

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 12 May 2005

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 12 May 2005

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

Schools-Colleges Review

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2793, in the name of Peter Peacock, on the schools-colleges review.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The document to inform the debate has not yet been delivered to members. I understand that there is a hold-up at the printers. Advance copies were eventually given to the Scottish National Party spokesperson and the other spokespeople yesterday afternoon, but no other member has had the opportunity to see the document. I would like the Executive to explain why it has failed to provide the appropriate documentation to allow a debate that was scheduled three weeks ago to take place. Given that the debate is supposed to be about the review document, I wonder whether you think it appropriate for us to continue.

The Presiding Officer: The supply of documentation is not a matter for me; it is a matter for the Executive. However, what has happened is unfortunate.

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): Shall I begin my speech, Presiding Officer, or do you want me to deal with the point of order separately?

The Presiding Officer: I think that you should deal with the point that has been raised, as it is clearly germane to the debate.

Peter Peacock: I fully acknowledge the point that has been raised. The documents were due to be in the Scottish Parliament information centre by 9 o'clock for members generally. We made provision for Opposition spokespeople to get access to the documentation midway through yesterday, to give them plenty of time to look at the document so that they could contribute effectively to the debate. I intend to set out in my speech what is in the review; I do not think that there is any reason why we should not proceed with that. We understand that the documents are now on their way. A mistake has been made. It should not have happened and I apologise to members for it.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer. Mr Peacock and Mr Wallace are due to launch the document this

morning at Telford College. It is questionable whether that is appropriate during a debate in which members will want to express their views to both ministers. Does the fact that the document has not been produced for the Parliament mean that it will not be available for the launch? If so, will the ministers not have every opportunity to stay and listen to what members have to say about the content of the review?

The Presiding Officer: The Parliament has agreed that the debate should proceed and that is what should happen. The Minister for Parliamentary Business made efforts to get the documents out yesterday. The situation is unfortunate but, as we have agreed to have the debate, I suggest that we proceed with it.

09:17

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): It is my pleasure to open this debate on school-college partnership. We know that many pupils already benefit from the learning opportunities that colleges bring to the school curriculum. We want to increase and enhance those opportunities throughout Scotland in order to open clear, new opportunities for pupils; to tailor learning to suit individual students; to offer more choice to pupils; and to ease pupils' transitions into further learning, training or employment. That is why we have today published the document "Lifelong Partners", our strategy for school-college partnership, and the guide to partnership that accompanies it.

The strategy outlines how we will deliver on our partnership agreement commitment to enable 14 to 16-year-olds to develop vocational skills through college courses. It has been developed in the context of our national priorities in education, our lifelong learning strategy and our comprehensive agenda for action and change, which is set out in the document "ambitious, excellent schools". The partnership approach recognises the breadth that we advocate in our curriculum review, "a curriculum for excellence", which was published last year—a breadth of learning that schools will be able to deliver more fully through working together with colleges. The strategy that has been published today also acknowledges that existing school-college activity will grow over the coming years. That growth, to which we commit ourselves in our strategy, represents a significant realignment of the school and college sectors.

The strategy completes our schools-colleges review, which has been on-going since October 2003. Despite its name, the review was never principally about schools or colleges; it was about pupils. The review has been wide ranging and lengthy. It has encompassed a conference of 120 representatives to frame a discursive consultation

paper; consultation on that paper; consultation on the review's interim report and a draft outline strategy; the issuing of leaflets seeking the views of school pupils; and numerous other consultation events and meetings. Our research has examined existing school-college links and, crucially, the attitudes of pupils to further education study as part of their school curriculum. The research has shown that pupils generally value college learning during part of their school week. The review has also included the findings of a number of working groups representing both sectors, as well as pupil and adult student interests.

Our strategy focuses on increasing and further enhancing school-college partnerships and on extending opportunities for pupils to access high-quality experiences and gain full recognition for their learning with colleges. We will measure the strategy's success by the success of the pupils—by their attendance at courses, by their attainments and achievements and by the ease of their transitions into further learning, training or employment.

In “ambitious, excellent schools”, we set out our agenda for action, which is built on our belief in the potential of all pupils and our commitment to help each of them to realise that potential. We also gave a clear statement in “a curriculum for excellence” of the purposes of school education from three to 18, along with principles for the design of the curriculum. Our aspiration for all children and for every young person is that they should be successful learners in life, confident individuals throughout their lives, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society and at work. We want to give pupils the opportunity to benefit from the widest range of educational opportunities and an enriched learning experience. We also want to equip them with a variety of skills that prepare them for life, the workplace and the community.

The principal locus for the education of school pupils is, and will remain, the school. However, we will broaden opportunities. Schools will increasingly work in partnership with other bodies to meet pupils' education needs. Allowing some pupils to access the more specialised learning opportunities that are available through colleges may be the most suitable way of helping them to fulfil their individual potential.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I welcome much of what the minister has said. He has spoken of the role of other institutions. Are there any plans to examine the links between schools and higher education institutions? Recently, there have been some difficulties in my constituency around that issue.

