivering high quality patient care and supports the significant investment and action to recruit, retain and value nurses and midwives being delivered through Facing the Future and other initiatives.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is that motion S1M-3092, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on substitution to a committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that Karen Whitefield be the nominated committee substitute for the Labour Party on the Education, Culture and Sport Committee as permitted under Rule 6.3A.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is that motion S1M-3091, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on committee membership, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the following Members be appointed to Committees—

Cathy Peattie to replace Frank McAveety on the Education, Culture and Sport Committee;

Paul Martin to replace Frank McAveety on the Standards and the Procedures Committees;

Wendy Alexander to replace Angus MacKay on the Justice 1 Committee; and

Kenneth Gibson to replace Tricia Marwick on the Local Government Committee.

The Presiding Officer: The last question is that motion S1M-3089, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Justice Committee is designated as lead committee in consideration of the Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Bill and that the Justice 1 and 2 Committees and the Local Government Committee be secondary committees.

Europe Day

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S1M-3032, in the name of Irene Oldfather, on Scotland and Europe day.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament is proud to mark Europe Day as a celebration of the founding of the European Union (EU); endorses the fundamental principles of the EU as set out in the Declaration by Robert Schuman on 9 May 1950; welcomes the contribution that the EU has made towards peace and solidarity across Europe; notes the relevance of the EU to the working of the Scottish Parliament and to the everyday lives of Scots, and encourages the people of Scotland, young and old, to join with citizens across Europe, in the celebration of our common values and to participate in the debate on the future of Europe.

17:05

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): This has been a very exciting day for the Parliament and I will say a little bit more about that in a moment. I thank the business managers of all parties in the Parliament—in the true spirit of European co-operation, they allowed the motion to be taken today by juggling other members' business debates.

On this day 52 years ago, the French foreign minister Robert Schuman made his groundbreaking speech and opened the debate with the words:

"World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it.

Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create ... solidarity."

The speech that advocated the regulation of coal and steel—the raw materials of war—led to collaboration for the first time in many years between France and Germany. To the great relief of Europe's people, conflict in Europe was replaced by economic co-operation.

That speech was the genesis of what we now know as the European Union and the origin of Europe day. I do not believe that Robert Schuman could have known when he made that speech on 9 May 1950 just how timeless and visionary his remarks would be. They are perhaps even more relevant today than they were then. We have had more than 50 years of peace in western Europe and the European Union's role in that must not be underestimated. It is important that we do not take that peace for granted.

A year ago in the Parliament we had a debate on Europe day and I called for us to stand together

in the face of extremism in some parts of Europe. I ask that we be vigilant in regard to the emergence of racism and xenophobia among certain fanatics, such as Jörg Haider in Austria. As we celebrate Europe day it is important that we acknowledge what I believe are the common values and principles that decent-minded people in the Parliament and throughout Europe share, regardless of cultural diversity and political affiliation. Those principles are our basic belief in democracy; our commitment to equality; our desire for better government and improvements in the principle of subsidiarity; our wish to promote opportunity for our people; and our yearning for peaceful co-existence.

The Scottish Parliament, as Europe's youngest Parliament, is keen to contribute to the debate on how the new Europe can affect our communities, our business and our people and how we can benefit from that engagement. It is difficult to imagine that only a few years ago, a day such as this would not have been possible. Today, we have opened our doors to hundreds of young people from schools throughout Scotland. We have an internet discussion group, which I hope citizens and interested parties throughout Europe will access.

Our debate today signals that, in the light of a changing and reforming agenda in Europe, we understand that Europe is relevant to our everyday lives.

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Does Irene Oldfather agree that it is not just the duty of the Parliament to spread awareness of Europe throughout Scotland, but the duty of the Government?

Irene Oldfather: I absolutely agree with that and I am sure that the minister will take that point up in his summing-up.

Our Parliament has been the voice of Scotland today, celebrating with citizens throughout Europe. If anyone doubts the relevance of Europe to our everyday lives, I say to them that 63 per cent of our manufactured exports go to the EU. It is estimated that 350,000 jobs depend on commerce within the internal market. As we develop and expand that further, opportunities for enterprising companies will grow. The roll-on, roll-off ferry link, which for so long was only an aspiration, will later this month be a reality. I know that the full benefits of that will quickly be realised by Scottish business.

