

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 9 October 2002  
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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## Scottish Parliament

*Wednesday 9 October 2002*

*(Afternoon)*

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

### Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** To lead our time for reflection this week we welcome the Very Rev James L Weatherhead, a former Moderator of the General Assembly.

**Very Rev Dr James L Weatherhead (Former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland):** Thank you. Forty years ago, in May 1962, I was for the first time a member of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland meeting in this hall and I spoke in support of a proposal for a Scottish Parliament. I do not claim that my persuasion moved the general assembly, which was minded to support such a proposal anyway. My proposal was only one of many irrelevant or superfluous speeches made in this hall before and since.

Before the Scottish Parliament was established, people used to say that the general assembly was the nearest thing that Scotland had to a Parliament. If that was true, it meant that Scotland was a long way in those days from having a real Parliament. That is not to denigrate the general assembly, but to say just that it is different.

The explicit basis of Church of Scotland government is the sovereignty of God, not the sovereignty of the Queen in Parliament or the sovereignty of the people. That is made explicit in the constitution of the Church of Scotland, as recognised, but not imposed or granted, by the Church of Scotland Act 1921. That constitution states:

"This Church as part of the Universal Church wherein the Lord Jesus Christ has appointed a government in the hands of Church office-bearers, receives from Him, its Divine King and Head, and From Him alone, the right and power subject to no civil authority to legislate, and to adjudicate finally, in all matters of doctrine, worship, government, and discipline in the Church."

The constitution, however, also says:

"This Church acknowledges the divine appointment and authority of the civil magistrate within his own sphere, and maintains its historic testimony to the duty of the nation acting in its corporate capacity to render homage to God, to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ to be King over the nations, to obey His laws, to reverence His ordinances, to honour His Church, and to promote in all appropriate ways the Kingdom of God."

That is clearly derived from what St Paul wrote in his Epistle to the Romans:

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God ... he"—

that is, the ruler—

"is the minister of God to thee for good."

I believe that other religions might say something similar, in their own terms.

Robert Burns said in the poem "Ode to a Louse":

"O wad some Power the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as ithers see us!"

I see you, the Scottish Parliament, as ministers of God to the Scottish people for good; and I believe that that is how God sees you.

## Education

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** We come now to the first item of business, which is the statement by the Minister for Education and Young People, Cathy Jamieson, on the national debate on education. I ask those who want to ask questions after the statement to indicate that on the screen.

14:34

**The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson):** In March, when I launched the national debate on education, I set out the following aims: to have a once-in-a-decade opportunity for everyone to think about what sort of education we want for young people in Scotland; to consider how education will offer the right opportunities for our children and young people to meet their aspirations, achieve their potential and build the future that is right for them; to examine the place of education in building Scotland's future; and to share views with each other, the Parliament and the Executive.

I have been delighted at the level of involvement in the debate from individuals and organisations across the country. I have been particularly pleased that young people have wanted to be involved and make their views known. Today, I want to share with members some of what was said during the debate and the pointers that we have been given.

I am pleased that young people and parents who were involved in the debate are in the gallery today and I welcome them.

The effort and enthusiasm of the people who participated in the debate was overwhelming. More than 800 events took place across Scotland and we estimate that more than 20,000 people took part in the debate. For any consultation, that is a tremendous response. It means that we can draw conclusions and identify the areas where consensus is clear, the areas that are working well and those areas in which we must modernise our approach. A wide range of organisations and people—employers, parents' groups, local authorities, groups from many faiths, children's organisations, young people with experience of the care system and homelessness, prisoners and equality groups—took part in many different ways, from big national conferences to groups in local halls and in people's homes.

Out of around 1,500 responses received, some 400 cover pupils' views. I believe that the views of pupils are central to the future of Scotland's education. Education should not be something that we do to our young people. Today's pupils are the future citizens of Scotland. They are our future parents, teachers, employers, health workers,

lawyers and farmers. They have a real stake in the future.

Another important feature of the debate is the partnership with the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. All the responses that were received in the debate are being shared with the committee, and I welcome its enthusiastic support for the debate.

However, not everyone was enthusiastic. Some people—including a few teachers—were sceptical about the process. One teacher said in his response:

"I firmly believe that no one pays any heed to what I write in these consultation documents so when you read this get in touch".

We did so. I have a message for that teacher, and for everyone else who took part: we have listened; your views count; and by taking part you have made a difference. We will show that our response is based on your views.

We commissioned an independent team at the University of Edinburgh, led by Professor Pamela Munn, to analyse the responses on our behalf. We are treating the debate seriously. With the volume of responses received, producing the full analysis and the fully considered response will take some time. However, to give an early indication of the views received we are publishing an initial report today. It is not the final word, but gives an overview of what has been said and what matters to people. Some of the messages are hard ones for me as a minister, but we are publishing the University of Edinburgh's report, including all the concerns, because those who took part in the debate deserve to hear an honest and full report of what was said.

What do the responses tell us so far? Education matters to Scotland. There is clear evidence of that from the numbers who took part in the debate. There is a pride in Scottish education. People do not want to lose comprehensive schools and a broadly based curriculum. This is not a faceless system. To pupils and parents, teachers are essential, and they are doing a good job.

I was pleased, but not surprised to see such positive messages. Every day, I see creative and innovative work in our schools. There is a fundamental strength to the education system in Scotland that we should bear in mind as we look to the future. We should not be afraid to change, where change is needed to improve the quality and relevance of the education service that our children receive. We must make it our business to improve where we must and ensure that we make continuous improvements within a stable framework.

We also heard that people were worried about the pace of change—parents and pupils as well as

teachers. They see a school system that is suffering from too many initiatives. They desperately want some stability, but they recognise the need to change some things.

Many people were concerned about the level of resources for schools and the standards of buildings and equipment and want there to be more and better-skilled teachers.

There were concerns about class sizes. People want pupils to get the attention and support that they need from teachers. There were also concerns about discipline. People want discipline problems to be taken seriously and dealt with effectively.

People were proud of the broad and balanced Scottish curriculum but saw problems with a curriculum that appears to be becoming overloaded. There was, therefore, strong support for the development of a core curriculum that would allow flexibility for schools to meet individual needs and talents—for example, by providing more time for art, drama, music and sport—and for pupils to have the chance to take short courses. There was also support for learning opportunities that would challenge our more able pupils.

There were concerns about the amount of assessment in schools and worries that there is now too much grading and sorting of children during their school careers. Those concerns point to real tensions. How do we balance the strength of Scottish education—which, for years, has offered us the opportunity to become rounded, informed citizens—with the need to meet the potential of each child and equip her or him with the skills and experience that are needed to find a job and achieve economic independence?

People wanted a stable framework—but with flexibility for more school-level control of resources and decisions. Where is the right balance to be struck? How do we provide equality of opportunity and provision throughout the country, but leave room for local decisions to be made when that is the best way to meet needs?

Parents and pupils rightly want to be well informed about education and involved in school decisions. I know that that is happening already in lots of ways—through school boards, parent-teacher associations and pupil councils, for instance—but it could be more effective. We need to do more. We should take a hard look at how we make that happen. How could we make better use of information technology for parents as well as pupils? How can we make sure that there is on-going contact rather than just occasional involvement? How can we get parents into schools—as well as getting information out—to ensure an active, dynamic relationship that places schools at the heart of the community?

To address those tensions and search out the right balance is not an impossible task, but it demands reflection and thought and requires us to work together. Over the next few months we will develop our full response to the views and questions, but some key aspects are already clear, particularly the need for stability and flexibility. We need to build a clear national framework that lets schools and authorities concentrate on meeting individual pupils' needs and enables local delivery, rather than burden schools with unnecessary bureaucracy.

The national debate on Scotland's education has taken place at a time of great awareness of the need to ensure that pupils leave school and higher and further education with the range of skills that will enable them to compete for jobs and to contribute to building a competitive Scotland. The Scottish Executive is committed to ensuring that our education system is of high quality and a global leader and that it plays a full role in helping to secure that competitive Scotland. Our challenge is to ensure that we build on existing strengths while modernising the education system to face the new challenges. By modernisation, we mean taking account of new thinking, new technology, new knowledge and new skills.

We need the right framework in place to do that and we have made a solid start. One of the first acts of this Parliament was to recognise the right of every child in Scotland to an education that fulfils his or her potential. Most important, the McCrone agreement that modernised teachers' conditions and introduced professional pay levels means that we can now recruit, train and reward the right teachers.

Those first steps and the conclusions from the education debate reveal the need for a closer and more productive relationship between those who manage, deliver and receive education and the Executive. I have already begun to build that relationship. I have today announced the repeal of the outdated Schools (Scotland) Code 1956 and we are investing more than £1 billion in school buildings, using the public-private partnership mechanism.

We are committed to doing even more to ensure that we have the right environment for learning. Through the Scottish budget for the next three years, we have provided for record levels of resources for schools. Those resources will enable us to build a modern education environment.

If our education is to be fit for purpose in future, teachers need the highest quality of training. I am determined to deliver just that. I announced today the next stage of our review of initial teacher education. The first-stage report was received last year and is now being implemented. I have commissioned Her Majesty's Inspectorate of

Education to carry out a scoping review of initial teacher education and to report to me in early 2003. That will give us up-to-date evidence on current practice to inform the second-stage review.

Those developments have cleared the ground. They pave the way and put key elements of the new education framework in place. It is the right framework to allow schools to deliver, but we must go further and examine how we might build on the guiding principles of our truly comprehensive system to build a system that meets the needs of all the children in our schools. That must not mean limiting the ambitions of any group.

A smart, successful Scotland will be secured only if we get beyond narrow, subject-based knowledge. We want to encourage and support young people to become creative, enterprising citizens. In order to secure that we need high-quality vocational education as one of the options available, not just for those staying on in the fifth year of secondary school because of when their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday falls, but right through school.

Schools need to work more closely with further and higher education, developing lasting partnerships. More involvement is needed with the real world of work in order to develop young people's ability to put knowledge into practice, to try out their skills and for them to be prepared for the world after school.

We need to secure better transitions from primary school to secondary school, and from the pre-five stage to primary, while recognising the needs of individual children and their development. We need to ensure that schools of the future have access to staff with the right skills and knowledge—teachers, specialists and support staff—who are best placed to provide pupils with the knowledge and skills that they need. We must not limit ourselves to arithmetical solutions to class sizes, but should bring more adults into the classroom to support teachers. We must find new ways to work in smaller groups, using other professional skills to support young people.

The strongest message from the debate is that people do not want more and more initiatives. I have heard that time and again when I have visited schools. I agree with that, but I intend to challenge everyone to aim for excellence and to deliver it. I will drive forward an agenda of continuous improvement in education. Just as we must avoid change for its own sake, stability must not mean stagnation. I want teachers, parents and other education professionals to work with us to create the stable framework that people want and to find ways of increasing flexibility in organising learning and teaching at a local level, while keeping pupils at the centre of schools and schools at the heart of their communities. I want us to have a shared vision for the future that

ensures that every school is a centre of excellence. That means that teachers, parents, pupils and policy makers—all of us who care about education—must keep working together to make the changes that will deliver for young people. Those changes will ensure that Scotland is a world leader in education, and they will build on our strengths, modernise and move us forward together.

This is about building on strengths and tackling weaknesses; it is about building an education system that is fit for purpose; and it is about building an education system that is fit for the future. Most important, it is about building an education service that is worthy of our young people.

**The Presiding Officer:** I have received a large number of requests to ask questions. It will not be possible to fit everybody in, but the shorter everybody's questions and answers, the more questions we will get in.

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** I thank the Minister for Education and Young People for her statement, and ask that she accept Michael Russell's apologies. He is on a previously arranged parliamentary delegation to Quebec. I am not sure whether his remit includes repairing relationships, but that is a different matter.

Let me turn to the heart of the issue. Does the minister agree that there is a difference between consultation with a blank piece of paper and the role of Government in leading the country and implementing action? I acknowledge that this is a long-term project, but point out that babies who were born within weeks of Labour coming to power in 1997 are now in primary 1. Can we ensure that the children of today do not miss out on vital Government action?

I note the press release that was issued before the minister made her statement, about the fact that the Schools (Scotland) Code 1956 is being phased out. How can that happen when so many references and terms are subject to continuing negotiation?

It is crystal clear from the University of Edinburgh's report that there is a strong desire for smaller class sizes, something which the minister apparently wearies of hearing about from the Scottish National Party, although that desire carries a weight of popular support. What exactly will the Government do for today's pupils that will involve investment in additional teachers, rather than just moves towards composite classes or having additional classroom assistants? In recent years the Government's favourite method of reducing class sizes to 30 in primaries 1 to 3 has been to have composite classes. That method is not based on any sound, substantial research—

something that the Government has itself acknowledged. Is the Government going to bring more teachers into the classroom, or will it be a case of trying to do arithmetic with an adult to pupil ratio instead of a teacher to pupil ratio, bearing in mind the fact that there were 95 fewer primary school teachers last year than in 2000, according to the most recent schools census?

Let me turn to the consultation responses concerning an over-emphasis on external assessment, an issue that was also raised by the SNP. What action does the minister anticipate to reverse the growing trend, so that children can acquire basic skills without the straitjacket of external assessment? The report refers to choice in the curriculum. How can one have choice in the curriculum if one is in a straitjacket of external assessment? What does the minister know now that she did not know before the extensive exercise started?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I did not think that I would miss Mike Russell, but he might have asked a question more quickly. I do not have the time to respond in detail to the many points that Fiona Hyslop raised. If I did respond to all her points, the Presiding Officer would not have time to fit in any more questions.

We are taking action. It is not a case of the Executive sitting back and not taking action on education. We have increased the number of adults who are working in classrooms. If the member went into classrooms as often as I do, she would know that the classroom assistants programme has been welcomed by teachers. It has removed the administrative burden from teachers and is providing opportunities for young people to have the support that they need.

The Schools (Scotland) Code 1956 was mentioned. A parliamentary question was answered this morning. The repeal of the part of the schools code that refers to early years education was signalled some time ago in guidance. Anyone who has been following the education debate would know that.

Fiona Hyslop has asked about whether it is the role of Government to consult. In a truly democratic society, it is the role of Government to lead. Although we will not shirk from leading, we will also work with communities, which are often not consulted, with young people, who are at the centre of education, and with teachers. We will work with everyone to come to a consensus and we will move forward. I make no apologies for that. The national debate has gone to places to which other consultations would not have dreamed of going.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I thank the minister for her statement and I

apologise on behalf of my colleague Brian Monteith, who usually fills this seat. He is widening his waistline in Bournemouth.

I am not surprised that the minister is pleased with the support that is shown for the comprehensive system. When the full responses are published, I suspect that many will prove to be from the usual suspects, who have a vested interest in the continuance of the current system, which benefits some, but fails too many—especially the least well off. All too often, the comprehensive system condemns pupils living in deprived areas to a sub-standard education from a failing school. If we wanted to design a school system that had the express aim of perpetuating social divisions, it would be hard to see how the Scottish Executive could improve on the present arrangements.

Members should not take my word for it. Someone said last week:

“The better-off can buy a better education, or move to a better area ...

In education, we need to move to the post-comprehensive era, where schools keep the comprehensive principle of equality of opportunity but where we open up the system to new and different ways of education, built round the needs of the individual child. ...

Why shouldn't there be a range of schools for parents to choose from; from specialist schools to the new city Academies, to faith schools, to sixth forms and sixth form colleges offering excellent routes into university and skilled employment?”

Who said that? It was not a Tory politician—it was Tony Blair, speaking at the Labour party conference.

I have just one question for the minister. What lessons does she believe that she can learn from her colleagues south of the border?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I was going to say that I did not think that I would miss Brian Monteith either, but I might revise my views. A member behind me is saying, “No.”

I am well aware of what the Prime Minister said last week. I will quote something else that was said last week:

“I believe in the comprehensive ideal—every child of equal worth; the highest expectations of everyone.”

