

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 20 January 2005

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 20 January 2005

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

Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2273, in the name of Jim Wallace, that the general principles of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill be agreed to.

09:30

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace): I am pleased to open the debate on the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. I thank the Enterprise and Culture Committee for its hard work in consideration of the bill and I welcome the committee's endorsement of the bill in its helpful stage 1 report.

As many members know, the proposal to merge the Scottish Further Education Funding Council and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council came from a report on lifelong learning by the committee's predecessor committee, the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, which was, at that point, under the convenership of Alex Neil. Indeed, the idea had been talked about in principle even before that, for example in the Garrick report. It is an idea whose time has come, and I am pleased to be able to recognise both committees' work and recommendations on translating the proposal into legislation. I also thank those who took part constructively in the consultation on the bill.

The Executive has proven its commitment to lifelong learning in recent years. Last September, we announced record levels of investment in higher and further education and, this week, I announced a significant improvement to the support package for young and disabled students. Moreover, when the bill is enacted, it will bring with it a number of benefits that everyone will recognise: the extension of the Scottish public services ombudsman's remit to cover students in FE and HE; statutory recognition of learners' needs and, for the first time, of a credit and qualifications framework; and the extension of academic freedom from higher education institutions to our colleges.

The Executive's vision for further and higher education is to achieve the best possible match

between the learning opportunities that are open to people and what is needed to strengthen Scotland's economy and society. Further and higher education play a critical role in the achievement of a coherent, relevant and high-quality tertiary education system, which must be responsive to the needs of learners and to the Scottish economy.

Our partnership agreement addressed that vision with a commitment to merge the funding councils and charge them to have regard to the future skills needs of Scotland, but the bill takes that commitment even further by recognising the valuable role that our colleges and HEIs play in contributing more widely to Scotland's social, cultural and economic needs. Through the merger, we are creating a single body that will take a coherent overview of both sectors. Further and higher education are different from each other in character and purpose, but they are closely linked and, taken together, can provide a wide and comprehensive range of opportunities for learners at all levels. The bill will create a system that will ensure coherent strategic decision making at a national level in relation to FE and HE for the years ahead.

As I indicated, the Enterprise and Culture Committee's consideration of the bill has been remarkably useful. I will take on board the majority of the committee's recommendations, so I do not intend to address all of them today. However, in one or two of the more complex areas that the committee identifies, I do not consider amendment to the bill to be possible. I will say a few words about those areas, but before I do so, I make it clear that, in all those cases, I agree with the underlying principles that the committee identifies but think that our shared goals can be better achieved in other ways.

In response to the committee's recommendation in paragraph 87 of its report, I have asked officials to consider what implications a change in terminology from "learning difficulties" to "additional support needs" would have. When I appeared before the committee, I tried to share with it some of the reasoning behind the terminology that we had used in the bill, and I look forward to working with the committee as we move through stage 2 to ensure that the bill covers that important point appropriately.

I am aware of the issues that the committee has raised on funding for students with complex additional support needs who choose or, in some cases, are obliged to study in England. The committee makes no specific recommendation for amendment on that, but I make it clear that I am committed to ensuring that everyone has a chance to learn regardless of background or current personal circumstances. It is important that the

views of a range of stakeholders and individuals are sought on the best arrangements for supporting those students who wish or have to study outside Scotland, and I intend to launch a consultation paper in the spring to seek views from a wide range of interested parties, including local authorities, FE colleges, young people, their parents and carers. The consultation will consider a range of issues, including support needs, the funding requirements and the options for future funding arrangements.

Another key area of debate, the evidence on which I followed with interest, was academic freedom for individuals. The bill extends academic freedom at an institutional level from higher education to the college sector, but the committee heard evidence from the Educational Institute of Scotland and the Association of University Teachers that individual academic freedom should also be extended to cover all institutions. I share the belief that academics in both sectors should be free to challenge received wisdom and to express controversial or unpopular opinions, and I welcome the opportunity to state in the strongest terms that that freedom of expression should exist in all institutions. The issue is important and extending academic freedom to colleges sends a strong message on the maturity and importance of the sector, but individual freedom is primarily a matter between the institutions and their employees. Since the issue was raised, I have received a number of representations, including some from those who point out that the issue is already covered in some contracts. With that in mind, I do not believe that we can amend the bill, but I am grateful to the AUT and the EIS for raising the point and I intend to give it further consideration outwith the bill process with representatives of the unions and the institutions.

The final issue that I wish to address is the one that, without doubt, has caused most controversy: the new powers in the bill to differentiate fee levels for certain subjects in situations in which we believe that Scotland-domiciled students would otherwise be disadvantaged. I welcome the committee's recognition of the issue's sensitivity and of the fact that the Executive has to respond to an evolving situation in England and Scotland, but I make it clear that the Administration's policy is that there should be no top-up fees and that Scotland-domiciled eligible students should pay no fees at all. That remains our firm commitment.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I am delighted with that assurance about this Administration, but the minister might not be responsible for further and higher education for ever and there might be different leadership in the future. Will the minister assure us that the bill will not allow top-up fees of any nature?

Mr Wallace: I give Mr Adam that assurance. Top-up fees as they have been introduced by the Westminster Parliament allow different institutions in England to set different fee levels up to a set maximum, but that plays no part in the bill. When I announced back in June that we would consider whether there should be a differentiated fee for medicine, I recall that Mr Adam said that he welcomed the fact that I was to

"address the difficulty with medical schools in Scotland"

and that he looked forward to

"hearing detail on the level of charge that will protect the national health service in Scotland."—[*Official Report*, 24 June 2004; c 9489.]

I will say more about the consultation on that in a moment.

I noted Fiona Hyslop's comments on the matter yesterday. It is unfortunate indeed that she plays politics with the interests of students by perpetuating the myths that fees exist and that top-up fees are to be introduced in Scotland. Concerns have been raised that that misrepresentation of the facts could dissuade some from applying to Scottish universities, which would have a negative impact on efforts to broaden access.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Does Mr Wallace acknowledge that it is the students themselves—through the National Union of Students—who have been most vocal in their opposition to section 8 of the bill and that the Government has not persuaded them that there is no cost for university study? Students know that they will have to pay fees, but at the back end of the course, not the front end. That is not helpful.

Mr Wallace: I had a productive and useful meeting with the National Union of Students last week. If Ms Hyslop acknowledges—as she seemed to do in that intervention—that top-up fees are not on the agenda and that Scotland-domiciled eligible students will not have to pay fees, it is wrong that she should perpetuate and fuel the myth that such fees are on the agenda and that such students will have to pay. That gives out all the wrong signals. The idea of handcuffs that could lead to a medical student who chose not to pursue a career in the Scottish health service having to pay some £67,000 is typical of the sort of thing that we get from the Scottish National Party.

Such an approach would not help to address the important widening access issues, about which I am sure we share concern. This week, we have increased the young student bursary by 11 per cent to £2,395 and extended eligibility for the full bursary by raising the parental income level that allows students to qualify to up to £17,500. Those

are real ways in which to help to broaden access and I hope that such measures are welcomed.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the raising of the threshold. Does the minister agree that it is regrettable that the threshold was so low in the first place?

Mr Wallace: Mr Monteith would be the first to acknowledge that we can fund measures only within our capacity—within the resources that are available to us. We made a commitment in the partnership agreement to increase the bursary level and the threshold up to which students were eligible for the full amount. We have honoured that not only in the letter, but in the spirit.

The power to set a differential fee is intended to be used only sparingly and when clear evidence shows that not to act would disadvantage Scottish students. I understand fully the concerns that have been expressed and the potential for future use of the power in a way such as that about which Brian Adam expressed concern. My officials are drafting amendments that will offer more protection. The amendments will make all relevant order-making powers subject to the affirmative procedure and will create a statutory duty on ministers to consult fully before raising a fee level or setting a separate fee for medicine, for example.

It is essential that any decisions to change fee levels should be open and transparent, and those who are affected should be involved in the decision-making process. I accept that a range of views is held on the issue, which is sensitive; it is essential that all those views are heard and considered fully and fairly.

As I have made clear, the power's intent is to allow the Executive to take action only when necessary to protect the interests of Scotland-domiciled students; it will provide no additional income for individual institutions. The criteria that may apply for such a purpose now may not apply equally in the future, so I have doubts about including specific criteria in the bill. However, I will consult informally in the coming weeks on what such criteria might be and we will include details in a further policy memorandum. I hope that the opportunity will arise at stage 2 or stage 3, or both, for Allan Wilson or me to put something on the record about the criteria.

The committee asked whether any Scotland-domiciled students would pay higher fees under the powers in the bill. As the committee's stage 1 report acknowledges, the measures are designed to control demand for places at Scottish higher education institutions and, as a result, broadly to maintain current cross-border flows. When concluding that we should increase tuition fee levels by more than the inflation rate, I recognised that that could affect a small minority of Scotland-

domiciled students who are not entitled to tuition fee support from the Student Awards Agency for Scotland, such as students who are repeating a year or undertaking a second undergraduate degree.

That is why I asked the implementation advisory group to consider whether any category of such students should be protected from the increased tuition fee. The group is still considering a range of issues that are associated with changing the tuition fee level and has not finally reported to me. When it does so, I will carefully consider its views and those of the committee before taking a final decision on whether any category of Scottish student will have to pay the increased fee level. Subject to considering that advice further, I make it clear that I am sympathetic to the argument that no Scotland-domiciled student should end up paying more.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the implementation advisory group report before stage 2 consideration starts? I am sure that the minister appreciates that that would be extremely helpful to the committee in considering stage 2 amendments.

Mr Wallace: I know that the group is close to completing its work and I think that I know when stage 2 will take place. I hesitate to give a categorical answer. In the debate, Allan Wilson or I will try to make the position clear. Even if the work is not complete, we can share with the committee a flavour of it. One point that is emerging is that the categories of students to which I referred should be given some protection. As I said, subject to further advice, I am sympathetic to meeting that concern.

Officials have sought views on higher fees for medicine and considered a wide range of options. We intend to publish all those responses in the near future. In the spirit of the protections that we plan to put in the bill, I intend as soon as possible to consult fully on the proposals for a higher fee level and for a higher fee again for medicine. Provided that Parliament passes the bill, I intend to announce the way forward before the summer recess. That consultation will also consider issues that concern self-funding students and those who are on gap years. I look forward to continuing discussions with stakeholders on the matter.

The Enterprise and Culture Committee asked for a clear indication of how the power would be used in the future for subjects other than medicine. I cannot predict whether other courses may experience similar pressures, but I can say categorically that we have no plans or hidden agenda to extend the power to any other subjects. We retain the balance of accountability, which should allow us to act to protect Scottish students' interests and should offer sufficient protection to

prevent the powers in the bill from being abused in the future.

The key is properly recognising the benefits of consulting student bodies and other interested stakeholders to ensure full, proper and transparent consideration of any such decision. It is essential to give Parliament an important role in approving any move to increase or differentiate fees further in the future. The bottom line remains that no eligible Scotland-domiciled student will have to pay fees under this Administration.

I thank again the committee and those who gave evidence for an excellent report. With Allan Wilson, I look forward to continuing to work with the committee and stakeholders as the bill progresses.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill.

09:46

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I congratulate the minister on taking steps to make what was originally a poor and misguided bill into one that is now, for the most part, fit for purpose. I say “for the most part” because a section that was introduced in the second draft of the bill is an exceptional problem and is completely unacceptable.

I am glad that the minister took steps to remove from the bill STEPs—that awful policy development of specified tertiary education providers. STEPs—the shortest-lived acronym in the history of public policy—has been binned. The term “STEPS” had a shorter shelf-life than the pop group of the same name; it has been disbanded and is busted.

The lesson of the bill, which the Enterprise and Culture Committee described quite generously, is that starting with a particularly bad bill and making a mess of it can mean that stakeholders redraft the bill into something acceptable. Members can call that a success of the parliamentary consultation process if they want. I judge it to be a triumph of the higher and further education sectors over the adversity of an initially problematic bill.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Does Fiona Hyslop accept that the initial document was not a bill, but a consultation document—a draft bill—and that the minister should therefore be congratulated on listening to stakeholders’ views?

Fiona Hyslop: If the member listened to me, she would know that the position could be interpreted in two ways. Starting with something extremely bad allows that to be redrafted to make sense. All parties acknowledge considerable movement from the draft bill to the bill as introduced.

The minister needs to think seriously about section 8. In essence, the bill concerns the administrative functions and merger of the two funding bodies, which are uncontroversial. The committee produced a focused and comprehensive report that contains key recommendations about parity of treatment—I listened to the minister’s points on that—in relation to academic freedom; the division of competencies, an important matter to which I am sure that we will return at stage 2; additional support needs; and who is eligible to chair the governing bodies.

I have no problem with the general principles in relation to merging the funding councils. However, the SNP has a serious problem with the sudden insertion, under a tenuous association, of powers to enable the minister to introduce additional top-up fees that are variable by course. Section 8 is a cuckoo in the nest of an otherwise reasonable bill.

The minister who said that tuition fees were non-negotiable is playing an active part in introducing legislation that will allow the charging of top-up fees that are variable by course. The minister’s Labour colleagues were quite keen on tuition fees in 1999 when he said that the issue was non-negotiable and they are using him to produce primary legislation for any future move to charge top-up fees across the board. Parliament deserves to be told about that. By presenting section 8 in such a form, the minister is auditioning for the part of minister for top-up fees. Placing the section in the bill is out of order. If its inclusion is covered by the bill’s “connected purposes”, that connection is by a tenuous string; the provision is certainly not central to the general principles of the bill. Top-up fees are wrong in principle and in practice.

Mr Wallace: I remind Fiona Hyslop of what her colleague Brian Adam said in the chamber, on behalf of the SNP:

“On the detail of the minister’s statement, I welcome the fact that he is to address the difficulty with medical schools in Scotland. I look forward to hearing detail on the level of charge that will protect the national health service in Scotland.”—[*Official Report*, 24 June 2004; c 9489.]

There was no question of challenging the principle—he wanted to know the detail. Does Fiona Hyslop object to what Brian Adam said, or is she willing—as he is—to make a commitment in principle, without being willing to provide the means to do things?

Fiona Hyslop: I hope that Brian Adam will have the opportunity to speak in the debate. He is right to say that we must address the problem of medical students in Scotland—I acknowledge that.

We must increase the number and percentage of Scottish students, but if we want to tackle a health policy and get more doctors to stay and

work in Scotland, the issue is not the initial stage of decision making. We want to keep doctors who are at the senior house officer stage, when they are looking to move away. We want to increase the total number of medical students by 100, and to increase and improve access and the decisions that universities make about who they take and when they take them.

The issue of wider access must certainly be addressed, particularly by the University of Edinburgh and the University of St Andrews. Pricing poorer English students out of medicine in Scotland is not the right way forward. Top-up fees are wrong in principle and in practice. Access to education should be based not on ability to pay, but on ability to learn. If it is unamended, the bill will provide the primary legislative mechanism with which to introduce the principle of having additional top-up fees that are variable by course in Scottish universities.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I want to move on.

Mr Wallace confirmed to me during an Enterprise and Culture Committee meeting that we are talking about the introduction of a top-up fee. He said:

"The same fee would apply to everyone".—[*Official Report, Enterprise and Culture Committee*, 16 November 2004; c 1271.]

The minister has made commitments, on behalf of the Administration, for Scotland-domiciled students, but including a provision in the bill that will allow an open season later for another Administration is problematic. The bill provides the legal gateway to top-up fees for any course for any student in Scotland—that is not in dispute. The minister can bluster and protest until the cows come home, but the proof of the bill's real intention is there in black and white in its text and in the policy memorandum, paragraph 35 of which states:

"subsections (5)-(10) outline the way in which Ministers can use a condition of grant to set maximum fee levels ... On 24 June 2004, the Deputy First Minister made a statement to Parliament, outlining the Executive's policy to increase fee levels in order to control demand for places in the Scottish HE system from English/Welsh/Northern Irish students once variable fees are introduced in England and Wales. This plan also raises the possibility that in specific areas such as medicine, where demand is especially high, fees could be raised to a higher level again."

We must determine what is in the bill and what is in the policy memorandum. What is in black and white leaves open a legal opportunity to have top-up fees that are variable by course throughout Scotland.

The purpose, as stated in the policy memorandum, is to increase fee levels to deter

cross-border flows in general, with the possibility that fees could be raised again to a higher level. That has been decided and legislated on before the working group that the Executive established on potential cross-border flows has reported publicly. The minister is responsible for the content of section 8 and the policy memorandum. The NUS, the AUT and the British Medical Association have all expressed concerns about the section. Why, therefore, is it included in the bill?

The Executive has made a smokescreen argument about justification for English medical students. We must blow that argument away, because it is wrong in practice. If the minister wants to tackle the problem of there being too few doctors as a result of bad workforce planning by the Government, that issue should be addressed properly as a matter of health policy and not used as a Trojan horse to ensure that there is a legal opportunity for top-up fees in the future.

We must increase the total number of medical students and the percentage of Scottish students within that total, as they are more likely to stay, but there are better ways of achieving such policy objectives. My colleague Shona Robison has set out positive and constructive proposals. There should be 100 extra medical student places. Admissions policies should be addressed, taking into account wider access factors. There should be a widening of access generally, and Scottish pupils should be allowed and encouraged to take five highers at one sitting if that is a requirement of the admissions process. There should be a fast-track graduate entry programme. There should be more generalists, rural medicine faculties, and exit interviews should be held at different stages of people's careers in order to influence decisions that are made at the SHO stage in particular. We urge the minister to examine the possibility of contractual golden handcuffs, rather than trying simply to price English students out of the system. If we train 14 per cent of Britain's doctors, why do we not try to keep more of them here, particularly when they reach 27, 28 or 29? That is the fresh talent that we should have in this country.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The member's golden handcuffs proposal is interesting, but she must be aware of concerns about the legal enforceability of such a proposal. Has the SNP taken legal advice on that policy? If so, will the member make that advice available to us this morning, so that we can reflect on it during the debate?

Fiona Hyslop: It is important to ensure that those who are trained in Scotland and whose training is paid for by the taxpayer should have the opportunity to contribute to the national health service in Scotland. I am saying that, in principle, golden handcuffs at the latter stages of training

are far better than a policy that introduces top-up fees at the start.

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson) *rose*—

Fiona Hyslop: I am conscious of time and must move on.

It is already more expensive for English medical students to study in Scotland, but that does not deter them from doing so. They come for the quality of teaching.

Mr Wallace: The member said that golden handcuffs are preferable to trying to price people away. What would she say to a student who, after perhaps a year of practising, finds that medicine is not for him or her and wishes to pursue a career that is more satisfying, but finds that they must repay the cost of their course, which could amount to around £67,000? What if a student should wish to go away and help with medical aid in Africa or south-east Asia? A £67,000 fine would be held over them. Is that not the reality of a golden handcuffs policy?

Fiona Hyslop: The minister and I know the reality of the situation. We are trying to address the issue of students who train in Scottish universities, benefit from that training and then go off to private practices, particularly in England, where there is a far more active private practice situation. That is where the real problem lies, and it is far better to face up to that than to make spurious points about our contribution to the wider world. We train more medical students than we keep. We must ensure that we keep them for the right reasons. If people want to contribute to the wider world—I absolutely support that—there is no way that the SNP would put barriers in their way.

It has been established in answers to parliamentary questions by Bristow Muldoon, David Davidson and Richard Lochhead that the issue that we must address comes later in the medical graduate's life. If we want to recruit and retain more doctors for the Scottish health service, there are better ways of doing so than what has been proposed.

Not only is the concept of top-up fees wrong in principle, but top-up fees are wrong in practice. The reasons for the Executive wanting to apply such fees, and the way in which it wants to do so, are seriously flawed, and the bill will be seriously flawed unless the minister commits himself to amending it and addressing the serious concerns that have been expressed. As the committee report states, a minister's verbal assurances in the chamber can be presented in a court if the act is challenged, but in the final instance—as the legal officers acknowledged in evidence to the Enterprise and Culture Committee—it is the wording in the bill and the wording of the act as

agreed by the Parliament that count. If Jim Wallace does not want to go down in the annals as the minister for top-up fees, he must amend the bill. I urge him to amend it accordingly.

09:58

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As the first member of the Enterprise and Culture Committee to speak in the debate, I will start by thanking the clerks for all their assistance in the preparation of the stage 1 report and for helping in the thorough process that we went through.

The Scottish Conservatives welcome the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill, which will merge the funding councils for further and higher education and will continue the trend of legislation that was started under the previous Conservative Government. It was the Conservatives who incorporated the further education colleges and set up the Scottish Further Education Funding Council. That resulted in a flowering of the FE sector, with outside expertise coming on to the boards and driving the sector forward. We now welcome the proposed merger of the Scottish Further Education Funding Council with the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.

The bill is important, not least because it will bring into legislation the principle of parity of esteem between the two sectors. Higher education and further education have complementary and equal roles. Higher education has a more academic focus and a greater research role. In contrast, further education is more technically based in general and more focused on skills and meeting the needs of the economy. It is quite wrong to suggest that one sector is more important or of a higher priority than the other, and having a single funding body for both organisations is helpful when making that point.

Although the bill is generally acceptable to us, there is some history to the current position, as Fiona Hyslop mentioned. The original draft of the bill caused concern in education circles. There was a flurry of anxiety that the universities were all to be renamed STEPs. So, instead of the University of Edinburgh, we would have the Edinburgh STEP. Frankly, some of that was just bad journalism, but I am pleased that the proposal has been dropped from the bill.

There were also more serious concerns about some aspects of the draft bill, particularly the conferring of additional ministerial powers. I do not know why the draft contained those and I am sure that the minister had no intentions in that direction. I can only put it down to an over-zealous civil servant in his department. There was vocal opposition to the proposals from both the further and the higher education sectors. I pay tribute to

the minister for listening to those concerns and for coming back with a revised bill that addresses the concerns and, by and large, meets the needs of the two sectors.

That said, there are a number of concerns about the bill that is before us. A primary issue of concern to the committee was the right of ministers to set fees for students undertaking full-time courses of study. We know all about the introduction of top-up fees down south and the impact of that in Scotland—the committee has already looked at that issue in detail. I appreciate that the situation is not of the minister's or the Executive's making. He is in the difficult position of trying to protect Scottish students' opportunities to gain places at Scottish universities. However, any legislation has to be carefully worded. The minister must be explicit about his intent now and in the future with regard to the possibility of varying fees for any course or programme other than medicine, which was the area highlighted in evidence.

There is another issue to do with other students who are domiciled in Scotland—for example, those who study part-time, those who have changed course during their studies, or those who are studying for a second or subsequent degree. I was pleased that the minister addressed that point in his opening speech. We wish to reserve our position on possible amendments at stage 2 to deal with the issue. It would be extremely helpful to committee members if the review that the minister mentioned in his speech were to be published before stage 2; the committee will have some difficulty addressing amendments on the issue without that information.

As I said, I appreciate that the difficulty that the minister is in is not of his own making. However, my party opposes top-up fees for Scottish students and indeed for all students in all parts of the United Kingdom. It is essential that there is no attempt to introduce top-up fees by the back door, even with the best intentions.

I listened with interest to what Fiona Hyslop said and I think that she overstated her case. Her rather manufactured outrage this morning at what she said the minister was trying to do did not lend any credibility to the SNP position. She gave the game away about the marvellous proposal that the SNP trumpeted this morning in its press release on golden handcuffs. The SNP has taken no legal advice on the enforceability of that proposal—it is a back-of-an-envelope proposal and exactly what we have come to expect of a party that is not an effective Opposition.

Scotland is and always has been an exporter of education. Education is one of our international strengths and we should be encouraging people from all around the world, even from England—I know that that might stick in the craw of the SNP—

to come to study in Scotland. What sort of message does it send to people from around the world if we seek to penalise those coming from elsewhere? That is a narrow nationalist proposition and it should be rejected.

Apart from fees, we have a number of concerns. The Association of Scottish Colleges has made representations about its concern that the new funding council will seek to reregulate institutions, which is the proper responsibility of the governing body of the institution or Scottish ministers. It is important that the new funding council does not engage in any empire building. Ministers exist to set policy and make direction. Thereafter, it should be the institutions that decide how money is spent at a local level. We do not need a raft of policy makers in the new funding council passing instructions down the line and providing another tier of administration. We must protect the independence of the further and higher education sectors. Moreover, we should ensure that the new funding council is a lean operation with a tight budget to ensure that the maximum amount of money is passed down the line to front-line services.

The bill proposes that there will be one statutory committee for the new funding council and that that will be a research committee. Having such a committee is certainly important. Although the Enterprise and Culture Committee does not recommend in its report that a skills committee be statutory, we encourage the new funding council to consider the need for a skills committee as an early priority when the council is properly constituted and operational. That is an important point, not just because a skills committee would be relevant to the work of the funding council, particularly in connection with further education, but because of the parity of esteem to which I referred earlier. It is inevitable that a research committee will deal primarily with the higher education sector. Therefore, it makes sense to have a skills committee to deal primarily with the further education sector. That would create a balance and ensure that those who run the funding council treat both sectors equally. It would also make sense for any skills committee to have sitting on it people from the business community and enterprise bodies.

The Scottish Conservatives welcome the bill. I hope that the minister will address the specific points raised on fees either during the debate or at stage 2, so that we can move forward with the formation of the new funding council with support from across the political spectrum.

10:06

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):
There is an established consensus in Scotland

that our further and higher education sectors should take steps to work closely together to ensure a unity of purpose and give our people the knowledge and skills to allow Scotland to prosper.

I am pleased that we come to this stage 1 debate at a time when there is broad agreement on the details of the bill. It has been said that the bill has had a rollercoaster journey on its way here in terms of the reactions that it has provoked. That we are now at a stage of broad consensus is a great compliment to the consultation process in which ministers have engaged. I say to Fiona Hyslop that that is what consultation is about—the fact that the bill that we are discussing today is different in important areas from the draft shows that ministers have listened to different points of view. That is a clear example of Executive consultation working.

I am pleased to open for Labour in the debate because, throughout our party's history, we have promoted education as being key to empowering people and giving them new opportunities and skills. A new merged funding council will be perfectly placed to support colleges and universities in their collaborations, which will mean even more points of access so that more people from a wider section of society have better educational opportunities.

It is worth looking at some of the early history of the bill because a lot of work has been done to get to where we are today. The proposal to have a single funding council was a policy that was first promoted by the NUS in the early 1990s. That shows that the policy is embraced by students and not only by those who form education policy. The policy was first promoted in the Scottish Parliament by the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee in its report on lifelong learning. It is a tribute to the work of that committee and that excellent report in particular that this initiative is now becoming a reality.

It strikes me that part of the reason why there was some heated—at times overheated—debate about the draft bill was because the tertiary education sector expected it to be a tidying-up exercise. The two funding councils were already sharing staff and offices and had a joint chief executive. The sector believed that the bill would simply bring together the organisations as one council with one membership. However, the draft bill ended up proposing more than that and legitimate concerns were expressed about the proposals for new definitions of institutions and powers that could be seen to impinge on areas that were properly matters of institutional autonomy. However, those concerns were listened to and acted on and the bill has widespread support in the education sector today.

A total absence of debate over a bill is an unusual occurrence in Parliament and there remains one area of contention in this bill. The NUS has objected to the limited power proposed by ministers to vary fees for medicine in order to address potential issues of cross-border flow of students. As always, the NUS has stated its case eloquently and strongly, but for once, I do not agree with my erstwhile colleagues. I am sure that the Executive would prefer that we did not have to deal with the consequences of a new system down south, but we do. In the context of some calls for drastic measures to ensure that Scottish universities are not overwhelmed by applications from south of the border, that power is very limited and it should be subject to affirmative resolution. The power is included to ensure that we are able to train enough doctors for the NHS in Scotland. I have to say that I have grave reservations about some of the alternative proposals that we have heard to address that issue.

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): If the power is so limited that it is not likely to be used, should we not wait for the system to settle down and see what happens with the changes south of the border before we introduce it in legislation?

Richard Baker: I do not think that the power is so unreasonable. However, we should consider other issues, which I will mention in a few moments.

It is greatly unfair for some people to imply that the power will lead to top-up fees by the back door. Indeed, ministers are not the only people who claim that such a presentation is unfair. I ask Fiona Hyslop and even Murdo Fraser—who, I have to say, was much more measured in his questioning of the proposals—to respond to what David Caldwell from Universities Scotland said on the matter:

"It is important to say that our interpretation of the bill is that it does not permit the introduction of variable top-up fees in Scotland and that, instead, it means the possible reintroduction of banded fixed-level fees that might be different for various courses. It is only a few years since we had band 1 fees and band 2 fees that were different for various courses of study."—[*Official Report, Enterprise and Culture Committee*, 2 November 2004; c 1157.]

Fees will be set by ministers and not by institutions. The proposed system is nothing like the system in England and any suggestion that the proposal means top-up fees by the back door is irrational and, at the very least, over-egging the pudding. The provision is neither unfair nor unreasonable, particularly given that it means that no Scottish or Scotland-domiciled student will be asked to pay any more for tuition.

However, as Chris Ballance mentioned, the committee has asked the Executive to find other

ways of addressing this issue. For example, the NUS has made some suggestions that should be considered. That said, I should repeat that I do not find the proposal itself unreasonable.

During the process, some misinformed reporting of the proposals unfortunately suggested that the Executive wished to merge individual universities and colleges. Of course, the bill contained no such proposal. Indeed, that issue did not form any part of the debate between universities and colleges, which have for a long time embraced the idea of articulation between the two sectors. They have sought ways of enabling people to enter universities and higher education courses not just from schools but from colleges and a variety of other access routes. In fact, Scottish universities and colleges have led the way not just in the UK but in Europe in developing agreements between institutions. For example, an increasing number of two-plus-two courses are being introduced, in which students spend the first two years at a college and the second two at university. Moreover, the Scottish tertiary sector has led the way in developing a credit and qualifications framework.

A new merged funding council will give extra impetus to such developments. It will give further encouragement to finding a united approach to strategic planning in tertiary education. Most important, it will help to support the institutions in the cross-sectoral initiatives that they have developed. When combined with record funding for higher education and increased bursaries for students from poorer backgrounds, the bill shows that the Executive is developing an important unity of vision in higher education and is giving universities and colleges the necessary resources and support to allow them to play their vital role in creating a skilled knowledge economy and a vibrant, successful Scotland.

10:13

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP):

As a member of the Enterprise and Culture Committee, I thank the clerks and the variety of organisations that provided oral and written evidence at stage 1. Like the majority of members, I welcome the decision to merge the two funding councils. Indeed, it reflects particularly well on the parliamentary process that the bill has been introduced as a result of recommendations in a previous committee report.

I was impressed by the Executive's evidence that it had been able to develop from an early stage a close working relationship with the various stakeholders that had an interest in the proposed legislation. However, like many other committee members, I was surprised to find that, despite such a close relationship, the Executive introduced

a fatally flawed draft bill. Surely that raises questions about the nature and adequacy of the consultation that had been carried out. That said, the Executive took the right course of action in withdrawing the draft bill and publishing a more appropriate bill, instead of clogging up the parliamentary process by trying to amend such a flawed bill at stages 2 and 3.

The bulk of the evidence that the committee received on the bill broadly supported its proposals. However, as my colleague Fiona Hyslop pointed out, people's central concerns focused on section 8. The NUS, the AUT and the University of Strathclyde students association all expressed concern that section 8 could open the door to variable top-up fees. Furthermore, the BMA was concerned about the impact of such an approach on access to medical courses and Fiona Hyslop and the NUS presented a number of different ways of addressing the matter.

I welcome the fact that the minister has taken on board the BMA's concerns that a minority of students whose first degree is not in medicine might be put in a difficult situation because they will not be able to attract funding from the endowment grant scheme. I hope that the minister will make further suggestions on that matter at stage 2, as that will help us to consider the bill more fully. However, the Deputy First Minister's comments this morning suggest that ministers are intent on continuing with the existing proposals in section 8. If so, they should seriously consider amending the bill at stage 2.

The minister has made it clear that the present Administration does not intend to use the powers that are set out in section 8 to vary top-up fees for courses other than medical courses. However, the wording of the section does not confine the use of the power exclusively to medical courses. Although I accept the Executive's intention at this stage, I see no reason why it does not wish to make that explicit in the bill. The minister well knows that he is not in a position to tie the hands of a future minister or Administration on this matter. As a result, it seems only reasonable that if the Executive intends to use the power to vary fees only for medical courses, it should clearly state as much in the bill.

Given the level of concern that has been expressed, I hope that ministers will reconsider this matter. If they are not prepared to do so, many people in the higher and further education organisations will continue to view the bill with some suspicion.

10:18

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I am acutely aware that I am

not a member of the Enterprise and Culture Committee. Previous speakers have mentioned the committee's work and its positive relationship with the minister, which will no doubt continue. I unashamedly wish to use an example from my constituency to highlight why I will support the bill's general principles. Indeed, most members will be able to point to examples in their constituencies and regions of the excellent work that colleges and universities carry out. There are examples of innovative methods of co-operation within and across both sectors.

As Murdo Fraser has pointed out, students are increasingly receiving their higher education from further education institutions and being matriculated by higher education institutions. The reformation of the funding procedures, which is one crucial element of the bill, will ensure that we get best value both for school leavers entering higher or further education and for adult learners.

This time last year, Heriot-Watt University announced that the university court was examining the case for relocating the school of textiles and design from the Galashiels Netherdale campus in the heart of my constituency to Riccarton on the outskirts of Edinburgh. Such a move would have ended 130 years of education and skills training in textiles in the Borders and removed 400 full-time students who live—and frequently work—in the area. The impact on the development of a higher and further education base in the Borders would have been serious. It would, of course, also have had a human impact, by taking away many creative people of different cultures from an area that warmly welcomes them. Indeed, that is contrary to the work of the local agencies in seeking inward investment and investment in infrastructure.

Shortly after the announcement that they were considering that option, the directors of the Netherdale campus of Heriot-Watt University were made clear about my views, because within two days they had been summoned to Parliament for a meeting with me. Shortly after that, the two Borders MPs, Archy Kirkwood and Michael Moore, and the two Borders MSPs, Euan Robson and I, met the principal and vice-principal to state our opposition to such a move.