Not only has Scotland benefited from the single market and the social progress that EU membership has brought, but we are well placed to benefit from the opportunities that enlargement will present. It is estimated that enlargement could mean an extra £175 million a year to the Scottish

economy, but we must gear up to take advantage of it. The European Committee is linking up with the region of Sachsen-Anhalt in Germany, which has an innovative project with Estonia to link up German business to opportunities in the east. We are looking to become a partner and to learn from that experience.

We must also capitalise on our experience in the public administration and service sectors. Through the administration of the ECOS-Ouverture programme, Scotland made good connections with partner regions in eastern Europe. Many of the candidate countries could benefit from Scottish expertise in drawing down structural funding and from a partnership approach to local economic development. Indeed, the European Commission has in the past described Scotland as a flagship performer. Those are the kind of concrete achievements that Schuman spoke of as the building blocks of solidarity 52 years ago.

I take the opportunity today to extend the hand of friendship from the Scottish Parliament to the candidate countries and to say, "Welcome. There has been much that has united us in the past and we look forward to extending our partnerships with you in the future." The nations and regions of Europe have a shared heritage as well as their own identity and, with that, a commitment to democracy and equality. The Scottish Parliament has a crucial role to play. By fulfilling our potential as a key player in the new Europe of the 21st century, we can leave to our people, our children and our grandchildren an inheritance of peace and prosperity. In those shared values lie our greatest strength.

17:12

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I thank Irene Oldfather for getting this matter on the agenda. I spent 24 years in the European Parliament and, oddly enough, was nominated for the unelected Parliament by none other than Harold Wilson. I do not know whether he ever regretted that. I was then an elected member from 1979 until I came to the Scottish Parliament. I can hardly describe the enormous thrill I felt the first time I went into the European Parliament and saw the nations that had been at war all sitting not in nationalities but in political groupings. That thrill is still with me any time I even think about those experiences.

I was a child of the war with two brothers in great danger, one of whom was missing for three and a half years. Because we lived near a synagogue, there were at my school in Glasgow Jewish children who had been rescued from the gas ovens. To me, the war was the most dreadful thing. Throughout my childhood, my mother jumped when the doorbell rang. I became a

passionate European because I could see that it was only by giving up some of our sovereignty together for joint purposes that we could possibly end war, which of course we have managed to do.

I am an enthusiastic European and that is how it will always be. I have seen enormous changes. The main change, I suppose, was the European Parliament's desire to acquire more powers. Enormous powers were added during my period there. The Parliament got powers of initiative, powers of compulsory consultation and powers to cross-examine the Commission, although it does not yet have power to select the commissioners.

When people used to tell me, "The European Parliament's just a talking shop," I used to get quite irritated. Who are we comparing it with? Certainly not with Westminster, where I also spent quite a number of years on two occasions. Rather, the European Parliament is a consensus Parliament. Our enemies being our Governments on the one hand and the Commission on the other hand, we tended to move together quite a lot on such matters as discrimination, human rights, the environment and the third world.

If we did not get our way, we raised the matter again a year later and started again with the same argument. We usually got our way. The European Parliament always gets its way in the end. We cannot say that about Westminster, because if a proposal is defeated in Westminster that is it for that session of Parliament. In Europe, one just waits a year and starts all over again.

One of my causes was a code of conduct for substandard tankers. I did not succeed the first time: I succeeded by getting enough supporters with other dangerous waters beside me with my dangerous waters in Shetland, Orkney and the Minch.

The initiative of which I am proudest is the Erasmus scheme. When I chaired the culture committee, we got the Erasmus scheme through. In that, I drew from Scottish experience, because we used to send our students to other universities throughout Europe, such as Bologna, Valladolid, Paris and Leiden. I just thought, "Why not dip into the Scottish experience and open it up for all European students?"

Glasgow became the city of culture when I was chairman of the culture committee, but I assure members that that was nothing to do with me—it was genuinely a decision by the English minister. It was to be Britain's turn to have the city of culture. Bath, Oxford, Glasgow and Edinburgh were in the running. Glasgow got it, the English minister said, because its policy was all about the future and the other cities were talking only about the past.

We also got recognition of the deaf sign language of each EU member state through the

Parliament. However, not all the countries have honoured that. Only three or four have done it, and Britain is not one of them.

In my opening speech in this Parliament, I urged that we follow the committee system of the European Parliament. I am happy to say that we have done that. Largely speaking, our committee system is the jewel of the Parliament. All parties are represented and everybody's contribution is valued if they have something interesting to contribute. That is the way that it is in Europe.