Estelle Morris, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, said that. I do not think that we are a million miles apart. Indeed, we are not apart in that we want to secure the best possible outcomes for every child. It is their potential that matters, not their postcode.

I take exception to the notion that schools all around Scotland are failing schools, which Murdo Fraser seemed to imply. That is simply not the case. The consultation exercise has produced

positive comments from parents and others—some of whom are sitting in the gallery—who are involved and who want to be involved in their schools and who want their schools to be at the heart of the local community. That is fundamental to the way in which we will proceed.

We will make the changes that are needed to ensure that every child has the opportunity to realise their ambitions and to build on their talents. That will not mean a fundamental dismantling of the present system. The vast majority of respondents to the debate were clear about that.

**The Presiding Officer:** For the Liberal Democrats, I call Ian Jenkins.

**Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** The minister will know that I welcome the education debate. I look forward to reflecting on the submissions more fully, but in the meantime I welcome the way in which the consultation has endorsed the comprehensive system and the comprehensive nature of Scottish education. I welcome the way in which it has expressed positive confidence in the quality and effectiveness of the teaching that is offered to our youngsters.

I want to ask the minister two questions. First, will she assure the Parliament that the period of reflection that she mentioned will not stand in the way of on-going action, such as her commitment to cut the amount of bureaucracy and paperwork, which is a blight on the current arrangements in schools?

Secondly, and more broadly, what way forward does the minister see for reconciling the quite difficult dilemmas that are inherent in the submissions? For example, on the one hand there is a clear perception that the curriculum is overcrowded; on the other hand, there is a clear wish to expand provision in certain areas, such as physical education, sport, music, art, drama and citizenship. Similarly, there is a perceived need for a core element in the curriculum, but a strong wish for choice, pluralism and flexibility within the system. There is a clear wish for stability, yet there is recognition that development is needed. What mechanisms can we adopt to move forward in those regards?

**Cathy Jamieson:** Those are important points that go to the heart of what we are attempting to achieve. First, I want to give reassurance that a period of reflection is not about disappearing behind closed doors never to come out again, but about engaging in the process, looking at the information that we received from the debate and taking action on that.

In a number of areas, we are taking action already. For example, Ian Jenkins asked about bureaucracy. We have streamlined what was

formerly the excellence fund to become the new national priorities action fund to give local authorities more flexibility over how they use those resources. Crucially, we have lifted some of the difficulties around the way in which local authorities are required to account for and report on the use of those resources. We have done that to give local authorities flexibility.

I recognise that there are dilemmas, but that is why it is important that we realise that this stage of the debate is part of a process. We want to continue to engage with the education professionals and with others. We also want to consider in some detail some of the quite creative ideas that the debate has thrown up, such as how we might reorganise the school day or the school week to allow for some of the additional opportunities that young people clearly want. We would want to do that while at the same time ensuring that every young person gets the core curriculum that will serve them well in later life.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Karen Gillon, who is the convener of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee.

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** I welcome the minister's statement and the co-operation that has existed between the minister and the Education, Culture and Sport Committee. Some key themes have emerged from both inquiries into education, which have been very much welcomed. The committee received responses that were not just from the usual suspects or vested interests, and that has been positive.

My first question concerns curriculum flexibility and physical activity, about which several issues have emerged. Will the minister give us a flavour of what came through the consultation on that and how she aims to respond? My second question is about rural schools. In the gallery today are pupils from Crawford Primary. Will the minister indicate how the national debate is helping to shape the education that children in such rural schools receive?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I am happy to recognise, as Karen Gillon has done, the unique way in which the Education, Culture and Sport Committee has worked with the Executive on this exercise. That has been valuable for us all.

On curriculum flexibility, some of the issues that were raised about physical activity concerned the resources that are available to schools. Some issues were about people wanting greater access to specialists—which was not necessarily always a call for additional PE teachers—and to people who are active and excelling in sports. We need to look at how we can build in some of those issues.

On rural schools, what came through strongly was that, because of their very geography, many

communities rely on small local schools and want those schools to remain. Interestingly, and crucially, education authorities are prepared to consider how those resources can be managed and utilised in a different way, such as by allowing teachers, head teachers and others to work in groups and in clusters. That is the kind of creative thinking that we want to continue. We have to consider how best we can get the flexibility that allows decisions to be made at local level. We will continue to work with the committee on developing such ideas.

**Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab):**

Education in Scotland should address the needs of all pupils, as the minister proposes. The service should be fit for purpose and resourced to meet the challenges of the future. To what extent have the needs of disabled and special needs pupils been addressed in the review, to ensure that they are able to play a full and equal role?

**Cathy Jamieson:** That is an important issue; I was not able to develop it in my statement so I am pleased to answer that question now.

We have to take the issue of young people with special needs and disabilities very seriously. As part of the consultation process, we engaged with Children in Scotland and other organisations to ensure that some events directly involved children and young people who had disabilities or special needs. I was pleased to attend events and to hear directly from those children and young people. They gave a powerful message that they want this process to be about not only changes to buildings and all the physical issues around education, but changes in attitude. They want us all to be genuinely committed to working with them so that they can get the best out of life—not only in school but when they move into adulthood. We will continue to develop that theme alongside the work that we are doing on developing a new special educational needs strategy.

**Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West):** Murdo Fraser spoke about the comprehensive system. Will the minister confirm that comprehensive education received widespread support from the 20,000 people across Scotland who took part in the national debate? Will she make it absolutely clear that the Scottish Executive will reject Tony Blair's clarion call to the Labour party conference last week that we must now move to a post-comprehensive era? Is that not a bit thick, coming from a Fettes former pupil who never moved into the comprehensive era in the first place?

**Cathy Jamieson:** Dennis Canavan is addressing an education minister who was one of the first pupils to go through the fully comprehensive system in Ayrshire, and I do not think that it did me any harm.

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** Ahem!

**Cathy Jamieson:** Tory members may not agree, but as my colleagues behind me are pointing out, whatever education system they went through did not teach them manners.

The clear message that has come out of the debate is that people are basically content with the structure of the education system in Scotland. There was no huge clarion call, as Tory members may suggest, to do away with the current system or to replace it with a model that they may prefer. However, people were clear that, in changing times, we have to adapt and modernise the comprehensive system, while retaining its fundamental principles. I hope that I made that clear in my statement.

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** When the national debate was launched, people dismissed it as an empty consultation exercise. However, the large number of people who have contributed to the debate—and to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's inquiry—proved the doubters wrong. I am interested in what the minister will do now to make progress and to ensure that any changes will involve parents, teachers and—most important—young people.

How does the minister intend to reduce class sizes? As important, how will she secure an approach that values learning in small groups?

**Cathy Jamieson:** Cathy Peattie has hit the nail on the head. When we talk to young people, parents and teachers, they talk about the importance of being able to work in small groups. Some of the creative responses that we received considered how schools or classes could be reorganised to allow much more of that kind of teaching where necessary or appropriate. There are other opportunities for bringing together larger groups of young people to deal with certain issues. I was at an event a couple of weeks ago that brought together a couple of hundred young people from schools right across a local authority area to do work on citizenship education. Those are the kind of things that people are beginning to say can be done. We do not need to limit ourselves into boxes; we can get additional people and additional specialists into schools to work with young people.

I give the reassurance that we will continue to work with the people and groups that have contributed to the debate so far. We have generated a huge amount of interest. The issues that people are talking about might not be the issues that we would have thought about in the early stages, but we now have a responsibility to move forward and to continue to work with those groups as we introduce concrete proposals.

**Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP):** The minister referred in her statement to the more than

£1 billion that is to be invested in school buildings throughout Scotland. I am sure that no one in the chamber, no pupil and no parent would deny that that was necessary.

Is the minister aware of last week's Audit Scotland report, which said that going down the intended PPP route will cost an extra 2 to 3 per cent in additional interest payments? That is £461 million, which translates into 92 extra schools. It also easily covers the £742,140 that it would cost to employ the 31 secondary school librarians that we need in this country to ensure that we have a smart successful Scotland. Why did the minister choose the private finance initiative route over those extras that would make a real difference to education in Scotland today?

**Cathy Jamieson:** We chose to take the route of making the biggest ever investment in school buildings and undertaking the biggest ever modernisation programme because the young people who are sitting in the gallery deserve better than the present quality of some of our school buildings. They cannot wait for some time in the future when the member believes that she might be able to deliver those things. I want to deliver those things now.

The young people whom I met at lunch time told me that there is a need to modernise the environment in which they are taught. They want to see and benefit from the new school buildings, and they want that now. I make no apologies for what we are doing.

**Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** This week, as part of sign language awareness week, I attended an event at Garvel School for the Deaf in my constituency. I met parents and pupils who expressed their concern about future specialist provision. Will the minister assure me and my constituents that children with special needs will get their fair share of the extra cash that is being invested in our schools?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I am happy to give that assurance. I take the issue of young people with special educational needs very seriously. The member will know that, last week, we announced additional resources for local authorities over and above the inclusion programme to ensure that local authorities can prepare their accessibility strategies.

Again, I met young people who have particular educational needs. They were clear that they welcome the changes that are being made; they want to be part of a school community and they welcome the work that we are doing.

I am happy to confirm that, in intending to repeal the Schools (Scotland) Code 1956, we have made it clear that we agree that teachers who are working with young people with special

educational needs should still require a specialist qualification. That is very important.

**Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):** The minister's statement included welcome comments about how the education service should work in partnership with pupils, parents and teachers, placing schools at the heart of their communities. We have seen that with the advent of community schools.

Will the minister tell us what steps the Executive will take to ensure that the new education strategy will meet the needs of Scotland's business communities and contribute to and reinforce policies to secure lifelong learning?

**Cathy Jamieson:** Again, I am happy to indicate that we take that issue very seriously. My colleague Nicol Stephen has been doing some work on it recently and will report on enterprise education in due course.

It has become clear from the debate that young people are saying that a week's work experience in fourth year is not necessarily the best way to prepare them for the world of work. They want us to look more creatively and imaginatively at linking with the business community and the opportunities that will be there for them in the future. We will continue to do that.

**The Presiding Officer:** We are running out of time, but there are three more Labour members who want to speak. I will take their questions one after the other, in one go.

**Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab):** Does the minister accept that those who argue that the comprehensive principle is upheld by ensuring equality of opportunity for all are simply wrong, because the old exams that sorted people into junior and secondary schools were equally open to all? Is not the real comprehensive principle an end to the selection and separation of pupils into different schools by ability? Can the minister assure me that there will be no break-up of the comprehensive sector in Scotland, as is threatened by some backsliders in England and Wales?

**Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab):** Will the minister examine the support in the consultation for special provision for gifted children, including sportingly, musically and academically gifted children? Will she promote flexibility and innovation in provision, not least for that great majority of youngsters who are now going through the comprehensive system in the post-compulsory education period? The minister and I had the benefits of compulsory education in a comprehensive system that was designed for the few, rather than the many. Will she ignore—

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. I am sorry, but we have to be quick.

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth)**

**(Lab):** I will make up for Brian Fitzpatrick's lengthy question by making mine short. I welcome the statement. How quickly will the minister be able to move to ensure that the needs of individual children are taken into account and delivered on?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I will try to deal with those questions briefly.

John McAllion mentioned the comprehensive principle. We have made clear today our understanding of what people expect from a comprehensive system. We are talking about every school being the best for young people and being a centre of excellence to which people have access.

Brian Fitzpatrick asked about gifted children. Interesting responses were received on that matter in the national debate. For example there were suggestions, which are well worth examining, for a children's university and for additional support for young people during school holidays.

Cathie Craigie asked how quickly we would move to ensure that the needs of individual children are met. I believe that we are doing that already. We will examine further what we are doing to afford greater opportunities to schools to organise in ways that allow them to meet their pupils' abilities.

**The Presiding Officer:** I thank everybody for their co-operation.

## Future of Air Transport

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** We are beginning this debate rather late, so I appeal to the opening speakers to take less than their allotted time if possible. The debate is on motion S1M-3469, in the name of Iain Gray, on the future of air transport in Scotland, and an amendment to the motion.

15:12

**The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Iain Gray):** I am pleased to introduce this debate. The debate itself is an introduction, because its essential purpose is to allow members to contribute to the consultation process on air transport, which was launched by Alistair Darling, the Secretary of State for Transport, in July, and which will close at the end of November. The process is taking place across the United Kingdom. A suite of consultation documents and technical studies provide a variety of detailed growth scenarios and outline the likely infrastructure requirements.

In Scotland, the consultation process is being conducted jointly by the Department for Transport and the Scottish Executive. Compared with the situation prior to devolution, Scotland is in a strong position because many of the key areas are devolved. Land-use planning, surface access and the management of publicly owned airports are our responsibilities. Licensing, safety, security and environmental policy are reserved matters, along with international agreements, economic regulation and slot policy.

The aviation industry is critical to Scotland's future, not only because it is worth £0.6 billion a year to the Scottish economy and provides directly 15,000 jobs—and at least as many again through multiplier effects—but because it links our nation to the rest of the world. Air links bind nations together. Airports and air services promote economic growth by increasing access to markets and suppliers, and by encouraging inward investment and tourism. Airports themselves act as focuses for clusters of businesses.

The aviation sector is growing. The success story in Scotland is one of dramatic growth with passenger numbers doubling in the past decade. The Scottish consultation document indicates that the current 18 million passengers a year who pass through Scottish airports may well increase to somewhere between 26 million and 50 million by 2030. The document also outlines the potential for air freight and the role it can play. The freight sector is subdivided into different categories, with dedicated cargo flights by freight aircraft—either scheduled or chartered—as well as belly-hold

facilities on passenger aircraft, and dedicated mail operations.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** The minister mentioned forecasts of future traffic levels. Will he explain why Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd forecasts that 1.8 million passengers a year will use Inverness airport by 2030, whereas the Department for Transport estimates that that figure will be only 800,000? Why does the Department for Transport estimate 1 million fewer passengers than HIAL estimates, if those organisations are working together in partnership?

**Iain Gray:** Predictions for a period as long as that to 2030 are not an exact science. That is why the prediction for the number of passengers passing through Scotland by 2030 is between 26 and 50 million, which I freely acknowledge is a wide range. Perhaps HIAL's estimate shows its ambitiousness to develop its business in Scotland.

Dynamic growth is predicted for all three categories of freight. Scotland could have dramatic growth in freight tonnage from 119,000 tonnes in 2000 to more than 570,000 tonnes by 2030. Mail and belly-hold tonnage will increase, but much of that increase will be delivered by dedicated freight aircraft.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** The minister continually refers to growth in the air industry and I go along with everything that he says. Does he agree that safety in the air is all-important? What representations has he made to his colleagues south of the border about providing the long-delayed air traffic control centre at Prestwick?

**Iain Gray:** As the consultation process makes clear, we are in constant discussion with the Department for Transport on all aviation issues and other transport matters. Of course air traffic control is part of that. I agree with Mr Gallie that safety is key. One challenge of the consultation, as we consider dramatic growth, is to allow and facilitate our industry to grow in a way that in no way compromises air travel safety, which is to the forefront of everyone's minds these days.

Glasgow Prestwick airport has established itself as a major freight hub for Scotland and the UK. Glasgow airport has a healthy belly-hold freight operation. Edinburgh airport is the dominant air mail centre for Scotland and its position in the central belt, its road links and its proximity to express freight users give it great advantages for express parcels and air mail in the future. Aberdeen airport plays the same role for north-east Scotland and the northern isles and Inverness airport plays a role in the distribution of mail and newspapers throughout the Highlands and Islands.

The possibilities are huge and the capacity of the air freight sector to deliver is vital to the development of many of our important businesses, such as information technology and biotechnology, and to meeting the needs of the large-gauge cargo market in the oil and gas, aerospace and engineering industries. As with the growth in passenger traffic, many considerations must be taken into account, not least environmental factors. The consultation document, rightly, assesses the impacts at Scottish airports of the growth scenarios, and environmental factors include noise and air quality changes as well as the potential impact on ecology and heritage. Like safety, those factors are key elements of the circle that must be squared to allow us to develop the aviation strategy in the best way.