Regrettably, the university had not considered that the problems with the campus in Galashiels that necessitated consideration of a move were problems shared with other partners. That jars with some of the evidence that Professor Archer, the principal of Heriot-Watt University, gave to the Enterprise and Culture Committee. He said:

"It is about remembering that in addition to the hugely important area of economic development, social and cultural engagement are equally important within higher

education."—[*Official Report, Enterprise and Culture Committee*, 2 November 2004; c 1163.]

The new ways partnership of local community planning authorities exists because there are shared issues across government agencies and public sector bodies. There are similarities in the education sector. I convened and chaired a working group of the new ways leaders, student representatives, local industry and Borders College to deliver a considered and long-term tertiary education strategy for the region. At the time, Borders College was working on a positive initiative to co-locate with Heriot-Watt at Netherdale.

From the meetings that I chaired with the leadership of the university and the new ways partners, three steering groups were established to examine the centre of excellence in textiles, the requirements of a vibrant and financially sustainable campus in Galashiels, and the future of further and higher education in the Borders. I was delighted that the university court decided late last year to stay in Galashiels and to continue to teach textiles.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Is it not a great pity that Christine Grahame is not here to hear the member say those things?

Jeremy Purvis: Indeed. It is worth while remarking that when this issue was last raised in the chamber, in May, Ms Grahame attacked the work that I was doing locally with the new ways team.

Chris Ballance: Will Jeremy Purvis join me in congratulating the local students associations on their part in the campaign? Does he agree that the strength of their campaign is the primary reason for the retention of the college?

Jeremy Purvis: Absolutely. I have a close working relationship with James Alexander, the leader of Heriot-Watt University students association, to whom I pay tribute. I have met him on more than 20 occasions, most recently last week, to talk about progress. I pay tribute to the students and to David Parker, the leader of Scottish Borders Council, to David Gass, of Scottish Enterprise Borders, to local industry representatives and, in particular, to Peter Lee, of Eildon Housing Association. The work of those community planning bodies in putting together an option for the university to stay, and their work on new residences, renewed residences, the incorporation of a conference centre, and a co-located campus of higher education for the university and Borders College, will be the building blocks of a long-term and sustainable future for the higher education base.

We must consider how the bill, which seeks to co-ordinate funding for the tertiary sector better, will benefit the Borders in future. It is recognised that there is little to be gained by continuing to separate the funding functions of the sectors. Indeed, there are considerable benefits from not dividing those functions. I am hopeful that the Scottish Further Education Funding Council will soon agree to award a considerable capital grant for the redevelopment of Netherdale campus and that that will be supported by funding from the south of Scotland European structural funds, and by the welcome initiative of Eildon Housing Association to redevelop the outdated and below-standard residences, with private and public investment creating new, flexible, high-standard accommodation for the students at Netherdale.

The aims of the bill can and should be delivered locally. The council, enterprise body, housing associations, industry, students and others have, arguably, been ahead of the Parliament and the Executive in their commitment to working together. It is welcome that the bill reflects the kind of partnership that we seek throughout Scotland. I commend the minister for bringing about the bill, which I hope will stimulate further developments throughout Scotland.

The Netherdale campus will be governed efficiently, will ensure better education provision and will have a wide local impact. Much work is still to be done on the campus and co-location of the college and university, but we have the prize of a sustainable base for further and higher education in the Borders; co-located college and university teaching with other college premises throughout the Borders, especially the new build in Hawick; shared commitments, risks and successes; and a substantially redeveloped and broader campus with conference and other facilities. My vision of a university college of the Borders, incorporating a renewed Scottish centre for textiles, fashion and design, could become a reality. It would be developed for the learners and the community of the Borders.

From research funded by the Scottish Executive, Borders College has identified the work that is required to build on the current very good standard of education in the Borders. The key areas for development in locally delivered higher education are social studies, art and design, business management, and health, including social care. Attracting new providers to work in the Borders is crucial to that. Support from a reformed funding mechanism will assist in addressing areas where development is needed, but it will also provide support for a new campus and for a new spirit of education within the Borders.

10:26

Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): This is an important debate on an important bill to which we have given detailed consideration in the Enterprise and Culture Committee. There is still some way to go, given that we are about to commence stage 2, but nobody doubts the importance of the post-school sectors in Scotland in helping to grow our economy and in ensuring that people have the skills and knowledge to achieve that aim in the years ahead.

The standard of our universities is well known worldwide, and that of our further education colleges is increasing, as is the role that they play in closing the opportunity gap and creating learning opportunities for many people in Scotland. That will continue under the strategic direction of the joint funding body that will be established by the bill.

Consideration of the bill necessarily has come down to a major issue. I will refer to that and to one other issue. The Enterprise and Culture Committee's report states that the most controversial issue—it is probably the only controversial issue—is contained in section 8, on variable fees. Fiona Hyslop and Murdo Fraser found it necessary to reiterate in their speeches that their parties are opposed to top-up fees. That was quite unnecessary, because every party in this Parliament is opposed to top-up fees and has been since they were first mentioned about a year ago. There is no question of any wavering on that, certainly by the Labour Party or the Scottish Executive, although I do not know about other parties.

Murdo Fraser: Mr Watson should have qualified his remarks. His party is opposed to top-up fees only in Scotland. His Scottish Labour colleagues voted for top-up fees in other parts of the UK.

Mike Watson: I am well aware of that. I do not support that position, and I am on record as saying so. I am talking about parties within this Parliament. I circumscribed my remarks in that respect.

It is perfectly clear to anyone who has read the bill or listened to the evidence that the proposed variable fees—about which it is legitimate to raise issues—are not top-up fees. That cannot be made any clearer, and scaremongering around the issue is not helpful. Although I appreciate and admire the work that the NUS has done, it has gone over the top on this issue. I am conscious of its concerns—its main one being any impact on students, of course—but the case has been overstated. That said, there are concerns. The Enterprise and Culture Committee expressed them and raised in our report five in particular, which need to be dealt with.

The most important concern is ministerial intent. I have a question for the minister, although I am not looking for a reply immediately. I looked back at the *Official Report* of the committee's meeting on 16 November, and there are different interpretations of what the minister said. I take it that his opening remarks were almost certainly written by civil servants and for that reason would have been extremely carefully worded:

"Scotland-domiciled students who are studying medicine or any other first degree will continue to have their fees paid for them in full ... but students who are not eligible for fee support from the Scottish Executive will pay more."—[*Official Report, Enterprise and Culture Committee*, 16 November 2004; c 1262.]

Initially, we in the committee failed to pick that up. We had to have our attention drawn to the matter by the British Medical Association in Scotland and the University of Strathclyde students association, which deserves great credit for writing to us—late in the day, admittedly—to outline situations in which students could be affected. Such situations involve students who have had to repeat years of study, those with a higher national diploma who have progressed to level 1 or 2 of a degree course, those who have changed course during their studies, those who, for various reasons, do not meet residency requirements and those who are taking their second or subsequent degree course, perhaps as a result of having dropped out of their initial course. I am not suggesting that a huge number of students are involved, but those categories are significant and it seems to me that when the minister made his opening statement at the meeting in question, his civil servants had them in mind; he might have had them in mind, too.

Later on in the same meeting, the minister said:

"I emphasise that the position will be no different for Scotland-domiciled students who are studying medicine, who will continue to have their fees met"—[*Official Report, Enterprise and Culture Committee*, 16 November 2004; c 1267.]

There are situations in which that would not be the case. I draw that to the minister's attention and urge that he uses stage 2 proceedings to clarify the position. The minister made it clear that he was "sympathetic" to meeting the committee's concerns. We have heard that the implementation advisory group may not report before stage 2, and those issues must be dealt with, just as we must ensure that cross-border flows are maintained and that we do not try to shut the gate on Scottish higher education. I do not think that anyone would suggest that that is what is being done; I certainly would not. We want to ensure that the supply of doctors in this country is increased because, as the BMA has identified, it is clear that that is a problem. We need to ensure that we deal with

those important issues; that is why the committee highlights them.

I will not address all five of the concerns that the committee highlights. The second one that I will consider is that over alternative approaches. The NUS has come up with highly credible alternatives to the minister's proposal. Before we began our consideration of the bill, I was not aware of the fact that students who study medicine must not just achieve all the necessary higher passes; they must achieve them all at one sitting, in secondary 5. That is an unnecessarily restrictive condition. I do not see why young people of that age should be disqualified from ever studying medicine just because they do not manage to meet that condition. Given that there is a need for more Scots to be admitted to medical courses, that condition could be relaxed.

I have another suggestion, to which I think Michael Matheson referred. It relates to students who want to study medicine as a second degree. They could have any number of reasons for wanting to do so, but the fact that the study of medicine is their second choice should not disqualify them from such study. I can understand why there should be no funding, payment of fees or loan facilities for students who do a second degree in normal circumstances, but I am suggesting that the circumstances that I have described are not normal. My proposal could be considered as a way of increasing the number of Scots who enter the medical profession. That is all that I want to say on fees, but the minister and his officials will have to work on the issue to overcome at stage 2 some of the remaining concerns that the committee has articulated.

An aspect of the bill that we have not heard much about today is academic freedom. In his opening speech, the minister expressed his belief that individual academic freedom should apply to all tertiary sector academic staff. However, if I picked him up correctly, he thinks that it would be unsuitable to amend the bill to achieve that. He gave no reasons, other than to say that the fact that the bill deals with institutions rather than individuals means that it would be more appropriate to deal with the matter in a different way. Although institutions are certainly the focus of the bill, they confer academic freedom on individual members of staff. In my view, the extension of academic freedom through those institutions to individuals could be built into the bill. I hope that at stage 2 we will at least have the opportunity to investigate that and perhaps to listen in more detail to the minister's reasons for believing that the bill is not an appropriate vehicle for extending academic freedom in that way. It is appropriate not just for all universities and further education colleges to be brought up to the level of

the pre-1992 universities, but for that freedom to apply not just to institutions but to individuals.

My final point is a reiteration of a point that Richard Baker made about the effectiveness of the process. Fiona Hyslop was less than charitable about the fact that changes had been made to the draft bill. In committee, we asked officials why the draft bill was so far wide of what the further and higher education sectors appeared to be comfortable with. That is not the point; amendment is part of the process. When the bill was introduced, it was evident that significant amendments had been made. That is a huge strength of the system. I want that strength to be developed at stage 2, when we will deal with further amendments. I am sure that the bill can be further improved and that the speeches of committee members and of other members in today's debate will inform that process.

10:35

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to speak in the debate.

The Deputy First Minister began by mentioning how the merger of the funding councils had been suggested by the Garrick committee. That happened a long time ago: it was not last month or last year, but before the Scottish Parliament was convened; in fact, it was before Labour eventually won an election in 1997. The merger of the funding councils is not so much an idea whose time has come as an idea that is long overdue, so we welcome the bill's general principle of merging the two councils.

The minister spoke about his recent announcement on state bursaries, which of course are funded by a cross-subsidy from one group of students to another. In other words, students fund the system by paying a tax, levy, endowment or whatever one wishes to call it. The minister announced a rise in the threshold of earnings of parents of students who might qualify for that cross-subsidy, but unfortunately—as far as I am aware—the corresponding threshold at which students repay their loans and their graduate endowments has not been raised; it remains unrealistically low. I believe that the threshold should be raised to a level of about £20,000.

Mr Wallace: The threshold will be raised to £15,000 from April this year.

Mr Monteith: I thank the minister for advising me of that and for the progress that is being made. However, as I am sure that he will understand, I will keep pressing for the threshold to be raised even further. At £15,000, the threshold will still be lower than it was back in 1997, when power changed hands. If we take inflation into account, a great deal remains to be made up.

I have a brief observation on Fiona Hyslop's nonsensical proposal; indeed, it is so fantastic that Edward Lear himself would have been proud to have thought it up. The idea of having golden handcuffs for medical students to discourage them from going into "private practice"—the use of that phrase was interesting—would be like going to sea in a sieve: it simply does not hold water. How many graduates go directly into private practice? Gey few, I suspect. How long would such an embargo on their employment last? Would it last for five years or 10 years? We need to know more about the proposal. What would happen to the medical students at the University of St Andrews who go to the University of Manchester to complete their degrees? Would the handcuffs get put on at the border, in St Andrews or in Manchester?

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I agree with the point that the member makes. What would the SNP's golden handcuffs policy, which would chain young doctors in Scotland to the national health service against their will, do for the motivation of those involved?

Mr Monteith: As the minister suggested, the SNP's proposal would be demotivating. I know many people who, in striving to become medical graduates, do not necessarily seek to work in the NHS. One must ask whether working for a private voluntary body in an area such as south-east Asia would constitute a breach of the restriction. Once one introduces exemptions to cater for certain categories, one creates a panoply of anomalies. The idea is nonsensical and was not worthy of the envelope on which it was written.

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): It was a fag packet.

Fiona Hyslop: The problem of students from the University of St Andrews having to go to Manchester that Brian Monteith identified is important. I understand that that situation has been addressed and that arrangements are in place whereby those students can take up positions that are offered by Lothian NHS Board. That is an example of the alternatives that should be provided to ensure that we keep more doctors—particularly junior doctors—and medical students in Scotland. That is the key issue and the policy objective. Let us have policy answers that meet that objective and do not interfere with the higher education system.

Mr Monteith: That rather long intervention did not tell me anything that I did not already know about the situation at the University of St Andrews. I am well aware of the university's attempts to ensure that all its medical students are taught entirely in Scotland. Margaret Jamieson suggested that Fiona Hyslop's ideas had been put together on the back of a fag packet, but I know that Fiona

Hyslop does not smoke. If we were talking about Tricia Marwick, I might have used those words, but I gave Fiona Hyslop the benefit of the doubt by suggesting that she used an envelope.

As Murdo Fraser said, we welcome the general principles of the bill, albeit with detailed concerns. One such concern is over any diminution of the independence of further education colleges. The history of SHEFC is littered with examples of interventions, central planning and direction in which the council attempted to second-guess the graduate employment market. We should refocus the proposed new funding council and create a far smaller body, thereby ensuring the real independence of universities and colleges, so that instead of granting teaching funds from the centre and second-guessing what is required we empower students and ensure that moneys and teaching funds follow the students. Such an approach would release institutions from failed central direction and restore the proper supplier-customer relationship to institutions of learning. The creation of a genuine market that is responsive to student demand will strengthen the international reputation and quality of our institutions, be they universities or colleges. I have every faith in the ability of the governing bodies of the institutions to respond to the demands that students make on them.

Although we welcome the bill, a great deal remains to be done and we seek improvements to it. We will achieve greater success when parties in the Parliament waken up and recognise that further work needs to be done and that Conservatives are needed in a ruling coalition if we are to make real progress in higher education. That moment cannot come soon enough.

10:42

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): I wonder whether that was a bid to join the Executive. I think that it was.

I am a member of the Enterprise and Culture Committee and I am pleased to speak in the debate. I am also pleased to hear how widely welcomed by members the bill has been. A major consultation exercise led to a draft bill that was subjected to further consultation, which resulted in the introduction of a bill about which I think that we can all say—at least in principle—“This bill is right for Scotland and we welcome it.” The bill has been welcomed by members, by the professional associations, by student bodies and by employers, which is a very important point. The committee took a considerable time to scrutinise the bill and had help both from a very good clerking team and from the Scottish Parliament information centre team, which provided us with a considerable amount of documentation. We were also helped

by the evidence that was provided in person and in written submissions.

I welcome the minister's clarification and his comments on future intentions in relation to possible amendments at stage 2, in particular with regard to the contentious issue of fees. I urge the Scottish National Party to consider what their proposed golden handcuffs might mean for a Scotland-domiciled student who qualifies in medicine but wants to work down south to expand their experience.

I ask the minister whether the implementation advisory group, which will report shortly, will take account of concerns about fee levels for part-time students or students in employment whose fees are met not by their employer but by themselves. I would welcome clarification on the matter.

What proposals are before the Parliament? The merger of the funding councils was a recommendation of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, which was convened by Alex Neil, now the convener of the Enterprise and Culture Committee. The involvement of the Scottish public services ombudsman can only be welcome in situations in which disputes cannot properly be rectified by the established mechanisms in institutions. The proposal for the extension of academic freedom might need further clarification, but I think that it has been welcomed by all. We will have better organised, better funded, guaranteed higher-quality institutions that offer further and higher education to Scotland's young people and to people who seek to return to learning. We will have institutions that take what is good from existing practice and adopt such practice for the benefit of all.

If we are to concentrate on our top priority, which is to grow the economy, it is vital that the workforce should be equipped with the right knowledge and skills to compete in the economy. Our further education colleges have proven success in closing the opportunity gap, creating learning opportunities and assisting in regeneration, as has been said. In my constituency, Glenrothes College and Fife College of Further and Higher Education are the institutions of first choice for the majority of people who enter the further and higher education sector. Thanks to the two-plus-two system, which is unique in the United Kingdom, students from both colleges progress to the universities of Abertay, Dundee, Edinburgh and St Andrews. We know the quality of the work—particularly the research—that is done in those institutions. The colleges also work closely with other stakeholders, such as the local authority, the local enterprise company and the sector skills councils, to ensure that the courses that are offered are appropriate, in relation not just to the expansion of students'

knowledge and understanding but to the need to meet employers' economic needs. This morning I spoke to the associate principal of Glenrothes College, who confirmed that he welcomes the bill and thinks that it offers opportunities for the further and higher education sectors to learn, collaborate and work in partnership.

I have come across a very interesting statistic. For every graduate employee in industry, seven support staff are required to provide technical and administrative skills, and further education institutions teach many of those skills. If members consider the importance of improving the skills and qualifications of the vital employees who support the people who perhaps do the blue-sky thinking, they will appreciate why the bill is a good idea and why the merger of the funding councils is necessary.

I welcome the scope in the bill for the recognition of new institutions that might be formed as a result of mergers. For example, discussions are going on about a merger between Glenrothes College and Fife College, which serve my constituents. I also welcome the assurance that the committee received in response to a question that I raised about the potential for growth of private institutions and the eligibility of such institutions for public sector funding. We were assured that a fundable body, although recognised as a provider, would not be regarded as the same as a funded body. I think that everyone will welcome the fact that there will be scope in the system for market intervention if that is appropriate.

I am a member of the Subordinate Legislation Committee and I remind members of and draw the minister's attention to the committee's recommendation that the provisions in the bill that confer powers on ministers to make significant modifications should require such instruments to be subject to the affirmative procedure and therefore to the will of Parliament. The recommendation was included in the Enterprise and Culture Committee's stage 1 report and I hope that the minister will take it on board at stage 2.

To sum up, the bill has been welcomed by all. We look forward to further discussion at stage 2 and to further clarification about the powers of ministers and agencies, and we recommend that the Parliament be the final arbiter in any significant decision.

10:49

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I, too, formerly served on the Enterprise and Culture Committee. I took an active interest in the matter during the early stages of debate on the bill and am still interested in it. One never reads all of a

committee report, but I read parts of the Enterprise and Culture Committee's stage 1 report with great interest and I am delighted that the committee has taken a structured and detailed approach. I am also pleased that the minister accepts without reservation the bulk of the committee's recommendations. The issues on which the minister is not yet prepared to accept the committee's recommendations are those on which there are differences between us.

I share the five concerns that the committee expressed about section 8 and I look forward to future changes to the bill to satisfy those concerns, particularly those on fees, which are the key issue. Other members have expressed graphically their concerns on the issue. As I said when we discussed the matter way back in June of last year, two principal issues arise in relation to medicine. One is about access to courses in medicine in Scotland by Scotland-domiciled students. We have significant concerns about matters that are not under the control of the Parliament—choices are being made elsewhere that will have a direct impact in Scotland. I do not doubt for a minute that the minister and his colleagues are having a genuine stab at addressing those potential problems. I accept that I asked for more detail of that work—which we have not got yet—but merely because I asked for it does not mean that I endorsed the principle. To suggest that I endorsed it by asking for the detail is taking the matter a little far. However, I accept that the Executive's proposals are one way of addressing the difficulty.

Subsequently, many stakeholders have raised detailed and well-argued concerns with the committee, which are laid out clearly in the report and which were articulated by Richard Baker, Mike Watson and Michael Matheson. Genuine alternatives to fees have been offered. My colleagues Fiona Hyslop and Shona Robison have built on some of those suggestions and offered an alternative. I seek an assurance from the minister that he will consider alternatives to using fees to regulate the number of students who access courses in medicine in Scotland.

As well as a duty to allow access to courses in medicine and to educate students, we have a duty to provide a health service. However, for successive Governments, workforce planning has not been a strength and we have serious issues with it that we must address, particularly in relation to medicine. Not all those issues are relevant to the debate, but we must address them to ensure that we have enough doctors.

Allan Wilson: I accept that we must consider all possible measures to address some of the disparities, but does the member accept that it is completely inappropriate in the current

international climate to suggest that medical students who qualify in this country and then go to work and use their skills in the third world should owe us £67,000 as a consequence?

Brian Adam: It is absurd to suggest that the SNP is not interested in helping people in other parts of the world, particularly those who cannot help themselves. One great strength of the Scottish tertiary education system is that we have many students from outwith Scotland. All our institutions have an international dimension, no matter what proportion of their students are local. It was not my intention in June to restrict that dimension, nor is it Fiona Hyslop's or Shona Robison's intention to do so. Any suggestion along those lines is a deliberate misrepresentation and I hope that the minister will not continue to pursue that argument.

The notion of being well-qualified or suitable to study medicine does not refer only to persons who achieved five highers at A grade in one sitting, which our educational system currently finds difficult to deliver for any young person. We must consider the entry requirements for professional courses, particularly—but not only—for medicine. The present arrangement significantly disadvantages those who attend schools at which pupils can take only four highers at one sitting because of the size of the school or the approach that it takes. That issue is perhaps not within the scope of the bill, but we must consider it urgently in addressing the overall issue of accessibility to our universities.

Beyond that, we have a duty to look after the health of Scots. People who are domiciled in this country deserve a high standard of health service and we must supply doctors to provide that. The suggestion of my colleagues Fiona Hyslop and Shona Robison is a welcome contribution to the debate.

Christine May: Given the difficulty that Brian Adam and his colleagues have had in answering even the simplest questions from Labour members on the golden handcuffs policy, does he agree that he should dissociate himself from it at once?

Brian Adam: Good try, but nae chance. Christine May's attempt to adhere to some party line shows her continued pursual of ministerial office. To return to Brian Monteith's comments, her opportunities might be restricted if the unionist coalition is broadened even further to accommodate Mr Monteith's desire for the ministerial Mondeo.

Mr Monteith: I did not rule out Mr Adam's party from coming into bed with us.

Brian Adam: I welcome the offer, but I shall politely decline.

Workforce planning must start with the admissions policies of medical schools in Scotland. At present, the gender balance among medical students is skewed significantly. Overall, 60 per cent of medical students are female and, in some universities, 70 per cent of medical students are female. Although no one wants to prevent young women from studying medicine, the present gender balance will have consequences down the line, but soon. We must address the admissibility criteria to ensure that we get people from a wide range of backgrounds.

In admissions to universities in general, the balance is heavily in favour of young women, which may not necessarily reflect inherent ability but the way in which exams are structured—they may be biased against males. That is perhaps not the most popular view, but the present situation will have consequences and we must address them. However, I have addressed them for long enough this morning.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): You have.

11:00

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I am happy to support the bill. Like other members, I applaud the degree of consultation on the bill and the flexibility shown by ministers. I have confidence that between them the minister and the Enterprise and Culture Committee will produce a bill at stage 3 that covers the various reasonable points that have been raised. What we need to achieve, if the Parliament finds the bill acceptable, is an act that has arrangements written into it, so that any major change will have to be made with the approval of the Parliament. We cannot bind future Governments and future Parliaments; all that we can do is ensure that any future Government with funny ideas has to bring those ideas to the Parliament for approval. Whether it produces a new bill or affirmative instruments, a Government with a majority can get its ideas through, so what is written into an act does not make all that much difference.

Fiona Hyslop: Donald Gorrie raised an important point, which is of concern. All that it would need for a future Government to introduce top-up fees for Scottish students—variable by course—is an affirmative instrument. That is not satisfactory as it does not involve a three-month consultation or proper legislative process.

Donald Gorrie: The reality is that if a Government has a majority it will get through the Parliament what it wants, whether by bill or affirmative instrument. We need to make it as clear as possible that any proposed changes have to come to the Parliament. We are always looking

forward to—or rather, anticipating with fear—some malign Government consisting of all sorts of awful people who will sneak things through. We want to prevent that.

Mr Stone: Brian Monteith.

Donald Gorrie: Present company entirely excepted.

What worries me about bills is that we debate and pass them, and it is all very sensibly discussed. We control the bill, but we do not control the money that is usually necessary to deliver its objectives; the Executive does that. The ministers are excellent people for whom I have a high regard. However, we must ensure that the Executive reflects the views of the Parliament in the way in which it allocates its money. I would like the way in which the Executive deals with the proposed new funding council to pay more heed to the quality of teaching and of student support. Research is important, and our future as a nation and as a people depends especially on the quality of research in science and engineering and so on, but the main purpose of universities and colleges is to teach. That is often neglected. When I was involved with a university there were complaints, for example, about totally inaudible lecturers. The quality of teaching has improved a bit since then, but it is still not that great. We need to give more reward to institutions—colleges and universities—for the quality of teaching and student support. When I have visited colleges in central Scotland I have been struck by the fact that they all have good pastoral care for their students. Sadly, that is often lacking in large universities, where students are left to sink or swim in a sea of alcohol. Institutions should be rewarded for teaching and student support, as well as for research.

Richard Baker referred to the increase in the number of people doing part of a degree at college and part of it at university. That is good, and it should be encouraged and developed. It is an argument for having one funding source for colleges and universities. Murdo Fraser said that Scotland had a history of exporting education, and that we should be worried about discouraging people, even from England. That is true, but we must balance that with the duty of the Executive and the Parliament to provide Scotland with the skills it needs. Whether those are craft skills or medical skills, the Executive has a duty to provide them. We must balance that with our noble record of exporting education. To take one example, we owe our examination system to Macaulay, who came up from England and studied at Edinburgh when the Scottish universities were vibrant. Oxford and Cambridge were sound asleep, and nowhere else in England had a university. Macaulay introduced exams—instead of patronage—for getting jobs and promotion. That was a step

forward. Exams are not all that good, but being the nephew of a duke—the previous system—was even worse. Our export of education has led to the modern system.

Murdo Fraser referred to the idea of a skills committee, which is mentioned in the committee's report. That is a good idea, and it would follow on from the idea of the quality of teaching, and the fact that we need to provide skills and not just research. The individual freedom of staff at colleges and universities is important. The minister has said that, and I hope that he will manage to enshrine it in the system in some way. It is good to have institutions that are free, but they should also be internally free. We could use the hypothetical example of a political system in which each party was free, but the internal arrangements of which were totally unfree. That would be a bad thing.

11:06

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I declare an interest as a board member of the Glasgow College of Building and Printing, which is soon to be launched as the Glasgow metropolitan college when it merges with Glasgow College of Food Technology. I congratulate the colleges on that. Glasgow Kelvin probably has the highest concentration of further and higher education institutions in Europe. I recently took Jim Wallace on a tour to see for himself the three universities, two specialist institutions and five FE colleges that I try to represent in the Parliament.

In commending the Enterprise and Culture Committee on its stage 1 report and its considered recommendations, I must say how much progress we have made in bringing higher and further education closer together in recent years. That is in no small measure due to the commitment of our universities and further education colleges to ensuring a smooth passage for students in the transition that some of them will want to make from further education into higher education. Our institutions should be commended for that.

For my part, I am unequivocal about the bill's purpose in restructuring the system to make it more accountable to elected members and to Government and, more important, in widening opportunities—as Richard Baker said—for our people and our country. While I endorse growing our economy as the top priority, I urge ministers constantly to monitor, review and act to set the conditions that break down the obstacles that prevent students from lower income backgrounds entering further and higher education in particular. The debate on prospects for medical students is a case in point. We know that too few students from unskilled backgrounds have the qualifications to gain entry to medical school.

Hundreds of Scottish students are denied a place at our five medical schools in Scotland. I have a constituent who gained five straight-A passes in one sitting and was refused entry because of the exceptionally high demand for places. It worries me a wee bit that so many Scottish students are not getting places, and I would like us to address that. I find myself agreeing with Murdo Fraser for the first time—it is a bit scary. I know that Scotland has maintained its five medical schools because of the historical nature of its system, which has enjoyed a high demand from English, Welsh and overseas students. Without that influx, we would not have been able to sustain five medical schools in Scotland. It is the quality of our provision that has been the main attraction.

One of the barriers to entry has always been people's ability to support themselves through university, particularly if no one else in their family has ever been to university. That is why I welcome the Executive's commitment to increasing the threshold in bursaries, which is too low and should be higher. I am pleased that the Administration recognises that it is important to have a system of non-repayable support.

In view of what I have said about obstacles to entry, there must be a systematic and constant review of student financial support and the level of student debt. If that becomes a genuine obstacle to entry, we must know about it and the Government must do something about it. Debt is a worry for some medical students, although the current evidence suggests that demand is so strong in medicine that debt is not necessarily a barrier. We should continue to monitor the situation, however.

There are complex reasons why many young people do not aspire to go to university. It is not all to do with student financial support. It is also about a lack of encouragement and a lack of self-belief. People can lack the belief that higher education is for them. A difficult family environment can also be a factor. Too many young people in Glasgow do not have any qualifications or skills. We face a real challenge in Glasgow as our economy grows. Glaswegians are not necessarily benefiting from that economic growth, and we need to tackle the issue of providing them with skills.

Jeremy Purvis: Does the member agree that school leavers who do not go into further or higher education are increasingly finding that they regret it? We must ensure that the system works for people in their early 20s who wish to return for further or higher education. Increasingly, it will be the further education institutions that will be most appropriate for them.

Pauline McNeill: I agree with that. The lifelong learning policy is just that: it is all about second,

third and fourth chances. That said, I would in no way want to box students from low-income backgrounds into further education. Jeremy Purvis is right, but the transition from FE to HE must be a smooth passage for those who want to make it. The merging of the two funding councils sends out the message that we expect institutions to make that transition easy.

The role of further education institutions has never been greater and, in my experience, their response to Government priorities and student need has never been greater. I would point out on behalf of the further education institutions that I represent that they would want parity in funding as well as parity in status.

I have been asked to mention a couple of further issues. The bill contains provision relating to the Scottish public services ombudsman. The question is how wide that provision should be and who should be able to appeal to the ombudsman. The Scottish credit and qualifications framework is important, and I refer to what I have already said about the agreement on qualifications. What is the point of someone not knowing the transfer value of their HND into higher education?

I turn to section 8 and fees. I have some questions that I would like the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning to address in his summing up. This is an important point of debate. Will fees be designed to provide a regulatory measure? If so, what kind of regulatory measure? Will fees be set so high as to provide a barrier so that demand does not outstrip supply if our fees are cheaper than those in England? Or will it simply be a matter of establishing parity with English fees? I seek clarity on why we need such a broad power. Could students on all Scottish courses be identified as a class of people for whom variable fees would apply? How far can we go, given how section 8 is structured? I probably know the answer, but I would be grateful if, in summing up, the minister could put something about that on the record.

It is clear that the Executive is saying that there should be more accountability to ministers as far as higher education is concerned. Demand for that is probably shared by the whole Parliament. I have asked 29 written questions on further and higher education. Each time, those have been referred to the appropriate funding council, but I think that ministers should be answering those questions. We should be taking powers to ensure that ministers are accountable in this area.

That leads me to academic freedom. I know that institutions guard it strenuously, and I do not intend to interfere with that. I have no difficulty in acknowledging that academic freedom is what makes a vibrant education system. I think, however, that some qualifications need to be

attached to it. We need some control in the planning of what courses we require in Scotland, particularly if we believe that growing the economy is our top priority. In qualifying what is meant by academic freedom, ministers must have the power to direct the provision of courses where that is required. It makes no sense that a college or university can set up a course that already exists, which could damage the existing provision. Where there are gaps in provision, Government should have the overall strategic responsibility for making something happen.

We desperately need to review the governance of the further education sector. That boards are accountable only to themselves is an idea of the past. Although I recognise some of the positive aspects, I think that governance must change. I know that the Scottish Further Education Funding Council has a review taking place and I hope that ministers will look at the results carefully. Changing existing arrangements would be beneficial not just to the Parliament and the institutions themselves, but to students—after all, that is why we are here. I think that that benefit will be immense. I congratulate the Enterprise and Culture Committee on its report.

11:16

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I pay tribute to my colleagues on the Enterprise and Culture Committee, and indeed to the clerks, who have worked hard on the report. It has been a most interesting process, as Murdo Fraser indicated.

I have enjoyed the debate hugely, and I will comment on some of the contributions that members have made. The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Jim Wallace, talked about the idea behind the bill. He pointed out several facts that I do not think have been contradicted. Record levels of funding are going into further and higher education. There is new support for disabled people, which will be incredibly welcome. The proposals for the enhanced role of the Scottish public services ombudsman have been well received across the board. The minister referred to the fact that this is about strengthening our economy and society. All that we do in this area helps us in that aim.

The policy is quite clear: there will be no top-up fees in Scotland—it is as simple as that. The number of young student bursaries is up by 11 per cent. That is one example of the increase in funding. As the minister said, no Scotland-domiciled student will have to pay fees under this Administration. Donald Gorrie made the point that in future, no matter how much people may scaremonger, if a minister were minded to introduce some measure to change the proposed

policy, that would have to come to the Parliament and be subject to a majority vote in the chamber, as that is how the affirmative procedure works. Donald Gorrie said that we cannot predict what might happen. That is the nature of democracy—all sorts of things can change—but we cannot take away from the sincerity of what ministers are saying today. Any other argument intended to scaremonger is disingenuous—we might just as well say that the slaughter of the first born is a terrible thing. The minister's intention is quite clear. I think that, to be honourable about it, the SNP should accept that.