The criticisms of the secrecy of the Council of Ministers that we always made in the European Parliament remain more or less unchanged. We had all sorts of practical plans, such as the chairman of the appropriate committee being allowed in when the appropriate subject was on the agenda, but we never got in.

On Britain's clout for Scotland, I disagree. Fishing is the example that springs to mind. In that and many other things, Britain is the country that keeps turning down European money because it will not match it. If Scotland were, as I want it to be, a normal member of the EU, Britain would actually have more votes.

17:18

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): Who could forget that it was a Conservative Government that took the United Kingdom into the Common Market in the early 1970s? Europe day, if any, is a time to reflect on how the EU and its development have been a political struggle in all parties in the UK. After all, Labour campaigned against membership in 1974 and even Tony Blair wanted to withdraw from Europe in 1983.

No one should claim the copyright on the EU or its institutions, nor should they be naive enough to believe that what is in favour with the electorate today will remain so for eternity. Until now, debate and argument on the future of Europe have been beneficial to its development. Member states have progressed treaty by treaty to where we are today, but we have never locked ourselves into commitments. That is at the heart of the debate on the future of Europe and its governance.

I was born at the time of Britain's entry negotiations. Having lived in many continental countries, I have no fear of Germans coming over the border or of French invasion, but I fear that the citizens of Europe are often left behind by political elites in the decision-making process. Most of us have seen the Europe day postcard with its symbol and the narrative on the back. It gives rise to the debate itself. It says that 9 May

"is an annual opportunity to celebrate the EU's achievements and reflect on its aims. Peace, freedom, prosperity and working together towards shared goals."

The last word in that quotation is what the debate is about. The challenge for us is to define those goals. Most of the public are not consulted on or aware of what those goals should be. I think that Europe is at that crossroads once again this year.

My party and I believe that the goal should be a wider, looser Europe, with the values of subsidiarity and diversification at its heart, and that the best way to bring Europe back to its citizens is to devolve power and decisions back to them. That is not best achieved by going over the collective heads of member states' Parliaments.

Other parties are open about their opinions, too. The European Committee heard evidence from Andrew Duff, the Liberal Democrat MEP who is also head of the federalist group. In the convention on the future of Europe, he pushes openly for the plan that he believes in: a federal Europe. That subject is open to debate and such views have been honestly put forward.

My belief, of course, is that although a federal system would theoretically allow a more direct route between citizen, elected MEP and, perhaps, European president, it would come at the expense of the nation state.

Irene Oldfather referred to the terrible rise of nationalism, which I think is a symptom of citizens' feeling frustrated and left out of the decision-making processes. Who can forget the Irish people's refusal of the Nice treaty? It struck all of us who visited Brussels that the EU Commission carried on regardless. We cannot ignore the people of different parts of Europe who are expressing their dissatisfaction with some of the things that are dealt with by European policy makers.

If the EU ignores the people of Europe and carries on regardless, people will feel more and more alienated—which is what has contributed to the scandalous rise of nationalism in recent years. Whatever we secure for the future of Europe, we must ensure that it is in touch with people and that people in this and other countries are consulted more often about the future direction of Europe.

Today, however, is an opportunity to reflect on the good things the EU has brought us: security, better trade, better culture and integration. Let us celebrate the fact that—hopefully—my generation will, as a result of the existence of the EU, not experience the wars that killed so many in the past.

I am pleased to support the motion, and so is my party.

17:22

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I congratulate Irene Oldfather on securing the debate. She is absolutely right to say that first the

European Coal and Steel Community, then the European Economic Community and now the European Union have made a massive contribution to peace on the continent: the longest period of peace in western European history. In particular, they have brought an end to Franco-German hostility, which erupted in three major wars between 1870 and 1945: the Franco-Prussian war, the first world war and the second world war.

As well as an unprecedented period of peace, the European Union has brought unprecedented prosperity and led to the spread of European democracy. I was fortunate enough to spend Christmas 1989 in Prague at the height of the velvet revolution and to hear Václav Havel's first speech as President of Czechoslovakia. That new year's eve I was at the Berlin wall when, to the astonishment of everybody and for the first time, the East German guards allowed people to pass freely between east Berlin and west Berlin.

That spread of European democracy is now leading to the enlargement of the Community, to the widening of the European Union's membership. It is also leading to the deepening of the Community. I hope that it will not be long before we join the euro. We in the United Kingdom should have learned by now that, by joining late, we had little say in how the Community first formed. Now, we may have little say in the way the single currency is managed.

