

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 6 November 2002
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER—Right hon Jim Wallace QC MSP

Justice

MINISTER FOR JUSTICE—Right hon Jim Wallace QC MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR JUSTICE—Dr Richard Simpson MSP

Education and Young People

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DEPUTY MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE—Nicol Stephen MSP

Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning

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Environment and Rural Development

MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT—Ross Finnie MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT—Allan Wilson MSP

Finance and Public Services

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MINISTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE—Ms Margaret Curran MSP
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DEPUTY MINISTER FOR TOURISM, CULTURE AND SPORT—Dr Elaine Murray MSP

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PRESIDING OFFICER—Right hon Sir David Steel MSP
MEMBERS—Mr George Reid MSP, Mr Murray Tosh MSP, Fiona Hyslop MSP, Alex Johnstone MSP, Patricia Ferguson MSP, Euan Robson MSP

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6 November 2002

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 6 November 2002

(Afternoon)

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

In exactly seven weeks today, we will celebrate Christmas, the day when we remember the birth of the prince of peace; the one arrow that stayed straight and true right to the end. As we approach that time of year, perhaps we should look at ourselves to see honestly whether we have kept our flight straight and true since it left the bow of the God who is the father of all his children everywhere.

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Our time for reflection leader this week is the Reverend Moira MacCormick, minister at Buchlyvie and Gartmore.

The Reverend Moira MacCormick (Killearn Kirk, Buchlyvie): I begin this meditation with a quotation from “The Prophet” by Kahlil Gibran, where he speaks about children. He says:

“You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth. The Archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows might go swift and far. Let your bending in the Archer’s hand be for gladness: for even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He also loves the bow that is stable.”

Over the past hundreds of millions years since humanity began to develop its God-given life, we have become men and women with incredible brain power and ingenuity. From discovering the basic ability to create fire and so to keep warm, we have progressed to the stage where we are able to travel to the moon and, no doubt, eventually beyond that.

One of the greatest gifts that humanity has been given is the gift of free will—the ability to make decisions for right or wrong, for good or ill. The creator who gave humanity that wonderful gift gave it in the earnest hope that all his children would learn that the best way for everyone to live was his way of love.

Throughout all the decades, centuries and millennia, the divine bowman has sent forth living arrows, but in all that time only one man has been able to live the perfect life of love, care and consideration for others, along with obedience to the one who had created him. That was the man Jesus. Because of that, the other side of human nature came to the fore, and he was nailed to a cross 2,000 years ago.

As we look around our world today, we cannot help but feel that many of the arrows that have been sent out have become crooked because they have used their God-given free will to go their own way, rather than in the direction in which they were sent.

Business motion

14:34

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Our first item of business today is consideration of the business motion S1M-3544, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to this week's business programme. I ask Euan Robson to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees as a revision to the Business Programme agreed on 30 October 2002—

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after first Parliamentary Bureau Motions, delete—

“followed by Ministerial Statement”

Thursday 7 November 2002

delete—

“9:30 am Executive Debate on the Scottish Executive Response to Foot and Mouth Disease Inquiries”

and insert—

“9:30 am Ministerial Statement on Housing

followed by Executive Debate on Forestry in Scotland”.—[Euan Robson.]

The Presiding Officer: As no one has requested to speak against the motion, I will put the question. The question is, that motion S1M-3544 be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Education (Schools)

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The main item of business this afternoon is a debate on motion S1M-3536, in the name of Cathy Jamieson, on flexibility and innovation in schools, and on two amendments to that motion. I invite members who would like to take part in the debate to indicate now that they would like to speak. I call Cathy Jamieson.

14:34

The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson): I am delighted that, once again, there are in the public gallery young people from a range of schools, some of whom I met at lunch time.

Education has been very much at the top of the agenda in the past few days and I am pleased to use our time this afternoon to allow us to debate such an important issue. The Parliament recognised the importance of raising standards when it approved, as one of its first major pieces of legislation, the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000. Every child in Scotland must have the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential, not simply to settle for second best, or worse, often because of circumstances that are largely out of their control.

Education must raise young people's aspirations and schools must be able to develop those ambitions fully. A great deal of innovative and excellent work is going on in Scottish schools to raise overall attainment. If we are honest, however, we know that there is still in pupil attainment an unacceptable gap between those who succeed and those who do not. Let us be absolutely clear; young people in poorer areas do less well. Some might argue that there has always been an opportunity gap, but the fact that it has always existed does not make it right or natural. The gap is unacceptable and we must find ways in which to close it. We cannot blame the system, because the system is all of us—teachers, local authorities and even politicians.

We all have a part to play in making the changes that will close that gap. They will be changes such as the agreement, “A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century”. We need well-trained, well-motivated and well-rewarded teachers. We need an education system that offers flexibility for local authorities and head teachers to innovate and to implement the best solutions for their areas or schools. We have already come a long way since the agreement was signed in January 2001.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I am grateful for the substantial sums of extra money that the Executive has committed to

funding the McCrone settlement throughout Scotland—that will make a big difference to the teaching and learning environment. However, the minister will be aware that there have been concerns expressed in the Highlands and Islands that the pattern of small schools there makes implementation of the McCrone recommendations challenging. When she discusses the broader education context with the Highland Council, will the minister be as flexible as possible about the way in which the council can use the funds that flow to it from various education spending initiatives? Has she had any discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities about changing the funding formula?

Cathy Jamieson: I am happy to reassure Maureen Macmillan. We have already made some changes in the way in which the national priorities action fund—formerly the excellence fund—can be used to allow more flexibility. I have discussed matters with COSLA and will continue those discussions to ensure that we take account of issues such as deprivation and rurality, as well as pupil numbers, in the amounts of money that go to local authorities through grant-aided expenditure. We will continue to work with COSLA on that. We are on track with all the McCrone agreement's commitments. All the targets have so far been met on time and we are making solid progress towards the others.

It is worth noting examples of local flexibility, such as business managers in Edinburgh taking bureaucratic burdens from head teachers. As one head teacher put it to me, that allows him get on with educational matters rather than sort out broken windows or leaky taps. There is local flexibility in North Ayrshire, where the local authority and the teaching unions have agreed that departmental meetings can be held outside the pupil week, which means more teaching time for pupils. In some schools, that allows increased numbers of secondary 1 classes, which reduces class sizes. That is the kind of flexibility that benefits teachers and pupils and helps to deliver better quality education.

Our giving more time for teachers to teach and allowing them to devote more time to each child will bring clear benefits. That is why we have reduced to a maximum of 30 primary 1 to primary 3 class sizes and why we have increased the number of classroom assistants so that we now have a pupil to adult ratio of 15:1 or better.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): The minister will be aware that class sizes will be a feature of this afternoon's debate. Has the Executive established an estimate of how much it would cost to reduce class sizes to 20 in the primary sector and the secondary school sectors?

Cathy Jamieson: I will deal with that point in due course and will explain where the Executive sees a way forward.

The importance of classroom assistants is clear from talking to teachers at the front line. Teachers want more support staff and they want more adults who have expertise in sport, music or drama coming into schools. That is why the First Minister talked in his speech in Glasgow yesterday about the unique position in which we find ourselves, with falling school rolls and increasing numbers of teachers and other school staff. We need to examine the opportunities that that might give us in the future.

It would be easy to resort to knee-jerk reaction or political sloganising; indeed, some people already have done so. We have choices and we need to know where our priorities lie. Let us have a debate. Should there be further class size reductions in the early years of primary schools? Should we extend class size reductions to the later years of primary schools or perhaps to the early years of secondary schools? We know that many pupils in many countries stand still in respect of their learning during the early years of secondary school. How can we best use our resources? Declines in school rolls will not happen uniformly throughout the country, or even in each local authority. Let us consider such issues more closely and develop real solutions that can be implemented sensibly and which can bring real benefits to pupils.

Our approach must be to consider the options and ensure that we have the right research and the right international comparators that will allow us to reach the right decisions. I say to Tommy Sheridan that options will be properly costed—our proposals will not have back-of-the-envelope calculations.

The guidance on flexibility in the curriculum that was issued to directors of education last year was an important and ground-breaking circular. It acknowledged that a one-size-fits-all approach to the curriculum would not necessarily meet the individual needs of pupils. I will give a few brief examples of where the approach is working. We will support 20 innovative modern language projects over the next two years. The outcomes and resources from those projects will be shared nationally and will provide an excellent knowledge bank for all schools and local authorities.

An exciting project that we are supporting is a partial immersion programme at Walker Road Primary School in Aberdeen. That project allows for teaching part of the curriculum in French. One primary 3 class has been learning French in that way since primary 1. Parents are also learning French so that they can support their children. I have not had the opportunity to hear it for myself,

but I understand that listening to the young people moving from broad Aberdonian to French with ease has to be heard to be believed. Perhaps Nicol Stephen will say something about that.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the minister take an intervention?

Cathy Jamieson: I would like to proceed—I will come back to the member later.

Ashcraig School in Glasgow has used innovation funding to provide access to French for pupils who have severe communications difficulties, which has helped to build their confidence. Another project is supported by a national grid for learning Scotland ICT innovation award. The awards were set up in 2000 and provide small grants to encourage innovative approaches in the use of information and communications technology in small-scale local learning and teaching projects.

Thirty different projects have been helped so far, which cover everything from specialist music teaching by videoconferencing in Argyll and Bute to a homework website in the Scottish Borders that gives pupils e-mail access to subject specialists. Therefore, the Executive is wholeheartedly encouraging schools to take a flexible approach to learning.

We have, through the future learning and teaching programme, acknowledged the need to support pilot projects that will explore the school of the future. There are 15 projects in the programme, of which I will mention just a few. The Highland future schools project has taken advantage of the two new community high schools at Ardnamurchan and Glenurquhart that have been built by Highland Council to pilot new ways of using ICT within a purpose-built school environment and, through links to the wider community, to increase the local skills base through home-school-community partnerships. What does that project mean to pupils and parents? At Ardnamurchan High School, it means that pupils will learn next-generation ICT skills, that they will have access to high-quality online teaching materials and that they can take home laptop computers on which to do their homework. Parents can use the laptops to access e-mails, electronic newsletters and school curriculum information.

Glenurquhart High School will also create links with the local community by offering ICT to the community and allowing adult learners to access e-mail, the internet and various online learning opportunities. That will give all members of the learning community continuous access to the school's central website portal, with linked access to school curriculum, subject, homework and revision sites.

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)

(Lab): Is the minister prepared to go further than that in respect of the wider school curriculum? Does she agree that a key contribution to our commitment to closing the opportunity gap—for which she will receive my whole-hearted support—can be made by effective use of school premises? Will she join me in welcoming the £8 million investment that we are making after decades of underinvestment in our schools? Bishopbriggs High School's games hall is opening tonight and will include provision for extensive community use of its facilities.

Cathy Jamieson: I am pleased to hear about the investment that has been made and I wish everybody well with the new facility. It will be of great benefit to pupils and to the community.

I will give a few more examples of what is happening elsewhere. Glasgow City Council is exploring innovative ways of organising and managing its schools through the Glasgow learning communities project. Six learning communities have been created in the east end of Glasgow. They are made up of schools, pre-school centres and support agencies. Each cluster is managed and organised as one unit. The aims are: to improve the transitions between pre-school, primary school and secondary school; to promote social and educational inclusion; to raise standards and increase achievement for all pupils; to improve partnerships between pre-school, school and the community; and to reduce administrative burdens on teachers and schools.

The sports comprehensives project that is being run by North Lanarkshire Council is another example of an innovative way of working. The project is piloting inclusive sports comprehensives and involves three high schools in the authority. It aims to increase participation in sport among young people in the authority area, to increase attainment and achievement, and to build confidence and self-esteem among young people. It aims to provide an enriched curriculum through enhanced sports provision and opportunities and to make a contribution to the wider regeneration of the area.

Each of those projects is different. Each is exploring its own vision of how schools might look, feel and be organised in the future. Each will be independently evaluated to ensure that we are able to identify their impact on learning and teaching, their impact on the local community and their impact on pupils and students, not only in terms of attainment and attendance but in terms of life skills and the quality of the educational experience. They are the kind of innovative ideas that will help every school become a centre of excellence.

I made it clear at the Edinburgh conference last week that I support the comprehensive principle, and Jack McConnell made it clear in his speech to head teachers yesterday that he supports the comprehensive principle. However, let me make it clear that I do not interpret a general thumbs-up—as we saw in the national debate responses—as an uncritical endorsement of the status quo. We need to raise our game in some areas.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will Cathy Jamieson give way?

Cathy Jamieson: I want to finish my point.

Nobody should be in any doubt that we will introduce reforms to improve matters where that is needed. Let me make it clear what comprehensive education is and is not about: it is not about putting all young people through a uniform learning process; it is not about assuming that the needs of every child are identical; and it is not about the first two years of secondary schooling moving too fast for some and too slow for others with all, or most, pupils in a class being given the same materials at the same pace, regardless of their aptitude or prior attainment.

Comprehensive education is about teachers responding to pupils' individual needs, prior attainments and past experiences, both when planning pupils' work in school and through parental involvement at home. It is about making best use of the flexibility that is already available to organise classes most suitably to meet the needs of the pupils.

We need also to work on keeping young people who are in the third and fourth years of secondary school interested in their education. That means that we must increase the choice of, and opportunities for, vocational education. We must make better links with further education and the world of work and allow young people to take vocational qualifications in school or in partnership with colleges. That does not mean young people leaving school at 14; rather, it means opening up more opportunities for them while maintaining the support that the wider school community offers. If that is what Brian Monteith means by his amendment, I will ruin his credibility by agreeing with him. Perhaps he will clarify that in his speech.

Murdo Fraser: How does the minister define a comprehensive school? Does a school that streams its pupils fall into the category "comprehensive school"?

Cathy Jamieson: I have outlined that the comprehensive principle allows various opportunities for people to look at the best options and to meet the individual needs of children and young people. We must remember that education is about much more than exam results. The national priorities in education reflect that clearly

and recognise that performance should not be measured only against attainment in exam results.

The aim of the school improvement framework is to ensure that we make progress on all the national priorities. We must think about attitudes and life skills and about providing a broad understanding of the world in which we live. That should involve teaching understanding of different cultures and the promotion of tolerance. Education must meet the social and academic needs of the whole child and enable children to play a full and productive part in society. I know that that can sometimes be difficult and that a child's development is not only about academic achievement. It can be difficult for schools to balance the need to provide a broad education with the push to raise standards in attainment. The good news—this is important when we talk about the comprehensive principle—is that classroom practice and research over the years suggest that those goals are not mutually exclusive.

Schools and authorities must continue to seek improvements that will raise attainment and close the opportunity gap. Where they have difficulties, we will ensure that the skills and expertise of HM Inspectorate of Education are channelled towards helping them to improve and get things right. My vision is that every school should be a centre of excellence for learning and teaching in its own community; a centre of excellence in supporting pupils and reflecting their individual needs and abilities; a centre of excellence in terms of accommodation and facilities, and a centre of excellence for leadership, management and staff development that sets its own challenging targets for year-on-year improvements.

We are committed to developing the improvement framework for Scottish schools and to closing the opportunity gap. We encourage flexibility so that local needs and circumstances are met. We recognise and celebrate the innovative and forward-looking practice that can be found in Scottish education and we are determined to encourage local innovation and local flexibility because only parents and people on the front line know what is required.

We plan to make details of all future learning and teaching projects available in the near future through a web-based publication to spread good practice and to inspire others to innovate. We want to work with teachers to harness their inspiration and dedication in order to create a learning and teaching environment for the future that delivers the very best for all our children and young people. I believe that that is what members want and I believe that we have a programme to deliver that.

I move,

That the Parliament is committed to raising standards in education and closing the opportunity gap; acknowledges

that *A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century* encourages greater local flexibility for schools in delivery of the National Priorities in Education; welcomes the contribution made by innovative projects in the Future Learning and Teaching programme to addressing issues such as the transition from primary to SI/SII, as well as new approaches to ICT and modern languages, and supports the Executive in its aim of ensuring that every school is a centre of excellence.

14:52

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I confirm at the outset that I also want the best for our young people, but the difference between the minister and me is that I do not believe that she has, as she said in her closing words, the programme to achieve that. I thank the minister for her speech and I do not doubt for a moment her genuine concern for the future of Scotland's young people, nor do I disagree in any way with her praise for the good work that is done in schools by teachers, parents and pupils, both individually and collectively. I stress that point, because in speaking to my amendment I will have much criticism to make of the minister and the First Minister.

My appreciation of the minister's stance does not extend entirely to the First Minister. We all know that his aim, which is to be achieved at any price, is the retention of power for Labour and the development of an absolute hegemony for his brand of Scottish South Lanarkshire Labour. His contributions to the education debate must be seen in that political context.

Brian Fitzpatrick: It is Mr Russell who is making party political points. Where is the mention of schools?

Michael Russell: I will come to that in a moment.

What unites the First Minister and, alas, the Minister for Education and Young People are muddle-headed, micro-managing, process-obsessed, self-congratulatory contributions to the debate on education and to the management of education, which is their responsibility. That is well exemplified in the minister's speech and the motion. It was also on display yesterday in the First Minister's keynote speech. I will devote a moment to that speech, which was designed to lead into today's debate. It is disappointing that the First Minister is not here; he is prepared to give his thoughts outside the chamber, but not inside it.

Yesterday, the First Minister returned to the issue of education which, he thinks, made his name in Scotland. What tablets of stone did he carry down from the lofty eminence of Bute House to lay down the route ahead? The big idea, apparently, is to drive up standards. What standards? He did not say. Where were they to be

driven? He did not say. In what way were standards slipping or falling? He did not say; he produced only some vague ideas about the role of the inspectorate in supporting failing schools—a role that it already has. What schools were failing? He did not say. He said that he wanted head teachers to have more power over the curriculum and the budgets. How much more power? He did not say.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): What is Mike Russell saying?