I listened to Fiona Hyslop's speech with great interest and I think that Alex Neil, if he can do so when summing up for the SNP, must address the legal advice that lies behind the golden handcuffs proposal. It may be right; it may be wrong, but we must know the detail. We have heard allegations of the repayment of some £67,000 being required if someone heads off to work halfway through their course—two or three years in. We need such matters to be addressed.

Murdo Fraser's contribution was supportive. In many ways, he reflected the work of the Enterprise and Culture Committee. Murdo welcomes the amalgamation of the two funding councils, and he was right to use the expression "parity of esteem" in referring to higher and further education. He made the first reference in the debate to the internationalism of Scottish education and the fact that we export some of our best training and education beyond the borders of Scotland. That is something that we have been proud of for many years, and we should be proud of it in future.

I am taken with Murdo Fraser's raising the possibility of there being a skills committee. That relates to the idea of parity of esteem, and I do not believe that ministers would rule out consideration of that. Murdo Fraser also referred to the involvement of the business sector and the private sector—the wealth creators. He was correct to do so. Co-ordinating the powerhouse of our economy and higher and further education is crucial.

Richard Baker referred to the two-plus-two programme. It is happening at my alma mater, the University of St Andrews, and it is welcomed there. He also talked about the NUS evidence. He cut to the chase, saying that if we are to live in the real world we must deal with the real consequences of what has been done south of the border.

On the subject of why what is in the bill is in the bill, let me say this: things could happen in future and if the bill does not provide for that, we could be making hostages to fortune. Let me put it this way: legislative buses do not come every day of the week. The bill gives us our only chance to make such provision. We have heard the minister

talk about the safeguards that will be placed in the bill at stage 2. I remind members that an affirmative instrument must be dealt with in the chamber.

Fiona Hyslop: Jamie Stone says that legislative buses do not always come along when we might want them to, but I suggest that the problem is that we have not even seen the report of the working party on cross-border flows and that, if it is decided that that proposal should be pursued, it would be far more appropriate to do so in a separate piece of legislation than it would be to hijack the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill.

Mr Stone: I do not agree with Fiona Hyslop's position, which should be no surprise to anyone. I would rather deal with the issue in the bill, as it is proposed, with the inclusion of the safeguards that the minister has talked about. The fact that the proposal would have to come back to the Parliament is important. All 128 of us—not including the Presiding Officer—will be able to vote on it.

Michael Matheson and Brian Adam accepted the intention of the bill in a generous spirit. Their speeches were generally supportive.

Jeremy Purvis made a characteristic speech, for which I applaud him. He brought to our attention the work that he and others do across the board.

Mike Watson summed up the issue when he said, simply, that variable fees are not top-up fees. That is the point of today's debate. He made a thoughtful speech that, in many ways, provided a clear pointer to the work that lies before the Enterprise and Culture Committee at stage 2.

Brian Monteith made a humdinger of a speech and I liked the point that he made about the need to ensure that there is no diminution of the independence of our universities and colleges. We would all accept that point. There was a certain amount of misrepresentation—purely accidental rather than mischievous—when we were first considering these matters some months ago. However, there is no question of a diminution in their independence.

Christine May accurately summed up the work of the committee and, as I have said already, Donald Gorrie drew our attention to the point about the affirmative instrument, which is crucial.

The bill is a hugely positive step. There has been a constructive working relationship between ministers and all members of the committee, regardless of political colour. That is a tribute to the convener. We have never written a report that was not unanimous. That is an indication of how the committee works.

I am proud of the state of the bill at the moment—it is going in the right direction, although we have work to do at stage 2—because I believe that it is a fundamental right of everyone in this country, of whatever age, whether they are fit or disabled, rich or poor, to realise their maximum potential in education. I mean that in an altruistic way. That is a basic human right. The funding council, the support, the additional funding, the ombudsman's role and everything else will be steps along an important road.

11:23

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Donald Gorrie referred to Lord Macaulay, who was a prominent Edinburgh member of Parliament. The Prime Minister of the day passed personal judgment on Macaulay, saying,

"I wish I was as cocksure of anything as Tom Macaulay is of everything."

I can say that we are sure that we support the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill in principle and think that it represents a sensible step forward.

I welcome the opportunity to conclude the debate for my side. The previous Conservative Government was instrumental in enacting the legislation that granted further education colleges academic autonomy and spearheaded the movement to increase parity of esteem between academic, vocational and professional qualifications. We see the proposed merging of the funding councils as a logical progression of that development.

The bill is supported by a significant proportion of the relevant bodies, such as Universities Scotland and the Association of Scottish Colleges and we echo their support. The legislation has the potential to improve articulation between Government and the academic institutions and might provide opportunities to improve co-operation between the research, skills and industry sectors. We believe that such co-operation would improve Scotland's academic and economic performance.

However, although we are broadly supportive of the bill, there are three issues on which we seek clarification and possible amendment before the bill returns to the Parliament.

First, it is important that the higher education and further education sectors are kept distinct within the new funding council and that the claims of both are given equal consideration. The establishment of a skills committee would ensure a balanced agenda and could promote better co-ordination of educational, research and economic interests. Demand for vocational and professional qualifications is increasing and the further

education colleges should not be sidelined in favour of the universities. We want the Parliament to encourage the closer monitoring of the new funding council to ensure that a skills committee is established and given due consideration.

Secondly, we think that the Parliament should seek assurances from ministers that they will use the powers proposed in section 8 of the bill only in exceptional circumstances. Regardless of the provisions in section 8, the minister already has the power to vary the fees that the universities can charge. That makes it all the more pressing that we have a clear commitment from the Scottish Executive in relation to the conditions under which it might impose fees. We remember, of course, the significant statement of the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning on 16 November, when he told the Enterprise and Culture Committee:

"categorically, this provision will not permit top-up fees."—[*Official Report, Enterprise and Culture Committee*, 16 November 2004; c 1261.]

We are committed to preserving the independence of our universities and colleges. We would abolish top-up fees and provide the saltire scholarship to cover the entire tuition cost, which would remove inefficient central planning from the sector.

Finally, we believe that the role of the funding council should be more clearly defined. The funding council's job must be, primarily, to distribute funds in a transparent, fair and efficient manner. It must not be allowed to have a high-level, policy-making role. There should be clearer provision for monitoring the council's operation to ensure that academic institutions retain individual autonomy. We think that it is essential that the funding council be kept lean. Universities and colleges have developed effective self-governing systems and are supported by Universities Scotland and the Association of Scottish Colleges. They do not need another vast quango to interpret legislation and offer guidance on implementation. The Scottish funding councils' declared direct staff costs of £2.2 million in 2004 are up around 14 per cent from their 2003 level of £1.9 million. The councils jointly employ 129 staff. The University of Glasgow pointed out during the consultation process that

"The UK Government's own advisers have recommended a significantly lighter touch regulatory and accountability regime for well-run universities, in the interests of efficiency, entrepreneurship and responsibility".

We believe strongly—indeed, passionately—in advancement on merit. We think that the education system that we have is the passport to fulfilment and that every citizen in our country should have a place in that system. Although the bill is likely to require amendment at stage 2, we give it an overall welcome as we believe that

improving the bill with appropriate and necessary amendments should not be an insurmountable task. One of the great strengths of the Parliament is the committee system and I believe that the Enterprise and Culture Committee is likely to give the bill the necessary attention and do justice by it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): I call Alex Neil. I say this with some trepidation, Mr Neil, but, at this stage, we have a degree of flexibility with the clock and you may have slightly longer than usual to speak.

11:29

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will restrict myself to half an hour.

This morning, I am wearing two hats; I am summing up on behalf of the Scottish National Party and I am speaking as convener of the Enterprise and Culture Committee. I will try to strike a proper balance between partisanship and statesmanship—always erring on the side of statesmanship, of course.

As I am the only member of the Enterprise and Culture Committee who was a member of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, it might be useful to remind members why we recommended in our lifelong learning report the merging of the further and higher education funding councils. Fundamentally, there were four reasons for that conclusion, which was reached with cross-party consensus and without any dissent whatever.

The first reason was the increasingly blurred line between higher education and further education. As Christine May pointed out in relation to Fife, many people follow the first two years of their higher education in an FE college. Some 40 per cent of those who go on to take a degree at university take the FE route. We have two separate funding councils—the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the Scottish Further Education Funding Council—but the Further Education Funding Council funds higher education as well as further education. Given the level of crossover, which did not exist 20 or 30 years ago, it seemed to us that it no longer makes sense to have two separate silos of funding.

The second reason for our conclusion was a result of study visits that we undertook to the Crichton campus in Dumfries and the UHI Millennium Institute in Inverness and the surrounding area. The Crichton campus is an interesting project in which four universities have come together. I believe that it is the only place in the United Kingdom, and maybe even in Europe, where people can get a degree from four universities on one campus. The relationship

between Dumfries and Galloway College and the Crichton campus is close, as indeed is the relationship between the 13 FE colleges in the Highlands and Islands and the UHI Millennium Institute. Uniquely, the university of the Highlands and Islands is being formed from the bottom up, as it were, through the 13 FE colleges. The evidence that we took on both the Crichton campus and the UHI Millennium Institute suggested that major problems result from the need to negotiate separately with the Higher Education Funding Council and the Further Education Funding Council. It makes sense to have a single pot of money that can be allocated easily on a priority basis.

The third reason was that the two funding councils are serviced by a single executive, so it makes sense to have just one council. That is where the recommendation came from and I am glad to say that we have reached the stage at which we have—I think—unanimity on the principle of the proposed merger.

The merger is the centrepiece of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill but, as has been mentioned, the bill also covers a number of other areas. I start with fees. I speak as convener of the Enterprise and Culture Committee when I say that although I oppose fees in principle, I accept that the Executive has a majority on the committee. I welcome what the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning said in his opening remarks when he accepted the recommendation in the committee's stage 1 report that we should use an instrument that is subject to the affirmative procedure, rather than an instrument that is subject to the negative procedure. In fact, I think that I am right to say that two instruments will be needed to implement section 8 of the bill. I also welcome his commitment that there will be a statutory duty on the minister or his successors to consult, before any such instrument can be brought to the Parliament.

I welcome the minister's acceptance of the committee's recommendations, but there is a case for going a wee bit further. I accept that the minister will never introduce top-up fees for as long as he is the minister but, with all due respect, we are writing legislation that will outlast him. At this point I become slightly partisan. I ask members to suppose that the Liberal Democrat minister is replaced by a new Labour minister, à la Charles Clarke, who believes in variable fees and top-up fees. If the legislation is not right, he or she will be able to introduce such fees.

Allan Wilson: Is not there an inherent contradiction in the member's position? He argues that Parliament will have the final say on whether top-up fees are introduced by a future

Administration, but he also argues that the minister will have the sole authority to do that.

Alex Neil: The realpolitik is that a minister will be drawn from the majority Executive. The concern, which was expressed articulately by Mike Watson, is that the legislation has to outlast not only the current Administration but many Administrations to come. I ask the minister to accept our recommendation, to analyse the alternatives that have been suggested and to give us his assessment of them. In particular, as we will start stage 2 consideration of the bill on 22 February and we are scheduled to discuss fees on that day, I say to the minister that it would be helpful to the committee if the report from the implementation group were made available to us before we discuss the amendments. I say that in a non-partisan way. The evidence that we took suggested that there are, at the very least, loopholes to be closed; Mike Watson, in particular, covered that point extremely well. The committee will work with the minister to try to ensure that we get the legislation right.

I will raise one or two other issues that members touched on in the debate. First, on the idea of a skills committee, I do not want to go into the detailed argument for such a committee because I do not believe that we should be over-prescriptive to the new council.

Christine May: Before Alex Neil leaves the issue of fees, will he tell Parliament—with either of his hats on, or with both, if the answers would be different—his view on the SNP's policy of golden handcuffs? I think that it is important for us to know his view.

Alex Neil: I am married to a former policewoman, so the concept of handcuffs is not new to me. If we look back at the history of the proposal, we see that something similar came out of the Calman report. It is not an entirely new suggestion and I think that it should be given serious consideration. The issue about medical graduates being able to travel to third-world countries is adequately catered for in the proposals. No one would want to stop medical graduates practising in the third world—indeed, we want to encourage that.

I return to skills. The merged council will have a total budget of nearly £1.5 billion by the end of the current parliamentary session. That is a substantial amount of money. Some of it will be devoted to research, but about two thirds will be devoted to universities and colleges. The word "skills", of course, refers to the skills of doctors, dentists and vets who are trained at universities as well as to the vocational skills that come from further education colleges. The minister needs to consider skills policy and how it is implemented.

Given the way in which the responsibility for skills policy will be diffused among different agencies—Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise have a responsibility for skills and careers, as do the new sector skills councils and their parent body the Sector Skills Development Agency—any new skills committee should be more than just an internal committee of the new funding council. The logical conclusion is that any new skills committee should be a cross-agency committee that can examine all aspects of skills and thereby provide a holistic approach to skills policy in Scotland.

Speaking personally, I suggest that there is a strong case for making Futureskills Scotland a hybrid organisation between the enterprise network and the new funding council. Futureskills Scotland's work ought to inform much of the work of the new council. Although such policy matters are not specifically for the bill, they will need to be addressed as a result of it.

Our stage 1 report also considered the make-up and membership of the new council and its sub-committees. The bill is absolutely right not to require members of the council's sub-committees, such as the research committee, to be members of the council itself. We want diversity in the membership of the research committee and the other committees. I strongly urge the minister that, when the time comes for him to appoint members of the council, he should not look for members from only within Scotland. Similarly, he should encourage the council to recruit international expertise for its sub-committees, especially the research committee, because that will help us to stay at the leading edge in many of the research activities that the new council will fund.

My final major policy issue relates to academic freedom, which Mike Watson covered extremely well. We must address two fundamental issues, the first of which concerns academic freedom within the post-1992 universities. Our committee believes—on a cross-party basis, I think—that the legislative safeguards of previous education acts should be extended so that they cover not only the pre-1992 universities but the post-1992 universities. That would provide a level playing field between the two sets of institutions. Some people, such as the principal of Glasgow Caledonian University, have argued that such an addition to the bill is unnecessary because staff contracts already guarantee academic freedom. My answer to that is similar to my answer on fees: whereas staff contracts can be changed quite easily, it would be difficult to undermine academic freedom if it was built into legislation. A strong case exists for simply extending the existing legislative provisions for the pre-1992 institutions to the post-1992 institutions.

Secondly, academic freedom should also be extended to the FE colleges. We all agree that that is a desirable objective. For the same reasons that I have given previously, it is worth considering the insertion in the bill of a new section to that effect.

Having gone through four sets of consultation, including the original Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee inquiry into lifelong learning, the bill is now near the end of the road. In this instance, the pre-legislative scrutiny process has done its job of ironing out the difficulties and sorting out the problems. Apart from on fees, the bill is the subject not only of cross-party agreement in Parliament but of pretty broad consensus out there in the academic community in universities and colleges, and in the student community and elsewhere. We should address fees by reassuring people that the bill will cater for all possible future scenarios, when we might not have a minister who is so committed to not introducing top-up fees.

On that basis, I hope that Parliament will give unanimous support to the bill. It is possible that some of us might have to abstain or vote against the bill because of the fees issue, but that will not be because we do not accept that the rest of the bill is highly desirable.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Allan Wilson to wind up the debate. Minister, there are 14 minutes left and they are all yours.

11:46

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): You are very kind. I will try to use those minutes to best effect.

It is a pity that Alex Neil's speech was spoiled at the very end—he had been doing so well—as I agreed with much of it, although I agreed with little of what his colleagues said earlier.

As Alex Neil said, it is important to establish what the bill sets out to do. The bill will provide for a more integrated view of lifelong learning by establishing one strategic organisation for tertiary education in Scotland. As Murdo Fraser did well to point out, the bill will allow decisions to be made for both HE and FE in such a way as to maximise the benefits of providing a direct read-across of the experiences of one sector to the other. The bill will also provide a coherent link between the objectives of post-school education and Scotland's economic objectives, which are of course vital to the Executive. In addition, the bill will be important in aiding achievement of parity of esteem between the different types of learning providers in Scotland.

Given the debates of the past six months or so, it is interesting that Alex Neil was the only one to

mention the fact that having one council to oversee both HE and FE will ensure that we get the best possible results from our substantial investment in those sectors. Let me remind members of the scale of that investment over the period of the spending review. By 2007-08, annual funding for higher education will exceed £1 billion, which is almost £300 million more than in 2003-04. That represents an increase of almost 40 per cent in cash terms, or 28 per cent in real terms. It would have been churlish of the Opposition not to welcome such an increase in higher and further education funding, so I am glad that Alex Neil referred to that substantial increase in resources.

As my colleague Jim Wallace said, perhaps the single remaining point of controversy concerns the new powers to set fee levels. From some of the comments in the debate, it is clear that there is a general concern that differential fees might be introduced under the bill, and a particular concern about the fees imposed on medical students who come to Scotland to study and those imposed on self-funded students. I will address the general concern first, then the particular concern.

For the record, let me restate what the Deputy First Minister said in his opening speech. The power to set fees is designed to be used only sparingly and only where there is clear evidence that not doing so would disadvantage Scottish students. Chris Ballance asked why we do not wait until the position south of the border is clearer. As Jamie Stone correctly pointed out, we have a legislative vehicle currently at our disposal and such vehicles are not like corporation buses, in that they do not regularly arrive in threes. The fact that we are making use of the legislative opportunity to protect the interests of Scotland-domiciled students by retaining powers to introduce differential fees does not mean that we will necessarily choose to exercise those powers.

The claims of the NUS have been properly described by other members as "over-egging the pudding". The Deputy First Minister has made it clear that we do not intend to introduce variable fees in Scotland. The partnership agreement between Labour and the Liberal Democrats states clearly that there will be no top-up fees here in Scotland. One would have to be akin to Rumpelstiltskin and have slept through the past five years in Parliament not to have noticed that the Labour and Liberal Democrat—

Brian Adam *rose—*

Allan Wilson: Talking of Rumpelstiltskin—

Murdo Fraser: He means Rip van Winkle.

Brian Adam: Given that the principal bone of contention between members today relates to fees and the Enterprise and Culture Committee has given ministers the opportunity to consider

alternatives, can the minister tell us in his summing up on behalf of the Executive whether ministers will do so, without committing to alternatives that they might consider?

Allan Wilson: I said that in my intervention during Brian Adam's speech. There are issues that we need to address, and I assure the member that we will do so. I am making the simple point that the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties in the coalition have made it clear that top-up fees are not on the agenda here in Scotland. I respectfully submit that the situation cannot be clearer than that.

As Richard Baker correctly said—I am sure that Brian Adam would agree—the introduction of the new variable fees scheme in England means that doing nothing is not an option.

Murdo Fraser: Will the deputy minister give way?

Fiona Hyslop *rose—*

Allan Wilson: I will take an intervention from Murdo Fraser.

Murdo Fraser: I am grateful to the deputy minister for giving way to me in the competition for his interest.

The deputy minister referred to the work that the Executive is doing to examine alternatives. He must appreciate that the Enterprise and Culture Committee has the important job of considering amendments to the bill at stage 2. Conservative members will want to consider carefully what amendments need to be lodged. It would be immensely helpful to us and to other members of the committee in that deliberation if the Executive could make available to us as much information as possible about the work that is being done elsewhere on alternatives. Can the minister give us that commitment?

Allan Wilson: Yes. I am familiar with the stage 2 process and the dynamic that is attached to it. I will address the issue that Alex Neil raised regarding the process and I supplement that by pointing out that—as the Deputy First Minister said—it is our intention to hold a wider public and stakeholder consultation over the piece on the issue of self-funded students.

The implementation advisory group can report to ministers before stage 2 on principles. Detailed technical work will need to be done, so the final report will not be available before April or May. We will not have access to that work at stage 2, which begins on 22 February. However, because of the support funding systems that the Executive is already considering, we have powers to take measures to provide support finance without making further legislative change. There is the

prospect of wider internal consultation with the Enterprise and Culture Committee and we have powers at our disposal to address the issue of self-funded students.

Fiona Hyslop: The minister argues that the issues that are raised by the introduction of variable top-up fees down south need to be addressed in Scotland. However, his argument has been limited to medical students. If the introduction of top-up fees down south will cause a problem of cross-border flows, why does the minister not see the logic of addressing the issue in total? Why is the Executive focusing solely on medical students, when it could be argued that there will be a problem of cross-border flows in all subjects?

Allan Wilson: I agree with Fiona Hyslop in principle and will address the detail of the SNP's proposal later, although she will probably not like what I have to say about it. We have taken a holistic approach to this issue. I will come on to the points that Pauline McNeill and Murdo Fraser made very ably in respect of the wider credit and qualifications framework and the particular issues that are faced by medical and, potentially, other students.

FE and HE have worked hard to develop the sectors in a number of areas. One such area is the development of the Scottish credit and qualifications framework. I welcome the committee's support for inclusion of the framework in the bill and I am pleased that we have been able to support the excellent work that the sectors have driven forward. Pauline McNeill made a relevant point about that work and, specifically, the requirement to attain five A grades in a single sitting during S5 for access to medical courses. Rightly, we have no control over university entrance standards. However, we support a range of access activities in higher education, including the Scottish wider access programme. We expect new access to medicine to be developed jointly in programmes with our medical schools.

There is clearly a balance to be struck. We must maintain the cross-border flow of students to which Pauline McNeill referred, which sustains our medical schools, while ensuring—importantly—that there is opportunity for Scotland-domiciled students, in particular, to access places in those schools. I say to Pauline McNeill and other members that we must maintain existing cross-border flows. I oppose Fiona Hyslop's proposal to set up a fees system that would require England-domiciled students to pay more to study in Scotland, because we welcome English students to our country to study. As internationalists, all of us would want that to continue.

Alex Neil: What the minister is saying is extremely interesting, but it proves that the

question is complex. I understand that the technical work will not be completed until after stage 2, but it is incumbent on us to consider the full report of the implementation advisory group before stage 3, which is scheduled for April.

Allan Wilson: As I have said, we can share the principles of the group's work. I cannot today give the member the commitment that he seeks, but we will work actively with the committee to bring together the timetables of the two bodies, if possible. As Alex Neil correctly pointed out, moves on medical fees affect not just staffing of the NHS but, critically, the opportunity that is provided to Scotland-domiciled students to study medicine and to use their skills and professionalism here in Scotland, in the rest of the UK and internationally. That is an important point. The Minister for Health and Community Care is considering a range of developments in response to the Calman report to ensure that there is greater staff retention in the NHS in Scotland. Those will include wider measures that have been discussed in general terms here today.

I question some of the motives of Fiona Hyslop and the SNP on this issue. As my colleague Jim Wallace said, she continues to play politics with the interests of students and to perpetuate the myths that fees exist and that top-up fees are to be introduced in Scotland. Concerns arising from such misrepresentations are not confined to this chamber but are disseminated to the wider public. They become a self-fulfilling prophecy, because people are dissuaded from applying to Scottish universities, which has a negative impact on our wider objectives of broadening access.

The most recent contribution to the debate—the £67,000 prospective golden handcuff—is the desperate act of a desperate nationalist party. It is another gimmick that is designed to drive the voters away. As Brian Monteith correctly said, it is not worth the paper or the envelope on which it is written. As an internationalist, I could not possibly accept its narrow nationalist connotations.

I thank all the members of the Enterprise and Culture Committee for their thorough consideration of the bill's general principles. I commend the general principles of the bill to the Parliament.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Prime Minister (Meetings)

1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues will be discussed. (S2F-1356)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): When I next meet the Prime Minister I will be delighted to congratulate him on his role in ensuring that, as we saw again this week, Scotland has the lowest unemployment for 30 years and the highest level of employment of any country in Europe, apart from Denmark.

Nicola Sturgeon: I bet that Gordon Brown would beg to differ.

I ask the First Minister to cast his mind back to last June when he set up an inquiry to consider alternatives to the council tax. At the time, Andy Kerr, then Minister for Finance and Public Services, posed the question of what would happen to the £300 million of council tax funding that is currently administered by London if the Parliament opted to abolish the council tax. What steps has the First Minister taken to find out the answer to that question?

The First Minister: As the consultation by the independent local government finance review committee, which I understand will be published this afternoon, will show, we included in the remit of the independent review the relationship between devolved and reserved issues and the financing of any new system of local government. That is the proper way in which to look ahead to any changes in the local government finance system, rather than making up policies on the back of a fag packet as others appear all too ready to do.

Nicola Sturgeon: I suggest to the First Minister that only ministers can answer the £300 million question. We need an answer to that question now. Cannot the First Minister understand that, without an answer, his inquiry, which will publish its first findings later today, will be inevitably skewed towards the unfair council tax, because to recommend any other system would mean that London would withhold £300 million of Scotland's money? Does the First Minister accept that the only way to avoid the dice being loaded in favour of the council tax is to get an assurance now that our £300 million is safe, come what may?

The First Minister: If the Scottish National Party felt that this was such an important issue, perhaps it should have thought about that before it

published its proposals for a new system of local government finance and taxation last February, which stated boldly that the £300 million would be available to the Scottish budget. Clearly, the SNP now understands that its policies were not properly thought through and not properly costed, like so many of its policies. I notice that today Ms Sturgeon is not even prepared to come to First Minister's question time to defend the policy that she announced this morning about putting ridiculous golden handcuffs on medical students from England and other countries who study in Scotland.

Nicola Sturgeon: If Scotland was independent, we would not be in the ridiculous situation of sending our money to London for the Government in London to decide how much it sees fit to send us back. Does the First Minister agree that, although the £300 million in question might be administered by the Government in London, it is Scotland's money that is paid into the Treasury by Scottish taxpayers? Does he further agree that if this Parliament decides to get rid of the unfair and regressive council tax, that money must be available to help to fund a fairer system and that for London to pocket the cash would be highway robbery? Will the First Minister stand up for Scottish taxpayers and make it clear to his colleagues now that he will not allow such robbery to happen?

The First Minister: Nicola Sturgeon has missed the point. If Scotland was independent, the Westminster Government would be the Government of a foreign country. Not only would we not get £300 million from it, but we would not get anything else from it either. It is ridiculous to assert that because the Westminster Government would be the Government of a foreign country, that would make it easier for it to give us £300 million. As Ms Sturgeon knows, the deficit that we would have to fill through increased taxation or cuts in services in Scotland would be nearer £3,000 million. That is a deficit that she is yet to resolve.

The reality is that there are two different styles of politics. As part of our overall confidence in our ability to make our decisions and look forward for Scotland, we can set up a proper, independent review to advise the Parliament and the Government on the system of local government finance and taxation in Scotland, or we can look over our shoulder all the time, greet and gurn about London and blame it for all the policies that we cannot deliver for the SNP. The choices that the Parliament makes should be made not on the back of a fag packet but here, in the full knowledge of all the facts, and then implemented properly by this devolved Government.

Nicola Sturgeon: Is it not the First Minister who misses the point that, if Scotland was independent, London would not have the £300 million in the first place and the Parliament would be free to do what is in the best interests of Scottish taxpayers? Is it not bad enough that council tax has risen by 50 per cent under Labour without our now being told that, if the Parliament decides to abolish that unfair system, London will cream off £300 million of our money? When will the First Minister start standing up for Scotland and standing up to London?

The First Minister: When will the SNP stop blaming London and England for everything and start taking responsibility for our own affairs in Scotland? Earlier on, I read out the fantastic unemployment and employment statistics that we now have in Scotland: we have the second-best employment statistics in Europe and the lowest unemployment statistics in Scotland for 30 years. Those facts about modern Scotland would be at risk if Ms Sturgeon's vision of a separate, divorced Scotland was to come into being. We would miss out not only on the £300 million, but on all the other benefits of economic stability—high employment, low unemployment and a financial system that benefits Scotland within the United Kingdom and ensures that it does not have the higher taxes and cuts in services that would come as a result of the SNP's policies.

Cabinet (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-1357)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We will discuss issues of interest to the people of Scotland.

David McLetchie: I thank the First Minister for that illuminating and enlightening answer. Are he and other members of the Cabinet aware that, in only one year, 71 glossy publications have landed on the doormats of Scotland's primary schools and that those publications have contained 3,500 pages of advice, exhortation and instruction, much of which has emanated from the Scottish Executive? Does the First Minister agree that our primary schools are drowning in a sea of top-down bureaucracy and that they badly need less central interference and more trust in and support for our teachers?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree absolutely. That is precisely why the Minister for Education and Young People announced in November—perhaps Mr McLetchie was on holiday at the time and did not notice—a new three-to-18 curriculum with much more freedom for schools, head teachers and individual teachers in Scotland and

for pupils and their parents to make choices about their curriculum, when they choose to sit exams, what exams they choose to sit and the options that they choose for their future, such as whether they choose academic or vocational courses. In our primary schools, where much of the bureaucracy has lain in the past 10 to 15 years, we have seen in recent years the benefits of increased investment, which is now supported by increased freedom, choice and opportunities for teachers to use their professional skills in the classroom in the way that they know best.

David McLetchie: I do not go on as many holidays as the First Minister does. The problem—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Order.

David McLetchie: The problem is that the situation that the First Minister describes is not the reality that teachers experience in our schools. The reality about which I spoke in the first supplementary question that I posed to the First Minister is the one that the head teacher of James Gillespie's Primary School—one of the primary schools in Edinburgh—describes in his latest newsletter to parents. He complains not about lack of money in our schools, but about the poor value for money and the disappointing levels of achievement that we get out of our system because of all the shackles, initiatives and bureaucracy that surround the delivery of education in Scotland, whether they come from the Scottish Executive or our local councils. Instead of sending out all those glossy documents to tell people what to do, why does the First Minister not give our head teachers the freedom to do their job and cut out the swathes of bureaucracy that are holding back them and our children's development?

The First Minister: I am sorry to repeat myself; I know that Mr McLetchie had prepared a second question that he felt he had to ask. In November last year, we announced further extensions of the freedoms in our schools. We have ensured that throughout our schools—for children at the age of three in nursery school to those who leave our schools at 18—more choice is available to head teachers, teachers, pupils and parents. More choices are available to use professionalism properly in primary schools and to give pupils in secondary schools the options that will not only allow professionalism to be used properly but will improve discipline in our schools, because pupils will be more motivated and so will like to turn in a good day's work.

David McLetchie: On discipline in schools, the First Minister should be aware that a member of school staff is attacked every 12 minutes of the working day in Scotland. His failure to address that

in the past few years is one of the disgraces of our education system. The situation is hardly conducive to an environment in which our young people can learn and develop.

I was interested in what the First Minister said about the need to have more choices. He normally couples that with a great mantra about all the millions that he has spent on our education system, which have produced poor results. If he is really interested in spending and investing more, and in improving choice and diversity in our education system, why is his Scottish Executive spurning Lord Laidlaw's generous offer to invest in a city academy, which would expand choice and diversity?

The First Minister: That is simply not true. I will meet Lord Laidlaw again tomorrow and we have an excellent working relationship that has in the past year resulted in significant investment by him in some of Scotland's most vulnerable children. He is to be congratulated on that. I have never held against him how he has voted or donated his money in the past. If he wants to donate money to good causes in Scotland today and, in particular, to promoting the welfare of our young people, he will have my full support. We will ensure that he can invest not only in vulnerable youngsters, but in Scotland's schools.

The Presiding Officer: There is one constituency question.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): This week, the First Minister announced welcome long-term investment in Scotland's railways and in phase 1 of the vital project at Waverley station. Will he address Haymarket station? Will he assure me that works at Waverley will be co-ordinated with Haymarket station improvements? I am sure that he does not want the disruption that was caused to disabled passengers from throughout central Scotland when Waverley station was shut last year. Will he give me a timescale for improving Haymarket? I understand that we do not yet have an agreed scheme for the works.

The First Minister: As the Minister for Transport said this week, the announcements will allow us to make significant progress with the plans for Haymarket as they are finalised. The timescale is not in place, but I am sure that the minister will be happy to discuss with Ms Boyack how it will be put in place and the final timescale when it is available.

This week's decisions are significant and have two great benefits for Scotland. First, we will have the most significant transfer of powers to the devolved Parliament and Government since devolution in 1999. We will have the ability to run an integrated rail service that will benefit passengers the length and breadth of our country.

Secondly, the accompanying financial transfer will allow us to start the significant improvements to Waverley station that will increase the number of trains per hour there from 24 to 28 initially. That will not only improve train services in Edinburgh, but open up the whole train network to improvements. The changes are significant. They are due to an excellent working relationship with Alistair Darling, who is to be congratulated on his efforts to bring them about.

Scottish Executive Priorities

3. Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Executive's current top priorities are. (S2F-1371)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Our top priority is to improve growth in the Scottish economy to create the wealth and prosperity that can close gaps in opportunity and help to fund our public services.

Frances Curran: I wonder where equality and fairness fit into those priorities—I would hope that they are always a priority for the Scottish Executive.

In that context, I ask the First Minister for advice for an ordinary woman in Fife who visited her dentist this week. The woman tried to make an appointment and was told that two hours were available on a Wednesday and two hours were available on a Tuesday morning. She said that she works and that she could come in the evening, but was told that those were the slots for national health service patients and that the other time is set aside for people who pay, so that they get a better service. When did NHS patients become second-class citizens? What advice should I give her from the Parliament and the First Minister about regaining equality in the NHS and health care?

The First Minister: I do not like such attitudes being expressed by professionals any more than Ms Curran does, whether they work in the private sector or the public sector. Once we announce next month our plans to improve oral health in Scotland and to take on the key challenges that exist as a result of difficulties in dental services in some parts of the country, I hope that Ms Curran will participate in the debate.

Frances Curran: I will certainly do so. However, is not the real issue the fact that to start with a principle of free health care for all and then introduce charges, such as prescription charges, means abandoning the principle of equality and having inequality? Health service dental charges are now on a par with private charges. When there were still socialists and principles in the Labour Party, it started with a principle and then had the vision to implement it.

The Presiding Officer: The member should ask a question.

Frances Curran: Why is the First Minister shamelessly allowing such a policy of inequality in health care under his watch?

The First Minister: I think that Frances Curran was in the Labour Party towards the end of the 1970s. At that time, the Labour Government increased prescription charges at a faster rate than they are increasing now. I can only assume that she agreed with that approach at the time.