I hope that this debate will stimulate a wider one in Scotland as a whole. More than 100 of the 129 members of the Parliament belong to parties that are committed to eventual entry into the single currency. That does not mean, however, that that view is reflected among the electorate. It is incumbent on us all to take a lead in the national debate that is to come.

I do not want to rehearse the arguments in detail, but I profoundly believe that membership of a single currency is in the economic interest of Scotland. It would free Scottish firms from damaging currency fluctuations and eliminate transaction costs. It would lead to lower interest rates and to greater price transparency—and so to increased consumer power and many lower-priced goods. It would safeguard more than 300,000 Scottish jobs that depend on trade with Europe. It would protect inward investment. It would safeguard and strengthen Britain's financial sector, not least here in Edinburgh, which manages the fourth largest sum of international funds—£160 billion—after London, Paris and Frankfurt.

I agree with my colleague Chris Huhne—a much more distinguished expert on the single currency than me; he was formerly a distinguished financial journalist and is now an MEP—who undertook an inquiry into the single currency on behalf of our

federal party leader, Charles Kennedy. The inquiry concluded that

“the UK Government's inaction on the euro is partly to blame for the damaging overvaluation of the pound.”

The sooner we have a clearer lead from the UK Government the better, but that should not prevent Scotland from taking a lead.

Just over 30 years ago, while perched precariously at the base of Nelson's column, I made my one and only speech in Trafalgar Square. I was there with such distinguished Conservatives—there was such a thing as a Conservative group for Europe then—as Kenneth Clarke, Hugh Dykes and Chris Patten. Many of them are now colleagues in the Liberal Democrats.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): No they are not.

Mr Raffan: I said that many of them are, but there are more to come. Foolish men will be swept away—particularly those on my right.

A week tomorrow I will be in Rosyth to see the first sailing of the Superfast ferry to Zeebrugge, which will open up a direct sea link to Europe. Earlier this afternoon I was with pupils of Coupar Angus Primary School, who were here to learn about Europe and Scotland's place in it. I told them that when I was their age—they are 10 or 11—I was not as lucky as they are because we were not part of Europe as we are now. The future of Europe is about not only our future but, much more important, theirs.

17:26

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Irene Oldfather on helping the Parliament to mark Europe day through this evening's debate. I pay special tribute to Winnie Ewing, who is Scotland's best link with Europe. If Sean Connery is Scotland's most famous film star, Winnie Ewing is certainly Scotland's most famous European. I know that they are good friends and I am thankful that both happen to be members of the SNP. The Parliament can draw on Winnie's experience and wisdom in European matters, as the SNP often does.

I welcome the debate especially because it shows that Parliament is marking Europe day. I only wish that the Scottish Government—or indeed, the UK Government—had gone out of its way to try to mark Europe day, but that has not been the case. I understand that the First Minister had a photo call today and that he will attend a reception organised by the European Commission this evening, but that is the extent of the Scottish Executive's involvement in Europe day. That is quite disappointing.

Before I came to the Parliament this morning, I listened to the BBC. The BBC talked about the English team in the world cup, Arsenal winning the English league and the Queen's jubilee, but it did not mention once that today is Europe day. That is disappointing, but the Scottish media are no better. As we all know, some of the Scottish papers have withdrawn from attempting to cover European matters in any detail. I hope that the Parliament can express the view to the media that they should do more to raise awareness of European issues throughout Scotland.

Irene Oldfather: The member will no doubt be interested to know that this afternoon's "Newsdrive" has covered Europe day.

Richard Lochhead: I am delighted to hear that. One can always trust the BBC's "Newsdrive".

Last week, I started to read Primo Levi's "If This Is A Man", which is the author's story of how he spent the last year of the second world war in a work camp near Auschwitz. As I was reading the book and thinking of today's debate, I thought that that book should serve as a reminder of why we are in Europe in the first place. The European Communities were founded to maintain peace in Europe and to spread democracy and tolerance throughout the continent. That should put all the other complaints about Europe into perspective. We should never lose sight of that fact.

However, the reality is that many people in Scotland think that the European institutions are remote and out of touch with opinion on the ground. One need only look at the common agricultural policy, which has spent billions of pounds, yet Scotland and Europe now have fewer farmers, who have less income. Similarly, we have hundreds of regulations under the common fisheries policy, yet Europe now has fewer fishermen and smaller fish stocks.