Anyone can participate in the consultation process. All the documents are available on a Department for Transport website or through a call centre. Background technical reports can be viewed in inspection centres. A questionnaire can be completed online and stakeholders have been sent copies of the questionnaire.

The Executive hosted a successful stakeholders conference on 9 September in Glasgow, which Alistair Darling, Jim Wallace, Helen Liddell and I attended. That was a strong indication of the importance that we place on the process. We are part of the way through a series of topic workshops, which are being held in Aberdeen, Inverness, Glasgow and Edinburgh. As I speak, Department for Transport, Scotland Office and Scottish Executive officials are engaging with those who use, and live around, Edinburgh airport at an exhibition in an airport hotel. That exhibition was at Braehead shopping centre in Glasgow yesterday. A closing conference will be held in November to draw together the consultation strands.

We are doing everything to encourage an informed debate about the many key issues that face us—maintaining and developing services to remote areas; providing extra airport capacity; the provision of adequate surface access to airports; the development of new routes; and maintaining access to the hub airports in south-east England.

We are committed to ensuring that the rising demand for air transport brings maximum economic benefits at minimal environmental cost to all Scottish airports and the communities that they serve.

**Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** I am sure that all members will agree that one element in the growth of a prosperous future for air transport in Scotland is the construction of modern rail links. When will the minister announce the favoured option for the development of the Glasgow airport rail link? When will a clear

timetable be published for speedy implementation of that link?

**Iain Gray:** I want to say something about rail links to both Glasgow and Edinburgh airports and something about the timetable that we face. If Mr Butler will bear with me, I will do so later in my speech.

We have no preconceived view on the best way of providing extra airport capacity; there is no hidden agenda. The consultation document sets out a range of options including a number of scenarios for Glasgow and Edinburgh. The document also considers the case for an entirely new central Scotland airport by examining an example site at Airth.

Although a new central Scotland airport would have distinct advantages in terms of route development, we have to recognise that it would be extremely expensive and time-consuming to develop, even if a site could be found that met all the environmental, safety and engineering requirements. Such a development presupposes that Glasgow and Edinburgh airports would close. However, that would result in the majority of passengers having to travel further to reach the airport, which would lead to increases in cost, congestion, and pollution. Given suitable investment, our other major airports at Aberdeen and Glasgow Prestwick have the capacity to handle higher volumes, as is the case at Edinburgh and Glasgow. All those options must be discussed fully.

**Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** Does the minister accept that one of the reasons that Scotland underperforms in respect of passenger numbers is landing charges? The Office of Fair Trading report into charter flight supplements indicated that landing charges at Glasgow and Aberdeen were significantly higher than the landing charges at Manchester and Newcastle. Will the minister address that point? If so, what will he do about it? If not, why not?

**Iain Gray:** Key to the aviation industry is the fact that it is an industry. As such, it is led by the marketplace. The landing charges at Glasgow and Edinburgh airports are a matter for the operator of the airports who has to negotiate with the airlines in order to create the possibility of new route development. I would expect that to happen.

I turn to Mr Butler's point. Glasgow and Edinburgh airports are the two largest airports in the United Kingdom without direct rail access. That is why the Executive has said that providing rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports is one of its top priorities. That commitment pre-dates the air transport consultation.

The study to determine the value-for-money case for the links is progressing well. The

consultants are considering in more depth four options for each airport and I expect their recommendations on the preferred option at each airport in the next few weeks. With the assistance of the Strategic Rail Authority, BAA, which owns both airports, and the relevant authorities, we will be able to move the projects forward to delivery.

However, necessary and unavoidable groundwork has to be done, including ensuring that the private bill that comes before the Parliament is robust enough to enable members to make informed decisions. All that groundwork suggests that the earliest starting date for design and construction of any link is likely to be 2005. I recognise that that is an ambitious timetable but, with the will and a fair wind, I believe that it is achievable.

Like many members, I am keen to see an improved network of direct routes to Europe and beyond. In the past we have considered new routes on a case-by-case basis. Together with the enterprise agencies, we are now working towards a coherent route development strategy. However, any financial assistance to air operators must comply with European Union regulations on state aid. A framework is required for identifying the routes that provide the maximum benefit.

In that context, I am pleased that Scotland has been selected to host the ninth world route development forum next September. The forum is the largest gathering of airline network planners in the world. Well over 1,000 route development specialists are expected to attend one of the most important events in the aviation calendar. By bringing that highly prestigious forum to Scotland, we are sending out a global message that we want to develop air travel in Scotland to our full potential and ensure that we achieve maximum advantage from the benefits of strong air links. Securing more direct international air services for Scotland will be top of the agenda when the leading players in the aviation industry visit Scotland.

Access to the London airports is also important for Scotland. Such access gives us entry to markets and services in south-east England and to many interlining opportunities. We will work closely with the other devolved Administrations on how best to protect access to the south-east and on the view that we should take on extra capacity at the south-east airports.

We are keenly aware of the particular requirements of remote communities and their need to access central Scotland, south-east England and interlining opportunities at the big hub airports. The financial support that we have made available to HIAL has risen from £7 million in 1997 to £21.5 million in the current financial year, which represents a 207 per cent increase in Government support over a five-year period. In the

period from 2003-04 to 2005-06, HIAL's expenditure will further increase to £22.1 million. That is a substantial commitment to HIAL and to lifeline transport links in the Highlands and Islands. The support that we provide will allow HIAL to continue to operate 10 airports and will keep airport charges at a level that can encourage the continuing development of air services. I understand that on Friday there will be an announcement about a new route from Inverness. I am sure that more details about that will follow.

Air services are shaped by businesses making commercial decisions. Our role in Government is to identify failings in the market and to be persuasive about, promote and legislate for the provision of public goods. In order to do that, we require a broad consensus about our aims for the industry that takes account of economic, social and environmental factors and considers the needs of all our communities. That is where the current consultation process comes in. We will do our best to ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute—that is the purpose of this afternoon's debate.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the consultation process currently being undertaken jointly by the Department for Transport and the Scottish Executive on the future development of air transport in the United Kingdom.

15:28

**Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** It is right to have a debate on the future of air transport in Scotland. As the minister said, air transport is essential for the economy and for tourism. Improvements are desperately needed in the Highlands and Islands and throughout our land. However, what solution does the Executive suggest? What strategy does it intend to pursue? After all, a strategy is essential if progress is to be made. We are debating a motion that asks Parliament to note

"the consultation process currently being undertaken jointly by the Department for Transport and the Scottish Executive".

Yahoo! Bingo! Salvation is upon us. A solution to poor air links, high air costs and few flights is about to unfold. That will be right—there will be more spin and consultations, but no substance or action.

I do not think that the Executive is the worst Government in Europe, as the leader of the Tories suggested. The Parliament and our country do not need lectures from the leader of the self-confessed nasty party. That party inflicted misery on many people in its native land and deindustrialised huge swathes of our homeland. With friends like Iain Duncan Smith, Scotland has no need for enemies.

However, I say to the minister that that is as good as I will be about the Government. The Government might not be doing us harm, but it is certainly not doing us any good. The Government might not be the worst Government in Europe, but it has a responsibility to govern. There has been an abdication of responsibility and a dereliction of duty. There are serious problems with aviation in Scotland that the Government has not addressed or even acknowledged.

Let us consider the situation. Internally, we have outrageously expensive flights in the Highlands and Islands. The cost of those flights is sucking the lifeblood out of communities and is an impediment to social and economic progress. No mention is made of that, never mind a solution provided. In the central belt and in urban airports elsewhere there is a critical shortage of direct air services to Europe and beyond. Direct links are essential, both for tourism—from an inbound point of view—and for the economy, from an outbound point of view. Comparable and even smaller nations have more direct flights and better air connections.

**Phil Gallie:** Does Kenny MacAskill realise that there is an ever-increasing number of flights to Europe from Prestwick airport? Does he agree that that is a great credit to the private entrepreneurship that has been shown by the management of Prestwick?

**Mr MacAskill:** I visit Prestwick regularly, as Mr Gallie will know. I am a great supporter of that airport and I wish it well. It has served Scotland well and I agree with Mr Gallie and endorse his sentiments.

Whether in comparison with Iceland or Ireland, Scotland falls short in relation to direct air services. After all, there is a direct flight from Reykjavik to Halifax in Nova Scotia, the homeland of the Scottish diaspora, but there is no direct flight there from Scotland. Our absurd position is that when the second First Minister—the one before the current one—went to tartan day last year, he flew by Aer Lingus via Dublin. Is not it absurd that at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century our country's foremost statesman travels to the capital city of the economic powerhouse of the world through the capital city of another nation on an aeroplane that belongs to that other nation's national flag carrier?

In the north of Scotland, where tourism is essential to the economy—yet where we find that it is in decline—affordable and accessible air links are also essential. What do we discover? Inverness airport, in the capital of the Highlands, has the highest landing charges in Europe. Ryanair says that the charge is £15 per passenger. "That's no true," says the chief Executive of HIAL, "It's only £8." Whether the charge is £8 or £15, it is too high. The First

Minister says that Ryanair must pay its share. It does; it pays its fair share at 58 airports in Europe where it lands, from Kerry in the west to Graz in the east and from Oslo in the north to Pescara in the south. What it does not pay are the First Minister's unfair charges at his airport.

**Iain Gray:** To paraphrase Mr MacAskill's last few words, he said yesterday that Inverness had the highest landing charges in Europe. That statement was described as an ill-informed media stunt aimed at grabbing headlines with no regard to the facts. I take it that he now says that it is correct that Inverness does not have the highest landing charges in Europe, but that that is of no interest in the argument that he is seeking to develop.

**Mr MacAskill:** It is a great pity that the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning has not read the study by Dr Romano Pagliari at Cranfield University, which was published many months ago. It may be that the previous minister was dealing with the issue then, but I would have thought that Iain Gray would have been up to date and up to speed on that important document.

What is the situation? What does the Executive suggest? It asks us to take note of its consultation document. Take note? I know that the First Minister wants to do less better, but that is doing nothing whatever. The consultation document is really one for south-east England. It is predicated on whether to have Heathrow 5 or a new airport elsewhere in leafy England. The consultation document recognises only two airports in central Scotland when it is clear that there are three. Is not Prestwick in central Scotland? Cannot the Department for Transport acknowledge that airport's location and appreciate its importance? Scotland is factored in only to the extent of how we link to the hub airports down in greater London. That, I say to the minister, is the current problem. We need an aviation strategy for Scotland. Surely that is what a Scottish Government should provide.

**Iain Gray:** It is clear to any mature parliamentarian that the "notes" motion is part of the consultation process and allows members to contribute to the debate on how we should develop our aviation strategy. Mr MacAskill is now seven minutes into his speech, but he has contributed no ideas whatever. Given the experience of the prison estates review, perhaps we should look to the previous leadership of the Scottish National Party for a contribution to this important consultation. Does the SNP intend to contribute any ideas?

**Mr MacAskill:** I am coming to the ideas. I might be seven minutes into my speech, but Labour is six years into government in London and has not delivered any improvements in aviation north of the border.

Michael O'Leary has been banging on the door offering to fly to Inverness and Stornoway, not in 2015, but now. Talk about looking a gift plane in the mouth.

**Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Mr MacAskill:** Not at the moment.

What are the solutions? The minister might wish to note that I am coming to the matters that he should deal with. We need a route development fund and we need routes to Spain, Italy and Scandinavia, among others. The Irish—never mind the Icelandic—take such routes for granted. We need to provide a marketing budget that will support airlines in providing such routes. Cornwall County Council did so for the Ryanair flight to Newquay airport and has reaped the benefit. The Welsh Development Agency supported Cardiff airport in attracting bmibaby. Cornwall County Council might not be the best council in Europe, and the WDA might not be the best agency in Europe, but those bodies have done more than the Executive has done to support and promote aviation. If they can, we should and come next May, if Labour will not, we will.

I remind the minister that his boss owns Inverness airport; Jack McConnell is its sole shareholder. It is his airport. He is responsible and accountable, but he has grounded flights into Inverness. He must take action to get charges down and to get flights flying. It is time for him to say why he has put tourism in the Highlands into a nosedive when he is in the cockpit. Tourism will fly high if he gets landing charges down. If he does not, we will know whom to blame. Come next May, if he will not get landing charges down, we will.

The Executive's position is not blue-sky thinking, but pie in the sky. It does not involve the development of new routes or the removal of existing impediments to flights. Flights into and out of Scotland are delayed or grounded, but not through bad weather or mechanical failure and not because of any airline or airport. The buck stops with the Executive, which will neither initiate new routes nor remove present impediments from airports. That is why I will move the amendment. I want to provide a flight path to the improvements that are badly needed the length and breadth of our land, throughout all sectors of our economy and in air services. The Executive is devoid of vision and it is vacuous when it comes to solutions. If the Executive rejects the amendment, the opportunity to take off remains for Scotland through a change in Administration next May.

I move amendment S1M-3469.1, to leave out from "consultation" to end and insert:

"urgent need, in relation to tourism and the economy in Scotland, to increase the limited number of direct

international connections and to expand the number of routes operated by low-cost carriers; further notes that Inverness Airport is operated by Highlands and Islands Airport Limited, which is wholly owned by Scottish Ministers; is concerned at studies indicating that Inverness Airport has the highest landing charges in Europe, and therefore calls on the Scottish Executive to set up a route development fund to promote direct international connections from Scotland and to take immediate action to reduce the landing charges imposed at Inverness Airport."

15:38

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** If Kenny MacAskill's speech is releasing our potential, it is not only the SNP's slogan that will not take off. We have just heard 10 minutes of unadulterated drivel and no clear policies. If I heard correctly, although Kenny MacAskill advocates Scotland as a hub for airlines, from what he said about Aer Lingus, people from countries other than Scotland would not be allowed to fly on such airlines to get here. The logic of what he said is that it is somehow an insult to Scotland to use an airline that does not come from this country.

**Iain Gray:** Mr Mundell is extremely unfair to Mr MacAskill in accusing him of having no ideas in his 10-minute speech. The single idea that he presented in 10 minutes was that we should support the marketing of Ryanair flights. We should acknowledge that.

**David Mundell:** Ryanair is the only issue that Mr MacAskill ever raises. Those of us who were present for his performance in Aberdeen will recall that the issue was raised then, although there was also a vague notion that Scotland could be towed out into the middle of the Atlantic and relocated so that it could be developed as a hub.

I welcome this opportunity to discuss the importance of air links.

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**David Mundell:** Not at this stage.

It is appropriate that we are debating the Government review. Conservative members who represent areas that have strong airport bases have many ideas to contribute to the debate. It is also to be welcomed that academics, business people and politicians have proposed the creation of a central Scotland airport. Although I will take some convincing that existing significant investments in Glasgow and Edinburgh should be sidelined in favour of a new build, with all the inherent difficulties that that would bring, including planning and environmental considerations, it is important that that idea be evaluated. I welcome the on-going study and I hope that, although the study outcome will miss the deadline for submissions for the review, the minister will

ensure that the Scottish Executive and the UK Government take its findings into account.

Those who have argued in favour of the central Scotland proposition are right to say that, in the United States, Glasgow and Edinburgh would be regarded as a twin-city conurbation, like Dallas and Fort Worth, and that our cities must work better together to maximise their economic potential. However, analogies with the United States must be treated with great care, given the hugely different geographic distances and population dispersal that are involved.

Kenny MacAskill's speech showed again his unwillingness to pay any regard to issues such as where our centres of population are, where Scotland is relative to the rest of Europe and the wider world and the needs of different types of travellers. The air industry is extremely complex. For example, we cannot ignore the impact that foreign Governments' support of state-owned airlines throughout Europe has had on routes and services. I am afraid that there has been a pitifully low level of action from the European Union to stamp out such anti-competitive practices.