Michael Russell: I will come to that.

Jackie Baillie: Eventually.

Michael Russell: Jackie Baillie should not worry—I will not be short of ideas, even if the Labour party is.

Among the many other things that Jack McConnell did not say was how his idea of giving more power to head teachers fits with the McCrone arrangement that is lauded in the motion. That arrangement looks to a collective, collegiate development of school communities and responsibility. How does that fit with the minister's view that there should be more power for school boards—an idea that was much lauded last year? Nobody will say.

To listen to Jack McConnell yesterday was to listen to the endlessly spun Jack McConnell, whose contribution on these matters was leaked to the Sunday newspapers. [*Interruption.*] Labour members are shouting because they do not like what I am saying. They hate the truth—which is that the emperor has no clothes. Mr McConnell's speech was leaked to the Sunday newspapers, leaked again to the Monday press, featured on Tuesday morning and then reported today. One would have thought that—to use his favourite phrase—he had taken charge of an education system that had fallen into the hands of incompetents and failures. Hang on a minute, though. How many education ministers have there been in the past five years? There have been five, of which Cathy Jamieson is the fifth. She succeeded Mr McConnell, Mr Galbraith, Mrs Liddell and Mr Wilson, who were all Labour education ministers. Labour has had responsibility for the stewardship of Scottish education for five years, six months and five days. Where were these proposals during that period? Nowhere.

Jack McConnell says nothing about the real issues in Scottish education because his contributions are spin and bluster. They are directed at the electorate, not at the young people of Scotland. What he said came nowhere near addressing the real needs and priorities of Scottish education. I want the Parliament to be crystal clear about my attitude and the SNP's attitude towards the issues in the motion. We supported and

continue to support the McCrone agreement. The main problems lie in the failure of the Executive to honour its part of the bargain. We believe in greater flexibility in schools, although the national priorities approach is a very vague way in which to achieve that. We want children to have help with transition at all the key stages in education, including the transition from nursery school to primary school. The Liberals are apparently so concerned about that issue that they have been unable to mention it in the two and a half years in which there has been a Liberal Deputy Minister for Education and Young People.

We want new approaches to ICT, but we also want existing promises to be honoured, such as the promise to provide an e-mail address for every child, which is nowhere near delivery. In February 2002, only 16 per cent of primary pupils, 8 per cent of special educational needs pupils and less than two thirds of secondary school pupils had been provided with an e-mail address.

Cathy Jamieson: Does Mr Russell agree that e-mail addresses for pupils ought to be made available on the basis of the age and stage of the pupil? Does he also agree that it is important that we put in place appropriate protection measures for young people, given some of the issues surrounding internet usage?

Michael Russell: Of course I agree, but I was not the one who said in my election manifesto of 1999:

"Every Scottish pupil will have an e-mail address".

Brian Fitzpatrick: A gimmick.

Michael Russell: It appears that that was a gimmick.

Brian Fitzpatrick: No—the SNP said that it was a gimmick.

Michael Russell: It was a gimmick that was not delivered. That was one of Labour's top five pledges on education. The manifesto also said:

"We pledge to provide at least four modern computers for every class in Scottish primary and secondary schools."

The reality is that the number of computers per class is no longer even measured for secondary schools, and the figure in primary schools stands at 2.2 per class. Labour members may talk about ICT if they want, but they should honour their promises.

Of course every school has to be excellent, and of course we have to close the opportunity gap; we can agree on the warm words, but we must get to the heart of the matter and produce the detailed policies that will do the job. Of course we have to achieve the best education for every child, but we must raise not vague standards, but a specific standard: we must raise the standard of education

that has been achieved when each child leaves school. To do that we must use the best tools at our disposal in co-operation with parents, teachers and, indeed, with everyone; the tools are all around us. We know that smaller class sizes produce results. There is no doubt about that or about the international research on that.

Cathy Jamieson rose—

Michael Russell: Let me finish.

The international research is comprehensive. If I am honestly being told that we are going back to the beginning of the issue, that is political evasion by the Executive to buy time and it has nothing to do with the needs of Scottish schoolchildren.

We also know that we need a change in the power balance in education. We need more consensus and less local authority domination. However, to be specific, we want to establish an education convention that is coupled with the continued roll-out of devolved school management. However, what is equally important is clarity in the budget process, good annual planning and an end to tinkering with small sums of money for public relations purposes, which is so beloved of the Executive.

It is clear that we need to help young people in transition periods, but it is particularly clear that we must find a way of guiding young people into vocational education whether they want to do that for positive reasons or because they get little from conventional schooling. However, we need a scheme for that, not just warm words. I will support Brian Monteith's amendment because it is right. However, we need a scheme that will do what he proposes.

Cathy Jamieson: I wonder whether, when talking about the tools for doing the job, Mike Russell will acknowledge that teachers welcome some of the additional tools in the form of classroom assistants and support staff. Will he also acknowledge that through the implementation of the McCrone recommendations we will have about 3,000 additional teachers and 3,500 extra support staff and that teachers welcome that?

Michael Russell: I acknowledge that teachers and many of us welcome a great many things that are happening, but those things are not at the heart of the matter. I ask the Minister for Education and Young People to have vision and to lead, not to fiddle about constantly in process and micro-management, which is the hallmark of new Labour and, in particular, of the minister.

We need to simplify our exam system, especially now that many schools are choosing to do that themselves and abandon standard grades. We need national leadership and national innovation on the matter, not just platitudes.

When the First Minister was elected a year ago he talked about wanting to do "less, better". As usual, that was a remark that was difficult to understand. However, if that actually means concentrating on the important issues and taking actions that will make a difference, then he has failed in education. We have heard much more, but we have not heard things that go to the heart of improvement.

The SNP amendment is deliberately designed not to take anything out of the Executive's motion, but to add to it. Our amendment adds the big ideas and implores the Executive to start at last treating education as a vital area for investment and creative change, rather than just another topic for self-laudatory parliamentary motions, spun political speeches and the expression of vague concerns. Those do nothing to make our country a better place or to build a better future for our young people. Education does that, but the Executive—alas—is failing education and failing Scotland.

I move amendment S1M-3536.1, to insert at end,

"but regrets that the Executive seems unable to take on board ideas which will make a real difference in the medium and long term such as the need for a substantial lowering in class sizes, particularly in the early years of primary, the simplification of the Scottish exam system, the review of 5-14 with the aim of creating more flexibility and less pressure, the building and development of a collective and collegiate view of school management as envisaged in the McCrone agreement (which should also involve parents and young people), and other major topics, but instead seeks to apply spin and hype to a First Minister's vision of education that is lacking in vision and depth and does not constructively address the main issue of providing the best education possible for every child in Scotland."

15:03

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to be able to take part in the debate. I am particularly pleased to be able to support the Executive's motion. I thought that I would just get that in to get off to a good start. Conservatives, of course, are in favour of raising standards, greater local flexibility, innovative education projects, new approaches to ICT and languages, and centres of excellence. Therefore, we have no difficulty in supporting the Executive's motion.

I should say from the start, to curry even more favour, that we will support the SNP's amendment. We, too, regret that the Government is unable to take on board ideas. Several ideas are being floated about and some of the SNP's ideas are worthy and well intentioned.

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Nicol Stephen): Will Mr Monteith clarify whether the Conservative party supports all

the measures that are outlined in the SNP amendment? Will the Conservatives vote for that amendment?

Mr Monteith: If the deputy minister reads the SNP amendment, he will see that it says that it regrets the Executive's unwillingness to take on board ideas. We need take no view on how worthy the ideas are; we need merely agree that the Executive is unable to take on board new ideas.

Tommy Sheridan: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Given the outbreak of consensus, will you reflect on your selection of amendments for this debate, especially as you refused to accept a perfectly good amendment today?

The Presiding Officer: As you know, Mr Sheridan, I do not give my reasons for choosing amendments to motions, but I point out that the words of the amendment that you lodged are contained in one of the other amendments, which demonstrates that there has truly been a genuine outbreak of consensus.

Mr Monteith: As I am not known as a consensual politician, I assure members that I will disagree with some points later.

It is easy to support the motion and the SNP's amendment because they are, in essence, rhetoric. Similarly, the First Minister's speech yesterday was about motherhood and apple pie and was full of things that everyone could sign up to. However, in the Government, there is confusion about supporting the comprehensive system. In one breath, the First Minister says that he supports the comprehensive ethos, but, in the next breath, he undermines the comprehensive ethos. If the comprehensive ethos means anything, it means mixed-ability teaching. However, the First Minister yesterday and the Minister for Education and Young People today argued that we should have flexibility so that we can have setting in schools. If that is the case, it is quite wrong to say that the comprehensive system remains intact.

Maureen Macmillan: I do not think that Mr Monteith realises what a comprehensive school is. Does he accept that all ways of teaching children take place in a comprehensive school, including streaming in the senior years, setting in the middle years and mixed-ability education in various years, depending on the age of the child and the subject that is being taught? One size does not fit all.

Mr Monteith: As someone who attended a comprehensive school and who sends his children to one, I am well aware of what they are. I am seeking to tease out what the minister means by "comprehensive". When we listen to speeches and read articles, it is clear that the word means various things to various people. If it is not about

the type of teaching—if setting and streaming are allowed—we surely cannot have selection operating in relation to comprehensive schools. However, that is what we find in some of them: Plockton High School, which is a specialist music school, selects pupils based on musical ability for some places; Broughton High School uses an external panel to judge auditions for places; Douglas Academy, which is another specialist music school, has two auditions before a final selection is made; Knightswood Secondary School has auditions for places in its dance school; and Bellahouston Academy's school of sport has a rigorous selection process.

Our comprehensive system allows setting, streaming and selection. What sort of comprehensive system do we have in Scotland?

Michael Russell: A simple illustration might assist Mr Monteith in his confusion. It is highly unlikely that I would receive an offer to be educated at a sports academy, because my sporting prowess is probably not good enough. It is daft to suggest that schools that specialise in an area should not be allowed to select pupils who are specialists in that area. It is also daft to draw from the fact that they do so some sort of lesson for the rest of Scotland that is completely wrong.

Mr Monteith: I am indebted to Michael Russell for pointing out the fact that, if we are to have specialist schools, they will have to select pupils who can—

Maureen Macmillan: Will the member give way?

Mr Monteith: No, I must make progress. Everybody has had a chance to intervene.

If we are to have specialist schools, they must have a way of selecting the pupils who attend them. The Government's thinking is confused if it believes that it cannot have further specialist schools, such as those that are provided in England, because that would involve selection, which might somehow break the comprehensive model in Scotland. How is it possible for England to have maths colleges—schools that specialise in maths—art schools, language schools, business and enterprise schools and technology colleges, all of which specialise and, to an extent, select the pupils who are allowed to go to them, but it is somehow not possible to introduce such schools in Scotland?

My argument is clear. Although the First Minister and the Minister for Education and Young People talk about comprehensive schools, mixed-ability teaching is certainly not the comprehensive ethos any more. All that “comprehensive” can mean now, if it means anything at all, is simply a geographical lottery—a postcode lottery for which school one attends.

The First Minister says that we want excellence not in only some schools—that is, the specialist schools—but in all schools. The Conservatives sign up to that. Of course we would like excellence in all schools, but we know—

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green) rose—

Mr Monteith: I must go on. I have taken a lot of interventions.

We know that some schools perform particularly well by academic standards. We know that 45 per cent of the pupils in the top decile—the top-performing 10 per cent—of secondary schools in the state sector are able to achieve three highs or more. That is to be applauded. We must welcome that and we must continue to try to improve on it.

However, we must have great concern about the lowest decile of secondary schools, in which only 4.1 per cent of the pupils are able to achieve three highs or more. One might think that that is because of those schools' localities. However, if we look at the schools in that section, we find great variation in the free school meal entitlement, which is generally accepted in education circles as a way of showing the depth of poverty and disadvantage in a school's area. The figure varies from nearly 60 per cent of the pupils in a school being entitled to free school meals to less than 20 per cent.

The depth of deprivation in a school area, therefore, does not necessarily mean that the school will have difficulty in encouraging pupils to achieve three highs or more. When the Conservatives came to power, more than 20 per cent of the pupils in the comprehensive system that we applaud so much left school with no qualifications after 12 years of school. That figure fell to less than 6 per cent. That is an achievement with which, whatever one thinks of political parties, we must be pleased.

Jackie Baillie: Will Brian Monteith give way?

Mr Monteith: No, I will carry on with my point.

We find that, once Labour came to power, that achievement was turned round. Last year, there was an 8.5 per cent increase on the previous year in the number of pupils who left school with no qualifications. The Parliament cannot be proud of that and we must strive to change it. We need policies to address that situation.

The way to deal with the problem is to accept that we need specialist schools, by which I do not mean elitist schools: I mean schools that reflect the fact that we need more technical training in certain areas, more vocational skills and more communication skills so that children can engage in the education process. If they want an academic route, that is great. If they want to learn skills such

as joinery, carpentry, plumbing and bricklaying—I heard Maureen Macmillan say just the other day that, in Inverness, a bricklayer gets £1,000 a week—such courses must be given esteem. We must encourage pupils to take that sort of route.

The amendment that we lodged to add some meat to the rhetoric says that we need to encourage diversity, for example by bringing the further education sector—which is experienced in vocational skills—into schools. We need to use the FE sector either in a management sense or for delivering courses in those skills.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: No. The member is in his last minute.

Mr Monteith: The Minister for Education and Young People asked me what I meant by my proposals. I suggest that she ask her colleague, the Deputy Minister for Education and Young People, because the words for our amendment are lifted directly from a Liberal Democrat press release—and I am quite confident that the Liberal Democrats will want to support their own words.

On that note, I will move to a close. The Government is taking a completely populist approach. It seeks to say that all is well and that the comprehensive system is delivering. However, it is ignoring the fact that there are real problems and it is not doing anything in particular to address them. We will support the Government in its rhetoric and we will also support the Scottish National Party in believing that the Government does not listen. We believe that what is worthy of support—particularly from the Liberal Democrats—is the idea that we bring more vocational teaching into schools, and that we can use FE colleges to deliver that.

I move amendment S1M-3536.3, to insert at end:

“and believes that greater flexibility should include giving new opportunities for children to study a wider range of courses, including those at further education colleges, from the age of 14.”

The Presiding Officer: We have certainly heard consensus carried to extremes today. I call Donald Gorrie.

15:16

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I will try not to break that consensus, Presiding Officer.

We all know that the Conservative party has problems with selection—whether it is selection of its leader, of its parliamentary candidates or of anyone else. Despite that, I am happy to support the Executive's motion and Mr Monteith's

amendment. Indeed, I have abandoned my usual distant seat at the back of the chamber to come forward and emphasise that the Liberal Democrats collectively support the motion strongly.

The key aspect of education is expectations: the expectation that the young person himself or herself has, and the expectation that other people have of them. People fulfil expectations. If I am addressing a putt on the golf course and I think, “My God, I'm going to miss this putt”, I miss it. If a young person goes to a school where no one really gets on very much and nobody at school or at home cares very much about education, they will fail in their education. We have to raise expectations. Other members have said that, especially in some of the more deprived areas, some teachers accept lower standards than they need to. They face problems, but I think that they have to push children more vigorously. We have to help the less successful children by dedicating staff to help them, for example through learning support.

The minister's speech was excellent, in that it emphasised variety and experiment within a comprehensive system. The only way that we will find out whether ideas are good or bad is if we try them out. If we have a one-size-fits-all approach, we never find out whether we are doing things right. If different schools of different size in different areas go in for setting or streaming or other systems, we can see what works and what does not work and copy the successful aspects more vigorously.

We can develop specialist schools and schools with various strengths, but we have to develop a broader idea of education than is sometimes held. There is too much ticking of boxes and there are too many league tables for people passing exams. Those things are important, but it is more important that we develop good citizens and that schools have the right sort of atmosphere and ethos. People should feel comfortable there, they should get on well together, and they should make real progress. Their talents should be stretched, whether they are in sport, music or the creative arts. All that is important, in addition to getting people through exams.

We have to consider the transitional stages in particular. The Liberal Democrats have recently been pushing the idea that, instead of the traditional primary 1, we should have a transitional class between nursery and primary, as exists in Scandinavia. The pupils would be taught by primary teachers in primary schools, but the atmosphere and attitude in their classes would be a bit different from the traditional, strict, P1-to-P7 approach. We think that that experiment would be worth trying out.

Maureen Macmillan: I do not know when Mr Gorrie was last in a primary 1 class, but the atmosphere in such classes is not strict and formal. Might not starting school at six disadvantage some children? Do not we need flexibility when dealing with four, five and six-year-olds?

Donald Gorrie: We could try being flexible in our approach to children from across that age spread. I might not have explained the Liberal Democrats' idea very well. I do not believe that traditional primary 1 is the same as it was 30 years ago. However, the continental countries seem to have a successful system that involves children starting formal education a little later than children in Scotland do. The idea is worth exploring.

There are problems with the transition from P7 to S1. The minister has dealt with that issue. The first two years in secondary school involve a big change from the way in which things are done in primary school. We must address that issue better.

Brian Monteith's amendment raises the issue that I described in a manifesto 30 years ago as "leaving school gradually". Those who are not academically inclined could have the support of the school atmosphere and of teachers, while benefiting from the skills that are taught by further education colleges. We should explore that idea.

We can make better use than we have made hitherto of informal education. In his entry for "Who's Who", a distinguished English person—I think that it was Sir Osbert Sitwell—said that he received his education

"during the holidays from Eton."

