

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 20 May 2004

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 20 May 2004

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

Skills and Continued Learning

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-1340, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on skills and continued learning, and on two amendments to the motion.

09:31

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): I am delighted that we are able to mark adult learners week and national learning at work day by debating in the Scottish Parliament the vital issues of skills and continued learning. At the end of this morning's parliamentary business, there will be a tutorial on basic sign language here in our temporary debating chamber. Later today, members may spot learndirect Scotland's mobile learning centre outside the Hub. This afternoon, I shall visit the first fire station in Scotland to take part in national learning at work day and, this evening, I shall present the John Smith award as part of the adult learners week awards in Dundee. That programme of events is designed to highlight the opportunities for adults to continue to learn or to return to learning, which in turn is an important part of our overall strategy to promote skills and lifelong learning.

The amendment in the name of Fiona Hyslop complains that our lifelong learning strategy is somehow separate from our strategy for a smart, successful Scotland. I want to show today that, in fact, the opposite is the case. Growing the economy is our top priority. We have set out clearly what we believe Scotland needs if we are to achieve that. The chief methods of growing the economy, as identified in "A Smart, Successful Scotland: Ambitions for the Enterprise Networks", include improving our global connections, supporting businesses to grow and improving our knowledge and skills. Whatever we do to refresh our enterprise strategy, we will not move away from those fundamental objectives.

We will improve our knowledge and skills in a strategic way, as set out in "Life through Learning; Learning through Life". That strategy, which is precisely what Fiona Hyslop's amendment suggests that we lack, is for delivering knowledge and skills in order to support economic growth. Our lifelong learning strategy affirms that it is essential to continue to invest in developing the

knowledge and skills of every individual, to enhance employability and to equip people for the challenges of the future, thereby allowing them to contribute to Scotland's economic prosperity.

The way in which individuals take up those opportunities and make those contributions will be different in each and every case. For some, it will mean taking the traditional academic route—our world-class universities are ideally placed to support those people. For many others, vocational education and training will offer the best way forward. That is why we are continuing to develop and implement policies that are designed to support vocational skills and learning. The question is not either having world-class universities or being at the cutting edge for training and skills globally. Scotland can have both and that is our aim. For each individual, there is a pathway through the qualifications system that will deliver the greatest value to him or her and ultimately to the economy. Vocational skills are in no sense a second-class way in which to make that contribution.

A skilled work force is a productive one that will enable Scotland to gain and retain a vital competitive edge. If we are to continue to build and retain a skilled work force, we must recognise that adults and young people need the opportunities and encouragement to learn and develop throughout their lives.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): At a reception held last night to highlight national autism awareness week, we heard from a young man with Asperger's syndrome who wanted to study medicine but did not get a good enough degree the first time round. He returned to university and got a 2:1, which would have been good enough, but it seems that only the first degree counts. He is understandably disappointed and frustrated by that and he has a lot to offer. Will the minister tell us whether it is within his remit to investigate such cases?

Lewis Macdonald: I would not want to comment in Parliament on an individual case. Elaine Smith should take up the case that has been raised with her by writing to the appropriate minister. However, I echo what she says: I, too, have met people who have overcome sometimes significant disabilities in order to make progress, either in the academic sphere, like the young man whom Elaine Smith describes, or in obtaining apprenticeships. It is striking just how many young people have made the effort to do that and have succeeded.

We want all our young people to be work smart from an early age, to enable them to be enterprising and active citizens who can grasp the opportunities that exist for them and come to an early understanding of the demands of the world

of work. That is why we put in place the strategy "Determined to Succeed: Enterprise in Education", to which we are committing more than £40 million over three years. Through that strategy, young people at schools across Scotland will have the opportunity to participate in a range of enterprising and entrepreneurial education and work-based vocational learning throughout their school lives, to embed key messages, skills and positive attitudes about the world of work. That will require a real commitment from the education and business communities to work together, sharing good practice and expertise and ensuring that teachers and business people understand one another's needs and share the opportunities.

I pay tribute to the many business people who have already made that commitment, from the Hunter Foundation's £2 million investment in the programme outlined in "Determined to Succeed", to individual decisions to adopt a school and to create relationships such as that between Kerr-McGee and Portlethen Academy, which I witnessed for myself in Aberdeen a couple of weeks ago.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Would the minister care to reflect on the comments made today by the Confederation of British Industry about the publication of a survey that showed that businesses in Scotland invest less in training than those in any other part of the United Kingdom?

Lewis Macdonald: Fiona Hyslop makes an important point, which illustrates exactly why we want to engage with the business community. The CBI's interest in matter reflects the willingness of many in the business community to address the issue. That is certainly an area in which we wish to make further progress.

We also wish to make progress in enabling 14 to 16-year-olds to develop vocational skills and to improve their employment prospects, by allowing them to undertake courses in further education colleges as part of the school-based curriculum. For that reason, I am happy to accept the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser, which emphasises that point, although I should point out that the policy is already contained in the partnership agreement. We are convinced that vocational learning will increase pupil choice by offering school curriculum flexibility. Vocational learning has proved popular with pupils and employers in preparing young people for the transition to the world of work.

Since the election, we have launched our schools and colleges review, putting pupils at the heart of the review and considering with school pupils and others how to improve school-college collaboration further by managing supply and demand and by ensuring that pupil welfare and support are fully taken into account.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Will the minister confirm that what he means by collaboration between schools and further education colleges is that schoolchildren will have a balanced and planned curriculum and that they will not, as the Conservatives suggested in a debate some time ago, simply go entirely into further education colleges without consideration of a balanced curriculum?

Lewis Macdonald: As Sylvia Jackson says, it is important that we have that balance and that we recognise that vocational skills development is part of a continuing school education curriculum. We must assist children and young people in making the best prepared and informed choices when they come to leave school.

Careers Scotland clearly has an important role to play. We continue to support the pioneering development and implementation of the Scottish credit and qualifications framework to provide all learners with a transparent and accessible guide to the landscape of qualifications in Scotland. Co-operation between Careers Scotland, learndirect Scotland and Futureskills Scotland is directed towards providing a seamless service to learners that allows them to make informed learning choices, and learndirect Scotland has put in place a national database of learning opportunities, which we think will be valuable.

We are also working with the enterprise networks to re-engineer work-based training for young people. We have made good progress with the modern apprenticeship programme—we announced earlier this month that we had passed our target of having 30,000 apprentices in training, two years ahead of schedule.

Fiona Hyslop: The modern apprenticeship scheme is to be welcomed, but does the minister acknowledge that those employers who take on the vast majority of modern apprentices are often in areas such as financial services, where there is less need for skills and less of a skills shortage? Standard Life, for example, is laying off 1,000 staff, which has its own implications.

Lewis Macdonald: It is worth considering who is going through apprenticeships. The largest category of apprentices is in the construction sector, which no one would dispute is a critical area of need for the Scottish economy. It is important that the apprenticeship training that is provided is responsive to changes in the wider economy and in the demands of employers. The work of the further education sector in responding to the changing demands of employers and in ensuring that needs in the wider economy are met is also important in that respect. It is worth noting the progress that has been made with modern apprenticeships. The best of those programmes have achieved high levels of completion and

positive outcomes, but we now want to focus on improvements throughout the range of apprenticeship programmes.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I am glad that the minister mentioned the construction sector, as I wish to highlight one particular problem. I have a constituent in Invergordon who is a mature student. He is a trained marine engineer, but he wants to switch to plumbing. So far, he has been experiencing difficulties in accessing the training. There may be a problem in co-ordination and access for people who would like to acquire skills that are desperately needed.

Lewis Macdonald: I agree with Jamie Stone about the importance of being able to meet that demand. The Executive is working with the enterprise networks and the FE sector to ensure that modern apprenticeships continue to respond to needs and that they improve their response where needs have not yet been met.

The Executive is also working to improve education in the workplace through the Scottish union learning fund. I was delighted last month to launch a round 4 project, led by ASLEF and the rail unions, and, later this week, I will visit a learning day, organised by Unison, towards the end of one of its union learning programmes. That method of supporting learning has allowed us to use trade unions' membership, connections and credibility in the workplace. In many cases, trade unions have recruited employers to the learning process. That is an important contribution. The unions are particularly interested in the introduction in Scotland of individual learning accounts, which will be available from this summer. ILAs are designed to help new learners into learning and to help people to return to learning.

Training and development are also crucial for small businesses. The Executive has begun to pilot business learning accounts to encourage more small businesses to train and develop their staff and we have made funding available for training access points for small companies. We are working jointly with UK colleagues to develop the skills for business network. That will allow all our employers the opportunity to feed into the sector skills councils, which determine the content of apprenticeship programmes. I spoke to the Sector Skills Development Agency before its board meeting in Glasgow on Tuesday and it was clear that it has a strong commitment to the particular needs of the Scottish economy.

With a national learning at work day, in adult learners week, at which people throughout the country can celebrate learning and try out new skills, there is much that we can continue to develop and that will continue to bring real benefits

for individuals and for the wider economy.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The Allander series lecture by James Heckman on skills policies last week was particularly well attended by representatives of the Executive parties. Did the Executive learn any particular lessons from that and does it have any plans to learn more from Heckman's work?

Lewis Macdonald: I was not at the lecture, but a number of colleagues were. As with all the lectures in the Allander series, I understand that that one was thought provoking and useful. There is clearly a debate to be had. The Executive recognises the importance of early-years skills and early-years training, but we also recognise the urgent necessity for Scotland to address skills issues with its existing adult population, as with the existing school-leaving population. The issue is not about concentrating on one generation, but about providing support for skills across the board. Futureskills Scotland is doing good work in identifying the skills gaps in the labour market and in working with the sector skills councils and other training providers to ensure that those skills gaps are filled.

The Executive wants to be ambitious for Scotland and to ensure that our policies work hard to maximise the contributions that individuals can make. However, we also want to ensure that we get the most out of our people in order to grow our economy, strengthen social justice and create a sustainable future for Scotland in the 21st century. I believe—and my colleagues are clear—that the wide agenda of knowledge and skills is critical to achieving that.

I move,

That the Parliament supports Scottish Executive initiatives, such as the Scottish Union Learning Fund, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and the Determined to Succeed programme, to ensure the provision of effective skills and learning opportunities that will allow more people to play a full and productive role in the workplace and in the community; recognises the vital contribution that skills and learning make in helping to stimulate sustainable economic growth and to close the opportunity gap, and congratulates all those involved in the Modern Apprenticeship programme, which has exceeded its target of having 30,000 apprentices in training two years ahead of schedule.

09:45

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I start by quoting an absent friend, Jim Wallace, the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning. I am sure that he is somewhere else today.

Mr Stone: That is well observed.

Fiona Hyslop: It is kind of obvious.

Jim Wallace and I attended an important meeting at a conference in Edinburgh last week about the future of and ambitions for the city. He commented that, although we would like to be ambitious for Edinburgh and for Scotland, ambition without an agenda is a pipe dream. That is my concern in relation to this debate and the Scottish National Party has framed its amendment on that basis. Our problem is that, although we welcome the debate, we think that it fails to face up to the real skills challenges in Scotland and that it is hampered by the lack of an agenda or national skills strategy.

In 1999, the Executive consulted on a skills strategy for a competitive Scotland. Indeed, Henry McLeish led a debate on skills.

Lewis Macdonald: Does Fiona Hyslop accept that "Life through Learning; Learning through Life" places a great deal of emphasis on the skills agenda and constitutes a strategy that links skills to the wider economic strategy that the Executive has set out?

Fiona Hyslop: It is interesting that the minister sets so much store by the content of that document. Why is it that, in the 13 months of the second session of the Parliament, this is the first debate on skills—or, indeed, on higher or further education—that has been led by the Executive in its parliamentary time? As we know, the Executive takes the vast majority of parliamentary time.

In the debate in 1999, Henry McLeish said that, at that point, all the Executive was doing was consulting on an action plan. Little has been done since then. We have a dossier—not a strategy—which is drowning us in descriptors and data, welcome as they may be.

Absent from the debate so far, and certainly from the minister's speech, has been mention of a significant contribution by the Parliament. The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee's report on its lifelong learning inquiry in the previous session was an important contribution to the debate. It had meaningful and achievable recommendations and I regret that the minister did not mention it and, indeed, that the motion does not refer to it. Some of the recommendations have been acted on, but only belatedly. For example, the lifelong learning forum recommended by the committee was established only in December 2003 and, to date, questions about its membership, the frequency of its meetings and the progress that it has made have been met with little information.

Economic growth is supposed to be the number 1 priority, but we know that the Executive is prepared to work only as a dependant within the devolution settlement and so has levers of power only to tinker with the supply side. Against that

background, the absence of a skills strategy will be felt even more acutely.

We should recognise that the debate is taking place in the context of adult learners week, but that should be the subject of a members' business debate. Indeed, I notice that Bill Butler, who is getting a reputation for lodging good motions for topics for members' business debates, has lodged one on the subject. I welcome the fact that the minister will be visiting a fire station this afternoon. I hope that he takes the opportunity to discuss with firemen their real concerns about the current dispute and about safety conditions in the public service.

We must recognise that Scotland's future economic success lies with having a high-skill, high-value work force. However, we must marry that with the fact that, unless we alter our demographics, we will continue to have an aging population. We need to consider whether we plan for decline or halt the decline. That is a real challenge and my colleague Jim Mather will cover the issue later.

Important things are happening. If it can live up to its spin, the fresh talent initiative—whereby skilled people from abroad are invited to come and work in Scotland—is one way forward. It can be matched by the use of the excellent skills and contributions of asylum seekers, the majority of whom stay on to become refugees.

The SNP supports a reduction in class sizes in order to improve basic skills. The late intervention of Professor Heckman in our on-going debate on early intervention is very welcome. I note the fact that it seems to take an American male economist to argue what many female professionals and politicians from all parties have long been saying in Scotland before anyone listens: invest early and reap the rewards for individuals, parents and society in spades later on. I am pleased that the Education Committee, under the direction of our convener, Robert Brown, will be examining early intervention later this year. Population pressures mean that rewarding nursery nurses properly through a national settlement is even more imperative. We must value those who nurture cognitive and non-cognitive development skills at home, because, as Professor Heckman has recognised, that input becomes so important at a later date.

We need to support the Scottish credit and qualifications framework and, rather than blundering into confrontation, we need to encourage collaboration between schools, further education and higher education. The SCQF has attracted international envy. It can meaningfully and materially make a difference, but it needs a cultural evaluation of skills, higher education and further education.

Mr Stone: So far, Fiona Hyslop has taken sideswipes about firemen and nursery nurses and has said that Jim Mather will be telling us about population growth—I look forward to that enormously. Could we please have some serious, concrete policies from the SNP? What would the SNP do? We on the Executive side are doing a lot, so what would the SNP do differently and better? I ask Fiona Hyslop to outline that clearly and succinctly.

Fiona Hyslop: I am just coming on to the relationship between HE, FE and schools, which is essential. I have mentioned smaller class sizes and the importance of early intervention in relation to skills and I have talked about the Scottish credit and qualifications framework. That framework can operate only in a climate of collaboration. I am afraid that the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, who is from Jamie Stone's party, has created a climate of confrontation between universities and FE colleges, which is undesirable. That is exactly the sort of thing that—

Mr Stone: Come on—give us some policies.

Fiona Hyslop: We would want to have co-operation between FE and HE. We would expand access to further education for those who need it. We are concerned that universities are full. The expansion of universities has, in many ways, been contributed to by an expansion of the middle classes. Further education represents the foundations for ensuring added value in the skilled work force and child care policies are required to ensure that people can access it.

Let me deal with one of the issues that the Government can do something about. A university principal recently said to me that a Government should provide legislative frameworks, not legislative cages. The Executive could well learn that lesson in the skills and education debate. The proposal to have Scottish tertiary education providers—STEPS—is an example of where Government policy is inappropriate. Steps is a disbanded pop group; it should not be the framework for taking us forward on an agenda through which we must build contacts between universities and business. We are putting institutions into a cage, which will prevent them from having the independence that they require to attract global investment and to facilitate the research that they need to do in order to develop business.

Lewis Macdonald: Could Ms Hyslop outline the respects in which she believes universities stand to lose academic independence and choice under the proposals that are being consulted on?

Fiona Hyslop: Nothing that the minister has said publicly would lead me to believe that they will. However, what I have read in the draft

Tertiary Education (Funding etc) (Scotland) Bill and what I have been told directly by university principals within the past 10 days indicate that the bill will unnecessarily provide for ministerial intervention, comparable to the powers under the School Education (Ministerial Powers and Independent Schools) (Scotland) Bill. That would restrict the direction of courses and the control over which courses can and should be run. I say that in the context of the forthcoming bill, not of statements that the minister has made.

I will now deal with vocational qualifications. In August 2003, the SNP suggested that 14-year-olds should have access to further education teaching. I note that the Conservatives refer to that policy in their amendment and that they mentioned it in their conference of October last year. The proposal is also in the partnership agreement. We must recognise the vital role of the General Teaching Council for Scotland. However, it is regrettable that the Executive has been slow to consult and be guided by the GTCS. I refer to the abolition of school codes, for example. If we want FE lectures in schools, to help 14 and 15-year-olds, we have to take the GTCS with us.

I turn now to skills, skills gaps and skills shortages. The number of vacancies in Scotland has increased by 7 per cent and the number of gaps that are hard to fill has increased by 5 per cent in one year. We must recognise what those skills gaps are. Futureskills Scotland has stated that the commonly lacking skills are planning and organising, problem solving, customer handling, teamworking and oral communication.

I recognise that we need construction workers and people with languages—particularly given the recent accession of new member states to the European Union—but, if we are to promote a meaningful, high-value, high-wage and high-skill economy for the future, we cannot forecast here and now which skills will be needed. Professor Heckman's work and the recommendations from Futureskills Scotland of what is required lead us to believe that knowledge of how to learn and how to develop skills will, in the future, be as important as the actual skills themselves.

Workplace learning is vital as part of the culture of continuous improvement and skills change and development. The message from a West Lothian Chamber of Commerce meeting that I attended last week was that the employers wanted young people and staff who knew how to learn and who wanted to learn, which would enable employers to train them with the necessary skills. The ideas of early intervention and the programme outlined in "Determined to Succeed" might help with that, but what is vital is a framework of knowledge of how to learn. The statistics show that the majority of training is provided by external training

companies, rather than by colleges. We need to address that issue.

Many things can and should be done. We should be using the skills of the asylum seekers who want to stay and work in Scotland. We should recognise the fact that skills gaps are often in the soft skills and not necessarily in the hard skills. We should also reflect on the need for a national spatial strategy on skills. The issues facing Glasgow are quite different from those facing the Lothians. In the Lothians, there are skills shortages in the form of a lack of people. In Glasgow, there is not necessarily a lack of people; rather, the skills gap needs addressed there. That must be reflected in policies for investment, which should be covered by the national strategy that we want to be developed. West Lothian College has the fastest-growing student population in Scotland—a nation with a falling population—and is turning away thousands of students, frustrating the employers who need the skills now.

That is what we mean when we say that we need a national skills strategy. It is about addressing the immediate issues, forecasting what we need in the longer term and ensuring that all the Government agencies, schools and HE and FE institutions work together to deliver that strategy.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will Fiona Hyslop give way on that point?

Fiona Hyslop: I am about to finish.

The Presiding Officer: The member is in her last minute, I am afraid.

Fiona Hyslop: I welcome the opportunity to explore those issues, some of which are contentious—we must face up to the age issue, in particular. I look forward to the Executive returning to the chamber to debate its national skills strategy in the future.

I move amendment S2M-1340.1, to leave out from “supports” to end and insert:

“regrets the absence of a national skills and lifelong learning strategy from the Scottish Executive as part of the Smart, Successful Scotland policy; recognises the contribution of the Scottish Union Learning Fund, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, the Determined to Succeed programme and the Modern Apprenticeship programme, but notes that these individual elements by themselves will not deliver the appropriate skills and continued learning requirements for Scotland in the 21st century.”

09:58

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome this morning's opportunity to debate the importance of skills and learning to the Scottish economy. The Executive's motion is correct to identify

“the vital contribution that skills and learning make in helping to stimulate sustainable economic growth and to close the opportunity gap”.

If we are to have a successful economy, we need a properly trained work force. An important element in that is the modern apprenticeship scheme, which, as the motion says, has been a tremendous success. As I am sure the minister will wish to acknowledge, that scheme was established by a Conservative Government, back in 1994.

Notwithstanding the progress that has been made, we still have skills shortages and skills gaps in particular areas. The survey of employers that was carried out by Futureskills Scotland in November 2003 contains some immensely useful information on the views of Scotland's wealth creators. According to the survey, one in four workplaces reported a skills gap. Skills gaps affect 187,000 employers in Scotland, or 9 per cent of the entire work force. Worryingly, just under half of workplaces that were recruiting school leavers thought that they were well prepared for work in terms of their core skills. The good news is that that figure rises to 74 per cent for students leaving FE colleges and to 82 per cent for university leavers.

Of particular concern to employers is the lack of soft skills, to which Fiona Hyslop referred in her speech. By soft skills, the survey meant planning, problem solving, customer handling and team working. All too often, employers find that school leavers are ill equipped with those soft skills. Certainly, most of the employers to whom I speak in my role as my party's enterprise spokesman are looking for school leavers to have basic skills such as the ability to read, write, count, turn up on time in the morning and communicate with customers and other employees in more than just a series of grunts. We also need to remember that 20 per cent of the Scottish work force has no qualifications at all. That is a major gap that needs to be filled if we are to meet our economic potential.

If we are to improve the situation—as we must—the role of the further education colleges in Scotland must be central, and I was pleased to hear the minister refer to that in his remarks. I had the pleasure of sharing a platform with speakers from the Association of Scottish Colleges and the Federation of Small Businesses at the Scottish Conservative conference in Dundee last weekend—and a highly successful fringe meeting it was too. There is no doubt that the 46 further education colleges in Scotland, which deliver education, training and skills to more than 500,000 people every year, are the essential component in delivering skills. The good news is that enrolments at colleges are on the way up and we are seeing increasingly large numbers of enrolments from women, the over-25s and those accessing

courses part time.

Our colleges are responsive to the economy's needs: they help to fill the skills gap by providing courses in areas such as engineering and construction, in which we know that there is demand for jobs. One anecdote comes to mind: we always hear that it is impossible for anyone who lives in a Scottish city to get a plumber, but such has been the publicity about plumbers allegedly earning £50,000 a year that all the plumbing courses are oversubscribed. The market works in response to such situations.

I know from visiting colleges in my region that the standard of education that they provide is high. I was delighted to see last week that Lauder College in Dunfermline was the subject of a superb report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, and I pay tribute to the staff and students whose work helped to achieve that. I have also visited Glenrothes College—which is shortly to merge with Fife College of Further and Higher Education—and Perth College, which provides a huge variety of courses and is an academic partner of the UHI Millennium Institute. Perth College has a number of interesting initiatives. It has an air training centre, and students from all over the world, including a large number of students from the middle east, come to Perth to learn civil aviation, which makes an important contribution to the local economy. I have also been to Angus College in Arbroath. Each of those colleges is a local college, serving its local community and providing an ever-higher standard of access to further and vocational education.

At the moment, it is Scottish Enterprise's responsibility to deliver skills and training. In the past, I have suggested that responsibility should be passed directly to the FE sector, which in practice delivers most of the courses. That would surely cut out a tier of bureaucracy and cost and would allow more resources to be allocated to front-line services. I put that point to the First Minister at First Minister's question time on 20 November last year. He replied:

"That is not a ridiculous suggestion and I am sure it deserves debate."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 2003; c 3476.]

I put the same question to Lewis Macdonald at question time on 25 March this year. He replied:

"I am surprised to hear Murdo Fraser suggest that. We include the enterprise networks in the design and management of apprenticeships precisely because of their understanding of the industrial sectors for which we are training people. All of us who believe that business should influence the training of apprentices, and that such training should meet the needs of the real economy, want to see a continued link between the enterprise networks, the private sector and further education colleges in the delivery of apprenticeship training."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 2004; c 7119.]

All of us believe that, except, it seems, the First Minister, so perhaps the minister would like to clarify what exactly the Executive's policy on the matter is.

Lewis Macdonald: Jack McConnell was, of course, right to say that such matters are worthy of debate. Will Murdo Fraser tell us, as his contribution to the debate, what he would do instead of using the enterprise networks to ensure that training providers are responsive to the business community's needs?

Murdo Fraser: I am grateful to the minister for trying to dig himself out of that hole, because the answer is perfectly simple. FE colleges are already extremely responsive to the needs of the businesses in their communities, as I am sure the minister recognises. The point is that, because they deliver the service at the coalface, they should be responsible for it. Do we need to involve the enterprise networks in taking such strategic decisions and managing the budget?

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I accept that the colleges are closely in touch with business, but does Murdo Fraser agree that, in many cases, there are difficulties with colleges being as well-attuned to business needs as they ought to be and that there is a case for having an organisation, agency or some other mechanism to ensure that the expertise in business is joined with that in colleges to their mutual advantage? That is the issue with which Murdo Fraser has to deal.

Murdo Fraser: That is an interesting debating point from Robert Brown, but I am not convinced that the local enterprise networks are more in tune with the needs of local business than the further education colleges are. However, I am delighted that we are having a debate on the matter, which is what the First Minister said we should have. No doubt we can develop the point further in future.

I was pleased to hear from the minister that the Executive will accept the Conservative amendment. Members will be aware that, in the past, we have spoken up for our Conservative policy of allowing 14 and 15-year-olds greater access to vocational training at further education colleges. A number of such schemes operate already, including one at Angus College, which I have seen in operation. It appears to have been a great success, so the Conservatives would like such opportunities to be increased. That would create a win-win situation, because we have far too many youngsters at school who are disengaged from academic subjects. As we know, we have a high truancy rate and high levels of disruption in the classroom—indeed, I believe that the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers is launching a new campaign about indiscipline in schools today.

I am not suggesting for a minute that greater access to vocational education is the solution to all problems of indiscipline, nor am I suggesting that we should dump all pupils who cause problems in FE colleges, but the simple fact of the matter is that we have pupils who are not interested in academic subjects but who would engage with a more vocational type of learning. Why not give such pupils the opportunity to access more vocational training at FE colleges? That has been tried in a number of pilot schemes, in which pupils are on day release. When I visited Angus College, I saw that the pilot scheme was successful: those pupils who engaged with it had a much higher attendance rate, and their attendance rate at school improved considerably—

Mr Stone: Will Murdo Fraser give way?

Murdo Fraser: I will in a second.

The Presiding Officer: He is in his last minute, Mr Stone.

Murdo Fraser: My apologies.

Mr Stone: Saved.

Murdo Fraser: I doubt it.

The school attendance rate of pupils in the scheme improved considerably because of the reward of going to college daily.

Our proposal would benefit those in school who want to engage in academic subjects and would benefit the youngsters who accessed the vocational training, because it would keep them engaged with education and ensure that they left formal education at 16 not without qualifications, as so many of them do at present, but with a first step on the ladder towards employment. It would also, of course, be good for the economy. I am pleased to hear that the Executive supports the proposal, and I hope that it will roll out such programmes and develop them further.

I welcome the Executive's motion. We require an educated and skilful work force if the Scottish economy is to grow, and that growth will be enhanced if increasing numbers of 14 and 15-year-olds are able to develop vocational skills within the FE sector.

I move amendment S2M-1340.2, to insert after "gap,":

"urges the Scottish Executive to increase the opportunity for school pupils across Scotland to access courses in further education colleges from the age of 14,".

10:08

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I had the pleasure of speaking at the conference of the Borders Adult Learner and Students Association in Galashiels two

Saturdays ago, at which people from all backgrounds and walks of life and of all ages gathered to discuss how to reduce the barriers to accessing adult learning opportunities in the Borders. Learning throughout life is not only about people taking a more active part in the local and national economy, on which I will touch in most of my comments today and which is the subject of the debate, but about self-fulfilment, overcoming personal issues and challenges and overcoming lack of confidence or low self-esteem. Some of the conference delegates with significant physical disabilities were an inspiration to all in having overcome the challenges that they had overcome to access learning opportunities.

Learning, and hence education, is one of the surest ways of making someone free and, as a Liberal, I am delighted that we place such an emphasis on learning and skills. However, I will direct my remarks to the impact of learning opportunities on making people active in the economy, on which the Liberal Democrats in the Parliament have a good and consistent record.

I cannot do that without mentioning a disturbing development in learning in my constituency: Heriot-Watt University's proposal to withdraw the school of textiles and design from Galashiels and relocate it to the Riccarton campus, just outside Edinburgh. It will not surprise members to hear that I am opposed to that, and I am chairing the local group of new ways partners—Scottish Borders Council, Scottish Enterprise Borders, Eildon Housing Association, NHS Borders and others. I am working with Heriot-Watt University and Borders College to seek alternative proposals that would provide strong academic arguments for the Netherdale campus to be developed and grown and which would mean that the campus is financially sustainable. The long-planned joint development between Heriot-Watt and Borders College is a practical and tangible example of the close relationship that we have already discussed in the debate. It could be the basis for a fit-for-purpose centre of excellence for Scotland in textiles and fashion, which are still our seventh-largest export, even after years of trouble within the industry, and the nucleus of a stronger higher and further education platform for the Borders that brings in providers from other universities throughout Scotland and greater opportunities.

The campus is important for that ambition, because it would establish a base outside the immediate city region of Edinburgh. Last Monday, we discussed with Fiona Hyslop the relationship between the Edinburgh city region and the areas immediately outside it. The base would be linked directly to Edinburgh by a new rail link. We would be able to rebuild the brand of the Scottish College of Textiles, which was developed over nearly 130 years in the Borders but which, unfortunately,

Heriot-Watt University has undermined. It is going to be a busy summer.

I return to the subject of the debate. Higher and further education opportunities are at the heart of the economic strategies of the Borders and Midlothian—the area that I represent—and of Scotland as a whole. However, they are not the sole source of developing skills; often the most effective way to develop skills is through direct practical learning experience with employers and colleagues. Time does not permit me to develop that point further, so I will limit my comments to only one aspect.

Despite Midlothian's modest size, it plays a special role in the region's economy. It is a centre for the global biotechnology revolution with an international reputation for research, development and production and it has a growing manufacturing base. However, both the heart of its problem and the key to its success are its people and their skills. Out-migration of young people seeking wider skills, experience and employment opportunities is characteristic of Midlothian, the Borders and, to an extent, Scotland as a whole.

Jim Mather: What steps is Jeremy Purvis advocating that we take to retain skilled people in Scotland, and the Borders in particular, and what confidence does he have that they will work?

Jeremy Purvis: I have absolute confidence. There are positives in Midlothian and the Borders, such as the high entrepreneurialism rate, especially among women, the extremely high standard of schools and the economic strategies of Midlothian and the Borders, which have at their core developing the right skills for the work force, adult learning, getting more people into the labour market and developing wider management and information and communication technology skills. That answers Jim Mather's point precisely.

It is important that when there is growth in the population of Scotland, my area can take advantage of it. The growth figures announced this week will make depressing reading for my friend Jim Mather, who has the odd economic philosophy that only by gaining independence will the Scottish male become more virile and the population grow. The latest figures challenge that.

Fiona Hyslop: As somebody who knows these things, I have to tell Jeremy Purvis that the size of a population is determined by the number of women, not the number of men.

Jeremy Purvis: I defer to Fiona Hyslop's practical experience in that regard.

I am pleased about the work of the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and the strong emphasis on practical, on-the-ground work in the partnership agreement. That has included:

creating apprenticeships for 30,000 people; creating vocational opportunities in and out of school settings for 14 to 16-year-olds; increasing child care provision to allow parents to access learning opportunities, particularly in rural areas where transport issues do not help the situation; and equipping more and more libraries, especially in rural areas, with computers to allow people to access local employment opportunities and provide everyone from silver surfers to teenage youth groups with information on learning.

Something close to my heart as a Liberal Democrat is the radical increase in work on the enterprise in schools agenda. On Tuesday I met the impressive person who is implementing the agenda and who is looking forward to it being rolled out throughout Scotland. I am looking forward to it becoming live in Midlothian and the Borders, because I am convinced that it will work and that it will help to address some of the underlying issues of out-migration in those areas. The Shell LiveWIRE entrepreneur of the year, who is based in Peebles in my constituency, was inspired as a pupil by Tom Farmer of Kwik-Fit fame. The £40 million initiative on enterprise in schools, which will include annual enterprise activities from primary 1 to secondary 6 and hands-on experience of business and enterprise for pupils in every school in Scotland with partnerships with local businesses, is real and tangible and will work not because it is an Executive policy but because it deals with individuals. While we are opening up opportunities for adult learning and removing the barriers to learning opportunities, it is fitting that in adult learners week the emphasis will be on young people and intervention at the earliest age, which will ensure success for the long term.