We must have an absolutely clear understanding of the issue's importance. Some members think that there are easy options and easy solutions that can be turned into the headlines that we see about the abolition of NHS prescription charges. Of course, the reality in Scotland is that 50 per cent of people do not pay prescription charges and that 92 per cent of prescriptions are free. To say that we should redirect resources away from providing training for additional doctors and nurses, equipment and vital services in order to abolish prescription charges and create an entirely free situation—not only would money be diverted elsewhere, but there will be significant additional cost to the health service given the additional prescriptions that all the experts in the field predict—shows that the Scottish Socialist Party's policy is wrong at its core.

Sexual Health Strategy

4. Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what input interested parties, including parents, schools and faith groups, have had in the drafting of the sexual health strategy. (S2F-1373)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We have heard from parents, schools, faith groups and others in the preparation of the national sexual health strategy, and I am grateful to everyone who has given us their views. We intend to publish the strategy very shortly.

Cathie Craigie: The importance of safeguarding the sexual well-being of the current generation and future generations of Scots should be paramount, and we should appreciate that sexual health is not only about sexually transmitted disease and unwanted pregnancies, but involves a delicate balance of ethnic, cultural and social issues.

I ask the First Minister to assure the Parliament and the people of Scotland that the strategy will take account of that balance, will ensure that all children have access to advice and help when they need it and will be published soon. With respect, we have waited a long time and I am looking for a date.

The First Minister: I confirm that the Cabinet agreed the strategy yesterday and that it will be published very shortly. I can also confirm the direction of travel for the strategy. It is vital that the debate and the strategy that comes from it are not polarised at one end or the other of the opinion spectrum. There are those who believe that we should not in any way help or provide a lead to youngsters in Scotland so that they can have more respect for themselves and others, take more responsibility and choose to delay sexual activity if that is what they wish for their own life. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who believe that that is the only solution that we should advocate.

I believe that our role in Government is, first of all, to ensure that we provide a lead, to argue for respect and responsibility and to ensure that youngsters in Scotland have the confidence and the respect for themselves to delay sexual activity for as long as they want to do so. I also believe that if they choose to take part in sexual activity, they need access to specialist services and advice in the same way as anybody else does. Therefore, we will have a strategy that adopts both approaches. It will be a better strategy for society and it will improve services throughout Scotland.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Does the First Minister agree that young people are at the heart of the question and are who the strategy should focus on? Will the First Minister reaffirm the Scottish Executive's previously stated position that all young people in Scotland have the same rights to information and services in relation to sexual health, irrespective of which school they go to?

The First Minister: Absolutely. There was a newspaper report this Sunday that was unrecognisable from the facts, as the Deputy First Minister and I said at our press conference on Tuesday. The reality is that we have guidelines that are appropriate for all our schools. At the core of that is young people's right to basic advice and services. However, that advice and those services should not be provided in a value-free environment. We need to give young people the confidence to say no if they want to and to delay sexual activity if that is their choice and is what is best for them.

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): Will the First Minister clarify the role of head teachers in matters such as sex education in schools? My understanding is that they can refuse to allow sex education to be taught in their school by those other than teachers—for example, voluntary organisations and faith or other groups that deal with such matters. However, although the guidelines are only that, it is not the case that head teachers can refuse to have the subject taught at all in schools.

The First Minister: We are clear that we expect every Scottish school to teach sex and relationships education. We also have in place in Scotland an education system in which the head teacher approves those who are in charge of the classrooms. Therefore, we seek a proper balance between head teachers' role in directing and leading the school and a consistent approach that ensures that all youngsters in Scotland get access to the right education and advice.

Education (National Priorities)

5. Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive has any plans to make tackling indiscipline a sixth national priority in education. (S2F-1365)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I do not think that that will be necessary because tackling indiscipline is already the second national priority in Scottish education.

Fiona Hyslop: The First Minister should understand that priority 2 in education also includes the continuing professional development of teachers and school buildings. Whether indiscipline is lumped in with those or is a separate, sixth national priority, it is still one of the biggest barriers to teaching and learning in Scotland. That being the case, is it not right and proper that the Parliament should scrutinise the Executive's policies and progress? Why then has the Executive moved from producing an annual survey of indiscipline in Scotland to producing one every three years? What does the First Minister have to hide?

The First Minister: We are determined to have more and better information about indiscipline in schools, but we are also determined to tackle it. If Ms Hyslop is serious about being the education spokesperson for the SNP, she should learn the national priorities and ensure that she understands that tackling indiscipline is our second national priority. Within that national priority, the key indicator of indiscipline will be the level of attendance and therefore truancy in our schools.

On the positive side, a number of youngsters in our schools are involved in, for example, buddying and mentoring schemes. We met youngsters here last night from Our Lady's High School in Cumbernauld, who were able to tell me of their pride that pupils in sixth year support youngsters in secondary 1 by buddying and mentoring them. That not only gives them responsibility but ensures that youngsters who come into the school are less likely to be involved in or affected by bullying. Our comprehensive range of practical policies to tackle indiscipline in schools is making a difference in secondary and primary schools throughout Scotland and I hope that, some day, the SNP will support those measures.

Lottery Funding (London Olympic Bid)

6. Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what effect the London 2012 Olympic bid is likely to have on lottery funding for Scottish sports and community groups. (S2F-1372)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Although forecasts of future lottery income are subject to many uncertainties, latest projections from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport suggest that total income to existing good causes will remain close to projected levels, even if a specific Olympic lottery game is introduced in the event that London's bid to host the 2012 games is successful.

Christine May: Executive measures such as public-private partnerships and environmental trust funding have provided considerable opportunities for community groups and communities such as Glenrothes and Levenmouth in my constituency to receive enhanced community and sports facilities, which are often used to train potential Olympic athletes, including our successful disabled athletes.

The Presiding Officer: This is not a statement. Can we have a question?

Christine May: How will the Executive ensure that the possibility of receiving such funding is not jeopardised if London's bid is successful?

The First Minister: I thank Christine May for raising such important constituency issues. The current projections for the distribution of lottery income and the assistance that might be available to London if its bid is successful make it clear that funding for the projects that she has mentioned should not be affected if they are still eligible at the time. In fact, those projects could be central to Scottish success if the Olympics come to London in 2012. Our future Olympic athletes will be created, supported and, ultimately, successful only by increasing the confidence, the participation and the sporting activity of young people in Scotland.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Is the First Minister aware that, contrary to his previous response, the House of Commons Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport has estimated that if current proposals go ahead, up to 60 per cent of existing lottery funding will be lost to organisations in Scotland, Wales and the English regions? Does he agree that that would be an unacceptable price for us to pay to have the Olympics in London?

The First Minister: Of course it would be, if that were true. However, the member's statement is a ridiculous exaggeration. All the current projections show that lottery income is likely to be enhanced in years to come, which means that it will be

possible for such finance to be available to the London Olympic bid without any detriment to Scotland. If Mr Neil and others on the SNP benches spent a little less time complaining about the London bid and a little bit more time trying to secure the future of Scottish sport, they would know that we have agreed with the UK Government that we will retain in Scotland the £25 million or so that might have been diverted to the Olympic bid away from training and preparing our own elite athletes for the games. That has happened as a result of positive pressure and participation from the Executive instead of moaning, greeting and girning from the sidelines.

I think that the London 2012 Olympic bid is good news for Scotland. Indeed, it is good news for Scottish youngsters, who will get their one and only chance not just to see the Olympic games in Great Britain but perhaps to participate in them, win medals, take pride in their country and be part of something very special. I hope that, as a result, future generations will be inspired to do the same.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): The First Minister has just affirmed his total support for the exciting British bid for the 2012 Olympics. In order to silence the alarm bells that have been sounded by those in this Parliament who hold parochial views, will he outline further the considerable benefits that will accrue to Scotland and Scottish athletics from a British-based Olympic games?

The First Minister: Well, two things have happened this week. First, we have seen more greeting and girning from SNP members than there has been for a long time on all kinds of issues. For example, this morning, they had the ridiculous idea of locking up English medical students to ensure that they could not go back home. Also, we have seen the Tories' proposal to cut Government budgets drastically throughout the UK if they win the general election that might take place this year.

I hope that those cuts will not include cuts in the sports budget or in the budgets that might lead to the success of the Olympic games bid, because I agree absolutely with Jamie McGrigor that the bid is good news for Scotland, good news for the United Kingdom and good news for young people in particular. Everybody in Scotland should support it.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):

Whether the money from the lottery goes up or down, will the First Minister ensure that various groups that do good work in the community—national bodies that produce facilities that other groups can use and sporting and community groups, for example—but that miss out because all the money is channelled through the councils or

because they do not qualify, receive funding directly from the lottery?

The First Minister: It is important that we organise improvements to facilities on a partnership basis, whatever funding sources are employed. Our strategy to develop new regional and national sport facilities will improve facilities throughout Scotland, using funding from councils and national bodies. That will give young people in Scotland a chance to train, particularly in the indoor facilities that we need so badly if we are to compete internationally and if our young people are to have the best possible chances. We should encourage funds to be directed to where they can best be used.

12:31

Meeting suspended until 14:00.

14:00

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Enterprise, Lifelong Learning and Transport

Rail Links (Mainland Europe)

1. Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Department for Transport concerning direct rail links between Scotland and mainland Europe. (S2O-5029)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): The Scottish Executive is in regular contact with the UK Government on a wide range of issues, including rail matters.

Eleanor Scott: I thank the minister for that helpful answer. He will be aware that in 1989 the British Railways Board promised that Scotland would get direct rail services to Europe. Eurostar has said that it will not fulfil that promise. Does he agree that that is unacceptable and that direct rail links between Scotland and Europe are a necessary part of our future transport strategy?

Nicol Stephen: I would certainly like to see improvements in the rail service not only within Scotland but in services to other parts of the UK and Europe. The responsibility for the east coast main line, the cross-country franchise and direct services to Europe lies with the UK Department for Transport. Despite the fact that significant increased powers over rail are now coming to Scotland, which I think everyone in the Parliament welcomes, the responsibility for external services will remain with the UK Government.

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): Am I correct in saying that not only are there no Eurostar services going from Scotland, but now we cannot even buy tickets for Eurostar services from London at Edinburgh station, which had been the only station where we could buy them, because Great North Eastern Railway has ceased to sell them? Does the minister think that, pending the introduction of direct services from Scotland, it might be a good idea if people could at least buy the tickets at Scottish stations?

Nicol Stephen: Again, I agree that we should have as full as possible access to services from Scotland and that part of ease of access to services is the availability of tickets. I am told that Eurostar is changing its retail system and is

working with the UK train operating companies to ensure that Eurostar tickets are available for sale at as many UK rail stations as possible. Other outlets include registered travel agents and Eurostar's telephone contact centre and online services. I will take up the issue that the member has identified. I would like as many stations as possible in Scotland to offer Eurostar tickets.

Congestion Charging (Edinburgh)

2. Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is satisfied with the proposed arrangements for public consultation about plans for congestion charging for Edinburgh. (S2O-5022)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): The Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 and associated regulations provide a statutory framework for consultation that a charging authority must follow. As the act also provides that a charging scheme will not come into force until the order providing for the scheme has been submitted to and confirmed by Scottish ministers, it would be inappropriate for me to comment at this stage on the detail of the City of Edinburgh Council's proposals.

Mr Home Robertson: Notwithstanding the powerful case for an appropriate package of incentives to use buses and trains, together with penalties for unnecessary car journeys, does the minister share the disappointment of MSPs for constituencies around Edinburgh that the package is seriously flawed? On the council's referendum, will he bear in mind the sound principle of no taxation without representation and will he confirm that the Parliament will have the final say on any congestion charging scheme in Scotland?

Nicol Stephen: John Home Robertson will be aware that there is on-going court action involving the local authorities around Edinburgh. That is properly a matter between the local authorities and the court and it would be inappropriate for me to comment on it at this stage. If the Scottish Executive gets a firm proposal from the City of Edinburgh Council, it will fall to me to reach a decision on the matter, so, again, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the specific details of the scheme. However, I have made it clear on a number of occasions that, if the charging scheme is fair and appropriate and there is clear evidence of local support for it, the Executive will support it, as did the Parliament when it agreed to put the legislation into effect.

Productivity and Efficiency

3. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to improve productivity and efficiency in both the private and public sectors. (S2O-4993)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace): Improving Scotland's productivity can be achieved only over the long run and with the right policies in place. The priorities that we set out in the refreshed "The Framework for Economic Development in Scotland", which was published in September 2004, underscore our on-going commitment to raising productivity and efficiency in both the private and public sectors.

We are laying the necessary foundations for improving productivity by investing in Scotland's infrastructure; improving the incentives for learning and skills; supporting research and development and innovation; and fostering entrepreneurialism. Our efficient government plan, "Building a Better Scotland: Efficient Government—Securing Efficiency, Effectiveness and Productivity", which was published in November 2004, expresses our commitment to providing higher-quality, more efficient public services with the resources that we have at our disposal.

Helen Eadie: I am sure that the minister, like me, welcomes many of the advances in efficiency that have followed developments in new technology—advances that have improved efficiency without damaging front-line services. However, does he agree that the development of one such technology—automated answering systems—must be pursued more carefully, so as to avoid dehumanising services and causing distress to constituents throughout the country?

Mr Wallace: I share the general proposition that Helen Eadie puts forward about the importance of wisely and effectively using investment in information technology to create efficiencies. Often, IT can free up staff time—part of the efficient government plan is to create efficiencies in time that allow staff to be deployed in the front-line delivery of public services. I hear what she says about some automated telephone operations and I will look into the matter. Like others, I find it frustrating when I spend a lot of time punching numbers into a telephone and not getting the service that I want. The City of Edinburgh Council's council tax department has one such system.

Ferry Services (Rosyth to Norway)

4. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with stakeholders on a proposed Rosyth to Norway ferry service. (S2O-4950)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): Scottish Enterprise met interested parties promoting a potential Rosyth to Norway ferry service on 8 June 2004. Other discussions have been held that are, at this stage, commercially confidential. The Scottish Executive would strongly

support the creation of such a link, but proposals remain at an early stage.

Iain Smith: I appreciate the commercial confidentiality of those discussions. I am sure that the minister is aware of the benefits that the Rosyth to Zeebrugge ferry has brought in attracting new tourism to Scotland and to Fife in particular. He will also be aware of the environmental benefits of removing some freight traffic from our roads. Will he assure me that the Scottish Executive, along with Scottish Enterprise, will provide whatever support it can to develop new routes—including that to Norway—and the terminal facilities at Rosyth for passengers and freight, as well as improving the road and rail links to Rosyth ferry port?

Nicol Stephen: Yes. I have said to the Parliament on several occasions that I see real potential for developing the facilities at Rosyth. I would like the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine rail line to be extended to Rosyth. I see the need for improvements to the road access at Rosyth and I also see the potential for additional ferry routes.

We are restricted in the creation of extra ferry routes because of the funding that any European Government can put into such routes from one country to another. However, through the freight facilities grant, we can invest in services on the dockside—we put in significant support for the current Rosyth to Zeebrugge service. If that investment could leverage additional routes, and if that meant our spending additional sums through the freight facilities grant scheme, I would be the first to support it.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I welcome the minister's words, especially on extending the railway line from Kincardine to Rosyth—I have always thought that that would be a good idea. Is the minister aware that 42 per cent of the passengers whom the Zeebrugge ferry is bringing here are new visitors to Scotland and that the ferry has already brought £150 million into the Scottish economy? I also welcome the announcement on Norway. Does he agree that it is time that we put Rosyth on the map as the hub port for Scotland in the North sea and attempted to get routes into the Baltic countries and Germany?

Nicol Stephen: It is important to emphasise Rosyth's potential, but it is also important that we promote other ports in the east of Scotland, including Aberdeen and those in Shetland and Orkney. There are real opportunities to renew some of the historic connections between the east coast of Scotland and Scandinavia and other parts of Europe. Rosyth can also play a key role in connecting the east of Scotland with the west and on to Ireland. That potential needs to be examined and developed. If we can do that well, the

European Union could be involved in promoting the traditional and historic links with Ireland.

Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 (Universities)

5. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether universities are within the scope of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. (S2O-5027)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 is relevant to all bodies in Scotland that carry out functions of a public nature.

Robin Harper: The duty on universities and colleges not only relates to the management of the biodiversity in their estate, but extends to the curriculum and the research that they undertake. What is being done to ensure that all aspects of the work of universities and colleges, particularly teaching and research, further the conservation of biodiversity?

Allan Wilson: The member is correct that the duties do not just extend to the institution's estate or procurement activities. The Executive's commitment to sustainable development in higher education is expressed in the existing guidance to the sector. We intend to include similar guidance in the letter that we will issue to the sector later this year. Universities and colleges can therefore have no doubt about their commitment to expanding and developing the role of the sector in that respect and to developing sustainability in their courses and curriculum.

Stoddard International (Kilmarnock)

6. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it and its agencies are taking to prevent Stoddard's factory in Kilmarnock from closing. (S2O-4959)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): The Scottish Executive and Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire have provided considerable financial support to Stoddard's in the form of permitted regional selective assistance and other state aid. We will continue to support the receivers in their efforts to find a buyer for the viable parts of the business and to secure as many sustainable jobs as possible. Mr Neil will appreciate that the receivers' discussions are commercially confidential, but we all hope that they come to a successful conclusion.

Alex Neil: The minister will know that I have been in regular touch with Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire to get an update on the situation. I encourage him to provide whatever battery of assistance he can to any potential buyer to ensure

that the factory remains open. It is far better for the factory to remain open with more than 200 jobs than for us to lose all the 500 jobs that were there in the first place.

Allan Wilson: Indeed. I and others made strenuous efforts during the Christmas and new year period to sustain the existing workforce and to ensure that relevant assistance was made available to the receivers and to other interested parties to secure the employment of the remaining portion of the workforce. We will be working closely with Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire to ensure the sustainability of the jobs of those who are currently in employment.

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): I am delighted that Alex Neil has shown his party's interest in the situation at Stoddard's. What steps have been taken to provide information on the support that will be available to a prospective bidder who would continue carpet manufacturing in Kilmarnock? Will the minister request assistance from his Westminster colleagues to speed up the process of redundancy payments for the 266 individuals who were made redundant last week?

Allan Wilson: On the second question, we would be happy to contact our Westminster colleagues this afternoon to assist in the process to which the member referred. As I explained to Alex Neil, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire is in direct contact with the receivers and will ensure that any prospective purchaser of the business knows the type and extent of any support assistance available from the state that is permissible under European Union state-aid guidance. That will all be done to sustain those in employment at the Stoddard's factory.

Road Transport (Emissions)

7. Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to reduce further carbon emissions and air pollutants from road transport. (S2O-5016)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): The Executive has a range of policies in place that are aimed at reducing transport emissions. For example, we are committed to spending 70 per cent of the transport budget on public transport; we give freight facilities grants to remove millions of lorry miles from our roads; we assess the environmental impact of every new transport project; we support the United Kingdom powering future vehicles strategy and are members of the ministerial low carbon group; and we encourage biofuels, assisting with the construction costs of the nation's first large-scale biodiesel plant near Motherwell.

Dr Murray: The minister will be aware that in many rural areas, such as parts of my constituency, the private car is the only feasible means of transport. Does he agree that more effort is required to develop alternative technologies for private transport? If so, what steps can the Executive take to encourage that?

Nicol Stephen: I understand the point and I recognise the dependence that people in many of the rural and remoter parts of Scotland have on the car. However, it is always worth emphasising that many people in rural areas do not have access to a car. That is why I believe that investment in public transport and improved bus services is important. The new dial-a-ride, dial-a-community-bus and dial-a-taxi services, which we support, are also crucial, particularly in rural parts of Scotland.

The lead role in relation to alternative fuels and the development of new types of vehicle will continue to come from the UK Government. Clearly, in time, the introduction of hydrogen fuel will be the crucial breakthrough that will allow us to break our dependence on carbon fuels. The Scottish Executive is involved in all the initiatives to which I have referred and we play a role in them with the UK Government. For example, I sit with my ministerial colleagues at Westminster on the ministerial low carbon group. The Scottish Executive will do whatever it can to support innovative projects—for example, through research and development at our universities—to ensure that we play a key part in reducing carbon emissions.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The minister will be aware that one way of reducing carbon emissions is through freight facilities grants, in order to move the haulage of goods from road to rail. I asked him some time ago about the Safeway FFG and whether Morrisons would use the grant after it took over Safeway. Perhaps he can update me on that situation.

Nicol Stephen: Unfortunately, I cannot give information about the outcome of the situation to which Maureen Macmillan refers. However, we are anxious to ensure that the FFG offer is taken up by all the organisations to which we offer assistance, but particularly by Morrisons, which has taken over Safeway. Of course, commercial decisions are involved, which we try to influence through the availability of grants. So far, we have had success and have more than matched our targets in moving goods off our roads and on to rail and waterborne modes of transport. However, we must do more of that if we want to continue to offer the grants. Ultimately, we will make a success of that only by ensuring that our railways and our other methods of transport are attractive

to freight operators. That is why we must do more to work closely with our freight operators and encourage them not to look always at the vehicle option.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Does the minister agree that one of the main reasons for supporting a Borders railway to Tweedbank in my constituency is that it would have a positive environmental impact and contribute to reducing the number of car journeys, particularly to Edinburgh, which is a congested and polluted city?

Nicol Stephen: The best way of reducing congestion is to make our public transport network ever more effective. We all recognise that there has been underinvestment for far too long in Scotland's rail network and in bus services and park-and-ride facilities. We must upgrade and improve the quality and reliability of public transport in Scotland and make our public transport network truly fit for the 21st century. That is why there is such a long list of significant transport projects in the partnership agreement and why the main emphasis of those projects is on public transport.

Justice and Law Officers

Speed Cameras

1. Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will publish a list of fixed speed camera sites and the detailed safety case for each site. (S2O-4958)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): Details of all fixed and mobile camera sites are published by safety camera partnerships on their websites. The Scottish safety camera programme office is currently developing a public website that will provide the safety case for each site. That information is already available from the individual partnerships.

Brian Adam: Does the minister share my concern over the widespread public cynicism about speed cameras and their increasing use? Will she take all possible measures to restore public confidence, including actively publicising—on more than just a website—the individual safety cases?

Cathy Jamieson: I hope that Brian Adam will agree that it is important to improve our road safety record and to assess road safety problems. I hope that he will also agree that we should consider introducing speed cameras at sites where there are speed-related problems resulting in injuries or fatalities. We know that cameras can have an impact on driver behaviour and can slow people down, which can lead to a reduction in those problems. I have already had discussions

with my colleague Nicol Stephen, the Minister for Transport, about ensuring that that is the focus for the safety camera work. The safety camera partnerships are working closely in conjunction with the police. At lunch time today, I checked for information for Mr Adam. If he wants to, he can find out on the website of the camera partnership that covers some of the areas that he is concerned with exactly where mobile cameras will be operating during the week.

Young Offenders (Secure Accommodation)

2. Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to increase the number of secure accommodation places for young offenders. (S2O-4961)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): The short answer is yes. In March 2003, I set out our plans for 29 additional places in the secure estate in Scotland, to bring the total to 125 places by 2007. Last June, St Philip's School started on-site work to build its new 24-bed unit. On-site construction of the second of the planned redevelopments has also just begun. The new Good Shepherd Centre in Bishopton will provide 18 secure places for girls.

Mr Home Robertson: I found it very helpful to sit in on children's panel hearings in my constituency and to join police officers on patrol in the area. I take this opportunity to pass on concerns about the shortage of secure places for that handful of persistently disruptive youngsters who tend to live in impossibly challenging home environments. As the six existing secure units in Scotland are often over-full, how soon does the minister expect to have enough secure places to protect those children and to protect the communities that are suffering from the behaviour of those children?

Cathy Jamieson: I congratulate the member on the interest that he has taken in the matter and on the fact that he has taken the trouble to sit in on children's hearings and to be involved with his local police. That is a welcome development and I hope that other members will also take those opportunities, to give them a greater understanding of the problems that are faced by the young people, by the agencies that deal with them and by local communities.

As I indicated, work is under way to try to ensure that we get the new places on track as quickly as possible. As I have made clear, I wanted to ensure that we did not have to close developments in order to redevelop them further and that we were able to keep the overall number of places at a manageable level during that period. I should add that we have introduced other measures that are available for use in situations where young people

require that degree of intensive support. In certain areas, it will now be possible to introduce electronic monitoring as an adjunct to intensive support and supervision.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): Does the minister agree that projects such as the expansion of secure accommodation at St Philip's School in my constituency should be required to achieve not only increased numbers of places but improved quality of services for the young people who are placed in secure accommodation? Does she also agree that what is important is excellence in the standard of not only the accommodation but the teaching in and staffing of those establishments?

Cathy Jamieson: Karen Whitefield is absolutely correct. Indeed, I had the opportunity to visit St Philip's School when building work on the new work commenced—as the local member, Karen Whitefield was also present. Of course, one of the key reasons why we want to redevelop the secure estate is about buildings but, as she rightly identifies, the issue is about much more than that. We have to ensure that the secure estate provides the right kind of service, treatment and facilities.

The young people who are at risk or who have particular needs must be able to get the right programmes. That is why we have taken the decision that some of the developments will be of sites that will, for example, deal only with girls and young women. It is also why we are focusing on trying to increase the number of places in areas where no such secure provision exists at present.

Community Policing

3. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what priority it gives to community policing. (S2O-4937)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): The Executive recognises the importance that the public place on a visible police presence on the streets. That is why we made a commitment in the partnership agreement to increase the number of police officers on operational duty in every Scottish force.

Alex Johnstone: Although the minister's answer deals with the situation to some extent, she will be disappointed to hear of reports that I have been given of a number of incidents in communities in Aberdeenshire, the most recent of which happened at the weekend, when a number of windows were broken at Aboyne Academy. Does she agree that visible policing not only makes people feel more comfortable but encourages the perpetrators of petty crimes to commit fewer crimes, as they know that there is more chance of being caught?

Cathy Jamieson: Obviously, I am interested to hear more about the detail of the incidents. In particular, I am interested to hear details of the responses that the local police force made. The member will have been in close contact with the police in order to ensure that some of the problems are dealt with.

Police forces right across Scotland take very seriously the sort of incident to which the member refers. I am aware of good examples of the police stepping up their visibility and presence in hot-spot areas in local communities. Police forces are putting additional resources into areas over short periods in order to try and deal with some of the problems. If the member has not approached his local police already, I am sure that, if he were to do so in order to discuss the matter with them, he will be given a full response.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The minister will be pleased to hear that, in response to a request that I made to the chief constable of Grampian police, another police officer post has been established in Aboyne. She might also be aware that the chief constable has just confirmed that an extra 200 police officers are to be established—

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I need a question, Mr Rumbles, not justifications.

Mike Rumbles: Does the minister agree that it is good news that the chief constable of Grampian police confirmed this week his intention to establish another 200 police in Grampian within the next three years?

Cathy Jamieson: That was the exact point that I was making to Mr Johnstone. If the local member contacts the police and brings matters to their attention, action can be taken. Of course, I am delighted to hear that the additional police officers are being put to good use.

Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission

4. Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive how many cases are currently awaiting hearings following decisions by the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission. (S2O-5005)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): I confirm that 22 cases are currently awaiting appeal court hearings following decisions by the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission.

Chris Ballance: There is growing concern about the time that is taken between the SCCRC ordering a decision to be reconsidered and such cases coming before the courts. Is the minister aware of the problem? Can she detail, either today or in writing, the longest, shortest and average waiting times for such decisions? Will she say

what the Executive considers to be an acceptable waiting time?

Cathy Jamieson: I can tell Mr Ballance that I have met the SCCRC to discuss a number of issues around the operation of its procedures. In the discussion, I made particular reference to some of the problems in the timescales. It is important to remember that some of the cases are particularly complex. We have tried to work to timescales. Current provisions allow for eight weeks from receipt of a referral for grounds of appeal to be lodged and they allow for a procedural hearing to confirm that a case is ready to proceed. A date is then set for a full appeal court hearing, which usually takes place four to five weeks later, or a date is set for further procedural hearings if necessary. As I said, such cases are typically complex. The average waiting time depends on several factors. I can of course provide the member with further information if he wishes to examine a case or cases in more detail.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): What proportion of the reviews is a direct consequence of incorporating the European convention on human rights? Will the minister go further to deal with sentencing reviews? Will she estimate the cost of implementing the ECHR since 1999?

Cathy Jamieson: The short answer is that I cannot do that now and I do not think that Mr Gallie expects me to be able to. He is asking a bit of a single transferable question. If he is interested in particular cases, I will consider them.

Spiked Drinks

5. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it remains concerned about the danger of drinks being spiked in pubs and nightclubs. (S2O-4983)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): Yes. In partnership with the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency and the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, the Scottish Executive continues to publicise the potential dangers of drinks being spiked in pubs and nightclubs through the Executive-funded know the score campaign on drug-assisted sexual assault.

Pauline McNeill: I welcome the public awareness campaign over Christmas and the new year. The minister is aware of the forensic qualities of drugs such as Rohypnol and gamma hydroxybutyrate, which have horrific effects when they are used on victims of drug-assisted rape—for instance, they can result in memory loss.

Does the minister agree that one idea would be to work more closely with student organisations and youth groups to raise awareness all year round of that horrific crime? Will he advise me—not necessarily today—of the number of reported

incidents? Will he continue to press drug companies to assist in preventing the crime, by taking steps such as Hoffman-La Roche's response of enabling the detection of spiked alcoholic drinks by their colour or odour?

Hugh Henry: I hope that the drugs industry co-operates with the responsible agencies to effect critical improvements for public safety. Pauline McNeill's idea of working with student and youth organisations is good and I will draw it to my officials' attention.

Between 1 April and 30 September 2004, 52 women and 10 men reported to the police that their drinks had been spiked. Of those women, 16 made allegations of sexual assault, which included two allegations of rape.

Independent Police Complaints Commission

6. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will now establish an independent police complaints commission. (S2O-5008)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): We intend to consult on the subject in the not-too-distant future.

Patrick Harvie: In November 2004, when the Executive was part of a United Kingdom delegation to the United Nations Committee against Torture, the Executive made a commitment to introduce legislation to establish a commission in this calendar year. Will the minister confirm that that is still the expected timescale and whether the Executive will consult on a commission to deal directly with all police complaints?

Cathy Jamieson: The member is aware that a significant amount of consultation has been undertaken. We have a commitment to make progress. As I said, we intend to produce proposals in the timescales that have been outlined.

Football (Banning Orders)

7. Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will take a decision on the introduction of football banning orders. (S2O-4974)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): I announced last month that the Executive would consult on proposals to introduce football banning orders in Scotland. A consultation document will be published shortly and we will make decisions in the light of responses to that.

Mr Macintosh: I thank the minister for her encouraging reply. Is she aware of the success of football banning orders in England and Wales? Is

she also aware that, unless there is similar or parallel legislation in Scotland, banned English fans will still have the opportunity to use Scottish ports and airports to travel abroad? Does she agree that, despite the relative success and good behaviour of Scottish fans who travel abroad, hooliganism does not stop at the border and that we should take action to target people who use football as a cover to cause trouble, so that matches can be left for the fans?

Cathy Jamieson: I agree that it is important that we take action in relation to what is only a small minority of people—I hesitate to call them football supporters, because such people often have no interest in football or no real connection with the clubs that they purport to support or represent and simply use football as an excuse to indulge in violence or in sectarian or racist abuse. We should not tolerate that. As I said, I intend to consider the introduction of banning orders in Scotland. It is important to recognise that in some instances we will be required to look across the border and internationally.

Football (Match-related Offences)

8. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Executive how many prosecutions there have been over the past year for offences related to football matches. (S2O-4916)

The Lord Advocate (Colin Boyd): The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service takes seriously prosecutions that are related to crowd trouble at and around football matches. However, the COPFS has no means of categorising an offence in its database as relating to a football match. Accordingly, I cannot give an answer on how many prosecutions have taken place over the past year.

Dennis Canavan: I commend the Scottish Executive, the police and the football clubs for the efforts that they are making to stamp out football hooliganism, particularly violence and verbal abuse that are motivated by racism and sectarianism. However, is the Lord Advocate aware that more than three and a half years have passed since the Parliament's cross-party group on sports met representatives from Rangers Football Club and Celtic Football Club, who suggested that when so-called supporters are found guilty of such offences the court authorities should automatically report details of the conviction to the relevant football club so that disciplinary action, such as the withdrawal of season tickets and the banning of culprits from attending future matches, can be taken? What progress has been made on that proposal?

The Lord Advocate: The member has just heard about football banning orders. The police have a means of categorising offences in their

database on football matters, which is used when decisions are made on the deployment of forces at football matches.

The member mentioned Rangers and Celtic football clubs and of course religious aggravation is an issue in relation to those clubs. Over a six-month period, an analysis was made of 108 reports in relation to section 74 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003 and it was found that 14 per cent of the reports related to allegations of sectarianism at football matches.

Conduct of Solicitors (Regulation)

9. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will publish its consultation document on the reform of the system that regulates the conduct of solicitors. (S2O-4930)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): The paper will set out our firm policy proposals to improve the system for handling complaints against lawyers. We are finalising the paper and will publish it as soon as possible.

Mr Swinney: I remind the minister that he gave a commitment that the document would be ready by Christmas. I attach the greatest importance to improving the system of handling complaints against solicitors, given my experience of a number of such cases in my constituency. Notwithstanding the fact that two solicitors are sitting immediately in front of me, I encourage the minister to ensure that the document is published with all speed and I ask the Executive to listen carefully to the serious points that members of the public make about improving the system.

Hugh Henry: John Swinney is right to remind us that we gave a commitment that the paper would be issued by the end of 2004. However, he and other members will be aware that Sir David Clementi's report on the regulation of legal services in England and Wales was published on 15 December 2004. Although there are significant differences between the regulatory arrangements for the legal market here and those for the market south of the border, we thought it appropriate and wise to consider the contents of that report and any implications that it might have for Scotland before we publish our report.

General Questions

Fairtrade Products (Sport)

1. Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it supports the use of Fairtrade products in sport. (S2O-5030)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): The Scottish

Executive encourages all individuals, businesses and other organisations to consider the benefits of using fairly and ethically produced and traded products, including those that are in the area of sport and leisure. The regulation of international trade is a reserved matter. However, the Executive maintains a close interest in trade issues, including the Fairtrade movement and other ethical trading initiatives.