Not everyone goes to Eton, but many people learn more about life and how to do things from playing in a local football team, being a scout, a guide or a member of a youth club, or attending the local community centre. Those activities are a very important part of education that must be integrated better with schools. Communities can help young people and young people can help communities. There is not nearly enough community use of school facilities. Not all schools have as much liaison with the community as they should have.

To help teachers and, in particular, to help pupils, we must reduce bureaucracy. I am sure that we all encounter the universal complaint that teachers are flooded with pieces of paper. In the past I have suggested having a bumf-busting committee. I have also volunteered to Jack McConnell to act as a bumf tsar. A mechanism for reducing the amount of unnecessary paperwork is needed. I urge the minister to consider that issue. I am still ready to volunteer my services.

We must give more support to teachers who face disruption in classes. We must address that problem by having better support in schools and, if necessary, support outwith schools for very difficult pupils. Much of the increase in staffing should be directed towards providing both learning support and support for children outside classes.

If we support teachers, improve the system in the way in which I have described and invest money intelligently in buildings and equipment, we can create a new generation of young Scots who will do better than we have done.

15:24

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): The Presiding Officer talked about consensus in this debate. There is consensus about some of the general principles and objectives that have been outlined. There is a need for education to be a clear priority for any Government in Scotland. We should invest in and develop education. We should engage in debate and discussion with those who are involved in the educational process, especially pupils, who in years gone by were often not listened to. The problem with the Executive motion is that it lacks vision and proposes no radical change in the way in which we approach education in Scotland.

The latest statistics show that, in both of the past two years, the number of pupils leaving school in Scotland with no educational achievements has increased. The increase was largest in Glasgow and Dundee, but throughout the country there are more Scottish pupils leaving school without any educational achievements than there were two years ago. That situation requires radical action and it requires us to have more urgency.

I asked the minister whether there had been any examination of the required investment levels to deliver a primary class size of a maximum of 20 throughout the sector. If we are going to engage in debate, let us have, first and foremost, an informed debate. It is clear that smaller class sizes improve educational attainment and I doubt whether anyone, including the Tories, would deny that. Everyone who is involved in the education profession agrees that smaller class sizes can help—and I do not wish to steal an SNP slogan—release the potential of children.

I do not know whether the Bishopbriggs High School students are still in the gallery. The train from Glasgow was late as usual, so I had the opportunity to speak to the students. I asked them what they thought was required in relation to improving education. I accept that that was not a scientific survey, but it was very interesting that just about all the students who were not too shy to reply said, "smaller class sizes". One of the pupils

said that although when he started his French higher a number of the students were worried and did not think that they would get through it, they had a class of only eight and every one of them achieved the qualification—he achieved an A pass. In other words, the idea that smaller class sizes can improve educational attainment has to be accepted throughout the education sector. If it is accepted, why are we not delivering it? Why are we not spending the money that is required to deliver it? That is what the Executive has to begin to examine. Let us see the figures.

Cathy Jamieson: Does the member accept that the involvement of a range of adults with particular expertise and specialisms is also important, so that young people have role models coming into schools from a variety of settings? Does he accept that it is also important that young people are in school buildings that are fit for purpose and which will deliver education in an environment that is fit for the 21st century, rather than the 19th century? Does he accept that new methods of learning and teaching are being developed that are not necessarily modelled on traditional methods whereby there is one teacher with 20, 30 or even more pupils sitting in front of them in the class?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh): That was a very long intervention. I shall allow you to go to five minutes to compensate, Mr Sheridan.

Tommy Sheridan: Thank you.

I agree with just about all the points that the minister made. However, I disagree with how the Executive finances the new buildings that she mentioned, because I believe that we should finance them properly, rather than by mortgaging our future. The point is, however, that all that is largely peripheral to a main drive or radical statement that would say quite clearly that Scottish education is going to go to the top of the table instead of sitting near the bottom as it is just now.

The amendment that was not accepted made a comparison with the small country of Cuba, which decided two years ago to invest in trying to deliver primary class sizes of a maximum of 12 throughout that poor blockaded country. I read the Economist Intelligence Unit's assessment of Cuba, which said that there had been remarkable improvements in the upgrading of education within Cuba. Cuba was able to announce in September that it had delivered primary class sizes of 20 throughout the sector. That is why it has higher educational achievement per pupil throughout the country and is sitting at the top of the table as far as educational achievement is concerned.

The minister needs to be more visionary and more radical and she needs to provide the resources that will put Scotland at the top of the league.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is time to close.

Tommy Sheridan: We will not get there until we have lower class sizes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There should be time for everyone to be called, but I cannot give everyone six minutes.

15:30

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The debate is timely, because, over the past few months, there has been a frenzy of activity, discussion and even enthusiasm in communities across Scotland, which have all been deliberating on the future of education. The contribution from young and old, from teachers, from parents and from employers has helped to shape the thinking that is emerging from the Executive's national debate on education and the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's parallel inquiry on the purposes of education.

It is unusual that I find myself agreeing with Tommy Sheridan's assertion that the time for debating is over. We must roll up our sleeves and get on with the task of delivering a world-class education for children now and in the future. I diverge from Tommy Sheridan in the detail of how we should do that.

There is much to build on. The McCrone agreement provides a stable framework that recognises teachers for the professionals that they are. The minister has given a commitment to provide 3,000 more teachers and 3,500 more support staff. There are already classroom assistants in every school and a commitment to deliver more has been made. There are record levels of investment in the school estate to ensure that our young people have the best possible environment for learning. Measures to tackle social exclusion have been taken, which will ensure that no child is left behind.

I will dwell on the social exclusion issue, because education has a key role to play in closing the opportunity gap. It is depressing that it is generally true that children from less affluent backgrounds do less well at school. Whatever the reason—whether it is lack of motivation, low aspirations or systemic social injustice—the impact is often for life. It affects not just people's individual earnings potential, but their contribution to the economy and to society as a whole. It is incumbent on us to ensure that the opportunity gap is closed and that we help every child to achieve their potential.

Let us get away from using academic attainment alone to measure potential. We must acknowledge that although academic attainment is important, education is about much more. What about life

skills, attitude, an understanding of society and those so-called soft skills that employers continually tell us are critical—motivation, confidence and self-esteem?

If children are motivated, they learn better. If they are confident, they learn better. If they have self-esteem, they learn better. If they are inspired, they learn better. In all cases, they achieve much more. I recognise that that is not a job for teachers alone. We need to inspire and motivate parents, because involving them in their child's education will reap positive benefits.

The twin aims of promoting social inclusion and raising standards are at the heart of the new community schools, which are already starting to close the opportunity gap, although there is a long way to go. The schools in my local area of West Dunbartonshire, which are all new community schools, show the potential that is created when that approach is combined with innovative devolved school management.

On devolved school management in general, I give a strong welcome to the themes that are associated with flexibility in the curriculum, which the First Minister and the Minister for Education and Young People have emphasised recently. I know that the teachers at John Logie Baird Primary School in Helensburgh, whom I met recently, support those themes.

Although it is the case that comprehensive education in Scotland is much valued, we need to do more to nurture the talents of each child; in other words, we need to provide individual learning for each child. Increased flexibility in the curriculum is necessary to enable teachers and head teachers to make decisions for their schools and their pupils. That will open up new opportunities. Flexibility in the curriculum needs to be matched by flexibility in how we measure standards and how we devolve the management of resources. If we intend to empower schools and pupils, that is the way forward.

15:35

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP):

Given that we are debating flexibility in schools, I will begin by talking about using flexibly the bricks and mortar of the buildings that we call schools. In 1999, before the Scottish Parliament election, the SNP proposed using our schools as children's centres and opening them for more than eight hours a day to provide facilities for young people. It is increasingly clear that that is an idea whose time has come. Recent research by MORI and the British Market Research Bureau on behalf of the Kids Clubs Network found that one in three 11 to 18-year-olds goes home from school to an empty house and one in four young people admits to hanging around after school with nothing to do.

How can we turn our schools into centres where young people want to be not only for their formal education, but for much more of their social education, outside the hours of 9 to 4? I would like the Executive to give such flexibility much more attention.

That issue came through strongly in Children in Scotland's work with young people for the national debate on education. Young people said that they wanted their schools to be more than educational settings. Until we have a national network of youth clubs, which the minister knows I am always going on about, schools will be the places in which we can offer such provision.

The minister must think about not only how we use such buildings, but how we fund them. As members know, the public-private partnership method to fund the schools that the Executive proposes to build will cost us an extra £400 million, according to Audit Scotland. That £400 million could have built us another 90-odd schools, which we could have used as children's centres. When we go down the PPP route, as in Glasgow, we end up with restricted access to the buildings, via charges or the contract, which can limit greater use.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Glasgow's problem was an increase in demand.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Fiona McLeod: Brian Fitzpatrick mentioned the new sports hall that will open at Bishopbriggs High School tonight and which we are delighted to see. The community will be able to access the hall, because it was not built under a PPP.

Maureen Macmillan: Fiona McLeod talks about the costs of PPP. I do not think that her calculations take into account the cost of school maintenance. I taught in a school where I was in a demountable hut that should have been buried 20 years before. No maintenance took place. That is why I support PPPs for schools, because schools will be kept in good condition year on year and will not leak.

Fiona McLeod: We also know that an additional cost of PPPs is the way in which maintenance contracts are presented to local authorities. The situation is not as simple as Maureen Macmillan makes out.

I will move on to the flexible use of staff. Members will not be surprised that I mention my registered interest as a member of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals. We are talking about flexibility. The national literacy strategy says that research on progress showed widespread concern from staff that there was

"too little ... opportunity for self-directed learning in the early stages of primary school"

and for fun in reading in the early stages of primary school. The development officer's remit under the national literacy strategy is classroom and teacher focused.

Cathy Jamieson *rose*—

Fiona McLeod: I am terribly sorry, but I am short of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Fiona McLeod is right on four minutes.

Fiona McLeod: The minister and I attended the W H Smith reception today. I ask her to consider the 31 extra school librarians that we need in secondary schools and the school librarians that we need in primary schools, because they will move us away from the nuts and bolts—the mechanics—of reading to the exciting world of literature, as we learned at the W H Smith event.

The national literacy strategy asks people to send in their ideas. Will the minister take it that my speech is my contribution, so that I do not have to write in? The issues that I have mentioned, especially flexibility, are important.

I will finish by talking about the information that we discovered from children in Scotland. When we asked our young people what education is for, they said that it is not just about getting a job, but about education for life. Will the minister consider the 11 key points that the young people mentioned in their evidence? I have tried to cover five of them in my speech. We are talking about flexibility, funding, staffing and listening to our young people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not have five minutes for everyone to speak, so I would appreciate it if the remaining contributions were a bit tighter.

15:40

Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con): Sometimes I worry about the level of consensus that emerges in the chamber during debates such as today's. However, I am glad that SNP members are still wearing their ideological blinkers in certain respects.

Scottish Conservatives have long argued that there is no one perfect way in which to deliver education, because every child is a unique individual. One of the main criticisms that has been levelled at the comprehensive system is that it has failed to acknowledge that truth. The sad reality is that a dogmatic adherence to uniformity and standardisation has damaged and continues to damage the education of too many Scottish children.

A look at the Scottish Executive's attendance and absence figures shows that, on any given school day during 2000-01, well over 10 per cent of secondary school pupils were likely to be absent. Inevitably, the problem is far more acute in some areas than it is in others. Of course, there are many reasons behind such an appalling statistic. However, one factor is that many of our children do not engage with the predominantly academic focus of our geographically based comprehensive system.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that we should increase flexibility in the system to the extent that pupils in their third and fourth years have the option to study vocational courses at further education colleges. That would not mean that children would leave education at the age of 14. The law requires children to be in full-time education until the age of 16 and we have no intention of changing that. Colleges would simply take over from schools in providing education for that group.

Maureen Macmillan: Has the member asked colleges whether they would be willing to do that, given that what is important is not just the subject that is taught, but all the pastoral care that goes with the school?

Alex Johnstone: We have made our proposals and we understand that some Labour councils are already progressing the idea. There are some obvious advantages to such an approach. We would stop many young people being switched off by the education process. Those young people would be given the opportunity to do something that was of more value to them and to learn skills that they would find useful in later life.

Dr Jackson: Will the member indicate how broad the curriculum might be for children who left school at 14 to go to further education colleges? Will there be subjects additional to the technical subjects?

Alex Johnstone: The colleges would have to continue to offer the required subjects. We are not suggesting that the education requirements for 14 to 16-year-olds should be changed. We are suggesting that young people should be given the opportunity of a more technically based education that will allow them to acquire skills that will be of value to them in later life.

The opportunity to study in a college environment would give young people more responsibility and a chance to mature. It is amazing how some young people who struggle with the more restrictive nature of school thrive when they are given more responsibility for their learning.

The benefits of such an approach would not be exclusive to those who took up the opportunity to

study in our colleges. It is unfortunate that, in many of our schools, the education of many is disrupted by the behaviour of the few. By offering constructive alternatives to unruly children, we would be helping those children who wish to learn in the classroom.

Cathy Jamieson: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: I am very nearly finished.

Where is the harm in giving more choice to young people? What is wrong with giving young people a greater say in their education? It is time that the Executive stopped patronising young people and empowered them to make choices about their future for their benefit and for the benefit of all Scotland's education.

15:44

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I will deal first with the SNP amendment, which

"regrets that the Executive seems unable to take on board ideas which will make a real difference."

I wonder where Mike Russell and the SNP have been for the past two or three years. The First Minister has mentioned the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000. We also have the McCrone settlement, which represents a huge investment in terms of a pay award and the continuous professional development package.

Continuous professional development is at the heart of improving teaching and learning in the classroom and it is at the heart of the McCrone settlement, which provides an opportunity that has not been seen before to bring together research and teachers' work in the classroom. During continuous professional development, teachers examine their practices, which they can develop with support. That will improve teaching and learning in the classroom, but it will take time—it will not happen tomorrow. Unfortunately, the SNP tends to think that some of the changes could happen tomorrow, without the necessary negotiations and consultations.

I should also mention the teacher induction scheme, which affords the exciting possibility of a mentoring programme for probationers to help to improve teaching in the classroom.

What about the huge investment in school buildings to provide modern facilities and equipment? I have only to look at Balforn High School in my constituency to know how successful that programme is.

Brian Fitzpatrick: Is the member aware of the many parents in my constituency in East Dunbartonshire who have visited Balforn High School and endorsed the facilities that have been

made available there for children? Does she share my surprise at Fiona McLeod's dramatic objection to the outline business case that is being made to the Scottish ministers? It seems that the SNP wills the ends but will not allow the funding for improvements to the school estate.

Dr Jackson: I take on board exactly what Brian Fitzpatrick says.

What about the community school programme? In one of the most deprived and disadvantaged parts of Stirling—Raploch—that will provide new opportunities that have not been seen before in the area. Not only the pupils, but the community, will benefit.

What about the national debate on education? People in the teaching profession are being asked about the priorities. The Minister for Education and Young People has given a commitment that she will listen and act.

A lot has been said about the key issue of class sizes—in particular by Tommy Sheridan—and about how the evidence suggests that we should move to reduce class sizes. Clearly, Professor Lindsay Paterson does not agree totally with Tommy Sheridan. He does accept points about the early stages of primary school—

Tommy Sheridan: Will the member give way?

Dr Jackson: Just let me finish. Professor Paterson states:

"we do need more research on the most effective teaching styles for small classes, and on whether some kinds of reduction in class size at later stages might also be worthwhile."

He is saying that we do not want to rush into the matter and that we have to examine teaching styles generally.

Tommy Sheridan: Does Sylvia Jackson accept the evidence of the Scottish Council for Research in Education, which gives the contrary view, and the evidence from America that shows that smaller class sizes are more effective for deprived and minority groups?

Dr Jackson: Professor Paterson accepts some of the research, in particular the research from Tennessee on socially disadvantaged children. However, even though he has looked across the board, he says that, over the piece, we need to do more research if the evidence it is to be conclusive. He is the expert whom most people are quoting on class sizes.

In visiting various schools in my constituency, I see a lot of good work. The Minister for Education and Young People visited Ballikinrain School the other day, where an enormous amount of work is being done to help children who have opted out of learning to get back into learning, so that they can

leave that residential school and move back into mainstream education. Innovative ideas, such as personal learning plans at primary and secondary schools, have been implemented. Stirling Council has undertaken quality audits, which are being fed directly into professional development to improve teaching and learning.

Finally, I turn to what Brian Monteith and his Conservative colleagues have said. I hope that he means that, if children are to move to further education at the age of 14, they will not be leaving a broad-based curriculum. I have concerns about children moving into a further education environment and not having links with secondary schools. I would like to find out more about those Conservative proposals. The higher still programme was introduced to develop the links about which Brian Monteith spoke. The Government is developing those links, so to some extent the Conservatives are building on what we are already doing.

15:50

Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP): When I first heard the minister talking about partial submersion, I recalled the flat roofs of schools in the 1960s, which gave rise to a good deal of submersion in classrooms.

In Glasgow in the 1980s, schools were grouped in clusters and some of the senior pupils in the fourth and fifth years went out to further education for part of the time. There are precedents for such a scheme, although some of the Conservative undercurrents can be a bit alarming to those of us who are not as trusting as members of that party would like us to be.

I telephoned three teachers last night and ran past them the contents of the motion. These were their reactions. The first said, with reflective pauses: "Doesn't matter if there's no money. Teachers will make the difference. Smaller class sizes—that's where private schools put their money." I asked, "What about five to 14?" The response was: "What do you mean?" I asked, "Does it restrain you?" I was told: "We just ignore it. There's a lot of conservatism in the curriculum. We are not educating people, we are fulfilling the curriculum." I find that disappointing.