10:16

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): As ever, it falls to the Greens to ensure that the issue of environmental sustainability is brought to the chamber. Perhaps others cannot see where it might fit into a debate on skills and continued learning, but we have long said that sustainability should be at the heart of education policy and the same is true for policy on continued learning and the development of skills for work, as well as for work itself.

We are talking about the importance of the development of skills that have broad application such as: the development of independent thought and compassion; the ability to understand and address complex issues, especially in relation to society's interaction with natural systems; an understanding of the vital links that join us all with the natural world; and a sense of citizenship and responsibility. I commend organisations such as

WWF Scotland for their work. WWF Scotland has developed a fascinating set of ideas and tools on sustainability in learning, including something that it has called "Linkingthinking", which is designed to help both educators and learners to develop some of the skills that I have just mentioned and which, in the words of WWF

"aims to provide a learning and teaching resource that encourages a fresh and highly relevant way of looking at the world."

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Would Shiona Baird care to tell us where the documentation and the policies to which the minister referred are deficient in meeting those aspirations?

Shiona Baird: The minister's motion talks about stimulating sustainable economic growth, but I have not heard any reference to anything that could be classed as remotely close to sustainability in the true sense of the word, on which I will expand later.

The Greens support whole-heartedly the kind of approach that WWF Scotland is taking, because it is vital if we are to address serious environmental concerns such as climate change, which is the nub of the issue. As well as the broader skills that should run through all continued learning, more specific skills can and must be developed if we are to move towards greater sustainability. We await eagerly the announcement of the green jobs strategy, which should see progress towards the development of a large number of jobs in renewable energy, reuse and recycling.

If Scotland were to take on a zero-waste policy, we would see a proliferation of exciting and innovative skills in tertiary education, skills training and the workplace. The commitment by our Government to something so radical and yet so practical would send a signal to those in the design and manufacturing industries that they could go full steam ahead with the highly creative process of designing and developing new environmentally sustainable materials and products without the waste that is produced currently.

We have seen the demise of heavy industry in Scotland, but there is now the prospect of a renaissance in cleaner, greener industries. Scotland is world renowned for its engineering expertise, particularly in ship building and the oil industry, and the skills that those work forces have developed over the years must not be lost. The Greens are not the first to suggest that those men and women have highly transferable skills for which the fledgling renewable energy industries are crying out. The Executive must do all that it can to ensure the creation of a strong skills base for the renewable energy industry and to enable workers to transfer their skills as smoothly and

painlessly as possible. We owe that to the workers and to the future sustainability of Scotland's industry in all senses.

Jeremy Purvis: In an intervention in a different debate, one of the member's colleagues suggested that it is Green party policy to renationalise all Scotland's utilities. Would that policy be extended to renewable energy companies?

Shiona Baird: Renewable energy is one of the major utilities in the sense of energy transmission. That was what my colleague referred to, rather than industries such as those that create renewable devices, which I think is what Jeremy Purvis is getting at.

I am concerned by the continuing occupational segregation in the modern apprenticeship scheme, with its consequent impact on pay and equalities. The Executive must be concerned by the segregation in the scheme between traditionally male apprenticeships and non-traditional female ones. The under-representation of ethnic minority groups is equally unacceptable. The Executive must address those issues if it is serious about closing the pay and opportunities gap, otherwise we will be wasting a valuable human resource at a time when industry and business need a skilled and flexible work force.

10:21

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): The ideas that were embodied in the individual learning accounts scheme, which was part of the Executive's and the UK Government's lifelong learning strategy, must be applied throughout the education sector, particularly the further education sector. Before I was elected as an MSP, I took advantage of the scheme and had an individual learning account. People could use them to further their skills through computer courses—I did courses on Excel and a database programme—or to facilitate leisure activities and hobbies, to learn a language or to do Indian head massage. Whatever people wanted, if a course was provided, they could do it. The scheme embodied the type of education system that we need, particularly if it is to be based on a lifelong learning strategy. I want to live in a society in which people have access to education throughout their lives and for all sorts of purposes.

One of the problems with the individual learning accounts scheme reflected the present culture in education. Three quarters of the bodies that registered as training providers were in the private sector and two thirds of them involved only 10 or fewer people in training. Of course, the scheme was closed down, with the suspicion that fraud was taking place. A huge shift has occurred in the delivery of further education and training through

the courses that the minister outlined because 43 colleges in Scotland now have a business, fast-buck or make-money agenda—they simply aim to attract money. Because FE colleges are completely business oriented, colleges compete with one another for money, particularly the money that is ring fenced for the initiatives that the minister outlined. The competition means that colleges do not collaborate or work together, but instead undercut one another in providing the courses that the minister talked about, which aim to fill the skills gap that the minister also mentioned. That is not a productive way forward for education, skills and lifelong learning.

At the centre of the issue is the structure of FE colleges, which are now no more than businesses, rather than education providers for the entire population. As part of the Thatcherite agenda, the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 was introduced, which deemed that 50 per cent of the board members of an FE college must be people from local businesses. There is no stipulation that members of the community must be involved and only one member of the academic staff and one member of the support staff must be involved. Communities must be involved. Young people, people who want to retrain and people who just want education for education's sake must have access to FE colleges, but they do not have a say in their running. Because it is not stipulated in the 1992 act that communities must have a say, boards take decisions about learning programmes that affect whole communities and which result in cuts or campus changes without taking cognisance of what the local community thinks. Examples of that are the Scottish Agricultural College in Ayr and the cuts that are being made at the Benbecula centre, an issue on which all members have been lobbied. The interests of the local community are not represented on FE college boards.

The Scottish Executive must repeal the 1992 act and introduce a different structure. If it does not, how will courses be delivered? The principals and boards do not deliver courses; they are delivered by the academic and support staff, particularly the academic staff. At present, boards in the FE sector are on a collision course with academic staff, whom the Executive needs to deliver the services as part of the agenda that has been set. Since 1992, there have been both compulsory and voluntary redundancies from the Borders to Aberdeen. Next week, the board of Coatbridge College will withdraw the contract of every full-time member of staff and issue new contracts with worse conditions. That is no way to motivate the people whom the Executive needs to deliver courses.

The structure of further education must be changed—it must be inclusive and should not be

based only on a narrow business agenda. If we want the type of Scotland that the Executive is talking about, communities must have a say and those who work in colleges must be better represented on the boards. If the Executive does not make changes, it will have all sorts of difficulties in trying to deliver the bright new Scotland that the minister spoke about.

10:27

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie)

(Lab): A key theme of the minister's speech was that growing the economy is the Scottish Executive's top priority. He said that investing in our people is crucial if we are to meet that goal. Like other members, I do not disagree with either the goal or the importance of the development of skills as a means of achieving it. However, we should disregard Fiona Hyslop's call for yet another strategy document, especially if it were to contain some of the platitudes that she trotted out this morning.

We must be much clearer about what we mean by skills. All too often, when people talk about skills, it turns out they are using the term as a proxy for qualifications, but the two are not identical. Thanks to Mrs Thatcher, thousands of skilled manufacturing jobs were lost in Scotland. The shipyards and engineering industries supplied a range of employment opportunities that are no longer available for my constituents in Clydebank.

I have no doubt that more young people are qualified to enter higher education than was the case 20 or 30 years ago. The qualifications that they now obtain are more numerous and, on the face of it, at a higher level, but looking at qualifications could give a misleading impression of the skills level in the work force as a whole. Because we encourage greater participation in education, particularly higher education, it is assumed that the work force has become more skilled, but boosting the supply of more highly educated or trained employees will not of itself necessarily act as the catalyst for enhanced productivity and competitiveness.

It is suggested that a combination of hard skills, such as numeracy and competence in the use of information technology, and soft skills, such as team working and communication, is vital. A great deal of effort has gone into designing those skills into educational programmes, but the strong drive towards accreditation of skills within formal qualifications disguises the fact that many of the key skills that are supposedly prized by employers are not readily amenable to assessment through written examination. A closer examination shows that, while there has been an expansion of high-skill, high-wage, high value-added work at the top end of the labour market, at the bottom end, the

proportion of people in low-paid, low-skill, low value-added employment remains stubbornly high in Scotland. Particularly in the service sector, many jobs have been simplified to the point at which workers are expected to follow an established set of routines and operations, with little autonomy or initiative expected or tolerated. For example, call centre workers are expected to give programmed responses to each mapped-out inquiry in an environment in which every action is closely monitored, measured and recorded.

The drive for control is not limited to the performance of set tasks. These days, in the retail sector and in many other areas of work, the way that employees look and personal attributes, such as dress, accent and manner, are central to recruitment and training practices. Notions of skill in that context have been devalued, whereas in traditional industries, such as shipbuilding and engineering, skills carried with them real market power and some measure of personal discretion over one's work. Too many employers claim to want skilled people but are unwilling to concede material benefits, whether in the form of a wage premium or increased status in the occupational hierarchy.

In the past, responsibility for developing skills lay mainly with the employer, with educators playing an important but supporting role. Now, employers complain bitterly that there is no ready supply of suitable potential employees—who are educated and trained at public expense—but too many employers take no responsibility at all for developing or even properly utilising the skills of their existing work force.

Employers' reluctance to move from the low-skill, low value-added sector and instead drive up skills and productivity in Scotland is not in their own best interest. Some of them, it appears, are happier to consider outsourcing work to parts of the world where labour is cheaper, rather than accept the role that they should play in developing the potential of the human capital of Scotland.

The progress that is being made in taking forward initiatives on the skills base is admirable, especially the progress on the modern apprenticeship scheme. I applaud the work that has been done by the Government. However, more schemes are not the answer on their own. We need economic growth, which requires a culture change throughout Scotland's business community. Our most successful company, the Royal Bank of Scotland, is leading the way by recognising the importance of the skills of its work force in ensuring its continued business success.

We need organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors to take more responsibility for developing their workers' skills, to value more highly their employees' skills, to give their

employees opportunities to use those skills to the full, and to gear their activities towards the high-skill, high value-added end of the market, rather than the low-skill, low value-added end of the market.

Business and Government must do more for those who are presently excluded from employment, as well as for employees. For nearly 10 years I have been an unpaid director of the Wise Group, which has a successful track record in getting unemployed people into work. The fact that unemployment is much lower than it was 10 years ago is welcome, but the barriers that face too many of our people in securing jobs and in maintaining themselves in employment have not come down.

We can and must do more if we are to narrow the opportunity gap that is a blight on our nation. That will require joined-up thinking followed by co-ordinated action to achieve what we all want—a prosperous, inclusive Scotland in which people fulfil their potential and are appropriately rewarded. That is not just a task for Government; business has to play its role, and we have to hold it to account, as we hold Government to account.

10:33

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I apologise to the chamber and the minister as I had transport difficulties this morning, hence my lateness.

As others have said, adult learners represent a wide range of people in age, ability and ambition. Some of them want to retrain to enter other professions, as I did at 40. When I meet adult learners, I see the difficulties that I faced in looking after a family at the same time as retraining. Some people simply want to get on to the education ladder for the first time, having missed out. I was on a panel that faced questions at an interesting meeting during the 100 learners' voices event this week, at which the issue was raised of adults with undiagnosed dyslexia who missed the boat first time round at school and who did not get to college. When the minister sums up the debate, I would like him to address the problem of diagnosing adults with learning difficulties. Adults with such difficulties who are diagnosed later in life find out that they were not really stupid at all; they just have problems that were not diagnosed.

People sometimes undertake adult learning to learn to tap dance. Whatever they do, it makes them happier, cheerier people. I have made the Presiding Officer smile; that is lovely. I am not going to make Jeremy Purvis smile in a moment. I heard all his stuff about Heriot-Watt University, which was all very worthy, but his colleague Jim Wallace, the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong

Learning, told me that he will not lift a finger to help Heriot-Watt if it has financial difficulties.

Jeremy Purvis: I anticipated that Christine Grahame would make such a comment, since I read the same in a headline in the local papers a couple of weeks ago. Can she indicate whether there are any circumstances in which she would work with the constituency member and the local agencies to challenge some of the Heriot-Watt assumptions to try to achieve a solution, rather than always seek the negative side of every single issue?

Christine Grahame: Oh dear, dear, dear, dear. I am quite happy to work with members. In fact, for at least five years I have worked with people from all parties to achieve a Borders railway. That railway will lead to major regeneration of the Borders economy; it is not simply a transport issue. Jeremy Purvis is being rather prickly.

I agree that Borderers have skills, but they are not rewarded for them. Their average earnings are £81 per week less than the rest of Scotland. Just 26 miles up the road from Galashiels, in Edinburgh, average earnings are £170 per week more than those of Borderers. There is not a lot to keep people in the Borders if they can live in Edinburgh and earn an extra £170 per week.

I also went to the Borders Adult Learner and Students Association—BALSA—conference. I think that I was on after Jeremy Purvis, although the organisers did not have us on the platform at the same time—I do not know why. The people I met were very interesting. The problems that were raised were the same as those raised by the Adult Learners Forum in Edinburgh—ALFiE—and at the event that I was at this week. The issues are simple. For example, child care is one issue. Another issue is adult care, because some people who look after adult members of their family cannot get respite so that they can do some simple studies. There are funding and support issues, and transport is a huge issue, particularly in rural areas. If someone in Hawick wants to study in Galashiels and has to get the bus, they find the services irregular and expensive. There are also contact issues. In rural areas, where people are spread out, one does not know who the other adult learners with the same requirements are. I do not know if it exists already, but I would like the minister to consider establishing an e-index or catalogue of organisations that can be accessed, updated, reviewed and audited, so that people can tap in and see what organisations exist in their area—or anywhere in Scotland—and what their remits are.

Lewis Macdonald: I know that Christine Grahame was not here for the initial speeches, but she should be aware that there is a national learning opportunities database, which learndirect

Scotland provides, and which should provide—

Christine Grahame: I thank the minister for that information. Are organisations such as BALSA on the database?

Lewis Macdonald: I can check that.

Christine Grahame: I can check for myself, now that the minister has been kind enough to tell me about it.

I refer the minister to the interesting document “A Bill of Rights for Adult Learners”, three points in which I will raise because they are important. The document states that adult learners should have the right to

“education which is relevant to their lives”

and which addresses

“their needs, interests, concerns and motivations.”

Education should come from the grass roots up. Adult learners should not be talked down to. They should

“be involved in the formation of adult education policy at local, national and international levels.”

That is incredibly important, because adult learners know the issues that they want to address, but they do not feel that they have access to policy, or even to MSPs.

Finally, as I have said already, there should be

“structures of social support ... dependant care, childcare, travel costs and other financial assistance.”

Those are practical solutions that can change people's lives and the lives of those around them.

10:38

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I start by making a point, to which Fiona Hyslop alluded, on the work of the former Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, on which I served, and the report on lifelong learning that took us well over a year to compile. I am extremely disappointed by what has happened to that report, because it has been placed on the back burner. Many of the issues that have been mentioned were the subject of extensive investigation when we were producing the report. The strength of committees is always being promoted in the Parliament, but the lack of continuity between the former Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee and the current Enterprise and Culture Committee—I mean no disrespect to members of the current committee—is a great pity. No members who served on the former committee are on the current committee. The electors had their say in relation to Mr Andrew Wilson and Mr Brian Fitzpatrick, but lack of continuity does not serve the committee system well, particularly when such an extensive piece of work has been done.

Lewis Macdonald: I am surprised that Mr Mundell does not recognise the work of the committee within the body of the lifelong learning strategy, which was produced in response to the report to which David Mundell and Fiona Hyslop referred.

David Mundell: I recognise that individual aspects of the committee's work have been developed. Overall, however, the committee's report does not provide the backdrop that the committee envisaged in relation to the future development of lifelong learning.

The very issue that Des McNulty raised about the structure of employment in his surprisingly good contribution—although it had a slight anti-business bias that I did not take to—was one of the issues that the committee looked at. We found that we were moving to an employment structure with a number of highly skilled jobs at one end of the spectrum and that, under the existing structure, there are a number of jobs that do not require many skills at all. We found that a process of deskilling was taking place and that we needed to look at the corporate culture that led to that environment. Much of the academic evidence that we took was to the effect that the companies that pursued that approach did not prosper in the long term because it is not a good, long-term corporate strategy to deskill the work force. The evidence was that we needed a major cultural change and debate on those issues and that it was no good for us to say simply that we must increase everybody's skills only to find that the jobs relevant to those skills did not exist. That important point was raised in the report, along with many others.

Des McNulty: My comments were not anti-business in any sense. My point was that, if we are to have a meaningful and effective skills strategy, that strategy must engage business. We need to achieve a culture change, particularly in those businesses that have not seen the light and aimed for high skills and high value. That is the direction in which Scotland must go.

David Mundell: It is indeed the case that we must engage business, but we must not lecture business. It is important that we get the balance right, as Murdo Fraser alluded to in his opening speech. That balance has not necessarily been delivered in the past, for example by the enterprise network.

As a member of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, I was always a strong advocate of the view that we should not try to force young people into higher education, or lead them to believe that they must go into higher education, immediately after leaving school; that is the right choice for some people, but it is not right for everyone. The committee report highlighted the benefits of part-time study, undertaken either in

the work environment or by returning to study later in life when some softer skills have been gained, such as common sense, which, like the term "skills" itself, has a multitude of meanings. We must readdress that issue.

For once, I do not agree with Christine Grahame, because I think that Jeremy Purvis has done a good job of trying to move the former Scottish College of Textiles forward, in liaison with Councillor David Parker, who is the leader of Scottish Borders Council.

Christine Grahame: The point that I tried to make was that the Liberal Democrat Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning has not entered the fray to support the important marriage between the college and Heriot-Watt University.

David Mundell: Ultimately, if there is no resolution and political issues come up, I am sure that I, Christine Grahame and others will raise them. However, in the first instance, we should support Jeremy Purvis's efforts to advance the debate. I also hope that there will be universal support for making progress with the Crichton College campus in Dumfries, which the minister has visited. The Crichton campus is a victim of its own success, in that it is constrained by the issues that cut across further and higher education. That is why I hope that the UK Higher Education Bill will provide an opportunity to resolve some of the funding problems in institutions that offer both further and higher education courses. There is no doubt in my mind that the bringing together of further and higher education, not in the sense of a merger but in a working relationship, is absolutely key to the development of lifelong learning in Scotland.

10:44

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I start with the issue that was raised by Fiona Hyslop and David Mundell and to which the minister responded. It was good that the work of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee influenced the Executive's lifelong learning strategy document. However, we should look at how we operate to try to become more effective.

At present, Parliament rides one horse and the Executive rides another, although they occasionally meet in the stable. We do not co-operate properly. If we had a system in which committees, ministers and their civil servant advisers met perhaps four times a year to have sensible discussions—not question-and-answer sessions, which have their uses but are limited—we could harness the different energies and knowledge to allow everyone to learn from one another. Without meaning to criticise the minister, I think that that idea should be considered.

We must also get the various branches of Government to co-operate better. Several head teachers of secondary schools have told me that, if they co-operate sensibly in the interests of a pupil to help that pupil to attend part time at a college and to gain some qualifications, those qualifications count for the college but not for the school. Although we have reduced the importance of league tables, they still exist. The school should get some credit for the pupil's performance as a student, otherwise, there is an incentive for the school to try to keep the pupil in school where they might follow courses less effectively than if they were at college. The young person might be better to leave school entirely to attend college at the age of 16. Such bureaucratic impediments to sensible co-operation should be addressed.

I was taken with the point raised in the report by the former Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee about the importance of business and soft skills. Employers find it increasingly difficult to work with young people who can communicate with their computer, but not with another human being. Our education system produces more and more people like that. We have to reverse that trend and ensure that, as well as being technically competent, people are socially competent and able to work in teams.

The old idea of having lots of team games is pooh-poohed in some quarters, but playing in an orchestra, participating in a dance group, or doing anything that teaches people to co-operate with others is valuable. Even going to a youth cafe where people socialise is a good idea. Modern life seems to discourage such group activities, but they should be part of the enterprise agenda.

I was recently taken with the work done by an organisation called—I think—Scotland UnLtd. That organisation has inherited—if that is the right word—quite a lot of money from the national lottery, which it gives out in small, one-off grants, usually of £2,000, to one, two or more people who have a nucleus of a good business idea. The money gives those people living expenses and therefore time for two or three months to develop their idea fully. The Executive could look at giving that idea more support so that skills can be married to business enterprise and more people can start their own businesses.

For whatever reason, we retain the idea in modern Scottish culture that we should work for somebody else, which might be the Government, the council, the Parliament, a law firm or whatever. The idea, in which the Americans believe much more, that life is about doing one's own thing and building up one's own little business, does not exist strongly enough here. Such ideas are extremely important and we should support them as well. I hope that the ideas that I have set out

will find favour with members.

10:50

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to participate in this morning's debate. In yesterday's debate on the marine environment, I said that sustainable development was the most important principle that the Scottish Parliament had to take into account. Perhaps I am taking a slightly different tack on this issue from that taken by Shiona Baird, but I feel that having the necessary high-quality skills is one of the most important parts of the sustainable development agenda. In fact, Des McNulty—who unfortunately is not in the chamber at the moment—said as much in his speech. Although Shiona Baird's other points were well made, she could have stressed that a little more.

The Executive should be congratulated on its holistic approach to lifelong learning to ensure that we continue to grow the Scottish economy. Indeed, the Parliament has witnessed the Executive's commitment to providing greater opportunities for a range of people. For example, in my constituency, pre-school provision for the under-fives has both helped children's education and allowed their parents and guardians to go back into training while, at the other end of the spectrum, people who are over 65 are being catered for. Extra support has also been given to information technology.

Certainly, Scotland's demographics dictate that our economy must grow faster to provide the resources that will sustain the quality of life that we all hope to have. The economy should also be able to provide resources that would allow some of our people to engage in the learning environment if for no other reason than to promote knowledge and personal development. That important point emerged in the recent consultation document on the review of tertiary education and research in Scotland, which also covers further and higher education funding. We must strike a balance between ensuring that certain academic work is undertaken and ensuring that the needs of the Scottish economy and the Government's priorities are met. I know from conversations with university principals that they have concerns about the consultation document. I hope that the minister will repeat the message that he and the First Minister have continued to give out that the principals do not have any such cause for concern; I also hope that he will give an assurance to meet them to discuss certain issues.

However, we must recognise that the diversity of learning provision goes beyond the higher and further education sectors and reaches into our communities. Much has to be done to co-ordinate funding streams and the work of all learning

providers to maximise investment in future skills. I agree with the view that, if we are to make the most of the substantial investment in lifelong learning, we must have a common funding platform that is responsive and relevant to the learning provision that our economy requires. As such a platform needs resources to deliver quality learning and research, I will welcome any additional support for knowledge transfer from further and higher education to business and for partnership working between the sectors to commercialise the learning and research that those institutions carry out. For example, the University of Stirling and Scottish Enterprise Forth Valley have been working very hard in that area. However, any funding platform should encompass opportunities to upskill and reskill our traditional industries as well as our private and public services. In that regard, we should take on Des McNulty's important points about how the Royal Bank of Scotland is leading the way in the area of continuing professional development.

Progression through learning and vocational skills training can be achieved only through collaboration between providers. However, such an approach should not be confined to the tertiary education sector. Instead, greater recognition should be given to informal community learning environments. From talking to people at the adult carers education—or ACE—project learning centre in Cornton, I know that many of them realise that if they had not gone back into some sort of training within their community they would not have been able to take up any lifelong learning, further education or job opportunities.

I have some concerns about the comments that have been attributed to the chairman of Scottish Enterprise on shifting the agency's focus away from supporting regeneration initiatives and skills training. Although it is understandable that Scottish Enterprise would want to focus purely on economic development, focusing on training and skills provides the opportunity to revitalise our skills base, particularly in communities that have the most need. I hope that his remarks will be clarified.

It is necessary to plan for the opportunities that will stem from major infrastructure projects in Scotland. At a recent meeting of the Local Government and Transport Committee, I asked about how the different Scottish Executive departments were coming together to ensure that the necessary skills were in place to allow roads, schools and other projects to progress in a planned way. At the time, Nicol Stephen gave a commitment to look into the matter and report back to the committee.

In closing, I could provide various examples from my constituency, such as the Playhaven

project, that illustrate how early intervention is allowing families to get back into training. I could tell the chamber about schemes such as Employability Stirling that allow disabled people to develop skills and secure jobs. Moreover, a lot of good work has been undertaken jointly by Stirling Council and other colleges, particularly Clackmannan College, with which the council has just won the prestigious UK beacon award for construction skills.

I whole-heartedly support the Executive's holistic approach to skills and training and its inclusion of all the sectors that are involved.

10:56

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

One of the Scottish Executive's five goals for its lifelong learning strategy is to create

"A Scotland where people have the chance to learn, irrespective of their background or current personal circumstances".

Last week, I had the privilege of meeting Jewel and Esk Valley College staff at the Milton Road campus to hear at first hand about what they provide for people who are seeking to recover from mental illness or to move on in their lives despite recurrent mental health problems. The integrated curriculum services staff to whom I spoke, who are led by Ruth Hendery, were very much in the business of delivering on another of the Executive's strategic goals: to create a Scotland where people have the confidence and skills they need to participate in society despite all the difficulties they might have to overcome. I want to highlight some of the issues that emerge from delivering learning opportunities to people who have mental health problems and to point out some of the shortcomings that constrain college provision. I hope that ministers will address those shortcomings.

It should not take much imagination to realise that mental ill health raises significant barriers to learning. For example, people who suffer from such ill health might have low self-esteem, might lack confidence and might have a fear of being stigmatised in a college environment if symptoms recur or if their medical history is revealed. They might have dislocated lifestyles and have very real financial difficulties, or they might be struggling with the side effects of medication, with a lack of concentration and with a reduced capacity for retaining information.

In such circumstances, access to education services more often than not requires the active intervention of referral agencies, no matter whether they be national health service rehabilitation teams or local and national voluntary organisations. Referrals must be appropriate; they

must take place at the right level, at the right time and in the right place, which inevitably requires that a range of services be available.

Additional support to overcome barriers to learning must be both comprehensive and holistic, which means that there must be close working relationships between the referral agencies and education providers. That poses a real challenge to the effectiveness of joint working. Although such issues are undoubtedly difficult, I sense that there is great willingness on all sides to tackle them and to assist people who are either recovering from or managing mental ill health in getting back into productive lives.

However, a big problem remains, which requires ministerial intervention and policy change. The current funding mechanisms need to be modified to allow students who have additional support needs to be accommodated without displacing mainstream students from college courses.

Currently, colleges have little room to expand dedicated provision for people who have additional support needs, or to provide education as part of rehabilitation. The on-going capping of growth throughout the college sector has led to an excess of demand for places. Priorities determine that those who are furthest from entering the labour market will be less likely to receive a service, as colleges are steered towards their core business of delivering vocational training. People who are recovering from mental ill health invariably need more pre-vocational training in preparation for job-related courses. Moreover, time means money, so colleges are under pressure to make courses shorter and to leave more material for students to cover through independent study. Again, that tends to disadvantage the client group about whom I am talking, who tend to need more personal tutorial support.

Although additional funding for students with additional support needs covers the extra costs of small classes, the overall budget remains limited and growth of such provision could take a disproportionate share of the budget. Colleges could be in the invidious position of having to choose between funding one student on a discrete course and funding two students on a mainstream course. Needless to say, colleges invariably address the needs of the many rather than the needs of the few.

There is a clear case for reform. Colleges that have the skills to work with partners in their own communities should be funded to provide discrete provision for people who have mental health problems, who perhaps need more time and support if they are to achieve their learning goals and become ready to undertake programmes of vocational training. I would be grateful for a commitment from the minister to addressing that

matter.

11:02

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate, especially because it is adult learners week, as the minister and other members mentioned.

A strong and growing economy is the essential prerequisite for a progressive Government whose primary objective is the construction of a society that values all its citizens equally and affords them the opportunity to realise their full potential. A successful economy to which all can contribute positively is the essence of a just society. The Scottish Government believes that to achieve that goal it must invest in the people of Scotland, who are our country's greatest resource, by promoting a culture in which learning and the development of skills are seen not as the province of the young, but as a lifelong right for all.

That approach is correct and necessary. My experiences as an elected representative in Glasgow during the Tory years of decline have taught me how vital the Government's strategy to provide meaningful skills and lifelong opportunities is for the people whom I represent. As a former teacher, I know that a modern and properly-resourced education system—primary, secondary, tertiary and work-based—plays a vital part in the development of the intellectual possibilities that lie in all our people, young and old.

The Government has initiated a number of schemes that are having a positive impact; I will highlight some examples. The enterprise in education strategy was launched last year and states:

"We want all pupils in primary and secondary schools to enjoy enterprise activities that encourage a sense of responsibility, recognise strengths and achievements and contribute to their development."

The strategy has the complementary objective of providing pupils with access to workplace training and an understanding of the day-to-day running of a business. Those worthwhile and necessary ambitions are supported by Executive commitments that

"Every pupil from P1 through to S6 must have an entitlement to enterprise activities on an annual basis"

and that

"All pupils over the age of 14 must have an opportunity for work-based vocational learning linked to accompanying relevant qualifications."

The Executive's enterprise in education initiative is indicative of a coherent, rational approach that quite correctly seeks to provide our young people with improved understanding of the challenges and opportunities of the world of work.

Other worthwhile initiatives seek to support a lifelong culture of learning and skills acquisition. There has been record investment in education by the Scottish Government; education spending in 2003-04 topped £5 billion for the first time, which represents £1,000 for every citizen of Scotland. However, the Executive was right to recognise that some young people's financial circumstances prevent them from taking advantage of the opportunities that are afforded to them at school. That is why I was delighted when the Government announced in March that education maintenance allowances, which have been successfully piloted in four areas, will be made available nationally. EMAs will be rolled out during the next four years and will provide financial support of up to £1,500 per year to encourage students to stay in education when their compulsory schooling ends.

The Tories have quite disgracefully, but not unexpectedly, called the EMA a bribe. It is not a bribe; it is a sensible investment in the future of young people and of Scotland and I welcome it.

Murdo Fraser: Is the member aware that there are concerns about EMAs, not just among people in my party but among many people in the teaching unions, who fear that the allowances will create two tiers of students in classrooms and in further education colleges?

Bill Butler: I am a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland, so I understand that concern, but my union is not always right; in this case it is wrong.

The Scottish union learning fund is one of the successes of recent years and has led to the creation of a network of learning representatives, who point the work force towards learning opportunities and negotiate with employers to make opportunities available. The continuing success of the fund is a positive sign of progress.

Time prevents me from doing more than mention the continuing success of the modern apprenticeships programme—as a result of which more than 31,000 apprentices are in training throughout Scotland—the good work that is being done to promote lifelong learning by Anniesland College in my constituency, and the creation of the new Yoker community campus, which should be ready to provide skills and training opportunities for local people in just under one year's time. Such developments characterise a strategy for skills and continued learning that is rational, practical and effective. On that basis, I commend the motion to members.

11:08

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Yet again, the discussion of education and lifelong learning has provoked some consensual

debate. I recall that in the first parliamentary session there was a rare opportunity to witness three—if not four—parties supporting a Conservative motion that called for more action to provide technical and vocational education by bringing schools and colleges together. The minister said that adults and young people must have the opportunity to learn and to improve themselves. Who could disagree with that? The Conservative amendment has been accepted and there are consensual stirrings in Parliament, despite the best attempts of Frances Curran and, a moment ago, Bill Butler to create discord. I do not think that their arguments will be generally accepted, however.

Robert Brown: Does Brian Monteith accept that one reason for the consensual nature of the debate is that the Tory amendment is, in essence, in the partnership agreement, and follows the Liberal Democrats' manifesto that is currently being consulted on?

Mr Monteith: No doubt Robert Brown will invite us to be part of that partnership agreement—although, of course, we would prefer to displace that partnership, rather than be part of it.

Despite the lack of a consensual view from Bill Butler, I did not hear it suggested that the Tory move to incorporate FE colleges and take them away from local authorities should be reversed. Instead, what we heard concerns better management of the system that the Tories brought in and further improvement of modern apprenticeship schemes. We do not hear a radical challenge from the socialist left.

This sort of debate must make Rab McNeil tear his hair out. We do not have Stewart Stevenson getting up and telling us how his experience of working in an abattoir related to the debate on FE colleges—or his experience of working on nuclear fission in a laboratory, or his experience of working as a bus conductor. At times, the debate has verged on the somnambulist; no doubt I am contributing to that.