Mark Ballard: I thank the minister for that positive answer. Is the minister aware that fairly traded footballs were recently launched on to the United Kingdom market and that the first league match to use such footballs took place at Whitehill Welfare Football Club in Midlothian in November last year? Does the minister agree that Whitehill Welfare has set an example to other clubs in Scotland and that sporting organisations in Scotland should be encouraged to promote the adoption of the highest standards of ethical trade throughout the sports equipment industry?

Allan Wilson: I pay tribute to the efforts of my colleague Mr Ballard and other members who have promoted and assisted the Fairtrade movement. Through his efforts and those of others, particularly my colleague Patricia Ferguson, the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, we can encourage people and sporting and other organisations to consider fair and ethical trade and production, with higher standards of human rights, environmental protection, labour protection and overall corporate social responsibility.

Dental Graduates

2. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what percentage of dental graduates remain in Scotland to practise dentistry. (S2O-5018)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Rhona Brankin): In 2004, 91 graduates from Scottish dental schools had entered vocational training in the national health service in Scotland by 30 September in their graduation year, which equates to 79 per cent of the total number of graduates. The previously available data, which covered the years from 1995 to 1999, indicated that, on average, only 58 per cent of dental graduates started their vocational training in NHS Scotland. The trend indicates that the level of retention is improving significantly and we are working actively to increase that level further.

Helen Eadie: I am encouraged by the statistics that the minister provides and I know that the Executive is working hard on the issue. The challenge is enormous, but does the minister agree that particular priority must be given to the most disadvantaged constituencies in Scotland,

such as mine, which is the poorest one in Fife but does not have one NHS dentist left?

Rhona Brankin: I recognise the problems in Fife. In recognition of those issues, Fife NHS Board has received funding from the Executive for the establishment of a new four-surgery dental access centre in Kirkcaldy and a three-surgery centre in Dunfermline, which are to be staffed by 5.5 whole-time equivalent salaried dentists. There will also be one whole-time equivalent salaried dentist for Oakley and a 0.8 whole-time equivalent specialist salaried dentist in surgical dentistry. It is hugely important that we target places such as Fife that have significant problems. Next month, we will announce significant measures to improve access to dental services and to improve children's oral health.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Is the minister aware that, as of recently, there is no longer any dentist in Fort William that is willing to take on new NHS patients, following the cessation of NHS services by one practice? Given that the area that is covered, Lochaber, is larger than the Lothians, will the minister make interim arrangements for locum visiting dentists or persuade the existing practices to review the refusal to take on new patients? Will she urgently discuss with Highland NHS Board the need to have a salaried dentist locally to serve the people of Fort William and Lochaber?

Rhona Brankin: I am aware of the current problems in Lochaber and I am informed that NHS Highland has put in place short-term arrangements for patients with a particular practice. Child patients will receive their dental care from the NHS Highland dental team based at the Fort William community clinic, and adult patients have been advised that their details will be retained on a waiting list for routine access to dental care. Adults with emergencies are being advised to phone the NHS Highland dental helpline, and emergency appointments will be arranged in Inverness. NHS Highland is considering longer-term measures. I am happy to emphasise to NHS Highland that this situation should be resolved as soon as possible.

In more general terms, we face serious issues in Scotland following the Tories' closure of the Edinburgh dental school in the mid-1990s, which cut the number of dental graduates by more than a third at the same time as cutting the number of dental hygienists by a third. We are working hard to improve the number of dentists coming out of Scotland, and we have increased the target output number of dental graduates from 120 to 135 a year by 2006. We are monitoring that closely, and we are working extremely hard to resolve the situation.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): In brief response, I point out that the problem is one of retention. At the time of the closure of the Edinburgh dental school, there were more than enough dentists.

On the question that was asked of the minister, I have recently been in communication with an Argentinean qualified dentist whose wife is also an Argentinean qualified dentist, who live in the north-east and seek assistance to become registered to practise in the United Kingdom. Bearing in mind the fresh talent initiative that was launched by the First Minister, what efforts are being made to support such people through a training initiative to get them on to the register?

Rhona Brankin: I cannot give the member specific information about Argentinean dentists; suffice it to say that we are satisfied that we are working extremely hard to produce more dental graduates. We want to retain existing dentists and to encourage dentists to work in areas where there are particular problems with numbers and access, and we want to ensure that we are training dentists adequately so that we can introduce a comprehensive system of children's oral care throughout Scotland and, most important, in areas of deprivation. If the member wishes to furnish me with information on that specific case, I would be happy to respond.

Affordable Housing (North East Fife)

3. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is tackling the shortage of affordable housing in North East Fife. (S20-4949)

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): Communities Scotland and Fife Council have agreed that North East Fife is a priority area for investment in new-build affordable housing. Investment in the area is therefore a priority for the development funding that is available to Fife through the Communities Scotland affordable housing investment programme. This year, we have increased development funding to Fife to around £13 million—almost 50 per cent above historic levels.

Iain Smith: I thank the minister for that encouraging news. Will he join me in welcoming Fife Council's decision to make use of the new power that was introduced by the Liberal Democrat-Labour Executive to reduce the council tax discount for second homes and to invest that money in new affordable housing? Does he agree that that power needs to be backed by appropriate planning controls to ensure that the land is available for new affordable housing developments? Will he agree to look seriously at any application—if one is received—from Fife Council to designate areas such as St Andrews

and the east neuk of Fife as pressured areas to ensure that any new affordable housing that is provided is not lost to the right to buy?

Malcolm Chisholm: Iain Smith raised three important issues, over and above the financial issue that I raised in my answer. New affordable housing is important, and I remind members that it will increase by 46 per cent throughout Scotland over the next three years. There is the issue of the release of land. I was in Fife this morning, opening a Women's Aid refuge, and the land supply issue in particular was flagged up to me. There are big planning issues there, which I am told will be addressed locally. We are considering that within the wider context of planning modernisation.

The extra money from the council tax changes will of course be of great use in Fife; I know that there are many second homes in Iain Smith's constituency.

The third point that the member raised is potentially relevant, in that it is up to Fife Council if it wants to submit applications to designate pressured areas. The thinking behind the changes to the right to buy in 2001 was that, if particular areas had a problem, we would consider carefully any applications for pressured area status.

Audiology Services

4. Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in improving audiology services. (S2O-5014)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Rhona Brankin): We are making good progress towards modernising audiology services. Modernisation funds have initially been spent on equipment, information technology, accommodation, staffing, training and digital hearing aids, and we are seeing positive results from that investment. We expect to meet our partnership agreement commitment that the national health service will be in a position to offer digital hearing aids in all cases where they represent the most clinically effective option by March 2006.

Mr Macintosh: Does the minister agree that, despite the substantial investment that the Executive announced about this time last year, far too many people have to wait far too long for access to the best and most appropriate hearing services? That includes infants in my constituency who are awaiting a cochlear implant or older adults who still apparently find themselves at the back of the queue for digital hearing aids. Does she agree that there is a need for urgent, continuous funding in audiology services? Will she consider utilising all sources or avenues of funding as well as spare capacity in the private sector to address those unacceptable delays?

Rhona Brankin: I agree whole-heartedly with what the member says. I believe firmly that the current wait for hearing aids is unacceptable. That is why we have put in place the modernisation process and plans. Furthermore, £17 million has been made available to NHS boards over the period from 2003-04 to 2006-07, and I announced recently that a further £5.5 million has been committed to the recurring funding of audiology services from 2006-07 onwards. That should allow NHS boards to recruit and retain the extra staff that they need. We must monitor closely the development of the modernisation project, and we need to continue to consider all sorts of different ways in which to reduce waiting times as a matter of urgency. That includes considering partnerships between NHS boards and the private sector.

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I appreciate that a great deal is being done to try to bring down waiting times for access to audiology services, but is the minister aware that the Royal National Institute for Deaf People is extremely concerned about the postcode lottery that still affects some people? In some areas of the country, services are getting better, whereas they do not seem to be improving in other areas. Can the minister give me any idea of what specific measures are being taken to deal with that aspect of the difficulties around audiology?

Rhona Brankin: I recognise that there are considerable differences between the approaches of different NHS boards. The target date of 2006 applies to all NHS boards in Scotland, and the way in which each board moves towards that target depends on the development of its audiology services at the time when the modernisation project started. I receive regular updates from my officials on the progress that is being made towards the 2006 deadline and I am happy to provide the member with information on that. We need to consider more broadly the issue of waiting times, and I am happy to keep the member updated on any thinking on that.

Andy Kerr and I are both very conscious of the difficult issues facing many people—not just older people, but younger people—with regard to the length of time that they have to wait. I am also aware of the issues around people's need for digital hearing aids, where appropriate. More than 14,000 digital hearing aids have been issued since the project commenced in 2003. We still have a long way to go, but we believe that we are on target for the 2006 deadline.

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): Today, two constituents of mine, Mr and Mrs Duncan, are visiting the Parliament. Mr Duncan has been waiting since last March for his appointment to have hearing aids fitted. Can the minister reassure Mr and Mrs Duncan, and indeed the Parliament,

that they are not being discriminated against, as they fear, because of the fact that Mr Duncan is above retirement age?

Rhona Brankin: I can give that assurance absolutely. As I have said, we are very much aware of the waiting times and the other problems relating to the issue. I represent a Lothian constituency and have people coming to my surgeries with similar problems. To reassure Mr Duncan, I can say that we are working as hard as we can. We inherited a situation in which access to hearing aids was difficult. Also, the development of technology has moved quickly in this area. The assessments that people require for digital hearing aids are more complex, which requires the professionals involved to undergo more complex training.

We are working as hard as we can to ensure that people such as Mary Mulligan's constituent, Mr Duncan, can get their digital hearing aids as soon as possible. That is a priority for us.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): On audiology services for children, does the Executive carry out any assessment of the effectiveness of audiology assessment services that were formerly carried out on a mandatory basis by health boards but which have been moved away from that? Is the minister satisfied that, at a local level, there is sufficient mandatory testing of children's hearing to detect at an early age whether children have hearing problems that can be properly investigated and assessed?

Rhona Brankin: The issue of newborn hearing screening is important to us. We are reviewing the progress of NHS boards in introducing that screening. The expectation is that newborn hearing screening will be available in all NHS areas by April.

If my response does not answer Mr Swinney's question, I am happy to speak to him afterwards.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): I am confident that the minister is aware that investment in audiology services is necessary if we are to achieve our partnership agreement targets on the provision of digital hearing aids. However, does she agree that there are areas of identified need, such as Inverclyde royal hospital in Greenock, which deals with high numbers of people who suffer from industrial deafness? Will she investigate that matter with Argyll and Clyde NHS Board and agree to meet me to discuss the issue in the near future?

Rhona Brankin: I am aware of some of the issues around industrial deafness and the particular problems that are faced by people in Mr McNeil's constituency. I am more than happy to meet Mr McNeil to discuss specific measures that can be taken in relation to that matter.

Schools (Leadership)

5. Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it intends to improve leadership in schools. (S2O-5003)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): Our agenda is set out in our document, "ambitious, excellent schools". As part of that, we will establish a leadership academy with support from the Hunter Foundation.

Cathy Peattie: Does the minister agree that good leadership in schools depends on good support from local authority education departments? What is the Executive doing to encourage local authority education departments to support leadership?

Peter Peacock: Cathy Peattie raises two good points. Strong leadership is important to the whole of the education system. Excellent schools are delivered, in part, by excellent head teachers who motivate teachers; in turn, excellent directors of education can help to motivate and stretch head teachers.

We need to strengthen leadership across the school system. Not only do head teachers, senior support staff, local authority staff and teachers have a leadership role to play in the school, but the pupils do as well. We have not invested enough in that, but we are going to do better in that regard, partly through the promotion of the leadership academy. The academy will be established this year and will take forward the agenda of generally strengthening leadership in our school system.

Primary Schools (Music Lessons)

6. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what proportion of primary school pupils has received, or is currently receiving, music lessons. (S2O-5031)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson): The five-to-14 curriculum guidelines on expressive arts advise that all pupils in primary school should learn to sing and play instruments within a timetabled class music lesson. Inspection evidence suggests that this is happening.

Robin Harper: I thank the minister for that answer, which nevertheless does not seem to be terribly clear. I thought that the Executive's ambition was to ensure that all primary school pupils learnt an instrument. Have more primary school music teachers been taken on in the past two years to cope with what I would have thought would be extra demand?

Euan Robson: I cannot give the member that precise information, but I will find it and write to him. There has been a major investment of £17.5

million over three years in the area, and it may interest the member to know that the number of presentations at standard and higher grade has risen in recent years, so there is some cause for pleasure.

Climate Change

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2275, in the name of Ross Finnie, on climate change, and three amendments to the motion.

15:01

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): Climate change is often referred to as the most serious threat that faces our planet, and rightly so. We are already beginning to witness its impact throughout the world and the future environmental, social, economic and political consequences should not be underestimated.

If we look to the scientific evidence, it is clear that we cannot attribute any one severe weather event to climate change, but climate change is contributing to a pattern of more frequent severe and adverse weather conditions. As members are all too well aware, the effect of more severe weather conditions has been acutely felt at lochdar on South Uist; sadly, we saw the funerals take place this morning of the five people who tragically lost their lives in the recent storms.

Climate change is a global problem that requires global solutions, but developed countries such as Scotland must be the first to reduce their emissions. It is therefore appropriate for the Scottish Parliament to debate Scotland's response to the problem this afternoon. The climate change agenda has accelerated in recent years and few scientists or political leaders now deny the evidence for anthropogenic climate change. Concentrations of carbon dioxide—the main greenhouse gas—in the earth's atmosphere have risen by more than a third since the industrial revolution took place between 1750 and 1850, and the 10 warmest years on record all occurred since 1990, including each year since 1997.

The international community has put in place a programme for action through the United Nations framework convention on climate change and the Kyoto protocol. Following Russian ratification, that protocol will come into legal force in four weeks' time, on 16 February. The targets that are set out in the protocol represent an important first step in the global efforts to curb the greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. However, we should recognise that much more substantial cuts will be required in the future.

The United Kingdom's target under the Kyoto protocol is a 12.5 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2012 and the UK is comfortably on course to meet that target. We are committed to making an equitable contribution to

that target and to working in partnership with the UK Government to move towards a domestic goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent by 2010. The data that were published last month in the regional greenhouse gas inventories show that we are moving in the right direction. Scottish greenhouse gas emissions are down by about 6 per cent and carbon dioxide emissions are down by more than 3 per cent since 1990.

The UK Government has pledged to go beyond the Kyoto protocol and put the UK on a path to cut its carbon dioxide emissions by some 60 per cent by 2050, with real progress to be made by 2020. Given the scale of the challenge that the world faces, I believe that it is right that the UK has made a commitment to make climate change a priority for the G8 and the UK's presidency of the European Union.

In the "Scottish Climate Change Programme" document that was published in November 2000, the Executive set out actions to be taken in devolved areas to mitigate, and to adapt to, climate change.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): The minister made the important point that he wants Scotland to make an equitable contribution in the attainment of the United Kingdom targets. Does he believe that the Executive's performance to date has delivered that equitable contribution? If he thinks that Scotland needs to do more, will he state what further actions must be taken?

Ross Finnie: I think that we are making an equitable contribution, but I do not think that we are doing enough. That is why—as I had intended to say later in my remarks—we have recently embarked on a consultation on the climate change programme that we set out in 2000. I am quite clear that we will need an even more focused effort in the next few years. Also, as the member is well aware, the phrase "equitable contribution" is difficult to define. The consultation makes it clear that I have an open mind on the possible need for clearer targets but, as many members will be aware, there are technical difficulties associated with that. However, I remain entirely open on that issue. If clearer targets can be achieved, I would like to achieve them.

As I said, we are reviewing the programme. For example, we will consider the development of a much more expansive Scottish energy efficiency strategy.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Ross Finnie: No. If I can make a little more progress, I will be happy to give way.

In keeping with the Executive's policy, the review of the climate change programme is a

public consultation, which will remain open until 25 February. I encourage all parties in Scotland to participate in that. I intentionally kept the consultation paper open and non-prescriptive in its outlook to encourage a wide-ranging debate on how the Executive might reinforce its climate change strategy. It is too early to speculate on the outcome, but we will consider all views, including those that are expressed this afternoon.

Among the matters that I am considering is the question whether we should introduce a Scottish greenhouse gas emissions target. Such a target was not set previously, but the review provides for that possibility. I am keen that we improve our data to allow us to measure better Scotland's progress in tackling climate change. As part of the review, we are working to evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies.

Richard Lochhead: The minister talked about the possibility of expanding energy efficiency measures. As I understand it, the Government of Scotland may have the responsibility for promoting energy efficiency, but the regulation of energy efficiency is reserved to the London Government. Is that not the case?

Ross Finnie: That depends on one's definition of energy efficiency. For example, the effective energy performance of buildings is clearly within our control because we set building control regulations. As Richard Lochhead will be aware, the Executive has raised the energy efficiency requirements in our building regulations such that they are now the highest standard in Europe. However, I believe that we can always improve. The Executive takes that aspect of energy efficiency very seriously.

The consultation paper provides an update on our progress against our first climate change programme. To meet the target of generating 40 per cent of Scotland's electricity from renewable sources, we have invested heavily in energy efficiency since the programme was published and we are developing an energy efficiency strategy for Scotland as a whole. To tackle congestion, we are improving the efficiency of our transport and we are committed to spending 70 per cent of the transport budget on public transport, which will be crucial if we are to make a serious contribution. To reduce waste, we are implementing the national waste plan and we have guaranteed £350 million to local authorities over the next three years to help them to implement our recycling and composting targets and to achieve our longer-term European Union targets for diverting biodegradable municipal waste from landfill, which will produce consequential reductions in methane emissions.

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The Parliament's researchers estimate

that the proportion of Scotland's transport spending that goes on public transport is nearer 50 per cent. Many items that are lumped into public transport, such as road works and road haulage funds, should not be there—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Ruskell, you must ask a question.

Mr Ruskell: What is the minister's view on that?

Ross Finnie: With all due respect to Mr Ruskell, who usually asks fairly crisp questions, that was not one of his better interventions but a vague amalgamation of information. The fact is that 70 per cent of our programme is aimed at delivering public transport. I believe that that is significant. Not only has the Executive increased the budget for transport, but it is transforming the proportion that we spend on public transport. Only if we provide adequate public transport is there any prospect that we will persuade people to stop using private transport. For that reason, the balance of spending is crucial.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con) *rose*—

Ross Finnie: I must make some progress.

We are expanding the area of woodland in Scotland, which acts as an important carbon sink and brings many economic and social benefits. We are undertaking research to help us to understand better the processes that contribute to emissions from Scotland's high organic soils, with a view to reducing those emissions. The first of two research studies into Scotland's organic soils was published earlier this month.

European legislation provides us with tools to reduce emissions. The European Union emissions trading scheme, which involves 25 EU member states, sets a cap on emissions. In Scotland, 117 installations, which account for almost 50 per cent of Scotland's carbon dioxide emissions, are covered by the scheme.

I recognise that we need to build on the action that we are already taking in order to deliver much greater emissions reductions in the future. We must tackle greenhouse gas emissions from all sectors, which in many cases will involve difficult decisions. We need to secure a profound change in the use of energy and other activities that release greenhouse gas emissions—in the home, in transport, in business and beyond—while ensuring that we secure sustained and sustainable development both in our communities and in our industries. The expansion of all the services to which I have referred will be crucial to delivery.

We must adapt organisations to enable them to respond to climate change. We are working with the Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research. We are involved in a

major UK programme of research into the impacts of climate change. We have introduced Scottish planning policy 7, the central purpose of which is to prevent development that would have a significant probability of being flooded. Those measures are crucial as we develop the current programme.

The Executive has recognised the importance of this issue. That is why we have launched a comprehensive consultation that invites people to participate in the development of a strategic environmental framework that we can progress. All our planning and processing will take place within the ambit of strategic environmental assessment, which will make a major contribution to the way in which we plan and implement public policy and promotion in Scotland.

I welcome the announcement of the Environment and Rural Development Committee's inquiry into climate change, which will, I hope, make a valuable contribution to Scotland's review of this important area of policy. I have never claimed and do not claim that the Government has all the answers or that there is no room for improvement. However, I believe that we are taking steps in the right direction to improve our policy. I hope that today's debate will make an important contribution to that process.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's review of its Scottish Climate Change Programme; notes the corresponding review of the UK Climate Change Programme and the Scottish contribution to this; supports the Executive's commitment to consider options for strengthening its strategic approach to climate change, its commitment to deliver improved greenhouse gas emissions data and its commitment to assess the practicability of introducing Scottish climate change targets, and agrees that climate change, as part of the Executive's commitment to sustainable development, is integral to policy-making in Scotland.

15:13

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): The SNP welcomes this important debate and the consultation that the minister has launched. Many people think that climate change is a bigger threat to the planet than global terrorism. The minister was right to say that it is currently the biggest threat to the planet. In recent times, we have all witnessed the tragic consequences of the power of nature. That shows how carefully we must treat the planet.

Climate change modelling is not precise, but we can all agree that the earth is getting warmer, which has huge implications for the planet. If anything, scientists have underestimated the scale of climate change. They have only just begun to investigate the consequences of the global carbon cycle—the way in which the planet handles

carbon, rather than simply the level of emissions that are produced by human activity. We have learned about the warming and drying of the Amazon basin, which means that one of the world's biggest and most important carbon sinks is being eroded. The trees in the Amazon basin are dying, which is releasing carbon into the atmosphere. At the same time, the permafrosts in North America, Asia and Europe are melting, which is also releasing carbon into the atmosphere. Because our oceans are getting warmer, they are unable to absorb and dissolve carbon as they have in past centuries. The most recent studies indicate that, even under business-as-usual conditions, we must revise the prediction for the increase in the planet's temperature by 2100 from 5°C to 8°C. We may all have underestimated the scale of this problem.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Given that the member identifies that the scale of the problem is greater than had perhaps previously been acknowledged, does he feel that the Scottish National Party conference last year made the right decision when it embraced the road-building programme? Should the SNP not review its policies?

Richard Lochhead: The one thing that I can guarantee the member is that the SNP has much more realistic and ambitious plans on the issue than his party will ever have.

The medium-term impact in Scotland will not be as great as elsewhere in the world, but it will still be significant because our infrastructure could be wrecked by storm damage and flooding, as we have seen in recent times. Biodiversity will also be disturbed in Scotland. In Scotland, our sea temperatures have increased by 0.3°C over the past 100 years. That has huge implications for people who make their living from the sea.

We can agree that human activity plays a crucial role in warming the earth's atmosphere and that it is accelerating that trend. Human activity could be the straw that breaks the camel's back. That is why it is so important that we take every measure possible to cut emissions from now on.

Unfortunately, despite the modest progress—which we welcome—that has been made since this Government was established in 1999, we are left in the shade by almost every other country in the European Union. If Scotland is treated as a separate country, only four other countries out of the 25 member states of the EU have a worse record than Scotland on carbon emissions.

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Lewis Macdonald): I was intrigued when I saw Richard Lochhead's amendment to the motion. I wondered on what basis he had drawn that conclusion because,

when I checked the latest figures from the European Environment Agency, I established that the number of tonnes of carbon dioxide emitted in Scotland per person was round about the European average. The figure was on the same level as that for Germany and was better than that for many countries, including Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland and Ireland.

Richard Lochhead: The Parliament's research service gave me the figures. When I saw the figures, I was disappointed by them, so they were checked three times. I assure the minister that, unfortunately, they are accurate.

The key issue that faces the Parliament is how we mitigate and adapt to climate change. We all recognise that we have to change the way in which we live our lives and operate as a society. Scotland can make a difference. We must put our shoulder to the wheel internationally.

The first priority must be to change energy generation from fossil fuels to renewables. The energy sector in Scotland is responsible for a third of emissions. A fifth of that energy is used for electricity. The emissions from electricity went up by 18 per cent in Scotland at a time when such emissions went down by 21 per cent in the whole of the UK. Over the past 10 or 12 years, the energy sector's emissions have increased by 7 per cent in Scotland, yet Scotland is the country with the biggest renewable energy potential in the whole of Europe. We have 25 per cent of Europe's wind energy resources, 25 per cent of Europe's tidal resources and 10 per cent of Europe's wave resources. This Government is presiding over a situation in which the country with the biggest renewable potential in the whole of Europe has one of the worst trends in emissions of greenhouse gases.

Ross Finnie: This Government is as committed as anybody to increasing the renewables content of energy generation in the future and it has set an ambitious target of 40 per cent. However, does the member accept that, as the problem is not caused by domestic consumption in Scotland, the only way in which the kind of reduction that he suggests could have been achieved would have been by cutting off supplies to England?

Richard Lochhead: The key factor is to reduce Scotland's emissions, which we can do if we realise Scotland's renewables potential.

The marine renewables sector is crying out for more support. There are calls for a test component platform, a combined wave and tidal tank and many other developments to get renewables projects in Scotland up and running. We need support from the Government to make those projects a reality. We must also stop London introducing charges for the grid that discriminate

against Scottish renewables projects. We must develop a hydrogen strategy for Scotland so that our vehicles can have clean fuels and we must develop the biomass sector, the solar sector and so on. We must also sort out the mess that has been created by the lack of strategic guidelines for wind farms throughout Scotland. That causes huge problems.

In the recent debate on forestry, we heard that the planting of new forests in Scotland has declined over recent years. We must reverse that trend if we are going to tackle this issue. We must also attract more research and development to Scotland. We must ensure that action to mitigate climate change does not undermine economic growth in Scotland; it could provide a huge economic opportunity for Scotland if we can grasp our renewables potential and make progress on those other matters.

The Scottish Executive is responsible for 25 per cent of gross domestic product in Scotland. Public sector expenditure in the whole of Scotland is responsible for 50 per cent of GDP. The Government can take a lead through procurement policies and changing the behaviour of its organisations and departments. It should take a lead so that the rest of Scotland can follow.

We have to have a strategy to ensure that Scotland can adapt to climate change. Let us not forget that this country is already committed to 20 years of climate change. There ain't much that we can do about the next 20 years. We will feel the impact of the measures that we take now post-2025. It is our responsibility to ensure that we fulfil our obligations to future generations and protect our environment.

As the minister's consultation document says, many of the powers that will enable Scotland to have an effective and meaningful climate change policy are reserved to the London Parliament; we have to get those powers up here so we can make a real difference. I urge the Parliament to back the SNP amendment.

I move amendment S2M-2275.1, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"is disappointed to note that a comparison of our per capita greenhouse gas emissions with the United Kingdom and the other EU member states shows Scotland with the fourth highest level of emissions; urges the Executive to adopt ambitious targets in relation to its relevant devolved responsibilities and to take necessary steps to ensure Scotland is able to mitigate and adapt to inevitable climate change; recognises that greenhouse gas emissions can be reduced by a range of measures, including the acceleration of renewables projects, energy efficiency, increased forestry cover, promoting research and development of clean technologies, and greater promotion of public transport, but recognises that, in order to effectively tackle climate change, Scotland requires the powers enjoyed by independent countries, including powers over fiscal, energy, aviation and foreign policy."

15:20

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I welcome the fact that the Executive lodged the motion for debate. Our opposition to it is based on what it omits rather than what it includes.

As a Conservative, I might have been expected in the past to have stood up and begun a denial of what we are discussing today but, as we enter the Burns season, members will forgive me for quoting him and saying:

"Facts are chieils that winna ding".

The evidence is out there that global warming is a problem with which we must deal. I hope that the Environment and Rural Development Committee's inquiry will get to the bottom of exactly how significant human activity has been in causing global warming. There is no doubt whatever that over some considerable time the amount of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere has been rising against trends from time immemorial and we can assume that human activity has played a significant part in that.

Caring for the environment is central to my Conservative principles and I acknowledge that it would be wrong to limit the ability of future generations to meet their own needs or to pass heavy environmental costs on to them. We want to encourage people to use less of the earth's resources and take more responsibility for the environmental impact of their actions. A healthy environment is essential in building communities, as we know, and we believe that the role of the Government must be to make it easier for people to use their natural inclinations to care for the environment and to work on their behalf.

However, we do not believe that the current obsession with targets and the action plans that the Executive is proposing is the most effective way of serving society's needs. Therefore, we are wary of the Executive's latest response to climate change—the idea of centrally imposed targets. Experience tells us that where that approach has been taken in the past, it has resulted in the Executive careering off spending taxpayers' money on a misguided publicity-driven policy that has brought people into conflict with environmental policies.

Richard Lochhead: Does not the member accept that there is a role for Government regulation, albeit that individuals also have to take responsibility for cutting emissions? The landfill tax was a crucial way of reducing methane emissions. Does the member not accept that if there had not been targets and regulation in that regard, such emissions might not have been reduced?

Alex Johnstone: Indeed, but the fact that targets are set is not instrumental in achieving them.

We have to consider the broader areas of policy and how we can contribute effectively to addressing the problem that the world faces today. If we are serious about tackling climate change, we must urge the Executive to take a more balanced approach in supporting other renewables technologies such as wave and tidal power and the energy from biomass and waste as well as nuclear technology, which will offer long-term opportunities for Scotland.

Mr Swinney: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Ruskell: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: I am not taking any interventions; I have only six minutes.

Nuclear technology is exactly what the Conservatives are expected to raise in the chamber and we will do so today. The UK's leading engineer, Sir Alec Broers, the president of the Royal Academy of Engineering, has warned that renewable energy will not stop global warming or the expected blackouts. He has said that the UK Government's plans to generate 20 per cent of electricity from renewable sources by 2020—it is 40 per cent in the case of the Scottish Executive—are unrealistic and that investment in nuclear power is therefore critical if shortages are to be avoided. He has also warned that the decision on nuclear power should not be based on emotion or exaggeration.

One of the Department of Trade and Industry's experts, Adrian Gault, director of strategy development at the energy strategy unit, recently told ministers that nuclear power will have to provide half of Britain's electricity if the UK is to have any hope of meeting its Kyoto targets for the reduction of greenhouse gases.

Mr Ruskell: Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: I am afraid that I do not have enough time to take any further interventions.

Professor Ian Fells, chairman of the New and Renewable Energy Centre at Blyth, Northumberland, has called for an immediate resumption of the building of nuclear power stations. He has said that it is time to end the wishful thinking over the potential for renewable energy.

Furthermore—and in support of the call for us to think again about building new nuclear power stations—I ask the Executive and the minister to look at the likely trends of energy use in other parts of the world. We see developing industry in

places such as India and China that will be built on the back of huge coal reserves, consequently contaminating the world's atmosphere further. Should we ever put pressure on those nations to reduce their CO₂ emissions, their only alternative would be inferior and potentially dangerous nuclear technology.

Therefore, it is essential that, as we consider how we should meet our future energy needs, we consider not only the fact that nuclear energy is essential in our balanced energy policy but the fact that, if nuclear energy is to have a role, it is better served here in Scotland, where our mature technology is available for our benefit, rather than in other nations whose technologies are immature and unreliable.

I move amendment S2M-2275.2, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“notes the Scottish Executive's review of its Scottish Climate Change Programme and the corresponding review of the UK Climate Change Programme and, however, urges the Executive to take a more meaningful and balanced approach in supporting other renewable technologies like wave and tidal power and energy from biomass and waste, as well as nuclear technology, which offer long-term opportunities for Scotland at a lower cost to our landscape.”

15:27

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): This is an historic debate, as it is the first time that climate change has been debated in the Scottish Parliament. I thank the Executive for bringing the debate to the chamber. The Scottish Parliament was dissolved just before the birth of the industrial revolution and it has re-emerged at the beginning of a new millennium in which the unintended legacy of that revolution is the biggest threat facing humanity.

Sustainable development is important, and we must achieve a balance between the economy, the environment and social justice. The fundamental definition of sustainable development is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations. That is the backstop—the needs of future generations. We can talk about the balance between the environment and the economy as much as we like, but if what we do compromises the needs of future generations, we are headed in an unsustainable direction.

It is clear that the needs of future generations are being compromised and will be compromised in the future by climate change. The debate on that is over. The CO₂ levels in the atmosphere today are unprecedented: they are higher than they have been over the past 250,000 years. Meanwhile, the global temperature has risen by almost 1°C over the past 200 years and that

change has accelerated since the 1950s. The predictive models that have been developed not by the Green party but by cautious bodies such as the IPPC—the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—are being validated by the record-breaking trends that we have seen of extreme weather in Scotland and throughout the world in recent years.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Does Mark Ruskell agree that it has taken a considerable amount of time for that change to become evident and that it will take an equal, if not longer, period of time—something like 40 years—for anything that we do now to have an effect?

Mr Ruskell: Yes. That is why it is important that we get the right policies in place now, rather than thinking in terms of four-year political cycles.

Consensus now exists internationally between Governments and the scientific establishment. It is now not only the Green party that believes that climate change is real but the United Nations, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and even the United States Pentagon. Additionally, 136 states, from Antigua to the Yemen, support the Kyoto protocols. We need global leadership at this time, which is convenient because the United Kingdom will have an opportunity for global leadership in the coming year. We have the presidency of the EU and the G8 is coming to Scotland to meet. We have a growing relationship with China, whose role in tackling climate change will be crucial during this century.

We have one of the best mixes of renewable resources in Europe. We have a special responsibility to get it right in Scotland and to set an example for the rest of the world. The key question is whether the equitable contribution that Scotland is supposedly making to the reduction of climate change emissions in the UK is really being made. It is clear that it is not.

No doubt the minister will say that Scotland is in a difficult situation because our baseline is different from that in England; we have fewer of the coal-fired power stations that England has been able to shut in recent years. To say that we have had no cards to play in the tackling of climate change in the past 15 years is disingenuous. There has been only a 5.5 per cent reduction in climate change emissions in Scotland in the past 15 years. That is a third of what has been achieved in England. Moreover, I do not think for one moment that that 5.5 per cent represents a ceiling on our ambitions because during that time, traffic congestion has risen, a Tory Government has built the M77 and air routes have expanded. All that was avoidable through Government policy.