Next, the teacher of a practical subject said: "There's too much devolution in my subject. People are reinventing the wheel all over the place and a lot of time is being wasted ... five to 14 is a waste of time and there is no time to create primary-secondary liaison." We were trying to prepare for that liaison in 1989 when I left education and it is tragic that that discontinuity still exists. That second teacher also said: "We pay lip service to five to 14, but we had to give the time to develop higher still." In other words, teachers feel that too much time was given.

A primary teacher said: "The curriculum is overloaded—we can't get through the basics so we have to rush them. Five to 14 is a farce—teachers teach to the authorities' guidelines. These are rigid in maths, geography, history and art and a little more flexible in English. We have got to move on, even if the kids are enjoying what they are doing. If you overdevelop a theme, you may tread on someone else's toes later in five to 14." Incidentally, that teacher has two computers in her classroom.

In raising national standards, a subtle balance needs to be struck between staff willingness and capabilities, resources and the lack of them, and scope for imagination and a rigid curriculum. Everyone is in the eye of that storm. The Executive must be willing to recognise that making every school a centre of excellence might mean that, in doing its utmost for pupils academically and socially, a school will become a paragon of excellence in the field of guidance, in police, reporter and social work liaison and in creating a secure and supportive environment for its pupils. That will not make parents send their children to it, but nonetheless that school might be excellent in such a context.

Some time in the mid-1980s, an education officer came to my school and said, "There is a meeting on Monday about TVEI"—the technical and vocational education initiative, which was designed to enthuse S3 and S4 pupils by moving education into vocational fields. Westwood, St Leonard's and Lochend in Easterhouse were submitted as Glasgow's pilot schools.

I recall making a Tannoy announcement to my waiting, sceptical staff to say that the golden eagle had landed and our submission had been successful. Much credit was due to the staff, who were in the midst of an epic salaries dispute with Mrs Thatcher as well as a developmental boycott. They embraced TVEI for the benefits that would accrue to the children. They insisted on establishing the courses without experts being foisted on them. We turned down the idea of a fast-food outlet on the M8 as not being suitable.

People seized the opportunity, ideas flourished, there was curricular innovation, pupils initiated projects and the consortium of three schools pioneered a Scottish Vocational Education Council module that was nationally validated. The courses were flexible and innovative and they developed the pupils' imagination and entrepreneurial skills. TVEI gave the three schools an additional £500,000 a year to achieve that during the period of the pilot. That enabled us to have sufficient, appropriate equipment, additional staff and smaller classes, which takes me back to the remarks made by the teacher whom I quoted at the beginning of my speech.

15:55

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): One of the most positive aspects of Jack McConnell's speech yesterday was that he showed that he is sometimes capable of being his own man and of thinking for himself instead of simply copying the Blairite agenda. Tony Blair told last month's Labour party conference that we need to move to the post-comprehensive era. That is rich coming from someone who never entered the comprehensive era in the first place. Tony Blair's old school, Fettes College, charges fees of more than £18,000 a year, which is about one and a half times the annual income of the average person in this country. Tony Blair does not support comprehensive education. He rejected it for his own children and his new Labour lackeys sneer at what they call bog-standard comprehensives.

When Tony Blair talks about the post-comprehensive era, he ought to be reminded of what the pre-comprehensive era was like, when the majority of the nation's children were branded as failures at the age of 11 or 12. When I went to university in the early 1960s, less than 5 per cent of young people in Scotland went on to post-school education. Now the figure is about 50 per cent, which is largely due to the introduction of comprehensive education based on the principle of equality of educational opportunity for all children, irrespective of their ability and irrespective of their parents' ability to pay.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): What are Dennis Canavan's views on encouraging the diversity of our education system?

Dennis Canavan: I will come on to that. There is no room for complacency about the state of comprehensive education. More effort must be made to improve standards in our schools and there should be more diversity and flexibility.

I was interested in Jack McConnell's suggestion that, in order to ease pupils' transition from primary to secondary education, teachers should be able to do a course of teacher training to qualify them to teach in both primary and secondary schools. There is nothing new about that. Many teachers of a previous generation were qualified to teach in both primary and secondary schools. I spent most of my teaching career in secondary education, but I recall my first teaching experience—indeed, I shall never forget it—in a primary school in a deprived mining community in Fife. I was 19 and still a student, but there was such a desperate shortage of teachers at the time that students could get a job teaching during their university holidays. I was thrown in at the deep end with a class of about 30 children who ranged in age from about eight to 11 and all of whom had learning difficulties. To begin with, they must have

taught me more than I taught them, but the experience probably helped me in the long run to become a better teacher.

That experience also made me realise how difficult it is to teach such children in classes that are far too large. Worse was to come. At one stage, I taught high school maths to classes of 40 or even 50. That would never be allowed in this day and age, and rightly so. There are now maximum class sizes, but they are not the optimum. Jack McConnell referred to the need for proper research. We do not need more research to tell us the obvious. Any experienced teacher can explain the advantages of reducing class sizes. I hope that the Scottish Executive will give much higher priority to employing more teachers in order to reduce the size of classes. That would be the best way in which to improve educational opportunities for our children and young people so that all of them are given the chance to reach their full potential and every school in Scotland has the chance to become a centre of excellence.

15:59

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Before addressing the motion, I would like to say a few words about the Tory amendment. The Tories propose to give children the right to leave school at 14 and study a wider range of subjects, such as chimney sweeping. The suggestion is certainly not new, but it is far more flexible than that party's previous policy of giving children the right to leave school at 16 and be forced into a youth training scheme.

Murdo Fraser: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr McNeil: I will take the member's intervention later, if he likes.

During my time at school, leaving school at 14 and 15 was the norm for too many. We left, undertook apprenticeships and thought that we had settled in a job for life. However, a problem arose when the supposedly secure jobs ceased to exist. Too many of us had a narrow set of skills that were of no use in the labour market. The absence of a broader and more formal education meant that it took far longer for many people to find work elsewhere or to retrain. That led to the loss of confidence, a fear of change in the work place and a resistance to returning to education and training.

Murdo Fraser: My question is simple. If the member has reservations about our proposals, will he support our amendment?

Mr McNeil: I might support the amendment, but I would need an assurance that we will not see kids turned out on the streets and assurances

from Brian Monteith that he has put his son's name down for a £1,000-a-week brickie's job. Perhaps then I would be more convinced that it was a good idea to leave school at 14.

We see the legacy of what I have described in low productivity, low pay, low skills and dead-end, short-term contracts. That is the reality for people who leave school with no qualifications or at 14, 15 or whatever.

I am uneasy that any attempt to turn the clock back 35 years could lead us to repeating such mistakes. I wonder whether any member would honestly be happy for his or her child to leave school at 14. The Tories are talking about other people's children. Would they resist their children leaving school at 14 or encourage them? I do not think that they would encourage them to do so. I would therefore welcome reassurances on the subject before I vote for the Tory amendment.

I welcome the reference in the substantive motion to

"new approaches ... to modern languages".

That reminds me of a story that I once read about a Scottish director of a company who was doing business in Italy. He lifted the telephone in a crisis and had to speak to someone in Italy. Of course, he could not speak Italian. A woman answered the phone and told him that it was a public holiday in Italy and no one could help him. "Why can't you help me?" he said. She replied, "I am the cleaner." That would not happen in Scotland.

For too many, languages are a speciality in Scotland. However, languages are rapidly becoming the soft skills that we need for the future. Our lack of language skills have long been a national embarrassment but, thankfully, action is being taken to sort out the problem, not least by IBM, which employs people in my constituency. About five years ago, IBM established a partnership with Inverclyde's schools. The aim was to address the national skills shortage in languages and equip school leavers with the business skills that they need to operate in an increasingly European environment. Students are mentored through their Scottish Qualifications Authority-recognised higher qualification in language for business by native speakers at IBM. The scheme is also run remotely through online distance learning.

Tommy Sheridan: I hope that the member agrees that IBM's healthy attitude towards education should become a healthy attitude towards trade union membership, too.

Mr McNeil: I campaigned for trade union membership at IBM and am pleased to say that there are trade union members at IBM. Some are my colleagues in the Labour party.

At the end of the course, the students get the chance to spend a week at an IBM subsidiary in either France or Spain. More important, if they pass the course, they are guaranteed a full-time position at IBM. To date, 45 pupils have gone through the programme.

I hope that the minister recognises such examples of local good practice. I ask her to consider how we can build on such examples so that all Scotland's pupils have opportunities that are at present available only to those who are lucky enough to live in Greenock and Inverclyde.

16:05

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I draw attention to my entry in the register of interests, which shows that I went to school. I am not alone. We all have an interest in the subject. My school motto was "ad vitam paror". If Iain Smith were here he would recognise that as the motto of Bell Baxter High School in Cupar—preparation for life. That encapsulates what school must be about.

Cathy Peattie, astonishingly, questioned why we were having a debate on education when, apparently, all the decisions have been made. The SNP does not think that that is the case.

Sylvia Jackson rather unfortunately chose to be selective in her quotations from Professor Lindsay Paterson. In the *Scottish Educational Journal* in October 2002, only a few weeks ago, he wrote:

"It is often claimed that research results on class sizes are ambiguous. This is not true: small reductions have no measurable effects, but large reductions do."

That is why the SNP will continue to pursue with vigour the aim of reducing class sizes. Some of the headlines of the First Minister's presentations yesterday used the word vision. That is an entirely inappropriate word in the circumstances. What is a vision? A vision is not about what we are doing today, which is essentially fiddling at the margins. A vision is about where we want to be in the long-term future. It is about what we want our educational sector to contribute to society in 15, 20 or 25 years' time. To understand the vision we must support it with aims—mid-term targets—which must include smaller class sizes. The opportunity is in the Registrar General for Scotland's report, which shows the reduction in the number of people available to go to school.

We have to set as an aim the development of a wider range of skills in the graduates of our education system. Above all, we have to deliver people to society who have the ability to adapt and learn for themselves in a changing world. No one in the chamber knows with any degree of certainty what the world will be like in 25 years' time. The only thing that we know is that we do not know.

What are our immediate tasks? We must do everything in our power to free teachers from the dead hand of bureaucracy. We must free the economic resources that will reward teachers and draw more people into the profession from a wider social, professional and general background. We must open the doors of our schools. I say to Duncan McNeil that, in my constituency, a new private finance initiative school is restricting access to community groups in a way that the previous unsatisfactory building did not.

We must consider the difference between education and training. I have concerns about some of the comments that I hear about diverting people from education to training.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Will Stewart Stevenson give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I do not have time. I am in my last minute.

If members wonder what the difference is between education and training, they should consider what their different responses would be were their daughter to say that she had sex education and were she to say that she had sex training. The answer is obvious.

In PFI projects we pay huge sums of interest to the banks for new buildings—we could release that money. The best schools are very good. We must bring all schools up to that standard. We need teachers with charisma, like my mathematics teacher, Doc Inglis, who used to take us through his tax return every year to illustrate the purpose of mathematics and how little he got paid. The minister has a long way to go to deliver on the charisma of Doc Inglis.

16:09

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I missed the middle 20 minutes of the debate because we have with us pupils from Aboyne Academy in my constituency of West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine. That is a practical example of the Parliament allowing flexibility and innovation in schools. The pupils are a physical manifestation of what we are discussing.

I trained as a middle school teacher. Stewart Stevenson said that we all have experience of schools; I am surprised by how many members have experience of teaching. I have experience of teaching at Aberdeen College—where I taught adults—and as a supply teacher at Portlethen Academy and Banchory Academy in my constituency. I am particularly pleased to take part in the debate.

The Executive is committed to raising standards, closing the opportunity gap and encouraging greater flexibility for schools in delivering a first-

class education system. We must do all three of those and not simply concentrate on one of them. We need a wide-ranging attack on all of them. I am pleased that Cathy Jamieson and Nicol Stephen are committed to examining innovative projects and to addressing issues such as the transition from primary school to S1 and S2, which is a major issue.

Brian Monteith's amendment focuses on giving youngsters flexibility and new opportunities to study a wider range of courses, including those at further education colleges such as Aberdeen College, from the age of 14. That is commendable. I listened with great care to Duncan McNeil when he asked for clarification on the Conservative amendment. I think that there was a slight misunderstanding—the Conservative amendment is taken from the Liberal Democrat pre-manifesto.

Mr McNeil: I am sure that Mr Rumbles would agree that not all words of wisdom come from Liberal Democrat manifestos. If Mr Rumbles's son or daughter told him that they wanted to leave formal education at 14, would he be aghast or would he celebrate?

Mr Rumbles: That hits the nail on the head—

Mr McNeil: Answer the question.

Mr Rumbles: I will, if Mr McNeil will listen. He seems to misunderstand the Liberal Democrat pre-manifesto—although I am glad that he has read it—and Brian Monteith's amendment. The idea is to give 14-year-olds the opportunity to continue their education. I have spoken to people who did not fit into the formal education arrangements of school at the age of 15. We can still have formal education arrangements that are tied to school, but which allow people to take courses at further education colleges.

Karen Gillon rose—

Mr Rumbles: I want to move on.

There is a lot of dancing on pinheads. Certain members seem to think that the Liberal Democrat pre-manifesto means something that it does not mean.

I am glad that Mike Russell has returned to the chamber. On 30 August, he unveiled a radical new SNP policy that is aimed at giving schoolchildren as young as 14 access to college courses. However, Alex Neil said last week in the *Daily Record* that those ideas were childish and ill thought-out. I hope that they have had a conversation about that.

Michael Russell: I am happy to confirm for Mr Rumbles that there is absolute unity and therefore not death in the SNP. I am sure that my friend and colleague Alex Neil will confirm his strong support for our policy.

Mr Rumbles: I imagine that there is as much unity in the SNP as there was with "Unite or die", but that is another story.

The most radical proposal in the Liberal Democrat pre-manifesto document is to consider the restructuring of the relationship between pre-school and formal primary education. That is innovative and is welcomed throughout the chamber, not only by the Liberal Democrats. We must open ourselves to new thinking and radical ideas for change. Dennis Canavan, SNP members and others talked about reducing class sizes. I agree that that is important from teachers' and students' perspectives, but it is only one of a range of issues that must be addressed.

Tommy Sheridan: It is the most important one.

Mr Rumbles: It is very important, but I would argue that it is not the most important.

I detect a lot of confusion and misunderstanding about the Tory amendment. If I thought that it was any different from the proposal in our document, I would not support it. I urge members to support Brian Monteith's amendment.

16:15

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Schools in the Highlands and Islands are not being treated fairly. The McCrone settlement proposals cannot be implemented because the money to fund them is distributed by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to the councils in the wrong way. The money would have been adequate if another formula had been used; however, it is another case of the Scottish Executive's one-size-fits-all policies not working. The Executive is letting down pupils, parents and teachers in the Highlands and Islands.

Brian Fitzpatrick: Will the member give way?

Mr McGrigor: No.

The one-size-fits-all Scottish Executive formula gives grant aid on the basis of population rather than teacher numbers. That penalises rural areas with low populations, thereby penalising the children in those areas. Let me give some examples. Under the formula, Highland Council will lose £6.6 million over three years and Argyll and Bute Council will lose £3.3 million. Only the increase in teachers' wages can be covered; none of the extra promises in the McCrone agreement can be afforded by those councils.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr McGrigor: No.

For example, there are meant to be new conditions for teachers concerning administration,

to allow them to escape from bureaucracy and paperwork and actually do some teaching. However, while West Lothian Council has been able to afford business managers, Highland Council has not. There was also meant to have been a wind-down scheme for older teachers, but that cannot be implemented because of a lack of funding. Highland Council would have been able to employ 30 new probationary teachers and 104 extra support staff under the McCrone settlement, but none of that can now be afforded.

Karen Gillon: Will the member give way?

Mr McGrigor: No.

Why was that not thought of by the Scottish Executive before it allowed the implementation to be carried out in this way? It is woefully unfair. The minister mentioned Ardnamurchan. That is one of the many areas where teachers cannot even find affordable housing in which to live.

I remind the minister that schools in remote areas incur more than double the expenses of urban schools. For example, the cost per pupil at the secondary school on Tiree is £10,000.

Michael Russell: Will the member take a helpful intervention?

Mr McGrigor: All right. A very short one.

Michael Russell: Although I agree entirely with the member that the difficulties are created by the inadequate funding of the McCrone agreement, one of the consequences that he has not mentioned—but which is very real in the two areas that he has mentioned—is the knock-on effect of the possible closure of small primary schools, which would be a disaster for Scotland.

Mr McGrigor: I am just coming to that.

The cost of the school on Tiree is paid by Argyll and Bute Council. The same council finds that the cost is only £2,500 per pupil at the Hermitage Academy in Helensburgh.

We have some small but important primary schools. For example, the school on Lismore has 15 pupils and the school on Gigha has only seven pupils. Those schools are vital to the communities, but the cost per pupil is £4,500 to £5,000—a huge extra cost. If the minister needs further proof of the inequity and unfairness of the funding system, she will get it from the councils that I have mentioned and from the Western Isles Council in Stornoway.

Western Isles Council has 4,200 pupils spread over 12 islands. In an urban context, 4,200 pupils would probably require five primary schools and four secondary schools—nine schools in all. However, Western Isles Council has 40 schools. That means that the council must pay 40 head teachers rather than nine. The McCrone settlement also says that each school should have

someone to look after reception duties. Forty people would be required in the Western Isles: who will pay for them? In rural areas, the funding should be based on teacher numbers, not on the population.

I ask the minister to listen to Brian Monteith's sensible proposals to encourage diversity in schools. He is not saying that everybody should leave school at 14. In the Highlands and Islands, it would be excellent if pupils older than 14 could spend some of their learning time at further education colleges, learning trades and gaining qualifications and practical experience that would help them in their later lives. Perhaps they might follow careers in agriculture, fish farming, forestry or tourism—industries that are on their doorstep. Those subjects can be taught by the university of the Highlands and Islands, which has 13 colleges that are underutilised at the moment. That would help the pupils and it would help the UHI.