In a Stewart Stevenson sort of way, I will not declare an interest but I will declare experience. I was a consultant to the General Teaching Council for Scotland for six years and a consultant to Edinburgh's Telford College for some three years. As a result, I have an interest in the matters that we are discussing, and I was invited to what was called a "strategic dinner" at West Lothian College just the other week. As members may imagine, I am all in favour of strategic dinners. I am also in favour of tactical dinners and, in fact, any dinners that come my way.

At that dinner, a very interesting discussion took place on registration of lecturers with the GTC; I would like to raise with the minister some serious

points about partnership between FE colleges and secondary schools. To teach in schools, one requires GTC registration; but to lecture in FE colleges, such registration is not compulsory. If we start having pupils in schools being taught—or lectured, if members prefer—by FE staff, those pupils will no longer be learning from GTC-registered teachers.

Fiona Hyslop: I listened carefully to Murdo Fraser's speech. His proposals under Conservative policy would be for pupils to be taught in colleges, as opposed to being taught in schools by college lecturers. Does Brian Monteith see this as a two-way process? Does he agree that the GTC has an important role to play if we are talking about lecturers coming into schools?

Mr Monteith: Yes, I see it as a two-way process; the birth of higher still made it almost inevitable that it would be a two-way process. Although it will often be easier if pupils travel to colleges for certain subjects, there will undoubtedly be times when managers of schools and colleges will recognise that it is easier for the lecturers to go to the schools. However, although more than 90 per cent of lecturers in most colleges are GTC registered, I make a plea that the enforcement of registration be resisted—not because we want to break the tradition of having GTC-registered teachers in schools, but because we should acknowledge that a real benefit can be brought to teaching by people who are actually in work and training.

The principal of Jewel and Esk Valley College mentioned to me the example of plumbing—a subject that is dear to all our hearts once or twice a year when things go wrong at home. Of course, more people are going into plumbing, but there is a real problem in attracting people to lecture in or to teach plumbing. Because of the high salaries in plumbing, it is hard to get people to come into colleges as teachers, although it is certainly possible to get them to come as students. We cannot expect that people who are qualified in plumbing will necessarily wish to gain teaching qualifications so that they can get GTC registration before passing on the benefit of their experience to students.

I do not necessarily expect the minister to give an answer on this right now, but I appeal to him to consider the point. If we are to get the blend right and have high-quality teaching and lecturing, we must bring in people who have experience in particular jobs. Practitioners can pass on the benefit of that experience, so we must ensure flexibility in the delivery of teaching. That is all I am asking: I am not saying that I have the solution, but that that is the sort of thing the Executive should consider with college administrators and business leaders.

There may be a way round the problem: if people have a particular professional qualification in the subject that they will be teaching, we may be able to accept—as long as they do not teach for more than a certain number of hours—that they would not need GTC registration. We should consider such ideas while colleges and schools come closer together to provide necessary vocational skills. If we get stuck on details, we risk bringing the whole system down.

11:16

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): Brian Monteith spoke of consensus. Did I detect a new policy for his party? Is he hoping to replace the Liberal Democrats in coalition with Labour? That is an interesting concept.

Far be it from me to introduce a discordant note, but I must. We have been talking about lifelong learning for all individuals. It is a great pity that that strategy is not being implemented. What is actually happening is this: if anyone wishes to embark on a computing course at their local college they can, through an individual learning account, qualify for a grant of up to £200 to help with costs—unless, of course, they happen to be 65 or over. People who are 65 or over do not qualify for the ILA grant, which is despicable. It is ageism and it must be stamped out by the minister or by anyone else who has any authority in the matter. Jeremy Purvis talked about “silver surfers”; let us give those people opportunities by giving them the grant that is available to everyone else. We should enable them to become silver surfers if that is what they want to do. It is totally unacceptable for this Parliament to allow ageism and it must be stamped out.

Brian Monteith spoke eloquently about the shortage of skills. That subject is dear to my heart, too. We all know that the skills of engineers, plumbers, bricklayers, plasterers and joiners are not being taught to the younger generations. We have a vast pool of well-trained and skilled people in all those disciplines; all we have to do is give those people the opportunity—probably part time because, unlike me, many people do not want to give up their retirement—to impart to the youth of the country their skills, which have been hard earned over a lifetime. That would be to everyone's benefit.

We have a shortage of houses all over the country, and we have the skills of all the retired people out there. I see nothing wrong in the Executive authorising every council to bring such people in part time. Every council could be made to hire young apprentices and to pay skilled part-time bricklayers, joiners, electricians, plumbers and so on to teach the young people in a practical environment rather than in a classroom. We could

build houses in every local council across the country. Twenty houses in each council area could help to deal with homelessness. Half the houses could be sold on the private market and the other half could be rented, so the scheme would be self-financing. It would also give the elderly retired people who would give up part of their time a chance to enhance their miserable pensions. Such chances are always welcome.

We could do something similar with nurses. Yesterday, we talked about agency nurses. I do not know how many members are aware of this, but an agency nurse can cost the national health service £56 an hour if the work is done on the night shift or on a holiday. That is an obscene amount of money; if it is extrapolated over a full year, it is almost as much as the First Minister earns per annum. In spite of that, nurses are being retired at 60, because they are deemed to be too old, even though they have a life expectancy of 84. Many of them would enjoy working, especially in the community. That would take the pressure off the NHS and help to tackle bedblocking, but the Government does not seem to have the vision to do that. All it wants to do is get people to go to college to get certificates. The people about whom I am talking do not need certificates; they have innate ability and knowledge, which they can pass on.

I remember addressing a meeting of 30,000 apprentices who were out on strike 55 years ago. We are now boasting about the fact that we have almost 30,000 apprentices, but back then there were 30,000 apprentices out on strike in the Lanarkshire area alone. We were on strike because our wage was only 19/6 per week, which was less than a pound. I will finish on that note.

11:21

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): I welcome the chance to debate the link between schools and further and higher education, and the Executive's consultation documents, "Building the Foundations of a Lifelong Learning Society" and "A Changing Landscape for Tertiary Education and Research in Scotland". I welcome those consultations because they give us the opportunity to consider the various elements of further and higher education and lifelong learning and to examine closely the purpose of those elements, which is to increase the skills of our work force, and to equip people to gain useful employment and to access lifelong learning—in short, to achieve the goals of "A Smart, Successful Scotland".

In a perfect world, there would be seamless transitions between school, further and higher education, work and on-going skills development.

As young people reach the end of one phase, they should already be getting integrated into the next, which could be either continuing education or work. I am sure that many members, whatever their level of education, will agree that the steepest learning curve they ever faced was the one they faced when they went into their first job, regardless of what stage their life was at when they did that. We must give people the skills to get that first job and we must provide them with the opportunity to develop the skills that they need to get their next job or to progress in their existing job. That applies especially to people from deprived backgrounds, who might not have many of the social skills that are needed for today's world of work or who might not fit the normal, tailored educational model that provides seamless access from one level of education to the next.

The improvement of access to education should not be limited to getting more people into further and higher education. People from deprived areas will not have proper access until more of them can find their way into the more prestigious courses, such as law or medicine. That may mean providing an alternative route to those specialities that does not require one to have done a first degree and to fund oneself through a second one.

There is no doubt that many of our schools, colleges and universities have been innovative in adapting programmes, courses and places of learning to meet the changing needs of communities, the workplace and the Scottish economy. For example, the community FE college that is based at Kirkland High School in Methil in my constituency has recently welcomed its 4,000th recruit, who is an adult returner to work who wants to change her employment opportunities. There are articulation links between a number of Fife's high schools, FE colleges and the University of St Andrews, the University of Abertay Dundee and Napier University.

I commend, too, the institute model that is being developed jointly by Fife College of Further and Higher Education and Glenrothes College, which both serve my constituency, in areas such as engineering, IT and the creative industries. The institute for business and management is to be launched next week and—as Murdo Fraser said—those colleges have just announced their intention to consult on a merger, which would streamline their administrations and the types of courses that they deliver for the benefit of the community and the work force. The fact that all that is being delivered within the strategy of Fife's lifelong learning partnership—which, in turn, is part of the Fife economic forum—represents a clear link with "A Smart, Successful Scotland". I know that the minister is anxious for that model to be developed throughout the country.

I will now deal with the document on tertiary education and the merger of the funding councils, the purpose of which is to provide greater strategic co-ordination and coherence in tertiary education in Scotland. The merger of the funding councils—which has, in effect, already taken place, bar the unification of their boards—is widely welcomed. However, the proposals for strategic direction for institutions and the powers of ministers have generated considerable debate, some of which has been measured and some of which has been—to be frank—hyperbolic. When the minister meets the universities and the colleges, I hope that he will do so with an open mind, and that the final outcome will strike the right balance between providing strategic direction and safeguarding academic freedom, which is a point that Sylvia Jackson made.

Last night, I had the pleasure of attending the premiere of a film in Fife. It had been made by the Fife active care leavers exchange group, which had used, in a graphic way, modern media and acting techniques, as well as lifelong learning opportunities, to show the difficulties that that sector of the community experiences in keeping down a job and getting into further or higher education. It is not just the young people who are in work who are the future of our country; young care leavers are, too. Their skills and aptitudes must be developed.

Scotland's fast-changing economy needs a dynamic lifelong learning ethos. The Labour-led Executive has shown its willingness and ability to make policy in a dynamic way. I commend the Executive's motion to all members of Parliament.

11:27

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): At the beginning of the debate, the absence from today's proceedings of the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning was noted; I am not sure whether that was intended as a snide comment or a simple observation. This week, Jim Wallace is on a trade mission to the Czech Republic and Slovenia—that is why he is not at the debate. It is appropriate to make that point in the introduction to the winding-up speeches, because the opportunities in the new expanded Europe represent the background against which today's debate takes place.

One of the pleasures of being a closing speaker in such a debate is that one has had the benefit of hearing everyone else's good ideas. There have been some excellent speeches, which, in large part, have been consensual. It has been a good, positive debate on a vital subject and has, in many ways, shown the Scottish Parliament at its best. The debate has provided Scottish ministers with much food for thought and much solid progress to

be commented on.

It must surely be the Parliament's objective—perhaps its prime objective—to make Scotland synonymous with education and learning and, in particular, to make technological and entrepreneurial education central to all that. We have no lack of role models, from engineers and scientists to entrepreneurs and philanthropists. Given the angst that we sometimes express in such debates, it should not be forgotten that we have a solid base in key areas—that is exemplified by Weirs of Cathcart in engineering, the superb work of our universities and colleges and our contribution to medical or biotechnological research. We have a large number of good small and medium-sized companies, which in my area of Rutherglen and Cambuslang, for example, are involved in an enormous range of activities. They support home and export markets in ways that I did not know about before I was elected to the Parliament and got the chance to go round some of them.

Jeremy Purvis made an interesting comment, which, although not new, was symbolic. He said that the key to the success of the Borders was the people and their skills. That applies to Scotland generally, as Bill Butler indicated, and it underlies the debate.

Fiona Hyslop made a good point about a national spatial strategy and the differences between different parts of the country with regard to growth and other specific needs, such as those that relate to Glasgow and Edinburgh. However, I was not certain what her position was on the merger of the funding councils; I thought that she came close to saying that she was not very keen on the merger or was biding her time on it. Merging the funding councils is an important strategic decision, which should mean a joint input by universities and colleges to a key and important area.

Fiona Hyslop: I will clarify matters. I do not think that there is any problem with the merging of the funding councils, which is a welcome bureaucratic change. However, there are concerns about the sector's future and the definition of the tertiary sector. There are serious concerns about the detail in the draft bill on tertiary education and the prospects for that sector—Christine May has just made that point.

Robert Brown: That is a welcome clarification. There is a debate to be had about where we should go in that respect and we will no doubt see the outcome of that debate over the next few weeks and months.

Fiona Hyslop seemed to be taken by Professor Heckman's lecture and the point about early intervention, which I think that we all support. In

fact, the Executive has put much emphasis on that, on nursery schooling for three and four-year-olds and on a variety of such initiatives. I hope that Fiona Hyslop does not sign up to a number of what I thought were extremely right-wing assertions by Professor Heckman, not least about the way in which we should fund further and higher education and the balance of funding between different areas. Perhaps she will accept that such things are all-important and that heavy investment in those areas is needed to sustain Scotland's advantage.

There has been much talk about plumbers, who seem to represent a key experience for members. It seems that people can never get a plumber. I have a quibble with the suggestion in the audit that there is not, in fact, a skills shortage. I am not entirely convinced by that, because many people have found it difficult to get people in a number of construction areas. It was odd that Jamie Stone mentioned the matter in his earlier intervention. In the recent past, I have heard anecdotally about a number of employers and employees—or prospective employees—who have said that they could not get people to come and work for them or that they could not get into plumbing opportunities. The problem might relate to structure. Are firms taking on an adequate number of plumbing apprentices? Does the set-up allow people to come into the industry? In short, does the issue relate simply to skills, or is there a wider structural issue that must be considered?

The experience of colleges has been mentioned, and there is an issue there. I went round a number of businesses in my area a summer or so ago and was not surprised to note that successful businesses put considerable emphasis on the need for high-class training and considerable investment in training and expertise. However, there was a considerable question mark over whether that training was always best provided by colleges rather than in house. That came as a surprise to me, because I confess that I am an admirer of the contribution that colleges make. However, it reflects the fact that we sometimes have problems in getting colleges to switch on to the changing markets for skills as accurately as they need to. People who are charged with such matters in colleges may need an overall way of approaching them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): The member has one minute.

Robert Brown: I want to mention one other issue. Shiona Baird talked about environmental sustainability. If there is one thing that is the hallmark of the partnership agreement and the Executive's work, with its emphasis on building green industries and so on, it is the environmental sustainability of what we are trying to do. The

Liberal Democrats in particular have made a significant contribution in that area.

Brian Monteith and Murdo Fraser dealt with a central point when they talked about 14 to 16-year-olds. Young people who are not entirely switched on by schools can be given the opportunity to go to colleges in the meantime, with the school controlling the set-up. That is a significant issue.

Important issues have been raised in this excellent debate, and the Parliament and the Executive have made significant progress. I welcome the motion.

11:34

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): The debate has been useful and constructive and many important points have been raised in it. Adam Ingram, for example, asked the minister to confirm that the interests of those with additional support needs will be properly taken into account. I will be glad to see the minister renouncing and dissociating himself from ageism, as John Swinburne suggested.

I am familiar with the reality that much inward investment has come to Scotland because the Scottish education system has prepared our young people, through advancement on merit, with superb technical qualifications. That remains the position, but we must concentrate on giving priority to areas in which there are skills shortages—Robert Brown has just alluded to that matter. It is ironic that many graduates find it difficult to get a job at a time when shortages exist. That could mean that we should have more students studying in further education and that we should place a less high priority on pushing up numbers for universities.

Our policy is to deal with skills shortages, which is why we seek to enhance the status of the further education sector. We noted with interest the rumours—which we understand have been strenuously denied—that the Executive wants to merge FE colleges with universities, but the point is that FE colleges can be advanced in status without any standards being lowered. Of course, we have the highest regard for FE colleges.

In our view, the Administration's arbitrary concern with increasing university admissions misses the essential point that young people should be able to obtain fulfilment according to their abilities, aptitudes and inclinations. Both university and further education should be seen as important steps towards employment. Indeed, in a harshly competitive world, if certain programmes no longer appeal to employers and potential employees, there is a case for reviewing and updating such courses and qualifications.

David Mundell spoke about the problems that are associated with deskilling and the need for reskilling, as it is obvious that nothing stands still, and Jeremy Purvis raised an important issue relating to the Scottish College of Textiles, which I hope that the minister will consider.

Shiona Baird, Sylvia Jackson and other members referred to the necessity of a commitment to sustainable development. The minister will no doubt reconfirm his commitment to sustainable development today.

Christine Grahame raised the important issues of child care and transport. A commitment on timing for the Waverley line would be universally welcomed.

Brian Monteith pointed out that Conservative policy has been adopted by no less a person than the Prime Minister and, of course, by the Executive. There has been some convergence with Liberal party policy. I welcome the fact that progress is being maintained on further education. Indeed, the fact that the Executive is going to accept our proposal to roll out access to vocational training to all pupils who are 14 or over and who wish to pursue it is a healthy sign. We believe that such a policy is of great importance in the climate of chronic indiscipline in many of our schools. That climate has been highlighted this week by the president of the NASUWT, who called indiscipline

“a serious cancer growing within our schools”

and called for a “zero-tolerance discipline regime”. The problem is no doubt compounded by the fact that many pupils have become disengaged from the academic system and would, in all likelihood, fare much better if they undertook vocational courses in further education institutions.

Dr Jackson: I want to make a point with which I hope the member agrees. In the Labour and Lib Dem partnership document, there is also provision for increasing access from school to further education.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I welcome that fact, which we can build on to produce the success that we need in a competitive Europe. I also welcome the fact that the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning is in the Czech Republic pursuing our interests.

Murdo Fraser and Fiona Hyslop highlighted a problem and focused on skills shortages, which must be addressed. We hope that the minister will say something about the fact that the lack of so-called soft skills among new recruits must be addressed. We welcome the fact that the minister is now giving whole-hearted support to the hugely successful modern apprenticeships scheme, which we introduced some 10 years ago.

Bill Butler referred to the necessity of creating a

culture for learning. I cannot help but recall that, when Einstein was a boy, he frustrated his violin teacher with his lack of aptitude for violin playing, so much so that his teacher said, “Einstein, can’t you count?”

Today, I suggest that learning is for everyone who is capable, including teachers and, in particular, those who aspire to be leaders of the people. I call on the minister to confirm his total commitment to learning for life for all our citizens. I support Murdo Fraser’s amendment.

11:40

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): This has been a good debate, which has properly praised the good things that are being done. Congratulations are due to those who are crusading about the need to acquire skills; developing services, programmes and initiatives; delivering training; and taking the big-hearted route, as Tom Hunter has done with his hard-cash emphasis on building entrepreneurial skills. Congratulations are due, in particular, to those who grasp the opportunity to learn, train and retrain.

However, there is no room for complacency. All other European countries are doing the same as we are and all of them have more power than we have. Further, most of them have a much better track record of population retention. Therefore, we must start any review of skills policy by understanding that inputs and outputs are not the same as outcomes. The outcomes that we need are more people in better jobs; a growing economy; improving living standards that will converge with those of our more successful European neighbours; and an increasing population, especially of young people.

Those outcomes are still some way away. The debate has exposed a lack of strategy on the part of the Scottish Executive or, at least, a strategy that does not pass audit. In response to Des McNulty’s point, Fiona Hyslop and I are not calling for a new strategy document; I think that we pass muster in relation to strategy documents. The Irish academic John Bradley, in his recent Fraser of Allander lecture, compared Ireland with Scotland and said that Scotland had the best documents, but that Ireland had the best strategies and, therefore, the best outcomes. That comes as no surprise, because the components of having and implementing a strategy include resources; macro-targets; comprehensive reporting of outcomes; evidence-led policy scrutiny; constant benchmarking; and evidence-led strategy and policy refinement.

We can see that resources are being made available for each of those elements—we welcome that—but we have no macro-targets. We

have no way of knowing whether, as Christine May said, we have achieved the goals of "A Smart, Successful Scotland." At a recent meeting of the Finance Committee, I asked the Minister for Finance and Public Services whether we should have a small number of firm, open, understandable macro-targets to show how we are doing. His response proves my point:

"There is no point in my setting targets for things over which I have no control or influence. ... it is difficult to set targets for population increase or decrease and for other aspects that are beyond our control; we play our part in such things, but we do not always have the direct levers of control. What happens in the American economy has a huge impact on Scotland, but I do not control the American economy."

We are grateful for that. He continued:

"I am happy to sign up to targets for things for which we are responsible and should be accountable, but the targets must be on things over which we have responsibility and control."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee, 27 April 2004; c 1299.*]

That is amazing—the minister is using the SNP's justified accusation as a fig leaf. He is scraping the bottom of his barrel of failed strategies so deeply that he is scraping into the top of our barrel and using our analysis of his core problem as his defence. While we welcome that honest acceptance of our argument and encourage the minister to dig deeper and take up our solutions, we know that no other minister in Europe would echo his statement. Thus, his position is unsustainable.

On the issue of comprehensive reporting of outcomes, I note that another recent Fraser of Allander lecture was delivered by the Nobel laureate, James Heckman, who used his opening remarks to bemoan, with incredulity, the lack of Scottish data. That leads me to the issue of evidence-led policy scrutiny. Heckman contrasted Scotland with other countries, such as his own, and suggested that we live in an era in which outcome data have never been more crucial to correct and shape policy, because such data supply the irrefutable evidence that intelligently forces policy change. What do we have? No data, no data-fuelled debate and, therefore, less-effective scrutiny. It is no surprise, then, that the Scottish Executive appears to have been doing nothing with regard to constant benchmarking. Not for us the sensible comparison of our results with elsewhere, which would enable us to learn from other jurisdictions. We should be not only learning what programmes and techniques make a difference elsewhere, but highlighting our successful methodologies to help other people and see whether they have ideas that could improve them further.

We need to be more like Andy Kerr and to answer honestly the question of what the

difference is between Scotland and other European nations. That is the fundamental tenet of problem solving, which forces us to a conclusion that might be uncomfortable for some: all the other states have the power to compete. Each of them has the power to build a powerful blend of competitive advantage that combines skills and infrastructure and to create the conditions that compel people, companies, capital and intellectual properties to stay in their home country.

There is, as yet, little evidence of evidence-led strategy and policy refinement. However, Heckman told us that, as with business, without that feedback loop and the constant refinement and reallocation of resources, optimal results will continue to elude us. In effect, he went some way towards bolstering aspects of the SNP's argument that there is a hole in the Executive's economic basket through which real value flows out to other economies. However, Heckman was also able to reach a conclusion that George Kerevan paraphrased in *The Scotsman*:

"the Executive is spending its money in all the wrong places if it wants to maximise results".

The current policies are being delivered in the absence of a strategy that stands up to scrutiny and are producing sub-optimal results, but the current package of policies has an even more fundamental flaw. Many of our trained people are drifting away to other economies, and trained people from other economies who will be welcomed here will tend to be attracted away again to faster-growing areas of the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Many of those people, especially those from the accession states, will want to take their newly polished English and their new skills back to their own country to buy into the exponential growth and asset appreciation that will happen there.

Jeremy Purvis: Jim Mather will have noticed that the Registrar General for Scotland's figures for population growth for 2002-03 show that the number of people coming to Scotland from overseas exceeded the number of emigrants by 700 and that 2,400 fewer people left Scotland to go to the rest of the UK in that year. How does he explain those figures?

Jim Mather: I question all the data that come from the Scottish Executive. For example, the new gross domestic product data suggest to me a company waking up one day and saying, "Let's forget about our failing divisions, such as manufacturing and engineering, and plan the business the way that it is at the moment, concentrating on the divisions that are strong." To do that would be to ignore the resulting redundancy costs, losses arising from lack of appreciation of failed assets, reorganisation costs, loss of credibility with borrowers, damaged share

price and, perhaps, a take-over attempt.

We want a chance to participate in a national upward curve. We want to use our national power and personal competitiveness as a lever to do so.

As always, we return to the core, unresolved problem, which Andy Kerr is now using as his fig leaf: our lack of economic powers. As long as we lack those economic powers and a comprehensive strategy for Scotland, we face continuing national and domestic insecurity about the future. No matter how good things might look in the short term, that insecurity is palpable. More people have to move to find jobs; others have to stay here and take lower-level jobs at a lower level of pay, which widens the income gap; and the population is declining. Surely that is deserving of a remedial strategy worthy of the name.

I support Fiona Hyslop's amendment.

11:49

Lewis Macdonald: Inevitably, Jim Mather's closing speech took us from the issue of skills and training to the issue of the devolution settlement. Of course, the issue before us is not what alterations Jim Mather would like to make to that settlement but how best to use the tools that we have. He asked what is different about Scotland. If he had listened carefully to what business said at the recent business in Parliament event that took place in the chamber a few weeks ago, he would have heard that what is different about Scotland is that we have a world-beating reputation for education and skills. Many people have said that that is why companies choose to do business here. The question for the Parliament and the Executive is how we maintain that world-beating reputation and adapt it to meet the needs of the 21st century.

The vital contribution that skills and learning make to economic growth and to social justice was widely acknowledged in the debate. Much agreement has been expressed about many of the measures that we have taken and proposed to promote skills and learning. However, some members have offered false choices. For example, a choice does not have to be made between improving soft skills and responding to industries' specific needs. We must do both. That is why Futureskills Scotland plays such an important role. Not only has it talked to employers to identify and address skills gaps and shortages, but it is conducting research on core skills and soft skills, which I have no doubt will be extremely useful and will be available to us soon.

A choice does not have to be made between a skills strategy and a lifelong learning strategy. I repeat that "Life through Learning; Learning through Life" offers a coherent and comprehensive

response to the report on lifelong learning that the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee produced in the previous session. When we published our lifelong learning strategy, that marked an important step in meeting the committee's aspiration to make the learning nation a reality. The strategy takes a learner-centred approach and places a strong focus on skills, knowledge and inclusion. Many of its key commitments are aimed at bringing more people into learning and helping them to stay there.

Fiona Hyslop: I appreciate the minister's comments, but will he reflect on the statistics that the Executive revealed today, which show an 11 per cent decline in the past year alone in the number of part-time students who enrolled in further education colleges? In many subjects, such as maths, engineering and technology, languages and education, that decline has been in the number of students following sub-degree courses. Will the minister comment on that worrying statistic?

Lewis Macdonald: The figures that we published today have several features. I am sure that Fiona Hyslop will agree that the clear overall trend remains upwards. The fluctuations in the number of part-time students who undertake higher education courses at further education colleges are nothing new and are not in themselves surprising. We want to ensure the maximum uptake of such opportunities and the maximum articulation from further education to higher education. That is why we have paid close attention to such issues recently.

The learner-centred approach in our lifelong learning strategy will tackle literacy and numeracy issues. We will introduce education maintenance allowances, which Bill Butler mentioned, and we will widen access to further and higher education. We believe that all that will help to redress the balance between those who achieve their potential and those who do not.

We have established the lifelong learning forum to ensure that we have the best advice on implementing our strategy. I am sorry that Fiona Hyslop reported difficulty in accessing information about that forum. There is no secret; it is a body that brings together people from many sectors of business and from learning and training providers. The forum will shortly establish its own website, which will remove any remaining uncertainty on Ms Hyslop's part. It will publish its first report next month and it will meet again very soon. If she wants to know more, she has only to ask.

It is important not to be pushed into a false choice between developing learner aptitude—soft skills, some might say—in the early years and investing in supporting adults and in continued learning. We need to do both. We have sharp

demographic challenges, which have been mentioned. They cannot be met by investment only in the very young or, equally, without improving our young people's skills and investing in pre-school education. That is why our range of policies and pipeline of support for learning are important.

Members have discussed the schools and colleges review and Brian Monteith asked about the GTCS's involvement in that. Great care has been taken to involve the GTCS in the consultation. It was given, and took, the opportunity to publish unedited its response to the consultation. We will continue to work closely with the GTCS and trade unions on how we implement the review of the relationship between schools and colleges.

The governance of FE colleges has been mentioned. It is true that FE boards are required to include members with professional and business experience, as Frances Curran said, but it is not true to say that that experience is confined to the private sector. It is found in the public and voluntary sectors and we encourage colleges to draw on whatever expertise will help them to make the choices that they must make to deliver proper and relevant courses to their students.

It was no doubt informative to debate the roles of FE colleges and the enterprise networks in ensuring that training provision meets the needs of business, but the key is to ensure that all stakeholders have a say and work together. The sector skills network is critical to achieving that. Sector skills councils draw on the expertise of employers and unions to work with trainers and learning providers and to ensure that the training that we provide is fit for purpose.

Modern apprenticeships are a key part of that training and a vital source of skills development for industry. We have placed great importance on the provision of apprenticeships to supply the skills that Scottish industry needs. Murdo Fraser was right to say that a previous Government introduced modern apprenticeships—it had to do so, because it had allowed traditional apprenticeships to wither away. When we passed our target of 30,000 modern apprenticeships earlier this month, that meant that we had increased by six times the number of apprentices in training since 1997. Most of those apprentices are young people, but it is worth remembering that apprenticeships provide an opportunity for older people to upgrade their skills.

Modern apprenticeships have shown that learning and sustainable development go hand in hand. I am delighted to report that the first modern apprenticeship scheme in the United Kingdom for nuclear decommissioning is based at Dounreay. That is another example of the benefit that our

modern apprenticeship schemes can bring to working people in Scotland.

Christine May and others asked about the relationship between further and higher education in relation to the consultation on the bill to complete the merger of the funding councils. The new funding council will not have a central planning role; that will continue to be the role of individual institutions. Like its predecessors, the new council will take a strategic lead on issues such as quality, coherence and new institutional models. The merger is not intended to impinge on academic freedom. The higher education framework that we produced last year made clear our continuing commitment to that academic freedom. In fact, the proposed bill will extend to FE colleges some of the academic freedoms that universities enjoy. We do not intend to change the status of universities or FE colleges.

Of course, learning is not just about further and higher education, important though that is. The debate has—correctly—focused on other sectors of learning and skills provision. We want to create a culture of lifelong learning. We use learndirect Scotland as our one-stop shop for encouraging people into learning and as a broker, through its network of 450 learning centres, to make access easier for all people of all generations. Tomorrow is silver surfers day and will mark the increasing uptake of access to information technology skills that learndirect Scotland has provided to the older generation.

I listened carefully to Adam Ingram's comments on learners with additional needs. He made important points that I am happy to consider and I will respond to him in due course.

Christine Grahame asked about Balsa in the Scottish Borders and ALFiE. Having checked since we had our exchange earlier, I can tell her that they are not listed on the learndirect Scotland database because they are learner forums rather than learning providers. However, the learning providers that are listed in the database will refer inquirers to appropriate sources of guidance, information and support. One of my senior officials will chair an information, advice and guidance delivery group that will meet next week and will consider ways of improving the delivery of learndirect Scotland services to such forums.

The lives of many individuals, even those of quite an advanced age, have been changed by the opportunity to re-enter learning and to learn new skills. Such learning contributes to sustainable development and I have no doubt that our green jobs strategy will identify sectors in which Scotland can prosper industrially and economically and, therefore, sectors in which additional skills will be required. Skills and learning are important for industry and contribute to growth in the economy.

In winding up, I can only repeat my invitation to those members who want to take advantage of some learning opportunities themselves to do so. A tutorial on basic sign language—courtesy of Deaf Action—will be held in the chamber at 12.45 pm, and I hope that colleagues from all parties will take advantage of that opportunity to learn a new skill. I hope that colleagues will also take advantage of learndirect Scotland's mobile learning station, which is at the Parliament this week.

It is clear that the importance of learning and skills is recognised on all sides of the chamber. I welcome the constructive nature of the debate that we have had on the subject today.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): We come to First Minister's question time.

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer—

The Presiding Officer: It would be convenient for the chamber if the point of order could be taken at the end of First Minister's question time. I shall take it at that time.

Carolyn Leckie: It is important that the point is taken at the beginning. Can the Presiding Officer—

The Presiding Officer: No. I have ruled on the matter.

Carolyn Leckie: Can the Presiding Officer—

The Presiding Officer: Order. Will you sit please, Miss Leckie?

Carolyn Leckie: If you refuse to discuss the nursery nurses—

The Presiding Officer: Miss Leckie, will you please sit.

Carolyn Leckie: Why cannot the struggles—

The Presiding Officer: Miss Leckie, I am requiring you to sit.

Carolyn Leckie: If you will not let us debate the nursery nurses—*[Interruption]*—I would rather be outside than inside the chamber.

The Presiding Officer: You are now on a final warning, Miss Leckie.

Miss Leckie, will you now please stand and apologise? As you will not, I regret to have to say that you are guilty of disorderly behaviour. I ask you to leave the chamber.

You will compound the offence, Miss Leckie, if you stay in your seat. *[Interruption.]* With great regret, I have to suspend the meeting.

12:01

Meeting suspended.

12:02

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: Order. I regret that incident. It was not necessary. We could have taken the point of order perfectly adequately at 12.30. When the chair rules, it must be obeyed. *[Applause.]*

Cabinet (Meetings)

1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S2F-880)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The next meeting of Cabinet will discuss our progress towards implementing the partnership agreement to build a better Scotland.

Mr Swinney: In a letter to his staff, the chief executive of Scottish Opera, Christopher Barron, said:

“the Sunday Herald article covers very recent developments, which were only made known to the Board and myself last Friday. The article was a result of a direct leak from the Executive in which clearly the First Minister has been involved.”

Are Mr Barron's comments true?