Much more important than the debate that we have had in committee and in the chamber on where we start and the baseline is the discussion on where we want to end up. Tony Blair has set the target of reducing our emissions by 60 per cent by 2050. That is an ambitious target and it is supported by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution and the EU environment council, although this week we heard how, paradoxically, Blair's officials tried to undermine that target in Europe. It is the best target that we have at the moment. On best estimates, it is the one that will help to stabilise the rise in temperature at around 2°C higher than it was in pre-industrial times.

The problem is that we are not making progress to meet that target. In our report, we predict that by 2050, we will not even be halfway towards that target. It is clear that the Executive's example on climate change is one of how to take two steps forward and three steps back.

It is great that the Executive has established targets for renewable energy and electricity generation; that is two steps forward. It then failed to set energy efficiency targets and that is three steps back. It has reopened rail routes and it supports the principles of congestion charging in Edinburgh, and that is two steps forward, but it intends to build the M74 and the Aberdeen western peripheral bypass, promote cheap flights and undermine the case for the Scottish Eurostar, and actively consider a second Forth road bridge, and that is three steps back. Contradictory policies are coming from the Executive all the time.

We need the minister to set a climate change reduction target in Scotland for Scotland. He should set a target that is achievable by all means, but it should be meaningful and set us on a path towards meeting the 2050 target. We need the minister to climate-proof spending decisions throughout the Executive and find support for renewables such as wave and tidal power. We need him to set an energy efficiency target and to back the Green party's bill on traffic reduction, which will complement the Executive's transport bill.

We are facing a global crisis. I ask the minister to give us a Scottish climate change programme that we can hold up as an example to the rest of the world of how to solve the crisis for the benefit of our future generations.

I move amendment S2M-2275.3, to leave out from "supports" to end and insert:

"is gravely concerned about the impacts of climate change on Scotland and the rest of the world and its implications for communities, the economy and the environment; is concerned that Scotland is failing to make an equitable contribution to the UK reduction of global greenhouse gas pollution; urges the Executive to set

specific carbon reduction targets for Scotland with the aim of a minimum of 60% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050, as recommended by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution; calls for a halt to Executive policies and projects that will undermine progress towards achieving this target; further calls on the Executive to set challenging energy efficiency targets in both the domestic and business sectors, recognising the economic opportunities that this affords; believes that there must be an accelerated introduction of all forms of sustainable renewable energy technology, including wave and tidal power, and considers that there is no place for expensive and unsustainable nuclear power in a sustainable Scotland."

15:33

Christine May (Central Fire) (Lab): Incredibly, there are people who, for various reasons, argue that climate change is not happening because there is no conclusive evidence. However, in 2001, even George W Bush said that climate change is an issue that must be addressed by the world. I wish that his Administration had taken more significant action, although I am sure that we agree with his statement. There is consensus across Europe, the UK and Scotland that priority must be given to combating climate change, protecting biodiversity, dealing with the environmental factors that are harming human health—especially in the urban environment—and finding more sustainable patterns of production and consumption.

In Scotland there is recognition that this global problem needs local solutions. Our First Minister, Jack McConnell, said:

"We must take responsibility for the world that we live in. If previous generations had known what we know now, then perhaps the decisions taken by them would have been different. We live with the consequences of those economic and political decisions, made with little thought for the long term, or for their impact on the environment."

I thank Mark Ruskell for pointing out that it is agreed that beneficial change will take time to become effective and evident. That is why it is important that we are not swayed from our policy direction of a sustainable, pan-UK and pan-EU approach to greenhouse gas reduction by the shrill cries of those who believe that more stringent action now will result in immediate beneficial change that will be measurable and evident. If there were an argument that was backed by scientific evidence for bringing in specific Scottish targets in certain areas, I would support it.

I will give an example from my constituency of the need for a sustained approach. Two paper mills, Tullis Russell Papermakers Ltd and Smith Anderson & Company Ltd, employ between them almost 1,000 people and support associated jobs in logistics and other sectors. Both companies play their part in helping to meet greenhouse gas emission targets and other environmental targets.

Smith Anderson in particular is a UK leader in recycled paper goods and has the only UK facility for recycling Tetra Pak cartons. Both companies use considerable amounts of energy and water in their production processes. Tullis Russell has an old coal-fired power plant for its energy supply. Therefore, it is obvious that many of the climate change measures affect the two plants. I have been in close contact with them and with the Confederation of Paper Industries to ensure that compliance with climate change measures does not result in an economic situation whereby both plants would face closure. As I have said before, there is little point in having the best quality environment to pass on to future generations if we do not also pass on a sustainable economy.

In order to reduce carbon emissions, Tullis Russell, in partnership with Scottish Biofuel Ltd, has recently applied for permission to replace its coal-fired plant with a biomass plant that will use 100 per cent biomass. I hope that that will come from specific energy crops that are produced in Scotland with support from the Scottish Executive. The biomass plant will have sufficient capacity to supply electricity to the grid and thereby potentially to heat local homes. The plant will operate as a base-load plant, which is very important for a sustainable energy supply with a mix of sources.

Mr Ruskell: Christine May mentioned base load, which is extremely important and which is related, of course, to the debate on nuclear power. Does she believe that we need to invest far more money in wave and tidal technology, which can generate the base load that we desperately require to complement generation of energy from wind?

Christine May: I believe that we need sustained investment in a range of technologies. Those include wave and tidal technologies—in which we are investing—supported by onshore wind, which is the mature technology. However, let us not forget that the 60 per cent that will remain to be generated if we achieve the 40 per cent target must come from a variety of sources. I argue that that should include coal, nuclear and other sources.

Richard Lochhead: We all have in our constituencies excellent examples like those to which Christine May referred. Does she agree, however, that the Government should show more leadership? The minister gave me a parliamentary written reply that said that only

"4.4 per cent of the energy used for heating the 14 largest Scottish Executive buildings was generated from renewable sources." —[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 14 January 2005; S2W-12711.]

Is not that rather pathetic?

Christine May: I have touched only on one aspect of what the UK's and the Executive's

policies are doing on climate change. I have not talked much about wind energy, which I support. I have not talked either about CO₂ sequestration and storage, nor have I dealt with the huge range of support that is available to industry, homeowners and communities for projects to improve the environment. For example, there is the Fife environmental recording network, the Fife Environment Trust and the co-operative movement through the energy for all initiative, as well as work by local authorities. Fife Council, supported by the Executive, is saving something like £1 million a year through energy efficiency measures. The council is not the only public sector employer that is doing such work. I know that the Executive is encouraging its employment locations to take similar action.

It is a fact that we need a balanced economy, but we also need to ensure that the measures that we take to promote beneficial climate change are sustainable, long term and do not put an undue burden on the economy. We must also ensure that we keep our targets under constant review.

I support the Executive's motion.

15:40

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): It is not the first time in a parliamentary debate that we have agreement about the extent of a problem but not necessarily agreement about the route to its solution. However, what has been good about the debate so far is that nobody has questioned the fact that climate change is now a significant factor that must influence and affect our policy making here in the Scottish Parliament. A point of principle that I want to establish is that, where we have the power and ability to take action to remedy the difficulties that we face over climate change, we should take those actions and use everything in our power to do so.

I am somewhat bewildered by the minister's response to my intervention about the contribution that has been made by Scotland to wider UK targets. I cannot see how a 5 per cent reduction in emissions in Scotland is equitable when the rest of the United Kingdom has reduced emissions by 14.9 per cent. Ministers need to intensify their actions in that area to make good that deficit.

I want to make three specific points relating to energy efficiency, renewable energy and flood prevention, which has had a significant effect on my constituency. First, on energy efficiency, there is a compelling argument that, where we have the power to improve energy efficiency, particularly in building standards, the Government should intensify its efforts to improve building standards. I very much agree with the point that the minister made earlier. I understand that the Government is

funding the central heating programme to improve the quality of heating systems in people's houses around the country to a specific standard, which is not equalled by the building standards that we expect for new and modern construction within Scotland. Someone can build a house to a standard that is lower than the standard that is expected of the central heating in older properties in Scotland. That, to me, is a logical inconsistency; I appeal to ministers to consider measures that will increase the effectiveness of building standards.

To follow the point that Christine May made about the debate in business, I believe that we should incentivise companies to take sensible measures in relation to their use of energy and resources. Far too often, there is a false debate between economic growth on the one hand and environmental protection and sustainability on the other. We all get involved in that debate, but there is a massive economic opportunity that can be realised if we take measures to incentivise companies.

Christine May: Does Mr Swinney agree that the renewables obligation certificate mechanism has been one area of support for industry that has been admired and which can, I hope, be adapted to meet the needs of emerging technologies?

Mr Swinney: Yes, of course I agree. If we are to intensify our activities in incentivisation, we must take due account of that and of other opportunities into the bargain.

I want increased renewable energy in Scotland, but we must face the reality that the debate on renewable energy in Scotland has run into the sand because of the absence of a national strategy for the design of renewable energy in Scotland. A plea for a national strategy was made by the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee under the distinguished convenership of my colleague, Alasdair Morgan; I hope that the Government responds to that point more effectively than it did in the parliamentary debate some months ago. Indeed, in its briefing for today's debate, Friends of the Earth Scotland—a prominent organisation that has been arguing passionately over many years for renewable energy—has made the same call for a national strategy, because it can see as clearly as I can that the debate has run into the sand of local objections and difficulties because of the lack of a strategy.

In my constituency, communities are under siege because of the number of congested applications, and Government policy does not assist them in the process of resolving that. Equally, the pricing strategy approach that is taken to offshore wind—an issue that was raised this week by Alex Salmond—is currently an important disincentive to achievement of renewables targets.

We must intensify support for wave and tidal energy in order to give greater substance to attempts to achieve sustainably a larger renewable contribution. My criticism of the Government's renewables strategy is that it is a one-legged strategy that is dependent on onshore wind power, which is in difficulty in the current debate.

My final points relate to flooding. My constituency of North Tayside has been seriously affected by flooding. I assume that that is attributable to elements of climate change. If one talks—as I have done over many years—to long-standing members of our society, one hears that some parts of my constituency, particularly the areas that flooded in the past few weeks in the Strathay area between Dunkeld and Ballinluig, were flood plains in the past.

I return to my original point, which is that in order to take steps to address such problems, it is essential that we use power wherever we have it. That is why I am appalled at the performance of the last Conservative administration in Perth and Kinross Council, which used not a moment of its time in office from 1999 to 2004 to put in place one stitch of flood prevention for my constituents in Perthshire. Those same Conservatives now parade around the county, preaching to people about flood prevention: they did absolutely nothing to protect the communities of Weem, Logierait, Dalguise, Dunkeld and Birnam. Those people should be ashamed of themselves; they did not use their power effectively.

Of course, there is now an SNP-Liberal coalition in Perth and Kinross Council. Thankfully, it has put those issues to the top of its political agenda and some sanity has been restored to our local authority. Thank goodness some power is at last being exercised, in collaboration with the Scottish Executive, to protect the communities that were so appallingly badly let down by the Conservatives—not for the first time—when they were in office.

15:46

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I begin by saying that I hope to make a sane contribution to the debate. I also want to say that some of the ideas that I bring to Parliament are my own and not Conservative policy. Nonetheless, they are ideas that recognise that climate change is a reality rather than a debating issue. The statistics are unchallengeable and the consequences of climate change and global warming are already too tragically evident.

In Scotland, it appears that precipitation will probably increase, as will storm frequency. Elsewhere in the world, temperatures will rise and, although we in Scotland will have an excess of water, other areas will have none. The desert strip

on either side of the equator will widen, which will mean that water will become scarcer there. Worldwide groundwater resources are being used up when water tables are falling; indeed, in many parts of the world, water tables are already at historic lows.

Other people have suggested that, in the long term, wars will be fought over secure water supplies. Scotland should look to the future in terms of harvesting and selling water. Of course, historically, it has not been economical to move huge quantities of water all over the world by sea routes. Although shipping costs are currently at an all-time high, the day might not be far off when capesize tankers could be used economically to carry water from Scotland to the middle east or elsewhere. In addition, as energy costs rise, desalination plants will become less economically viable, which will also increase the market for, and the price of, potable water. In looking to the future, I believe that a new market for water will emerge in 10 to 30 years. The past 10 years has seen exponential growth in sales of bottled drinking water, which is a commodity that could rapidly be scaled up into bulk deliveries.

We have a requirement to reduce greenhouse gases if possible—although I doubt that that will happen worldwide. Nonetheless, we must continue to develop renewable energy sources in Scotland. Currently, we are seeking to do that through development of wind farming, largely to the exclusion of development of other sources of energy.

In my view, we ought to consider more hydroelectric power. After all, it is an utterly reliable tried and tested energy source. After taking energy from the water, we could pipe it to the coast where it could be loaded on to ships for export.

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): Will the member give way?

John Scott: If I may, I will finish the point. The proposal would benefit from the building of reservoirs relatively close to the coast in places where a deep-water port could also be easily accessed to keep pipe construction costs to a minimum. That said, the issue of location is relatively unimportant. What is important is that, by using water twice in this way—once for energy provision and once for supplying an emerging market—we would produce a double-win situation.

Christine May: Will the member take an intervention?

Shiona Baird: Will the member give way?

Christine May: Will Mr Scott—

Shiona Baird: But—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: To whom are you giving way, Mr Scott? Is it to be Shiona Baird or Christine May?

John Scott: I give way to Christine May.

Christine May: Will Mr Scott name some of the unimportant locations that he proposes to flood?

John Scott: That would be a matter for the market to decide. Sales of water would help to defray high reservoir construction costs.

Shiona Baird: Will the member give way?

John Scott: No, I do not have time.

An utterly reliable source of renewable energy would be provided. Of course some land and valleys would be used to do that, but in my view a reservoir is more attractive than a wind farm. If we had more hydroelectric power, that would add to the balanced mix of renewables on which we will increasingly need to depend as, nationally, our dependency on wind farming increases.

It should certainly be possible for 18 per cent of Scottish electricity generation to come from renewables by 2010 without problems of intermittency developing, but if we are to meet the longer-term target that 40 per cent of electricity generation should come from renewables by 2020, the next 20 per cent cannot all come from wind power without intermittency. Therefore, strategic further investment in hydroelectric power should be considered to provide a balanced mix of renewables and to create the opportunity to sell the water after it has been used to produce energy.

I have not costed my proposals, but the entrepreneurial part of my character tells me that the concept is worth exploring and that, if it were viable, it would turn the problem of developing a reliable and dependable renewable energy supply into an opportunity.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister can make a short intervention.

Lewis Macdonald: Does Mr Scott accept that it is for the industry to develop such proposals and that a number of hydro-power proposals are being prepared?

John Scott: I accept the minister's point and I welcome the proposals to which he refers. I am not suggesting for a moment that that should be a Government initiative.

My hydroelectric power proposals would create a modest number of jobs in rural areas. The hydro idea is worth investigating before the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and power-generating companies make final decisions on the major electricity transmission routes that will be used to harvest wind-turbine generated

electricity, and it should be factored into route-design calculations.

We cannot put all our renewable energy hopes in wind power and, in fairness, we are not doing that. However, although the harvesting of wave and tidal power might be viable in the long term and hugely worthy of further investment, it is not yet viable. The production of energy from biomass and from photovoltaics are still in their infancy, too. In the long term, the burning of precious gas supplies will contribute to production of more greenhouse gases and to further global warming and climate change. In the long term, nuclear power might be the only truly environmentally friendly option.

Whatever measure we ultimately choose and decide on nationally to combat climate change, worldwide drought and electricity supply problems, we know that we must get our decision right first time. Decisions on climate change and energy supply have perhaps been deferred for long enough. I offer my idea to Parliament in an attempt to address both issues positively and sustainably.

15:53

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): I look forward to hearing which towns and villages in Ayrshire would be inundated under John Scott's plans.

John Scott rose—

Mr Home Robertson: I apologise for the fact that I will not be able to take interventions, because I have quite a lot to say.

As we have said repeatedly, Parliament was established to achieve Scottish solutions to Scottish problems. By the same token, as citizens of a global village, we must play our part in achieving global solutions to global problems. I welcome the fact that the minister made that point in his opening speech and I welcome the debate; I just wish that American state legislatures would give the same attention to their global responsibilities. The phrase, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen" was coined back in 1952; perhaps the time has come for our US cousins to develop that theme. The phrase, "If the cooker's on fire, it's time to turn off the gas" might be apt.

If we wait until we get conclusive proof about global warming, it will be far too late for future generations to do anything about it. The case for urgent precautionary measures to protect the global environment is overwhelming. That has been endorsed by representatives of every party whose members have spoken in the debate.

It is largely thanks to the commitment of our UK Government that the Kyoto treaty has now been

activated. I welcome the fact that our Scottish Executive is actively engaged in reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. I strongly support the Executive's aim of generating 40 per cent of our electricity from renewables by 2020. That target is extremely ambitious and we will not get anywhere near achieving it if we just pay lip service to renewables and then support nimby campaigns against wind turbines. That point is all the more relevant after the events that took place in Perth yesterday. I am well aware that such matters can be controversial. Part of the Crystal Rig wind farm is in my constituency and I know that some people have strong feelings about enormous wind turbines in wilderness areas. I understand why. Serious objections must be considered fairly, but ultimately if we are serious about the matter we should have the courage of our convictions about climate change and we should back appropriate wind farm proposals.

I have a big constituency interest in electricity. The Cockenzie coal-fired power station and the Torness nuclear power station are in my constituency, as well as part of the wind farm that I mentioned. A third of Scotland's electricity comes from East Lothian and the industry employs 1,000 people in the county, so I bring local knowledge to the debate. Even if we achieve the target of 40 per cent of electricity generation from renewables—a big “if”—60 per cent of Scotland's power, plus that proportion of our electricity exports, will still have to come from conventional generators. However, more than half of our existing generating capacity will reach the end of its design life within the next decade. If we do not start to plan new base-load power stations now, we will face power shortages and blackouts in the not-too-distant future—the situation really is that serious. There are legitimate concerns about CO₂ emissions from Cockenzie and Longannet power stations. With the best will in the world, it is difficult to control emissions from older coal-fired plant, especially in the case of Cockenzie, which is run as a standby generator. The modern clean coal technology to which Christine May referred could do far better, but we cannot escape the fact that burning of fossil fuels produces CO₂. In addition, the depletion of scarce global stocks of oil, gas and coal to generate electricity might not be the best use of precious resources that will be needed by future generations.

There is a legitimate and important point about CO₂ emissions from fossil-fuel fired generators, but extremist sections of the environmental lobby are opposed to nuclear power too, which is silly. The operation of nuclear power stations in the UK is avoiding the emission of 50 million tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere every year—that is equivalent to taking half Britain's cars off the roads. I accept that the big problem with nuclear

power is the need to provide safe and secure permanent storage for radioactive waste. Come what may, we will have to construct a national repository for the waste that we have inherited from older plant. Britain should make a virtue of that necessity by planning a repository that can take the far smaller quantities of waste that will arise from a new generation of modern nuclear generators. Finland and Sweden are providing for permanent storage of nuclear waste; Britain can and will do so, too.

John Scott: I had the good grace to acknowledge that my ideas were not those of the Conservative party. I am interested to know whether the member's pro-nuclear ideas are his own or those of the Labour party.

Mr Home Robertson: I am trying to keep party politics out of the debate, but the answer to the member's question is, “Wait and see.” There is a serious debate, which we must all address seriously.

I will summarise. First, we need to plan for new generators to replace aging plant and to provide the more than 60 per cent of electricity that cannot possibly come from renewables. Secondly, we must seek to retain Scotland's share of the UK's electricity in order to sustain jobs in areas such as East Lothian. Thirdly, it would be irresponsible to add to CO₂ emissions through increased use of fossil fuels in power stations, so the time has come to begin considering and planning new nuclear generators. We cannot afford to continue to indulge an irrational taboo about the nuclear industry; we must have an honest and informed debate about how we will generate electricity in the not-too-distant future.

Earlier this week, a number of colleagues from all but one of the parties in Parliament took part in a preliminary meeting about the establishment of a cross-party group on the civil nuclear industry. I sincerely hope that that group will help to promote informed and constructive discussion, although I have no doubt that some of its members will express views that are different from mine. Let us have a serious discussion about the subject.

I urge the Executive to acknowledge the case for considering all the options for generating electricity without causing global warming and climate change. As we know from what happened last week in South Uist, the issue could not be more urgent.

15:59

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): To echo the Executive motion, I welcome the revisiting of the Scottish climate change programme with the aim of developing and strengthening it. In particular, I welcome the commitment to develop improved

data, because I believe firmly that good information underpins good decision making.

All members agree with the scientific community that climate change is happening. A small minority of scientists argue that the data are being misinterpreted, but, in general, the scientific community agrees that climate change is happening and that the cause is human activity, which has increased emissions of the so-called greenhouse gases, particularly since the industrial revolution. The main effort in response to climate change is the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The Scottish nationalists' amendment helpfully lists a number of measures that can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and I am glad to say that we are taking all of them.

The main source of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland is energy generation, which creates about 32 per cent of the total emissions, a figure that has increased, in contrast to the reductions in other areas. That statistic shows clearly where our attention should be directed and I will focus mainly on that issue. A rough breakdown of Scotland's electricity generation shows that 55 per cent comes from nuclear, 30 per cent from coal and gas, 11 to 13 per cent from hydro and 2 to 3 per cent from other renewables and waste. At present, our maximum domestic demand is 60 per cent of the installed capacity. Scotland is a net exporter of electricity, which is one of the complications in calculating disaggregated statistics that would allow us to monitor Scotland-specific targets on emissions reduction. That is not to say that we should not compile such statistics, just that doing so is not as simple as it might appear.

Our five major power stations—Peterhead, Cnockenzie, Hunterston, Longannet and Torness, which are fuelled by gas, coal and nuclear—will all reach the end of their planned lifetimes during the next five to 30 years and will have to be replaced within that timeframe and in accordance with the limits on carbon emissions that we have agreed to meet. Nuclear power undoubtedly meets the non-carbon-emitting criterion, but it has so many disadvantages associated with it that I cannot accept that it is the answer. Frankly, the wishful thinking is done by the nuclear engineers, who do not want to be deprived of their toys.

Hazardous waste is still the main drawback of nuclear power, but there are others. Intermittency and lack of security of supply are often cited as arguments against other methods of electricity generation, but nuclear power stations sometimes have to be shut down fast and without warning, which results in the loss of a substantial chunk of the base load in a once—nuclear power stations need substantial backup. Furthermore, in the world in which we live today, the threat of terrorist attack must be taken seriously, and a

nuclear power station is a large target with a large potential for disruption and contamination if it is hit. On a somewhat different level of argument, the aspirations of the world's underdeveloped economies are a significant factor in the global carbon equation and we need to demonstrate that renewable technologies are viable and desirable.

Alex Johnstone: Does the member accept that the nuclear industry in this country has an extremely good safety record and that there is a serious potential problem with the use of nuclear power in less-developed countries with less-developed technology? We must address the opportunities that nuclear power affords us before accidents like the one at Chernobyl happen in other parts of the world.

Nora Radcliffe: Alex Johnstone has just made my case for me.

Alex Johnstone: I do not think that the member understands the case.

Nora Radcliffe: I understand it clearly. We have not solved the problem of hazardous waste, and other hazards arise from the use of less-developed technology and from less-responsible use of the technology. A risk analysis comes out against the use of nuclear power.

Apart from anything else, the potential crossovers between nuclear power generation and nuclear weaponry are, for me, a further strong disincentive to promoting that form of generation. I would like the Department of Trade and Industry to get its head out of the sand, accept that nuclear is not an option and redirect the level of resource that would be required to build new nuclear plants towards clean coal, carbon sequestration and more efficient hydro power.

Richard Lochhead: Does not the member's plea to the DTI vindicate the SNP's argument that all energy policy should be transferred to the Scottish Parliament so that we can have a proper and comprehensive energy policy?

Nora Radcliffe: I invite Richard Lochhead to say after me, "I am a Scot, I am a Briton, I am a European and I am a member of the global community." We cannot have a little bit of the stratosphere above Scotland that is entirely under our control. He keeps telling us that fish swim across boundaries, and I can tell him that air moves around the world in currents.

I was interrupted in full flow.

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

Nora Radcliffe: The DTI has to pay serious attention to what needs to happen to allow our huge renewable resource to be developed. Predictable tide and wave generation can supply

the base load, and the DTI must accept that most of the resource is in Scotland and most of the demand is in England. It must tell the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets to act accordingly and to look to facilitate the bringing together of supply and demand. The grid should be upgraded and the trading arrangements sorted out, so that financial institutions and commercial companies have the confidence to invest in what I firmly believe to be the future. It appears that the oil and gas companies see the writing on the wall, and it is time that others did, too.

I will cover another couple of points quickly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Very quickly.

Nora Radcliffe: In Scotland there are opportunities for communities to become either self-sufficient or less dependent on energy from the grid, and those opportunities should be explored and exploited. A lot could be done at our own hand to encourage such initiatives.

The solution to the energy gap is not wholly on the supply side. We are hugely wasteful of energy. A lot of the gap could be closed by reducing demand.

I gather that I have run out of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are well over time, I am afraid.

Nora Radcliffe: In conclusion, the Scottish Executive is working to tackle and manage climate change. The suggestion that we are doing substantially less than England is a fallacy. We work with the UK Government; we are contributing our share. I commend the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but we are short of time. I must ask members to stick to the time limits that they have been given.

16:06

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): At least we can cut to the chase and state that in this chamber we believe that climate change is happening. It is much better to describe it as "climate change", because although bits of the planet will warm up, "global warming" does not convey the full force of the changes that will take place. Across the globe we will have a much greater malaria problem. We still have not tackled the problem in sub-Saharan Africa and the prospect of it growing across the globe should worry us all.

John Scott made points about water shortages, particularly in the subtropics, which will have a huge impact on the ability of countries in the region to grow crops and feed themselves. Countries in the region already have unstable Governments and huge poverty problems. It is

estimated that tens of millions of people will be affected by rises in sea levels and flooding. The issues are difficult.

Recently, I was dismayed to read advice given to Tony Blair by a respectable journalist in one of the respectable Sunday broadsheets that he should deal only with the problem of global poverty and not try to tackle climate change as well, because that would be too difficult. The complexity of climate change is a difficult issue to deal with. It will hit every bit of everybody's lives, regardless of where they live in the globe. That is why we need a coherent approach to climate change.

There will be lots of difficult issues and I will try to focus on them, rather than on the consensus, although the right starting point is the fact that we agree that climate change is happening. We in the rich, westernised countries are responsible for 60 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, yet we represent a small percentage of the world's population. We have a serious responsibility to tackle the situation.

We will not escape the problems ourselves. I ask members to look at the west coast and imagine a 40 per cent increase in rainfall during the winter. That is not a happy prospect. The fact is that that increase will probably come in extreme storms; it will not flow gently throughout the winter. Householders on the west coast will have huge problems, not just with flooding, but with insurance. There will be much bigger insurance bills and huge problems with household damage. The horrendous weather that we have seen in the past few weeks will become more normal, which is another huge problem.

This is not a criticism, because six minutes each is no time at all, but members have not said that we have to deal with climate change now as well as think about what we can do to stop it. The 40-year lead-in that people have spoken about is probably beginning to hit us now. If there is a big disagreement among scientists, it is about how fast the change will happen. None of us really knows the answer. We are not experts—we can only read the evidence. However, it appears that some scientists think that the process is happening faster. There are some much more short-term questions that should concentrate our minds. This is not just an issue for the next 30 years; we cannot put off considering it just because we have four-yearly elections. We will encounter some of the questions now, and some of the problems that we will have to deal with might be quite unpalatable. Shifting resources from priorities to which we are already committed to dealing with the impact of climate change is not something that any member will relish discussing.

It is not just the Parliament that needs to discuss climate change; it is also a big issue for local

authorities to debate, as they are the bodies that currently deal with flood prevention schemes. I repeat that there are short-term issues and that we should not just think of climate change as a 40-year or long-term issue—we should not focus on the fact that the climate will be different in 2100, as change will take place a lot faster than that.

We have debated energy today, and I know that the Tories are holding a debate on the subject next week. Labour Party policy is still in favour of a moratorium on nuclear power until we sort out the issue of nuclear waste. John Home Robertson is right in so far as nuclear power is part of the discussion that needs to be held in relation to the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent, but it is not the easy, quick fix that some nuclear engineers describe. John Home Robertson acknowledged that to an extent, at least, although he was a bit unfair to call those of us who are not persuaded of his view extreme environmentalists. Some of us think that we are sensible to be a bit cautious, and a lot of Labour members would agree with me about that.

The short-term issue that we really need to focus on is energy efficiency. It is not sexy and it does not get people out of bed in the morning, but it has kept a lot of people in Scotland alive since we started our heating programme. If we link short-term energy issues into social justice, we begin to get win-win situations, which could make some of the harder decisions that we have to take in the Parliament a little bit easier.

The issue of building standards is a no brainer. We have already raised them and we need to keep raising them over time. It is easy to talk about doing so in the Parliament, but actually raising them is hard for the building industry. People in the industry know that their consumers like fitted kitchens, and if any of us went out and bought a house tomorrow, we would be attracted by the fitted kitchen, rather than by high energy-efficiency specifications.

I would like the minister to spend a couple of minutes of his winding-up speech on the issue of air transport. The fact that we are finally getting half-decent air links from Scotland has been a liberation for many people in Scotland and is hugely beneficial for Scotland's economy. However, there is a downside, which includes the fact that millions of people now drive to airports by car and the fact that we are possibly replacing rail travel with short-haul air travel, which simply does not make sense.

I will give members some information that I checked out on the web last night. If an individual wants to go to London from Edinburgh or Glasgow, the train will cost them at least £30 to £50 each way, with a journey of four and a half hours or five and a half hours, depending on

whether they go from Edinburgh or Glasgow. However, they could go by plane for £13 to £30 each way, including tax. The equation is not a clever one: this is not about stopping people using their cars or getting on planes; it is about beginning to think through the implications of using our cars all the time and of choosing to take cheap flights even though the train probably offers the better journey. The economics of that choice are crazy.

We must keep up the push on the big investment in public transport. This is a good week to say that, because we know that big money is going into rail, but we must keep up efforts in that area in the long run. We will have to deal with some difficult issues in the Parliament and I hope that the inquiries that the Executive and the Environment and Rural Development Committee are undertaking will let us take them a bit further.

16:13

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): I will start by addressing John Scott's rather ingenious idea about shipping water elsewhere. However, he did not address the objections that there would be to the location of the reservoirs.

John Scott: I think that there was a misunderstanding when I said during my speech that the location of the reservoirs was unimportant. Their location would be very important, but there are many valleys in Scotland that have absolutely nothing in them and which would be the better for having something in them.

Alasdair Morgan: As I was going to say, that exemplifies one of the major problems that we have with electricity generation. Every form of electricity generation provokes lots of objections. If a new power station is built somewhere, no matter what kind it is, there are objections. If a wind farm is built somewhere, there are objections. Why is there currently only one proposal to build a major hydroelectric scheme in Scotland? It is not because there are not plenty of valleys that could potentially accommodate hydro schemes, but because the people who build such schemes know that there would be lots of objections from naturalists and others, including people who live in the valleys concerned, who do not want them to be flooded. That is one of the major problems. The only reason why we have not had any objections to tidal or wave stations is that there are no proposals for any, but if proposals are made, objections will be received. That is a difficult issue that we politicians have to face.

I welcome the decision of the Environment and Rural Development Committee to hold an inquiry into climate change. John Swinney referred to the Enterprise and Culture Committee's inquiry into

renewable energy, which, because of time pressures, concentrated largely on electricity generation. I welcome the fact that the Environment and Rural Development Committee's inquiry will be wider.

I notice that, in its briefing, RSPB Scotland said that there was no longer any rational doubt that climate change was happening. Those of us who are older feel that we have lived through some of that climate change. However, there is a major problem in that, while there is no debate about whether climate change exists, there is a major debate, in some parts of the scientific community, about the cycle over which that change is happening and the causes of the various cycles that we are going through. Clearly, any short-term cycle, which I believe there to be, is perhaps overlaid by a longer-term cycle about which it is difficult to get data that can be used for modelling. There is also a debate about the extent to which the current cycle is caused by man's activities and the extent to which it is caused by other factors, such as radiation from the sun. The problem is that those uncertainties can be exploited by the people to whom Christine May alluded, who seem to want to deny the existence of global warming for their own purposes.

I share the minister's view that the evidence strongly suggests that there is a problem and that it is being made worse by human activity. Even if that were not the case, I take the point that John Home Robertson made when he said that we would do well to act on that assumption. If, at some time in the future—perhaps long after we are on this planet—it is proved that we were wrong, we will have lost nothing by being wrong and taking the precautions of increasing the use of renewable energy and reducing the use of fossil fuels and energy as a whole. I raise the scepticism that exists over climate change because it is being exploited by those who wish to campaign against the only renewable technology that is currently commercially available, which is large-scale wind power.

I totally accept that we need to concentrate on other forms of renewable energy, such as wave and tidal power. In fact, that is what the Enterprise and Culture Committee recommended. However, while we are waiting for that technology to come through, we need to get the wind strategy right—or, rather, we need to get a strategy in the first place. The fact that there is no strategy allows nonsense to be peddled in order to influence and exploit reasonable people whose only major problem with wind farms is their detriment to the scenery. Those people have genuine concerns because, under the present system, they can see no end to the number of wind farms that are proposed in their area.

The minister needs to help those of us who want to campaign for wind farms. We need some assistance from him so that the people we are trying to convince about the virtues of that approach can see the parameters of and limits to what we are proposing. As John Swinney said earlier, at present all those people see is application after application and all they hear are the doom-mongers saying, "Imagine what Scotland will be like if all those applications are passed." We know that they will not all be passed but the people we are trying to convince do not. It would be of great help to us if the minister were to put in place a national strategy for wind farms now rather than next year or the year after.

16:19

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): I welcome this debate and the consultation. As Sarah Boyack says, there is a consensus in the chamber that the recent bad weather in Scotland has been caused by climate change, which is a reality. The recent weather has brought home to all of us the fact that we should be focusing on climate change and that it has the capacity to destroy property and, sadly, take lives. The recent bad weather has been devastating for Scottish communities and today's debate is timely. We must use this opportunity to make concrete decisions on how to tackle climate change.