It is important that Scotland have a voice in Europe. As the motion says, we need to participate in the European debate. However, Scotland is missing from the convention on the future of Europe. Scotland's political leader, Jack McConnell, has no higher status than rapporteur to the Committee of the Regions, which itself has only observer status. Other small nations in Europe, such as Denmark, are at the heart of the debate over the future of Europe. Those countries have influence, but the Scottish Government does not use what little influence it has.

In conclusion, if we want to make our vision of Europe a reality, we need real influence in the heart of Europe. That means that, one day, we will need to celebrate not only Europe day, but independence in Europe day.

17:29

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Irene Oldfather not only on today's debate, but on her boundless enthusiasm in promoting Europe. Although many of my colleagues and I do not always agree with everything that she says about Europe or with all aspects of her vision for the future, I admire the way in which she has pursued the issue. I regret that, although I had the pleasure of Mr Hugh Henry's distinctive convenership of the European Committee, I did not last the course—because the number of members was cut—to have the benefit of Irene Oldfather's convenership, which I am sure is equally distinctive.

I agree with one of Keith Raffan's comments—that an intelligent and coherent debate about Europe and Scotland's role in Europe is needed. I disagree with his views on the euro. It is clear that people can support being in Europe and being part of the European Union while not being in favour of the euro. To oppose the euro does not make one anti-European. One great progression of the past year or so is that we can move away from the viewpoint that being against the euro means being against Europe as a whole.

That discussion of issues is needed. The EU needs to develop and learn. It could learn from the Parliament. Recently, I had two very different experiences. One was with the Parliament, when the Rural Development Committee travelled to Dalry in Galloway to take evidence from people in rural Scotland about rural integration. That was a professionally managed event, in which the public were free to participate. I also attended the EU's allegedly public hearing into foot-and-mouth disease, which—for some bizarre reason—took place in a cafe in Gretna. Fifty EU personnel and three farmers were present at that hearing. That did not create a favourable impression among the population.

The other part of the debate, which we discussed when I was a member of the European Committee, is the need not to view Europe as a cash provider to Scotland. We must make serious adjustments. I know that the minister is aware of issues in relation to the common agricultural policy. We often talk about structural funding. An area such as Dumfries and Galloway may well receive £4 million in structural funding, but we receive £60 million a year in CAP funding. If we do not start to make preparations and do not understand that that funding basis will change, we will be in serious difficulty. However, at least the European Committee and debates such as today's provide the opportunity to discuss and examine the issue. On that basis, I have pleasure in welcoming and supporting the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Several members have added their names during the debate to the list of members who wish to speak. I am about five minutes short, so although I will accept a motion without notice to extend the debate until 6 o'clock, I expect the debate to finish five or 10 minutes before then.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended until 6.00 pm.—[*Irene Oldfather.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:34

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): I thank Irene Oldfather, who is the convener of the European Committee, for securing the debate. She always keeps an eye on such anniversaries, which keeps the rest of us in line. That is nice to know.

I am entirely pro-European Union, but we live in an interesting time in the EU's development. Members have touched on some of the issues. The current and most important issue in the EU for me as a citizen and as a member of a political party is the development of the constitutional convention on the future of Europe, which will give us a new passport with a new message on its inside page.

The convention will also affect our individual and collective rights in many ways. However, my fear is that because, in effect, centre-right Governments control the big five member states, their influence will affect personal and individual freedom issues and make legal frameworks more draconian than is necessary. I cite in evidence of that the behaviour of Aznar's Spanish Government toward nationalists in the Basque country, where large youth organisations, social organisations and the largest radical political party have been declared terrorist organisations.

Today, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has led me to believe that on the advice of the Spanish Government, the British Government will add all those organisations to the list of terrorist organisations that was issued in 2000. I find that deeply worrying, because I am a member of an organisation that has been declared a terrorist organisation. The organisation in question provides food, succour and comfort to political prisoners in the Basque country. To be frank, I am no terrorist and neither are the people who run that organisation.

Does the minister agree that the constant extension of the list of outlawed organisations and political groupings in no way advances democracy in Europe? The constitutional convention should be the focus—the crucible—for the development

of a genuine and truthful democracy and for the creation of a Europe of the peoples, not a Europe of the nation states. I make those comments because several members have said that Britain and Europe have been at peace since the formation of the European Union, but that is not true. It is not true within the boundaries of the United Kingdom, within the boundaries of Italy or within the boundaries of Spain.

It is a false concept to pretend that the only benefit of the EU has been to prevent a major war between France and Germany. The EU has made it possible for people around the world to carry out extremely brutal and vicious wars. The second, third and fourth-largest arms producers in the world are European companies with Government involvement. We might not be experiencing war on our own soil, but we export it daily.