The First Minister: Frankly, I am a bit bemused by talk of a leak. I understand that the *Sunday Herald* has said that its story was the result of its best journalistic endeavours. I do not want to be disparaging of the *Sunday Herald* or any other Scottish newspaper, but it would not have taken a mastermind to write the story. I understand that *The Scotsman* has been calling this week for an explanation as to how the information got into the public domain. The paper reported on 8 May that the Scottish Executive could pay up to £6 million for the restructuring costs of Scottish Opera. On the same day, the paper reported that the plans for Scottish Opera's future would involve between 120 and 200 job losses.

Last Friday, before the story broke—Mr Monteith has referred to this—*The Scotsman* reported that the Executive was considering a plan that could see

“more than 100 redundancies among its chorus and staff”

and reported that

“the Executive will finance the one-off restructuring”.

In addition, *The Herald* reported last Thursday that the unions at Scottish Opera had said that redundancies would involve anything up to 180 staff losses and that they had talked of Scottish Opera's problem in financing and maintaining the Theatre Royal.

I have a lot of admiration for Douglas Fraser and the *Sunday Herald*, but I think that his article last week was well informed by other newspapers.

Mr Swinney: In that long and tortuous answer from the First Minister, there was no denial of Mr Barron's remarks. If the First Minister is so sure of his ground, why did his spokesman say, “No comment”? On Tuesday, his spokesman refused to comment on speculation; on Wednesday, it was called gossip and, in this morning's newspapers, it

was conceded that there was an off-the-record discussion between the First Minister and the editor and an on-the-record discussion with the journalist. In the light of all that confusion and the damaging charge that has been made against the reputation of the First Minister explicitly for revealing private information about the Executive and the organisation with which it was holding discussions, will he authorise an inquiry into the leaking of that important Government information?

The First Minister: I realise that Mr Swinney has problems almost every week in changing his second question based on the answer that he gets to his first one, but that probably takes the biscuit. All that information was already in the public domain and had been in newspapers, which do not seem to have journalists talking to one another from one week to the next. It is important information that has been discussed widely inside Scottish Opera and the Scottish Arts Council, with the trade unions and with others. What the chief executive of Scottish Opera says is a matter for him and for the board of Scottish Opera. I will not get involved in the discussions that might take place between him and his employer.

No matter what attempts Mr Swinney or others might make to sap the confidence of young Scots in the cultural activity that is now taking place in Scotland and which has been reinvigorated by devolution and the establishment of this Parliament, it will not be possible for him to divert attention away from all that progress, all the awards that are being won and all the achievements that are being made in Scotland. There is renewed interest and activity in our schools and renewed success in our national companies. The national companies of Scotland are doing well. They have to stay within a budget, but they will continue to do well with our support and nothing that Mr Swinney can say and no diversions that are planned will take away from that.

Mr Swinney: The only diversions are those of the First Minister from answering legitimate questions on the issue. I remind the First Minister of what Mr Barron's letter said. It stated:

“the Sunday Herald article covers very recent developments, which were only made known to the Board and myself last Friday.”

The great litany of answers that I got in response to my first question to the First Minister went only up to last Thursday; that was as recent as he could get. The issues mentioned in the letter went to the board on Friday and, hey presto, the First Minister was briefing the editor and speaking on the record to the journalist. Why? Because he knew that there was a damaging story in another newspaper from which he wanted to divert attention. Is that not typical of the type of spin

culture that the First Minister presides over and is it not time that we had an inquiry that either cleared him or found him guilty of deceiving the public?

The First Minister: Unfortunately, it is all too typical of the debates that we sometimes have in the Parliament, and in the wider public arena in Scotland, that people say one thing one week and another thing another week, and that they cannot even be consistent. It was not that long ago that Roseanna Cunningham, Mr Swinney's deputy, was saying that there must be a change to the unquestioned assumption by Scottish Opera that it can be bailed out every time it gets itself into financial trouble. It is important that this country has a successful national opera company, but it is also important that that opera company stays within budget and does not overspend by up to 25 per cent every year. If any other public organisation in Scotland did that, Mr Swinney and others would be demanding the head of the chief executive and calling for it to be closed down. That would be the wrong approach.

We want a successful national opera company in Scotland that has thousands of young Scots aspiring to play in its orchestra as a result of the music tuition and the encouragement that they get in our schools, but we also want that opera company to live within its means and to ensure that it can do so for the foreseeable future.

Mr Swinney: I hear all that the First Minister is saying, and it is fair comment to list all the objectives for Scottish Opera. However, what is important is whether the First Minister is telling the truth and whether he is releasing confidential Government documents to get him out of a hole in the Sunday newspapers. Will he give his agreement for an inquiry into conduct that has brought his reputation into question over the past few days?

The First Minister: I remind Mr Swinney that, on 8 May, *The Scotsman* referred to the Executive paying

"for the restructuring costs of Scottish Opera",

and to how much money that might involve. Last Friday, two days before anything appeared in any Sunday newspaper, *The Scotsman* said that there would be redundancies and that the Executive would finance a one-off restructuring.

The day before, *The Herald* reported that the unions at Scottish Opera were saying not only that there could be staff losses, but that Scottish Opera's problem in financing and maintaining the Theatre Royal was under discussion too. All those issues were in the public domain days before anything appeared in a Sunday newspaper. Mr Swinney should change his questions when he hears the first answer. Let us discuss the real

issues here in Scotland: maintaining a thriving and successful cultural sector; and ensuring that our national companies succeed not only here but elsewhere in the world.

The Presiding Officer: Members will notice that Rhona Brankin has a question on Scottish Opera. With her agreement, I will take it now, and a limited number of supplementaries thereafter.

Scottish Opera

4. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether Scottish Opera has a future. (S2F-893)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I certainly hope so. We want to have a first-class national opera company in Scotland, but it must operate successfully within the budget that is agreed for it by the Scottish Arts Council.

Rhona Brankin: Does the First Minister agree that the SNP is guilty of playing politics with Scottish Opera? Can he assure Parliament that any settlement reached with Scottish Opera will ensure that it continues to produce first-class opera that enhances the reputation of Scotland as a culturally vibrant country, while living within the budget provided by the Scottish taxpayer?

The First Minister: We have an excellent opera company of which we should be proud. However, we should insist that it lives within its means. All parties should ensure that they say the same thing from one month to the next. It is not good enough for the Scottish National Party to call on the Executive, six months ago, to make Scottish Opera live within its budget and then, when we try to do so, to condemn us for that practice. We need a bit of consistency within the Parliament if it is to have credibility among the people of Scotland. Scottish Opera is not alone. We also need to have a thriving cultural sector in Scotland, which is why there is a culture minister in the Cabinet, why we have moved towards free music tuition in all Scottish primary schools, why we have established a national theatre and why we are re-energising the National Galleries of Scotland with capital investment that is making those galleries among the best in Europe.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): If the Scottish Executive had taken notice of Sir Peter Jonas's report, which was independently commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council, and if it had given Scottish Opera the funding that Sir Peter suggested, Scottish Opera would not now be in the position of having to look for money to pay for redundancies or part-time working. The *Sunday Herald* article revealed many things, some of which were not in the public domain. The article revealed that the Theatre Royal was expected to be taken out of the hands

of Scottish Opera and run by the Ambassador Theatre Group and that there might be a new, publicly funded venue. Can the First Minister deny that he or a member of his team broke commercial confidentiality by revealing those two facts, which were not in the public domain?

The First Minister: There was a whole range of information in the public domain and I am sure that many people were aware of information in advance of last Sunday. My information about Scottish Opera is that no commercial or other information that entered the public domain this week, last week or the week before will cause Scottish Opera any difficulty with companies with which it is in discussion.

Again, however, we have a problem of consistency. Yet again, on the record, Mr Monteith calls for more money for Scottish Opera when, only last August, he was saying that a Conservative Government must make changes to the way in which arts and culture are funded, so that arts and culture become more self-sufficient and less reliant on state handouts, and so that we are not forever coming to the rescue of companies such as Scottish Opera. Today, Mr Monteith argues for an extra £2 million a year for Scottish Opera; just last August he was saying that it should get almost no money, because it should not live on state handouts. He should be consistent from one month to the next. If we are going to have quality national arts companies in Scotland, let us give them some certainty. Let us ensure that, while they live within their budget, they know what their budget will be. In that way, they can plan for the future and put on performances here and abroad of which we can be proud.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): Is the First Minister confident that a budget and an arrangement for running Scottish Opera can be agreed that Scottish Opera's management feels will provide a good company delivering good opera for Scotland and that the Scottish Executive feels is within what it can afford? Will he ensure that the Scottish Arts Council and the other major arts bodies are involved in the discussions, given that they are directly affected by what happens at Scottish Opera?

The First Minister: It is important to clarify that responsibility for that budget lies with the Scottish Arts Council, which has to discuss the matter with Scottish Opera. We would discuss the matter with the Arts Council to ensure that if there were a request for additional resources, we could say yes or no to that request.

Not surprisingly, given that the opera company is way over budget and now in debt, there have been requests that we give it some finance to see it through this difficult period. That is likely to be an

important contribution, but there must be guarantees that the company will be sustainable over the longer term. We want there to be a successful national opera company in Scotland, and we want that company to be properly financed, but we are not prepared constantly to pour money down the drain and into debt. Scottish Opera has to live within its means, and it has to manage its budget properly. When it can do that, there will be a proper case for considering additional resources.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): The First Minister mentioned credibility. Credibility comes from honesty. Perhaps the First Minister could do the Parliament a favour and show some respect. Will he order an inquiry into the leak?

The First Minister: I have no intention of ordering any inquiry into any leak when, in recent weeks, Scottish Opera, the Scottish Arts Council, the trade unions and all sorts of other people, including those from the company that Mr Monteith mentioned, have been involved in discussions. I have no intention of going into their business and having a civil servant or anybody else question all of them on what they might have said to a journalist at some point about matters that, by and large, were already in the newspapers—which, this week, have been saying that the information was not in the public domain. It is a ridiculous situation.

The important issue is what happens to Scottish Opera in the future. We want there to be a successful national opera company in Scotland. We do not want to plough money into debt and bad management. We want to ensure that the opera company is managing its budget, that it is producing quality performances and that we are investing in a company that can not only deliver for young Scots but ensure that Scotland's international reputation remains high.

The Presiding Officer: I thank members for their patience.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he next plans to meet the Prime Minister and what issues he intends to raise. (S2F-888)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I have no immediate plans to meet the Prime Minister.

David McLetchie: I am very sorry to hear that. I had thought that the First Minister might take him to Loch Fyne for a kipper. I would advise him to remember to book a table in advance, so that he is spared a discussion in the car park.

Would the First Minister like to pass on to the Prime Minister, when he next meets him, the views of the Scottish president of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, Ian Clydesdale? He said this morning:

"Because of persistent disruption, teachers are having to spend more time on discipline paper chases and less time teaching classes. Education for the majority is being seriously hampered by the bad behaviour of a minority."

It is hard to disagree with Mr Clydesdale, as the Executive's own figures show that there is an assault on a member of school staff every 12 minutes of the working day. The root of the problem is the Executive's weak-kneed approach to exclusions. Would the First Minister agree with Mr Clydesdale that

"all assaults on teachers by pupils"

should lead to

"permanent exclusion with criminal charges pursued",

where appropriate?

The First Minister: Mr McLetchie chooses to mix two issues—I am happy to do the same. As a former teacher, as an elected representative and as someone who has some responsibility not only for the education system and the professional staff who work within it but for the education of Scottish children, I do not think that children who say something loudly in a classroom—who are regularly recorded in those statistics as committing an assault—should be permanently excluded from the classroom. Teachers should be able to control their classrooms; they should be able to maintain discipline; they should be encouraged to do so; and they should be supported by their head teachers and by the system in doing so. They should be able to achieve that there and then, and not need to exclude children permanently for one "verbal assault"—as it might be described—that might have taken place.

I believe strongly—and anybody who visits Scottish schools today will know this for a fact—that discipline in Scottish schools is significantly better than it was three or four years ago. I believe that the actions taken by local authorities, the Government, teachers and teaching unions, parents and senior pupils—helping to deal with bullying in the school, working closely with younger pupils and protecting and supporting such pupils—have made a significant difference. In every school that I ever visited when I was Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs three years ago, I got comments about discipline in the classroom, playground and school more generally. In every school that I have visited in the past 12 months, the comments are positive, the atmosphere is changing and there is no doubt that the new buildings, the new staff, the new guidelines that ensure that exclusions are used

much more appropriately and the new curriculum and assessment are contributing to a much better experience for Scottish schoolchildren and a much better teaching environment for Scotland's teachers.

David McLetchie: The First Minister should get out more. It beggars belief for him to say that discipline is improving when, five years ago, there were fewer than 2,000 recorded assaults and there are now 7,000. The school situation that he has described is certainly not that described by the teachers who are meeting in their conference this morning. The Executive's response to this major problem in our schools was typically inadequate: to set up a task force. Mr Peacock's latest approach has been to refuse to believe his own figures and to seek to massage the problem out of existence, which is in stark contrast to what Mr Clydesdale and his colleagues are telling us.

Is it not the case that we now have a total policy void on this important subject in Scotland? The Executive, having abandoned its disastrous non-exclusion policy, is clueless about how to support our teachers. The First Minister is fond of telling us, as he did again in his answer, that he is a former teacher, but why will he not listen to his former colleagues?

The First Minister: Because, as I have said before in the Parliament about a range of other areas of policy, although I have the greatest of admiration for the history, traditions and current work of our trade unions in Scotland, I do not accept everything that every trade unionist says at their annual trade union conference. I do not accept what the representative of the NASUWT said this morning. I think that he is exaggerating the position and I do not believe that it accurately reflects the situation in Scottish schools. It certainly does not accurately reflect the situation as I see it from talking to parents, children and teachers.

That is not to say that discipline in Scotland's schools is not a problem that must be tackled. That is precisely why we have made a difference to the issue not by setting up a task force but by genuinely involving and pulling together representatives of Scotland's teachers, local authorities, parents and other important stakeholders in the system. We have made that difference with better buildings, better facilities and better training for teachers and student teachers; more staff in the schools to help with the problem; better liaison between the schools, the teachers and those outside the schools who have some responsibility for discipline; more involvement from the parents and from the senior pupils in helping the junior pupils; and a range of other initiatives, including improving the use of school uniform and changing the guidelines on exclusions.

All those different factors have made a difference. Scotland's schools are more disciplined and more effective than they were three or four years ago, and the Executive parties are proud of that.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): At his next meeting with the Prime Minister, the First Minister may wish to draw to the Prime Minister's attention the BBC's recent troubling exposé of the private security industry, which is an excellent example of courageous investigative journalism.

The First Minister may be aware of my continuing concerns about the impact of the unregulated private security industry, particularly given the significant and welcome construction and regeneration work in the communities that I represent. I ask him to outline when the Security Industry Authority's remit will be extended to Scotland and what action is being taken to work with the police to tackle the culture of intimidation and violence that underpins activities that are little more than protection rackets. I also ask him to act speedily to tackle the increased problem of organised criminals using a range of unregulated private enterprises to strengthen their control on local areas—a development that is in danger of undercutting our shared commitment to safe and secure communities.

The First Minister: I agree with the assertion that that is a serious issue. We would all welcome and benefit from some good investigative journalism in Scotland and it was good to see that on this occasion. The issues at stake are very important and we need to handle them properly and consistently, but we also need to listen to ensure that we have the best solutions. Although three years ago our policy was to have our own Scottish system for regulation, as a result of the consultations—which I notice Opposition members regularly disparage these days—and listening to people who have made representations to us, it is now clear that a better solution would be to have a consistent system of regulation throughout the United Kingdom. We are therefore seeking a legislative slot at Westminster to ensure that legislation on that can be put in place.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

3. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to discuss. (S2F-900)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I have no specific meeting with the Secretary of State for Scotland in my diary, but I expect to see him again soon.

Robin Harper: On 9 October, the First Minister assured us that work with the food-producing

sector was going to produce better standards. He said:

"Those measures are already making a significant difference"—[*Official Report*, 9 October 2003; c 2546.]

in improving food standards in hospitals and schools. I am sure that the revelations about the disgusting and unsatisfactory conditions of food production at Tillery Valley Foods are not among the significant differences that he envisaged when he made that statement. Does he agree that the current contract to supply food to the new Edinburgh royal infirmary should be suspended and that alternative arrangements should be made to allow patients at the hospital to receive a better standard of service?

The First Minister: My understanding is that the contract is a matter for those who hold the contract and that it would be suspended only if the contract was not being properly fulfilled.

Robin Harper: When the First Minister launched the Executive's healthy living campaign, he said:

"We have been unhealthy for too long. I want the healthy choices facing Scots to be the easy choices. That means educating people, raising standards in school and hospital meals".

Despite that, hospital patients are being served food that has been cooked at least twice, frozen and microwaved—not to mention driven hundreds of miles to the hospital. It is well known that all those processes degrade the nutritional value of the food. In the First Minister's role as food champion, is he saying that the disgraceful state of hospital food is none of his business? Does he not have a duty to champion quality food in Scottish hospitals? I call on him to tell us now that he will intervene in the situation to ensure that all Scotland's hospitals provide good-quality, nutritional, locally produced food for their patients and—as he intimated on 9 October—give local Scottish producers a chance to get involved in a new contract.

The First Minister: Mr Harper may be surprised to hear that I have much sympathy with some of the points that he makes. I believe that there will be an announcement next week on the matter, which he might wish to welcome.

Breast Cancer Treatment (Waiting Times)

5. Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): To ask the First Minister why the Scottish Executive has not met its 2001 target on waiting times for breast cancer treatment. (S2F-896)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The target is for women who have breast cancer and are referred for urgent treatment to begin that treatment within one month of diagnosis, where clinically appropriate. That is a challenging target,

but it is a very important one. Discussions are taking place with local health managers to tackle any problems that are leading to inappropriate delays.

Shona Robison: Is the First Minister aware that the Scottish Breast Cancer Campaign stated that it was very unlikely that one in five women diagnosed with breast cancer would delay her treatment through choice, as was alleged by the Minister for Health and Community Care? Therefore, in addition to what the First Minister has said about contacting hospital managers, will he instruct the Minister for Health and Community Care to launch an investigation into the 700 cases that involve people waiting longer than one month for breast cancer treatment?

The First Minister: I do not believe that one in five Scottish women diagnosed as having breast cancer wants to delay her treatment and the Minister for Health and Community Care has made it clear this week that he does not believe that. There are a small number of women for whom—either through their choice or because of clinical advice—treatment is deferred, but far too many women are still going beyond the one-month deadline through no choice of their own and not because it is clinically appropriate. That is still an issue for us. Action requires to be taken at the local level to ensure that the right staff are in place and that the right systems are delivering to the target.

The Minister for Health and Community Care is monitoring the implementation of the work to achieve the target, not only through the statistics that have been released this week, but on an ongoing basis. He will report on progress as information becomes available to us.

ScotRail (Franchise)

6. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the First Minister how the new ScotRail franchise will maintain and improve the level of rail services across Scotland. (S2F-898)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We set out our objectives for the ScotRail franchise in our directions and guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority. The franchise will build on the existing level of service and will allow new services to be incorporated as and when they are developed.

Jeremy Purvis: That is a positive reply. The First Minister will acknowledge that the new rail franchise gives Scotland the opportunity to set the framework for improved rail services throughout Scotland for the long term and, crucially for my constituents, to ensure that one of the new rail services, the Borders railway, is fully integrated into the network. Does he agree that it is vital that

the decision on the franchise for Scotland is taken in Scotland? Given that there might be differences in approach by the SRA and the Scottish Executive, with perhaps a different emphasis on risk and revenue, does he agree that advice from the SRA should be a contributory factor, not an overriding one, in the Executive's decision?

The First Minister: This may not be helpful, but it is important that I clarify that ministers must make a decision on the Borders railway in line with our analysis of the studies that we have commissioned. We will make an announcement on that in due course. Not only in the Borders, but in other parts of Scotland, we are looking for enhancements in railway provision and opening new lines, such as that in central Scotland between Lanarkshire and Milngavie. The new franchise will allow those important developments to be incorporated. The decision on the franchise will be made in Scotland by the Scottish ministers and we will announce the result of it in due course.

The Presiding Officer: I revert to the incident at the beginning of First Minister's question time. I have a duty to maintain good order in the chamber and I will not have First Minister's question time, which is a high point of the week, hijacked. Both the majority and minorities in the chamber have rights. I offered Miss Leckie the chance to make her point of order at the end of First Minister's question time, but she refused and continued to speak. When challenged by me, she continued to speak and then refused to apologise. That is a serious matter, but I have no wish to create martyrs in the Parliament. I have the power to suspend members and I have the power to ask them to withdraw from the chamber—I asked her to withdraw. All members should be aware that how the people of Scotland perceive the Parliament and how we relate with them is in our hands and that we should use that responsibility wisely.

12:32

Meeting suspended until 14:00.

14:00

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Education, Tourism, Culture and Sport

Green Tourism Business Scheme

1. Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive when VisitScotland will publish a brochure to list and promote members of the green tourism business scheme. (S2O-2462)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mr Frank McAveety): Membership, by listed tourism businesses, of the green tourism business scheme is promoted through the national tourism website visitscotland.com. This information is also available at www.greentourism.org.uk. Any further measures to publicise the information are a matter for VisitScotland.

Chris Ballance: I point out that 18 months ago VisitScotland promised members of the green tourism business scheme such a brochure, but it has not yet come to fruition. I would be grateful to the minister for any encouragement that he can give to VisitScotland to enable a brochure to be produced, because we need to promote green tourism businesses.

Mr McAveety: I am happy to take up the member's request and to report back to him on it. I assure Mr Ballance—as I often have in the chamber and in discussions—that we value the contribution that green tourism can make to the development of our overall tourism product. We hope to continue dialogue to ensure that we have that commitment over the next few years.

Skye Bridge Tolls

2. John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has assessed the impact of Skye bridge tolls on the tourism industry of Skye and Lochalsh. (S2O-2403)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mr Frank McAveety): There has been no specific assessment of the impact of Skye Bridge tolls on the tourism industry of Skye and Lochalsh, but we have not seen any evidence of visitors to the island being discouraged by tolls.

John Farquhar Munro: I am sure that the minister is aware that tourism and related activities are the main economic planks of Skye and

Lochalsh. As we approach the coming tourism season, will the minister encourage his Cabinet colleagues to honour the commitment in the partnership agreement to remove the discredited toll regime from the Skye bridge, in order to support the area's economy?

Mr McAveety: As the member is aware, we are in discussions and negotiations about how to deal with the Skye bridge toll regime. That issue forms part of the broader discussions that I, along with fellow Cabinet ministers such as the Minister for Finance and Public Services, will need to have in the near future. Between 2001 and 2002, traffic across the bridge increased by 8 per cent. Since 1996, traffic across the bridge has increased by 17 per cent. There is still an opportunity. I am sure that the member agrees that the fundamental issue is that we increase opportunities for tourism in Skye and Lochalsh by continuing to make progress on investing in the marketing of Scottish tourism, both nationally and internationally. We hope that in that way tourism investment in the economy—about which the member is right to care passionately—can be delivered.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): That is an interesting reply. Given that last year the minister made it known that £27 million in bridge tolls had been collected and that the terms of the tolling licence, which were to collect £23.64 million at 1990 prices, may now have been fulfilled, what is his response to the opinion of Mark Poustie, professor of law at Strathclyde University, that there is now

“doubt regarding the lawfulness of the continued collection of tolls by the concessionaire”?

Mr McAveety: That question does not fall within my ministerial responsibility. I am sure that the Executive ministers responsible are addressing the concerns to which the member refers. The critical issue is how we deliver on both the partnership commitment that has been mentioned and the partnership commitment on tourism. The evidence of the past few months suggests that the new money that has been injected into Scottish tourism will benefit the Skye and Lochalsh area and, I am sure, its inhabitants.

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): As the minister knows, the cost of crossing the bridge was frozen in December 1999 and it will never increase—that is thanks to the Executive's intervention and it obviously benefits both locals and tourists. An issue that is constantly raised by my constituents, and indeed by tourists, is that books of tickets are valid for only one year. Given that the price will not increase, will the minister consider discussing with the Minister for Transport a change to the rules to allow books of tickets to be valid for two years?

Mr McAveety: I am happy to take that matter up with the minister who has responsibility for it. We can address those broad issues, but I welcome the initial comments in the member's contribution. We have made substantial inroads in relation to the cost-effectiveness of the bridge tolls, and our ambition is to assess the future viability of tolls, not just on the Skye bridge, but elsewhere in Scotland.

Secondary Schools (Principal Teachers)

3. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent consideration it has given to the role of subject principal teachers in secondary schools. (S2O-2413)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): Staffing structures and the role of subject principal teachers in schools are matters for each local authority to determine.

Dennis Canavan: Is the minister aware of the concern that some schools are implementing the McCrone proposals in such a way that many subject principal teacher posts are being abolished? Given that such teachers form the backbone of the management and delivery of the academic success of a good school, will the Executive issue guidance to ensure that such posts continue, especially in essential subjects such as English and mathematics? All pupils study those subjects at some stage in their school careers, and they need to be led by teachers with specific qualifications rather than by general factotums with, perhaps, no experience of teaching some of the subjects for which they are supposedly responsible.

Peter Peacock: I am sure that highly qualified principal teachers, who apply their management skills in schools, will be alarmed to be described as "general factotums". I am aware that concerns have been expressed in some parts of Scotland about how changes in education are being managed. However, following the McCrone agreement, in which there were a number of changes to promoted posts and the abolition of assistant principal teachers, assistant head teachers and senior teachers, scope has opened up for local authorities to take a wider look at the management of schools. As a result, in some parts of Scotland, the responsibilities of individual subject principals are being merged into a faculty of like subjects. It has been shown that where that is happening, it is working extremely well and, in one sense, it is strengthening management capacity at that level in schools. It is certainly not diminishing the management of subjects.

With the development of things such as chartered teachers in Scottish schools, highly skilled teachers will be resources in departments and they will continue to have responsibility for

developing the curriculum, supporting probationer teachers and so on. Change is an inevitable part of the development of education, and the changes that are taking place are being managed effectively. Where they are working in faculty departments, they are working very well.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): First, I have to say that I am a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland. On principal teachers, I understood that the main concern was about certain management duties such as setting examination papers. Will the minister give us a commitment that, if there are on-going concerns such as that which Dennis Canavan raises, he will meet the EIS and other stakeholders to iron out the issues?

Peter Peacock: As Sylvia Jackson is aware, I meet trade unions as often as I can. I hope to meet with the EIS in the not-too-distant future, just as I have met with it, and other organisations that represent staff, in the past. I always listen to what those organisations have to say, and if there are things that we can do to take action to support staff, we will seek to try to do them. However, we will do that within a negotiated framework. Significant changes are taking place in the management of Scottish schools, and those changes have been agreed by the trade unions, the employers and the Executive as part of the new negotiating arrangements. We are putting a lot of additional support into schools to help senior staff with management tasks; more than 3,500 additional support staff have been introduced in recent years to help with those tasks. I am always sympathetic to arguments and I act when it is appropriate to do so, but I would not want to act against change that is benefiting Scottish schools.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Is the minister aware of the great geographic disparity in the development of curriculum faculties? In some areas, that development is governed by the location of departments rather than their subject matter—for example, departments on the ground floor are put together, which is corridor management rather than professional mentoring.

Would the minister be prepared to propose the guidance for which Dennis Canavan asked in order to reappraise what is happening throughout Scotland? Although the change to faculty departments is not a direct result of the McCrone agreement, it most certainly is an indirect result of that and we should take national cognisance of it.

Peter Peacock: Fiona Hyslop is right in that faculty departments are not a direct, negotiated part of the McCrone agreement and its outcome, but they are a consequence of other changes that are taking place. Of course, nothing ever stands still in the management of schools and in the development of how we manage them. I stress

that faculty departments should be organised around similar subjects, rather than on the basis of shared geographic space. I have heard tell of the latter situation and it seems a slightly odd way of going about things. Nonetheless, such decisions are taken at local level. Practice is developing and we want to share best practice throughout Scotland as effectively and quickly as we can, so that there is more consistency. We will continue to drive that forward in appropriate ways.

Education (Improvement)

4. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what contribution the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 is making to the improvement of education in schools. (S2O-2456)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): Under the 2000 act, authorities are focussing on improvement and on delivering the national priorities in education for pupils in their schools. We have a framework to monitor and report on progress.

Des McNulty: The minister will be aware that this is national epilepsy week. I congratulate the Executive on its support for today's launch of Epilepsy Scotland's updated guidelines for teachers on managing epilepsy. Will the Executive consider issuing guidance for local authorities to ensure that all staff who work directly with the public receive some kind of epilepsy awareness training?

Peter Peacock: I am happy to acknowledge the point that Des McNulty made. Indeed, I gather that Euan Robson has just come from launching the guidelines. One of the things that I mentioned in my first answer is that local authorities are pursuing our five national priorities, one of which is inclusion and equality. That priority is designed to focus on exactly the type of issue that Des McNulty raised, and to ensure that nobody is disadvantaged in the school system because of a condition that might disadvantage them if we were not paying close attention to the situation. I will be happy to review with my officials the kind of advice that is currently available on epilepsy to see whether it requires to be improved and to embed it more firmly in practice and in teacher training.

Route Development Fund (Impact)

5. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is monitoring the impact of the route development fund on tourism. (S2O-2426)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mr Frank McAveety): VisitScotland uses the United Kingdom international passenger survey to assess the number of visitors from overseas to

Scotland, which has been rising strongly since the start of the route development fund. However, most of the new routes have been operating only for a short time and precise analysis will have to wait until we have a full year of operation to measure.

Mike Pringle: I thank the minister for his response. Given the recent failure of the Duo airline and the adverse effect that that kind of failure might have on Scottish tourism, can the minister promise to look at how Scotland can be promoted further in those regions that have just lost a direct air link to Scotland?

Mr McAveety: The marketing strategy that VisitScotland deploys is independent of the route development fund. The strategy can complement that fund, but it can continue even if an individual route fails to do so. Certainly, we will carry on marketing within Germany and Italy in particular, which are the areas in which Duo operated, to ensure that we pick up the tourism market there as well. Again, with reference to responses to earlier questions, the additional injection of marketing money will address most of the tourism issues and I hope that we can continue to grow Scottish tourism, compared with the difficult period of over two years ago.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): The minister may be aware that I have had informal discussions with the First Minister regarding the creation of a route development fund for freight. Can he tell me whether any progress has been made in creating such a fund and how that might impact on Glasgow Prestwick international airport, Scotland's fastest growing airport?

Mr McAveety: I am thinking of requesting a job transfer this afternoon because that is the third transport question that I have had. However, I do not want to frighten the coalition partners in that respect.

I can certainly take up with the Minister for Transport the matter to which Mr Scott referred, and give him an answer in due course.

Secondary School Teachers (Recruitment)

6. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what proposals are being considered to address any present difficulty in recruiting suitably qualified secondary school teachers in an area such as the Highlands. (S2O-2387)

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): As the member will know, the recruitment of teachers is a matter for each local authority. However, the Executive works with local authorities and other interested parties to address recruitment issues.

Mr Stone: As the minister will be aware, in constituencies such as mine—that includes, by definition, some of the most remote parts of Scotland—there are huge difficulties in hiring teachers for places such as Kinlochbervie. That is despite the best efforts of the Highland Council. Indeed, recruiting teachers for Wick and Thurso is not easy. What will the minister's officials do to address that? Ultimately, regardless of where they come from, children have a right to be taught the core subjects that are necessary for their education. I am interested to hear the minister explore that issue and give us his thoughts.

Euan Robson: I am aware of the issue that the member has described, not least because he has raised it so assiduously in the past. Vacancy rates in Highland secondary schools are running at about 2.5 per cent, compared to about 1.7 per cent across Scotland. However, I appreciate that particular problems might arise in specific schools, such as that in Kinlochbervie, which Jamie Stone mentioned.

The teacher work force planning advisory group, in which the Executive is involved, is considering among other issues a preference waiver payment scheme, which is being piloted. The scheme pays £4,000 to probationers who decide to go and work for a particular authority. I believe that Highland Council has already received three probationers as a result of that scheme. There are also other possibilities. For example, local authorities could offer incentives if they so wished.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister confirm whether everything is being done to encourage online and distance learning, especially for specialist subjects throughout schools in the Highlands, where the number of pupils in each school might not always justify a teacher? Such developments would not only increase access, but provide a wider range of subjects.

Euan Robson: I am pleased to confirm that that is being developed. The University of Aberdeen and Highland Council are, I understand, working in partnership on that, as is the University of Dundee. The fact that distance learning allows people to be taught within the secondary or primary schools in their localities is a useful development. We will watch how the pilots go and develop them further as necessary.