Despite that, it has been refreshing to see genuine competition emerge in the air travel industry in the form of low-cost airlines such as Ryanair and easyJet. The combination of Ryanair's innovative fares structure and services and the equally entrepreneurial operation of Prestwick airport has led to one of Scotland's real successes in air travel, which should be celebrated. My colleague, John Scott, who is the local member for Prestwick, will no doubt return to that in his speech.

When I visited Prestwick this week, I was struck by the buzz and vibrancy at the airport. The number of international visitors passing through the airport confirmed the fact that low-cost flights not only take Scots abroad, but bring international visitors to Scotland. There has been significant evidence for that in the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee's continuing inquiry into tourism in Scotland.

**Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** I whole-heartedly endorse what Mr Mundell says about Prestwick airport and its success. However, it is a former British Airports Authority airport, and it was not a success under that company. Does David Mundell agree that the airport's success has occurred when it has not been owned by BAA? Does he also agree that that success can be replicated elsewhere in Scotland and that Prestwick is not the only airport that can enjoy such success?

**David Mundell:** I accept that the success that Prestwick airport has enjoyed should be replicated at airports throughout Scotland. There is

tremendous scope for that; we can learn from Manchester airport. I am not going to beat the drum for BAA and I am sure that the Scottish Executive would not do so. We must lobby and ensure that BAA is positively promoting the capacity of each of its airports.

Let us return to Mr MacAskill's speech. One airline flying to one airport will not resolve the issues that surround air links to and from Scotland. Low-cost airlines are not a panacea for the issues that are faced by Scotland's remote communities, nor are they the complete solution to the need to establish business links between Scotland and Europe.

We must not repeat the tunnel vision that overwhelmed discussions of air travel in Scotland in the 1970s and 1980s, which led to an obsession with transatlantic direct flights. Having more low-cost flights in and out of Inverness would be welcome—I am sure that Mary Scanlon will speak about the benefits of that—but it is not the only way in which to develop the wider range of flight options that Scotland needs.

The Scottish Executive has a significant role to play, not least in relation to the transport infrastructure that surrounds our airports. A fundamental development for Glasgow airport will be completion of the M74 northern extension, to which the Scottish Executive is committed. Let us hope that the wording of the comprehensive spending review does not rule out completion of that major project. It is clear that the perception of delays and difficulty of access via the Kingston bridge are restricting the development of Glasgow airport. The development of the rail link to the airport needs to be progressed. As Bill Butler pointed out, decisions need to be made as soon as possible.

The same is true of Edinburgh airport, the development of which could be enhanced by completion of the A8000 and firm decisions being made on the proposed rail link. I am sure that Brian Adam agrees that the construction of the western peripheral route would have a significant beneficial impact on developments at Aberdeen airport. Airports do not exist in isolation—the infrastructure around them makes them more or less attractive to travellers, be they travellers on low-cost airlines or those travelling first class on business. If we do not get that right and the Scottish Executive does not deliver on the important infrastructure issues that I have mentioned, the consultation process and the air links review will have been futile.

15:47

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** It is axiomatic to say that in the modern world we depend on air

transport links. The speed of modern travel has shrunk the world to the global village in which we live. We welcome the Government's consultation on how best the UK can respond to the increasing importance of, and demand for, air transport.

It is vital that the future of air transport and how it is developed are not considered in isolation. The perceived imperatives for development should be examined critically; some lateral thinking would be welcome. In Scotland it is particularly important that social factors are given proper weight.

There are a series of interlinked aspects to overall consideration of air transport. The starting point in the UK context is the congestion and the pressure on air services in and out of London. To what extent is the solution to that problem to build more capacity? To what extent would it be more sensible to release capacity by diverting traffic away from the south-east, both by developing regional hubs to free capacity directly and by taking measures to move economic development out of the south-east? Should not we try to take the heat out of the area and to spread some of the glow to other places where there is the infrastructure, including housing and a work force, to cope with it?

Spreading air traffic to regional hubs would make it easier to ensure air safety, because planes would be operating in less crowded skies. A much higher proportion of internal business and tourist traffic to and from the south-east and throughout the UK should travel on the much more environmentally friendly rail system. The sums of money that are needed to build new airports or to extend existing ones would buy a really good train set.

Air transport is a huge contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Should we direct our thoughts towards using air transport only where it is really necessary to do so? Should we place a tight definition on the word "necessary"? The other environmental aspect of air transport, which is not talked about much, is the different taxes on aviation fuel and fuel used by other forms of transport. Planes may be airborne, but there is no level playing field.

So much for the arguments for limiting air transport. In considering air transport in the Scottish context, I return to a word that I used earlier—"necessary".

**Brian Adam:** Nora Radcliffe referred to the necessity for air and other transport. Does she agree that it would be more environmentally friendly to have direct flights from Scotland's airports, particularly to Europe, rather than for flights from Scotland to go first to a hub airport in the south of England, thereby causing congestion and using excessive aviation fuel?

**Nora Radcliffe:** I agree absolutely with Brian Adam's point, which shows the importance of thinking holistically.

Arguments about the links between airports and economic development are a bit over-egged. Economic development needs a transport infrastructure, but not necessarily an air infrastructure. What is essential is the strategic provision of air services; Scotland needs direct transatlantic and European links. Scotland also needs links to London, but perhaps not as many as there are.

A decent rail service would offer more comfortable, more convenient and more environmentally friendly journeys between Edinburgh or Glasgow and London, probably with journey times that compare reasonably overall with the air routes, which would free up capacity at both ends. However, when one considers the Aberdeen and Inverness routes to London, the time factor begins to tip the balance towards air travel.

In a Scottish context, the so-called lifeline services are vital. To echo Para Handy's comment,

"If Dougie was here he would tell you",

if my colleague Tavish Scott—who is in Quebec—were here he would tell you about the problems that are posed to remote and island communities by the ferociously high cost of air transport when it is priced purely commercially. Those high costs impact on individuals and on island service providers. For example, Shetland NHS Board has a bill of well over £1 million for flying patients to Aberdeen and a Shetland family that goes on a package holiday to Majorca pays the cost of the holiday over again to get to the departure airport on the mainland.

Careful consideration must be given to how essential air services are protected, to where public service obligation orders should be used and to what can be done to mitigate the high cost of air travel for island dwellers. The Cranfield University study into PSOs argued that they are being underused in Scotland in comparison with other European countries, particularly Norway, which is similar in size and topography to Scotland.

There has been some mitigation of tax for air passengers from island airports. Should there be more? Are there other avenues for doing more to bring down prices? A single superairport to replace Edinburgh and Glasgow airports has been mentioned. That might be an attractive proposition, but although that long-term prospect is being explored, the possibility must not be allowed in the meantime to freeze other much-needed developments for Edinburgh and Glasgow

airports. The planned rail links to both airports must go ahead in the short term while the pros and cons of the various development options at both airports, and perhaps the development of a single, central airport, are carefully thought through.

The consultation is extremely important and it is important that Scotland's needs and opportunities are clearly articulated, well argued for and met. We await with interest the outcome of the consultation.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh):** We move now to open debate. Time is rather tight, so speeches should be kept to four minutes, please.

15:53

**Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** Like other speakers in the debate, I welcome the consultation that has been launched by the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Executive. The consultation is vital not only for Scotland's aviation industry, but more generally for our wider economy. The continuing debate and consultation should be an opportunity for all parties and stakeholders to impact on the future shape of air transport in Scotland.

Air transport has undoubtedly been growing strongly in Scotland. In the past 10 years, the number of passengers using our major airports has grown from about 8 million in 1991 to about 16 million in 2000. If we include all the minor airports, that figure rises to about 18 million. Passenger numbers are projected to increase to between 26 million and 50 million by 2030, depending on different assumptions. Therefore, this is undoubtedly the right time for us to look at the shape of our airports and aviation industry for the future. It is also the case that Scots have a higher propensity to fly than do people in any other part of the UK outwith London. The picture is not one of failure, doom and gloom, as Mr MacAskill suggests.

Air travel is essential to Scotland and makes a direct contribution to the economy. Iain Gray referred to the 15,000 direct jobs that it provides, of which more than 500 are in the area of West Lothian that I represent. However, it also provides thousands of jobs that result indirectly from the aviation industry in areas such as tourism and air freight and in the businesses that prosper because of the good links to and from Scottish airports.

We should recognise that the opportunities for people in Scotland to travel for leisure purposes have also been growing in recent years. Scotland has direct links to many European cities including Amsterdam, Paris and Dublin that we did not have a number of years ago. Edinburgh airport also has

the highest number of low-cost airline departures of any airport in the UK outwith the south-east of England. Those are other areas of success that we should welcome.

It is important that we take into account the environmental impact of expansion of the industry, which has been referred to by other speakers. I draw to the attention of the minister the matter of noise pollution from night flights, which affects a number of constituencies in Scotland. This is the right time to plan for the future. There is no point waiting until capacity has run out.

Kenny MacAskill's speech was disappointing but not at all surprising. It contained the usual mixture of talking Scotland down and making uncoded spending promises. It also contained inaccuracies: Mr MacAskill claimed that Inverness airport has the highest landing charges in Europe, but the information that I have before me states that Norwich airport charges £19.47 per passenger, Bournemouth airport charges £17.26 and Teesside airport charges £14.99, which is broadly in line with the figures that Mr MacAskill gave for Inverness.

**Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Bristow Muldoon:** No, I have only a short time.

Mr MacAskill makes the case for extra public subsidy to allow a private company to make money from air travel. If that is his argument, why is the SNP against allowing a private company to make a profit from any degree of public investment in a public-private partnership?

**Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab):** That is anathema to the SNP.

**Bristow Muldoon:** As Brian Fitzpatrick says, that is anathema to the SNP. I look forward to an SNP speaker answering the question.

The growth in passenger numbers will continue. In partnership with the industry, the Executive and the UK Government should be identifying opportunities for the Scottish aviation industry to connect with new destinations, whether they are in Europe—for example, Milan, Munich and Barcelona—or across the Atlantic.

The future of Scotland's airline industry is positive. It has performed well in recent years and it is vital to Scotland's economic prosperity. The Government should work with industry and other stakeholders and it should disregard the doom and gloom merchants in the SNP.

15:58

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** I think that it was Samuel Johnson who said:

"When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life".

The Executive's consultation document is a product of that same metropolitan mindset. As we read it, we learn fascinating insights into the state of aviation in Britain. We learn that, of the 180 million passengers who pass through UK airports every year, no fewer than 100 million—well over half—go through London. We know that there is huge potential not only among the members of the SNP, who are looking forward to achieving their aims next May, but in the future of air traffic. The document tells us that air traffic will double or treble in the next three decades. That means that there are massive opportunities. If the United Kingdom were truly united, should not more of the benefits of those flights be dispersed around the UK? Are Labour members happy that well over 60 per cent of all flights from Scotland go through London as the hub?

I agree with much of what Nora Radcliffe said. The situation is not sensible, but nothing in the consultation document will change it. Indeed, everything in it will perpetuate the congestion that is caused by flying through London. I agree that Scotland wants new routes. We want them to be established to other UK destinations and to mainland European and American destinations.

In the short time that I have, I will address a number of matters that affect the city of Inverness. In the Highlands and in the Parliament there was a united approach to the submission of an application for a public service obligation for the Inverness to Gatwick route. I will remind members why that is so important. I will give one concrete example. Inverness Medical, which now employs more than 13,000 people, came to Inverness partly because Ron Zwanziger, the head of the company, was, as he said, able to travel from Heathrow to Inverness to get there.

Inverness Medical would not exist if he had come five years later, because British Airways scrapped the Heathrow service without any notice. Only a strong political campaign by the Scottish National Party and others secured the Gatwick route as an alternative. The precedent exists; the Gatwick route must be protected. The PSO application was submitted well over a year ago. What has happened to it? Highland Council, Maureen Macmillan, who seems to find this amusing, and the Scottish Executive support it.

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** We were just commenting that Fergus Ewing seems to have no problem with flying through London if Inverness Medical does it. Inverness Medical has expanded considerably since the Gatwick route opened.

**Fergus Ewing:** I am glad that Maureen Macmillan agrees that the PSO is sensible.

Unfortunately, the Scottish Executive does not say anything about it any longer. It is the application that dare not speak its name.

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald)** rose—

**Fergus Ewing:** Perhaps I will give way to the minister in a second.

We heard in February, March, April and May from the Secretary of State for Transport that he would make an announcement of his decision on the PSO soon. Perhaps Lewis Macdonald can make it now.

**Lewis Macdonald:** Far from saying nothing about it, the Scottish Executive has been fully supportive of the bid and has enabled the Department for Transport to carry it forward in co-operation with Highland Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

**Fergus Ewing:** When will we get a decision? The bid seems to have gone into the ether. The consultation document has been published as a means of shelving the decision.

We need to establish new routes. I was delighted with Kenny MacAskill's proposal of a route development fund. That proposal has been supported by many, including the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, which made a submission in a letter of 1 February. Inverness airport is making progress on a number of fronts. I believe that it is working towards establishing new routes, but the main problem is high landing charges. Unless that problem is addressed, Inverness airport will not be competing on a level playing field. That is abundantly the case. State aid is irrelevant. Unless the situation is addressed, Inverness will not achieve its potential. The SNP will not allow that to happen. Sadly, the Scottish Executive seems complacent and intent on ensuring that that is what happens.

16:03

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I commend Kenny MacAskill for pitching for a job as a marketing assistant for Ryanair from 2 May next year. He must be top of the list.

I will concentrate on the future of air transport to and from the Highlands and Islands. I note that the Executive motion

"notes the consultation process ... on the future development of air transport".

I hope that the minister's responsibility for HIAL will include conducting a similar consultation process. In Aberdeen, significant consultation and debate surrounded the late opening of Dyce airport. However, I understand from constituents in

Nairn that HIAL carried out no such consultation prior to announcing 24-hour opening. There is also concern about increased freight on the Inverness to Aberdeen road. I ask the minister to extend the culture of consultation to HIAL.

To compare the lack of growth at airports in the Highlands and Islands with the growth at airports in the rest of Scotland is interesting, given the current subsidy of £21 million. If we take the eight HIAL airports that were in operation in 1991 and note their expansion—or otherwise—over the decade to 2001, we find that the number of passengers has reduced by 23 per cent. As the minister said in his opening speech, that compares with a doubling of passenger numbers at BAA airports over the same period. I hope that that figure will be used when HIAL is asked whether it is making the best use of its subsidy and whether it is working fully with all partners to utilise the potential of its airports to provide cheap flights for visitors, residents and business. While there has been a 23 per cent reduction in the number of passengers at HIAL airports, passenger numbers at Prestwick airport have increased thirty-fivefold in 10 years, from 35,000 to more than 1.25 million last year.

I appreciate the particular local circumstances in Shetland—I am sure that Tavish Scott would be jumping up and down on hearing that word were he here—but it is interesting to note that, over the same 10-year period, there was a sixteenfold increase in the number of passengers at the Shetland Islands Council-owned Scatsta airport. However, it is still the case that crossing the Pentland firth is more expensive than crossing the Atlantic. This week, I was trying to get back to Inverness for a meeting having been to Carstairs hospital on Monday. The flight to Inverness from Edinburgh airport cost £182, and was not at a time of day that would favour business travel.

**Lewis Macdonald:** Does Mary Scanlon accept that the figures to which she refers primarily reflect the position at Scatsta and Sumburgh airports, and that Inverness airport, the hub airport for HIAL's network, has experienced an average annual growth of about 6 per cent over the past 10 years?

**Mary Scanlon:** Inverness is one of the few airports where there has been any expansion over that period. I do not want to waste my time over this, but other figures, including those for Kirkwall airport, are very worrying.

I understand that HIAL and Highlands and Islands Enterprise have funded a study into the economic and social benefits that low-cost airlines would bring to the area. Although the report on that has not yet been published, it is hoped that, with a partnership approach that emphasises the economic and social benefits for the whole of the

Highlands and Islands, and with seasoned negotiators in place, people in the Highlands may reap the benefits of low-cost travel in the future.