We all accept that climate change is a reality. Globally, six of the 10 warmest years that have been recorded were in the 1990s, and 1998 was probably the hottest year of the past millennium. The first three months of 2002 were the warmest since records began in 1860. Temperatures in Scotland are expected to increase by between 1°C and 3°C by 2080, which will result in an increase in winter rain of between 10 and 35 per cent. Although Scotland is still rising after the previous ice age, sea levels are predicted to rise by up to 0.8m by 2100, and levels will rise by between 8cm and 30cm by 2050. That, combined with future storm surges, could put most of Scotland's coastline below the 5m contour and leave it more vulnerable to flooding. Approximately 170,000 residential properties in Scotland—or one in five—are at risk from flooding.

Wildlife and snowfall are also under threat. Species such as the Scottish primrose and the ptarmigan might disappear and snowfall in the western half of Scotland and the Highlands could decrease, which could have a devastating effect on the Scottish tourism industry and result in job losses.

What can be done about the problem? First, the Scottish Executive must set a climate change target for Scotland that is broken down into

sectoral guidelines. Secondly, all major policies and projects should be CO₂ proofed.

Patrick Harvie: If all Executive policies were carbon proofed, would the member's party continue to support the expansion of air travel and oppose congestion charging?

Ms Byrne: I do not know where Patrick Harvie got the idea that we support the expansion of air travel. We have issues with that, to which I will come shortly. On congestion charging, there is a huge debate to be had; the issue for us is not the principle of congestion charging but the fact that it will hit the poorest people, who can least afford it. We need to look at the matter again. We do not oppose congestion charging in the sense that Patrick Harvie suggests, but we realise that, in Edinburgh, the policy will not favour people who earn the least and who have to travel to work. That is an issue that we can discuss at a later date. We are not being duplicitous in our approach.

Thirdly, there should be a major shift in transport resources towards public transport, cycling and walking, with an immediate cessation of unnecessary road-building projects such as the M74 extension. Fourthly, a national programme of tree planting should be initiated—I was pleased to hear the minister mention that. Fifthly, there should be an immediate cessation of building on flood plains and of drainage of wetlands.

Finally, the Scottish Executive must fund the renewables industry properly and not in a piecemeal way, as happens at present. The industry should receive funding that is comparable to that which was lavished on the nuclear industry and continues to be lavished on British Energy to this day. The renewables industry in Scotland should be publicly owned. We should not have huge wind farms set up throughout the country to the benefit of big building companies and private owners. We should consider where wind farms are to be placed and ensure that there is proper consultation with communities. Wind farms should be publicly funded to tackle climate change now for the future generations of Scotland.

I quote from a forthcoming report from WWF Scotland, which concludes:

"while the intentions of the Scottish Executive have been laudable, the outcomes suggest a lack of practical control or indeed any strategic overview of the actions in Scotland (and their economic and environmental cost) that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions to a greater or lesser degree."

The report also states:

"the Scottish Climate Change Programme was long on aspiration, but short on quantifiable targets."

I think that that sums up the current situation. I hope that the debate will move us forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches, which should be of six minutes.

16:25

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): I have been quite encouraged by the consensus among members that climate change is a reality. That is a good starting point. Perhaps members who are still present could go one step further by agreeing with me that we should congratulate Tony Blair on saying in September 2004 that the time for action is now. It is good that we have consensus.

We need to take some major, difficult and uncomfortable decisions. As Sarah Boyack said, those will become more uncomfortable the longer that we leave them—I had intended to refer more of her comments, but I see that she, too, has left the chamber—but there are also huge opportunities to be grasped as we make efforts to reduce greenhouse gases.

John Home Robertson said that climate change is a serious issue on which we need an honest and informed debate, but he started off his speech by name calling. He has some serious questions to address about what he thinks a serious debate is. However, let me ask him and the Conservatives why anyone would opt for nuclear power when we have such huge resources all round Scotland. It simply does not make sense.

In his so-called green speech in September 2004, Michael Howard said that nuclear power is expensive. That was some understatement. Everything to do with nuclear power is quoted in billions of pounds that trip off the tongue rather too easily. The Government plans to accept financial liability for up to £5 billion of British Energy's nuclear liabilities. British Nuclear Fuels Ltd's liabilities are £48 billion. The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's annual budget is £2 billion. Worst of all, Nirex will require £83 billion over the next 40 years not to dispose of but simply to manage our existing nuclear waste. Nirex believes that it could take anything from 25 to 40 years before a waste facility is in place.

What did Alex Johnstone mean when he said that we must not pass on heavy environmental costs to future generations? There is an unbelievable illogicality to his argument.

Alex Johnstone: Does the member accept that the next generation of nuclear power stations will use technology that will have the capability of allowing us to achieve our aims over the next 60 years, with only a 30 per cent increase in the total amount of nuclear waste for which we need to find a home?

Shiona Baird: But how much will that cost? We have technologies to create power without such waste.

Mr McGrigor: Will the member give way?

Shiona Baird: I must first proceed a bit further.

We need to imagine where the renewables industry would be if it had received just a small fraction of the billions of pounds of public money that have been wasted on nuclear power over the past half century.

Mr McGrigor rose—

Shiona Baird: I will give way to Jamie McGrigor.

Mr McGrigor: Does the member accept that Denmark, which relies very heavily on wind energy, has the most expensive electricity prices in Europe? Certainly, its electricity is more expensive than ours.

Shiona Baird: With nuclear energy, the full cost comes later. We should stop considering only the present costs of renewable energy. If we compare the total costs of renewable energy with those of nuclear energy, we are into a completely different ball game.

Let me address security of supply, on which Nora Radcliffe made some important points. Despite John Home Robertson's unfortunate arguments, one or both reactors in five of our eight nuclear power stations had to be shut down in 2002. During that year, Torness was shut for several months, but I do not remember any blackouts resulting from that.

The performance and innovation unit, which was set up by the Cabinet, said in 2002:

"Future risks to our security of supply of both gas and electricity will be *significantly* reduced by implementing an energy-efficiency programme and a diverse renewable strategy which can reduce our dependence on gas beyond 2020."

Amory Lovins of the Rocky Mountain Institute states:

"Each dollar invested in electric efficiency displaces nearly seven times as much carbon dioxide ... If climate change is the problem, nuclear power isn't the solution."

I could provide endless quotations from people in Government circles who dispute the value of nuclear power.

The other issue that we have not really addressed is transport, on which we must make a really difficult decision. In the 21st century, the Executive's decision to proceed with the Aberdeen western peripheral road makes a nonsense of its climate change intentions. If ever there was an opportunity to create a modern transport system that would be the envy of Europe—especially in

Aberdeen, which is the energy capital of Scotland and in which the intermediary technology institute for energy is starting work—this was it.

I end with two short sentences. Tony Blair said that we must act now. His adviser said:

"Action is affordable; inaction is not".

16:31

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): This has been an excellent debate, despite the fact that attendance has been fairly sparse. It has ranged from the minister's excellent opening speech, through Richard Lochhead's construction of the atmospheric border between Scotland and England and the nuclear debate, which generated a bit of heat, to excellent speeches by my colleague Nora Radcliffe and by Sarah Boyack, in particular.

I was tempted to say that, at first glance, Scotland is one of the few countries in the world that might benefit from climate change, because it will become a little warmer here. The downside is that we will not have Costa del Glasgow, because it is also becoming much wetter, as unfortunately we are all aware.

After the tsunami disaster, no one needs to be reminded of how devastating the power of extreme geological events can be. As many members have mentioned, in recent weeks there have also been fairly extreme floods in parts of Scotland, Carlisle and other places. Just as the tsunami disaster and the horrific images of death and destruction that accompanied it gave a powerful boost to the campaign for the improvement of aid and trade arrangements, in a slightly different context the same disaster has raised the profile of the potential harm that may be caused by global warming.

As other members have indicated, there is another relevant cloud on the horizon. That is brought to mind as we watch the celebrations for the reinauguration today of President George W Bush—Dubya. The single biggest issue for climate control is the failure of the United States to sign up to the Kyoto protocol or even to accept the principles that underlie it. I am bound to say that those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad. This is a serious issue that we must take into account. I hope that if the Prime Minister, who has made considerable effort on this front, has the influence that he claims to have with the President of the United States, he will expend some of the credit that he has earned over recent years to persuade the President to take effective action in this area. I do not have to say that I am not holding my breath.

In the United Kingdom, we are comfortably on course to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by

12.5 per cent by 2010. I pay tribute to the Scottish Executive and to my Liberal Democrat colleague Ross Finnie, in particular, for their work in accelerating action in Scotland. Because of Liberal Democrat commitments that we, along with our colleagues, have delivered through the partnership agreement, we have more renewable energy, more investment in recycling, tighter building regulations, more ambitious energy efficiency measures and better policies on flooding than exist in England.

Mr Ruskell: The member refers to his party colleagues. Does he agree with the Liberal Democrat leader, Charles Kennedy, who has described the impact that the UK Government has made on climate change as pitiful? Given that in Scotland we are meeting only a third of the targets that have been achieved in England and Wales, what does he think about the record of the Scottish Executive?

Robert Brown: I agree that we have a long way to go. The minister was candid about that. On any view, this is undoubtedly a staging post on the way to what we seek. However, when the Executive came into power it was starting from a very low basis. We have made considerable progress over the period since then.

The point that I was going to make is that that progress means that momentum is gathering and it becomes possible to build on what has been done so far to stimulate a further drive forward. The issue for today is whether we can step up that momentum in response to what I think is growing public support for stronger measures.

I will concentrate on a couple of points. I welcome very much the drive and commitment that have led to the delivery of renewable energy through wind farms. Wind farms will rightly continue to be important, but there is a lot to be said for producing energy near to where it is consumed. I hope that the Executive will be able to give more focus to a step change in the use of solar power and the use of domestic or factory-level wind power. Technology is developing in that sector and Scotland could be at the forefront of what is an immature market. More encouragement and support for housing associations and councils to take action that would show a proper sense of corporate responsibility as well as benefit their bottom line would make a big difference to our renewable energy production. Such developments are not as dramatic as the large wind farms, but they are appropriate and eminently sustainable.

The other issue is the potentially useful mechanism of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. We should take the time and the opportunity to review the operation of HECA at its current halfway stage to strengthen the targets and to consider how to address the fact that most local

authorities are failing to meet their targets under the act. I have raised the issue a number of times with the Executive and I have to say that it is one matter that could have more bureaucratic drive put behind it.

Sarah Boyack was entirely right to talk about how we deal with climate change now. Nevertheless, on flooding, I was pleased to hear—contrary to the comments made earlier by the Green party—Ross Finnie's commitment to preventing development on flood plains where there is a significant possibility of flooding. I have seen the result of the failure to do that in the east end of Glasgow—among other areas—where there were floods three years ago, so I hope that he sticks to that determination. The prevention of such development is a serious constraint that we ought to go along with.

We are making significant progress. As members have all said, this is a serious and important issue that we have to get right. We want there to be an acceleration of motion in this regard. I pay credit to, and look forward to further progress on, the actions being taken by the Scottish Executive in this context.

16:37

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I will raise an issue that is particularly relevant in my region of the Highlands and Islands: flooding and the impact of climate change on the sea.

As an Argyll man I am used to heavy rain, so let me start by saying that we have to be careful that we do not jump to conclusions on climate change. It would be easy to say that the terrible storms of last week, the flooding across large areas and the many landslips in the spring and early summer that are caused by heavy rain are the results of climate change. However, where I live on Loch Awe the water has never reached the level that it did in 1957. In the same region, we had a decrease of 30 per cent in rainfall in 2003.

Nevertheless, one only has to have seen pictures from last week's storms, or from areas where flooding is a regular problem, to be concerned about the impact that our climate can have on our lives. In some parts of the Highlands and Islands the start of heavy rain nowadays raises fears of rivers and burns rising and the possibility of homes and businesses being ruined.

The 2004 report by the Association of British Insurers on the future impact of climate change on flood defences and requirements notes that claims arising from storm and flood damages in the United Kingdom doubled, to £6 billion in the period from 1998 to 2003 compared to the previous five years. The association believes that damage

claims from river and coastal damage could increase from £1 billion a year now to £20 billion a year by 2080.

Last Friday, David McLetchie was in Moray to visit the Lhanbryde flood alleviation scheme, which is one of six schemes in Moray that are desperately needed to deal with flooding. The Lhanbryde scheme is close to completion and should be operational in April. However, it is the only scheme that has been started and Forres and Elgin are likely to have to endure the fear of flooding for some time to come. Although the other schemes are likely to happen, the issue of how Moray Council funds the schemes is on-going. The Scottish Executive has said that it will pay 80 per cent of the cost of the schemes, but that leaves Moray Council responsible for 20 per cent of £140 million, which is £28 million. Flood alleviation will be a problem for councils.

Alasdair Morgan: The member started by talking about areas where there seemed to be less water than there was decades ago and areas where there seemed to be more water than there was decades ago. I was expecting him to ask us to draw a conclusion from that and I wonder whether he will come to that.

Mr McGrigor: The conclusion is that some of these things have happened before. Only yesterday, I visited Lochgair in Argyll to see the site of the new sewerage system proposed by Scottish Water. Despite vocal opposition from local campaigners, Scottish Water ignored residents' concerns that the loch floods above the level of the planned new septic tank about every 10 years. Lochgair residents knew that the scheme was not suitable and told Scottish Water so, but they were ignored. Thankfully, yesterday Argyll and Bute Council rejected Scottish Water's application. Scottish Water's blasé attitude to the consequences of its actions could have led to local homes being flooded with sewage. That has happened in Campbeltown, Inverary and other areas in the west and is the kind of local disaster that could be avoided if action such as that which John Swinney suggested were taken.

During a recent Campbeltown flood, businesses had to shut and pump out water. Flats and a nursing home were cut off and people's livelihoods and homes were put at risk because a suitable scheme to deal with excess water was not in place.

Mr Swinney: Will the member give way?

Mr McGrigor: No.

Many local people have worked hard to supplement the natural beauty of their areas and improve tourism, but they cannot do that if they are not supported by Scottish Water. The hard work that has been done is being put at risk

because the Executive and Scottish Water are letting problems drag on while the debate continues about who pays for what, and when. The Executive said that the problem was Scottish Water's. It passed the buck, which I think is a shocking indictment of the Lib-Lab Executive's attitude to rural communities; it simply washes its hands of the issue and hopes it will go away, but it will not.

On our coastal defences, the tragic deaths in the Western Isles last week highlight why we should be concerned about the effects that climate change might be having on our seas. The inter-governmental panel on climate change predicts that the global mean sea level might increase by 79cm between 1990 and 2100, which could have devastating consequences for low-lying coastal areas, and that all coastal areas might experience severe weather conditions such as those of last week.

What we need from the Executive is adequate flood and storm damage prevention. We need more research into why flooding is becoming an increasing problem. We need to know whether it is the result of climate change or simply the poor planning of new housing developments—building on flood plains—and deforestation. We need to consider the root causes of flooding to determine the best way of dealing with it in future. We need the Executive to do more to allow Scotland to adapt to the new climate that we are experiencing. The Executive needs to ensure that sufficient warning procedures are in place for any future storms and that sufficient funding is available for flood prevention as well as for encouraging innovative solutions. We need action from the Executive, because, like the sewage in Campbeltown, the issue is not going to go away.

It is interesting that many of the landslips that took place in Scotland in the spring and early summer of last year were in areas from where the sheep stock had been removed. Perhaps stock removal should not be undertaken without considering landslips. The landslips might not have happened had the stock been left where it was.

16:43

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): We all acknowledge that climate change is perhaps the most overarching subject that we are ever going to debate. Tackling it will require revolutionary action in comparison with what we have done in the past. When we scrutinise what the Government is proposing, we do so in a spirit of co-operation to try to ensure that Scotland sets the example that the world needs us to set. We are one of the main polluters of the world because of our early development and our industrialised

society. We can set an example to help other countries. We will have to allow countries such as China and India to develop. The west, and more developed nations, will have to take much bigger hits in relation to how they operate. The central part of all this is that we must have a much more strategic approach that is strengthened from the centre. The minister proposed that, but I have yet to hear whether the sustainable development directorate and how climate change is dealt with within the Scottish Government at present is central to that. The Environment and Rural Development Committee has questioned the minister about that and we look forward to definitive answers.

Assessing practicable targets is a major part of what the minister has talked about. We have talked a lot about energy, but about two thirds of emissions are accounted for by transport and by heating for houses. I will concentrate on housing. I refer members to a report in *The Herald* today about Cathy Jamieson's visit to the Western Isles to see for herself the tragic devastation in the community in South Uist. The report tells us:

"The need for building regulations and transport systems to be adapted to the threat of storms and floods is being assessed by ministers prior to a major conference on the implications of climate change."

The Executive must recognise that the SNP has argued in the Parliament for far better standards of housing from an early stage and that many of the suggested measures were rejected. We do not have the Scandinavian level of housing standard, which we require, and we do not have the kind of housing that can resist the greater storms that will result from climate change. It will take a huge amount of work to achieve that.

Members of various parties have suggested that the cost of inaction would be enormous. The cost of action will also be considerable; however, unless we take that action and commit a lot more of our funds to tackling climate change, we will get behind. We will get to a stage at which Scotland is not setting an example to the world, but trailing. If, as the SNP amendment suggests, we get the mitigation measures right, we can sell that technology to other countries and use our advances to help other people. I would like the debate to move in that direction, and the SNP suggests that we need more powers to do that.

The Executive says that we need to improve the quality of data, which brings us back to the question of powers. On emissions data, the Executive's consultation document says:

"The determination of a Scottish target is also complicated by the fact that the Executive only has full leverage over areas devolved to it, with UK Government policy decisions having a significant influence over Scottish emissions."

The SNP stands for our having full powers to deal with all policy areas and we ask the Scottish Parliament to come with us in that direction.

Ross Finnie: Given the fact that we are a net exporter of energy, does Rob Gibson expect us to take powers to limit the amount of energy that is to be used by those who are resident in England?

Rob Gibson: We must try to be sensible about this and recognise the fact that, if we set an example, the Government in London will set targets for England. We must set targets for Scotland that set an example, and we must ensure that the way in which we produce energy can be sustained.

We should also ask people whether, if the need for energy continues to increase at the present rate, they and their families will be able to find ways in which to take responsibility for it in their homes. That is the major area that we have not discussed. There can be central regulation, but that is difficult. To reduce climate change we must get people on board. We must get businesses educating their workforces in saving energy and auditing how they use energy, so that they can reduce their consumption. We must get families to make decisions about what energy they use in the home and how that is approached.

Frankly, until we get that kind of lead from the Government, we will see the disintegration of society. We need a reduction in emissions not of 60 per cent, which is what Tony Blair has called for, but of 90 per cent in order that, in 20 years' time, we do not find that climate change has got out of hand, as some have predicted. We have 20 years in which to work and the SNP amendment suggests that we need a much stronger lead from the Government.

16:49

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Lewis Macdonald): As Robert Brown said, I have enjoyed what has been a good-quality debate. Ross Finnie opened by referring to climate change as one of the most serious threats facing our planet. It has been encouraging that, although one or two contributions wandered from the central theme, not a single one has taken issue with that point of view. There are issues to discuss and it is right that they should be the subject of vigorous debate.

Rob Gibson's speech reflected the views that were expressed by his party during the debate. The powers of the Parliament are not central to what we are discussing, which is what we need to do to tackle harmful emissions.

Richard Lochhead: Does the minister not appreciate that, if everyone in the chamber feels that the environment is a good enough issue to

devolve to Scotland because it is best handled here, and if there is consensus that energy policy is central to our environment policy, then the same rationale should be applied and energy policy should be decided in this Parliament?

Lewis Macdonald: If there is a consensus in this chamber it is that what matters is that emissions from Scotland are cut. It matters much less which Government is responsible for cutting them. As members of different parties have acknowledged, Britain is leading the way in global efforts to tackle climate change and show what action can be taken. Scotland is playing its part within that wider context.

This will be an important year for tackling climate change in Scotland, as well as across the UK and beyond. The Parliament is debating the subject and the Environment and Rural Development Committee is conducting an inquiry. Following our current consultation, the Scottish Executive and the UK Government will publish revised climate change programmes later this year. In the summer, as Mark Ruskell said, the G8 summit will come to Scotland and we are working hard with our partners on a programme of events to show why the decision to come here was a good one, and why it is an opportunity that Scotland should not miss to influence policy positively in the world community.

Mr Swinney: Before the minister leaves the subject of parliamentary inquiries, does he have anything further to say about the Government's response to the Enterprise and Culture Committee's inquiry—which has now been echoed by submissions from Friends of the Earth—about the importance of the Executive strengthening the national strategy for renewable energy? Will the strategy be made more diverse?

Lewis Macdonald: I certainly do have something to say about that and I will come to it in a few moments.

To look at the wider picture, we recognise the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and of monitoring how that is done, and we acknowledge our responsibility to ensure that those commitments are fulfilled. That is why we have issued our consultation and are seeking views from all parties as to how those targets will best be met.

The subject of powers was raised in the debate and it is important to say that, in the context of working with the UK Government and the EU, we already have more ambitious targets and are leading the way in some of the initiatives to promote action on climate change. One of those initiatives is renewables. We have a more ambitious renewables target thanks to our existing platform of hydroelectricity and superb natural resources. We also have better standards in

building regulation. The thermal insulation standards put in place since devolution have put us among the leaders in Europe. I welcome the clear and unambiguous support that we have heard from many in the chamber, including John Home Robertson and Alasdair Morgan, for progressing with wind as a key part of our renewable energy future and for diversifying the renewable energy that is offered.

Of course, we considered very carefully the views of the Enterprise and Culture Committee. We have a strategy for promoting renewable energy. It is set out very clearly in planning policy and guidelines. Whether they relate to wind or hydro or anything else, it is clear that renewable energy developments should be accommodated where the technology can operate efficiently and the impacts can be properly addressed.

Rob Gibson: Does the minister agree that the strategy is first-come, first-served and that that is its strength?

Lewis Macdonald: No. Decisions about the location of wind farms, and any other type of renewable development, are best taken at a local level, if possible, because local authorities and local communities are impacted on most and understand their areas best. Certainly, the last thing that we want to do, which would be incompatible with what we actually do, is to close down whole areas of the country to particular types of renewable development, while saying that we recognise that we need to expand the sector—as we clearly do.

There are other important points to be made when it comes to the question whether Scottish targets should simply reflect those set for the UK as a whole. It is important to recognise the differences between the emissions patterns in Scotland and those elsewhere. For example, the figures that were produced, I understand, by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre for Richard Lochhead are very different from those published by the European Environment Agency, which compare levels of carbon emissions per person across the European Union. Such differences in the figures highlight the difficulty of trying to compare like with like.

Mr Ruskell: I thank the minister for giving way.

On the critical target of reducing emissions by 60 per cent by 2050, does he acknowledge that, on our current rate of progress in Scotland, we will miss the target by a half?

Lewis Macdonald: No, I do not accept that. It is completely wrong to try to extrapolate levels of saving that have been achieved over the past 12 years to those of the coming 46 years. The point is that we and the UK Government are consulting in order to identify what needs to be done to increase the effectiveness of the measures to tackle

emissions. When we do that, we will see that the targets are achievable and that we must commit to them and find the best way to carry them forward.

A number of other issues were raised during the debate that challenged particular aspects of policy and asked how they related to the wider picture. Richard Lochhead questioned emissions from electricity generation. It is true that they are up by 10 per cent, but it is also true—and relevant—that something of the order of 17 per cent of Scotland's electricity generation is exported furth of Scotland. Because it is generated here it counts against our emissions targets. It is important, in comparing the figures and in deciding what targets we should set, to recognise such features and differences.

We are also promoting a range of renewable sources besides wind and hydro, which are the two current and significant contributing renewable resources. It is worth reminding members of the work that is being done by the forum for renewable energy development in Scotland and of the investments that are being made by the DTI, as well as by us, in order to support the development of, for example, marine energy and biomass.

On the suggestions that seeking 40 per cent of our energy supply from renewable sources is either too modest or unrealistic, I draw it to the attention of the parties who made those suggestions that the 40 per cent figure was reached on the basis of a wide-ranging consultation. The industry, and others who understand the opportunities and the limits, were very clear that although 40 per cent was ambitious, it was within the range of what could be achieved. It is on that basis that we have taken that figure forward.

It is also important to distinguish between motor vehicles and the roads on which they travel. I do not accept the view that because motor vehicles are an important contributor to carbon emissions we should simply freeze the road network and the transport infrastructure that we have today and that that would answer the problems. In fact, more efficient use of our roads, as well as of our other transport systems, is a critical part of tackling climate change. As for aviation, its impact on the environment cannot be dealt with by Scotland alone, but only on an international basis. We therefore support the UK Government's efforts to carry forward that issue during its presidency of the EU. We think that that is the right way to go. Like Sarah Boyack, we believe that energy efficiency is also critical to the efforts that we shall make.

I am grateful to members for the views that we have heard. I believe that they will contribute to the debate, and they will certainly be noted in our consultation.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-2269, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out an extension to the timetable for stage 1 completion of the Prohibition of Smoking in Regulated Areas (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the timetable for completion of consideration of the Prohibition of Smoking in Regulated Areas (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be extended to 30 December 2005.—[Ms Margaret Curran.]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item is consideration of business motion S2M-2270, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees (a) that the Justice 2 Committee reports to the Justice 1 Committee by 28 January 2005 in relation to the Solicitors (Scotland) Act 1980 (Compensation for Inadequate Professional Services) Order 2004 (SSI 2004/550); and (b) that the Justice 1 Committee reports to the Justice 2 Committee by 28 January 2005 in relation to the Title Conditions (Scotland) Act 2003 (Notice of Potential Liability for Costs) Amendment Order 2004 (SSI 2004/552).—[Ms Margaret Curran.]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S2M-2273, in the name of Jim Wallace, on the general principles of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: We are in the middle of a division.

Mr McNeil: I wanted to point out that the duplicate card that I received is not working, but please go ahead with the vote.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 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)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (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)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 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)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 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)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (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)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (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)
 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)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 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, 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)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)

ABSTENTIONS

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 110, Against 1, Abstentions 4.

I accepted Mr McNeil's intervention, so his position is on the parliamentary record.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-2275.1, in the name of Richard Lochhead, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2275, in the name of Ross Finnie, on climate change, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 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)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew, (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (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)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)

Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 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)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (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, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 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)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (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)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 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, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 28, Against 80, Abstentions 7.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S2M-2275.2, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2275, in the name of Ross Finnie, on climate change, 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)
 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)
 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)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 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)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (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, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (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)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)

Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 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)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (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) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 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)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 17, Against 97, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that amendment S2M-2275.3, in the name of Mark Ruskell, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2275, in the name of Ross Finnie, on climate change, 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)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (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)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 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)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (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, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 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)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (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)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 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, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 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)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 15, Against 79, Abstentions 20.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S2M-2275, in the name of Ross Finnie, on climate change, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.**FOR**

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (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)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (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)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 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)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (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)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 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)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 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)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 85, Against 21, Abstentions 9.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's review of its Scottish Climate Change Programme; notes the corresponding review of the UK Climate Change Programme and the Scottish contribution to this; supports the Executive's commitment to consider options for strengthening its strategic approach to climate change, its commitment to deliver improved greenhouse gas emissions data and its commitment to assess the practicability of introducing Scottish climate change targets, and agrees that climate change, as part of the Executive's commitment to sustainable development, is integral to policy-making in Scotland.

Robert Burns National Heritage Park

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-2114, in the name of Adam Ingram, on the Robert Burns national heritage park. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now, and ask those members who are leaving the chamber to do so as quickly and quietly as possible.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament deplores the impending disintegration of the Robert Burns National Heritage Park; questions the wisdom of the actions of South Ayrshire Council in withdrawing from the joint board responsible for the park and, in particular, in leasing out the park's visitor centre, the Tam O'Shanter Experience, to a commercial operator thereby eliminating a vital income stream for the upkeep of the Burns cottage and museum; expresses alarm at the formal withdrawal of an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund which, if granted, would have allowed rebuilding and modernisation of the Burns museum enabling proper storing, archiving and display, and considers that all interested parties should work together to ensure that flagship assets for Burns heritage tourism are properly developed in good time for the major events planned for the 2009 Homecoming Year, marking the 250th anniversary of the birth of the national bard.

17:09

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am grateful to the members who are taking the time to participate in this evening's debate on the legacy of Robert Burns. I am also grateful to the many members of the public in the public gallery who have travelled to Edinburgh from Ayrshire to listen to what I hope will be a constructive session.

Over the next week or two, many of us will meet again at the perhaps more convivial gatherings at which we will celebrate the life and works of our national bard and toast his immortal memory. This evening, we have the more sobering task of finding a way in which to ensure the long-term survival of his physical legacy in the form of buildings, manuscripts and artefacts. Our task is to preserve a unique treasure as a source of inspiration for future generations. If we forget Burns, or are careless with his legacy, we will diminish both as a nation and in what we can contribute to the world.

Given the iconic status of Robert Burns, it is almost unbelievable that 46 per cent—almost half—of the most important Burns material in collections throughout the country is kept in uncontrolled environments, which allow its condition to deteriorate. By far the most important single collection is held by the Burns cottage

museum in Alloway, where more than 35 per cent of all the surviving material that was used or created by Robert Burns is kept in truly primitive conditions. The problems include rainwater penetration through the roof and dilapidation. The situation is shameful. If anyone doubts the truth of that, I refer them to the report that was published last April by the distributed national Burns collections project.

Crucially, the report identifies that most of the collections are managed and funded independently; little or no support is received from the Executive or other national bodies. Surely the lesson to be learned from the failure of the Burns national heritage park is that local partnerships alone do not have the wherewithal in terms of expertise or finance to maintain and develop nationally important Burns heritage sites or collections.

I am not absolving local authorities of all responsibility—far from it. For example, South Ayrshire Council has allowed a £200,000 backlog of repairs to the auld kirk Alloway to build up. However, the Executive must have realised some years ago that the park was not sustainable under the joint board of local partners. Similarly, the never-ending saga of applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund should have awakened ministers and officials to the reality that a new museum was not in the offing in the foreseeable future. We are talking about the same Executive that declared three years ago that Burns heritage would be at the heart of its tourism development strategy and which is pinning such hopes on the 2009 year of homecoming—the 250th anniversary of the birth of Burns.

That said, I do not want to descend into the blame game. There is still time to turn things around, although there is no time to lose, and I challenge the Executive to deliver on its rhetoric. The way forward has been mapped out by key players in the tourism and heritage fields. Professor John Lennon at Glasgow Caledonian University's Moffat centre, whom the Executive commissioned to come up with an action plan for 2009, has already identified a lack of central focus that could and should be addressed. That can be done if the conservation and management issues at the national heritage park are tackled immediately.

In its final road-map report, the national Burns collections project recommends that the Executive and other national bodies should provide the long-term funding to sustain the Burns collections and should support the development of capital bids.

Most important, the National Trust for Scotland has expressed an interest not only in taking over the park, but in turning it into a national hub for Burns heritage that would co-ordinate the

fragmented national collections. Its vision is that Alloway would form the gateway to a tourism trail that would cover Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway, which would give people the opportunity to experience a coherent single-ticket pilgrimage. At long last, we have an exciting and realistic proposition that would allow the massive potential of Burns heritage and tourism to be fully realised.

I hope and trust that the Executive will rise to the challenge. Ministers will need to take a hands-on approach to facilitating the handover of control of the heritage park from the local partners to the National Trust for Scotland. They will also need to make a significant long-term financial commitment, so that our priceless Burns heritage can be cherished and promoted in a way that will be a constant source of pride for Scotland. The immortal memory of Robert Burns deserves nothing less.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. A considerable number of members want to speak, so I will keep them to a tight four minutes.

17:15

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): I congratulate Adam Ingram on securing the debate. As an Ayrshire member of the Parliament, I am delighted to participate.

Burns has different meanings for different people and generates different levels of interest, which can range from attending a Burns supper once a year to being an expert on all things Burns. However, we are all concerned about the conservation of the many artefacts and buildings that are associated with the bard's life. Adam Ingram's motion considers in particular the Burns national heritage park, but the buildings in the park cannot be singled out from all the other buildings that are connected with Ayrshire's Burns heritage. Currently, each of the three Ayrshire councils is responsible for the development and conservation of its Burns heritage. I hope that colleagues will forgive me if I concentrate on the area within East Ayrshire Council's boundaries, which contains many associations with Burns's life.

Mossgiel farm, where the bard produced some of his best-known works, is in private ownership and is occupied by a tenant farmer. The Mauchline Burns Club is interested in developing the farm as part of a Burns trail, thereby securing an important building that was home to Burns for much of his life. Another place that has associations with Burns is Poosie Nansie's in Mauchline, where some of us recently enjoyed a drink and where Burns regularly met his cronies to discuss and toast the events of the day. There is also

Mauchline kirkyard, where many of Burns's cronies were laid to rest.

Members might ask why I am talking about Mauchline. I declare an interest: my daughter has deserted Kilmarnock to make her home in Mauchline. The area is in my colleague Cathy Jamieson's constituency and she and her Westminster colleagues are seeking the establishment of an important Burns trail that will include all the buildings in the Mauchline area that are associated with Burns.

East Ayrshire Council manages the accommodation that is provided for the Robert Burns World Federation at the Dean castle in Kilmarnock and a significant Burns collection, which includes a copy of the Kilmarnock edition and other artefacts that are associated with Burns's life in Mauchline and Kilmarnock. That is a significant commitment for the council, which must also deal with the destruction by fire of the Burns monument in Kay park in Kilmarnock, which happened on Friday 14 November 2004. The monument was built in 1879 at a cost of £2,893—I hope that Alex Neil will be able to convert that into today's figures—which was raised by public subscription. The monument was restored in 1990 at a cost of £223,000, but the building remained in a poor condition and there was no public access to it. The council advised me today that Historic Scotland has agreed to participate on a project board to determine the future of what remains of the monument. For once, I pay tribute to Historic Scotland.