Disruptive Pupils

7. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to help teachers to deal with disruptive pupils as part of its strategy to reduce antisocial behaviour. (S2O-2392)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): In the past year, significant progress has been made in supporting teachers to establish positive behaviour. The recommendations of the discipline task group and many other initiatives are being implemented.

Donald Gorrie: Will the minister co-operate with the Minister for Justice and the Minister for Communities to ensure that antisocial behaviour is addressed within as well as outwith schools? Given that the one often influences the other, the education people could help those who deal with the social aspects of the problem if they co-operated better.

Peter Peacock: I am happy to confirm that I always co-operate with Margaret Curran—anybody who does not do so perhaps takes their life in their hands—and that ministers are in close co-operation and dialogue with each other on those matters.

As I have stressed often of late, one thing that we must recognise is that, for many children in Scotland, school is one of the most stable parts of their lives. That has been the case consistently over many years. We need to use that period of stability within the lives of those young people not just to bring about changes in their behaviour in school, but to link those changes to their lives in the wider community. We are considering how we can make those connections even stronger in future. That is one reason why we are continuing to promote our integrated community schools programme. We are trying to develop practice in that area so that we can make a significant impact on behaviour, not just within schools but in the wider society and communities within which the schools exist.

Vulnerable Children (Support)

8. John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SCCUP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to provide more support services for children who are vulnerable as a result of substance abuse by their parents. (S2O-2389)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson): We are determined that vulnerable children in Scotland, including those who are affected by the substance misuse of their parents, should receive the support and protection that they need. Details of the action that is being taken will be set out in the response that we are currently preparing to "Hidden Harm: Responding to the needs of children of problem drug users", which is a report that was published last year by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. We are also driving forward our reform programme for child protection, following the publication earlier this year of the children's charter and framework for standards for child protection.

John Swinburne: Research has thrown up the frightening statistic that up to 6 per cent of children under 16 have a drug-abusing parent—twice as many as in England and Wales. Only a small number of drug projects are aimed at the huge needs of those children. What action is the Executive taking to ensure that drugs treatment agencies for adults are recording essential data about the children of the clients presented to them? Does the Executive agree that if those agencies do not know about that large percentage of Scotland's children, it is failing to help them?

Euan Robson: As I said, there was a UK-wide report called "Hidden Harm: Responding to the needs of children of problem drug users". It estimated that between 40,000 and 60,000 children in Scotland were affected by parental drug misuse. As I have said, officials are preparing for publication this year the Executive's response to the 48 recommendations in the report. We await with interest the outcome of the kinship care study that is currently being undertaken and sponsored by the social work services inspectorate.

Finance and Communities

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People (Support)

1. Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what it is doing to support and increase the engagement of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the life of Scotland. (S2O-2467)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Mrs Mary Mulligan): The Scottish Executive has already provided £700,000 to national LGBT organisations. In March this year, we announced funding of a further £512,000 to the Equality Network. The Executive is strongly committed to active, sustainable involvement with LGBT communities on a very wide range of issues.

Shiona Baird: I thank the minister for her reply. Is she aware that LGBT Youth Scotland and Stonewall Scotland have both been turned away by the community fund, which has de-prioritised work with LGBT communities? Will the minister undertake to investigate the funding of LGBT community organisations as a vital way in which to include them in the life of Scotland?

Mrs Mulligan: I recognise the role that those organisations have to play. That is why our officials are already in discussions with them about the loss of their grant, and to consider what areas we would have an interest in providing additional funding to sustain and in what areas we could offer other kinds of support in the forthcoming year.

Central Heating Programme

2. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made on its plans to provide central heating in households occupied by senior citizens. (S2O-2414)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Mrs Mary Mulligan): We have made excellent progress with that part of the central heating programme aimed specifically at the over-60s. So far, 20,000 systems have been installed and we aim to install a total of 40,000 systems by 2006. In addition, the central heating programme in the local authority and housing association sectors will also benefit many senior citizens. I should also mention that I recently announced that we are extending the programme, to replacement of partial or inefficient systems in the homes of those who are over 80.

Dennis Canavan: Many people, especially pensioners, are very grateful for the installation of central heating. However, is the minister aware of complaints from pensioners who were excluded from the first phase of the programme because they had central heating systems—albeit in many cases ones that were inefficient or even not working and therefore incapable of providing adequate heat? Will the Executive confirm that those people are now eligible to apply? Will the Executive also undertake a national advertising campaign to encourage such people to apply? Can the minister give an indication of how long such applicants will have to wait to get a proper, efficient heating system installed in their homes?

Mrs Mulligan: As I said in my original answer, we have extended the programme to replace inefficient or partial systems in the homes of over-80s. We will need to consider whether we should reduce that age still further. We introduced the scheme at the behest of many MSPs, and we are responding to the demands that MSPs are presenting to us. However, we also need to ensure that pensioners are aware of the provision. We have been working with the power companies to ensure that, when they are approached, they inform pensioners and others of the availability of the scheme, thereby ensuring that they receive the benefits of it. The length of wait will depend on how many people apply to the scheme. Our ultimate aim is that people receive the service as quickly as possible, and I believe that we are on target to achieve that.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I welcome the extension of the central heating scheme to pensioners who are aged over 80 and have partial or inefficient heating systems. However, many of the pensioners whom I represent are less than 80 years old and have partial and inefficient central heating systems. The

scheme is partly about energy efficiency, and the energy that they are using is not being used efficiently. Can the minister give a time scale for the introduction of proposals to extend the scheme to all pensioners who have partial or inefficient central heating systems?

Mrs Mulligan: I can only repeat that we will consider that in due course, once we have finished the targeting that we are doing at the moment. Members will appreciate the need to target the most needy first. All pensioners will be entitled to the warm deal programme, which can offer them effective measures to deal with energy efficiency. If Cathie Craigie wishes, we can provide her with additional information on that for her constituents.

Binge Drinking (Deprived Areas)

3. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is tackling the issue of binge drinking in deprived areas. (S2O-2425)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): The Executive has a communications campaign to reduce binge drinking, which is focusing particularly on young people throughout Scotland. Our plans for liquor licensing reform, which were published on 17 May, include a number of proposals to reduce the impact of binge drinking on communities, including improved monitoring of compliance with licence conditions; a crackdown on irresponsible promotions; and giving communities a stronger voice in licensing decisions.

Mike Pringle: Does the minister agree that the problem of binge drinking in deprived areas often stems from boredom, especially among teenagers? Does she agree that, as well as raising alcohol awareness, any measure to tackle binge drinking needs to provide suitable alternatives to excessive drinking?

Ms Curran: Yes, I acknowledge that. I strongly believe that we must provide a range of facilities, services and opportunities for young people to create a diversion from damaging behaviours. We must ensure that the services that we create around alcohol—in which we have made considerable investment—are sensitive to the needs of young people. We should do that in a balanced way, alongside the proposals that we are introducing and the huge investment that we are making in community and other services. That should allow us to meet the needs of young people as Mike Pringle has outlined.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): Does the minister share my concern that, over the past two years, Albyn House—a designated place for people with alcohol problems in Aberdeen—has seen a 25 per cent increase in

first-time admissions? I found that out last week. What role does she see in future for such designated places? Will she give extra support to them so that binge drinkers are dealt with safely and given appropriate information to try to deal with the problem in the future?

Ms Curran: Although I am not familiar with the specific example to which Richard Lochhead refers, I am sure that my colleagues will pursue any specific matters that are drawn to their attention. Cathy Jamieson will look at the issue in the near future. We have a problem with binge drinking in Scotland, and it is something that we must take seriously. We must consider service provision in response to that, but we must also understand some of the underlying causes behind young people engaging in binge drinking and the serious, damaging behaviours that follow. The Executive is taking the matter seriously in responding to antisocial behaviour and in terms of liquor licensing and the services that—as Richard Lochhead rightly points out—need attention.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Does the minister agree that resources are all-important in this area? Does she share my concern that the bids from the local alcohol action plans, which are crucial to tackling alcohol misuse in Scotland, amounted to more than 15 times the money that the Executive could provide? What additional resources is she going to provide to enable us to make the national alcohol plan an effective reality?

Ms Curran: I acknowledge the work that Keith Raffan has done over many years in the Parliament. When we worked together on the committee that considered the drugs report, he emphasised the need to develop alcohol services in Scotland. In response to that, the Executive has doubled the money that it gives to those services and it now provides £8 million.

The Executive is not complacent. It understands that there is a problem with binge drinking in Scotland. Binge drinking puts pressure on services and the Executive has to continue to examine it. However, we have to take a co-ordinated and balanced approach and the nation has to come to terms with its problem with alcohol and with the scale of alcohol abuse among our young people. The Executive is not being self-righteous. The problem is shared by all in our nation and we must all come to terms with it.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The other designated place, run by the Church of Scotland, is in Inverness. People are often taken there from accident and emergency wards, and by the police, to be given advice and support. Given the minister's commitment to services, will she visit the Church of Scotland's designated place at Beechwood House in Inverness, with a view to

rolling out that excellent service throughout the rest of Scotland?

Ms Curran: In the interests of cross-party working, I would be happy to visit the project that the member mentioned. She might know that I plan to go to Inverness in early summer. Given that the general assembly of the Church of Scotland is meeting in the chamber across the road from here, it is proper that we agree to pay attention to the services and the significant work of the Church of Scotland in this area.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Question 4 is withdrawn.

Fresh Talent Initiative

5. Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what opportunities the accession of 10 new member states to the European Union provides for the fresh talent initiative. (S2O-2434)

The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr): As well as providing long-term prosperity, stability and improved security for all citizens of Europe, not to mention new tourism and cultural opportunities, the new member states will provide a positive opportunity to bring to Scotland the talent and skills that will contribute to our economic success and allow for the development of individuals.

Ms Alexander: Will the minister assure us that the Executive is encouraging greater co-operation among Scottish universities to attract young talented people from eastern Europe to come and study in Scotland?

Mr Kerr: Indeed, yes. As well as the negotiations that we have had with the Home Office about the extension of visas, the Executive is supporting the postgraduate scholarship scheme and the work experience scheme in order to secure work-related placements. We are also working with our first-class universities to ensure that they not only market themselves abroad, but have the tools, equipment and resources to attract skills to Scotland and retain them once they have come to our shores.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Given that the fresh talent initiative is aimed mainly at university students and that Scotland already has an abundance of graduates, some of whom find it difficult to get jobs that are commensurate with their qualifications, how can the initiative be aimed at those in eastern Europe who are skilled in the trades that are needed in Scotland? Is that a future priority for the Executive?

Mr Kerr: The challenge is worldwide and the competition for people is intense. Individual economies and companies are chasing talent all

over the world. It is unfair to say that the fresh talent initiative is designed only for students. It is designed with reference to key skills and managed migration to Scotland. When the First Minister and I were involved in the launch of the initiative, we met the consuls and consuls general from throughout Europe and beyond and we focused on students and people with skills in civil engineering and architecture, for example. We have confidence in the Scottish economy and we have to attract such people to our shores. We also have to use the talent that we have in Scotland. The fresh talent initiative is all embracing. It is about ensuring that young Scottish graduates stay in Scotland and that those who have left Scotland come back to work and live in Scotland and contribute to our economy. It is about attracting well-qualified and talented people, not just university students, to our shores.

Glasgow Housing Stock Transfer

6. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the Glasgow housing stock transfer has achieved all its objectives. (S2O-2397)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): Not yet. The aim of the Glasgow housing stock transfer is to promote long-term and sustainable improvement in the city's housing. Significant progress has been made to date and I expect many more tenants to see real improvements to their housing over the next few years as the investment programme accelerates. Communities Scotland will continue to monitor the Glasgow Housing Association's overall performance and specific progress against the transfer objectives.

Pauline McNeill: The minister will be aware that I represent the community of Dundas Vale, which has within its complex a community hall that is the life-blood of many elderly, church and other groups. Is she concerned that one of the first acts following the transfer of stock to the local housing organisation was that the locks were changed without warning and the hall was closed for six weeks, leaving local tenants and residents mystified about the policy of tenant participation? Notwithstanding the reasons why the hall closed—minor health and safety problems—does she agree that one of the main purposes of housing stock transfer is to increase the involvement of tenants in their communities and environment? Does she further agree that the type of action that I have described is not consistent with or in the spirit of Executive policy and that LHOs should be careful about the message that they are sending out?

Ms Curran: I absolutely appreciate the spirit in which Pauline McNeill expresses her comments. I

am not aware of the situation that she describes, but I will look into the generalities of it. The situation should be dealt with more specifically by the regulator, but I am happy to talk to Pauline McNeill once I clarify the details. She will appreciate that it is difficult to respond to an individual case at question time.

LHOs in Glasgow have inaugurated a scale of community involvement that we have never seen in the city before. Community organisations sometimes make decisions with which we do not agree, but logic dictates that sometimes we have to go with those decisions. I do not know whether that is the situation in the case that Pauline McNeill describes, but I am happy to look into it and either communicate with her or refer her to the appropriate person.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Is the minister aware of the proposals that the GHA has made and approved not only to vet tenants who wish to become members of the board, but to have its chief executive sit on the board? The GHA is the only housing association in Scotland to do that. Does she agree that those proposals undermine the democratic process of stock transfer and tenants associations, that they lead to an obvious conflict of interests and, as has been said before, that they go against the ethos of tenant participation, which was one of the original objectives of the transfer?

Ms Curran: Overall, I am tempted not to agree because, as Sandra White is well aware, in formulating its transfer policy the Executive set up Communities Scotland as the appropriate regulator. It is the job of Communities Scotland to regulate the GHA, which is an independent organisation. Communities Scotland looks into any complaint or appeal that concerns registered social landlords and ensures that such complaints or appeals are acted on in accordance with its constitution. As is proper, ministers operate at arm's length from Communities Scotland as it undertakes its duties as regulator. As far as I am aware, Communities Scotland has said that any changes that have occurred recently in the GHA are within the governance arrangements and are appropriate within the regulatory regime.

Environmental Improvements (Support)

7. Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what specific support it is providing to cities and towns to carry out environmental improvement work. (S2O-2407)

The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr): The Scottish Executive provides a range of support to cities and towns throughout Scotland through their local authorities and other agencies for a wide variety of environmental improvement projects.

Bruce Crawford: I am sure that the minister will agree that Stirling Castle and its immediate environs should be the jewel in Scotland's tourism crown. Therefore, I hope that he will confirm that he shares my dismay that the area around the castle, which should be a honeypot for tourists, has been held back by the drastic need for environmental improvements and investment. Add to that empty shops, schools in danger of closure, the loss of post offices and deep social problems and the picture is far from rosy. We need a vision of what can be done, which should be delivered by a multi-agency task force. Is the minister prepared to use his good offices to facilitate such an approach?

Mr Kerr: Bruce Crawford raises the topic of the wider opportunities that our properly co-ordinated regeneration strategy provides. The strategy takes into consideration many of the elements that he outlined in his question. However, we should give due credit to the local council, which is working in partnership with enterprise agencies and others on the renewal of housing and on the industrial opportunities to be provided by investment in enterprise parks.

The Executive works in a wide variety of ways and, through the work of the ministers involved in regeneration, we are trying to work together more effectively. Bruce Crawford's question ignored many of the valuable interventions that the Executive makes through a variety of funding mechanisms, which put millions of pounds into improving our environment and quality of life and into attracting new people, skills and employers to Scotland.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Does the minister agree that significant environmental improvement work in our towns and cities can be carried out through the construction of new housing? Following the recent welcome announcement of £15 million to regenerate Culterhove and Cornton in my constituency through the community ownership housing programme, will he say how that programme will be rolled out across Scotland?

Mr Kerr: I must be honest and say that I would have to refer to the minister who has responsibility for that matter. However, the member's example highlights the interventions that the Executive seeks to make in order to regenerate communities. We acknowledge that we have to take an holistic approach to these issues and to look across what Bruce Crawford called the offices or the bureaucracy of the Executive to ensure that we target resources and get best value for that money.

General Questions

Glasgow Homeopathic Hospital

1. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it supports the full retention of in-patient provision at the Glasgow homeopathic hospital. (S2O-2454)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): That is an issue for Greater Glasgow NHS Board in the first instance. If the board proposes a significant restructuring of services at the Glasgow homeopathic hospital, it would have to consult fully on the issue and submit its proposals to me for approval.

Robert Brown: I note the minister's reply. The Glasgow homeopathic hospital—and in particular the integrated care unit, which is earmarked for closure as part of Greater Glasgow NHS Board's funding cuts—is unique in Scotland and indeed has been uniquely successful in areas where the national health service can offer no other resource. Does the minister agree that the proposed cut is being made purely and simply on financial grounds and that there is no pretence to its having any medical basis? Does he also agree that we have enough trouble with things that do not work as we would like them to without the scandalous proposal to close a facility that very clearly does work? Does he accept that he should take a close interest in such a national facility?

Malcolm Chisholm: I described my role in my answer to Mr Brown's first question. However, I will say that everything that I have heard about the hospital suggests that it provides an excellent model of patient-centred and holistic care. Moreover, as Mr Brown has reminded us, it takes patients from many boards throughout Scotland. I am sure that Greater Glasgow NHS Board will want to bear those two points in mind when it considers its position on the matter.

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): Is the minister aware of the concern—not to say consternation—that has been caused by the proposal to close a modern and successful in-patient facility at the homeopathic hospital, which is located in my Glasgow Anniesland constituency? There is a clear belief that the proposal is rushed, insensitive, short sighted and ill conceived and that it will quite rightly meet with outright opposition. Will he assure me and all members that he will accept only the result of a consultation that is based not on cost cutting but on clinical need? Furthermore, will he accept my invitation to visit the hospital to see the good work that it does in taking an holistic approach to treatment?

Malcolm Chisholm: I repeat my position on this matter. However, I am keen to take up Bill Butler's

offer to visit the hospital and to see at first hand what I have heard about. I mentioned that I had heard good reports about the hospital and I should point out that Mr Butler was one of several people who talked to me about it—I know that he held a meeting on the matter last week.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Is the minister aware that many of the patients whose experiences of the homeopathic hospital have resulted in positive outcomes have been long-term users of other NHS services that have not proved successful for them? Without the facility, they would continue to use those services. Does he therefore agree that closing the in-patient facility would not represent a long-term cost saving?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am certain that Greater Glasgow NHS Board will want to bear the member's point in mind and that, as Bill Butler said, it will consider the fundamental clinical issues. However, if it intends to save costs through the proposal, it should also bear in mind that the patients who would have received treatment in the hospital will have to be treated elsewhere.

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): Does the minister recall a debate last month at the University of Edinburgh during which, in answer to a question, he outlined his personal commitment to homeopathic services? Would it not be better for him to intervene in the situation now instead of waiting for the plans to arrive as a fait accompli on his desk?

Malcolm Chisholm: I have made some fairly positive remarks about the homeopathic hospital in my answers this afternoon and I have willingly agreed to Bill Butler's suggestion that I visit the hospital, but I outlined my formal position on the matter in my first answer.

Fuel Prices (Rural Communities)

2. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what representations it has made to Her Majesty's Government about the impact that rising petrol and diesel prices have made on remote rural communities. (S2O-2383)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): The Executive appreciates the concerns of people throughout Scotland, particularly those in remote and rural communities, about rising fuel prices. As the member knows, the price of fuel has increased due to recent significant increases in crude oil prices. Fuel taxation is a reserved matter and Scottish ministers will continue to ensure that Scotland's interests are placed firmly on the Whitehall agenda through direct contact with United Kingdom Government ministers.

Alex Johnstone: In his capacity as a member who represents an Aberdeen constituency, the

minister will be aware that, when oil prices last rose significantly, oil companies not only were required to pay additional taxation on profits from higher oil prices, but were asked by the Exchequer to pay a windfall tax on their additional profits. It is reasonable to expect that that additional income to the Exchequer could be used to offset tax at the petrol stations. That would keep fuel prices down without reducing revenue in any way. Will the minister take an early opportunity to make that suggestion to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to ensure that he does not make an enormous profit out of the hardship of those who need transport in rural areas?

Nicol Stephen: I am certain that the chancellor is considering those matters, which will be decided at Westminster. He takes a close interest in Scotland and particularly in our rural communities. Oil prices are at a 20-year high and it is predicted that they will remain high for a considerable time. There is also talk of pressure on gas production, which means that gas prices might be affected during the next 12 months. Those are important issues not only for rural communities, but for communities and businesses throughout Scotland. The Scottish Executive will monitor the situation closely and will make representations to the UK Government whenever that is appropriate.

Fines (Payment System)

3. Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how it intends to improve the system for the payment of fines. (S2O-2390)

The Presiding Officer: I call Nicol Stephen—sorry, I mean Cathy Jamieson.

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): I thought that perhaps Nicol Stephen would answer the question on my behalf.

There are a number of existing measures available to the courts to enforce or encourage the payment of fines. Those include giving an offender time to pay, arrangements for payment to be made by instalments, recovery through civil diligence—for example, by arresting earnings—and the facility to make deductions from income support or income-based jobseekers allowance in appropriate circumstances.

The review of summary justice considered fines enforcement as part of its wide remit. It recommended that a number of the existing measures for collecting fines be strengthened and that the enforcement of fines in default become the task of a dedicated public body. We are currently consulting on the report's recommendations.

Michael Matheson: Is the minister aware that, on average, every year during the past 10 years

some 7,000 people have had proceedings taken against them in Scottish courts because they failed to buy a television licence? Many of the people who are fined in those circumstances default on the fine and find themselves back in court, where they receive a custodial sentence or a community disposal. That process uses up valuable court resources. Does she agree that the time has come to end the criminalisation of individuals who do not have a TV licence and that the matter would be better dealt with through civil proceedings similar to those for council tax arrears? If so, will she make representations to her colleagues at Westminster and ask them to amend the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949?

Cathy Jamieson: The question raises a number of issues. First, it is important that we do all that we can to ensure that, when fines are imposed for whatever reason, we use sensible means to collect them, we make it easier for people to pay and we ensure that the proper enforcement procedures are in place. I do not want people to end up in our prison system because they have problems paying fines. That is why we are beginning to use alternative measures such as supervised attendance orders. I hope that Mr Matheson will be prepared, as I will, to consider what is happening south of the border in relation to the collection of fines. Changes there have meant that people are not constantly returning to the courts so that fines can be enforced, because fines officers now have improved powers to collect.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): What progress has been made in decreasing the number of women in prison in Scotland for the non-payment of fines—fines that were imposed in the first place for crimes connected to poverty, such as not having a TV licence or soliciting?

Cathy Jamieson: I refer Elaine Smith to some of the general comments that I have just made about fine default and the measures that we have put in place. We acknowledge that women often end up in custody because of the non-payment of fines. That can have an especially detrimental effect on families, which, again, is something that I want to avoid. We will continue to focus on alternatives to custody. We have opened the 218 time-out centre in Glasgow, which provides an alternative to custody and deals with some of the vulnerable women who might otherwise have ended up in places such as Cornton Vale.

Petrochemicals Industry

4. Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it has taken in respect of the petrochemicals industry since the recent announcement by BP plc regarding the

future of its olefins and derivatives division. (S2O-2431)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): Although petrochemicals industry support is a reserved matter, both the Scottish Executive and Scottish Enterprise Forth Valley are working to achieve a sustainable future for petrochemicals at Grangemouth in view of the industry's importance to the local and national economy.

Cathy Peattie: The minister will be aware that more than 1,000 jobs have been lost in Grangemouth over the past three years, to bring the three BP companies together as one company, to improve production and to provide synergies. The decision to split the company now is very short sighted. People are concerned about their jobs and about health and safety issues. Will the minister do all that he can to protect those jobs and perhaps convince BP that its decision is wrong?

Lewis Macdonald: At Cathy Peattie's invitation yesterday, I was happy to meet trade union representatives from the plant. They carefully explained their concerns to me. On the basis of that discussion, I undertake that ministers will write to Lord Browne—the chief executive of BP—to explore with him how the efficiencies that have been gained through the integration of the three existing business streams at Grangemouth will be protected under the company's current proposals.

Scottish Water (Meetings)

5. Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive when it next intends to meet representatives of Scottish Water. (S2O-2402)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): Ministers and their officials have a close working relationship with numerous representatives of Scottish Water and meet regularly.

Mike Rumbles: The minister will be aware of the story today in *The Press and Journal*, which reveals that Scottish Water has ignored and hidden from the public the findings of an independent report and has pressed ahead with plans for a completely unsuitable waste screening plant in Stonehaven. Does the minister believe it appropriate for Scottish Water to be less than straightforward in its dealings with the public? Can the Executive, as the majority shareholder, take action not only to prevent that fundamentally flawed scheme from proceeding, but to change the way in which Scottish Water, which is a public company, operates?

Ross Finnie: I am indeed aware of the matters raised in *The Press and Journal* this morning

because the member wrote to me on Tuesday to advise me of the serious allegations that he wished to draw to my attention. The appropriate response for me is to say to the member that I take the allegations seriously. I will investigate the allegations fully with Scottish Water and will respond in detail in due course.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Is the minister aware of the situation in Campbeltown, where people are having to live with sewage not only lying in the streets but floating in the harbour? What is Scottish Water going to do about it?

Ross Finnie: I am well aware of that situation and of a number of alleged failures in the operations of plants. George Lyon has been in correspondence with me for some time on those matters, which I have taken very seriously and raised with Scottish Water. In essence, they are operational matters but they affect the public interest. As the minister responsible, I have sought responses from Scottish Water. I will respond to members once I have had a reply from Scottish Water.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): On the same subject, the minister will be aware that serious failures have occurred not only at the new sewage plant in Campbeltown, but at the new plant in Inverary. Flooding is the main problem in Campbeltown, but in Inverary the installation of the new plant has resulted in a constant problem with sewage odours. Both problems appear to have been caused by fundamental design failures and Scottish Water's continuing inability to correct them, which mean that Scottish Water now has little credibility left with my constituents. I request that the minister urgently investigate the cause of the problems and Scottish Water's continuing failure to correct them. I ask him to bring to a halt the work on the many other sewage treatment plants in Argyll and Bute until Scottish Water can sort out the stinking mess that it has created in Campbeltown and Inverary and put in place a design team that is able to design plants that are fit for purpose.

Ross Finnie: Again, I do not wish to comment in detail on the allegations that the member has put to me over recent weeks. I have called for a report and will respond once I have heard both sides of the argument. I am reluctant to intervene, in particular on the issue of whether the same design team that is in place today will be in place tomorrow. I do not want to stop the progress on works if that is not appropriate. Once I have received a response from Scottish Water, I will respond to the member.

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Water infrastructure has suffered from underinvestment for a long time. How will the

Executive support the implementation of the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 and the multiple public goods over and above water supply that that act will bring?

Ross Finnie: As the member will be aware, we will be embarking on the review of quality and standards III shortly. That process will involve wide and full public consultation. Members of Parliament, the relevant committees and the public will all have the opportunity to contribute to an assessment of the relative priorities—not only those of meeting the statutory requirements as regards water quality and sewage disposal, but, as the member mentioned, those relating to the much wider issues that are covered by the legislation. That will require hard decisions, as there is not an unlimited amount of money. We will have to balance the matters that are dealt with in the water framework directive against the statutory requirements under the other environmental legislation. That will form part of the full process of the consideration of Q and S III.

Retirement Home Owners

6. Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to address the needs of retirement home owners who own a share in the equity of their property. (S2O-2375)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): We have no plans on that issue. The Executive's property law reforms in the Title Conditions (Scotland) Act 2003 will help owners to take decisions in sheltered and retirement housing. However, those reforms are concerned with property ownership. In a shared equity arrangement, the needs of occupiers who do not own the properties are dealt with in individual contracts.

Mr Macintosh: I thank the minister for his reply, from which it is clear that he is aware of the anomalous situation in which the elderly people who are living in retirement complexes and who own a share in the equity of the property rather than the property itself do not benefit from the protection and control that the Title Conditions (Scotland) Act 2003 offers. Will he assure me that that is the result of an oversight by the Executive during consideration of the Title Conditions (Scotland) Bill and that he will explore the possibility of using the Tenements (Scotland) Bill to rectify that oversight, if that is possible?

Hugh Henry: The Title Conditions (Scotland) Act 2003 is concerned with property ownership. In shared equity arrangements, the owners do not own the property, so what the member described as an oversight is not actually an oversight. We do not plan to amend the Tenements (Scotland) Bill to take account of that issue, as the bill deals with

ownership in tenement blocks. The difficulty in the situation that Ken Macintosh describes is that there is a different legal arrangement.

The Presiding Officer: If we are brief, we will just have time for question 7.

Strathclyde Passenger Transport (Rail Services)

7. Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer to question S2O-2239 by Nicol Stephen on 6 May 2004, how many passengers used Strathclyde Passenger Transport-supported rail services in each year since 1995. (S2O-2380)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): Information for the years 1995-96 to 2002-03 is given on page 5 of the recently published "SPT statistics & trends 2003", a copy of which is available in the Parliament's reference centre. Passenger numbers in the year to March 2004 were 41.1 million.

Phil Gallie: I thank the minister for his helpful answer. That document shows that numbers reduced significantly year on year until last year, when they increased, which I welcome. However, does he agree that that increase was perhaps attributable to the increased use of Prestwick airport and the number of flights coming into it? Is he aware that the rail station there was funded by Prestwick airport and that it is operated and maintained by Prestwick airport? Given the contribution that the airport makes to the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive, will he look at the funding for the operation and maintenance of that rail station into the future?

Nicol Stephen: I was going to make the unfair political point that the figures are now well above those during the final three years of the Conservative Government. However, Mr Gallie moved on to the issue of Prestwick airport and I am pleased to support his view that we must strengthen services to that airport. The Prestwick rail link has an important role to play in that respect and I am anxious that the working group that has been established with Network Rail, the Strategic Rail Authority, the local authority and the airport operator should make significant progress over the coming months to try to achieve exactly the objectives that I am sure Mr Gallie wants to be achieved.

Major Events and Festivals in Scotland

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-1341, in the name of Frank McAveety, on major events and festivals in Scotland, and two amendments to the motion.

15:03

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mr Frank McAveety):

I welcome the opportunity to speak about the role that major events and festivals play in contemporary Scotland. I remind members that the importance of festivals is echoed in many different and diverse communities in Scotland and that they have been celebrated by many of our great poets, such as Robert Burns and Robert Fergusson, who commemorated a whole series of events and festivals that included the occasional celebration of alcohol and enjoyment. Those are certainly features of many current festivals.

I want to outline the role that festivals and events play in the wider Scottish economy and their significant role in the development of our cultural infrastructure and the achievement of excellence that is central to what has been achieved in Scotland's cultural scene in recent years. I also want to outline the role that they can play as important focal points for communities, and how communities can have greater confidence as a result of events and festivals. The ambition in Scotland is to continue to compete for world-class festivals and events in order to draw people from around the globe year on year. Such festivals and events can have a significant impact on our tourism economy.

The debate is timely because only last week, Scotland secured the badminton world team championships for 2007. That was done by a partnership of a number of major agencies, including Glasgow City Council, in our largest city. We want to see many more such commitments and to obtain as many events as we can for Scotland between now and 2015.

We have an excellent track record of creating and hosting world-class events and festivals. As we are all aware, Scotland stages the world's largest and leading annual arts festival and, around it, we have a plurality of festivals such as the comedy festival, the book festival, the fringe festival and the long-standing international film festival. Furthermore, at least three years in every five, we host the most prestigious golfing championship, the British open. It might not be part of our culture generally to boast about what we can do, but it is important that we recognise

that Scotland is a place that can hold world-class events.

We are becoming more easily accessible, thanks to the increased number of flights in and out of Scotland. The route development fund is important in that regard. Furthermore, the welcome development of the ferry route to Rosyth has had a substantial positive impact on our tourism product.

Our cities are consistently reinventing themselves. We now have six cities, each of which has unique characteristics. One of VisitScotland's most recent innovations was to commit itself to celebrating and promoting those cities through a variety of information networks. We want to ensure that people who come to Scotland can hear the testimony of those who have experienced the contribution that our cities have made. That is a welcome development.

There is no doubt that our built heritage is one of the main things that attract tourists to Scotland from the UK and around the world. In the past 10 or 15 years, continued investment and the involvement of the Heritage Lottery Fund have reinvented such wonderful visitor attractions as Edinburgh castle and Stirling castle.

Across a range of history, we boast four important world heritage sites. There is one on our doorstep here in Edinburgh, Skara Brae in Orkney, the wonderful development in New Lanark—which, I remind people, was almost derelict 25 years ago—and, of course, St Kilda.