There is much talk about landing charges, but I do not think that they are the only factor. However, we do need a financial structure that will give incentives to HIAL to increase traffic at Inverness and throughout the network. There are many times of day when Inverness airport is quiet, and surely it is better to have cheap flights than no flights.

I ask the minister, when summing up, to appraise the performance of Highlands and Islands Airports in its use of the public subsidy, in its accountability to Government and in its ability to represent the interests of the Highlands and Islands in air travel.

16:08

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I welcome this opportunity to debate the future of Scotland's air services and the fact that there has been wide consultation on the issue. Naturally, I, too, wish to concentrate my comments on the provision of air services in the Highlands and Islands.

As Fergus Ewing said, whenever the future of air services is discussed, people in the Highlands and Islands understandably get nervous about the Inverness to London link. The decision to withdraw the direct link between Inverness and Heathrow airport caused outrage, and initiated what was a long-fought, but unsuccessful, campaign for the route to be reinstated. What is more, people in the Highlands believe that the Inverness to Gatwick link is under threat. We are concerned for its future. British Airways has said that it has no plans to withdraw the service, but reports that the service might be withdrawn surface continually, which is disconcerting.

The former Minister for Transport and Planning, Sarah Boyack, is to be commended for giving strong backing to the case for a PSO on the route, and the Highlands and Islands strategic transport partnership has stressed in its report the compelling case—on social and economic grounds—for introducing PSOs to protect lifeline Scottish air routes. I am glad to hear the present Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning say that he continues to work closely with ministers at Westminster to ensure that the case for a PSO is properly understood and is fully considered by the UK Government.

The debate is about more than just links between Inverness and London. There are myriad other issues in the Highlands and Islands.

The way in which the SNP referred to low-cost airlines suggested that no such airlines flew into

the Highlands. That is a complete misrepresentation of the position—easyJet flies in and out of Inverness. Although everyone would like Ryanair to come to Inverness, the principle of fairness must underpin the discussions. People in the Highlands have been truly appalled by the way in which negotiations have been conducted. They have also been appalled by Kenny MacAskill's ranting about the situation. I hope that HIAL and Ryanair will continue to discuss how they will achieve their mutual aim. That must be the overwhelming priority.

**Mr MacAskill:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Maureen Macmillan:** No.

The role of HIAL is not simply to support Inverness; it must support air services in the rest of the Highlands and Islands, where there is no competition for routes. HIAL continues to develop and upgrade all the Highland airports, but it is not responsible for air fares. Lack of competition and a low population density lead to the high cost of air travel from Wick and the islands—and, in the case of Orkney, between the islands—even though those routes are exempt from air passenger duty.

The key point is that high fares do not offer those who live in Caithness or on the islands a genuine choice of travel options. I am often bemused by the fact that companies use low passenger numbers to justify high fares. If airlines thought about the issue imaginatively, they would realise that bringing down their fares might attract people to travel. Companies such as BA need to think carefully about the social and economic implications of their high fares and the lack of concessionary fares on some routes. I hope that the minister will continue to enlighten the airlines' thinking.

I am particularly interested in the future development of Wick airport, which suffers from poor timetabling and neglect of its second runway. Economic growth in Caithness should mean the development of Wick airport and I ask the minister to consider building capacity there.

I want to deal with the importance of the smaller airports in the Highlands and Islands and to mention the possibility of building more airports. Skye councillors have recently proposed an airport for Skye, which could benefit tourism. The cost might compare favourably with the cost of upgrading roads. The development of the airport in Oban could provide real alternatives for people on the Argyll islands, whose only air services are to Glasgow. For someone on Colonsay, a ferry trip to the dentist in Oban is a three-day event.

There is a case for ensuring that such airports continue to develop by becoming local hubs. We should consider how air services could

complement the ferry services in Argyll. Oban airport could serve the Fort William area. It is obvious that investment is necessary. I urge the Executive to think imaginatively about the potential of airports in the west Highlands. The issues are complex. When it determines the future configuration of air services in the rest of Scotland, the Executive must ensure that it takes into account fully the needs of the Highlands and Islands.

16:13

**Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** To some extent, the debate has focused on low-cost carriers and the competition that they might well bring. A possible concern is that low-cost carriers might merely knock out the competition, rather than grow the market. They might also provide competition for the railways, which are more environmentally friendly. I suggest that the evidence supports the view that low-cost carriers grow the market and open up genuinely new opportunities for people to travel—whether for pleasure or for business. We must encourage that.

The people who are responsible for the infrastructure, particularly those in Scotland, have been slow to react. Prestwick airport has been the notable exception. It has seen large growth, almost exclusively from low-cost carriers. That growth has taken place in spite of Prestwick's location disadvantages—

**Bristow Muldoon:** Will the member give way?

**Brian Adam:** No, I want to develop my point. I might find time for the member later.

We must consider why so much of Scotland's business has to go through the London airports. One does not have to look much further than BAA's comments on the situation. BAA has stated:

"In particular, we are forecasting growth in passenger traffic through Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted".

BAA's commercial interests are not necessarily the public interest. One reason why Prestwick is now successful is that it is not part of the BAA group. The current consultation exercise should take a serious look at BAA's almost monopoly position in the large airports that serve Scotland.

I do not for one minute suggest that we should have no links with London hub airports. Such links are particularly important in the Highlands and we need continued access to them.

**Lewis Macdonald:** The consultation document addresses the issue of ownership and considers proposals that could incentivise greater route development. Will Brian Adam respond to the consultation in that context?

**Brian Adam:** It will be most interesting to see what happens as a consequence of the

consultation.

I can inform the minister that, despite the significant expansion in the air travel market, Aberdeen airport's growth has been around 2.3 per cent per annum, which is rather pathetic. That is against the background of the benefits of the oil and gas industry that Aberdeen has. We are not seeing the kind of growth that should happen. There is no real competition between Aberdeen and Edinburgh or Glasgow for international air travel. Indeed, the focus of BAA's business is, as BAA itself has said, to forecast growth in passenger traffic through Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. That is in nobody's interest. I hope that one consequence of the consultation will be a change in focus, if not ownership, of Aberdeen airport. A change in ownership is one option that should be seriously considered.

There has been much debate about access to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports, but there are serious problems in Aberdeen. The western peripheral route alone will not provide the answer, so we ought to look at how rail links could be improved. There is little in the way of proper public transport to the airport—a fact that has been recognised in recent BAA publications. Unlike Edinburgh, which has a good and successful bus service, Aberdeen airport does not have a bus service. The success of Edinburgh's bus service may reflect the fact that the service is wholly owned by Edinburgh City Council, which has recognised the city's economic needs. That is not the situation in Aberdeen, which has only a deregulated bus service.

We need to consider seriously how we get people to the airports if the airports are to form part of an integrated transport arrangement, which I believe is the desire of the Executive and ought to be the desire of everybody. If we had a proper railhead near the airport in Aberdeen, we would be able to attract a much wider group of passengers. The route development plans, as endorsed by the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, are the way to grow the business in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way.

We ought to focus on regional airports as a way of making certain that Scotland has a proper and successful place in the future of international air travel.

16:18

**Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** I welcome today's timely debate. As we look forward to the next 20 to 30 years, this is precisely the time when we should discuss what kinds of air services Scotland needs.

I have been disappointed with some of the nationalist speeches this afternoon. Never mind "Release our potential", listening to the SNP is like

listening to the doom and gloom party. We heard about all the things that are wrong. There were some wonderful obsessions with London as a place to fly through—it is great if one is coming from Inverness but terrible if one is travelling from anywhere else. We need to recognise the interconnectedness of air services. It is important that we can fly via London, Brussels, Amsterdam or Paris. That is the modern world. People who want to fly in and out of Scotland need to have the right choice. We should not be obsessed with London.

The one amusing thing in Kenny MacAskill's speech was his analogy between Iceland and Scotland. At some point, Mr MacAskill needs to get out the map and look at the differences.

**Mr MacAskill:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sarah Boyack:** No thank you. I have heard Mr MacAskill already today.

One of the things that really disappoints me about the SNP amendment is that it ignores the range of challenges that are set out in the consultation document. It is almost as if the document had not even been read. The amendment ignores key issues to do with the development of routes and the development of Scottish Airports Limited under the aegis of BAA; issues to do with capacity and growth that our airports face; issues to do with surface access links, which are at a critical stage in Glasgow and Edinburgh; and of course the issue of the future development of HIAL, which Nora Radcliffe and Maureen Macmillan spoke about.

**Mr Hamilton:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sarah Boyack:** No, thank you.

I want to focus on surface access issues. Although we are looking forward over the next 30 years, we must consider an urgent issue. I welcome the minister's commitment to get going on rail links by 2005. Around Glasgow and Edinburgh, the road network has reached capacity. Travelling to either airport by bus, taxi, car or—crucially for our freight industry—lorry, there are times in the day when people can miss flights because the delays are so bad. I welcome the look forward over the next 30 years, but the next five years will be critical. Many opportunities will be missed if we do not get our act together.

I welcome the improvements that have been made—improvements that were welcomed by Brian Adam. The Labour council in Edinburgh has improved bus access through the creation of the greenways network, which also gives taxis much faster access to the airport. Much can be done to focus investment to improve the quality of the

experience for tourists to Scotland and to make the country more attractive for domestic users.

The debate has not focused on making better use of our existing infrastructure. Glasgow and Edinburgh airports have seen significant investment over the past few years. They are now more attractive and much more could be done to market them and Prestwick to make them better used—with the existing infrastructure.

When he winds up, will the minister confirm that he will consider the future capacity of runways? No decisions will be made in this consultation exercise but, over the next 10 years, we will have to involve local communities. I was at a community council event at the weekend—as was Mr MacAskill—at which it came over strongly that community councils feel that they have not been consulted. We must talk to the key stakeholders and the national stakeholders, but we must also talk to local interest groups, environmental groups, local business interests and local transport companies. They need to be consulted about the future of our airports to ensure that the benefits of our airports and the opportunities that they offer are maximised.

The consultation gives us an excellent opportunity to discuss a 30-year approach, but we must make the most of the current opportunities in our airports. We must make the best use of them and consider the environmental impact of expanding the access to them. We must do that in a sensible and managed way. Critically, we must make the most of the airports that we have. The challenge is to see them as part of our economic future.

I welcome the debate. I strongly support the Executive's motion, which has done the job—it has given us the opportunity to debate the issue. Let us be positive, let us look to the future and let us see what we can do—rather than just whingeing and moaning.

16:23

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

A number of members have spoken from a local perspective and I will unashamedly do the same, by looking at the ways in which airports affect my constituents in Tayside and Fife. At present, the area is not well served by airports. As we have heard, there are, in effect, five regional airports in Scotland—at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Prestwick, Aberdeen and Inverness. None of those airports directly serves Tayside and Fife, which have a large population.

I suppose that the closest and most accessible airport is Edinburgh, but the transport links are still poor. There is no rail link as yet, although I hope that we will have one in a few years' time.

However, not all travellers have access to rail and many will still travel by car. Last week, it took me more than two hours to travel from Dunfermline to Edinburgh because of a car crash blocking the A8000. Sadly, such events are not uncommon. I was not going for a flight so I did not miss it, but I was late for a committee meeting. If I had been going to the airport to catch a flight I would have missed it despite having left in plenty of time to get there. Such occurrences are not uncommon and cause considerable problems for people trying to use their local airport.

There is an airport in Dundee that is owned by Dundee City Council and which has daily scheduled flights to London City airport. That is a welcome service, but the airport in Dundee is not financially viable and is heavily subsidised by the council tax payer.

A proposal has been made for a new central Scotland airport in the Falkirk area. That idea was floated by my colleague in the European Parliament, John Purvis MEP, and by various others. It is an interesting proposal, but I wonder whether it is realistic, given that it would depend on the closure of Glasgow and Edinburgh airports to be successful. It would be no more accessible to my constituents than Edinburgh is, unless and until a new Kincardine bridge is built.

Businesses in Tayside and in Perth and Kinross want a local airport.

**Sarah Boyack:** Will the member not accept that if we get improved rail access to Edinburgh airport, one of the options would provide excellent access for residents in Fife and Tayside and beyond?

**Murdo Fraser:** The member makes a fair point but she should recognise that rail access is only as good as where the railway goes to. Many of my constituents live a long way from railway stations. They do not want to travel to a railway station and leave their cars parked there for two weeks while they go on holiday. They would rather drive to the airport. A rail link would be welcome, but it is not the full answer to the problem.

There is also a proposal to reopen for commercial use the airfield at Errol, which is currently used only by gliders and light aircraft. Ryanair has already expressed an interest in using Errol for low-cost flights. If Errol were to be developed, the existing 1,500m runway would have to be extended to 2,200m. Facilities would also have to be built for aircraft and passenger handling, fuel provision and security. It is inevitable that there would be some opposition from local residents, but the financial benefits for the economy of Tayside and Fife would be extensive.

A recent feasibility study that was done in Newquay, from where Ryanair has started flying

once a day to Stansted, estimated that that service will put £40 million into the Cornish economy. Ryanair's initial proposal for Errol is for five routes, which would generate an estimated £200 million per annum. The potential for the Scottish economy—particularly for the tourism industry in Perthshire, Angus and the southern Highlands—is tremendous.

The advantage of the Errol site is that it is handy for the centres of population in Perth and Dundee that are not currently well served by airports. It is immediately adjacent to the M90 motorway and to the east coast main rail line, so it would be possible for it to be served by a rail link. It is also within 90 minutes of 90 per cent of the Scottish population. I believe that it would be an ideal site for a new airport to serve Tayside and the northern parts of Fife.

A development at Errol would be led by the private sector but would of course require some support from the public sector in putting in the necessary infrastructure. Although responsibility for such matters is reserved, I ask the Executive and the ministers to consider the proposal for Errol. It would be of great benefit to the local economy and to the wider Scottish picture.

16:28

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** While listening to the speeches, I have to ask myself why it is so bad to put Scotland's interests first in the Scottish Parliament. Labour members should also be asking themselves that. Where are their ambitions? Perhaps Wendy Alexander's letter was right; their only ambition is a Mondeo car or something like that.

There is no question but that air transport is crucial to the growth and well-being of the economy. As the minister said, it is important for tourism and industry. It is vital that investment should be made to develop international routes and to enhance accessibility of airports by improving transport links.

Glasgow airport has suffered from the lack of support from BAA and successive Governments. BAA has evidently prioritised its airports in the south-east of England, as has been stated by many members. The Executive has failed to show any vision, commitment or speedy action in putting in place the decent transport links that are required by Glasgow and Edinburgh airports.

The importance of rail links was highlighted in BAA's paper on rail strategy. It proudly lists lots of improvements in rail links to many of its airports and I shall mention a few. The Heathrow express was launched in 1998 at a cost of £500 million. There are now plans to extend that rail link at a further cost of £150 million. The Gatwick express

runs four times an hour, seven days a week. Stansted has one of the highest shares of rail access, at 27 per cent, and there are plans there for a new fleet of rolling stock and for investment in stations and infrastructure.

The BAA paper describes how Southampton is linked by excellent rail services to the local area and by an express route to London. Let us see what it says about Scotland. It proposes a mere 7 miles of rail links, which tells us how BAA has participated in the studies into the potential for rail access. That is shameful on the part of BAA. A lack of vision and investment on the part of BAA and the Government is responsible for the sorry situation. We still have no rail links to Glasgow or Edinburgh airports.

Now we have a proposal for a new so-called central airport—a hare-brained scheme for a super-duper airport costing God knows what and taking God knows how long to build. For Mr Mundell's information, it is a smokescreen to hide the fact that it is in BAA's interest, as Brian Adam mentioned, to push traffic through Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted and ignore the needs of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. It might be all right for us if we want to pay extra air fares to fly from London, but our constituents either do not want to or cannot afford to. I say to Sarah Boyack—who is leaving the chamber—that it may be okay for her, but it is not okay for people in the rest of Scotland who wish to fly directly from Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Inverness or wherever. Why should they not be allowed to do that?