Finally, Donald Gorrie referred to a man who was educated during his holidays from Eton. I believe that he was Osbert Sitwell, who was in any event a very brainy fellow.

16:20

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate and I will start by adding my contribution to the discussion on comprehensive education. I appreciate that it is sometimes difficult to measure the success or otherwise of comprehensive schools and that comparisons are often iniquitous. However, in East Renfrewshire the evidence is clear.

When Labour came to power in 1997 around 10 per cent of pupils in my constituency went to private schools. Today it is estimated that fewer than 3 per cent do so. Without wishing to sound like a character from "The League of Gentlemen", we have local schools for local people and their success is recognised by the whole community.

There is not one easy answer as to why that should be so. However, I believe that the answer lies in the policies implemented by the Scottish Administration and by our Labour colleagues at Westminster. The answer also lies in good school buildings, such as in the new Mearns Primary School in Eastwood, which was opened by the First Minister. That school is typical of the investment that has been made and that continues to be made in the education infrastructure throughout Scotland—public-private partnership or otherwise.

The answer also lies in smaller class sizes in conjunction with the success of the classroom assistant programme, which has reduced the adult-child ratio, freed up teacher time and

improved discipline. The answer also lies in the huge expansion of nursery and after-school care, which gives young people the best start in life. The answer also lies, of course, in the McCrone agreement, which recognises the professional commitment of our teachers and has ended the damaging and pointless institutional hostility between teachers and Government, which was inherited from the Tory years.

There has also been a great deal of local innovation, particularly the community school programme. Local primary and secondary schools, health services, social work and—most important—the local community have been able to come together in the comprehensive spirit to achieve the best outcome for local people.

I highlight the success of community schools but I draw the minister's attention to a particular area that could do with that attention, which is the work of speech and language therapists. I know that the minister is aware of the problems that exist in that area, but some of those could be resolved by more flexible local working. Speech and language therapists are currently accountable to the local health boards, but pupils would greatly benefit if head teachers had more control over the deployment of therapists. The minister might wish to pursue that issue with her colleagues in the health department.

There are many examples of local flexibility, but greater flexibility would be appreciated, particularly in my area, in the tricky subject of placing requests. The current system puts an enormous burden on local authorities, puts families through the mill and distresses large numbers of pupils out of all proportion to the number who actually go to a different school from the one to which they would otherwise go. The solution lies not with nationally framed legislation but with giving local authorities the powers to frame guidelines to suit local circumstances and needs.

I will conclude on the over-emphasis on assessment in an already crowded curriculum, which is a concern that emerged from the national debate on education and which is certainly a worry to parents, teachers and pupils in my area. The presumption that studying for eight standard grades is the most appropriate and best way for our young people to progress is clearly not true.

A point made by others and which is alluded to by the Tory amendment is that we need to find ways to allow pupils to take more vocational courses, but only when that is in their best interests. For example, the difficulty that some young people might have with a foreign language should not prevent them achieving their potential across a range of other subjects at the age of 16.

Where secondary schools have been practising inclusion for some time now, learning support teachers are having to develop materials for pupils entering S3 and S4, but they still run into the obstacle of how to give those pupils credit without their having to negotiate the formal assessment process.

Those are some of the areas in which we need to continue to innovate. However, I commend the minister for the direction in which we are heading and for her undoubted commitment to improving opportunities for all our young people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): This is a rare occasion for Robin Harper because he has up to seven minutes, if he wishes.

16:24

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The great debate on education this year has so far not lived up to its promise. A reading of the *Official Report* of today's debate will show that it was relatively limited, unsubstantial and full of worthy saws and wise sayings. There was hardly a statement with which I could disagree, but the debate has not begun to tackle two big questions. The first concerns the purpose of education. Having established that, we must then decide whether we have an education system that is fit for purpose.

There have been gleams of light. Donald Gorrie challenged us to think of other ways of educating younger children, such as by keeping them at home or in other modes of education such as the Satya Sai school in St Andrews, which is a worthy example of a different approach to the education of very young children.

In a welcome flash of light, Colin Campbell challenged whether our timetabling system and our curriculum are fully fit for purpose and whether we should consider truly innovating by abandoning the system that we have.

Everybody in the chamber should consider the possibility of abandoning the examination system altogether. I do not advocate that but I have talked about it before. Members should ask themselves what education would look like and feel like then. What would the quality of education be? What concerns would we have to address? How would we construct our educational system without an examination system? If we did that, we might start to think along the right lines. However, we would still have to have examinations because, as has been repeated time and again, for many people, the purpose of education is to fit people to society. I challenge that.

When Jackie Baillie talked about confidence,

motivation, initiative, self-expression and self-esteem, I thought "Yes! The penny has dropped. She is going to launch into something really important," but that did not appear.

Jackie Baillie: I did not have time.

Robin Harper: In Scotland, we have 50 per cent fewer business start-ups than the south of England has and we have a considerably greater failure rate among those start-ups. Businesses tell us that what they want from school leavers are the qualities that Jackie Baillie listed, not pieces of paper.

Mr Rumbles: That is all very well and it is great to hear such radical ideas but, from a business perspective, how would we measure whether the kids coming out of school have those abilities? What sort of examination would replace all the ones that Robin Harper would abolish?

Robin Harper: The answer is simple. If every pupil were encouraged to develop their full potential, most of them would leave with those qualities. An examination would not be needed, because the abilities that they had would be perfectly apparent to an employer, especially if we used the system of self-evaluation and evaluation by teachers that we already use when pupils apply for university. I have experience of that from my time as a guidance teacher. An appraisal of a pupil's qualities needs no examination; it is pure common sense.

Is our education system fit for the purpose of turning out young people who have the qualities of self-confidence and self-esteem and who are prepared to challenge things? That is an important aspect: will our young people be able to challenge the way things are or will they simply fit in with society? That question must be asked, as the answer is probably that we are not preparing young people in the best way for the outside world.

Michael Russell: Mr Harper makes an extremely important point about the creation of the ability to think and challenge. However, the skills that he talks about are required not only by businesses but by life. The frustration of the ability to challenge what people think and contribute to democracy are often the factors that lead to crime and disillusionment. Would he care to comment on that?

Robin Harper: Indeed I can. I now feel pressed: I have two very important points to make.

We need to have a really good look—as we did in the debate—at the part that music, drama and art can play, but we also need to consider outdoor education, forest schools education and environment education. If we asked all the voluntary organisations in Scotland that deal with

young people for their favoured method of encouraging self-confidence and self-esteem in young people, we would find that it is to get them outdoors.

What has happened to outdoor education in Scottish education? Since we lost the economies of scale of regional council education authorities, it has almost completely disappeared. We must get it back by one means or another, even if that means knocking heads together in a few councils and saying, "Will you please get your heads together and do something about this?"

Let us have room for real flexibility and innovation. Let us say to head teachers that, if they want to change their timetable completely, they can. Let us say to them—to take up the point that Ken Macintosh made—that if they want to say to children, "You can just do four or five standard grades and then go and do art or go to the local college," they can. The point that the Conservatives made, which was misinterpreted, was simply that we should allow children and young people to decide at 14 where and how they will be educated.

I have a last challenge: what is happening to young children with ME? I raised the issue seven months ago. The cross-party group on ME had a meeting at lunch time and, although I was not able to attend, I promised that I would raise the matter. Is the Executive addressing the problems of young children with ME in schools?

16:31

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Over the past few months, I have had the privilege of being involved in the national debate on education and in the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's debate on the purposes of education. I have also had the opportunity to visit schools throughout my constituency. It is a diverse constituency, so there are schools in former mining communities with particular problems, in agricultural communities, and in towns such as Larkhall.

There is a wide spectrum of educational opportunity in my constituency, and a great deal of good is going on, but clearly there is room for improvement. That leads me to have some sympathy with points that are made in the Scottish National Party amendment, particularly those about the exam system and the need to reduce the burden of assessment on teachers—the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's experience of the SQA bore that out—and about

"the building and development of a collective and collegiate view"

of schools and school management.

However, once again, the SNP could not help itself and had to wrap those good points in political rhetoric. I find myself unable to support the amendment because of the way in which it has been packaged.

There is a real need to address the issues. I have highlighted some of them. I will make other specific points, which I hope the minister will be able to answer in his closing speech or later. The first relates to flexibility and how it applies to children and young people with dyslexia. Ministers will be aware of my interest in that subject over the past few months. Greater consideration must be given to how that group of individuals can be given better support to realise their potential and to how the flexibility that is available—particularly through modern technology—can be used to help them to do that.

My second point relates to sports comprehensives. I welcome the comments that the minister made in her introductory remarks. During the investigation that I undertook for a committee report three years ago, I visited a sports college in Manchester. I was impressed by the way in which sport was used across the curriculum to enable young people to learn subjects in which they might otherwise not have been as interested. It was particularly heartening for me to see young boys of secondary 2 age engaged fully in education because they were doing it through a medium in which they were interested.

I welcome the fact that North Lanarkshire Council has had the courage to move ahead with the sports comprehensives project within the comprehensive system. I hope that the minister will examine that example and consider how it can be used throughout Scotland in future.

My next point relates to teachers. We are right to say that teachers are a valuable asset. That is clear to me when I look back on my educational experience. The good teachers are the bits of that experience that I remember. They are the people who had an impact on me and who helped me to learn.

The McCrone settlement enables us to appreciate teachers and to put them at the heart of the agenda. We must continue to point out that support staff, equally, play a valuable role in the learning experience of our children and young people. Classroom assistants are not a substitute for teachers, but they are a welcome addition to the classroom setting. I know from experience in my constituency that they are not just responsible for wiping noses and checking jotters; they have been valuable assets in the classroom, and I hope that we will be able to support them and to develop their learning potential, as well as that of the children.

My fourth point is on lifelong education. Donald Gorrie, I think, made some worthy, nice points about the need to encapsulate such things. There is more of a need for greater co-ordination between local authority departments. I had the strange view that, following the reorganisation to single-tier local authorities, co-ordination between education and community education would take place. That co-ordination does not take place as well as it could. We need to consider how to develop further the role of community education in supporting learning, both before and after school, particularly in relation to homework. Many pupils do not live in an environment that means that they can go home and learn effectively.

The minister said in her opening speech that she had some sympathy with the Tory amendment. I, too, had some sympathy with it when I read it, but I am slightly concerned by the comments that Alex Johnstone and Mike Rumbles made in referring to difficult children. The Tory amendment is not about dealing with difficult children. We need to reflect on why children do not find the school environment supportive.

Cathy Jamieson: In a past life, I worked with vulnerable children who were not accommodated by schools. I did not interpret the Conservative amendment as being about taking difficult or disadvantaged young people out of school. If that were the case, I would not give the amendment any support. I interpret the amendment—and I hope that this will be clarified in Murdo Fraser's summing up—as dealing with the creation of genuine opportunities, picking up on some of the valuable work that is going on between schools and the further education sector.

Karen Gillon: I very much welcome the minister's clarification.

Mr Rumbles: Could I, too, intervene at this point?

Karen Gillon: I cannot give way, I am afraid.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes—the member is out of time. I am sorry.

Karen Gillon: When I was at Jedburgh Grammar School, I took up an economics course at the then Borders College of Technology. I know that relationships with the FE sector can take place and that they are worth while. However, we should not see such relationships as a solution to the problem. We must address the problem properly, and not shove difficult or disadvantaged children out of the way and hide them. Unfortunately, I think that that was what was coming through in some members' contributions.

I hope that the minister will be able to pick up on the points that I have raised, either now or at a later date.

16:38

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

This has been an enjoyable debate and, in the spirit of consensus, I will start by agreeing with something that Michael Russell said: he expressed regret that the First Minister is not here for the debate. The First Minister made an important speech on education yesterday, and we heard some fine words from him about extending flexibility and choice. I am not sure exactly what he was signalling, but such a move would be extremely welcome on this side of the chamber. In fact, we have been calling for more flexibility and choice for years. If the First Minister's conversion towards Tory ideas on education is genuine—I suspect in the teeth of opposition from the Minister for Education and Young People—then that is welcome. Therefore, we have not sought to amend the motion; we have simply made an addendum.

I wonder how real the First Minister's conversion is. In the speech that he made yesterday, he was at pains to praise the comprehensive system, but we know that the system fails some of the most vulnerable in society.

Cathy Jamieson: Perhaps the member would care to look closely at the text of what the First Minister said. He made it clear that he was talking not about a system, but about a principle, and that he wanted enough flexibility to use the comprehensive principles to get the best for our children and young people.

Murdo Fraser: I am obliged to the minister for that clarification, and I will deal with some of those matters shortly, but I think that she has to accept that, for some pupils, the comprehensive system does not work. For many pupils, it does. Bright children, those with parental support and those who attend the top-performing comprehensives do well out of the current system, but the system fails too many others. I am talking in particular about those who struggle in class, those whose home environment is not supportive and those who are trapped in the catchment area of a failing school, who do not have the middle-class option of moving house into the catchment area of a good school. Those children are being failed.

Mr Rumbles: Will the member confirm that the Conservative amendment is not about difficult children? Children may have difficulties with the system. The aim is to give them opportunities to cope with that.

Murdo Fraser: I will come on to our amendment, which I am not discussing at the moment. I will clarify that the proposal for greater involvement of FE colleges is not intended as a way of dealing with difficult children.

Earlier we discussed what the term “comprehensive” means. The minister talked about the comprehensive principle and I tried to tease out from her exactly what that meant. The word “comprehensive” seems to have become a Humpty-dumpty word—it means anything that people want it to mean. The minister says that it is possible for a comprehensive school with a specialisation in sports or the arts to select on the basis of ability. She says that it is possible for a comprehensive school to reject mixed-ability teaching and to have setting and streaming. If that is her vision of comprehensive schools, she will not encounter much opposition from Conservative members. However, I wonder if that is what she means.

Robin Harper: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I am sorry—I have already taken two interventions.

The real test for the First Minister is how serious the Executive is about allowing parental choice. Let us not forget that the First Minister signed the order that took St Mary's Episcopal Primary School in Dunblane back into local authority control, in the teeth of opposition from parents in that school.

I will now deal with the amendment, which proposes one simple policy idea that should win support from at least three parties in the chamber. My colleague Alex Johnstone set out our proposal in detail. We all know that our schools include some 14 and 15-year-olds who have no interest in academic subjects. Their presence in school—if they attend and do not add to our appalling truancy statistics—can be disruptive for other pupils. Is it not much better for such pupils to have the opportunity to undertake vocational training, not in a school environment, but at FE colleges?

Brian Fitzpatrick *rose*—

Cathy Jamieson *rose*—

Murdo Fraser: I will give way to Cathy Jamieson.

Cathy Jamieson: I want to be absolutely clear on this point. In my speech I indicated that I was happy to support the amendment, on the basis that it is not about taking children and young people out of school at an early stage and placing them in another environment where they do not have the correct support. The amendment should be about opening up opportunities and building on the good work that is already being done and the links that exist.

I must be absolutely clear on that point, because I indicated to Brian Monteith that I was prepared to support the amendment as defined by him. However, because of what Murdo Fraser and

others have said, I now have doubts about the amendment. Will the member make absolutely clear whether the amendment is about taking children out of school at 14, or about having the flexibility—that is the word that Murdo Fraser seems to want to use—to get the best for young people and allow crossover between FE and schools?

Murdo Fraser: I am delighted to give the minister the confirmation that she seeks. We are talking about having flexibility. However, at the moment, some 14 and 15-year-old pupils are disengaged from the mainstream process of education. The amendment provides an opportunity for those pupils in particular. I see no problem with that.

Karen Gillon: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: I am afraid that I cannot. I have already taken three interventions and I am over time.

Duncan McNeil and others on the Labour back benches have expressed concern about our amendment. I am sorry that he has left the chamber, because he wanted this point to be clarified before he voted. I reassure Duncan McNeil that the amendment is not about people leaving school at 14—it is about allowing them to have access to training and education at FE colleges.

If Labour members are concerned about the policy, they should seek clarification from coalition colleagues on the Liberal Democrat benches, as it is the Liberal Democrats' policy, too. I am not surprised that Labour back benches are confused. When we proposed the policy on 10 October, Cathy Jamieson attacked it. She said that we should not write off young people or limit someone at the age of 14.

Cathy Jamieson: That is exactly why I asked for clarification of the amendment. We should not limit young people's options and write them off at the age of 14. I am happy to build on the good work that is being done and the links that exist between colleges and schools. The Conservatives are not introducing a new policy initiative or new action. I want to make it absolutely clear that Labour and Liberal Democrat members do not support removing children from formal education at the age of 14. I stand by that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Fraser, this is the last minute of your speech.

Murdo Fraser: Thank you for your indulgence, Presiding Officer.

I am interested to hear the minister's explanation, but on 10 October we set out our policy in detail and the minister attacked it.

It seems to me that we have a consensus, because we have come forward with a policy, the Liberal Democrats have come forward with a policy and the SNP has come forward with a similar policy. We have a clear view on what the policy should be, which is to allow 14 and 15-year-olds access to training and education at FE colleges rather than in schools. There is nothing complicated about that. Little wonder that there is confusion on the issue when the minister attacked the policy on 10 October. I am delighted that she seems to have changed her mind. Let us support the consensus and move forward with a new idea for Scottish education.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Irene McGugan is winding up for the SNP. It would be helpful if her speech were kept closer to six minutes.

16:45

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): As we have heard from a number of speakers this afternoon, flexibility has been and will continue to be a key aspect of the Scottish education system, but it has become increasingly difficult to practise with the raft of central Government guidelines, initiatives and targets. For schools to take advantage of flexibility and innovation, we suggest that there requires to be a simplification of the current processes—a point that Karen Gillon conceded. There has to be a simplification of the exams system, a reduction in bureaucracy, the creation of clear paths and links to further education and an end to the overly complex and inflexible PFI initiatives to fund school buildings and management. I accept that Karen Gillon would not concede the latter point.