We are an important destination for many events and it is important that we match our visitors' expectations. That is why we need consistently to ally what we do in events and festivals with what we do in terms of our marketing strategy and the quality of our product. That is why it is important to engage with all the providers, be they transport providers, entertainment providers, hotel and accommodation providers or anyone else involved in the broader strategy of tourism. We need to do more work in relation to the various parts that make up the whole. All the elements are inextricably linked.

We want Scotland to be a must-visit, must-return destination. We must ensure that people who come here for events—whether the event is a small local one or a major sporting or other international event—experience the friendliness of Scots, about which we hear much testimony, and appreciate the quality and unique nature of the experience. We need to hold on to and cherish that.

Events support our tourism strategy, for example hosting the British open championship reinforces Scotland's image as the home of golf. Events such as the Loch Lomond great adventure race support

the growing activity holiday market that Scotland must appeal to. We can use events and festivals to extend the tourist season across the year. That will deal with the sustainability issue that many members are concerned about and it will ensure that we have equity in relation to who experiences the positive benefit of events and investment.

However, the benefits of events and festivals can go much further. They promote Scotland on the international stage. There have been recent welcome developments in respect of the Edinburgh military tattoo, which virtually sells out before it starts each August. It attracts global TV audiences of more than 100 million people and showcases one of our world heritage sites.

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): Does the minister accept that the military tattoo has political connotations, particularly given that it has invited the red army of China to come in the same year as Parliament will be addressed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet?

Mr McAveety: I recognise the sensitivity of the issue, but that is a matter for the tattoo's board.

At the centre, we need to recognise that the tattoo has been an incredible success, especially in recent years. It is certainly a feature that we can continue to develop. One key development that the tattoo wants is to go to the diaspora of Scots, especially in Australia and the rest of the southern hemisphere. It wants to promote its wares there and to create a similar experience in that part of the globe.

As for other evidence of development, we acknowledge that events and festivals encourage young people to participate in sport and cultural activity. A commercially driven festival such as the T in the park music festival can be showcased as an incredible success again this year. That event has developed massively in the past 10 years and the number of young people who participate in it has doubled.

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Is the minister aware of the extremely successful Aberdeen international youth festival—of which, I should declare, I am trustee—which has welcomed more than 700 talented young musicians, dancers and actors from around the globe, including some from Aberdeen, every summer for the past 31 years? Will he consider visiting the festival, which this year runs from 4 to 14 August and finishes just before the Edinburgh international festival starts? We would like to give the festival more publicity outwith north-east Scotland.

Mr McAveety: I put on record my appreciation of all festivals that have such a long history. If my diary permits it and I am in that part of Scotland at that time, I will consider visiting the festival. The

Word festival is another development in Aberdeen. The range of writers and creative thinkers that that involves presents an ambitious programme.

That gives me the opportunity to acknowledge the work that many folk throughout Scotland do to develop festival ideas. In the past month or so, I have visited the Shetland folk festival and the fèis Rois movement. Those represent two different ways in which traditional music and performance have encouraged young people and adults to work together, benefited the local economies of Shetland and Ullapool and made a difference. At the heart of those organisations is not just a festival, but excellence and quality. I re-emphasise that the Executive is committed to excellence and achievement, rather than to mediocrity, as some people have suggested in the print media recently.

I draw attention to our success in developing the commitment to holding the Ryder cup in 2014. Putting on one of the major golf events on the sporting calendar will promote Scotland internationally. We will have the opportunity to build up from that with our commitment to the clubgolf programme for nine-year-olds, to ensure that we create a benefit for the wider Scottish community in addition to the experience of the event and the legacy that that will leave.

One key message is that events and festivals can build capacity and skills, as I said. We need to ensure that those skills and that capacity are developed in the next few years. As for the role of EventScotland, the key events agency, I say that recently, it has developed, with the city of Glasgow, the Piping Hot festival, which will celebrate our traditional culture and present that internationally, which is important. EventScotland will support large and small events. That is why a budget has been set aside for examining different ways of supporting events. The organisation's key strategy is to work with existing agencies and existing local leaders—particularly local authorities—to address concerns.

In conclusion, I say that Scotland has an excellent track record of creating and hosting world-class events and festivals. We have some of the very best that the world has to offer. At the heart of those is a commitment to the centrality of excellence and achievement that the First Minister and I share. If we can continue to ensure that people participate in and have access to events and festivals and that the end product is always excellence and achievement, not only our cultural world, but our general economy will flourish, and Scotland will be the better for it.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises Scotland's excellent track record of creating and hosting world-class events and festivals; recognises the great benefits that events and festivals can bring throughout Scotland, such as boosting

our economy, promoting the international profile of Scotland as a place to visit and in which to live, work and invest and encouraging Scots, particularly young people, to participate in sport and culture; welcomes the success achieved by EventScotland in its first year of operation in realising the potential of Scotland as a world-class destination for events, and congratulates the many organisers of festivals throughout Scotland in their success in getting communities involved in these festivals and attracting visitors to Scotland.

15:14

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): The minister said nothing with which I would seek to disagree. On the SNP benches, we normally dispute the requirement for motherhood and apple pie motions. In this instance, it is fair to say that it may be important for us to acknowledge, as a country, the importance of events and festivals. We also need to recognise and accept that they do not just metamorphose on their own and that, on occasion, familiarity breeds contempt. Those of us who reside in the city of Edinburgh, for example, seem to take for granted that there will be an Edinburgh international festival or an Edinburgh's hogmanay. We think that somehow or other everything will be all right on the night. Clearly, a considerable amount of work goes into such events and it is only fair that it be acknowledged.

The minister is correct to say that Scotland is doing well. We have a duty to talk ourselves up when we are doing well, but although we are doing well, we can certainly do better. The minister is also correct to acknowledge that we have to compete globally for events, many of which are competed for not only within the United Kingdom but throughout Europe or globally. To achieve and build upon success, as we have done to date, we must not rest on our laurels, but consider how we can add to and improve our product.

It is important that the duty to sell Scotland is not seen as something for the national tourist board alone but for all of us in Scotland; the minister touched on that at the end of his speech. It is most certainly the duty of parliamentarians and the national Parliament. It is our responsibility to talk up Scotland, to give credit where credit is due and to take action where necessary to ensure that we can improve on our record.

It is also important that we congratulate those who have done the work in that respect to date, as the minister did in his speech. It is clear that festivals and events act as significant draws to local areas and to the nation as a whole. It is also clear that they provide substantial income and added value and that they contribute to the culture and vibrancy of communities, cities and Scotland as a whole. We have to build on and act on that.

In the global age in which we find ourselves—in which travel is much easier—it is important that we

acknowledge the tourist trade's recognition that the destination is no longer enough. Instead, tourists now look for a purpose that will take them to a destination. Simply to sell Edinburgh as a wonderful city with a castle is no longer adequate when tourists can travel just as cheaply—in many instances more cheaply—to Prague or Tallinn. It is not enough for us simply to say that we have wonderful Highlands and Islands when tourists can also easily access South Island in New Zealand. In a world with cheap global connections, it is not enough for us simply to say that we have great destinations: many other cities, communities and countries have equally wonderful destinations and assets to sell and promote.

In many instances, we have to provide an additional reason for tourists to come to Edinburgh: they will not come simply because it is a majestic city with a wonderful castle, but they will come because of the fantastic festivals that are now promoted throughout the year. Tourists will visit Glasgow not only because of the city, but because of the international piping festival, which allows people the benefit of visiting the city with an added something special that might take their fancy. We have to look to our laurels and recognise that vital aspect.

We must also recognise that not all events and festivals relate to arts and sport and that business tourism also falls into that category. We must consider not only the success of the Edinburgh International Conference Centre and Glasgow's Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre, but that of Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre. The Scottish National Party recently held a meeting at AECC and I know that the minister attended the 2004 VisitScotland expo that was held in that wonderful facility. Venues like EICC, SECC and AECC are competing for business events not only with other venues in Scotland, but in a global marketplace. We have to add value to their efforts.

Clearly, many events are not mounted on such a grand scale as those that go on in Aberdeen, Edinburgh or Glasgow, nor are they sporting or artistic events such as the Edinburgh festivals or the European champions league cup final that was brought so successfully to Glasgow recently. Many such events take place in small communities. As Nanette Milne mentioned in her reference to Aberdeen international youth festival, in towns and villages throughout Scotland, significant events take place that add considerable benefit to their localities. I am thinking of book festivals—one of my Green colleagues has lodged a motion on the Wigtown book town festival. Events such as that give added value and we must consider them.

Clearly, Scotland has to aspire and to have ambition. The minister was correct to comment on that. Just because we fail once does not mean

that we should not try again. I know that we will have to take a raincheck on whether we proceed for Euro 2012, but the fact that we missed out on our Ryder cup bid means only that we must persist and try again. Edinburgh lost out in the Heineken cup, but it has to try again; I hope that it will succeed. Certainly, the same thing happened with the rugby league challenge cup. Further efforts will be made, even though the bid that was submitted last year was unsuccessful.

We must recognise that there are limits. There is a general perception in athletics that a population of 4 or 5 million—not for a nation, but for a city—is required to host grand prix athletic events, so there must be realism in what we bid for. No one would suggest that Scotland should seek to host the Olympics. In the global world in which we live, the Olympic host nation must be of a certain size. Even with co-operation between Edinburgh and Glasgow, the Olympics will remain outwith our league, but that does not mean that we should not have aspiration and ambition.

Our major criticism relates to EventScotland. Why is that organisation needed, given that such matters were previously dealt with successfully by Glasgow City Council, the City of Edinburgh Council and tourist boards, local or national? We believe that in many instances the stumbling block was a lack of funding. Let us abolish EventScotland. It may have been introduced with a worthy intention, but our tourism industry has just undergone a review in order to slim it down from numerous area tourist boards to a VisitScotland that will allow us to focus and market Scottish tourism. We do not require a plethora of events. We were doing well under the old regime, but we could do even better under a new one that would allow local, national, public and private bodies that have the incentive to do so to bring in and maximise the benefits of arts, business, communications and other events.

The stumbling block for Scotland is the question of affordability and accessibility. We need to add value to the efforts of those who wish to host events successfully, but we must make our country affordable and accessible. Given that we face spiralling costs, we must acknowledge that our major problem is the high pound, high VAT and high fuel prices. We should acknowledge and build on the success that we have today.

I move amendment S2M-1341.1, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“notes the success of the festivals and events throughout Scotland over many years, created and contributed to by a variety of organisations, whether central or local government, national or area tourist boards or private or public bodies; notes that the impediment to further success has been a shortage of funds and that the creation of an additional and unnecessary tier of bureaucracy is not the solution, and calls for the abolition of EventScotland and

the creation of an event fund for appropriate organisations and bodies to access in order to continue and build upon the success to date.”

15:22

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green):

When first I saw the motion, I thought that the Executive simply had too much parliamentary time, because this is the third motion on the tourism, culture and sport portfolio that is self-congratulatory, goes nowhere and is irrelevant to the real issues that the arts face.

I do not want to belittle the importance of festivals. I hope that all members in the chamber will sign the motion that I have lodged congratulating Wigtown on its international festival, which starts tomorrow. I draw members' attention to my registered interest in respect of Wigtown.

I have been involved in several festivals and know their importance. However, it seems that with the motion the Executive and the minister are ducking the real issues that face the arts in Scotland. We have a crisis when Scotland's leading writers are attacking the minister and the Executive's arts policies. On Monday, Ian Rankin appeared on a nationwide broadcast on Radio 4 to attack the minister. He has also written in the *Holyrood* magazine. Gradually, Government is encroaching on the arm's-length principle for arts funding. There is debate about whether Scotland's arts community and writers should formulate Scotland's arts policy and determine the future of Scotland's arts.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): Does the member believe that the minister has no role in the arts in Scotland, given that the budget for arts organisations comes from the Executive? Does he think that we should fund people ad infinitum, regardless of cost?

Chris Ballance: The Scottish Arts Council was set up separate from Government to fund arts organisations. It is that council's responsibility to administer arts funding, and it does that job well.

The other issue is Scottish Opera. At First Minister's question time, we heard briefly that there has been a leak that undermines the powers of the minister and Parliament. If it is true that there has been a leak, we are in the worst of all worlds, in which most of the professional opera singers in Scotland are being sent either to the dole or to London.

Scottish Opera's youth wing, which is arguably its most accessible and successful part, is being hived off. There is an enshrined principle that Scottish Opera is the only arts organisation that may overspend and mismanage its finances time and again—it has been bailed out 20 times in 40 years. We all receive large mailbags about those issues, so we should be debating them now.

The importance of festivals is not an issue. Their importance is accepted by everyone, so I submit that the subject should not occupy two hours of parliamentary time. There are other, more important arts issues that we could be discussing.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): People who are involved in voluntary arts up and down the country organise arts festivals from January to December, and they continually say, "Politicians should listen—this project needs funding, and it is just as important as Scottish Opera". We should be having this debate.

Chris Ballance: As I said, I am not belittling the importance of festivals. I have been involved as the chair of—

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. We have spent some minutes on the Green amendment, but the member has not referred to it at all. He seems to want a debate on Scottish Opera and the Scottish Arts Council. I do not recall that the Greens opposed the business motion to debate the matter.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mrs Marwick, the member made several references to festivals, which are mentioned in the motion that is down for debate. How he allocates his time within his six minutes is his business. I take it that you will donate a minute of your time to allow Mr Ballance to complete his speech.

Chris Ballance: If I may, I will complete my speech.

I fully recognise the importance of community festivals in particular, and I pay tribute to the enormous contribution that hundreds of thousands of people make by organising such festivals, which almost inevitably benefit their communities.

However, on my amendment, I urge caution with regard to national events, which are not always thoroughly beneficial. In an excellent article on the MTV Europe music awards in *The Scotsman*, Louisa Pearson commented:

"Like any good party, the proof of the pudding will be not in how much people enjoy themselves on the night, but how long they reminisce about it afterwards."

It is not just about the number of people who come along to a one-off prestige event, but about how many of them come back on the national stages. We know that festivals are worth £203 million to Edinburgh's economy, but we do not know how much of that stays in Edinburgh's economy. The bigger national events can bring environmental and social disbenefits, such as problems with litter, which must also be considered. My amendment calls for something to happen, and I ask members to support it.

I move amendment S2M-1341.2, to insert at end:

"further notes that EventScotland's mission statement encompasses environmental as well as other benefits and that the Scottish Executive's major events strategy, while mentioning sustainability and affordability, places these items 11th and 16th respectively out of a total of 16 priorities, and calls on the Executive, through bodies such as EventScotland and VisitScotland, to work to ensure that environmental and community benefits are not given a lower priority in the quest to attract prestige events."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It might be helpful to members who hope to speak in the open debate if I advise that I have to cut the time allocation to five minutes, although I will continue to award six minutes to the opening and closing speakers.

15:28

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): This morning, a learned Edinburgh gentleman commented to me that the motion is all verbiage and that it is the sort of thing that makes people ask what the Scottish Parliament is for.

However, it would be wrong of me to be churlish. We should celebrate this case of Daniel coming to judgment. It seems that, at last, we have a Labour Government that says that culture is a good thing—the First Minister said so in his St Andrew's day speech. He said that culture should be at the centre of everything. It may be that the considerable section of the Scottish public that loves opera is now questioning whether he was sincere in that statement. We wait with bated breath to see how the future unfolds for our beleaguered national opera company—that award-winning company that now faces downsizing and a loss of jobs. It is high time for the First Minister and the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport to take responsibility for the mess that Scottish Opera is in.

What is obvious is that, despite all the words of support, the Executive's approach to improving culture—and the tourism that goes with it—is fundamentally flawed. The Executive's strategy and review-led approach means constant interference and restructuring, which impedes progress. Last week's letter in *Scotland on Sunday* that was signed by 55 of Scotland's leading cultural figures said:

"There is a void where the Executive's arts policy should be."

That puts the matter well. I hope that the Executive takes note of that statement, because many people in the arts world are beginning to despair.

The Executive's approach to culture and tourism always consists of glossy brochures, state-led

strategies and new organising bodies, which are all paid for with public money that could be better spent on events on the ground. Government involvement should be confined to enabling, encouraging and, possibly, to advising on methods; Government should not be involved in content or artwork.

The Conservative party is proud of Scotland's great record of holding successful major events and festivals, but the fact is that most of the main events, such as the Edinburgh festival, the Edinburgh tattoo, the royal highland show and the open golf championship, came into being and flourished long before the creation of EventScotland. I suppose that it was inevitable that the launch of the Executive's strategy would entail the establishment of a new body of that type, because the Executive is so fond of them.

Rather than create bodies such as EventScotland, why does not the Executive take advice from the individuals who have been successful in promoting events in the past? For example, there is Ricky Demarco, who is giving a half-hour broadcast this afternoon on American television to sell the Edinburgh festival. Members should note that the American television people did not ask EventScotland; they asked Ricky Demarco. It is not surprising that they went to him, because he has experience of putting on thousands of theatre plays, concerts, performances and exhibitions and of organising funding internationally from 40 different countries. He has been doing all that for 40 years and his contribution to the Edinburgh festival is legendary. Are people of his calibre and experience advising EventScotland and, indeed, are they advising the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport? It does not appear that they are—more is the pity.

Festivals and events are extremely important all over Scotland and are becoming more so all the time, as world tourism grows by more than 4 per cent a year. Among the special things about festivals and events are the benefits that they bring to the communities in which they are set. That applies to big international festivals and events such as the Edinburgh international festival and the Edinburgh fringe, and the royal highland show, which promote Edinburgh and Scotland around the globe. It also applies to the smaller festivals, such as the new year ball game in Kirkwall, which is a hilarious football game between two ends of the town; Up-Helly-Aa in Lerwick, which is a celebration of Shetland's nordic heritage; the riding of the marches, which takes place in several Borders towns; and, of course, the numerous highland games, which take place throughout the summer all over Scotland.

There is also the annual Gaelic mòd and, this year, the Lochaber festival of Scots and Irish

gaeldom, which are vital to encouraging and supporting Gaelic culture. Two other important events this year will be the Scottish food fortnight, from 18 September to 3 October, and Scotland's countryside festival on 4 and 5 September. Those events are aimed at promoting Scottish food and drink and encouraging understanding of countryside issues. I congratulate the Scottish Countryside Alliance for organising them.

I want to highlight the fact that festivals often occur in provincial towns or rural areas outside the normal tourism season. The mid-Argyll music festival is a good example. I know it well and it is a remarkably well-organised event that is held in Lochgilphead in March. The festival highlights many sorts of music, poetry, dance, choirs and ensembles, and has a big competition for school brass bands. The festival brings many visitors to Lochgilphead and Ardrishaig and it has become a famous event. That kind of festival, which celebrates traditional music, brings to participants self-esteem and confidence, an increase in personal skills, the benefits of participating and interacting in groups, the pride of belonging to a group or choir, opportunities for an increased social life and the glory of achievement.

There are far too many other festivals for me to name, but they should be supported because they are expensive to run; for example, there are travel and accommodation costs, facilities hire, obtaining finance and recruiting organisational and administrative skills. All that takes a great deal of time. How do we quantify voluntary time in terms of cost? The events are genuine examples of people-led culture; they have nothing whatever to do with Executive strategies and require no Government intervention. The Executive should use its money for funding festivals at the grass roots, instead of setting up more quangos like EventScotland.

15:35

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I apologise that I will shortly have to depart the chamber, but I must attend a meeting that is intended to facilitate the operation of the Parliament next week.

I support the motion and I welcome the success that we have had in attracting international touristic events of various sorts, but I want to concentrate on the effect that events and festivals have on Scots. Other members have highlighted the importance of such festivals to our tourist trade, so I will not replicate what they have said, but I think that we need to give more thought to the value that they have in brightening up life for Scots.

We perhaps suffer seriously because of Calvinism. I am a member of a church that is supposed to be Calvinist—although I am certainly not Calvinist in many ways—but I think that Calvinism has had a heavy effect on the Scottish character. There is a feeling that enjoying oneself is not really on, so people conceal that by getting totally drunk. Policy should aim to create happiness. To use a cliché, it should aim for the greatest happiness of the greatest number. People sneer at that, but I think that it is a good aim.

En passant, I point out that Mr Ballance's speech focused entirely on the arts. I am a vaguely arty chap myself, but life extends far beyond that. Festivals also promote good food—as Jamie McGrigor mentioned—and sport and enjoyment of all sorts. There is life beyond Scottish Opera—for God's sake, can we not shut up about it and wait till there is an announcement? At that point, we will be able to argue about whether we have a good deal or a bad one.

I want to concentrate on the effect that all these festivals and events have on Scots. For example, the Edinburgh festival is successful at attracting many tourists, but the great majority of the people in the audiences have EH postcodes and live in the travel-to-work area around Edinburgh. The same is true of the fringe and of the big events in Glasgow and Strathclyde park. Such events attract many visitors, but they play an important part in the life of our people locally.

As other members have mentioned, we have many good local events of all sorts—Jamie McGrigor listed a good number, so I need not mention them all as well—which are often the one opportunity that people have to show their contribution to the community. At such events, one sees groups of wee lassies doing drum majorette stuff, which is really good for them and for the community and makes their parents and grandparents very proud. We should encourage that sort of activity much more than we do.

As well as having events that are based on cultural activity, such as celebrating Robbie Burns—who is one of our more successful industries—we can base events on sport, by encouraging people to play golf here, or on the heritage industry, by having mock battles outside castles or reinvigorating industrial activity in the way that has been done at New Lanark. We can also have steam railways running, as they do at Bo'ness. I think that the Highland games and other festivals have already been mentioned, but we could also have environmental celebrations that encourage people to become interested in the environment.

We should perhaps have parties to attract exiles, whether they are merely from England or from places such as New Zealand. Attracting such

people back is an industry that has huge potential. While watching the dress parade in New York in which the First Minister did his best to promote Scotland by wearing a slightly futuristic kilt, I had a long conversation with a lady who was one of the organisers. She was very enthusiastic about Scotland, but I was struck by the fact that London was the nearest she had come to visiting Scotland. She should have visited here repeatedly and we have failed by not having been able to get her to do that. We need to attract the exiles by having good activities for the local people.

Such activities need not require huge amounts of support. Making modest funds available to help local festivals—just £1,000 here or there—could make all the difference to them. That might allow them to get best value from their activity by promoting and publicising it and getting people to come and take part, whether they are local or not.

We have to stimulate our communities. Local activity gives people work to do in advance and they can enjoy the day itself. If we stimulate communities in a modest way, we can get good value from our investment in public life and in tourism. We will get tourists to come by enjoying ourselves in our own communities. I hope that we will not forget the Scots when we worry about attracting tourists.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now go to the open debate. I ask members to keep to tight five-minute speeches.

15:40

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I welcome the debate; it should be used as an opportunity to reflect on the importance of major events and festivals to Scottish life economically and to our cultural life.

It has been taken for granted by some members that we should bag the fact that festivals are good for us and move on to something more exciting and more interesting. However, we should reflect on how festivals can be used as an economic tool in transforming economies. Consider the impact of the Glasgow garden festival. It had a huge impact on Glasgow's perception of itself; it led to a lot of economic development and it helped Glasgow to make vital economic transitions to become a new global city. The same is true of festivals in Edinburgh.

It does not surprise me that last weekend *The Observer* mentioned Edinburgh and Glasgow as the top two destination cities for people in the UK. We should celebrate that in this chamber. Edinburgh and Glasgow have achieved that, as Kenny MacAskill said, not only by being good destinations, but because of long-term investment in the culture of both cities. There has been

proactive and strategic use of festivals to promote those cities, not only to people who come into them but to the people who live in them, to transform their feelings for and confidence in their cities.

It is not possible to list the many events that Edinburgh had last year—there were 50 of them. Everybody knows about the Edinburgh festival fringe, the Edinburgh international book festival, the Edinburgh international festival, the Edinburgh international film festival and the Edinburgh jazz and blues festival, but there have been 50 events in total in the past year. Such events are really important to the city—they generate approximately £200 million a year.

In response to Chris Ballance's comments about the MTV awards, I point out that a detailed analysis of the impact of the MTV awards was presented to the City of Edinburgh Council this week. The analysis not only examines the impact on the city but considers what type of people came and where they were attracted from and includes hard-headed thoughts about where the city needs to go on future awards ceremonies such as that.

There is analysis of how festivals take place. As Frank McAveety and Kenny MacAskill said, they do not take place by accident; they are part of a long-term strategy. In Edinburgh, the Labour council has had a long-term strategy to promote Edinburgh as a city of international scale to get all the cultural and economic benefits that come from that. It is about promotional activity and it is about developing the city's infrastructure. Co-ordination between the City of Edinburgh Council, the local tourist board, the local enterprise company and all the local tourist industries around and about the city has been critical to that success.

I hope that the minister will give a reassurance in his winding-up speech that the very welcome reorganisation of the local tourist industry will not be allowed to disrupt the superb momentum that has built up in the city—particularly in relation to the future of the Edinburgh convention bureau.

Success is not built only on marketing the city; it is also built on developing our cultural strengths. There have been years of investment by central and local Government. I do not think that the Tories' comments about Labour's commitment to the arts were fair. For the past 20 years, the City of Edinburgh Council has consistently invested in the arts. It has invested not only in big flagship projects, but in community arts and in developing the ability of young people to develop their artistic potential.

We need to support not only the flagship cultural icons. We must also underpin support for innovation and creativity in schools. That is why I welcome very much the reference to young people

in the Executive's motion today. We must give young people the opportunity to get involved in arts in the future, to use the arts facilities that are available and to take part in the festivals that are on now.

It is also about investing in the future. We should not take it for granted that we will always have the festivals that we currently have and that they will always continue. For us in Edinburgh there are key issues about the public transport infrastructure and about developing a strategy to replace the Ross bandstand—if the minister would like to devote a minute of his final remarks to the way forward on that matter, I would be delighted.

The new national theatre is also coming along. That should benefit the whole of Scotland and should enable our producing theatres to take their productions around the country and abroad.

There is a lot more that we need to do, and it is a question of leadership at both local and national levels. That is why I welcome the fact that we have EventScotland. If we are to be a country that thinks big on arts, tourism and festivals, we must back up that big ambition with practical work. It is not about bureaucracy; it is about co-ordination, focus and putting in the resources to make it happen. Only this week, the City of Edinburgh Council has decided to set up an events unit because it recognises that doing things on a wing and a prayer and trying to be supportive are not enough. We have to be focused, develop a strategy and look to the future. The Executive's motion sets that out and we should support it.

15:45

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

The success of festivals throughout Scotland is a reflection of people in our country celebrating their lives. The small festivals that make up the bulk are the ones that most people take part in. It is probable that more people take part in festivals than take part in football and many other things like that; however, the kind of funding that is available for festivals is not nearly what it should be.

This month, I have appeared at fèis Rois as a participant. I have also dipped into the Ullapool fish week and done some walking in the Caithness walking festival. Such small festivals attract people from other countries to take part in something that local people are themselves celebrating. I do not need to declare an interest, but I was an organiser of the Highland traditional music festival for more than 20 years. The problem is that festivals are usually run by volunteers who run out of steam eventually—or get elected to Parliament. Money is needed to back up the volunteers' administrative efforts to allow the festivals to be sustained and to

allow the volunteers to do more creative thinking and less of the drudgery.

However, the fact is that that money seems to be being used to fund the superstructure of the arts. Our amendment talks specifically about EventScotland, which has a chief executive on a salary of £95,000 although it has not yet even published a business plan for staff, administrative costs and so on. People in many parts of the country will look at that kind of money and think about what £95,000 could do to help sustain a hundred festivals around the country. Thanks to the Scottish Arts Council and careful discussions over the years, greater amounts of money have been given to festivals, but it has not been nearly enough to sustain many festivals in the face of today's cost increases. The question of whether EventScotland should exist is something that my colleague Kenny MacAskill has argued about. I do not know whether we need it—in fact, I think that we should probably abolish it.

When we project our culture into the tourism market and onto a bigger stage, VisitScotland has an important part to play. However, I am sorry to say that it is not always as professional as it should be. For example, it has a policy called “A Soundtrack for Scottish Tourism”, which is about promoting traditional music. Yet, at the VisitScotland expo 2004, which was held in Aberdeen last month—which the minister called one of the best that he had attended and which, as one of the industry's biggest business-to-business trade fairs, he described as “a resounding success”—VisitScotland did not take the opportunity to present a full showcase of Scottish traditional music. A package was offered but was not, in the end, bought. I am afraid to say that the hospitality package that the participants from all around the world got was a stop-gap measure, not the best that could be provided, because VisitScotland would not pay a reasonable amount for musicians of the top quality. That is the kind of thing that we hear about, although people do not want to discuss it too widely. People feel let down by the fact that organisations in which people have very large salaries do not, in the end, reflect the culture of Scotland.

It is on the culture of Scotland that I will finish. The motion gives no inkling of a strategy to project the best of our Scottish culture abroad. For example, will any part of the year of Highland culture be sent on tour around the world? It would be great if the minister could spell out such a strategy. We have to take a can-do approach to sending out cultural ambassadors, because that is a part of selling Scotland. I suggest that many people come to Scotland for our traditional culture because it can be found only here and they take that message back to their own countries and more people come here. It is important to get the

strategy right and I hope that the minister gives us some answers.

15:50

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): In speaking in this debate, I will highlight three events that are taking place in Ayrshire this summer and note the benefit that they will bring to the Ayrshire economy and to Scotland's economy as a whole.

The open golf championship will come to Troon in my constituency, and I hope to see many members there as it promises to be a terrific event. I particularly look forward to seeing the minister there. Apart from the pleasure that it will bring to the tens of thousands of visitors who will visit Troon, the championship will be watched by millions of people worldwide.

Many will not know that the open championship began at Prestwick in 1860 and has gone from strength to strength. In addition, with Turnberry just 20 miles down the road, South Ayrshire has three championship courses within a 20-mile radius of Prestwick airport; that is a huge and unique asset that we must promote and exploit. However, that can happen only if adequate transport links are developed and maintained in South Ayrshire.

According to an independent assessment, the 2003 open, held at Sandwich in Kent, benefited the local economy by £17.6 million and created 1,300 full-time equivalent jobs. I hope that this year's event at Troon will benefit the Ayrshire economy by around £20 million. Not just the restaurants and hotels will benefit from the championship; all Scotland will receive a boost through the promotion of our unique and identifiable golf courses.

Also coming to Ayrshire in 2004 is the world bowling championship, which will be held at Ayr's Northfield bowling complex. That event will also publicise Ayrshire's attributes. Ayr will also be the centre of the Burns an' a' that festival, which starts on 28 May. I hope that the many Burns enthusiasts in the Parliament—I think particularly of Cathy Peattie—will visit that definitive celebration of Burns's life and work.

However, none of those events is staged without cost. It is only reasonable to consider the cost in relation to the benefit. Obviously, as world-class sporting events, the open and the world bowling championships will bring international tourists to Ayr. However, gentle questions have to be asked about the Burns festival, which received £630,000 of public funding last year and cost more than £800,000 to stage. Indeed, it has been calculated that every visitor to the festival cost £42 per head, and the festival still has some way to go before it can be regarded as a stand-alone event. That

said, it is money well spent because it promotes Ayrshire's cultural heritage, builds local self-esteem and develops our tourism product range. We must continue to support the event, still only in its third year, in the belief that it will some day become an international, self-financing festival.

With the impending demise of Ayrshire and Arran tourist board, we must now consider what will take its place. In Ayrshire, there is an organisation called the Ayrshire and Arran tourism industry forum, which has more than 100 business members who have in the past developed tourism initiatives in Ayrshire. The AATIF has long been overshadowed by the tourist board, but it is a practical and working model of what must be in place to develop and promote market-led tourism in Ayrshire. The organisation, comprised of local business people, developed three of the four products that were referred to recently as major successes by the chief executive of our local tourist board. I believe that that business model should be encouraged and developed as the hub system announced by the minister in his review of tourist boards.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the member give way?

John Scott: I would rather not if Mr Purvis will forgive me. I am short of time.

I believe that local people taking local decisions about a product in a market that they know are more likely to be successful than the top-down approach offered by VisitScotland and EventScotland. A local organisation is more likely to promote and develop the local tourism package that is so necessary to real businesses in our tourism market. EventScotland means more quangos, more glossy brochures and more state-led strategies, and they are not the answer for Ayrshire or Scotland. A grass-roots, practical, pragmatic and bottom-up approach is much more likely to succeed and grow our tourism market. I urge the minister to consider the working model in Ayrshire as the way forward for Scottish tourism.

15:55

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I am pleased to participate in the debate, which has been slightly bizarre at times, not least the contribution from Chris Ballance. On one hand, he asked why all the prominent artists in Scotland are criticising the Scottish Executive and, on the other, he said that the Scottish Executive should stop Scottish Opera overspending its budget. I argue that those artists are critical exactly because the Scottish Executive said to Scottish Opera that enough was enough and that the gravy train that has gone on for far too long must stop.