**Sarah Boyack:** Will the member give way?

**Ms White:** No, I will not.

The main problem is that BAA owns every single one of those airports. I find that rather strange. I ask the Executive to write to the Government—I will certainly write on my own behalf—because it is about time that the Office of Fair Trading looked into the dealings of BAA. It is obvious that not just Glasgow but the whole of Scotland is suffering from BAA's monopoly. I hope that the Executive will pick up that point. I know that the matter is referred to in the Executive's consultation document, but I would like to see it in writing—and I would like the letter to be copied to me—that BAA is becoming a monopoly and is doing down the whole of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** We move to closing speeches. We are absolutely on schedule. Robert Brown, you have four minutes.

16:32

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** This has been an interesting debate, but it went off slightly half-

cocked at the beginning because the SNP amendment addresses issues that are fairly peripheral to the central matter. On that, Kenny MacAskill did not provide a significant degree of enlightenment. The SNP's idea of a national air strategy is that airlines should be some sort of national virility symbol, with the St Andrew's cross on the side of aircraft that are flown on by First Ministers as if they were third-world tinpot dictators. That is not my idea, nor is it the idea of the chamber, of what the national airport strategy should be for the United Kingdom or for Scotland.

Airports, as a variety of people have said, do not exist in isolation. There is a social context—members have talked about lifeline links to the islands, Highland airports and so on—but the central issue that we have to begin with is that the strategy of predict and provide is wrong. Too many flights are going through London. A number of members have made that point. In what was otherwise a good speech, Sarah Boyack rather overstated the case the other way. We need to have a regional strategy that takes flights away from London to the north, the midlands and Scotland. It is the job of Government to examine that and consider how we get away from overheating the south-east economy, which is bad for that area and bad for us—those are two sides of the same coin. Too many flights go through London.

Nora Radcliffe made a significant contribution on the need to view aeroplanes in the context of other forms of transport. It is obvious that aeroplanes are not necessarily the most environmentally friendly way to travel. They are necessary in many instances—for example they are the best way to travel long distances—but for travel from Glasgow and Edinburgh to London, trains may be the best way to travel.

**Mr MacAskill:** Will the member give way?

**Robert Brown:** I will finish my point. It is extremely disappointing that the SRA's plans for the west coast main line seem to have gradually dissipated almost to the point of vanishing. Capacity would be freed up if the west coast main line was brought up to the standard in the original plan, which would be much more environmentally friendly. It would also free up capacity on aeroplanes.

My main point relates to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports. They may not be big enough, as the consultation document suggests, to be niche hubs by themselves but, if we view Glasgow and Edinburgh airports—which after all are only a few miles apart—as having a number of things in common and if we view them together strategically, we could produce a different context. I do not know whether the phrase “duplex airport” describes the right approach, but the potential is

considerable for co-operation to divert and attract transport to Scotland and to those two airports.

The recent Fraser of Allander Institute report suggested that Glasgow, more than Edinburgh, would have employment and job creation benefits from the provision of a new runway at its airport. That is particularly because of the higher level of international flights at Glasgow—some 70 per cent of Glasgow's traffic is international—which incurs higher charges and generates higher income. If we take the hangover point, the west of Scotland's economy is forecast to grow, but not by as much as the east of Scotland's economy. The debate has a within-Scotland context, too.

Like others, Sandra White touched on the crucial Glasgow airport and Edinburgh airport railway links. Unless we have the infrastructure to make those airports work to best advantage in an integrated way with transport structures in the rest of Scotland and the UK, we will not make the best of the opportunities that are available.

A consultation is being undertaken. Many good speeches have been made today. We should build on that and progress with consensus from the Scottish Parliament on how we develop the important airport links.

16:36

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** Members will forgive me for being parochial, but as the constituency member for Prestwick, I will deal with the issues that relate to Prestwick airport. Before I do that, I must say that rarely do Government reports leave one feeling angry and exasperated, but "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: Scotland" does so. It does not acknowledge that the future of passenger air travel in Scotland has changed. Low-cost carriers and no-frills airlines are here to stay. Ryanair's importance to Prestwick and its contribution to growing the market—to which Brian Adam referred—cannot be underestimated.

Neither does the report acknowledge the phenomenal rate of passenger growth at Prestwick. It projects that 3 million passengers a year will pass through Prestwick only by 2030, whereas real-world estimates suggest that 3 million passengers will use Prestwick by 2005. The report puts Prestwick in the same category as Inverness and Dundee. Without being unkind to Inverness or Dundee, I say that the report could not be wider of the mark.

Prestwick is the only civil airport in Scotland with a 3,000m runway. It is virtually fog free. It has a rail link that 30 per cent of its passengers use and an improving road and rail infrastructure. The completion of the A77 upgrade by 2006 will, in effect, make Glasgow Prestwick Glasgow's

second airport. It is more accessible to Glasgow travellers than Stansted is to London travellers, as Prestwick is sited only 30 miles from Glasgow city centre. Furthermore, Prestwick can expand in its existing buildings to take more than 3 million passengers and further expansion can be accommodated on site without the need for land acquisition.

To put it simply, I see no need to develop a central Scotland airport at enormous cost, as the development of Prestwick as Glasgow's second airport can be achieved easily and at relatively little cost to the taxpayer. The £1.5 billion for a central Scotland airport, plus the road and rail infrastructure costs, are costs that we can well do without when we have under-used assets at Prestwick with all the road and rail connectivity in place.

In addition, low-cost freight carriage may follow low-cost passenger flights in an increasingly competitive market. With its 3,000m runway, quick turnaround times and the potential for rail access, Prestwick has the capacity to facilitate that next step in freight growth. Of Scotland's airports, only Prestwick can accommodate a fully laden 747. To further enhance Prestwick as a freight destination, some freight must be moved from road to rail. I have discussed that idea with all the local stakeholders.

First, a feasibility study must be undertaken into moving freight from the airport on to the railway by means of a bridge or a tunnel. Secondly, we have to ensure that the rail line from Ayr to Glasgow is cleared to carry containers. That would enable the Ayr to Glasgow line to connect with the existing cleared line network that takes freight to the south of England and Europe. Just-in-time delivery, combined with low-cost freight flights and supported by quick turnaround times will make Prestwick the Scottish airport of choice for air freight in the next 20 years.

The people of Ayrshire take enormous pride in Prestwick and in its potential to become a niche hub for Scotland because of its maintenance, repair and overhaul facilities, and its freight and low-cost travel capability. It is well recognised locally that Prestwick will be the engine of economic growth in the area. I believe that the future development of Prestwick enjoys the blessing of the public and politicians alike, which is important, as Sarah Boyack said.

In the present climate of low-cost travel, the development of Prestwick offers Scotland the ability to accommodate the increasing need for capacity in air travel for at least the next 20 years at little or no cost to the public purse. All that is required is for the blinkers to be taken off and for Glasgow Prestwick to be recognised as the national asset that it is.

16:41

**Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands)**

**(SNP):** In summing up the debate for the SNP and speaking to our amendment, I thought that it would be useful to start with the points on which we agree before moving on to set out for the Executive the areas on which we disagree. The SNP is not ginning or complaining; we are trying to make positive suggestions that can be developed. If that is not the point of a consultation, I fail to understand exactly what is.

Everyone in the chamber agrees on the importance of the sector. The consultation document mentions that air transport is expected to make up 2 per cent of Scotland's gross domestic product by 2030. We all understand the importance to the inward investment market—when it recovers—of our direct links with the European Union and the United States. We all understand the importance of air transport for Scottish exports and tourism, which is a £4.5 billion industry. In other words, we all understand that air transport is a key driver for Scotland's economic growth.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mr Hamilton:** With all due respect, as the member has just arrived, I will not.

I think that members also agree that, because of environmental concerns, it would be sensible to divert flights from going through London. The point is made not out of constitutional obsession, but because we believe that it would make sound environmental and politically sensible policy. Nora Radcliffe made the point that travel through London leads to an excessive environmental toll. She said that an added environmental impact resulted from planes being stacked up because of delays in landing. She also said that we should look ahead to what we could do to roll out PSOs in the Highlands and Islands. I am sure that many members would agree on all those matters.

There are two areas of dispute. The first is how to encourage growth and discourage the pressure on the south-east. "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom" states that growth will be dependent

"upon whether or not additional capacity is provided at airports in the South East of England."

That shows why there is a need to refocus and for Scotland to have a hub. However, the consultation document appears to flirt with us. It sets out the need for support for more direct flights to the European Union and America, but it continues to look through the same prism that says that flights have to go through the south-east hub.

We know that the number of passenger flights

has doubled in the past decade and that that trend is set to continue. Sarah Boyack referred to the possible growth scenarios. Under the heading "South East Constrained Scenario", the document captures the effect of one constraint on that growth. If there is no growth in capacity down south, that would

"make access to London's principal airports from Scotland more difficult and expensive."

The point that we are making is that there is no need for that to happen; it is entirely unnecessary and avoidable. The pressure on the south-east hub is not an SNP obsession, nor is it a Liberal Democrat obsession. It is a fact that is recognised in the consultation document. We have to ask the question, "What do we have to do to get ourselves out of this south-east prism?"

The SCDI made it clear that passengers in Scotland want to be able to fly direct to a large number of destinations. The SCDI said that that would provide massive cost savings and reduce inconvenience and transfer times at hub airports. That is not a political point; it is a factual business point and we should look at it in that way.

The second area of dispute relates to what should be done in the Highlands and Islands, which is the subject of the second part of Kenny MacAskill's amendment. Fergus Ewing highlighted the disparity between HIAL's estimate of 1.8 million passengers per annum and the Department for Transport's estimate of 0.8 million. With a waft of his hand, the minister said that there is a wide margin of error. However, a margin of error that is bigger than the original estimate is ridiculous—a difference of 1 million cannot simply be dismissed as a margin of error.

The answer to the problem lies in the report, which says that HIAL's forecasts

"depend heavily on attracting 'no frills' carriers and international services".

The problem and the answer are in the report, but the minister does not seem to recognise that. He should tell us which estimate he and the Executive back. Given that HIAL's estimate is 1.8 million passengers and given that it is predicated on no-frills carriers and international services, why, in the name of goodness, would the minister be against it?

**Iain Gray:** No member has said that they are against widening the range of available direct flights or increasing the number of no-frills, low-cost carrier services that are available from Scotland. The point is that HIAL already has such routes operating out of Inverness in a business deal that it negotiates with the airlines.

**Mr Hamilton:** It is remarkable that the minister says that no one is preventing anything, given that

that is exactly what the Executive is doing. Ryanair wants to come into those routes. Incidentally, it has been suggested that the SNP is somehow in hock to Ryanair and is desperately trying to promote the Ryanair interest. I make it clear that it is fine if British Midland, KLM, Lufthansa and Scandinavian Airlines want to come into those routes. The issue is structural and the Government could do much to aid matters.

There has been an argument about why Inverness airport has the highest landing charges in the European Union. Bristow Muldoon even disputed that that is the case. In a biting piece of oratory, he told us not to worry about the £15 landing charges, as he had heard on good authority that Bristol airport's charges are higher. He did not give us his source. He is saying, "Don't worry. Inverness airport's charges, even using your figures, are not the highest; they are just exorbitant." If that is his best defence, it is not very good. We have cited the Cranfield University report—a proper academic study that is much more trustworthy than Bristow Muldoon is.

**Bristow Muldoon:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Hamilton:** I will not, as there is not enough time.

The Executive could act on the punitive costs. I am not sure whether Bristow Muldoon or another member mentioned the fact that passenger volume at Inverness airport has grown by 6 per cent. We should contrast that with what has happened at Prestwick airport, which Mr Scott spoke about. The increase in volume at Prestwick has been 120 per cent. Does not that suggest that there might just perhaps be merit in going down the road that I suggest?

The SNP has made a range of constructive proposals that are driven by nothing other than the need to ease capacity in the south-east and to give Scotland a competitive advantage. The SCDI said:

"Responding to the consultation document's question on shifting maintenance operations to regional airports, SCDI considers that such a change would solve the capacity problems in the south-east regarding both excess air traffic and land shortages."

It comes to an important conclusion:

"As Inverness airport has both air space and land availability, SCDI recommends that an aircraft maintenance facility be located there."

In other words, there is massive potential in Inverness to use and expand the facilities in the Scottish national interest.

The amendment contains two concrete proposals that the minister could progress as part of the consultation. The route development plan could extend to Spain, Italy and Scandinavia, as

Mr MacAskill said, and there could be increased emphasis on the marketing budget—some members, including Murdo Fraser, mentioned such emphasis in other parts of the UK. The fact that the minister will not follow our proposals tells us a great deal about the Executive's paucity of vision.

16:49

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald):** The debate has been useful, as a review of air transport is overdue. The previous aviation policy white paper was published in 1985. Since then, the industry has been subject to considerable change and development. More than ever, air travel is an integral part of the way in which countries do business.

By its nature, aviation is highly interconnected. That is why the consultation process sees us bringing forward a consultation document in partnership with the UK Department for Transport. The consultation covers reserved and devolved matters and will lead to the publication of a UK white paper next year. That will lay out a strategic framework within which we will develop our vision for the future of aviation in Scotland. We will add detail to that vision by producing a route development strategy and by adapting the proposals that come forward through our land-use planning system.

Clearly, the tragic events of 11 September last year led to a major restructuring in the industry, both by accelerating existing trends and by creating opportunities. We have seen the demise or the realignment of some international flag carriers and the welcome rise of low-cost, no-frills airlines. The role of second-force operators has also increased. That is why this is a good time to review the focus and direction of aviation strategy and why the consultation process is important. The process provides the opportunity for a full and thorough debate. I am glad that many members have taken that opportunity in the spirit in which we brought it forward.

In general, the issues are complex and do not lend themselves to quick fixes. We need to approach them in a mature and considered way. We must shape support for the industry and achieve the capacity requirements that are necessary to meet Scotland's needs. In doing that, we must strike a balance between economic, environmental and social priorities. That balance must maximise benefits and minimise disbenefits.

Several members have mentioned the disbenefits, which occur locally and nationally. Noise pollution, planning blight, additional road congestion and increased generation of greenhouse gases are all potential disbenefits of

increased airport capacity. That is why it is important, as we look to continue growth in air transport, that we consider those issues carefully and in good time. Technological improvements, better operational practices, provision of rail links and the efficient use of existing facilities can all help to reduce the disbenefits. Alternatives must be adequately considered. Our aim in the consultation is to generate a broad consensus on the best overall strategy for sustainable development.

Scottish aviation is clearly a fast-moving industry. There has been clear market segmentation in recent years and we are looking for ways in which to develop all those potential markets. We will do so in a way that strengthens the role of all our existing airports for the benefit of Scotland as a whole.

Some members have emphasised the options for enhancement of capacity. It is important to stress that, at this time, we are considering the enhancement of capacity and not the construction of new runways. The limiting factors are different for each airport. We recognise that, if the demand predictions are correct, we may need an additional runway at some point in the future. One of the purposes of the consultation exercise is to preserve long-term development options at the pressured airports in order to avoid having them sterilised by other uses. In response to Sarah Boyack's question, I can say that no decision on extra runways is required at this stage and none will be required for at least 10 years. We recognise the long-term pressures and the need for incremental additions to terminals, aprons and taxiways to meet some of the short to medium-term pressures. We also recognise the possible need for runway extensions.

The capacity issues in the north of Scotland are of a different sort from those that apply in the central belt. At airports such as Inverness and Aberdeen, the ability to operate the latest generation of aircraft will be vital for future development. This is why the Government, together with the operators of the airports, will look at the issues closely.

**Brian Adam:** Does the minister recognise that a number of low-cost airlines have ordered a significant number of new aircraft of the type to which he referred? What steps has he taken to ensure that Scotland has a fair share of the new routes that will be flown by those aircraft?