It should not fall to individual local authorities, trusts or organisations to work in isolation to protect our heritage. The current mishmash is demonstrated by Ayrshire and Arran Tourist Board's failure to finalise a date for the Burns an' a' that festival, which usually takes place in May or June—only four or five months away.

For me, that says it all. Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire, the three local authorities and local, national and worldwide Burns organisations all have a part to play in developing the strategic objectives to deliver a Burns triangle to maximise the assets that we have in Ayrshire and Dumfries. Let us move forward and put something in place that provides an appropriate homecoming in 2009.

17:20

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Adam Ingram on obtaining the debate and on the work that he and others have undertaken on the project. I declare an interest: I live in Ayr, within a mile or so of the Burns cottage. Margaret Jamieson is absolutely right that the Burns facilities that we are talking about are not only in Ayr, but in many other parts of Ayrshire,

such as the statues of Burns in many towns, the works at Mauchline and the sites in Kilmarnock that she mentioned. Even when one goes further afield, into Dumfries or up the High Street in Edinburgh, Burns is all around.

We should be particularly proud of Burns, not just because he is our national bard, but because he is celebrated in Ayrshire, Scotland and the world over. The Burns heritage in all its forms is a huge asset for Scotland, not just within our boundaries, but internationally. Which other national bard of any country has statues of him or her in places as far away as Melbourne, parts of Canada and the United States? Burns suppers are held all over the world, in places as far apart as Russia, South America and Japan, as well as in many other countries. The English national bard, Shakespeare, was a great man and writer, but who has ever heard of a Shakespeare supper anywhere in the world? There are none. We must pay tribute not just to Burns the poet, the patriot, the internationalist, the satirist and the man, but to Scotland, for producing someone of that genius and talent. We should not let that go to waste.

Next Tuesday, it will be 246 years since our national bard was born in a wee cottage in the village of Alloway, just outside Ayr. In a few years, in 2009, we will celebrate the 250th anniversary of Burns's birth. By the time we get to 2009, we should not be having debates such as this; we should be out there celebrating what has been achieved between now and then, not just in making the Burns cottage and the national park in Ayr a great magnet for international visitors to Scotland, but in linking together all the other facilities, as Margaret Jamieson mentioned.

We should be proud of the Burns heritage. However, it is not enough just to be proud of it and to promote it; we must now invest in it heavily. The issue is one on which people from across parties, boundaries and counties and from every segment of society in Scotland can join forces. Let us make 2009 not only a year that we will not forget, but one that the world will not forget.

17:24

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I congratulate Adam Ingram on securing the debate on the Burns national heritage park. I welcome the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport's announcement yesterday of interim funding for the park and her declaration of commitment and intent regarding securing the future for the Burns heritage in Ayrshire. Adam Ingram's motion has captured the mood of unease and concern about the matter in Ayr, Ayrshire and the west of Scotland. Last week, Peter Watson, the chairman of Alloway and Doonfoot community council, lodged an e-petition expressing concern about the future of our Burns

heritage. I welcome him and others from Alloway here tonight.

The future of the Burns national heritage park has dominated the local press for months. Although the park is not located in my constituency, its influence on and importance to the town of Ayr cannot be overstated. Concern has been widely expressed by all sectors of the community at the apparent lack of focus; the feeling is that the future of the park has been too big a problem to solve locally. Concerns have also been expressed at the possibility of loved and valuable Burns artefacts being removed to Edinburgh or elsewhere. With apologies to east coast colleagues, I believe that the artefacts that are located in Ayrshire must remain there.

However, the mood in Ayr and Ayrshire is far from one of doom and gloom over Burns. As members will be aware, at this time of year we are girding our loins for the annual round of Burns suppers. The annual celebration is now a worldwide event. We are also looking forward to the fourth Burns festival in the spring, although we do not know the dates yet.

Everyone in Ayrshire knows of Burns's importance as a poetic genius and iconic tourist attraction. However, although his poetry, wit and music are beyond compare or reproach, his potential to attract tourists to Ayrshire has not yet been realised locally or nationally. A huge opportunity now exists for a new beginning. I am optimistic that, with the help of Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire, the National Trust for Scotland, Historic Scotland, the national lottery and South Ayrshire Council, Patricia Ferguson will, because of her close interest in the matter, put together a package that secures the Burns national heritage park and develops its potential for tourism.

Access to Ayrshire has never been easier for visitors, with Ryanair providing low-cost flights to and from Prestwick, which is Scotland's fastest-growing airport. The A77 upgrade is at last nearing completion, putting Ayr within half an hour's travelling time from Glasgow and the central belt.

Good new ideas are also coming to the fore from the National Trust for Scotland, which is developing a Burns trail that links under a single ticket access to all the sites dedicated to the bard in Ayrshire, Dumfriesshire and Kirkcudbrightshire. Unquestionably, such an approach has benefited whisky and tourism in the north-east; it is an obvious and welcome idea for the south-west. Also new and welcome are the enthusiasm and professionalism that the National Trust for Scotland can bring to the situation.

I look forward to Burns's fame and influence spreading still further round the globe. I also look forward to the minister's response to the debate, in

which I hope she will flesh out her proposals for securing and developing Ayrshire's greatest literary and tourism asset.

17:28

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, am pleased that Adam Ingram has secured the debate because, as Margaret Jamieson said, it allows us to examine the wider aspects of Burns's legacy. We now have, for example, the annual Burns festival, which is funded by the tourist board and grants from Ayrshire's councils and Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire.

I do not know the financial ins and outs of the situation and whether the festival has been financially viable or loss leading in its infant years. I am not convinced that the best people for the job are running the show—that is another debate—but I am convinced that Ayrshire should, on behalf of Scotland, be promoting Robert Burns and his work in every way possible. The Burns festival is truly important. We should capitalise on it and build on it. In Ayrshire and in Scotland as a whole, we should show pride in everything related to our national bard.

Alex Neil mentioned Shakespeare, who is England's national bard. Shakespeare's birthplace and places associated with his legacy are never neglected or allowed to fall into disrepair—there is no argument about that. We have to show pride in Burns, his poetry, his philosophy, his egalitarianism and his sterling service to our culture in collecting and promoting traditional song.

Kilmarnock, which is part of the area that I represent, is the birthplace of the first edition of Burns's poetry, which is a wonderful legacy for the town. As Margaret Jamieson said, public subscription built the Burns monument in Kay park in Kilmarnock in 1879. Sadly, the monument was neglected over the years and in 2004 was destroyed by fire. The monument must be saved. East Ayrshire Council has a duty to save it on behalf of the people of Kilmarnock.

The Scottish Executive has a duty to assist if required, through whatever means possible, in preserving and promoting the heritage of Scotland's national bard on behalf of the people of Scotland. If the will is there, the means can be found. I look forward to hearing what Historic Scotland's plans are. What is not needed is for the Burns monument merely to be patched and repaired and preserved as a shell.

I do not believe that Robert Burns would have wanted sterile monuments to be created in his honour. I think that the man would truly have appreciated a focal point and a centre for the living, breathing and wonderful culture of our

country, to which he contributed in his time. That can be done. People and local groups have the knowledge, the capability and the experience to realise such an ambition. For example, the highly respected and successful Living Tradition in Kilmarnock has contacts all over the country and all over the world and its staff have a practically infinite knowledge of traditional cultures and how they are best preserved and promoted. We should be listening to those people, rather than always seeking top-down solutions.

Robert Burns was a man of the people. His legacy is maintained by folk from all walks of life. I ask both East Ayrshire Council and the Scottish Executive not to be "wee, sleeket, cowran tim'rous" beasts, but to lead on the project to restore the Burns monument in Kay park, first through a commitment to save it and, secondly, by listening to those people who can provide ideas and enthusiasm for its future use and its place on the Ayrshire Burns trail.

17:31

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I join other members in congratulating Adam Ingram on bringing the debate to the Parliament. In some ways, I see the issue as a test of the Parliament. Six weeks ago, a local community organised a public meeting and gathered together a full hall overflowing with people. Adam Ingram became involved and lodged a motion. As a member of the local community council told me at a briefing, the community got angry—and here we are, six weeks later, debating the issue in the Parliament.

We now have to prove that we, as a Parliament, can answer that community. We must not just save our Burns heritage, but grow it. Why did that community get angry? It got angry because of the failed trusteeship of the Burns visitor centre and a bad decision by South Ayrshire Council to lease out the Tam o' Shanter experience, as well as a complete failure to manage commercially a visitor centre and attraction based on the homelands of Scotland's—and possibly the world's—best-known and most famous poet.

We must now move on. I very much welcome the interest that is being shown by the National Trust for Scotland. I hope that that interest can be encouraged and that the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport and we, as individual members, can work with that body.

As many members know, I would like to go further in celebrating Burns. I would like Burns to be endorsed as the provider of a Scottish national anthem. I have lodged a motion to celebrate "A Man's a Man for a' that", with which the Scottish Parliament reopened in 1999. I have had, much to my surprise, a huge mailbag on the issue. As a

result of that, and as a result of the debate in the newspapers, I would rather like "Auld lang syne" to be added to the pot for consideration.

Burns has given us a magnificent heritage. If we travel abroad and ask foreigners about Scotland, the three icons that will come across are kilts, bagpipes and Burns. We have to build on that. Burns is a national treasure and we must celebrate and build on that heritage. I underline the importance of the national Burns collection, about which we heard earlier, as a part of that.

We must build Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway as the land of Burns, to celebrate the culture of the west of Scotland and to grow rural communities that have a high dependence on tourism for extra income. The Executive needs to make a great deal more effort in that regard.

I started by saying that the issue was a test of the Parliament. Adam Ingram has brought the matter to the minister's attention; I ask her to ensure that, in particular, the initiative relating to the National Trust for Scotland succeeds.

17:35

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I welcome the debate and the minister's announcement, to which we have heard reference. I hope that she can today make a fuller statement along the same lines. I particularly welcome the excellent report that was produced by the national Burns collection, which lays out the subject well and points the way ahead. I hope that we can do something along the lines that it recommends.

Quite clearly, Burns is a major neglected asset in Scotland. There is a network of enthusiasts around the world, as others have said, in which there is tremendous potential. He is, arguably, the world's greatest lyric songwriter and should be commemorated as such around the world. There is an analogy to be made with golf, which was an incredibly neglected Scottish asset until more effort was made recently to market it. It might appear curious to compare Burns with golf, but they are both popular around the world and can make Scotland an attractive destination for people.

Our task is to harness the local enthusiasm behind all the small local museums and so on, especially in Ayrshire and the surrounding counties, and to link it with the technical skills of marketing, modern museum management and conservation in one big organised museum. The university of the Highlands and Islands is scattered all over the Highlands and Islands; similarly, there could be a Burns museum that was scattered all over the west of Scotland under one organisation, which would ensure co-ordination and that people could enjoy all the resources in a well-managed way. I hope that the National Trust

for Scotland can offer the necessary leadership and that the enthusiasm of Burns organisations can be brought together as I have described. I hope that the minister can lead the way in that and, when necessary, knock heads together; Scots are not always brilliant at co-operating with one another.

There is a wider issue about small museums, with which our system does not deal well. We can perhaps learn lessons that would enable us to help other small industrial and cultural museums that could benefit from modern display techniques and information technology systems.

We have to tackle education. From speaking to people in the folk-song arena, I know that they are disappointed by the lack of singing of Burns's songs in schools and that they are saddened by the ignorance of his songs that is displayed by many teachers. We have to tackle that issue because it is a basic one.

We should learn from two films: "The Sound of Music" and "Braveheart". Salzburg has had a huge tourism industry based on Mozart, but that industry is becoming more firmly based on "The Sound of Music", which has been incredibly successful at promoting Salzburg and music. "Braveheart" is the most awful film in terms of history, but it has had a huge impact around the world and has brought a great deal of publicity to Scotland. What about making a really good musical film starring somebody as Burns and using Burns's songs and music? If we launched that at the right time and filmed it in Ayrshire—rather than in Ireland, as was the case with "Braveheart"—we could really develop something.

John Scott: Will the member take an intervention?

Donald Gorrie: I am sorry, but I am out of time.

17:39

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I should declare interests; I am a member of the committee of the Scottish Parliament Burns club number 1, as we are now called, and I was brought up in Alloway. I say to John Scott that, in this east-coast MSP, he has an ally in his attempt to repatriate the works of Burns to Ayrshire. He has my support in that effort.

I congratulate Adam Ingram on bringing the debate to Parliament. The number of members who have stayed behind for the debate is testament to the strength of feeling across the parties. We have probably had debates to celebrate the work of Burns in January every year, but this is the first time that we have had a responsibility to do something to ensure that his heritage is promoted. We can do that by ensuring

that the Robert Burns national heritage park has the support that it needs.

I regard Burns as a lens through which we see Scotland. He gives us a window on the past and he gives us values as a touchstone for the present, but he also gives us an opportunity for growing our future. We need to make sure that we bring together the cultural strands, the historic strands and the economic strands to make the most of that valuable heritage. Given the terms of the motion, the debate is about stewardship. Burns's heritage is not just for Scotland or for those of us from Ayrshire who are passionate about and proud of him. Burns's work is world heritage, and our duty in protecting and promoting Burns involves stewardship of that heritage. Adam Ingram made the point that people from all over the world make pilgrimages to Ayrshire. When I was a child, I caught my bus to school from outside Burns's cottage and I saw at first hand the attendance there of people from all around the world who were deeply passionate about Burns. We must also represent their concerns.

I reflect on the point that Donald Gorrie made about films. How many films do we know of that include the song "Auld lang syne"? I am reminded of "When Harry Met Sally" because the song is sung at the end of that film, although the film is probably also remembered for other parts. There are far more statues and monuments to Burns than to any other figure in world history, and if the world knew the position that we face as far as his heritage is concerned, it would be appalled. For that reason, we should look to see what can be done. On protection of Burns's work, I stress that it is not just his songs and poetry that contribute so much to our heritage, but his written documents and manuscripts.

I finish on the opportunity for the future. Burns is exciting and his work attracts enthusiasm in Scotland and all around the world. If we can get our act together to address the difficult issues of local and national stewardship, we will do Scotland proud and make sure that the Scottish Parliament does what the people expect it to do: to speak up for and stand up for Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Mr McGrigor, I am minded to accept a motion without notice to extend the meeting for 15 minutes.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by 15 minutes.—[*Phil Gallie.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:43

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I congratulate Mr Ingram on securing this

important debate on the future of the Robert Burns national heritage park. Robert Burns is probably Scotland's most important cultural figure and his lasting impact can be clearly seen in the celebration of his life that takes place annually on 25 January. Alex Neil was quite correct to say that the celebrations are not restricted to Scotland; I know of Scots from Moscow to Timbuktu who have recited Burns and worn kilts—probably incorrectly, but they are flying the flag for Scotland.

Burns's verses have been sung down the centuries and they speak directly to each generation. His grasp of human nature never fades or dates. Burns is contemporary to each generation and probably always will be. Shakespeare also had that gift, but Burns was by far the better songwriter.

We would all agree that the situation that Mr Ingram outlined is not only undesirable, but a disgrace. However, we also know that the situation is all too common in Scotland: cash-strapped local authorities are snowed under with underfunded Executive initiatives and the resulting ring fencing of much of local authorities' budgets leaves them with little to spend at their own discretion. With insufficient money being allocated from the centre to cover the Executive's policies, local projects end up being cut.

Local authorities have a responsibility for the preservation of their local heritage. In the case of the Robert Burns national heritage park, South Ayrshire Council appears to have experienced problems in fulfilling that part of its remit, but I am not sure that any of the current participants should shoulder the blame. We are seeing important parts of our heritage crumble away for want of funds. The matter urgently needs to be addressed, but the Executive has yet again placed more costs on local authorities in the past year without providing extra funding. That can lead only to further above-inflation council tax rises.

I am encouraged that the minister met representatives of the National Trust for Scotland today to discuss the possible involvement of the National Trust in a plan to secure the long-term future of the Burns national heritage park. The National Trust has some interesting ideas for the creation of a national Burns centre and a Burns trail, which could attract increased numbers of visitors to Alloway and south-west Scotland. I sincerely hope that all those who are involved in the project can work together to make that vision a reality in time for 2009, which will be the 250th anniversary of Robert Burns's birth.

The current situation whereby our national poet's home and an important collection of his works are funded piecemeal by hand-to-mouth donations should not be allowed to continue. It is a disgrace that we are seeing the slow decline of

such an important part of our cultural heritage. What, I wonder, does VisitScotland think about the situation? As Chris Ballance rightly pointed out, Burns should be a tourist treasure. We must remember that Burns was part of the Scottish enlightenment—that wonderfully exciting time when an explosion of new thought and culture shaped not only Scotland but much of the rest of the world. Burns played his part in the transformation of Scotland from one of Europe's poorest nations to one whose thoughts shaped the future of our modern world.

Today, we stand at a similar crossroads. We should look to the genius of Burns and that of his contemporaries, such as David Hume and Adam Smith, to inspire us as they inspired so many people in the past. The preservation of Burns's heritage is our responsibility and duty. We must not fail the memory of this cultural giant.

17:47

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): I congratulate Adam Ingram on securing the debate.

Today's announcement of a £50,000 grant from the Scottish Executive is to be welcomed as a short-term solution, but it is vital that we find long-term solutions in order to secure the future of the Burns national heritage park. I welcome the minister's plans to meet the National Trust for Scotland and South Ayrshire Council and I hope that those meetings will be productive.

As an Ayrshire woman who lives in the heart of Burns country, and as a long-time admirer of his works, I find the threat to the Burns heritage park to be an extremely bleak situation. Our national bard is revered the world over, yet we in Scotland struggle to maintain his heritage. We fail to promote Burns heritage and thereby to secure and to build our tourism industry in Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway, yet many of us will attend Burns suppers over the next few weeks, at which we will celebrate his life and work with the help of a little dram or two.

I wonder what Burns would say about all that. What would he say about today's parliamentary debate on the state of his heritage? I do not mean to accuse anyone of being a murderer, but these are the lines that come to my mind:

"Ye hypocrites! are these your pranks?
To murder men and give God thanks!
Desist, for shame!—proceed no further;
God won't accept your thanks for MURDER!"

There has certainly been some hypocrisy not only from members in the chamber but from all those who say that they value Burns but have not been prepared to get his heritage sorted out and

maintained. I hope that members will accept those lines in the spirit that was intended.

With some vision, we can find the means to secure both the Robert Burns national heritage park and the Burns monument in Kilmarnock's Kay park. Even before the fire, the monument was sitting in a state of decay and decline, with dead pigeons and pigeon droppings inside it. Let us have vision about what we could do with that. As Linda Fabiani said, let us not just leave it as a monument but come up with a vision for it. We need a purpose for such buildings, and we need more of them across Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway. Let us do our best to get back our heritage.

I congratulate North Ayrshire Council—I do not often do that—on instigating a superb historic tour in Irvine. It starts at the fantastic Irvine Burns Club and Museum, which is often visited by our schoolchildren and hosts poetry readings and all sorts of other events. It also has some wonderful Burns artefacts. Following a presentation about Burns at the museum, the walk takes people around the town to other areas. That is vision.

We need to join up the whole Burns experience and to include Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway—not just for the sake of the important tourism industry, but for the sake of our children and future generations, who have the right to enjoy our bard and his heritage. I hope that we can move forward and secure that today.

17:50

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): We all seem to have connections with Alloway. My sister lives about two minutes' walk from Burns cottage in the village. One very wet day, we strolled around the cottage yet another time. I was appalled to see the condition in which artefacts such as the family Bible were kept. Various manuscripts had been put in primitive cases in very damp conditions. Security was also casual. These are world treasures, rather than treasures just for Ayrshire or Scotland.

I am glad that at the 11th hour something dramatic is to be done to rescue the artefacts. However, that is not the only thing that we need to do about Burns's heritage. His true heritage is in the words of his poems and songs. He took great trouble to rescue melodies that would otherwise have been lost to the world for ever, putting words to them that emblazoned them on our hearts. I refer to songs such as "Ae Fond Kiss", with its wonderful pathos, "Scots, wha hae" and, of course, "Auld Lang Syne". However, study of Burns is not mandatory in our school curriculum, which is currently under review. I hope that it will become mandatory for pupils as a result of the

review. I remember that, at school, I knew Shakespeare by heart, but we did Burns only in the week before the 25th and at no other time. I think that that continues, and it must change.

The man was not only a poet, but a philosopher. Why was his song "For a' that and a' that" sung at the opening of the Parliament in 1999? It was sung because it spoke of equality. There were some uncomfortable words in there for our monarchical visitors that day. Burns also saw hypocrisy to the core in "Holy Willie's Prayer"; his words are still as true now.

The words and songs of Burns unite communities small and large. Like many members, I speak at a lot of Burns suppers. Women are in high demand, but the reply to the toast to the lasses can get a bit tedious. The best Burns supper that I have ever attended was at a wee community at Wanlockhead. It was a moonlit winter's night, with snow piled up at the sides of the road. When I drove in, I could not see a soul and the village was deserted. I thought that the Martians had landed. With my typical lack of direction, it took me ages to find the village hall. However, when I opened the door, I found that everyone was there. There were banners everywhere and we had a wonderful evening. The whole community was drawn together by Burns.

In the same way, when we reach hogmanay, communities the world over are drawn together. The one man who does that is a Scotsman—Robert Burns. We have let his heritage dry up, disintegrate, get damp and be distributed. We have been casual about this man who has the status around the world of a colossus in culture. I am glad that the Parliament intends to do something about that. Chris Ballance was right to say that, if we can create something that is worthy of the heritage of Burns and of Scotland, the Parliament will have done one grand job.

17:54

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):

I thank Adam Ingram for bringing this topic to the Parliament. One of the biggest disappointments of this prestigious and expensive Parliament building is the sad fact that, so far, I have yet to see a reference or tribute to Rabbin Burns anywhere on the campus.

I asked the question of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body at a meeting of the Finance Committee and Paul Grice assured me that there is an alcove or suchlike within the perimeter wall that pays tribute to our national bard. To date, I have yet to locate that item. That speaks volumes for the cavalier fashion in which those in charge of building the place have dismissed the most famous Scot of all times—

Robert Burns. Surely out of a ludicrous budget of £431 million a statue of Burns should have been a main feature in the entrance to this place. No; they opted for acres of cold, bare concrete throughout the complex—that form of art extends even to a whole bare wall in the First Minister's private office.

However, more than £70,000 was spent on an inscription that is engraved in granite outside the Donald Dewar room. The inscription is attributed to John P Mackintosh, an MP in the Lothians in the 1960s. It states:

"People in Scotland want a degree of government for themselves. It is not beyond the wit of man to devise the institutions to meet these demands."

That is beautiful rhetoric, but I do not think that it will be translated into 47 different languages. Any quotation from the bard would have upgraded this place and they are available in abundance from Scotland's literary genius.

Rozelle House, which is close to the Burns cottage, currently hosts huge murals by Goudie, which depict images taken from Burns's epic "Tam o' Shanter". Those fabulous murals, or even reproductions of them, could have covered large, bare areas of concrete in Holyrood. Those visual masterpieces would have paid homage to our bard's genius. The paintings were purchased by Tom Hunter and given to South Ayrshire Council. A visit to Rozelle House to view the paintings is a must for any Burns enthusiast.

On Monday this week, I again visited the Burns cottage; I was en route to my caravan down at the Heads of Ayr. I knew that Adam Ingram had secured this debate, so I thought that it would be fitting to get a first-hand update on the condition of this national treasure. I found it rewarding to be able to feel the affinity with our bard that can be experienced by getting so close to his birthplace.

Last year, 78,000 people visited the cottage, but I was assured that if the local councils had not removed most of the signs that direct people to it, the figure could easily have been in excess of 100,000, as it regularly was before 9/11. It is reckoned that Americans who drive into Ayr all too often fail to locate Burns's birthplace. Signs are affordable and are necessary for basic marketing.

I was told that lottery funding had not been forthcoming recently and that, unless urgent maintenance and renovations are carried out soon, much of the building could fall into a state of disrepair; it is already showing early signs of severe neglect and it could be lost to posterity. I know that £50,000 has been awarded by the Executive towards the cost of repairing the Burns heritage park, but in reality that would not even cover the cost of rethatching the cottage.

I call upon the Executive to loosen its purse-strings and to restore the Burns cottage to as near its original form as is possible. It should market the site and make the National Trust for Scotland responsible for its future upkeep. Only then will this most important tribute to Scotland's national bard remain an integral part of Scotland's national pride.

17:59

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Given the pressures from outside the Parliament, I feel that it is necessary to declare an interest: about 45 years ago, I joined the freemasons, as Robert Burns did. I would hate to think that I speak in the debate in such a way that someone would accuse me of bias.

I agree with almost every statement that has been made in the debate. I perhaps have one slight difference with Margaret Jamieson. She emphasised the importance of the heritage trail. In my view, when we think of Burns, there can be no more important place in the world than the auld clay biggin in Alloway. That is his birthplace and, in the eyes of many in the world, it is the heart of Burns.

I congratulate Adam Ingram on securing the debate and on the wording of his motion, which tells the story. Perhaps uniquely in the chamber, I am one of the murderers to whom Rosemary Byrne referred, because between 1992 and 1997 I was a member of the Burns Trust through my election as member of Parliament for Ayr. At that time, we had a vision of seeing the heritage park grow. I pay tribute to Gibson McDonald and the old Kyle and Carrick District Council, which put the heritage park together, because it knew about the problems that the trust had in maintaining Burns's cottage and the artefacts there. It needed the heritage park and, above all, the Tam o' Shanter experience to provide the funds to allow the cottage to thrive and develop into the future.

Money was spent at that time. There was a major renovation at the beginning of that period. There was a dispute about the fact that the cottage was painted in traditional colours, which led to local disapproval, but that was an aspect of heritage that had to be committed to in order to obtain the funds to allow the cottage to be maintained.

I want the cottage to develop and thrive in the future. I welcome the interest in it that Patricia Ferguson registered today. The trust cannot deliver any more; we need the heritage park to be taken over by the National Trust for Scotland. It is important to maintain the Tam o' Shanter experience in the heritage park, which would provide the trust with an element of funding.

I refer back to the period 1992 to 1997. I pay tribute to Douglas Hemming, who put a lot of work into securing the artefacts in the Burns cottage. He, like Donald Gorrie, acknowledged the importance of technology in preserving those artefacts and prepared plans for that. In more recent times, national lottery funding has been a way of providing the capital. We need the revenue and must allow the national lottery to contribute to provide what is needed on the heritage site to sustain it well into the future.

18:03

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Adam Ingram not only on securing the debate, in which I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak, but on the motion, which I was pleased to sign. The minister has had the benefit of hearing tonight's debate and of course she was in the chair as Deputy Presiding Officer in the Parliament's first debate on Burns's legacy, which I instigated. However, I do not think that this debate will conclude in the way that that one did, when our former colleague Dorothy-Grace Elder presented the Deputy Presiding Officer with a cake.

I have a number of points to make, the first of which will come as no surprise. The importance of Dumfries and Galloway to the Burns legacy must always be stated. To paraphrase the well-known saying in Dumfries, Burns may have been born in Ayr, but we have still got him in Dumfries. When we consider the Burns legacy, we must not only include Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway, but consider his contribution throughout Scotland. It is important to state that point.

It is easy for Opposition members to say glibly that things must be taken forward in a certain way, but we must all recognise the significant challenges in bringing together the many interests involved in the Burns movement, which, unfortunately, are not always in harmony. To my mind, nothing represents that more than the failed attempt in 1996 to have a festival to mark the anniversary of Burns's death. That is not to say that bringing together the interests is not worth doing; in fact, those events showed that it is extremely worth doing, as all the members who have spoken in the debate recognise.

We must also understand that nowadays the visitor is looking for a visitor experience. Suggesting that we can just package things as they have always been packaged will not take us forward.

Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab): I recognise David Mundell's long-standing interest, which I share, in developments in this area. We have heard a lot about monuments, artefacts,

statues and suchlike. Does he agree that, important as those are, they are not as important as the vision to which Rosemary Byrne referred? Does he further agree that, for Burns's memory to be preserved, we must appeal to a new generation of Burns enthusiasts and get them as enthused as he and I—and other members—have been, which means approaching the subject from a different direction?

David Mundell: I agree with Allan Wilson on that point. We must seek to make Burns a much more living experience in order to engage people. That is not to discount the artefacts, so many of which rest in the Globe Inn in Dumfries—that is very apposite, because it is, in many ways a living monument. However, we must move towards creating a living experience that engages our young people in Scotland and visitors. It is clear that visitors who come from abroad are looking for a whole package and a whole experience; they do not just want to see things in a glass case. On that note—and without a cake—I conclude my remarks.

18:07

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): I welcome the opportunity to close today's debate on the important issue of the Burns legacy in Scotland, and I thank Adam Ingram for bringing the debate to the chamber this evening.

David Mundell referred to the debate that he sponsored in 2000, in which I was privileged—I think that that is the right word—to be the Deputy Presiding Officer. He correctly recalled that, at the end of the debate, I was presented with a cake bearing the effigy of Robert Burns. Most members would not be surprised to hear that my colleague, Cathy Peattie, sang in that debate; however, I am sure that even Scottish National Party members would be surprised to hear that Fergus Ewing also sang a solo. It was a memorable occasion. In recalling that debate, I hope that Robert Burns—whose effigy is sitting in the public gallery tonight—would regard this evening's debate as a little bit more dignified.

I am fully committed to securing the long-term future of the Burns legacy. It is personally important to me, as I have a long-standing interest in Burns and, as some members will know, I once worked in both Dumfries and Ayr at the same time, which was interesting. That helped to foster my interest even more. I have been working with partners to address, as a matter of urgency, the poor state of the Burns cottage and museum and the difficulties that are currently facing the park as a whole.

One point that Adam Ingram, unfortunately, missed out in his otherwise excellent speech, but

which was mentioned by David Mundell, is the fact that we need to secure the willingness of those who own the various elements of the Burns experience in Ayrshire in order to make the project work. Such issues concern me, and I reassure members that I believe that the long-term future of the Burns legacy in Ayrshire will be secured. We are moving in the right direction and, over the past couple of months, following representations that were made to me by my colleagues Cathy Jamieson and Sandra Osborne, I have instigated discussions with all the relevant parties that are involved in securing the Burns legacy in Ayrshire. I am fully supportive of the real partnership that is now forming with a view to bringing about change.

As members know, the Executive has committed £50,000 for 2005-06 towards the running costs of the park. That will give us time to continue our efforts to secure the park's future. The Scottish Executive has also been instrumental in securing curatorial support from the National Library of Scotland and the National Museums of Scotland in supporting the upkeep of the collection until a new museum is completed.

I take seriously John Scott's point about the items that are in collections elsewhere. Some of the distributed collections have a long and historic legacy in the place where they are to be found, not least because Burns moved around Scotland. I am conscious that, for example, the original manuscript of the song "Auld lang syne" was taken to Edinburgh with a view to conserving it for the future because of the conditions in which it was being kept. I hope that that will be one of the items that will be repatriated to Ayrshire, its rightful home, once we are able to put in place the facilities needed to look after it.

I see the Burns national heritage park as the centrepiece of the year of homecoming for the Scots diaspora in 2009. That is why I agreed with the National Trust for Scotland that the park should be retained and managed holistically, keeping all its elements together, including the Tam o' Shanter experience.

Recent research has thrown up a surprising set of statistics that indicate that 330,000 people per annum visit the Tam o' Shanter experience, but only 25,000 of them make it into the museum and cottage. We have a job to do to make sure that the people who visit the Tam o' Shanter experience do not just stop for a cup of coffee but have the experience that David Mundell was talking about. That is part of my ambition for the site.

I welcome the National Trust for Scotland's interest in becoming involved in the ownership of the park and, subsequently, a new heritage lottery fund bid for a museum. Earlier today I had a very positive meeting with Robin Pellew, chief executive of the National Trust for Scotland, to

hear about the proposals for the development of the park and the wider perspective of a Burns trail in Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway. The trust's involvement is an exciting development and I remain confident that it would be best placed to take over the management of the park and to develop the Burns legacy into a quality product—something that is not just a tourism asset but which reflects the importance of Burns and gives our generation and future generations a good idea of his legacy and what he was about.

I hope that we might be able to work in a comprehensive way with everyone involved in Ayrshire. I think that that is now beginning to take place and I applaud the efforts of South Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Council, North Ayrshire Council and others who are trying to make it happen. I am also aware that Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire has been part of our wider efforts to provide substantial support to the development of various aspects of the park.

The Burns an' a' that festival, which was established by Allan Wilson when he was Deputy Minister for Environment, Sport and Culture, continues to grow and flourish and will become a showcase event for 2009. That is not, by any manner of means, all that will happen in 2009, but it will be an important event. I am therefore pleased to confirm to members that all the funding partners, including VisitScotland, have now committed funding to the festival for 2005 and beyond. I should say to Margaret Jamieson that I understand that this year's festival will run from the 21st to the 30th of May. I take her point that we are getting close to those dates and that we need to make a point of publicising the festival to everyone who might be interested in it.

Donald Gorrie mentioned the idea of a movie. I understand that a movie is being filmed at the moment and that Scottish Screen is involved. It is not a musical—perhaps next time, and perhaps Donald will have some ideas about who can take part. I am also grateful to Phil Gallie's very constructive input. Given that I worked in Ayrshire at the same time as him—it was part of my job to make sure that he did not get re-elected—

Phil Gallie: The minister was successful.

Patricia Ferguson: I was.

I remember that there were funding crises from time to time back then, too, and that we seemed to lurch from one crisis to another, as far as looking after heritage was concerned. I want to ensure that that does not happen again.

I believe that the Burns legacy is alive and well and will be secured for future generations. The time is right to act to secure a long-term future for his legacy. I can reassure members that we are taking the initiative and being proactive in what is

a partnership approach that is beginning to bear fruit. Securing the long-term future of the Burns legacy is well within our grasp, if we continue to work together. That is my aim and I am committed to achieving it.

I am grateful to members who have indicated their great interest and enthusiasm and their support during the debate. I hope that that is a message that we can collectively communicate to everyone in Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, the rest of Scotland—we all have a connection with Burns somewhere—and the rest of the world.

Meeting closed at 18:15.

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