The most important issue for us as Scots and as people who carry a UK passport is whether Britain will get into Europe or whether it will continue with its semi-detached approach, which is exemplified by the British Government's failure to agree with the EU measures against the state of Israel for its occupation of Palestinian territories. Are we going to be in Europe or are we going to be the 51st state? We cannot be both. I suggest that to become truly European, Europe needs to stop talking about the euro and peace and needs to talk about the development of democracy and the possibility of carrying a unified European passport that allows travel and the protection of law in all member countries and in the countries that will accede to the EU.

17:38

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I, too, pay tribute to Irene Oldfather for so skilfully securing a debate on Europe day on 9 May. It is a delight to work with Irene, with our colleagues on the European Committee and with our minister.

I have no doubt that my colleagues in the Executive—particularly Peter Peacock, whom I knew in a previous incarnation, when we had interesting times in carrying out European work in local government—have a powerful commitment to working in Europe. I know that Henry McLeish and his successor, Jack McConnell, have always been determined to ensure that the people of Scotland get the best out of Europe and that we contribute to Europe in the best way. I am proud to be part of a team that is helping to develop that work.

I agree with Keith Raffan—for once—that among the many things about Europe that we can celebrate is the fact that next week we will have the Rosyth-Zeebrugge ferry. The setting up of that service was an example of genuine co-operation

at local government level. The name that is often given to local government in the Parliament impugns the integrity of local government officials. We should remember that local government brought members such as Peter Peacock and other celebrated individuals into the Parliament.

We should recognise local government officials' value and their contribution. My colleagues in Fife Council have continued an initiative that was started away back in the days of the North Sea Commission—which Peter Peacock will know very well. The ferry is a tremendous example of what good co-operation and collaboration can bring to the people of Scotland and I am delighted to be part of it. It opens up opportunities for business and tourism. I will really celebrate next week when we help to launch the service as the ship sails from Rosyth. I hope that it will be a success and that people will realise the opportunities that it offers.

Keith Raffan is right to say that we will have to show some leadership on the euro. Winnie Ewing was the one who convinced me about the euro on a television programme. She might remember it: she said that she was going to be given hospitality in Spain and that, to get there, she would be going through four countries, in each of which she would have to spend money. When she came back to Scotland she said that she had not spent very much money in any of the countries that she had travelled through and that she had been given lots of hospitality. She said that she had had £400—or however much it was—in her pocket but that all of it had gone on commission and bank charges.

Ben Wallace: Will the member give way?

Helen Eadie: I am on my last two seconds.

When the people of Scotland go on their summer holidays this year and start to use euros, they will really understand the difference that the euro can bring. They will save money but it will cost the banks. Hallelujah!

17:42

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I endorse wholeheartedly every word of Irene Oldfather's motion. I would also like to record my appreciation for the power of work that a number of people did to organise school visits today. Eurodesk, Young Scot and the Scottish youth parliament were the youth organisations involved, together with the offices in Scotland of the European Commission and the European Parliament. We should not forget our own staff and the teachers who came with the children.

Primary school children from all over Scotland have been in and around the Parliament today, helping us to celebrate Europe day. It was great

for many reasons. The kids whom I met this morning were great—some of them got up at 5 o'clock in the morning to get here. It is good to see youngsters being interested and getting involved in what I might describe as the civic responsibility of being Scots and being Europeans. What makes Governments work, and what keeps politicians honest, is an involved and interested electorate. Those young people are the electorate and, indeed, the politicians, of the future. They have a lot to teach the people and the politicians of the present. I was impressed by some of the suggestions made by the group that I was with. One especially imaginative suggestion was that school pupils from different European countries should go on joint school trips. Now, I might have thought of that, but the added twist was that the trip should be to a country that was abroad for both groups.

Other youngsters advocated e-penfriends, to help them learn the language of their counterparts in other countries. The group that I spent time with were not only definitely pro-euro but understood why they held that view.

I will not use the debate as an occasion for a political speech, but as an opportunity to celebrate the fact that an organisation that was born five years after the destruction and bloodshed of the second major war of the 20th century in Europe had ended has been a factor in the political stability and the continuing peace that we enjoy in western Europe. The organisation has gone from strength to strength. The membership has grown from the original six to the current 15 and it is set to grow still further. Its role, its structures and its way of working have changed along the way. It has given us peace, prosperity and the enrichment of having closer relationships with cultures other than our own.