**Lewis Macdonald:** I will return to that matter. I know that Brian Adam will join me in welcoming the new routes that Ryanair and Air France have established in recent weeks from Aberdeen airport. We are engaged in the consultation to identify the means that are required to develop such routes.

An important aspect of the improvement of existing facilities relates to surface access. A number of members have raised the issue of rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports. We are looking to be in a position to announce preferred routes for those rail links within the next few weeks. Our ambition is, as Iain Gray said, to be able to carry those forward by 2005.

**Robert Brown:** Will the minister clarify the time scales for the likely developments? The dates for the Glasgow airport rail link have recently been the subject of controversy.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I confirm Iain Gray's comment that the timetable for work to begin on the rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh by 2005 is ambitious but achievable. An agreed strategy on surface access to Aberdeen airport, which was devised by local partners, including BAA and the local authority, is also in place. I am delighted that the Executive kick-started that strategy a few weeks ago by providing funding.

Much has been said about HIAL, which is the publicly owned operator of lifeline airports in the Highlands and Islands. HIAL has a crucial role. Some of the criticism that has been made of its charging structures is simply unfounded. The figures that I have seen show that Inverness's landing charges are on the median for airports of comparable size in the United Kingdom. HIAL is publicly owned precisely because it operates in a different environment from that in which Prestwick, Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh operate. Because of that unique operating environment, we have provided heavy subsidy, which, as Iain Gray said, has trebled since 1997.

**Bristow Muldoon:** Does the minister recognise that, apart from the record subsidy that the Scottish Executive provides, decisions made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer also benefit airports in the Highlands and Islands?

**Lewis Macdonald:** That is certainly the case. Both Governments recognise the particular situation of Highlands and Islands airports. Maureen Macmillan and Mary Scanlon mentioned the prospects for development of the smaller Highlands and Islands airports, which are lifeline services. In that context, we will examine proposals to enhance air travel through a continuing programme of investment in terminals and infrastructure. The consultation offers an opportunity for such proposals to be introduced. Bristow Muldoon mentioned some of the investment and support that has been given. The new terminals at Stornoway and Kirkwall airports are a tangible benefit of our increased support for HIAL.

The proposed PSO on the Inverness to Gatwick route has been mentioned. We support that

proposal because we recognise the importance of routes to London as well as elsewhere. It is eminently sensible that the UK Government should respond to that proposal in the context of the consultation, which includes consultation on access to the south-east hubs and on PSOs. Fergus Ewing's suggestion that the UK-wide consultation is a device to postpone the decision is, frankly, bizarre.

**Fergus Ewing:** In that case, will the minister say when the decision will be taken on the application that was submitted last autumn for a PSO for the Inverness to Gatwick route?

**Lewis Macdonald:** The decision lies with the Department for Transport and not with the Scottish Executive, which is why we continue to talk with our colleagues in the Department for Transport and to support the application in the context of the consultation.

HiAL has worked successfully with airlines to encourage and attract new services. For example, it has attracted low-cost easyJet flights to Inverness and has recently secured a new BMI service linking Stornoway and Edinburgh. As Iain Gray said—although one or two members might have missed it—yet another new service that HiAL has attracted to the Highlands of Scotland will be announced later this week. Given that at least Duncan Hamilton gave a mature response to one or two of the points in the debate, I look forward to the SNP's welcoming the establishment of that service.

We are committed to ensuring the development of an expanded network of routes for Scotland. We are mindful of the needs of low-cost operators and the freight industry. We have a clear remit and strategy for route development and we intend to act on it. This time next year, 1,000 delegates—representing every major airport and international airline in the world—will meet in Scotland to do business with one another and to agree the basis for new routes and services. The world routes development forum will come here because Scotland is where airlines want to be and because the Scottish Executive, Scottish Enterprise and VisitScotland have made the forum possible and welcome. The forum will come to Scotland because the Scottish Executive wants to encourage direct routes overseas as well as securing and enhancing existing routes to London.

We are in the midst of an extensive consultation process. With our colleagues in the Department for Transport, we are striving to ensure that all the issues are given a thorough airing, as many of them have been today. The resulting policy will say much about Scotland's place in the world. The consultation offers a platform for growing our air transport industry and our air route development networks over the next 30 years.

## Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Euan Robson to move motion S1M-3475, on the designation of a lead committee.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the following regulations—

the Criminal Legal Aid (Scotland) (Fees) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/440);

the Criminal Legal Aid (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/441); and

the Criminal Legal Aid (Fixed Payments) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/442).—  
[Euan Robson.]

## Decision Time

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** I have three questions to put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S1M-3469.1, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, which seeks to amend motion S1M-3469, in the name of Iain Gray, on the future of air transport in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

### FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 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)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Grn)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 28, Against 75, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that motion S1M-3469, in the name of Iain Gray, on the future of air traffic in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**FOR**

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

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

**AGAINST**

Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)

**ABSTENTIONS**

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Grn)  
 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)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 75, Against 1, Abstentions 27.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament notes the consultation process currently being undertaken jointly by the Department for Transport and the Scottish Executive on the future development of air transport in the United Kingdom.

**The Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that motion S1M-3475, 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 Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the following regulations—

the Criminal Legal Aid (Scotland) (Fees) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/440);

the Criminal Legal Aid (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/441); and

the Criminal Legal Aid (Fixed Payments) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/442).

## Prison Officers' Club (HMP Polmont)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S1M-3419, in the name of Michael Matheson, on the closure of the prison officers' social club at HM Prison Polmont. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now. I invite members who are leaving the chamber to do so quickly and quietly.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the decision by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) to close the officers' social club at HM Prison Polmont and considers that SPS should withdraw this decision and honour its commitment to allow the club to purchase the property, recognising the important role of the club to both staff and the local community.

17:04

**Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I thank Fiona Hyslop for securing the time for this debate. It is a pressing issue and I was keen to have a debate on it as early as possible. I lodged the motion only two weeks ago, and I am grateful for having been able to secure time for the debate so quickly. I welcome the members of the social club who are in the public gallery. They have been campaigning for months to stop the closure of their local social club.

I am sure that most members have some form of social club in their constituency. Often social clubs are closely linked to companies or industries in local communities. They are often left behind when industries move on or cease to be located in Scotland. Clubs find themselves struggling to cope—struggling for members, struggling financially and struggling because of the poor state of their establishment.

The story of the Polmont prison officers' club is very different. It is not a story of a struggling club. Opened in 1957, the club is well established in the local community and is well used. In its 44 years, it has been seen as a key part of the community in Polmont. It has 350 members. They include people who currently work in the Scottish Prison Service, retired prison officers, officers' families and friends, and members of the wider local community. The club is well supported, so why close it?

I am sure that many members present at today's debate will be aware that the Scottish Prison Service tends to work in mysterious ways. Back in 1998, the club indicated to the Scottish Prison Service that it would like to purchase the property and raised the matter with the SPS directly.

Naturally, the club was delighted when on 21 August 1998 it received a letter from the governor of Polmont prison, Dan Gunn, who indicated that at a recent meeting the prison board had decided that the club committee should be offered the opportunity to purchase the club premises. The governor invited the club to indicate whether it was interested in doing that.

In the past two years, because of the governor's offer, the club has invested some £45,000 in upgrading the building to ensure that its standards are adequate. I am sure that members will recognise that, after such investment, this is a very good club. The chamber can imagine the shock and dismay that club members felt when, in August this year, they found out that the Scottish Prison Service had decided not to renew the club's lease on 4 January 2003. That decision came out of the blue. It was not preceded by any consultation and is a complete U-turn from the commitment that was made in August 1998.

Members may ask why the Scottish Prison Service decided to make such a U-turn. In its corporate plan for 1999 to 2002, the service stated that one of its key objectives was to move the Scottish Prison Service college to premises that were better designed and serviced to meet the service's needs. The SPS has now decided to knock down the social club, which is beside the college, to landscape the site for two years and to save up a little capital, which will allow it to build new facilities on the college campus.

Some may say that it is important for the SPS to have adequate facilities for training staff. However, I understand that the real reason for the decision is to allow the SPS to enhance the college to use it for corporate functions.

In August, the officers' club raised concerns about the proposal not to renew its lease with the SPS. On 4 October, it received a letter from the SPS confirming that it would not renew the lease on 4 January. However, in its generosity the service has agreed that the club may purchase a piece of land for a new officers' club. A piece of land of around an acre will cost the club about £100,000. That figure does not include the capital costs of building a new club. However, because the SPS recognises that capital costs may be involved, it has offered to allow the club to purchase some properties in Newlands Road. The cost of those properties would be £200,000.

I am sure that members will recognise that purchasing either land or the properties that have been offered is well outwith the financial scope of the club. I believe that the SPS letter is nothing more than an excuse to allow the SPS to say that it is trying to work with the club. In reality, the letter offers the club nothing.

Members will be aware from my comments that the club is well used by the local community. I will illustrate how well used the club is. Between now and the end of March 2003, the club has bookings for functions on every Friday and Saturday night. For the new financial year from April 2003, the club already has 27 bookings for various functions and events. The club is extensively used by a wide range of organisations within the local community and for family functions and parties.

I will give members only a taste of the groups that use the club, but I could mention many. One group is the Braveheart project, a voluntary mentoring group that was recently established in the local area to work with people with heart problems. The project is being piloted and monitored by the Health Education Board for Scotland, the British Medical Association and the British Heart Foundation.

The Braveheart project chose to use the prison officers' club because it is much cheaper than using any community facility within the local area. The club provides an important resource for an important and worthy project.

The club has had a letter from Squadron Leader Murray of the Air Cadets, who states:

"I am sorry to hear of the impending closure of the Polmont Officers Club. Over the years members of the Air Training Corps have used the club for a variety of functions ... The main reason the Officers Club was used was the friendly, safe environment. The Officers Club serves all members of the community."

There is also correspondence from the local football club, which uses the club extensively and demands that it remain open. Clearly, the club is an important resource in the local community.

I have a document called "A New Vision For A New Service", which was printed from the Scottish Prison Service website. The document states under the heading of "Respect for our Staff":

"The Scottish Prison Service is proud of our people. We recognise that our staff work in difficult circumstances and are dedicated and skilled. But our image is not good and often that is a self-inflicted wound. We all have a responsibility to make sure that the work we do is recognised, in the wider community."

Clive Fairweather stated at the Justice 1 Committee recently that there was a need to build relations between SPS staff and senior management. How does the SPS's treatment of the officers' club fit in with the SPS's new vision? I hope that the minister will recognise that the Scottish Prison Service has not given due credit to the important resource that the prison officers' social club is for the Polmont area. I hope that the minister will intervene personally to ensure that the SPS honours its commitment of August 1998 to allow the club to purchase the property. *[Applause.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

I ask for four-minute speeches, please.

17:13

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** Polmont is part of my constituency of Falkirk East, and I thank Michael Matheson for lodging the motion. We have worked together with the social club representatives since closure of the club was announced without warning, consultation or negotiation. No hint had been given of the club's fate. Just a few days before the announcement, the club spent £2,000 on new equipment. As that expenditure suggests, in the 45<sup>th</sup> year of the club's existence, club finances are healthy because the club fulfils a need.

Prison officers, their families and friends need somewhere where they can socialise, free from the aggressive encounters that they risk elsewhere. However, the club offers more than that: it is also a resource for the local community and a good place to hold birthday parties, weddings and other functions. The club is frequently used by local groups and charities and is the focus for voluntary activity by prison officers. The club also employs eight people.

Retired officers have written to me and to Michael Matheson. They make comments such as:

"The club allows me to keep in regular contact with the friends I have made."

Retired officer Walter Henderson, who attended the opening of the club in 1957, writes:

"The proposals could prove to be a Public Relations disaster returning to the attitude of them-and-us which existed before the Club."

Being part of the community has helped the club avoid the nimbyism that could have existed.

Other letters refer to the impact on staff morale, which is already at an all-time low. Last year, the club was refurbished, but now that refurbishment appears to have been a waste of money and effort.

This is not the first time that prison officers have sought my help. A steady flow of people have attended my surgeries, and other MSPs report that they have also dealt with prison officers. The circumstances surrounding this closure are symptomatic of a wider malaise. I am frequently told of instances of the SPS adopting bullying and dictatorial management styles. I know that the SPS can be slow, obstructive and secretive when it responds to inquiries. Until today, when I received hurried faxes to my Parliament and constituency offices, there had been no replies to my letters on the matter.

If the SPS management refuses to change its ways, perhaps it is time for the Scottish Executive to change the SPS management.

I doubt whether intimidation and disregard for staff can be addressed unless there is a new broom to sweep away the cobwebs of industrial relations rooted in a previous century—and I am not referring to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There are parallels with the situation that arose in relation to the Scottish Qualifications Authority. As they did with the SQA, ministers must address the continuing problems in the SPS. In the first instance, I would like to hear the minister say that he will support my prison officers and use his influence to ensure that the SPS either reprieves the club premises or, at the very least, offers the club a realistic offer of relocation and ensures that it can continue to provide a valuable service to the officers, their families and the community.

17:17

**Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West):** I congratulate Michael Matheson on securing this debate on an important matter affecting people employed in Polmont young offenders institution and other people in the local community.

I have had correspondence on the issue from constituents who are employed in Polmont and I took the matter up with Tony Cameron, the chief executive of the SPS, who replied today. I find the attitude of the SPS unsatisfactory. For a start, there seems to have been no meaningful consultation between the SPS and the trustees of the club before the closure decision was made. On the contrary, there seems to have been considerable secrecy surrounding the original decision and a deliberate attempt not to reveal the closure decision until one month before the date of the closure.

It appears that the SPS has the legal right to terminate the lease with only one month's notice, but that is a deplorable way for any employer to treat employees.

Mr Cameron tells me in his letter that the SPS is now willing to extend the lease until the end of June next year to allow the club to honour commitments made to various groups and organisations. I therefore appeal to the SPS to use the next nine months to consult the trustees of the club in order to explore all possible alternatives to closure.

I understand that the reason for the closure is to demolish the premises in order to develop the SPS college, which is next door. However, some of the club members have suggested alternatives that would allow the college's development to go ahead without the club being demolished.

Even if the SPS is hellbent on demolishing the club premises, it has also been suggested that the SPS could and should provide an alternative plot of land nearby to build another social club. I was amazed at the price of £100,000 that Michael Matheson mentioned, but am aware that the cost of alternative premises could be as high as £200,000.

In his letter, Mr Cameron says that it would not be proper for the SPS to provide funds for the purpose of finding alternative land for the club. If the SPS is unwilling to provide funds, surely it could give the club the lease of a nearby plot of land. Last year, the club spent £30,000 upgrading its facilities. That money would not have been spent if the SPS had at that time given any hint of closure.

The SPS may not have any legal obligation to do otherwise, but it certainly has a moral obligation to stop treating its own employees with absolute contempt. To be a prison officer is a very stressful job, and the club gives prison officers the opportunity to unwind and relax after a hard day's work. Some members of the local community also use the facilities, and some social events in the club have helped to raise funds for numerous good causes such as the Strathcarron hospice and the children's ward at Falkirk and District royal infirmary.

It would be a great pity if all that were to cease due to the Scottish Prison Service's high-handed attitude. I therefore appeal to the Deputy Minister for Justice to tell Tony Cameron to think again and enter into meaningful negotiations with the club to ensure its continuation.

17:21

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** I welcome the opportunity to debate the subject and congratulate Michael Matheson on the persuasive way in which he advanced the case. Cathy Peattie's and Dennis Canavan's points were very well made. Cathy Peattie's letters most certainly should have been answered.

The officers' social club provides an essential service to prison officers and the local community. I am concerned to hear that the Scottish Prison Service wishes to demolish that excellent facility and replace it with a road. Not surprisingly, the members of the club find that highly objectionable—all the more so because the club committee was under the impression that it could buy the building from the SPS and run it independently.

Furthermore, the suggestion from the SPS that the club could buy land near the present site for new premises at the overall cost of some £300,000 to £400,000 is totally inappropriate

because there is simply no way that the club could afford that scale of expenditure.