The need to implement policies that deal with the big issues in education is obvious. Evidence shows that child poverty is increasing, that violence and bullying in the classroom are rising and that the gap in educational attainment is widening. The minister and Jackie Baillie acknowledged the negative impact of those factors.

As well as tinkering with the processes of education, the Scottish Executive should focus on the strategies that will drive up attainment across the social spectrum and throughout Scotland. To pick up on Tommy Sheridan's point, I was concerned to note that only 5 per cent of pupils in Dundee achieve five highers, while 58.6 per cent of pupils in East Renfrewshire achieve five highers. That is not equality of opportunity.

I am not sure that it was necessarily helpful for the First Minister to be reported as saying yesterday that slack teachers and dithering education chiefs will not be allowed to stand in the way of a first-class education for every Scottish

child. That not only seems to imply that teachers are in large measure to blame for the current poor situation in education, which is extremely insulting, but it ignores the fact that the majority of teachers are hard-working and equally committed to the idea of excellence for everyone.

I want to mention two issues briefly. One is flexibility in language provision. It was good to hear the minister's example from Aberdeen, which involved very young children, and Duncan McNeil's rosy picture of language learning in his area, but that is not the norm. Previous guidance, which stated that at least one language other than English should be pursued through S3 and S4, was replaced with an entitlement to some education in a modern language from primary 6, which did not require to be pursued beyond S2. There are concerns that that approach to language learning will downgrade and create further decline in language options in schools. The choice in many schools is already limited to French and I accept that that is not appropriate for everyone. Choice and flexibility are not available to everybody who wants them.

If we acknowledge the importance of languages, we should strive for every Scot to be multilingual and should support choice in modern European, indigenous and community language options if they are needed. As language expert Professor Joe Lo Bianco puts it, "Monolingualism implies self-imposed dependency," which is something that we must strive to end. In Ireland, promotion of its indigenous language has resulted in commonly held bilingualism and an increased interest in further language learning. In 1998, 40 per cent of Irish students took a modern language exam for their leaving certificate, compared with only 12 per cent of pupils in Scotland.

Secondly, I want to mention the situation faced by families who chose to home-educate their children. It could be argued that they have, in effect, rejected the one-size-fits-all approach and have gone for flexibility and innovation in education.

It is almost a year since the Executive drafted guidance on home education. That guidance caused fear and alarm among families involved in home education. Little or no progress has been made in the seven months since the consultation period ended. In the meantime, MSPs are dealing with a number of families who are suffering harassment and persecution by local authorities that defend their actions by citing the guidance, even though it is only draft guidance. The minister has yet to intervene to alleviate what is an unacceptable situation for the children concerned.

The national debate and the inquiry into the purposes of education by the Education, Culture and Sport Committee have been mentioned.

Smaller class sizes were identified as a key theme in the national debate and were supported by the Educational Institute of Scotland, the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association, the Scottish School Board Association, educationists, teachers, parents and pupils. The subject of smaller class sizes has dominated the debate. In the document giving children's views on education, to which Fiona McLeod referred extensively, young people mentioned smaller classes in three out of the 11 key bullet points. Smaller class sizes were one of two overwhelming messages. Given that that message came directly from young people, I hope that the minister will take serious note of it.

Robin Harper: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that she is winding up.

Irene McGugan: In spite of Murdo Fraser's efforts to stop members supporting the Conservative amendment, we will continue to support it, because it encompasses SNP policy.

The national debate is important and it shows that the SNP is identifying the issues of greatest relevance to all who are involved in Scottish education, who recognise that our policies offer genuine opportunities for innovative decision making, flexibility and choice.

16:52

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Nicol Stephen): The debate deals with a big issue—no issue is more important to our nation's future. Therefore, it was disappointing that, after about 20 seconds of supportive words, Mike Russell lowered the debate into the political gutter. His personal and political point scoring will have done little to inspire the young people who were watching in the gallery. After accusing ministers of many things, few of which had much to do with education, he accused us of something that he called micromanagement. I put on the record the fact that that is not our approach. As our motion suggests, we seek more devolved management, greater local responsibility and higher levels of innovation and flexibility.

Let us examine Mike Russell's approach to education, which is often the same as the SNP approach to other issues, such as the economy and health. He called for ministerial intervention and centralised Government action on every issue. He blamed the Government and said that the minister must act. Mike Russell is the micromanagement man and the SNP is the micromanagement party. Let us imagine what would happen if Mike Russell were the Minister for Education and Young People. We would have

meddling and micromanagement at breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Brian Monteith's speech was described as a confused presentation, but that may have been because he indicated that it was Conservative policy to support the SNP amendment and admitted that his amendment had come from a different political source. I will return to that point. He completely failed to understand our objective of achieving excellence—excellent teaching, excellent facilities and equipment, excellent buildings and excellent leadership—in every school in Scotland. We aim to provide excellent schools for all.

Robin Harper: Will the minister take an intervention?

Nicol Stephen: I will take the member's intervention shortly.

The Conservatives would achieve excellence for the few, which was disguised during the debate as a sincere concern for children in deprived areas—the children whose futures the Conservatives blighted and ignored when they were in charge of education in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Did they target resources on the communities and individuals who were most in need at that time?

Mr Monteith rose—

Nicol Stephen: Did Brian Monteith help to close the gap, or did he increase division, disillusionment and despair?

I will give way to Robin Harper.

Robin Harper: The minister mentioned excellent buildings. Despite evidence that green eco-buildings produce significant advances in learning in schools of up to 10 per cent, PFI agreements rarely—if ever—require buildings to measure up to the highest ecological standards.

Nicol Stephen: I agree with that concern. We would like to consider that issue further, because, as we build and invest more than £1 billion in new schools, we want the best of design, which means focusing on environmental issues as well as on architectural issues. The best of architects incorporate such matters in their designs, but we must ensure that that becomes the norm.

Donald Gorrie gave a supportive speech and talked about simplification, reducing bureaucracy and busting bumf. We look forward to his appointment as the bumf tsar, and I agree with him that we need to do more on that.

I have a simple message for Tommy Sheridan: teachers do not want radical change that is driven by politicians. The fact that parents and pupils do not want radical change is as important to me. What frustrated me most was the fact that he said that Scotland was near the bottom of the table,

whereas the reverse is true: Scotland is near the top of the table. For example, in the recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's programme for international student assessment studies of reading, maths and science, we are in the top 10 in every subject in comparison with 31 other OECD developed nations. Few European countries are ahead of us. Canada, New Zealand or Japan are often at the top—but never Cuba.

Tommy Sheridan: I thank the minister for that information. However, both the OECD and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's report put Canada second for third and fourth grade achievements in mathematics, whereas Cuba is first in those grades. Unfortunately, Scotland is seventh in one list and eighth in the other. Perhaps the minister should read his brief a wee bit more astutely. If teachers do not want radical change in class sizes, why do the EIS, the SSTA and all the other teachers unions support smaller class sizes? [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. There is too much private chuntering and noise, which is discourteous to the minister.

Nicol Stephen: I have read the reports; I have also read the tables for the report to which I referred and I assure Mr Sheridan that Cuba was not at the top of them. However, I am happy to examine his statistics.

Ours is not a political but a partnership approach that is led by a passionate belief that better education in Scotland will not be driven by dogmatic political intervention. That partnership, which would have been inconceivable five years ago, is not only between teachers, Government and local education authorities; in every school in Scotland, it must include pupils and parents in a meaningful and widespread way.

Schools must be at the heart of our communities. New community schools and health-promoting schools provide integrated education, social work and health services that focus on the child. That is the future that we all want to build. Those schools also provide services for the whole community and give the old as well as the young access to facilities throughout the day, not only during school hours.

That is why our new schools in Scotland must have the highest design values, including sustainable development. They must create excellent learning facilities, but they must also include the best drama, music and sporting facilities and they must have more staff. Extra teachers, extra classroom assistants and extra support staff should make learning less formal, more flexible and more fun—exactly as many members described it.

I am just about out of time but I will take a final intervention from Brian Monteith.

Mr Monteith: I thank the minister for taking my intervention. Yesterday, the First Minister said that it would be good if more schools were to employ setting. What does the minister say to his former school, Robert Gordon's College, which does not use setting? Would he urge that school to adopt setting as part of the flexibility that he supports?

Nicol Stephen: We have clarified that setting is the correct approach. I would welcome the introduction of setting in any school, as that is the right educational approach for Scotland.

I must finish the point that I was about to make because it is an important point that relates to Brian Monteith's amendment and it is one of the issues that requires clarification before the end of the debate: I condemn outright Murdo Fraser's remarks.

Karen Gillon: For the sake of the chamber, will the minister clarify what the Executive is intending to achieve by supporting the Conservative amendment? Is the Executive supporting greater flexibility in complementing the existing school system? Alternatively, is the minister suggesting—as the Tories did earlier—that we should dump difficult pupils into a second-class education system?

Nicol Stephen: I reject outright terms such as "disruptive children" and "difficult children". I reject outright the views and the approach that Murdo Fraser proposed this afternoon.

On the basis of the clarification that Brian Monteith and others gave, I emphasise that 14-year-olds will not be able to leave school early and that there will be no change in the school leaving age.

We support Brian Monteith's amendment. More than that, the amendment is difficult to reject because what it seeks to achieve is already happening in innovative pilot schemes throughout Scotland—in Glasgow and Dundee, for example.

Yesterday, I was in Dunfermline at the launch of a partnership agreement between Queen Anne High School and Lauder College. That agreement will achieve exactly what the majority of members who are in the chamber today understand by Brian Monteith's amendment.

Our objectives must be more decentralised management, more parental involvement and more choice and diversity in the curriculum, with greater innovation and flexibility. Decisive action must be taken to achieve and maintain high standards, and resources must be targeted to close the gap.

Education is central to Scotland's future. We can make no more crucial investment. Each and every child in Scotland must be at the heart of education. That is the core of our approach. We need education that works for all our children and which inspires every young person in Scotland. That is a big ambition, but it is an ambition that should unite us all.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We come to the Parliamentary Bureau motions that are set out in the business bulletin. I draw members' attention to the fact that the first three motions are on the same issue and I ask Euan Robson to move all three together.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees under Rules 2.2.4, 2.2.5 and 2.2.6(a) of the Standing Orders that the meeting of the Parliament on Wednesday 13 November 2002 may continue beyond 7.00 pm.

That the Parliament agrees under Rule 11.2.4 of the Standing Orders that Decision Time on Wednesday 13 November 2002 shall begin at 7.00 pm.

That the Parliament agrees that Rule 5.6.1(c) of the Standing Orders be suspended for the duration of the Meeting of the Parliament on Wednesday 13 November 2002.—[*Euan Robson.*]

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Presiding Officer, I have a point of order that relates to Parliamentary Bureau motion S1M-3549.

The Presiding Officer: I have not reached that one yet.

Tommy Sheridan: That is what I am going to ask you about. Will that motion be discussed today? If not, it would appear that we will have 24 hours between the discussion of the motion and the deadline for lodging amendments for a scheduled stage 3. Are you satisfied with that length of time or do you believe that it has been rushed?

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but I do not have motion S1M-3549 in front of me. It is still to come, but it will not be discussed today.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): My understanding was that S1M-3549 was the revised Parliamentary Bureau motion that was moved at half-past 2 this afternoon.

Tommy Sheridan: I am sorry, Presiding Officer, but the motion that we debated at lunch time related to the change to tomorrow morning's business only; it did not relate to next week's business, which is what I am concerned about. If you are saying that the motion will be discussed tomorrow, we are leaving only 24 hours for amendments to be lodged to an important bill that we are to discuss on Wednesday.

The Presiding Officer: I have just been dealing with this matter in my room. The deadline for lodging amendments was on Friday—I am sorry, I am advised that the period began on 30 October and ends this coming Friday, so you have until Friday to lodge amendments.

Tommy Sheridan: My point is that motion S1M-3549 will trigger the deadline for the lodging of amendments to an important bill.

The Presiding Officer: That is correct.

Tommy Sheridan: If the motion is discussed tomorrow, that deadline will be truncated to only 24 hours, because the last day for the submission of amendments will be Friday at 4.30 pm.

The Presiding Officer: That has always been the case.

Tommy Sheridan: It has not always been the case in relation to the notification of a stage 3 debate. My point is that you are allowing only 24 hours' notification.

The Presiding Officer: The chamber agreed to that, following the motion that was moved earlier today. You are correct that the deadline for lodging amendments was brought forward; it closes this Friday and everybody now knows that. I do not know what your problem is.

Tommy Sheridan: I am sorry, but we did not agree to that motion today. The motion that we agreed to earlier today related to the change to tomorrow's business only.

The Presiding Officer: There will be another business motion tomorrow, so if you want to make a point you can speak then.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): On a point of order. I wonder whether it would be of assistance if, as the convener of the Social Justice Committee, I informed the chamber that stage 2 of the Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Bill was completed on 30 October and it was known what we would need to amend thereafter. Therefore, it has been possible to prepare amendments from 30 October.

The Presiding Officer: Indeed. I said that a moment ago. To be absolutely clear, I confirm what the convener of the Social Justice Committee said. Members had from 30 October until this Friday to lodge amendments, so I do not know what the problem is—[*Interruption.*] There is plenty of time for the lodging of amendments, but if there is any quarrel about the business motion members will have another opportunity to discuss it tomorrow.

I return to motion S1M-3548.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Discontinuance of Legalised Police Cells (Ayr) Rules 2002 (SSI 2002/472).—[*Euan Robson.*]

Decision Time

17:09

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We come to decision time. There are seven questions to be put.

The first question is, that amendment S1M-3536.1, in the name of Michael Russell, which seeks to amend motion S1M-3536, in the name of Cathy Jamieson, on flexibility and innovation in schools, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: I heard a no. There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (Ind)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Grn)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (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)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 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 49, Against 61, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S1M-3536.3, in the name of Brian Monteith, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Cathy Jamieson, on flexibility and innovation in schools, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 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)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 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)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (Ind)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 107, Against 4, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S1M-3536, in the name of Cathy Jamieson, as amended, 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)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (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)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (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)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
 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)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (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)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 80, Against 0, Abstentions 30.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament is committed to raising standards in education and closing the opportunity gap; acknowledges that *A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century* encourages greater local flexibility for schools in delivery of the National Priorities in Education; welcomes the contribution made by innovative projects in the Future Learning and Teaching programme to addressing issues such as the transition from primary to SI/SII, as well as new approaches to ICT and modern languages, and supports the Executive in its aim of ensuring that every school is a centre of excellence and believes that greater flexibility should include giving new opportunities for children to study a wider range of courses, including those at further education colleges, from the age of 14.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S1M-3545, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the meeting of the Parliament on Wednesday 13 November, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees under Rules 2.2.4, 2.2.5 and 2.2.6(a) of the Standing Orders that the meeting of the Parliament on Wednesday 13 November 2002 may continue beyond 7.00 pm.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S1M-3546, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on decision time on Wednesday 13 November, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees under Rule 11.2.4 of the Standing Orders that Decision Time on Wednesday 13 November 2002 shall begin at 7.00 pm.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S1M-3547, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on suspension of standing orders on Wednesday 13 November, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that Rule 5.6.1 (c) of the Standing Orders be suspended for the duration of the Meeting of the Parliament on Wednesday 13 November 2002.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S1M-3548, 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 2 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Discontinuance of Legalised Police Cells (Ayr) Rules 2002 (SSI 2002/472).

Science and the Parliament

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S1M-3454, in the name of Sylvia Jackson, on science and the Parliament. 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.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the "Science and the Parliament" event being held on Wednesday 6 November 2002, organised by the Royal Society of Chemistry in association with Scotland's leading science organisations; notes the contribution of Scotland's 40,000 scientists to our economic, environmental and social development; further notes that Scotland is a world leader in many scientific disciplines; congratulates Scotland's scientists for their excellent ratings in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise; welcomes the Scottish Executive's science strategy set out in *A Science Strategy for Scotland* and the efforts to foster an environment which enhances student participation in science, to invest in the science infrastructure and equipment of our educational establishments, to increase investment in research along with supporting greater industrial research and assisting in the practical application of our world-beating research, and believes that the Executive should take measures to reverse the downward trend and ensure that more students are choosing to study science at higher grade and degree level.

17:14

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): As a chemistry teacher and a teacher trainer at Moray House Institute of Education, not too far down the road from here, I have had an interest for many years in science development generally and in science education in particular.

I give special thanks to the Royal Society of Chemistry, in association with Scotland's leading science organisations, which include the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Institute of Physics, the Institute of Biology, the Institution of Chemical Engineers, Save British Science Society, the Scottish universities policy and research advice network, the Association for Science Education—of which I have been a member for too long—and the Society of Chemical Industry. They have organised today's science and the Parliament event, and I hope that all MSPs present have been able to attend that event and will join us in the Signet library after the debate.

Science and the Parliament is now an annual event for scientists, parliamentarians and science policy personnel. Last year's event was very popular and successful and I am sure that this year's event will be, too. As members will know, this year's event takes place during European science week.

I would like to say a little about the Royal Society of Chemistry, which is the learned society for chemical sciences and the professional body for chemical scientists in the UK. It has more than 46,000 members worldwide, is a major publisher and provider of chemical information and supports the teaching of the chemical sciences at all levels. It organises hundreds of chemical meetings every year and is a leader in communicating science to the public.

As my motion says, Scottish scientists are world beaters. The results of the 2001 research assessment exercise confirmed that universities and higher education colleges in Scotland are leaders in carrying out internationally competitive research. In Scotland 5,666 academic staff were submitted for assessment under the exercise—12 per cent of those submitted for assessment across the United Kingdom as a whole. That figure is much higher than Scotland's percentage share of the population, which is less than 9 per cent.