For me, the main *raison d'être* of the Scottish Parliament, the European Union and in particular the European Parliament is the same—better government. It is common sense to deal with some issues co-operatively on a wider than national basis. It is also common sense to devolve power to the nearest practicable level to the citizen. We have benefited greatly, and in many ways, from our membership of the EU. There are obvious physical benefits, such as roads and bridges, and various other projects that would not have happened without European funding.

I want to celebrate the fact that the EU has been particularly effective in driving forward action on two fronts that are dear to my heart: equality and the environment. I am delighted to speak in this debate and to contribute to the celebrations. I am pleased to be able to say with enthusiasm: vive l'Europe!

17:45

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP):

I am pleased that the consultative steering group looked to Europe in establishing our Parliament. We are elected proportionally using the same constituency list system as Germany. Like most of Europe, our business is determined collectively in a bureau. For internal appointments we use the d'Hondt system, which was invented by a Belgian. We have electronic voting and we sit in the classic European hemicycle.

As the motion states, there are close working links between the EU and the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Parliament and its committees are interested in many of the same subject areas as the EU. I believe that there is no subject committee in the Scottish Parliament in whose subject the EU does not also have an interest. I have experienced that on a personal level, because I am a member of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee of the Scottish Parliament and, as a member of the Committee of the Regions, I sit on the Commission for Culture and Education. The overlap and added value is very useful.

Members of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee have just begun to get regular information about the work programme of the European Culture, Youth, Education, Media and Sport Committee. That is very helpful because our committee—and all committees of the Scottish Parliament—should be aware of EU policies and legislation as early as possible so that we can consider their impact on Scotland and influence Scottish and UK ministers if appropriate.

The motion also highlights the fact that the EU has a major impact on the everyday lives of people in Scotland. However, there is a lot of work to do to raise awareness of that and of what each EU institution does. I was sent the latest edition of the Eurobarometer, which charts public awareness of all EU bodies, including the Committee of the Regions. The figures are improving, but they are still not very good. When people were asked whether they had ever heard of the Committee of the Regions, only 31 per cent said yes, while 61 per cent said no—I do not know what happened to the other 8 per cent. Worst of all, the country with the highest awareness of the Committee of the Regions was Portugal, with 54 per cent, but the lowest awareness was in the United Kingdom, with 15 per cent. It has been suggested that not until we have a long-running storyline in “Coronation Street” in which Ken Barlow decides to run for the presidency of the Committee of the Regions, will we improve on those figures.

I will finish by making a huge cultural leap from Ken Barlow to Jean Monnet, the founding father of the European Community. He said:

“men and women who are placed in new circumstances or are subject to a new set of obligations, adapt their behaviour and become different. If the new context is better, they themselves become better.”

I am sure that we all hope that that will be the case for both Scotland and Europe, now and in the future.

17:49

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services (Peter Peacock):

As Irene Oldfather and other members have said, today is a day for celebrating a remarkable achievement and the vision and commitment of our forebears in setting the foundations for the modern European Union. As Winnie Ewing and other members have said, the EU came about from the aftermath of two hugely destructive wars in the first half of the last century and stemmed from a commitment to ensure that that never happened again. Those are the origins of the European Union.

It is to Robert Schuman's eternal credit that, on this day in 1950, he took those first historic steps and called for Europe to move forward. That is still relevant today. Old enemies began to work together to resolve disputes, rather than going to war, which had been the tradition in Europe prior to that. It is fitting that Irene Oldfather has managed to coincide today's debate with the exact day of Schuman's speech in 1950.

I have made it clear before in this chamber that I am an unashamed enthusiast for Europe, in the way that Winnie Ewing described. I believe that the development of the European Union is one of the most remarkable achievements of our history. Winnie Ewing described when she first went to the European Parliament. I remember when I first walked into the European Parliament hemicycle, when I was a member of the European Committee of the Regions. I was with several hundred people who were doing the same job that I was—I was a council leader—but they were from all over Europe. I remember thinking that only 50 or 60 years before the same people were at war, lobbing shells at each other and causing massive destruction. The fact that we have moved forward in the way that we have is impressive by any standard.

The achievements of the European Union are set to continue with its impending enlargement. The EU has contributed enormously to peace and security in Europe. It has also contributed to many other areas of the day-to-day lives of our communities: to business; to the creation of jobs and trade; to fighting international crime; and to a cleaner environment, which members, in particular Nora Radcliffe, have talked about. All of that has been built upon a common marketplace for goods and services and a vibrant European economy.