Way back in 2000, a committee of this Parliament said that the national companies had to

fulfil their roles within the budgets provided by the SAC and not commit themselves to activities in expectation of future increases in funding. That has not happened.

The Tories stand up and say that we could continue to fund Scottish Opera with a blank cheque. Perhaps that is their rationale, but I think that we should debate how much money Scottish Opera should get and, once the budget has been set, everyone should have to operate within it. That should apply to Scottish Opera in the same way that it applies to anybody else.

Mr McGrigor: In 2001, the Scottish Arts Council commissioned the Jonas report, which showed that Scottish Opera was losing about £1 million a year. Surely it does not take a rocket scientist to work out that, after three years, the company will be £3 million or £4 million down.

Karen Gillon: Huge structural issues are involved. I have been involved in the debate since 1999 and whenever anybody criticises the way in which the structure and operation of any of our national companies are handled, they are deemed to be philistines. I am prepared to be called a philistine if that is what it takes to sort out the problems.

When we last looked at the figures, we found that 46 per cent of the total SAC budget went to the four national companies. If that is the kind of structure that we want, that is fine. However, we need to debate the matter, because people up and down the country say to me continually that the funding that goes into the national companies is not justified in terms of output compared with what they do in their local communities. Those people are asked to limit their artistic expression because of budgetary constraints, yet people in Scottish Opera have told Parliament that they cannot be limited by budgetary constraints. That is simply unacceptable.

I was brought up in the Borders where festivals are commonplace. Local communities come together to organise their events, not just to celebrate their history, but to look to the future. The festivals attract people from all over Scotland and the world. We have similar events in Biggar and Lanark in my constituency. In one day in June, the Lanark lanimers day festival attracts to the town 3,000 visitors from all over Scotland in a celebration of the past and the future. It is a huge cultural celebration.

I say to the minister that there is merit in the question of how such festivals get support. They do not get the kind of support that other large organisations receive. As part of his cultural review, I hope that the minister will ask the commissioners to look seriously at the contribution that such events and festivals make and at how we can continue to support them at a local level.

My colleague Sarah Boyack showed how important Edinburgh's festivals have been to that city. My colleague Pauline McNeill will tell us about her night at the MTV awards and how important that has been to Scotland.

In my final minute, I will talk about the under-21s rugby world cup because it provides us with an excellent opportunity. It shows what can be achieved through partnership, not with the Scottish Executive alone, but with the governing body and the local authorities in Edinburgh, Glasgow and the Borders. I hope that we can assess and evaluate how that event goes and how it manages to showcase our younger rugby stars. We must look at how it manages to encourage more young people and visitors to watch rugby, because it will provide us with a platform for having another go at hosting the senior rugby world cup in years to come. I will be grateful for the minister's comments on that.

This important debate spans every community in Scotland from the smallest to the largest and I hope that, through it, we can begin to redirect funding to where it will have the greatest impact in our local communities.

16:00

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I am delighted to be able to be parochial this afternoon and to talk about the greatest arts festival in the world, which is right on our doorstep. Indeed, outside the door of this chamber, we can see the tell-tale signs of scaffolding being erected on the castle esplanade, cobblestones being moved around a bit and people in cafes encroaching on our streets. The time that is equally dreaded and anticipated by Edinburgh's population is fast approaching when we welcome visitors from around the world to our city.

As we have already heard, there are so many festivals in Edinburgh that, depending on the literature that we read, we do not see the same number written down twice. We have Easter festivals, summer festivals, the international festival, the fringe, the tattoo, the book, film and jazz festivals and—obviously—the Christmas and hogmanay festivals. Edinburgh is a year-round festival city.

Largely because of that, Edinburgh has a worldwide reputation. Generally speaking, our festivals are a great success story for the city and for Scotland. Last year, for the first time ever, the fringe sold a million tickets, half of which went to local people. Five hundred thousand visitors fill our hotels, bars and restaurants and, overall, Edinburgh's festivals generate more than £200 million for the Scottish economy and promote Scotland within the UK and around the world.

As Donald Gorrie pointed out, the festivals also play a crucial role in introducing Scots young and old not only to our own culture but to the culture of the world. I welcome many of the recent attempts that have been made by the festivals and by others to take ballet, opera, theatre and music into local schools and operations such as the north Edinburgh arts centre. That centre is doing extremely good work in my constituency without, I have to say, any assistance from the Scottish Arts Council.

There is a real appetite in Edinburgh to get involved and City of Edinburgh Council and many commercial sponsors have risen to the challenge. However, the city cannot afford to be complacent, which is why I welcome the establishment this week of the council's dedicated events unit to manage the development of its events strategy; to assist existing events; and to provide a one-stop shop that will make it easier for promoters, organisers and partner organisations such as the Scottish Executive to find out what is going on in Edinburgh and to get involved in it.

I also welcome the Executive's commitment to supporting and developing major events through the establishment of EventScotland. Indeed, we should be sharing expertise to ensure that we can attract many of the events that members have mentioned and to develop better links between those events and our wider strategic priorities in marketing Scottish tourism and business.

The Executive has rightly supported and assisted Edinburgh's events and festivals in several ways. It gave a certain amount of funding for the MTV awards and has allocated money to national museums, art galleries and transport projects. However, although Edinburgh has been highly successful in this respect, last year's hogmanay festival shows what can happen when things go wrong. Indeed, they can go disastrously wrong, because the whole world is watching.

I would like the Executive to assist Edinburgh further in several ways. First, on a very parochial point, I hope that it will help to find a new site for the royal highland show to ensure that it is not lost to this part of Scotland. After all, it attracts 150,000 people every year.

Secondly, I ask the Executive to allocate extra funding to Lothian and Borders Police. It costs the council £200,000 to pay for the policing of the hogmanay festival. Thirdly, on infrastructure pressures, Sarah Boyack has already mentioned the Ross bandstand and we also need to upgrade the city's sports facilities for the 21st century. Fourthly, a number of national and local events and festivals around Scotland are experiencing insurance problems, which is causing some of them to go to the wall.

Finally, I ask the Executive to consider whether councils such as City of Edinburgh Council that rightly invest council tax payers' money in events and infrastructure elements that benefit the whole of Scotland—for example, the EICC—can be given greater support to do so either directly by the Executive or through the new tourism framework.

16:04

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I sincerely welcome this debate on festivals. When I first saw the motion in the *Business Bulletin*, I thought that it presented a great opportunity for the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on the Scottish contemporary music industry to highlight what that industry contributes to the economy, particularly through music festivals. Unlike Chris Ballance, I realise that the debate presents a great opportunity.

It is to their credit that the First Minister, Frank McAveety and previous ministers have indicated that they believe that music festivals are important to Scotland and that they have attended many such festivals. I endorse the vision of Scotland as a world leader in being a destination for events and festivals. That is not a trivial matter.

The benefits of the MTV Europe awards have long been recognised and talked about. The event was an important economic activity and it is refreshing to hear that the enterprise network, which secured the event, believes that the music sector is important to enterprise. Because we have shown the world that we can stage such an event, we are now confident enough to argue that other events should be staged in Scotland. The minister is aware of my attempts to follow up on the First Minister's desire to bring the Brit awards from London to Scotland and many other awards ceremonies, such as the Ivor Novello awards, should rightfully take place in Scotland. I make special mention of the tartan clef awards, which the minister might attend later this year. We could make more of the fact that that is a Scottish event, because we have a vibrant music industry in Scotland. Perhaps we should also have our own event.

Ministers must recognise that festivals are not just important for the economy, although that is important. Festivals are also an expression of passion for music and culture. They demonstrate that Scotland is a place where people are passionate about their tastes and they are important to many music fans. We must recognise that the credibility that Scotland gained from hosting the MTV awards means that we will host more such events. I congratulate City of Edinburgh Council on its organisation of the event; the council received a special award from MTV

Europe for hosting the best ever event. Creativity contributes to the nation's economy, character and vibrancy. Donald Gorrie is not wrong when he says that there is a need for enjoyment and happiness. Perhaps our slogan should be "a smart, successful, happy Scotland".

T in the park is one of the most successful music festivals in Scotland and T on the fringe is part of the Edinburgh festival. Some 65,000 people attend each day of T in the park—I see my colleague Irene Oldfather nodding, because she is a music lover and has attended that important event. For the first two years that T in the park ran, the event did not cover its costs, but now it is one of the most successful events in Britain and 30 per cent of its tickets are sold to people outside Scotland—they are mostly bought by people in England.

Promoters tell me that some issues must be tackled if we are to continue to promote these important events. One issue relates to the policing of major events; there is too much disparity in the application of fees. The industry is complimentary about how events are policed, but fees should be applied more evenly. It would be helpful to consider how policing costs might be standardised for events as they are for football matches. Organisers also call on the Executive to acknowledge the nature of the events industry and to consult them properly about its plans in relation to its recent review of the security industry.

We need to consider venues in more detail. Scotland needs more appropriate venues. We have seen the SECC's plan for a 12,500-seat auditorium that will put Scotland on the map and enable it to compete with major cities in the United Kingdom. That is important; we already lose out on numerous events because we do not have the appropriate venues. I hear that plans for the forthcoming Simon and Garfunkel concert are suffering for that reason.

Some members have ventured into the debate about the proposed new cultural commission. I have stayed away from that issue, which requires another debate. As a devolutionist, I support the concept of national companies such as Scottish Opera, Scottish Ballet and the national theatre and it is important that those companies are of high quality. What we do in Scotland is important. However, my support for such companies does not negate my desire—or that of any member—to broaden out our definition of the arts. We must challenge the notion that such companies represent the only concept of the arts. Ken Macintosh and I have argued for four years that the cultural strategy should broaden its scope to include the music industry as a legitimate force in the arts. I acknowledge that the Executive has now taken that idea on board. Let us get the balance right. This has been a good debate and I

will welcome further debate on the cultural commission.

16:10

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP): This afternoon, I want primarily to highlight the outstanding work of the Edinburgh people's festival, which has not been mentioned so far. However, before I do so, I have to say that I detect an overemphasis—both in the motion and, to some extent, in the debate—on the purpose of arts and cultural festivals in Scotland in boosting the economy, promoting tourism and providing investment opportunities for commerce. Where, in the words of 10cc, is the celebration of “art for art's sake”? I welcome Pauline McNeill's remarks, which rightly redressed some of the balance, because it seems to me that too much of the debate has been about the “money for God's sake”.

What cultural and artistic festivals add to the cultural life of Scotland is immeasurable. It goes way beyond any balance sheet or profit and loss account of this hotel chain, that international brewery, or restaurants and shops in our tourism and catering industries. We have to emphasise that in this debate.

Cathy Peattie: Would Mr Fox not agree that the jobs that are created are very important and that, for many areas, the major providers of jobs will be hotels and so on?

Colin Fox: Of course I agree with that point, but it is the one point that has been reiterated time and again in the motion and in the debate. In my opinion, the cultural side of the equation has been left untouched.

On a more positive note, I welcome the congratulations that the minister offers in the motion to our arts festivals and the people who present them. As the minister knows, an arts celebration is running in this city between 6 June and 12 June. The Leith festival is a community arts festival that has been reborn in recent years, as have others. I take this opportunity to wish Mary Moriarty, John Paul McGroarty and the team at the Leith festival every success.

I grew up in industrial Lanarkshire which, like much of Scotland, had gala days in every town and village in the summer. Such memorable days were often the gateway for youngsters like me to enjoy a wider interest in the arts as we grew up.

I hope that events such as the Leith festival abound and flourish all over Scotland but, in the time that I have left, I want to concentrate on the Edinburgh people's festival. A decision was taken by the 1945 Labour Government—a radical, visionary and popular decision—to establish the Edinburgh festival. The festival was to be an

international celebration of the arts, to raise the spirits of a war-weary population who were emerging from the second world war and who were aware of the privations that still endured. It was that Government's visionary idea that led to the Edinburgh festival that we see today.

For many critics, the problem with the Edinburgh festival of the late 1940s was that it fell into the hands of those whom the late great Hamish Henderson once famously described as the “Edinbourgeoisie”. The community celebration, which was meant to be for the people and by the people, was lost to a much more expensive and elitist alternative. In 1951, Hamish Henderson, Ewan MacColl, Joan Littlewood, the miners union, trade unions and labour organisations—the critics of the festival—decided to organise the Edinburgh people's festival. Time does not allow me to elaborate on the great success that the people's festival achieved, but it is fair to say that it went beyond the wildest dreams of its originators. In the end, it was not the failure of the festival that killed it, but the cultural poison of McCarthyism in the early 1950s.

I am glad to say that, in 2002, the Edinburgh people's festival was reborn. That year, a certain David Sneddon sang in the Jack Kane centre in Craigmillar, three weeks before winning the BBC's “Fame Academy”. Last year, the festival ran for a week—with a world première of a play in Woodburn miners welfare; a comedy night; a celebration of the contribution that Edinburgh's Indian and Pakistani community has made to the city; and many other events. The highlight for me was the flyting—the debate—that took place in Wester Hailes, on the subject of “Whose culture is it anyway?” The line-up included Paul Gudgeon, who is the director of the fringe, Richard Demarco, who has been mentioned before, Joy Hendry, Tam Dean Burn, Tommy Shepherd, Robert Rae, Angus Calder and Kevin Williamson. Despite the last-minute apologies of Irvine Welsh and Paul Laverty, it lived up to its billing. It was a fantastic evening of arts, celebrated with gusto in an atmosphere of enlightenment, experience and improvement. This year's festival runs from 7 August to 14 August.

The Edinburgh people's festival is unashamedly not about boosting the local economy or promoting the city's international profile; it is about celebrating something that is much more valuable—our common humanity. Its continued success will be measured by the extent to which it includes and involves the communities of the Lothians. I am enormously encouraged by the support that the festival has received; in particular, I thank City of Edinburgh Council for the support that it has provided and the minister and his staff for helping to develop the people's festival in the years ahead.

16:15

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): As well as Celtic connections in Glasgow and ceilidh culture in Edinburgh, Scotland has festivals in Aberdeen, Glenfarg, Moffat, Girvan, Orkney, Arran and Linlithgow. In fact, there are far too many to mention. Scotland has famous festivals every weekend—and I am not just talking about T in the park.

Festivals are organised by voluntary organisations, local authorities and local partnerships of businesses and enthusiasts. From spring to autumn, there will be a festival somewhere in Scotland every weekend. “Exploring the tales of the Misty Isle and its hinterland” is the title of the Skye and Lochalsh storytelling festival, which is being held this week. Earlier this month, the Highlands and Islands music and dance festival in Oban celebrated its 21st birthday. The fact that that clashed with the Shetland folk festival and big in Falkirk shows what a wealth of events we have. Sometimes choices have to be made.

It is that wealth of cultural tradition that brings so many visitors to Scotland. They come to see the land of Robert Burns, not just in its historical context, but as part of a living tradition. No truly Scottish event is complete without its complement of cultural heritage. Even our pop festivals have a Celtic fringe. However, we are not always quick, or slick, enough at selling our country on its greatest strengths. Too often, we offer a caricature of Scottish culture rather than the real thing. We must look beyond the lucky heather and the tartan dolls if we want to project Scottish culture on the world stage.

VisitScotland must promote Scotland as a country that is rich in cultural capital. It must promote not just the big events, some of which are on the website, but the broader sweep of local events and festivals. If VisitScotland does not promote Scottish culture, who else will? It should give pride of place to the products of Scottish culture in all that it does. The same goes for Scottish Executive initiatives. I hope that the cultural commission will take on board the importance of nurturing our indigenous culture.

Scottish culture is uniquely rooted in our experience as a people—it is a people’s culture. We want to share our culture; it is a diverse mix, but it is our mix. If we want our culture to prosper, we must grow our cultural capital. That means supporting and promoting the events and festivals at which Scottish culture flourishes. The traditional arts must get a fair and equitable share of any support that is provided. Scottish arts should no longer be the poor relations.

The debate has been important. I hope that we will return to examine exactly what the cultural

commission will involve and will have an opportunity to explore the importance of our arts, including our traditional arts, in Scotland.

16:18

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. I want to highlight the importance of some major events to the economy of Fife and Kinross.

I am told that the open golf championship brings around £25 million to the Fife economy. I am glad that, next year, it will return to its spiritual home, St Andrews. Shops, hotels and ordinary homes all benefit economically. I believe that more than half a billion people throughout the world watch the championship on television. We are fortunate that St Andrews is part of the cycle that ensures that the open is brought to Scotland three out of every five years. I apologise to John Scott for my next remark, but it is true that, as all great golfers know, winning the open in St Andrews is that bit more special.

Fife and Scotland have been late in realising the potential for golf tourism—in spite of the fact that we in Fife have more golf courses per head of population than anywhere else in the world. We can learn many lessons from Ireland’s marketing of its golf industry. St Andrews is a success despite appalling transport links and poor road, rail and air links and we must do much better for our visitors than we are currently doing.

Pauline McNeill has already mentioned T in the park, which is an example of a major event that results in huge benefits for the local economy. I have been told that it has been estimated that £2.5 million is pumped into the economy in the town of Kinross alone. I pay tribute to my colleague Bruce Crawford who, as leader of the SNP-controlled council, was instrumental in bringing T in the park to Kinross in the first place.

It is not only the T in the park weekend event that brings benefits—the weeks of preparation beforehand also bring benefits. Roadies, scaffolders and other essential workers who put together the festival site fill the hotels and bed and breakfasts in Fife and Kinross. Of course, youngsters make money for weeks afterwards clearing litter from the site. I have been told that a healthy tent-recycling industry has grown up around the site, thanks to people leaving behind tents, which are then sold on by enterprising youngsters. I have also been told that, in Fife, a person is a bit daft to buy a new tent, as there are plenty just after the event every year.

Scotland has a lot going for it. It has beautiful scenery and friendly people—as the minister said—but our weather is not all that it could be. However, apart from last year, the weather has

been no barrier to the hogmanay celebrations. Scotland and Edinburgh have successfully marketed themselves as the place to bring in Ne'erday. Therefore, if the event is right, the weather is not too important.

We must build on the success of events such as the open, T in the park and the hogmanay celebrations. Scotland is rich in important dates in the winter, no doubt because our ancestors believed that we needed something to cheer us up and get us through the long winter months. Last year, I spoke at a Burns supper in Markinch. Alex Salmond was also there to speak. He made a brilliant suggestion that, because we are so rich in such dates, we should market a winter celebration of Scotland. It could start on St Andrews day, run through hogmanay and end on Burns night. It should be a celebration of Scotland and all that is Scottish. That is a great marketing opportunity. All that we need now is for somebody to take it.

16:22

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Kenny MacAskill opened the debate for the SNP by arguing that EventScotland should be abolished. I disagree. We need a proper events strategy in Scotland.

Margaret Smith and Sarah Boyack said that we seem to have a festival almost every day in Edinburgh; we also seem to have a festival every day throughout Scotland. We need a strategic approach. I welcome the fact that there is a lot of good discussion in the major events strategy about how to get the maximum out of events. It is recognised that there needs to be a strategic approach to help identify infrastructure gaps

"and assist in the proper planning of new facilities to avoid the creation of 'white elephants'."

That is welcome. The fact that there is a commitment to spread the benefits of events to areas throughout Scotland is also to be welcomed.

Mr McGrigor: The member mentioned the numerous events and festivals that take place in Scotland. Why is a body such as EventScotland needed to overmanage events and festivals when they have been managed perfectly well in the past?

Mark Ballard: A proper strategy is needed because we must recognise that events can bring benefits as well as disbenefits to communities. Infrastructure problems are mentioned in the major events strategy and there are problems with too much litter and problems that are caused for communities, such as Tiree, that have fragile infrastructures. They may have world-class waves and therefore may attract surfing events, but infrastructures get overstressed if events happen in the wrong way. That is why we need an overall

strategy and why I welcome the commitment to an events strategy in Scotland.

We must recognise that that strategy cannot be predicated on cheap flights, which are an unsustainable form of transport. Any tourism or events strategy that is based on the continuation of cheap short-haul flights is a very short-term strategy. We must have a wider vision in respect of how to get people from outside Scotland to events using sustainable forms of transport.

I am pleased that much mention has been made of the benefits of local and community events. Those events have a huge potential that is often unrecognised because too much attention is paid to the super events, such as the MTV awards. I was pleased at the mention of the Edinburgh people's festival and the Highland traditional music festival. I would like to mention Edinburgh's Beltane festival, which is organised by the Beltane Fire Society. It is a wonderful event that is the highlight of my Edinburgh festival year. At its height, the event has attracted 15,000 people to the top of Calton hill. It is a volunteer-led event to which huge contributions are made by hundreds of people. They make the event work and provide a wonderful spectacle for the people of Edinburgh. The festival has often faced an unsympathetic set of authorities and I am pleased that a more enlightened attitude has been adopted by the City of Edinburgh Council. As the Beltane festival is a community-led festival, it is an important addition to the festival circuit in Edinburgh. I very much congratulate all the volunteers on their work in putting together such a spectacle. We should support more community festivals, which bring huge and often unrecognised benefits.

Having talked about one of the more alternative festivals, I will now talk about one of the most mainstream events that Scotland is likely to hold in the coming year: the G8 summit, which, rumour has it, will be held at Gleneagles. The amendment in Chris Ballance's name talks about "environmental and community benefits". We have to recognise the major concerns in the communities around Gleneagles about the impact of that event, and every effort must be made to minimise the event's impact on those communities.

We also need to recognise that thousands of people will be coming to Scotland to express their legitimate right to dissent, demonstrate and call into question the actions of the G8 members. It is vital that we recognise that there will be a need for infrastructural support to cope with that. We need to recognise the legitimacy of that alternative event and to allow the proposition that there is an alternative model of economic development to that which is pursued by the G8 members to be given its proper space.

I welcome the fact that there is an events strategy but, as Chris Ballance's amendment recognises, we need to recognise that community benefits, environmental considerations and diversity—in terms of both the types of festival and access to those festivals—must be central if we are to have a proper events strategy for Scotland.

16:28

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The minister said in his opening speech that it is not in our character to boast about our successes in relation to hosting major events, but that we should do so. Accordingly, I am glad that my colleague Margaret Smith boasted of her city's success in that regard. We should be proud of our success and we should celebrate and promote our events.

Last year, when I made my maiden speech in this very hall, I said that I was proud to be a standard-bearer for my constituency. As a constituency MSP in the Borders who will soon be attending the Penicuik hunter and lass, the West Linton whipman, the Melrose crowning, the Innerleithen Cleikum, the Selkirk and Lauder common ridings, the Gala braw lads gathering and the Peebles Beltane—which, I assure Mark Ballard, is Scotland's real Beltane, although I am not decrying the Edinburgh Beltane—I know that local festivals have an important role in binding together a community, in celebrating values that we need to cherish, such as civic and community pride, respect and responsibility for others, and in recognising our history, heritage and where we have come from.

The common ridings have national significance, but we must recognise that they are organised and supported by local communities and celebrated in local communities. However, Selkirk common riding—which is Europe's largest equestrian event and involves 600 riders—has an international resonance. I recognise the commitment and support that local government and the Scottish Executive give to its organisers. Other parts of the UK can learn from us.

In an excellent speech, Karen Gillon reminded us that more needs to be done to support equestrian events. I would like the minister to discuss with Executive colleagues the creation of an equestrian unit in the Executive, which would increase the significance of such events, and others, at the heart of the Government.

Members have mentioned the importance of the city festivals and discussed the growth that they have experienced. Donald Gorrie, Margaret Smith, Sarah Boyack and others talked about the Edinburgh international festival, whose ticket sales increased by 12 per cent in 2003. Edinburgh

festival fringe tickets are sold in this hall where we are meeting. I have queued for tickets for fringe events with friends who have visited from around the world. Is it not appropriate that this debate in our national Parliament is taking place in a building that is at the heart of the Edinburgh international festival?

Ticket sales for the Edinburgh international book festival are up 15 per cent and fringe ticket sales are up 21 per cent. Those are success stories that have a financial value of £200 million, as Sarah Boyack said. There is also good news for our capital's galleries and museums, which have had significant investment in recent years and in which more investment will be made. As we can see when we walk down the Mound, exciting projects are under way.

The major events strategy that the minister described has several areas that its agency, EventScotland, will prioritise. Among those are events that showcase Scottish culture and sport; events that have an intrinsic appeal to Scots, as Donald Gorrie said; events that stimulate pride in the local population; and events that are available, achievable and affordable. As far as I am aware, the priorities in the list are not in any order, so I am a little surprised that the Greens' amendment says that some matters are given greater priority than others. Local events are linked with national events.

I was disappointed by Chris Ballance's speech, in which he said that we should not debate the subject. Jamie McGrigor took up that depressing theme. As when the SNP and the Tories said on Tuesday that they did not want to debate children's hearings, that does the Parliament a disservice. People who attend common ridings throughout the Borders—including those in my constituency, in Euan Robson's constituency and in Karen Gillon's constituency—will be pleased that we are discussing problems such as measures for road closures, the increasing cost of public insurance and attracting English visitors across the border to see the wonderful celebrations.

We must ensure that the new tourism hubs, which will be positive for Scotland, have effective service level agreements that are negotiated with local businesses—John Scott called for that—and with communities.

Donald Gorrie asked us to consider the wider aspects of non-arts-only festivals and common ridings. The common ridings take us back to the violent past of the reivers and the skirmishers across the debatable lands, but the standard bearers whom I will take pleasure in meeting and the children who participate in the local festivals give us all an example of civic pride and respect for fellow citizens. Those events benefit tourism

and jobs, but they also make our communities happier. That is why the debate has been positive and has done the Parliament a service.

16:34

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It was perhaps unfortunate that

"a blast o' Janwar' Win'
Blew hansel in on"

the nation's first EventScotland event of the year, so that the hogmanay party in Princes Street became non-event Scotland, as Margaret Smith was right to say. The jury is still out on EventScotland, weather apart.

As Jamie McGrigor said, Conservatives are proud of Scotland's record on hosting major events and cultural and sporting events. The Edinburgh international festival is a classic example of such an event, as are many other events that are attracted to the capital city, as Sarah Boyack, Margaret Smith and others said. However, we in the Conservative party are sceptical about any attempts by the Executive to define or implement culture. In that direction lie the public relations howlers that the Executive has perpetrated on arts matters in recent weeks. The publicity gaffs over Scottish Opera threaten to become a full-blown soap opera.

I have some sympathy, therefore, with Chris Ballance's view that the Executive has lost the confidence of many in the arts world. Although the minister's hip black tee-shirt on the beach at Cannes this week was not quite the sartorial disaster that Jack McConnell's pin-stripe kilt was in New York, that kind of token luvvyism is scorned by the very people whom it is supposed to impress.

The minister said, rightly, that we have a great product here in Scotland, but the question is whether we are marketing it as well as we should do. Kenny MacAskill rightly drew attention to the global nature of the competition that we face. The minister and John Scott talked about the forthcoming open golf championship at Troon, as did Tricia Marwick. I am sure that it will be a great success, as will next year's open at the home of golf—St Andrews.

However, those great events have little or nothing to do with the Scottish Executive. In golf, as in other areas, the Executive's approach to cultural tourism has meant much fanfare, grand claims and soundbites, but little follow-up and no apparent overall strategy. Does any member remember the golf strategy that Henry McLeish launched back in 2000, which was supposed to be about promoting Scotland's less-famous golf courses? In a survey of golf clubs and centres in mid Scotland and Fife, which was conducted this

January, three key questions were asked. In response to the first question, which concerned the success of the strategy, 90 per cent of the clubs and centres said that it had not made a blind bit of difference. The second question concerned the training packages that were to be implemented to help clubs to market their business strategies: 82 per cent said that they had not heard of the packages. The third question asked whether the views of clubs on the development of the sector had been sought: 84 per cent said that they had not.

The Executive's approach seems to be geared towards the headline-grabbing big events and not towards the grass-roots initiatives and expertise about which the Executive has less understanding and for which it undertakes less promotion. I pay tribute to the thousands of local festivals across the country, which were mentioned by members including Cathy Peattie, Donald Gorrie, Rob Gibson, Pauline McNeill and others. They were absolutely right to do so, because people put a huge amount of effort into those local events. I commend one such local event to the minister—the proposed twinning of Lower Largo in north-east Fife and the Chilean island of Juan Fernández, or Robinson Crusoe Island as it is now known. That is an excellent example of such grass-roots initiatives.

The journalist Daniel Defoe was so inspired by the tale of Alexander Selkirk, the 17th century explorer who hailed from Lower Largo and who was marooned for four years and four months on a Pacific island, that he used it as the basis of his great adventure story "Robinson Crusoe". After a lot of hard work and a long campaign by the community council in Lower Largo, the official twinning of the two communities will take place on 10 September, which is the 300th anniversary of Alexander Selkirk landing on the island—I hope that the minister will put the date in his diary. I pay tribute to all of those in Fife and beyond who have put together the detailed programme of festivities.

Those celebrations in north-east Fife exemplify the potential for other places in Scotland that are associated with historical figures such as Robert Burns, who was mentioned by John Scott, to do the same thing. There is the potential for places not only to host major events and festivals, but to demonstrate the capacity for communities to work together to showcase their history and to make a significant contribution to tourism in Scotland.

I wish the people of Lower Largo great success in their Robinson Crusoe event in September. I look forward to the minister being there in person—with or without his tee-shirt—to lend the Executive's support to the event. Certainly, I intend to be there.

16:38

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Not knowing the place personally, but given that it is an island, I assume that the Chilean island of Juan Fernández is not the place that the last train continually seems to go to.

Although the motion might have been dreamt up to fill the last two-hour slot, it covers many important issues. Many members have mentioned the importance of festivals and events for their areas—and, indeed, for their press releases tomorrow. [*Laughter.*] I shall do the same later on—just watch me. The rather anodyne nature of the motion means that I welcome my colleague Kenny MacAskill's amendment. I hope that even those on the Government benches who will not bring themselves to support the amendment can at least agree that it gives us an issue to debate.

The main point that Kenny MacAskill made was right: we need events to add value to our tourism, to differentiate our tourism products from those that are to be found in competitor countries and to grow an important part of our economy. I make no apology for saying that this debate is about growing the economy. We need to look critically at the structures that are in place and to ask whether they can deliver what is appropriate to or efficient in meeting that aim.

In an early intervention, there was an indication that we might go down an interesting and controversial side road. Chris Ballance tried to get the minister to discuss the merits of the Red Army and Tibetan independence but, alas, the minister did not rise to that challenge. Perhaps in his summing up we will get an answer to the question.

Chris Ballance eventually got on to the Green amendment in the last minute of his speech. His position seemed to be that events such as the MTV awards were of dubious value because they seemed to create a lot of litter in Edinburgh. On that basis, we will not hold many international events or festivals in Scotland. The one favour that the Green amendment does us is that it refers to priorities 11 and 16 of the 16 priorities—which are not numbered in order—in the original major events strategy document that the minister's predecessor launched. Any strategy that has 16 priorities has perhaps 11 priorities too many. The Executive needs to identify what is important and what is just added verbiage.

The Greens are in difficulty when they criticise the strategy. Air travel has been mentioned. Many of the important, large events depend on air travel so that people can come here not just to participate in them but to see them. We know that the Greens are basically against air travel, so they have a real problem that they were, perhaps, trying to avoid.

Mark Ballard: Will the member give way?

Alasdair Morgan: I am about to respond to a point that Mark Ballard made in his speech, so his name will be mentioned, at any rate. He said that he opposed Kenny MacAskill's amendment because we need an events strategy. No one is arguing that we do not need such a strategy. The argument in the amendment is that we do not need a separate events organisation to deliver an events strategy. If there were a different organisation for every strategy that the Executive has delivered or launched in the past five years, there would not be enough people in Scotland to man them.

Much of the rest of the debate rose above the banality of the motion. Most speakers concentrated on festivals and culture, instead of taking a wider view of the motion, which referred to all events, including sporting events. Margaret Smith raised the interesting issue of the insurance that is increasingly needed for events. That burden falls disproportionately on voluntary organisers of small events in many areas of the country. The new disclosure regulations create a similar problem in many areas for events that involve young people, especially children.

Jeremy Purvis briefly mentioned another burden that bureaucracy places on events—that of road closures. Here comes the local press release. In Dumfries and Galloway, we have had particular trouble with road closures. Sanquhar and Kirkconnel lie on the A76 from Dumfries to Kilmarnock, which is the only route through those towns. On festival days, parades go up and down the road, which has to be closed as a result. Previously, the local constabulary was happy to close the road for the hour that was required in each direction, at no cost to anyone. Everyone involved would have a great time and visitors would enjoy themselves. Now a ridiculous cost is being forced on local voluntary organisers, who do not have much money and do not raise huge sums from those events.