It is astonishing that the SPS apparently failed to consult the club committee about the plans, given their immense importance to those involved. Instead, the SPS presented its plans as a fait accompli. I hope indeed that the SPS will listen to the club's proposals and will agree to have a meeting with the club to discuss the best way forward. As Michael Matheson pointed out, the social club has been established for around 44 years. It has built up a strong and proud membership of 350 people and has close links with the local community. The club is well known for its charity work. Dennis Canavan mentioned its support for Strathcarron hospice. The club also gives support to community groups, such as Neighbourhood Watch and the Braveheart project, by offering its premises for their meetings.

The club is regarded as a safe haven for prison officers. After a hard day, the club provides an environment in which they can unwind and relax after hours of intense vigilance. As their job is more stressful and dangerous than most, it is not a lot to ask that their efficiently run social club be allowed to remain standing.

The club members are—frankly—appalled to learn that the Scottish Prison Service wishes to demolish their building. Michael Matheson said, I think, that they were shocked and dismayed. The SPS's approach is certainly bad for morale, not least because the club members have invested between £44,000 and £45,000 in renovating the interior during the past year or so. To see that investment literally reduced to rubble would be a tragic waste.

It is time that the SPS agreed to listen to the club committee's reasonable proposals. That is no more than an extension of common sense and courtesy. I sincerely hope that a good outcome can be found. I urge the Scottish Prison Service and the club committee to enter into a dialogue with a view to resolving the matter to everyone's satisfaction. I very much hope that the minister will use his good offices to try to find a way out of the morass.

17:24

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** Michael Matheson and the two local constituency MSPs have covered matters well, but I will emphasise three points. We should consider first, the merits or otherwise of the decision as to whether the club should be destroyed; secondly, the way in which the matter has been dealt with; and thirdly, the wider matter of executive agencies, which was raised by Cathy Peattie.

I have visited Polmont, and know a little about it,

although not enough for me to judge whether in order properly to expand the SPS college it is necessary to demolish the building that houses the social club. It appears that that is not the case. The SPS must show that such action is necessary and it must demonstrate that its decision stands up, which it has failed signally to do so far. I have criticised the Executive for its conduct with regard to jails, but I say that if it is necessary to demolish the club to improve and extend the college, we must accept that—as long as alternative accommodation is provided.

My second point relates to the way in which this whole thing has been gone about. I have been involved in many of the Justice 1 Committee's discussions with representatives of the Scottish Prison Service, so it does not surprise me at all. The Prison Service's personnel management and personnel relations are abysmal. It is ludicrous to drop this bombshell on the club—metaphorically speaking—at a time when the club has been spending a lot of money on improvement. If the club had not already spent the money, it would at least have been able to start with a nest egg for building a replacement, should that prove necessary. The conduct of the consultation—or rather the lack of consultation on the part of the SPS—has been quite disgraceful and, as other members have said, unacceptable.

That brings me to my third point, which Cathy Peattie covered a bit, and which the Justice 1 Committee has considered, which is the issue of executive agencies and the lack of control over them. Poor Richard Simpson will have to answer for the Prison Service in a straight-bat fashion—if I may use a cricketing analogy without being disloyal—despite the fact that his wicket has already been demolished. The SPS has conducted itself in a totally indefensible manner. If someone in the Scottish Executive justice department conducted themselves in such a way, the minister would take the flak and could do something about it, but that is not the case with executive agencies.

That whole problem, as was first highlighted by the Scottish Qualifications Authority and which is now being highlighted by the SPS and other agencies, must be tackled. We must determine how we, and ministers, will get a grip on executive agencies. The problem at Polmont might appear to be small and parochial, but it raises a key national issue. I hope that the minister will take to heart the message that we must get a grip on our executive agencies, and that the Executive will start doing something about it.

17:28

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I congratulate Michael Matheson on

securing the debate, and I congratulate the prison officers, their families and colleagues who are here. Some of us met the officers recently when they were launching their petition. It seems incredible to be talking about having to save a club that is so obviously successful, not just from the point of view of prison officers, but from that of the whole community. How many assets like the social club at Polmont do communities generally have?

It does not seem so incredible that we are having to discuss the matter, however, when we learn that the social club is owned by the Scottish Prison Service, which I hold in even less regard than does Donald Gorrie. The Justice 1 Committee has had nothing from the management of the SPS but arrogance and inability to consult at all levels. As for its recent statement that it intends to change its corporate personality and be more consultative, I am waiting for pigs to fly.

On the subject of wildlife, I did not know that one of the organisations that uses the Polmont prison officers' social club is the Laurieston and District Racing Pigeon Society, whose president stated in a letter of support for the club—and I apologise for this dreadful pun—that his

“members were shocked to hear that they would not have the privilege of holding our yearly ‘Doo’ in the Polmont Staff Social Club.”

The subject is not funny, but I thought that I would throw that in.

I also note that the social club is used by the local fly-fishing club and by the San Quentin Country and Western Club. I hope that all those organisations do not use the club at the same time. Anyway, that demonstrates the range of activities that take place in what is a community club.

Members have heard about the money that was spent. That money was spent for a reason—it was spent because the prison officers thought that they were going to be able to buy the property. The meat of the debate lies in the text of the motion. The SPS should

“honour its commitment to allow the club to purchase the property”.

That is the starting point and the end point of the debate. The offer was made when the club needed building up. That has been done—investment has taken place and the club is profitable. It has much more money in its bank account than I have; it can start running my finances for me. I believe that the club has £12,000 in savings and has invested about £40,000. The club was built up to the point of its being ready to be purchased and to make its way within the community. At the last minute, the plug was pulled without a whisper of consultation—the club was simply told, “Your lease is not being

renewed.” That is typical of the management of the Scottish Prison Service.

I will be interested to hear how the Deputy Minister for Justice can defend the management of the SPS. I suggest, with respect, that Tony Cameron has the opportunity to show that he has changed his colours and that he is a listening chief executive. For years, he has trashed and demoralised prison officers through failure to reorganise the prisons. The prison officers run a successful club. Mr Cameron can show that he is listening to the people in the Prison Service, so let him make his first such gesture by allowing the prison officers to keep their building.

17:31

**Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con):** I support Michael Matheson's motion and thank him for bringing the matter to members' attention.

Like other members, I have been contacted by constituents who work at Polmont young offenders institution. They expressed their concerns about the SPS's planned closure of their social club. The social club is the only place where staff are able to relax, to wind down and to have a drink—while still in uniform—when their shifts have ended. There is no doubt that looking after some of the challenging youngsters can be hectic and stressful; the club can provide a comfortable venue for a relaxed debriefing after the day's events.

The club offers social and recreational value to its members and the charitable and fundraising ventures that it organises benefit greatly the local community in Falkirk. Many members have spoken about the organisations that use the club, which I do not propose to rehash. The club is seen as an integral part of the community, so for its members and others in the community, the closure of the club will mean the substantial loss of a safe and affordable recreational amenity.

I am given to understand that bookings have been taken for functions for more than a year in advance. That brings me to my concern about how the news of the planned closure of the club was communicated. Although I could be corrected, I understand that the news of the closure was supposed to be kept secret until the last minute—4 December—even though the decision had been taken some considerable time in advance. If the social club had had the slightest inkling that its future was in doubt, is it likely that it would have spent £40,000 to £50,000 on a programme of upgrading and refurbishment of the bar and lounge areas? If my figures are different from those of other members, that is possibly the Holyrood effect—we cannot get our figures right on that either.

If the SPS had taken more interest in its employees and in their club, it might have known of the planned expenditure. As things stand, the money has been abused. Has not the SPS been vindictive on a scale that members of the Parliament should deplore?

Battle-hardened politicians are used to the idea of repairing to one of the local hostels for refreshment or light relief after a day's endeavour. Talking is thirsty work and we are happy to take our chances among the voting public, if we are lucky, or among colleagues or parliamentary journalists, if we are not so lucky. We will not have had to cut down a youngster who has taken, or who has attempted to take, his own life. The effects on people who are touched by suicide might never leave them. I hope that Michael Matheson will forgive my advert for the motion on suicide that I have lodged.

I said that I would be brief. I am eager to hear the minister's response.

17:34

**Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** I am happy to support Michael Matheson's motion on his local constituency interest, just as he and many other members have so excellently supported the prison officers who are employed in Peterhead in my constituency.

I see that Richard Simpson has just received a note on SPS notepaper, which I hope carries late advice of good news. We should perhaps characterise the relationship between the SPS and its staff as one that is based on trust and understanding: the SPS does not understand its staff and the staff can no longer trust the SPS.

In view of the amount of time that I have spent in prisons and in the company of prison officers over the past year, my friends and colleagues are perhaps beginning to wonder about my own bona fides, but the bona fides of the executive of the SPS are at the heart of today's debate. Does the SPS regard staff merely as a resource to fire off against problems and the duties that it has been given? Does the SPS regard prisoners simply as a commodity to be processed through the Prison Service? I hope not. The issue is entirely different, but such an attitude would be consistent with what often seem to be the commercial ambitions of the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service.

I would rather see the SPS show that it cares, that it is interested in public policy and that it wants to deliver on public safety. We can do that by having a Prison Service that is well resourced in buildings and programmes, but none of that will matter if we cannot deliver staff who are committed and who are able to go the extra mile that we get from excellence in public services.

As in the estates review's proposals for Peterhead, we do not know the cost of closing the social club and such a cost cannot necessarily be measured in pounds and pence. The cost will be paid in a continuing reduction in the morale of the people who are employed in the Prison Service.

Once again, the Prison Service has made an arcane and perverse decision that goes against everything that the Executive tells us about partnership. There is no partnership between the executive of the Prison Service and the people who are employed at Polmont if the SPS closes the facility in the way that has been described. The Prison Service and the minister will have noted that, when a community is roused as it was in Peterhead, a community can win. I see every sign that the community in Polmont is on the point of taking to the barricades; I will join those people there if it will help.

I know that the minister had extensive experience of the Prison Service prior to coming to the Parliament and that he has a personal understanding of human psychology. If we cannot look to the Prison Service for ethical, caring and professional behaviour towards staff and their responsibilities to the wider public, I see nothing but the bleakest of futures for the Prison Service.

I think that it was Oscar Wilde who said:

"I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member."

I suspect tonight that, if Tony Cameron knocked on the door of the club in Polmont, he would not be accepted as a member.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I think that the quotation should actually be attributed to Mr Stevenson's alter ego, Groucho Marx.

17:39

**The Deputy Minister for Justice (Dr Richard Simpson):** I congratulate Michael Matheson on securing the time for this debate on a matter that is undoubtedly of considerable importance to the people in Polmont. That has been evident from all the speeches that have been made. I acknowledge the fact that Cathy Peattie, Dennis Canavan and Donald Gorrie have received representations on the matter. Indeed, I have discussed the issue with Cathy Peattie at some length a number of times, and correspondence has passed from my desk to that of the SPS.

First let me give a little history. The clubs—there were some 11 of them—were set up in the 1950s and shortly thereafter, when all or most of the prison staff were required to live in the vicinity of the prison. At that time, the SPS owned substantial property in the area of the prison. Today, very few properties are owned—a few in

Edinburgh and a few in Cornton Vale—and there is no longer a requirement to live in the vicinity. The second change is that, of the 11 clubs, I think that three are left—although I am not sure of the exact figure. Certainly, few are left. There has been a process of divestment and clubs have gradually been closed or sold, or returned to operational use. There are only a few exceptions to that.

In 1998, when the policy was being promoted that the clubs could be sold off and that the SPS could divest itself of direct interest in them, all the remaining clubs were asked to express an interest if they wished to purchase the club. I am advised by the SPS that no such request was received from Polmont, but today's debate has shown that members of the Polmont club take a different view. However, as far as I am aware, there has been no subsequent pressure by the club to try to go through with the sale.

In the intervening period, the SPS—following the Executive's policy—has had to consider proper training for officers in the coming years. The SPS must ensure that the college at Polmont, or at an alternative site, is developed to promote training for new admissions to the service and for continuing professional development. I know the college at Polmont well; I have attended it many times. It has poor access, inadequate parking and dilapidated buildings, and it requires substantial refurbishment. The SPS is therefore totally correct, in its pursuit of correctional excellence, to consider this issue seriously before deciding how to proceed.

An option for the SPS was to find a fresh site and, in due course, to build a new college. Another option was to retain the existing college and revise, extend and improve it to make it fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century—thus retaining some 70 jobs in the Polmont area and, appropriately, providing ready access, because it is in central Scotland. In August of this year, the latter option was chosen. The SPS is developing its plans accordingly.

A consequence of that decision is, I understand, that the site of the current staff club will be required to ensure safe access to the new kitchens for lorries. At present, access to the site is not wholly satisfactory. As to whether the site could be retained in some way within the present college, I do not have sufficient knowledge to give an answer. However, I understand that that is not possible and that the development is important.

The club is undoubtedly well run and—as we have heard from all members—is used extensively by members of the community and by clubs within that community, as well as by its 350 members and by its associate members. Clearly, the facility is highly regarded in the community. It seems to me that the outcome of discussions between the

SPS, the college, the community and Falkirk Council should be that a resource of some sort should be available in the area to meet the needs of the community. Whether that facility will still be linked to the SPS is another matter.

I have learned from today's speeches that a substantial amount of money has been invested by the club. In meetings that have been held, the figure of £15,000 is all that has been mentioned. Today, a figure of between £40,000 and £50,000, and a figure of £45,000, have been put on the record. Investment has been made that, technically and legally, was made at the risk of the club, because that is the form of the lease. Nevertheless, we should consider carefully whether some form of recompense or negotiated settlement can be arrived at.

Under the lease that has been in place since the 1980s, notice must be given in December for termination of the lease in January. As far as I know, no attempt has been made to renegotiate that lease. Legally, therefore, the SPS did not have to give notice to the club until December.

I understand that two meetings have taken place between the club and the SPS at which there were discussions about alternative properties and alternative land. Again, those meetings were alluded to although I am not quite sure how accurate the figures were. Certainly, the figure of £300,000 is not correct. One figure referred to land and one to buildings. Those figures were being combined by my colleagues; perhaps that was not appropriate.

**Michael Matheson:** I have a letter from the SPS that was sent by e-mail dated 4 October. The letter details that it would cost £100,000 per acre, or £200,000 to buy the properties at Newlands Road.

**Dr Simpson:** That confirms what I was saying. Those figures should not be combined; they are separate figures.

It is important that there should be continuing dialogue between the club and the SPS. The SPS should consider carefully whether the site is an absolute requirement for the extension. If it is, the SPS must proceed because the college is important in terms of both employment and the future of the SPS.

Alternative sites might be considered and there might be some way in which the local community, Falkirk Council and the SPS could come together. At present, the SPS pays the rates and charges a peppercorn rent to the club. The club is therefore in a position whereby the SPS is giving some subsidy to the local community, and whether that should be the role of the SPS is a matter for considerable debate.

I cannot say that the SPS should change its position.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Will the minister confirm that the decision that was made by the SPS was not made by ministers? In view of the substantial issues of concern that have been raised by members of all parties today, will the minister make certain that the SPS is aware of that strong concern and that it pursues those matters in dialogue with the club?

**Dr Simpson:** I am happy to give that assurance and to indicate that I will hold further discussion with the SPS and convey personally the strong feelings that have been expressed by members of all parties.

I am concerned that we should have a modern prison service in which there is trust and understanding—not in the form that was described by Stewart Stevenson, but genuine trust and understanding between the SPS and its staff. The signing of the agreement that is just coming into place between the trade union and the SPS is a basis on which we can proceed. We have to undo some of the past antagonism between the two sides.

I hope that we can have further discussions in that area and that we can try to ensure that this worthwhile community effort is considered further in a satisfactory way. I hope that each side will at least understand where the other is coming from. I have given Lord James Douglas-Hamilton an undertaking that I will raise the matter with the SPS.

*Meeting closed at 17:49.*

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