But the EU is much more than just an economic phenomenon. It is the only trading bloc in the world that has an explicit policy to bring about economic and social cohesion and solidarity among the members of the European Union, wherever people are within the Union. The EU is about working together in partnership to make Europe a more harmonious place, which is better balanced, cleaner, more prosperous and safer for all the peoples of Europe. The members of the European Union are much stronger together than they were apart, prior to the Union's creation.

As a number of members have said, despite all the positive aspects of the European Union, challenges face it at present. Ben Wallace and Richard Lochhead touched on that. The view of the Union is changing in parts of Europe. Part of the reason for that is that people believe the Union to be distant from the citizen. A lot of work is going on to address that.

Richard Lochhead: The minister will appreciate that one of the debates on the future of Europe is about where executive power should lie, that is, whether it should lie with the European Parliament or the European Commission. What is the Scottish Executive's view on that?

Peter Peacock: I will draw some of those points out as I proceed.

The forthcoming enlargement of the EU, which we support strongly, will increase the population of the EU by approximately 130 million people, but it will also open up huge opportunities for Scotland in trade and development. Enlargement has the potential to make the institutions and the workings of the EU seem even more complex and distant from the people, who already perceive the EU to be distant. That has led to the current debate on the future governance of Europe.

The EU is a complex, interwoven, multi-layered democracy. It has two or three layers of local government which—in particular on the continent—are built around communal government and power being passed to regional and state governments. The EU also has sub-member state administrations, with either legislative powers or purely administrative powers, member state Governments and the European Parliament itself. The machinery of the EU is extremely complex, and includes the Council of Ministers, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, and the European Court of Justice among others.

Scotland has strong representation in the EU at all levels of decision making—through the UK Parliament, via the UK Government, through the Executive directly into institutions and in the European Parliament itself.

Richard Lochhead: Will the minister give way?

Peter Peacock: I wish to make progress.

Scotland has influence in the European Economic and Social Committee and in the Committee of the Regions. It also has influence in lobby groups around the European Parliament and the European Commission, for example the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions. In that context, Scotland is represented at the top table of all institutions and groups in Europe. Scotland punches well above its weight in the European context. It has the twin benefits—and I disagree with Winnie Ewing on this point—of being part of one of the strongest member states, that is the UK, while at the same time it has access to every level of the Union's decision making.

I regret that Richard Lochhead, unlike others, brought a discordant tone to the debate with regard to powers. He mentioned that the First Minister was making a contribution to the European debate today. In addition, this debate is taking place and I am going up to Inverness to speak on behalf of the Executive at a debate on European matters.

Richard Lochhead: The minister talked about Scotland punching above its weight in Europe. Scotland should be punching above its weight in the Council of Ministers. Under the devolved set-up, how many meetings of the Council of Ministers has the Scottish Executive been represented at this year?

Peter Peacock: That question shows that Richard Lochhead fails to grasp the crafted analysis that I am trying to make. The Executive is represented at all levels of the European Union. Scotland is represented in the UK Government and the issue therefore does not arise.

Securing a new Europe requires a partnership where government at all levels, whether it is the UK, EU, the Scottish Executive, our MEPs or local government, works closely together with the trade unions, the business community and the voluntary sector to respond to the challenges that Europe faces. That partnership has to continue to develop and build on the huge progress that has been made to date.

Our aim is to make the European Union more open, coherent, effective, accountable and relevant to the ordinary men and women of Europe. As part of its principles, the EU should be committed to subsidiarity. As others have mentioned, the Scottish Parliament and the Executive have a role to play in the process of helping to bring about greater understanding, participation and benefits from the European Union.

Ben Wallace rose—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. The minister must wind up.

Peter Peacock: We want to secure a Europe that is genuinely closer to the citizen and that enables us all to benefit from European growth. As others mentioned, I am sure that the Scottish Parliament will welcome the fact that the First Minister will draft the Committee of the Regions' main opinion paper on the reform of the treaty.

I would like to return to the Schuman declaration, which is referred to in Irene Oldfather's motion. In its time, the declaration was visionary. It was a declaration that was incredibly far-sighted and creative. We are here to celebrate the achievement of that vision, which is the creation of the European Union and the priceless benefits that it has brought to the people of Scotland. The Executive fully supports the sentiments expressed in the motion lodged by Irene Oldfather.

Meeting closed at 17:56.

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