However, the numbers studying science at higher and degree level have been falling over the past few years, and that fall is especially pronounced in chemistry and physics. Between 1993 and 2001, there was a large decrease in the number of pupils passing higher grade sciences. Chemistry was down from 10.8 per cent of the school roll to 9.2 per cent, physics was down from 10.4 per cent to 9 per cent, and biology was down from 7.6 per cent to 6.6 per cent.

I will refer now to science numbers in higher and further education. Answers to parliamentary questions have revealed the true extent of the decline in popularity of physics and chemistry degree courses in Scotland. It is astonishing that there has been a 27 per cent drop in applications to chemistry courses over the past five years, and a 19 per cent drop in applications to physics courses. The drop in acceptances is even greater, with a 30 per cent drop in chemistry and a 34 per cent drop in physics.

Scotland is expected to face a shortage of physics and chemistry teachers in a few years' time, when numbers of physics and chemistry teachers retire and new posts come on stream.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I do not think that my own example is a particularly good one. I did sixth-year chemistry, but chose instead to study history at university. I should say in my defence that the most famous chemist in the land at the time was a certain Mrs Thatcher. Time has moved on, however, and I wonder whether Sylvia Jackson agrees that it is crucial that we get more students to study physics and chemistry at university. In particular, does she agree that we must recruit more chemistry and general science teachers? Is not that the most important step that we can take?

Dr Jackson: That is exactly right. I thank Kenneth Macintosh for that intervention and I will go on to say more about the points that he raised.

Science teachers, many of whom were recruited at the same time as I was when I first went into teaching and are therefore of a similar age, are among the oldest group of teachers in our schools. That fact, combined with the falling number of applicants to train as teachers, is likely to result in a shortfall of teachers, especially experienced ones. That is a vital issue. Local councils predict that they will need 763 new science teachers over the next six years and 321 for physics alone.

John Young (West of Scotland) (Con): In view of the considerable reductions in chemistry and physics and the other reductions that she has mentioned, does Sylvia Jackson have any comparisons with other countries in western Europe? Are there similar reductions in France, Germany or Holland, or do we not have figures?

Dr Jackson: I wish that John Young had given me notice of that question. I shall certainly try to find out and give him that information. In fact, the Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, who has much greater resources at his disposal, might be able to answer that question.

The Scottish Executive's report on the supply of teachers shows that physics has been listed as a priority subject for some time and that chemistry, biology and science are in the top 13 subjects that are identified as priorities by councils. Although there is currently no overall shortage of science teachers, the number of applicants applying to do teacher training in the sciences has fallen in recent years, especially in physics and chemistry.

However, it would be unfair to say that the Scottish Executive is not listening or pursuing useful policies. Those policies include the science strategy for Scotland; the creation of an independent Scottish science advisory committee; an £8 million investment in science equipment and training for schools; developments within the five-to-14 science education programme; science year in Scotland; the national education debate; the Royal Society of Edinburgh teaching fellowship; increasing research funds for the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council; and, of course, the school building programme, which is upgrading and building many new school laboratories.

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): It seems that there are mostly males in the gallery. I think that they are science teachers, or they work in science, biology or whatever. What are we doing to encourage women to go into the sciences?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I suppose that Dr Jackson would like extra time to compensate for all the interventions.

Dr Jackson: I would like that, Presiding Officer.

There have been long campaigns to encourage more girls into the sciences, particularly into physics and chemistry. Those campaigns have been more at school than at university level. The Association for Science Education, of which I have been a member for too long, as I said, has dealt with such campaigns.

The science community, which includes the many science associations that I listed earlier, has suggested a number of measures that could improve matters. Members of those associations are in the gallery. First, there could be a Scottish centre for teaching excellence. To build on recent developments in science and teaching, the Scottish Executive should back the creation of a Scottish centre for science education. It would support continuing professional development, which is at the heart of the McCrone settlement, and developments in that respect, and it should be a partnership of all Scotland's universities and the scientific societies and institutes. I hope that there will be a centre in every region of Scotland.

Secondly, there should be incentives to recruit more science teachers. My colleague Kenneth Macintosh asked about those. Such incentives would help to tackle the potential shortage of quality science teachers.

Thirdly, there should be even more investment in school laboratories. To provide a modern science teaching environment, additional resources will be needed. Indeed, it has been calculated that £13 million should be invested each year fully to equip Scotland's secondary school laboratories and to keep them up to date. We desperately need an audit of secondary school laboratories to assess what investment is required and to find out whether £13 million has been invested. Improving school science facilities would also help to attract more pupils into the sciences. In recent years, a related issue has been the need to include more science in the training of primary teachers and the on-going professional development needs of teachers in primary and secondary schools.

Finally, there should be a network of Scottish science centres. The Scottish Executive should invest in Scotland's science centres in order to secure their financial future, support their work on the public engagement with science, cut the cost of entry to the public in a similar way to the scheme for free entry to museums and develop their role in the formal science education network. The work of the Scottish Science Trust in supporting pupils and teachers in informal science education through such centres is well known. I gather that the core funding for that organisation is being reviewed, but it is likely to be received too late to prevent the trust's closure. I have spoken to

the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning rather than the deputy minister, who is here tonight, about the issue and look forward to a response. If that is not possible tonight, I look forward to one in the near future.

I look forward to other members' speeches and to the deputy minister's comments on how we can proceed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Eight members wish to speak. Speeches will be of no more than four minutes.

17:25

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I speak for everyone in the chamber when I say how pleased I am that, another year on, the Parliament has another opportunity to debate science issues.

In a recent newspaper article, the chair of the Scottish Science Advisory Committee used the example of China and outlined the lengths to which that country's leaders are going to encourage a strong science base. They recognise that science can contribute to wealth creation and they have invested heavily in scientific infrastructure. They are providing good opportunities for outstanding Chinese scientists to return to China. The implication is that Scotland needs to provide similar incentives to encourage the return of its own highly able graduates and postgraduates, many of whom work in other parts of the world.

It is a constant source of amazement to me that despite coming from a parental home that has much more of an arts ethos, both my children are science graduates and one makes his living as a research scientist—outwith Scotland, it has to be said. I could say to the minister that that is entirely because he wanted to take advantage of the better opportunities in Denmark to study renewable energy and that kind of thing, but that would be only partly true. His primary reason for moving was that he fell in love with a beautiful Danish girl, and they are very happy together. The message remains valid, however; if other countries are getting state-of-the-art equipment and offering higher salaries within an improved career structure, we must ensure that we are competitive and offer similar conditions.

A great deal of the focus of members' speeches will rightly draw attention to the need to get more young people of both sexes enthused about science at school and to get them to study science at higher level and beyond. From my family experience, I know that it is not easy to identify exactly what prompts that interest and I expect that the impetus varies from student to student, so addressing the problem of raising the numbers will remain a difficult one.

There is no doubt that we need to take action. Over the past seven years in Scotland there has—as has been made clear—been a massive reduction in the number of people choosing to study science, particularly at university. There are also concerns about the number of young people taking science at school.

One obvious encouragement, which was touched on by Sylvia Jackson, would be schools' having good up-to-date equipment. Schools need that to help them to make the science that they teach reflect the modern way that science is done. In this increasingly technological age, young people will not be impressed or enthused by old worn-out equipment and infrastructure. I appreciate the £8 million that has been allocated by the Executive for school equipment, infrastructure and training, but it is estimated that at least £50 million will be needed to bring our school laboratory facilities up to scratch and worthy of the 21st century. I will leave that thought with the minister.

As for teachers, it is critical that we are able to recruit sufficient high-quality staff for our science departments. It might be that having identified physics, chemistry and biology as priority subjects, we might need to be even more innovative and proactive in attracting trainee teachers to those subjects. Science is important to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the country. We in the Parliament must do all that we can to promote science's development.

17:28

Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab): I thank Sylvia Jackson for securing the debate. It is appropriately timed because it is European science week and 2002 is science year. As we know, science and the promotion of science and technology are vital for today's society and the future of Scotland's economy.

As Sylvia Jackson highlighted ably, we have much to be proud of here in Scotland. I will mention a few of the world-renowned institutes in my city of Aberdeen. The Rowett Research Institute is currently carrying out crucial work on obesity, which is a growing threat to people's health. Aberdeen residents will be familiar with adverts luring them into the Rowett Research Institute with offers of free food and lodgings while they are experimented on. There is also the Macaulay Institute, whose director was recently appointed to the new Scottish Science Advisory Committee, which is one of the outcomes of the new science strategy.

The University of Aberdeen has made use of proof-of-concept funding in commercialising science—researchers at the university are working

on shark antibodies, which will apparently make us all much healthier—and the Robert Gordon University does immensely important work on renewables, particularly on tidal streams. We also have the scientists in the marine laboratory, whose work is accepted by the fishing industry, however much its conclusions are hotly disputed. All those people carry out vital research that contributes to the well-being of Scotland's people and its natural environment.

I want to mention the role of science and technology in the oil and gas industry. The development of the North sea has been underpinned by innovative solutions to complex problems that demand high levels of skill and expertise from scientists and engineers.

To continue to supply industry and academia with the people required, it is essential that we enthuse young people about science and technology. As Sylvia Jackson and Irene McGugan said, the recent fall in the number of school and university students who pursue studies in science, technology and engineering is worrying and will undoubtedly contribute to the developing skill shortage. There are great potential opportunities in what we hope will be a new industry in Scotland based around renewables. Even more than in the oil and gas industry, the skills that are required for renewables will be science and technology based. It is becoming more important that we ensure that enough young people are attracted to science.

A lot of good work is being done in the science centres throughout Scotland. Satrosphere in Aberdeen introduces children to science as fun. Such centres need better and more secure funding. Even more important is the work of organisations such as the Grampian science and technology network, whose activities are being rolled out throughout Scotland. The programme works with primary and secondary schools and has been developed in conjunction with private companies such as BP. The programme supports primary school teachers in teaching science and technology and often works with the youngest pupils. At a more senior level, the scheme provides mentoring for advanced technology students. For example, students are linked to BP engineers who work offshore. The scheme has been highly successful for the schools and companies that are involved.

As members have mentioned, one key way in which to ensure that young people engage in studying science is to give them hands-on experience, which means having enough fully equipped labs. I cannot end without mentioning a regular correspondent of mine who is desperately concerned about the inadequate funding of physics labs in schools. He is clear that the recent

funding is welcome, but says that—as Sylvia Jackson mentioned—a lot more is required to bring labs up to scratch. I look forward to the minister addressing that point.

17:33

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I congratulate Sylvia Jackson on securing the debate. I also congratulate her on the tenacity that she shows on the subject all year round, not just once a year. We owe her a great debt for that.

Like other members, I took time out this afternoon to go to the Signet library to listen to the Royal Society of Chemistry conference. Unfortunately, I could not stay for as long as I wanted because of other duties. Many members were in the same situation. The conference was excellent and I am grateful to Willie Rennie for the detailed briefings that he made available to MSPs.

One of the contributors at the conference was Paula Hedley, who is 17 and who attends Buckie Community High School. Her confidence and ability to communicate and express her views were a joy to behold and are a great credit to her family, school and community. If she makes as much impact on the local community council—of which she must be the youngest member—and on the youngsters to whom she is a buddy reader as she did on many learned members of the society and other interested individuals, she will be a great asset to civic society in Scotland.

I shall concentrate on one of the points that she made, which registered strongly with me, about the lack of employment opportunities for young skilled scientists, especially in our rural communities. I am sure that the minister, who cut his political teeth in the constituency of Moray, will understand that employment opportunities are an important aspect of retaining and recruiting scientists. Paula Hedley said that it is a long way from Buckie to the central belt. She lives in Portknockie, which is even further from the central belt. If Paula were to follow a career in science, the only jobs that would come along would be in our distilleries or in the fish and food-processing plants. However, those jobs are few and far between.

That talented young lady has changed her career pattern. She is heading off to the University of Strathclyde to take a degree in tourism, business studies and languages. Of course, she will be an asset in that field. However, as legislators, we must consider how we can recruit and retain the skills of such people in the scientific sphere in our rural communities and our more remote areas, rather than just in Scotland as a whole.

Over the many years in which I have been

involved with politics, one of the issues that has haunted us has been the so-called brain drain from Scotland. My colleague Irene McGugan spoke about her son falling in love with a young Dane but also finding opportunities in Denmark that we could not offer at home. All the statistics that we have heard—I will not repeat them, because those who have read Willie Rennie's briefings will be only too well aware of them—show that science seems to be becoming a less attractive option for our young people; that the number of science recruits is falling in schools, universities and colleges and that the number of science teachers is falling because many of the principal teachers are approaching retirement age.

Those are depressing omens for the future of the skills base in Scotland. They must be addressed over and above the strategy that the Scottish Executive has put before us and which has been endorsed by the Parliament. Additional resources will be required, but we must show the political will to ensure that our young people are not deprived of the facilities that they need to advance their careers in science.

17:37

Mr David Davidson (North-East Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Sylvia Jackson on securing this important debate. All too often, science is ignored not only in Scotland but in the Parliament. We have an annual round, but it needs more than that, as Margaret Ewing said.

I come from a science background. During my first year at university, I studied chemistry, physics, botany and zoology, which also took me into brewing and other delightful arts that required visits to the various establishments up and down the Royal Mile. One point that has not yet been made in the debate is that good science has the power to help all humanity. Scotland has played a tremendous role in that respect, especially in medical sciences and technology.

Sylvia Jackson cited some statistics from answers to parliamentary questions. What amazes me is not who is applying for places at university but the fact that the figure for total acceptances to study chemistry has dropped by 34 per cent over the past five years. That is not sustainable. The equivalent figure for physics has dropped by 31 per cent, which is also not sustainable. The Foundation for Science and Technology recently held its annual debate at the Royal Society of Edinburgh. The report of that debate states that it is necessary to

"encourage greater uptake among young people of scientific subjects by, for example, identifying good role models among members of the scientific community who had been commercially successful."

That is an important issue for the Scottish

economy. We are beginning to see good signs in the commercialisation of biomedical science, which was mentioned earlier. That is essential. Another point to emerge from that debate is one that I have raised with ministers over the three years of the Parliament. The report states:

"Cross-disciplinary research should be encouraged: in its present form the Research Assessment Exercise could be an obstacle to such collaboration."

It is an even greater obstacle—I had a good dialogue with Wendy Alexander about this—when one is not allowed to mix the Government funding for higher education research with money from an industrial company. That is nonsense, because the two feed off each other. Clearly we must attack that issue.

Elaine Thomson referred to Satrosphere in Aberdeen and there are other places, such as Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh and Sensation in Dundee. It is important that we engage and enthuse young people at an early age. I remember David Bellamy and Magnus Pyke, who gave tremendously exciting theatrical performances on television that made science come alive. We need more enthusiasm and good advocates, but we must start children early.

Basic science can be taught in nursery and primary schools and does not require a huge degree of input because it excites children to find out how the world works, what reactions are and how things operate. It is important that we get people to become investigative at a younger age—that point applies to all education but particularly to subjects that lead on to science.

I am sure that Alex Neil and others will refer to the entrepreneurial advantage that we have in Scotland and its value to the economy. Commercialisation is essential, but—to quote the five Es at members—the most important thing is that early on we must engage, excite and enthuse, as Irene McGugan said, and then we must educate and encourage.

17:41

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the members of the Royal Society of Chemistry who are in the public gallery. This is the second speech that they have heard from me in 90 minutes, so either they are gluttons for punishment or they know a good thing when they are on to it. I suspect that it is the latter, of course.

I will concentrate on two aspects that go together: the commercialisation of research, and science education. I will refer back to the report that was published by the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee about this time last year on university research and teaching.

Four things need to be done if we are serious about commercialisation. First, we need to overhaul the research assessment exercise in the way that David Davidson mentioned and make it much simpler. The current system is crazy. For example, an academic who published four articles in prestigious journals would get the maximum brownie points through the RAE. However, if he or she took out a patent, they would get few brownie points. If they set up a spin-out company, they would get no brownie points whatever.

Things should be the other way round. The situation is particularly ridiculous because many of our foreign industrial competitors would use the four articles in the prestigious journals to get the intellectual property required for them to patent a product and would get all the commercial benefit from that. Therefore, a total overhaul of the RAE is required.

Secondly, we need to learn from the University of Cambridge model of encouraging the commercialisation of its academics' research. The tight funding of Scottish universities means that they are totally reliant on what is essentially marginal revenue from the sale of intellectual property and patents that result from research. However, the University of Cambridge makes no claim to any of its academics' research work. They retain the rights over it. Therefore, they have access to the intellectual property rights, the patent rights and so on. The spin-out rate around Cambridge has exploded because of that, creating new wealth and jobs on an unprecedented scale. In addition, those people to whom the university gave a chance are voluntarily donating to the university through endowments and all the rest of it. We need to consider doing a deal with our universities to repeat the Cambridge model.

My third point is that the Executive's budget, under the heading of enterprise and lifelong learning, rightly sets a long-term target of getting the level of business spend on research and development up to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average. We currently spend 0.53 per cent of our gross domestic product on business research and development. To get to the OECD average, that figure needs to rise to 1.54 per cent. That means an additional spend, year on year, of £750 million on business research and development. We have to try to get to that level if we are to remain a modern, industrial and competitive nation.

To the minister, I say, "For God's sake, get ahead with the intermediate technology institutes!" It is taking for ever to set them up and a wee bit of energy, innovation and dynamism might help them to become a reality before we are all dead.

17:45

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I congratulate Sylvia Jackson on securing the debate. For the benefit of our welcome guests in the gallery, I point out that these 5 o'clock debates were recently described as being rather similar to tutorials. I commend that description to our guests as it nicely brings out the thoughtful style in which we conduct these debates.