Jeremy Purvis: We received the assurance that the Minister for Transport would not implement in the Borders the guidelines that operate in Dumfries and Galloway. As the member should be aware, those guidelines have been replaced by a consultation on a national approach to road closures. The previous guidance indicated that an advert must be placed in a national newspaper, which placed crippling costs on local organisers. That provision has been replaced by a requirement to advertise in a local newspaper—something that the organisers would do in any case. Euan Robson and I have achieved a significant step forward. The member may wish to redraft his press release, if he has already written it.

Alasdair Morgan: I am sure that I will give due credit to the Liberal Democrats in my press release, as I always do. I am not saying that nothing has changed, but there is still an issue to be addressed. We have a ridiculous situation in which the diversion around Sanquhar has to be advertised even though it takes so long that it would be quicker for the lorries to wait for the end of the parade. Perhaps we made a mistake by dealing solely with the Minister for Transport; perhaps we should deal also with the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport. I look forward to corresponding with him in the future.

Donald Gorrie is no longer here—he said that he had to go—but he said that he is a Calvinist and a bit arty, and he went on to say that we should all be happy.

Of course, many speakers mentioned the festivals in their areas. I am grateful to Sarah Boyack, who pointed out that Edinburgh has 50 festivals but did not list them all, but Jeremy Purvis went a fair way towards listing all the festivals in the Borders.

Several members went off at a tangent and into the debate about Scottish Opera. Although I think that they hijacked the motion unfairly, they showed that there is an appetite throughout the Parliament for that debate, and I think that we need to have it in the near future.

I will conclude, to allow the minister time to respond to the many points that have been made. It is clear that events and festivals are important and that they need to be an integrated part of our tourism product. The promotion of events needs to be integrated with the promotion of tourism, but we should slim down our structures and make them more efficient, as we are doing with VisitScotland. We certainly should not create more quangos to do jobs that can be done well by existing organisations. I do not think that the case for a separate events organisation has been made, although there is a case for an events strategy. I therefore ask members to support the SNP amendment.

14:47

Mr McAveety: I will try my best in the time that is available to address many of the points that members raised in the debate. If members wish to pursue issues after the debate, I am happy to try to respond formally.

I disagree with the SNP amendment. Herod gave the newborn more time than the SNP is giving EventScotland to demonstrate its worth to tourism or the wider benefits of events in Scotland. EventScotland has made a difference; we can already see some good examples of events that would not necessarily have taken place in its absence. We have hosted the European cross-

country championships, the climbing world cup, the champions league final, the mountain bike world cup, the world gymnastics cup final, indoor and outdoor international athletics meetings, the world curling championships, and the PGA European tour golf events. Because we have EventScotland, we have a greater capacity to address the co-ordination of issues such as licensing and policing, and we have a genuine opportunity to move forward. I do not think that the SNP amendment is sustainable, following analysis.

On the broader issues, we have the capacity to work with agencies to celebrate what they do well and to grow further what is already there, and that is something that we want to move forward on. Many members rightly touched on local events and festivals, from the islands to the Borders and from north-east Scotland to our major cities.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Mr McAveety: I will develop my point, and I will let the member intervene in a moment.

Events and festivals have their own characteristics and they should not be diluted by any of the national agencies or partners involved. We should recognise that their character is driven by local volunteer capacity in some cases and by local authority commitment in other cases.

Mr Ruskell: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr McAveety: I said that I would allow Alex Fergusson to intervene.

Alex Fergusson: On the subject of less well-known events in Scotland, has the minister decided to accept the invitation to open the fledgling wickerman festival in my constituency? The festival has an increasing reputation for quality, and he would be welcome.

Mr McAveety: I note with interest that my social calendar has been expanding dramatically as the debate continues. If I go to the event to which Alex Fergusson referred, I hope that, unlike Ted Brocklebank earlier, he would accept me in an Armani suit, co-ordinated with a George tee-shirt.

Members raised fundamental issues about events and festivals during the debate. I am delighted that many members from all sides of the chamber recognise that, as well as celebrating art forms, festivals—both small and large—have an impact on community confidence and bring social and economic benefits to local areas.

Mr Ruskell: Will the minister give way?

Mr McAveety: Can I develop some points? I will try my very best to allow an intervention later.

Some of the debate strayed into much wider areas; certainly, some of it was about our general policy on the arts and culture in Scotland. I felt that much of the debate was contradictory. Some members argued that we should direct and shape the development of the arts much more directly, whereas others argued that we should use a light touch or should not intervene at all.

The reality is that the culture commission that the Executive has established will provide for the wider arts and culture debate to be generated and aired properly. That could be done through a novelist such as Ian Rankin or a back-bench MSP. Alternatively, a newspaper editor could be desperate enough to create a motion and circulate it around artists and then claim that the result was a news story. Of course, the newspaper editor omitted to mention in *Scotland on Sunday* on Sunday last that the original idea came from him rather than from the arts community. I note with interest that that motion, or open letter—and its e-mail version—was about celebrating excellence and avoiding mediocrity. I was privy to the original e-mail and I was disappointed to find that it contained two substantial spelling mistakes. Therefore, it did not live up to the aspiration of excellence that it was trying to comment on.

We believe, as do people throughout the country, that we can create from both small and large festivals something that can genuinely transform people's lives. Art for art's sake can also transform people's lives—it can make an important contribution. We want to celebrate both impulses. Our position has been falsely caricatured in the recent past, and we have been told that improving access to the arts will not achieve excellence. In fact, John Wallace, from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama said to me only last week that by increasing the numbers of participants in traditional music in the academy and in other colleges, he has dramatically improved the quality of the work that is being produced. Some of our best performers in traditional music are the equivalent of performers in other forms of music. We Scots should celebrate that.

On the old debate about the importance of our national arts companies, it is a caricature of our approach to claim that it is mediocre. The Executive has made a commitment to a national theatre, which would not happen otherwise. We made a commitment to provide £17.5 million to create capacity for young people in Scotland to explore art as something that can transform their lives. Such commitment does not show mediocrity; it shows excellence. Members who believe that a commitment to celebrate our traditional languages—for example, through Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the forthcoming Gaelic bill—does not show an ambition for Scotland in which we

celebrate small and large aspects of culture in the belief that they can all make a difference are not debating the point but trying to create something that it is not the point at all.

The cultural commission will have the chance—

Mr Ruskell: Will the minister give way?

Mr McAveety: I want to make this point clearly because a number of people have had a pop at the First Minister and me in the recent past.

James Boyle, who only a year ago expressed concerns about our commitment to the arts and culture, will chair the cultural commission. To appoint him to that role is not the action of an Executive that lacks confidence in what it is doing; it is the action of an Executive that wants to interrogate the issues by engaging with the arts community and arguing points honestly and openly, not by caricaturing the debate as being one between high culture and low culture.

I am in good company, because Jenny Lee was attacked 40 years ago, when she became the Minister for the Arts, for wanting to open up the debate about what happens in the arts. Sir Alan Peacock, who is not a natural political ally of mine, said that when we want to address the issue of how we fund arts organisations, we will be accused of philistinism. In the recent past, Cathy Jamieson and I have been caricatured in the newspapers, which claim that we have a class-based approach to the adoption of policies—nothing is further from the truth. What is class based are the caricatures of people like Cathy Jamieson and me. Because we come from a west of Scotland background and because of the way we sound, we are told that we have no contribution to make to the arts, or we are accused of not making a contribution in our previous roles.

I was previously convener of the arts committee of Scotland's largest council, which invested more in the arts per head of population than any other local authority in the United Kingdom. When I became leader of that council, the same caricatures were made in relation to our library strategy. However, that strategy has transformed the library service, increased usage of libraries and made a genuine difference to communities. Even under budget constraints, our council supported the Tron Theatre Company and The Arches theatre through their difficulties. We also provided support for a range of other issues. I will take no lectures from people who claim that we have no commitment to arts in Scotland.

Worst of all, some of the attacks that have been celebrated in the chamber have been Tory inspired. Despite a former Tory leader's claim that there is no such thing as society, I believe that the arts play a cohesive role and can help to create a sense of society. However, that same former Tory

leader also claimed that she read the novels of Frederick Forsyth, as if that should be the high point of a person's consumption of culture and fiction.

The real issue is how we change things for the better, so let me make some key points. Several members raised important issues about the role of traditional culture and how we celebrate that. Let me make it clear that I believe that fèis Rois and the many other traditional music events across Scotland have a genuine role to play in making a difference to our cultural infrastructure. They are as excellent as any other art form.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Minister, you have one minute. Members, please make less noise.

Mr McAveety: Our commitment to other types of music and other art forms was raised by several members. Pauline McNeill asked what support we are giving to contemporary music. We are dealing with that through a number of discussions, both formal and informal. Similarly, the role of major developments, such as the festivals in Edinburgh, was mentioned. Again, I continue to have dialogue with many of the agencies about how we can make a difference to those developments.

Festivals and events make a difference. They say something about who we are as a nation, so we should never compromise on their quality. We need to support our national arts companies, but it is wrong to claim that, in endeavouring to provide that support, we should not ask searching questions about how resources are managed and how they make a difference.

We want a cultural infrastructure that celebrates both the high and the low. It should celebrate the achievement of the performer or the artist and recognise the role that they can play in genuinely making a difference to our future. The culture commission's role will sit alongside, and synchronise with, that of our events strategy. That will allow much more interrogation and critical examination. By doing that, we will genuinely be able to make a difference.

This Executive need not apologise for the investment that it has made in events or for the massive commitment that it has given to culture through the cultural strategy. There is much more that can be achieved. Instead of brickbats and personal attacks, we want a cultural infrastructure of which we can all be proud. We want to build an infrastructure that people can consume wherever they are, no matter where they come from, what they believe in or what their past is. Ultimately, we want to ensure that Scotland is a nation in which culture is at the very heart and centre of what we do and believe.

I urge members to support the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As the debate has finished early, I suspend the meeting for just over one minute.

16:58

Meeting suspended.

17:00

On resuming—

Decision Time

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S2M-1340.1, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S2M-1340, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on skills and continued learning, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)

Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 33, Against 75, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-1340.2, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S2M-1340, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on skills

and continued learning, 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)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (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)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of 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)

AGAINST

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)

ABSTENTIONS

Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 106, Against 4, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S2M-1340, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on skills and continued learning, 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)

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (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)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of 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)

AGAINST

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 107, Against 5, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament supports Scottish Executive initiatives, such as the Scottish Union Learning Fund, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and the Determined to Succeed programme, to ensure the provision of effective skills and learning opportunities that will allow more people to play a full and productive role in the workplace and in the community; recognises the vital contribution that skills and learning make in helping to stimulate sustainable economic growth and to close the opportunity gap, urges the Scottish Executive to increase the opportunity for school pupils across Scotland to access courses in further education colleges from the age of 14, and congratulates all those involved in the Modern Apprenticeship programme, which has exceeded its target of having 30,000 apprentices in training two years ahead of schedule.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that amendment S2M-1341.1, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, which seeks to amend S2M-1341, in the name of Frank McAveety, on major events and festivals in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.**FOR**

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 43, Against 68, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that amendment S2M-1341.2, in the name of Chris Ballance, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.**FOR**

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 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)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)

McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (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)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 12, Against 100, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that motion S2M-1341, in the name of Frank McAveety, on major events and festivals in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)

Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)

Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 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)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 94, Against 0, Abstentions 18.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament recognises Scotland's excellent track record of creating and hosting world-class events and festivals; recognises the great benefits that events and festivals can bring throughout Scotland, such as boosting our economy, promoting the international profile of Scotland as a place to visit and in which to live, work and invest and encouraging Scots, particularly young people, to participate in sport and culture; welcomes the success achieved by EventScotland in its first year of operation in realising the potential of Scotland as a world-class destination for events, and congratulates the many organisers of festivals throughout Scotland in their success in getting communities involved in these festivals and attracting visitors to Scotland.

Local Television

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-1201, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on local television. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I will allow a couple of minutes for members to leave the chamber and while we wait for the minister to return.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates Thistle Television, the only local television station in Scotland, on commencing local television broadcasting throughout Lanarkshire with a potential audience of 400,000 local people; welcomes Thistle Television as a valuable addition to local media networks and creative employment, and looks forward to its contribution to local business, culture, education, and community involvement.

17:11

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I welcome back the minister and I also welcome Margaret Mitchell who is the only other central Scotland MSP in the chamber.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): Excuse me.

Linda Fabiani: I take it all back. I also thank the First Minister for attending; I am glad he takes such an interest in Thistle Television.

We all know that John Logie Baird invented television, and that he was a Scotsman. There have been attempts to claim the invention for Marconi, who was an Italian. Of course, the long cultural interaction between the Scots and the Italians has led to some great achievements, and it is a well-known fact that the combination of Scots and Italians produces the very best of people. Nonetheless, television was the brainchild of a Scotsman, even if the BBC chose to switch to Marconi's system instead of using Baird's, and television owes its existence to Scotland.

In my home county of Lanarkshire, we are still pioneering the growth of TV. Although it is a small beginning, there is at least one example of a local television station operating in Scotland. I am referring to the recently established Thistle Television, and I welcome some of its representatives to the Parliament.

Thistle Television is Scotland's only local television station and it has a potential audience of 400,000 people throughout Lanarkshire. The opportunity exists to make Thistle Television a pioneer for local TV in Scotland, leading the way for others to follow. I know that there have been other local television stations—such as Channel 6 Dundee and Lanarkshire TV, which previously covered Lanarkshire—but Thistle Television has

the chance to be a trail-blazer for local television. I hope that there will be an expansion of local services throughout Scotland.

What can local television offer? Community television can provide educational opportunities—local authority initiatives or projects involving local schools and colleges can be highlighted, promoted and supported via the local TV station. Community groups can have a conduit for their activities and community issues and campaigns can be highlighted. MSPs, MPs and local councillors could take advantage of a ready-made forum through which they could communicate with their constituents, although I must admit that not everyone might welcome that. Local news broadcasts can also be made. Moreover, local businesses can advertise their wares, products and services at a reasonable cost. They can also use their local TV station as a recruiting tool, as can job centres and other employment and recruiting agencies.

Local TV can and does offer the opportunity for local people, particularly young people, to learn a trade in the media industry—Thistle Television is already showing how that can work. Young people can use work experience or volunteering to assess whether the media would be a career choice for them as front-line reporters and presenters, technicians, writers, producers, editors, camera operators and a host of other jobs that we do not know anything about. Local TV gives people a fantastic chance to learn about an important communications medium from top to bottom.

Of course, in recent years, there has been an upsurge in media studies courses in our colleges. Would it not be great to have more opportunities for our graduates in the media in Scotland? Would it not be of great benefit to our communities to have such skilled people on our doorstep?

Many groups, organisations and individuals could take advantage of local television. Local television can be a force for the promotion of the well-being and attributes of communities, a place to air one's views and a means through which to tackle and deal with community problems. Earlier this afternoon, we debated national and local festivals. Those festivals could be covered by local TV, enabling people to have a sense of pride in their achievements. Perhaps the Executive would be willing to take the initiative in advising communities on how to go about setting up companies to run a local TV station.

I have a few concerns. The first relates to the funding of local TV stations. Under the Communications Act 2003, we now have the community media fund. However, the value of that fund has dropped dramatically from the initial proposal of £25 million, through a revised proposal of £6 million, to reach the current figure of

£500,000. Most of that money is likely to go to community radio.

There is the option to sell advertising space. North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council have both been supportive in providing content for Thistle Television. However, I wonder whether there is scope for those councils to use some of their advertising budgets to support the station and whether the Scottish Executive might also consider supporting local television in that way. Local advertising campaigns could target specific issues in specific areas.

It is interesting that Channel M in Manchester is partly owned by the University of Salford. That could be a model to which our universities might look if the funds can be found. Northern Visions is funded in part by Belfast City Council and Channel 7 in Immingham is in receipt of European grants, which require matched funding.

My second concern is that the licences available for community TV are analogue licences. At first glance, that does not seem to be much of a problem, until one realises that the United Kingdom Government intends to start switching off the analogue signals. I grant that the deadline for that has been put back several times, but the phase-out process, which is due to begin in two years' time and to be completed by 2010, seems to be firming up. We must consider granting digital licences to community TV stations. I ask the minister whether he is willing to ensure that digital licences are available for Scottish community television stations.

My third concern is that the current licences for local TV stations—restricted-service licences—last for only four years. BBC and ITV licences operate on a 10-year basis. In order to allow long-term planning by local television companies, the licence period for RSLs should be extended to the same 10-year period that is enjoyed by the big fish in the pond.

It is always useful to look at international examples. An example of the successful implementation of community TV is to be found in Denmark. The Danes began the process in 1983 when they broke up the monopoly of the national broadcaster, Danmarks Radio. Community TV has taken root in Denmark and there is now an almost national network of local TV stations. Sweden is also taking access television to its people, with support funding from central and local government.

There is now a national and international view that the medium of television has become too one sided and unidirectional under the control of large corporations and individuals. I believe that people want to take back some of the control. I want Scotland—the home of television, after all—to

become proactive in developing local TV stations. There seems to be no reason why we cannot do that. With the right encouragement, we might even find our local TV stations producing the kind of work that can be exported. I have faith in our creative abilities.

I hope that members and the minister will agree that Scotland has an opportunity that should not be spurned. We should be doing whatever we can to advance Scotland in this area of the creative industries. I hope that the minister will take some time to think about possible ways of helping to fund community TV in Scotland for the benefit of all our communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We can be reasonably flexible with the time allocations.

17:19

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I am grateful to Linda Fabiani for securing this important debate. By way of background, I want to begin by confirming that the Conservative party is entirely comfortable with the broad thrust of the Communications Act 2003: its liberalising and deregulating nature is a sensible response to the modern communications industry.

Twenty years ago, there were only three TV channels in the UK. The number of broadcasters has grown since then to far more than 250. Restrictions on the ownership of national terrestrial broadcasting licences were outdated; broadcasting has now been opened up to new ideas and sources of investment. In that context, I very much welcome the launch of Thistle Television, which is an operating division of CiSTM.

This new local television station—which, as the motion highlights, is the only one of its kind in Scotland—will operate under a restricted service licence in the west of Scotland, particularly in Lanarkshire. It will broadcast from the Blackhill transmitter on terrestrial TV and has the potential to broadcast to more than 2 per cent of the UK population. As a result, Thistle Television has the opportunity to become the provider of local television services in other parts of the UK and to give local businesses, salespeople and advertisers a platform to promote their services and products.

In that respect, it would be appropriate to draw a comparison with local newspapers. As far as advertising and editorial comment are concerned, local newspapers need to be close to their customers in order to survive. The same is true of local television. Evidence from different researchers and sponsors of local news, events, sports and so on shows that there is a demand for local advertising. Indeed, the level of advertising in local newspapers throughout Scotland confirms

that there is a demand for geographically targeted marketing and advertising.

That said, the key to the success of Thistle Television and other local TV broadcasters will lie in the content and quality of their programmes. Content should be driven by consumer demand and not be overly prescriptive. Thistle Television has paid due regard to that crucial marketing prerequisite with its recognition of the popularity of, and hence the need to provide programmes with, a strong local and regional news content as well as programmes that cater for wider sporting and entertainment interests.

The success of this initiative could have huge benefits, not least to the local economy through the provision of employment and skilled jobs in the high-tech sector. The training opportunities that will be available will enable students to gain some workplace experience and to take their first steps on the media career ladder. There will be opportunities to promote local culture and to showcase local events, performers and artists as well as a chance to strengthen local democracy and encourage local involvement and participation in local issues.

I again thank Linda Fabiani for raising awareness of the existence of this new local TV station and the potential benefits and opportunities that it offers to Lanarkshire and the wider community. I also wish Thistle Television every success for the future.

17:24

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):

I have to say that I am still recovering from being trapped in a lift during a visit to the new Parliament building. I am disappointed that we were not met by a team from Thistle Television to record what happened for posterity. The thought of having to give Phil Gallie the kiss of life left me stone cold. However, we all managed to survive and are here to tell the tale.

Thistle Television is an excellent company that should be complimented on all the work it is doing for the local community.

The Executive pours an awful lot of money into advertising campaigns for this, that and the other and, to be honest, a lot of that money is creamed off by agencies. It would get much better value for money if it boosted the finances of Thistle Television and gave the company a remit to put its messages across to local communities, instead of paying for 20-second adverts on TV that cost at least £20,000, not to mention what the agencies cream off over and above that. In the past two years, the Executive has spent £14 million on such campaigns and an awful lot of that money could have been channelled into local television. Such

an approach would benefit communities and it would certainly benefit Thistle Television.

Football is on television ad nauseam, but if the Scottish Premier League and others gave Thistle Television permission to broadcast Hamilton Accies or Motherwell Football Club reserve games on a Thursday night when there is no football on TV, that would relieve the monotony of hospital life for the many football fans who are patients in hospitals such as Hairmyres and Wishaw.

I was impressed by the professionalism of the team at Thistle Television and by the manner in which they went about their business. The company offers a tremendous opportunity for people who want a career in the media and the people who work there are seizing that opportunity. I saw the final product and it could not have been done better by Scottish Television or the BBC. The Thistle team should be complimented on a magnificent job. The company should have financial backing from the Executive—such financial support could use up some of the surplus money that sloshes about in the big agencies.

I thank Linda Fabiani for giving us the opportunity to air our support for a local company that is doing its best to keep its head above water. The Parliament and the Executive should give Thistle Television every support they can.

17:27

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I congratulate Linda Fabiani on securing the debate and I agree with her about the economic, cultural and social benefits that local television broadcasting can bring to communities. I welcome to the gallery Thistle TV and I wish the company every success in the Lanarkshire area.

We must put the matter in a wider context. Scotland has a long and proud tradition of community media, which makes a unique contribution to local arts, culture and community development. However, media access can and must be improved. That is particularly important, given that recent UK-wide broadcasting legislation has opened up ITV and Channel 4 to international ownership. There is a real possibility that in a few years' time monopolists such as Rupert Murdoch might control British commercial television channels. When that happens, it will be vital that communities own broadcasting systems so that they can speak to themselves in their own accents and do not have to depend on globalised, market-led and amorphous television programming that is determined by the cheapest values.

The current funding and regulatory environment is not conducive to development of community media in Scotland. The sector has a difficult

existence and we must encourage it as much as we can. Community media need more financial and political support if more projects like Thistle TV are to go ahead. Linda Fabiani mentioned the funding system in Denmark; there is a much more progressive approach to Government subsidies in Scandinavia and the Netherlands, which therefore have a much more vibrant community media sector. Like them, we could provide more funding from non-commercial sources.

The problem with purely commercial local television networks is that, like the global television network, they are forced to chase advertising and to choose programme content that addresses the needs of advertisers rather than the needs of the local community. The problem with an unfunded station is that it is not able to produce programmes of the quality that is required for the station to sell them on. A decently funded community service can make programmes that are of high quality—locally based and with local strengths—that can then be sold on right across the global market of community stations and, occasionally, to larger stations as well. The possibility of a local programme finding itself a wider market is higher if the programme is of high quality.

I acknowledge that media regulation remains a reserved matter, but I urge Vicki Nash, the recently appointed Scottish director of the Office of Communications, to ensure that the regulatory environment is improved for the Scottish media sector so that we do not miss out on the valuable benefits that such an environment can bring.

CMA Scotland—the Community Media Association—is currently undertaking an audit of media access in Scotland for the media access project Scotland, which is funded by Scottish Screen. I ask the minister to note the results of that audit and to work with the CMA to open up more opportunities for community media. I would welcome the minister's comments on that when he sums up.

The Executive must endeavour to have better structures and resources in place so that the media landscape in Scotland is properly representative of the range of communities. Local media can provide training and offer the first step on the media career ladder. They can also provide social inclusion by making TV more relevant to people's lives—free and inclusive, as opposed to fee and exclusive. It can encourage local democracy by enhancing access to local issues. It can showcase local events, local performers, local bands and local artists. It can reach the parts that other public service broadcasters—certainly the commercial broadcasters—cannot ever hope to reach.

17:32

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): I, too, congratulate my colleague on securing the debate and I congratulate Thistle Television on its launch and, I hope, its success.

I agree fully with most of the points that have been made. There is clearly a dichotomy in that although we live in a global age and a shrinking world, there is a desire for diversity, albeit in an age of homogeneity. I do not see any difficulty in our being able to straddle the divide if sufficient action is taken with the structures being provided, and some limited funds being made available.

Some people want to be able to access MTV. I may not be of that generation but, in the earlier debate, I agreed with the minister on the benefits of hosting the MTV Europe music awards in Scotland. People in this country and elsewhere can enjoy soap operas and whatever but, even in this age of globalisation, they wish to retain their own individuality and identity. They want local news, local sports content and local stories. There should be no difficulty in balancing the benefits of what is available on the global market with the ability to retain people's individual identities.

As Margaret Mitchell pointed out, it is clear that the issue has two aspects: it is about jobs and it is about culture. It is important that we retain our cultural identity; I believe that a market exists and that people actually want to access it. We have to create a level playing field. If we do not, we will—as Chris Ballance and others have said—leave things to the Fox TVs and the Berlusconi and we will end up with a homogenised television service that people will see wherever they live in the world. I do not think that people want that; they want to be able to pick and choose. They want to access MTV, "EastEnders", "Crossroads" or whatever, but also to maintain their individual culture and identity.

The issue is also fundamentally about jobs. In Scotland, we are blessed with media schools that are highly successful. Glasgow Caledonian University and the University of Stirling in particular are spewing out media graduates, but the tragedy is that the number of jobs for them in Scotland is insufficient because we have not created the market. Once again, the nation is failing both to access the talents that it is producing and to build on the talents of the youngsters from elsewhere who come here to study but who, after studying and learning, depart to utilise their skills elsewhere. We as a nation are losing out and we need to address that.

Radio Telefís Éireann, for example, employs about 2,000 people in Dublin, which is substantially more than the number of people who are employed in any media centre in Scotland. In

Spiddal, a small village outside Galway, Teilifis na Gaelige has a work force of 80—never mind the fact that additional media companies live off TG4 in that area. That amounts to a significantly higher number than are employed by all the media put together in the city of Inverness. The Inverness media companies would not be able to match the number of people who are employed by TG4, which also has outlets for sport, not in Spiddal or in Galway, but down in the Irish Gaeltacht in Waterford. We are missing a trick there.

Those companies are not there simply to be subsidised. In Ireland, although it is recognised that they should be supported so that they retain an Irish identity and—certainly in relation to TG4—nurture the Irish language, they have to exist and compete in a global world. Therefore, they are told not just to defend the cultural values and benefits of being Irish, but to try to utilise and sell their products globally. They are managing to do that.

As well as being able to visit TG4, I was able to visit a company that is called Telegael, which has just won an Emmy. That shows that, even in small areas of western Ireland, it is possible to compete globally if one has the necessary resources and talents. I do not know whether Thistle Television will ever aspire to winning an Emmy, but unless we give it the opportunity by encouraging it and letting it develop, it will not do so. I believe sincerely that what has been done in Ireland can be replicated here; we must do it.

It is vital that we address the changes that Chris Ballance commented on. Ofcom is changing and the BBC will not remain the same. Although I do not want to get into a constitutional debate, I think that we cannot continue with a minister for culture who has no control or influence over the biggest of the mass media—television—which has a fundamental effect on our culture. The fact that the Scottish Parliament cannot get involved in what is happening at the BBC or in Ofcom means that we have significant difficulties, not just in addressing possible economic benefits, but in addressing cultural problems. That matter will have to be debated. The issue is not purely constitutional; it is not just about repatriation of powers. If we want to retain our culture rather than just plug the gaps in Scottish Opera, for example, we must have control and influence over the biggest of the mass media. If we want to create the number of jobs that have been created in Dublin, Canada, New Zealand and elsewhere, we must have such control and influence. All those things can be done, but we need to address the present situation.

It is a matter of adding value locally. At the end of the day, we need to give a modest amount of assistance to companies like Thistle Television. They should be capable of doing what Telegael has done, which is to provide an excellent local

service that retains the individuality and identity that people want, allows them to pick and choose—to switch off Thistle Television to watch “Eastenders” or whatever else—and, at the same time, provides jobs. It should be possible for a Scottish company to emulate Telegael’s feat of winning an Emmy. We need to provide assistance and, in due course, to consider changing the structure so that we can provide the opportunity for economic growth while preserving our cultural identity in a global world.

17:39

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mr Frank McAveety): I congratulate Linda Fabiani on securing a debate on her motion. The speeches have shown members’ passion for celebrating the achievement of Thistle Television in establishing itself and the ambition that lies behind the organisation’s creation.

I acknowledge members’ suggestions on a range of issues, such as how to increase the quality and range of broadcasting, how to address matters that would not necessarily be addressed by larger, terrestrial television companies and how to retain some sense of local identity. Just as, with the printed word, there is no doubt that people will have much more trust in the local press than in a national newspaper, it is true of broadcasting that people will trust the local provider of information much more than they trust a national broadcaster.

Out there among members of the public, there is an interesting trend in relation to where people get their information from and what they are prepared to believe. Therefore, it is important that Thistle Television has developed itself to try to address the wide audience with which it can potentially move forward.

Members have raised a number of key and important issues and I will do my best to say where the Executive is on them. In the short time that is available to me, I will try my best to identify the direction of travel.

First of all, I congratulate Thistle Television on the range and quality of its programmes. It has identified the fact that it needs a wide range of programmes to attract the audience that it wants to attract. A market-led approach is important, because it is important to demonstrate to advertisers that it can genuinely make a difference.

John Swinburne raised the national advertising campaigns that the Executive operates. If he writes to me, I will certainly raise how we determine where adverts or promotions should be and the Executive’s capacity, through its advertising budget, to deal with important issues that affect many people. The vast majority of

advertising about pensions, health and flu jabs is no doubt from the UK Government. Given John Swinburne's political interests, he will obviously be most concerned about such issues and there might well be issues that can be explored to find out whether there is potential.

Another key issue relates to building an audience. Given the range of Thistle Television's programmes, there is no doubt that it intends to build its audience, perhaps through connections with young people in schools and by creating a young audience, as well as an audience that includes the families of those children. That is a good strategy.

I also welcome the fact that it has used a football programme, "Ninety", which includes the former Celtic and Liverpool player, Frank McGarvey. I welcome that not because of the teams that he played for, but because he used to live round the back from me and regularly used to nutmeg and humiliate me on the football pitch. It is good to see that he is spending more of his time in a television studio than in a betting shop.

On the broader issues of development, the Executive recognises that a number of important issues have been raised by the Community Media Association, which Chris Ballance mentioned. That is why we have been supportive of the CMA through Scottish Screen and of working in partnership with Scottish Screen to consider, through the screen industries, how we can develop a much more effective community media strategy than there has been to date. We welcome such an opportunity. A digital media access group has been set up, which includes Scottish Screen, the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Enterprise, to try to address that critical issue. There is a little time to play for with digital transfer, but there are local impacts that we must be sensitive about.

Although I recognise that the matter is reserved and am conscious of political parties' position on it, there is no doubt that there must be continuing dialogue through Ofcom. That will evolve as we consider the strategy for the BBC charter. Certainly prior to recent events at the BBC, there was a move at senior level in the direction of having a greater understanding of the regions and nations of the United Kingdom. There is a continuous stratum that can be mined and I would certainly like to find out whether we can explore options in that respect.

The appointment of Vicki Nash—whose local government experience has been valuable in the past—means that there is someone who recognises the value of local community strategies. Through Ofcom, we can address a number of issues over the next period. Certainly, in the Executive's discussions with Ofcom, I will raise many of the points that have been raised in

the debate, particularly those relating to digital licences and other ways in which Ofcom can intervene and ensure and respect Scotland's national integrity.

There are other broader issues that we must address. We must continue to support the independent company and to recognise the role that it has played in giving confidence to a local area. Thistle Television is entering a competitive market and is currently on its own as a small independent broadcasting company. We must try to ensure that we remove barriers to maximise its opportunity to grow, and—more important—to encourage others to enter the arena wherever they are in Scotland.

There are many issues that we must address over the next period and I will certainly take on board the points that have been raised in the debate. I welcome the fact that Linda Fabiani has brought the issue to our attention. We genuinely want to make a difference.

I conclude by mentioning another great who has appeared on television. Milton Berle said:

"We owe a lot to Thomas Edison—if it wasn't for him, we'd be watching television by candlelight."

I hope that we can address the issue, that Thistle Television can grow and that we can develop television at a local as well as a national level.

Meeting closed at 17:45.

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