Many excellent points have been made on the issue of getting young people to study science at school and university. However, what does a first-class honours graduate who is deciding what to do next and who turns to the job advertisements in the back pages of the *New Scientist* discover? That the money on offer is rubbish. If someone is offered the choice of going into academia as a research chemist or joining the Charlotte Square mafia of fund managers, it is clear which way they will go if filthy lucre is what appeals to them—although I admit that there is a small possibility that what is happening in the stock market might alter that.

I want to fly a kite for a moment. I might be wrong, but I think that there is an impression that, if someone joins a British company as a chemist—or any other sort of science graduate—in 10 or 20 years' time, they might still be a chemist. The career progression from newly employed scientist to board member is not always evident. I am prepared to be shot down on that point, but it is worth considering. We must remember that there is a nasty snobbery about arts degrees being better than science degrees. I need that career progression to be explained to me.

As an example of the problems that can be caused by the impression that I am talking about, I will mention my son, who got good highers in science but, for many reasons, decided that science was not the way forward and has chosen to read economics at the University of Edinburgh next year. That might link back to what was said during this afternoon's debate on education.

A couple of weeks ago, I and some other members attended a good get-together that was organised by the Foundation for Science and Technology. The subject was, more or less, "Whither science in Scotland?" and much good stuff was said. However, I was struck by the fact that the vast majority of people there were academics and eminent professors. There were some politicians but, despite the fact that invitations had been issued, hardly anybody was there from the world of commerce. In the past, the dialogue between scientists and politicians has not been as good as it should be—which is why Sylvia Jackson is to be doubly congratulated for bringing this debate to the chamber today—and, as Alex

Neil has said on previous occasions, the dialogue between scientists and commerce must be improved as well.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are still three members who wish to speak. In order to accommodate everyone, I would be willing to take a motion without notice to extend business by 15 minutes.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by 15 minutes.—[Mr David Davidson.]

Motion agreed to.

17:49

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I speak as a former principal teacher of physics and chemistry at a small junior secondary school in Kenya and as the current rector of the University of Edinburgh.

David Davidson spoke about the reduction in the number of people being recruited into physics and chemistry. That, of course, has a knock-on effect. I am reliably informed that, two years ago, the number of students who were recruited into engineering departments—I think that this is general, rather than just at the University of Edinburgh—fell by 50 per cent and has remained at that low level for the past two years. Physics and chemistry are crucial background subjects for those who wish to continue from school into engineering.

Elaine Thomson talked about the contribution that the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen will make to the development of renewables and the hope that it will become a centre of excellence for renewables development in Scotland. Above everything else, we need engineers to enable us to capitalise on the huge success in renewables that beckons Scottish universities and manufacturing. That success is there for the asking if we are prepared for it. However, all the signs are that we will not be as well prepared for it as we could and should be.

Elaine Thomson also mentioned the project in Aberdeen to interest young people in science. We need to raise the status of craft, design and technology—otherwise known as CDT—in Scottish schools. There are ways in which that could be done. Schools should be encouraged to have big competitions and exhibitions of students' craftwork at the end of the year with prizes to be awarded to raise the status of CDT and to involve parents. The status of a subject in a school can be raised in many ways. That could be done for CDT.

Sylvia Jackson talked about centres of excellence for physics and chemistry. Perhaps we should include engineering and CDT in those

centres of excellence, as we have a need for people who are skilled in those subjects.

By the by, our colleges of veterinary science, such as the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies—the Dick vet—in Edinburgh, require students to have five As, including as many sciences as possible. The courses are oversubscribed by a ratio of 8:1. What an appalling waste of talent it is that seven out of eight or eight out of nine young people who made up their minds to do veterinary medicine were not encouraged along the way by the school careers service to think about having some other scientific career in their back pocket, because veterinary science is not the only career and entry to it is so competitive. There is a discontinuity in the way in which we encourage young people along scientific pathways.

In the debate on education this afternoon, we talked about flexibility. The Executive should investigate the ways in which schools generally get students out of school into engineering projects. Safety—hard hats and so on—gets in the way of such activities. However, that kind of hands-on experience is important. I am thinking not only about the provision of equipment in school, but about getting pupils out of school. We must do everything that we can through the careers service to upgrade science as a career.

17:54

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I am grateful to the Royal Society of Chemistry for giving me the opportunity again this year to talk about science and in particular for the brief that it provided.

A number of members asked questions during the year highlighting the shortfall in applications for and acceptances on science and engineering courses. That shortfall must be a matter of great concern.

As someone with a couple of science degrees—the first from the 1960s and the second from considerably later—I have some understanding of why people are interested in science. I was enthused about it. Growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, I wanted to be a scientist. Clearly, young people today do not have that kind of enthusiasm. I do not know why that is. The professional bodies are doing their level best to interest people in science.

It is noticeable that, if a university course is given an appropriate label, folk will be attracted to it. Nowadays, not only are medicine and veterinary science oversubscribed, but forensic science is, too. The attraction exists because forensic science is portrayed on television as an exciting, sexy profession. Having spent a large part of my life as

a forensic scientist, dealing with forensic toxicology, I am not sure whether I recognise what is on television. However, forensic science excited me. It was not a deadly dull, dreary drudge of a job, but I do not know how we can convey that to young people.

There is no doubt that we are producing science graduates of quality and that the future of industry and of the economy will rely on them. We are no longer going to be the screwdriver economy; we must drive up standards and attract much better quality jobs. We have attracted developments in biotechnology industries in particular, for which we need graduates. It is noticeable that the uptake in biological sciences reflects that need, although there has been a small decline even in that field, if not the severe decline that has taken place in physics and engineering.

The issue is not just the financial rewards, although they are important. People need job satisfaction and intellectual stimulation; they need to feel that they are doing something of worth to society. That is what is required to attract young people to become the scientists and engineers that our society needs.

I do not have an instant answer to the problem. We should certainly focus on the kinds of courses that I have mentioned and, regardless of whether they are given the necessary veneer to attract an oversubscription of scientists—not that many courses achieve that—we should try to make the professions more attractive to young people.

It worries me that my children have not chosen to do science, even though my wife and I are both science graduates. Although one of my sons is doing computing science, my other children were not attracted to the subject and have gone down different routes. What is the difference between now and the last century? What is wrong with science and how we are portraying it?

Other issues, relating to the way in which scientists who are training at universities are treated, have attracted the attention of my colleague, Mr Neil. In particular, short-term contracts for research scientists need to be considered. I am delighted that one of the universities in my area, the Robert Gordon University, has addressed that issue, to its great credit.

We need to continue to attract young people to science. Scientists are trained to ask questions and to answer them. That is what society needs. We need those forensic skills in science and engineering and not just on the more intellectual side. We also need them in politics, law and economics.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: And timekeeping.

Brian Adam: Those skills are needed here and now. Thank you, Presiding Officer.

17:59

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Although I agree with some of what Brian Adam said, we have to avoid the temptation to engage in a great level of dourness or glumness—that might be due to the influence of where we meet—about where we stand in relation to the sciences and research. There are a lot of exciting, innovative features to what is going on in Scotland. We have a disproportionate influence on the United Kingdom science base, and we should celebrate that, recognising the role that our scientists and those entering the sciences play, not only in our economy, but in our national life.

I am weary of politicians opining too much on the sciences. Until recently, our interaction as a class with the sciences was not very auspicious. The false attempts that were made to shove eggs or hamburgers down our children's throats in order to establish our dubious credentials are good reasons for avoiding such behaviour.

Many members have spoken about getting in on the ground floor. Much progress has been made on promoting science at school level as an interest and a career. Sylvia Jackson was right to mention the improvements that have been made in the school estate and how important those are. I echo Elaine Thomson's concerns, having visited secondary schools in my constituency that have not yet been replaced or refurbished. One comes across teachers and kids who are performing ferociously well, but struggling with inappropriate and outdated facilities. It is not an exaggeration to say that when I walk into science labs in St Ninian's High School in my constituency—as opposed to St Ninian's High School in my colleague Ken Macintosh's constituency—I recognise them, as they are similar to the labs in which I was taught. I left school just as someone else was entering number 10—the two events are not unconnected.

It is important to get our youngsters interested in a career in the sciences. Some excellent work is being done in schools. The role of inspirational science teachers must not be underestimated. Finding ways of getting children excited about what it means to be involved in the sciences is important. The young engineers club at Lenzie Academy in my constituency is doing that in a very innovative and exciting way. Such initiatives can be complemented by settings such as Glasgow Science Centre, to which I take my children regularly. The venue has attracted unfair criticism. If anyone wants to make it clear to their children that the sciences are not as dull as the science teaching to which we were subjected, they should

take them to explore venues such as the Glasgow Science Centre.

We must match resources to our rhetoric. Britain must not make the mistakes in science education in the next generation that we made in the previous one. I welcome the funding that has been made available to a new generation of young British scientists and look forward to the implementation of the Roberts report. That will mean an average rise of £4,000 in science post-doctoral research council pay. The average stipend for research council PhD students will rise to more than £13,000 by 2005-06—twice what it was in 1997, even after inflation.

Alex Neil recognised, grudgingly, the significant shift of resources that has taken place and, most important, the strategic lead that has been given to the intermediate technology institutes. By anyone's reckoning, £50 million is not to be sniffed at.

Alex Neil: I am not making a party-political point, because that would be wholly inappropriate. I accept that £50 million is a great deal of money. However, it is nothing compared with what is being invested in parallel institutes in Sweden and Singapore. We need to recognise the scale of investment that we must make if we are to compete.

Brian Fitzpatrick: I hope that Alex Neil will find time to join me in welcoming the average annual rise of more than 10 per cent in spending on the sciences that will take place over the coming years.

Robin Harper mentioned the future opportunities—as well as challenges—to protect and safeguard our environment. The exacting tests that we have set ourselves to meet our 2010 targets are an opportunity for science and research. Robin Harper made a very important point.

We are in danger of being on the receiving end of reverse treating. Politicians are always reminded to avoid treating, but I understand that there is to be a reception. Unfortunately, I will be unable to attend, but I am sure that those who have sat through tonight's debate will enjoy it.

18:04

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): I, too, congratulate Sylvia Jackson on securing a very worthwhile debate. I also congratulate the Royal Society of Chemistry and its partners on organising today's science in the Parliament event, which I was able to attend—albeit briefly—this afternoon and which my colleague Iain Gray will address later this evening.

I agree with those who have said that we do not focus often enough on science in the Parliament. I know that many of my colleagues will take the opportunity this evening to talk to scientists and hear about their successes and concerns first hand. I believe that the event will help to highlight to the Parliament the vital contribution that our science community is making.

It is important that we raise the profile of the science agenda and celebrate the enormous contribution that science makes to our economy and to our quality of life. Let us not forget that Scotland has a wonderful tradition in science. There are a number of indicators of that, such as the number of Nobel prizes that Scots or people who have studied in Scotland have accumulated over the years, which at the latest count was around 20, and the groundbreaking discoveries and inventions.

Science today is still thriving. Elaine Thomson talked about the centres of excellence in Aberdeen and there are many others throughout the country. Scotland consistently wins 12 per cent of the funding from UK research councils, which is above the average. We rank third in the world in citations per head of population and research shows that our existing spin-out process at universities is as efficient as that of the United States of America. The 2001 research assessment exercise found that half of our researchers work in departments that produce internationally competitive research. We now have 19 departments that have achieved the highest rating in research, which is around double the figure for the previous assessment exercise.

Alex Neil: I accept all the figures that the minister has just given and they are to be celebrated. One area in which we are way behind is our share of defence research expenditure, for which there is a huge budget. Although I would not wish some aspects of defence research to come to Scotland, will the minister give an undertaking that he will talk to the Ministry of Defence and the appropriate agencies about increasing Scotland's share of defence research?

Lewis Macdonald: No. I have tried to indicate today that the higher education sector in Scotland is perfectly capable of making its own case and it does not require any special treatment in its relations with the Ministry of Defence, or anybody else, because of the excellence that has been achieved. Alex Neil might have ambitions for our universities to enter other areas of research, but I think that we should build on the excellence that is already in place.

There are many good stories to tell, but we have heard tonight from Sylvia Jackson and others about the concerns that interest in science and technology in schools and universities might be on

the wane. We acknowledge the importance of those indicators. That is why our science strategy, which was published in August last year, committed the Executive to ensuring that enough people study science to meet the needs of our country. More broadly, we see science and skills as the main drivers of the modern knowledge economy. For that reason we are concerned about any decline in interest in those subjects within the education system.

The UK-wide Roberts report investigated those concerns and concluded that significant issues were at stake. We will certainly wish to address those. The question was asked about comparators outside Scotland. The Roberts report considered that the problems in Scotland were fewer because of the higher participation rates in post-school education compared with those south of the border. There is encouragement in that.

There is encouragement in the fact that half of all children leaving school with highers have achieved at least one science higher and a quarter of all children have achieved at least two. It remains the case that, after English and Mathematics, the most popular individual subjects include a number of science subjects. The situation with technological studies is less happy at standard grade, but at higher level the situation has remained fairly steady.

There is a mixed picture in higher education. As has been said in recent years, students have been taking pure physics and chemistry in smaller numbers. At the same time, the number of students who are taking biological studies and information technology courses has been on the increase. Many students now take a mixture of disciplines and so comparisons over time have become difficult. It is worth noting that between 2000 and 2001, the most recent year for which figures are available, the number of students who were accepted to take up science and engineering courses increased by 4 per cent to a current total of more than 9,000.

Although I acknowledge that there are issues and concerns to be addressed, I do not believe that we are facing an insoluble crisis in the study of science. I acknowledge that there will be areas of both growth and loss.

John Young: I am a non-scientist and a non-physicist, so the minister must excuse my ignorance. China was mentioned earlier. I am sure that that was correct, but one cannot compare China with western Europe, for obvious reasons. Are the various qualifications that one can obtain in such subjects in this country recognised in most west European countries? In other words, are such qualifications interchangeable?

Lewis Macdonald: I can see that John Young is following a European project this evening. I will be happy to respond in writing to his earlier query to Sylvia Jackson and to his latest query about recognition of qualifications. That will give him the full picture.

We acknowledge that science will play an important part in contributing to our economic future, both in a European context and in a global context. We seek growth in areas of science that are strategically and economically important, as well as in those areas that are fashionable. That is why the independent science advisory committee that we have recently established will give us advice on those issues.

We have been working on a range of initiatives to promote science in schools. As has been mentioned, we have injected additional funding of £8 million into the school science infrastructure and have provided £1 billion of additional funding for school infrastructure in general. We have established the improving science education five-to-14 project, which is a major programme that has been designed to improve the image of science education in Scottish schools. In March, we will hold a major conference on science education over the next 20 years, to stimulate innovative thinking on the teaching of science. We must lift the teaching of science and make it more relevant to young people.

The attitudes of young people are influenced by many pressures and by many role models. Many people in the gallery would acknowledge that scientists have an important role to play in projecting a positive image of science. Tackling public perceptions of science can be a long process that requires patience. The scientific community, above all, can work with Government in seeking to achieve that outcome.

Our science strategy sets out a firm statement of intent on the importance of science within our wider strategies. We will continue to take every opportunity to assist the universities in getting out the good stories on science and in celebrating their achievements and aspirations. The science strategy played an important role in shaping the spending review, which was set out only a few weeks ago. We will increase investment in science and research in universities by nearly 20 per cent during the next three years. That represents an increase of £45 million.

Sylvia Jackson and others made specific suggestions, to which I wish to respond. We are aware of the proposals for a national centre of excellence in science teaching that have been introduced south of the border. Although there are no plans for such a centre in Scotland, we recognise the issues that the Roberts report identified. We are working with the Wellcome Trust

on various ways in which those issues could be addressed. The science advisory committee will advise us on that and on other issues, such as continuous professional development for science teachers.

We have made the recruitment of physics teachers a priority for education colleges, which has resulted in an increased take-up. If the need arises to do the same in other areas of science teaching, we will take the necessary action.

Science centres were mentioned. As Sylvia Jackson knows, we have occasionally provided short-term funding to address specific problems with science centres. We will develop our future policy on where science centres fit into our overall strategy in the context of the on-going joint review with UK ministers.

Margaret Ewing referred to Paula Hedley's experience. The promotion of science and technology will work only if the rising generation becomes confident of gaining well-paid and well-supported jobs in which to use scientific skills.

There is an issue about the relative lack of research and development in industry in Scotland. We acknowledge that, in many respects, we lag behind. We need Government action to tackle the situation and we need a push from the science base, through the commercialisation of scientific research.

I assure Alex Neil that significant energy and dynamism are being applied to introducing proposals for intermediate technology institutes. We consider them a vital part of commercialisation and of making industry provide role models, as well as scientists. The Government will provide a push in that direction. I agree that it is important to proceed with the institutes quickly, but it is also important to get them right, which we will seek to do.

Brian Adam: The centres of excellence, which are about to become intermediate technology institutes, have been in gestation for three years. Will the minister give members an idea of when we will see the institutes?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is four minutes over his allotted time.

Lewis Macdonald: That is a scientific assessment of the position, to which I will respond.

We are keen to make progress on the institutes quickly, as Mr Adam and others know from previous debates. Members should rest assured that we will introduce proposals as early as we can, when they are ready to be taken to the next stage.

Much activity is being undertaken in the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. At Scottish

Enterprise, the ITIs are an example of how we can achieve commercialisation. As members know, we are undertaking a review of higher education, which will cover that matter. That will present us with a major opportunity to ensure a better strategic fit between the research base and our economic future.

I welcome the debate and the motion. I assure Parliament that we will continue to do all that we can to promote the role of science in education, in the economy and in our overall strategic approach.

Meeting closed at 18:16.

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