Peter Peacock: The specific focus of this work is school-college links, but other work is on-going

between higher education institutions and schools and we want to encourage those links. A recent initiative has been the summer schools that are run in Glasgow to encourage young people who might not otherwise do so to think about pursuing a university education. We are also encouraging universities to reach down into schools to help and support them in more dynamic ways than they have in the past. That work is not off the agenda, but the focus of today's debate is further education.

Work-based vocational learning is an integral part of our national strategy for enterprise in education, as set out in “Determined to Succeed”. We want colleges to help schools in their task of developing the capacities of young people. They can do that by widening pupils' opportunities for progression in learning; by preparing them for further learning; by easing pupils' transitions from school to further learning, training or employment; by broadening pupils' curriculum choices; and by enriching pupils' educational experiences. Partnership can, among other things, give pupils access to specialist staff, materials and facilities that schools may generally be unable to offer and it can provide the opportunity to undertake meaningful courses and experiences in vocational areas.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I am sure that the minister will agree that the role of careers services is vital to the whole process that he is describing. How will that role be promoted to ensure that pupils are given the right advice about which skills areas they might want to go into?

Peter Peacock: Sylvia Jackson raises an important point. I am not going to refer to the matter specifically today, but I know that people want to develop more appropriate relationships between careers staff and students in schools and in further education colleges. That area will gain more attention from us over time.

The process of going to colleges can help to demystify post-school learning for young people; it can encourage pupils to see the value of post-school education and understand the lifelong nature of learning. That is why, as we outline in our strategy, all secondary and special schools in Scotland will, by 2007, have an effective, meaningful and appropriate partnership with at least one college for pupils in secondary year 3 and above. Similarly, Scotland's colleges will have effective, meaningful and appropriate partnerships with secondary and special schools.

Vocational education can provide a suitable context for learning something that might capture pupils' imagination and interest and better engage some pupils to learn. It provides an opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of subject-related skills such as literacy and numeracy in practical ways.

As a country, we are generally good at laying the educational foundations for those who train to be professionals, such as teachers, social workers, doctors, lawyers and accountants. However, our education system could do more for those pupils who want to be professional care workers, electricians, technicians, plumbers and the like.

The key means by which we will deliver our partnership agreement commitment is the development of skills-for-work courses. Those courses will lead to nationally recognised qualifications in vocational areas as an alternative to one or more standard grades, for example. The courses are for national qualifications at levels from access 2 through to higher and will consist of Scottish Qualifications Authority national units, each of which will be assessed on a pass or fail basis. The courses will be integral to the school curriculum.

Fiona Hyslop: I am interested in what the minister is saying, but, if there is to be an impact on the world of work as well as on pupils, will he indicate the quantity of pupils who he expects will participate in college courses during the next few years? What is his vision of the situation in five or 10 years' time?

Peter Peacock: I will say something about that later. We will be piloting a lot of the work so that it can be fully tested before it is rolled out across the system. As I will indicate, I hope that we can do that in an orderly fashion, so that we do not simply dump pupils out of the school system into the college system—the work must be planned so that colleges can cope with the changes and create the capacity that they require to allow the change to happen.

Some schools might be able to provide the skills-for-work courses, but many courses will be delivered in partnership with colleges. We recognise that the success of the courses will depend on the quality of the progression routes that they present to pupils, on the extent to which the qualifications are respected in the labour market and the learning community, and on how they improve job prospects and career development.

Just as pupils who study geography or history at standard grade are not necessarily expected to go on to become geographers or historians, pupils who undertake the new skills-for-work courses will have open choices to make about their future occupations. The availability of the qualifications will provide a wider range of activities that make up a balanced education. The courses will be valuable regardless of whether pupils wish to pursue a career in that subject area in later life. At their heart will be those core people skills that are relevant to all, such as communication and team working.

The courses will also seek to enable pupils to develop those skills and attitudes that are demanded by employers, such as an understanding of the workplace and the employee's responsibilities, self-evaluation skills, flexible approaches to problem solving, and confidence to set goals and to reflect and learn from experience. The courses will help to give pupils who want to progress in their chosen field a solid educational pathway to further learning, training or employment.

The SQA will develop the courses, with quality experiences at their core. To pick up Fiona Hyslop's question, I should say that the courses will be piloted during the academic years 2005-06 and 2006-07, in order to evaluate them with a view to rolling them out nationally in August 2007. The subjects for the first year of the pilot are early education and child care, construction craft skills, financial services, and sport and recreation.

I am delighted to say that the expressions of interest that the SQA has received from local authorities, schools and colleges that want to participate in the first pilots have well exceeded our expectations. We will ensure that the participating centres and candidates receive appropriate support in order to maximise the potential for a successful pilot. That means that the overall scale of the pilot has to be manageable and feasible.

Pupils of all abilities in S3 and above will be able to be considered for college learning opportunities. Those opportunities should be regarded as a positive choice to access specialist provision in colleges, not as an alternative provision for pupils with additional support needs or disaffected or disengaged pupils. We will not dump difficult pupils out of school and into college. Decisions on going to college must be in the interests of the individual child, not wholesale transfers from one setting to another.

Options will be made available to pupils on the basis of available capacity, as they are with all other students in further and higher education. Given that there is an inevitable limit on capacity, and to maintain colleges' central ethos, due regard will be paid to those pupils who will benefit most from activities that enhance their life chances.

Schools and colleges already have in place robust internal quality procedures to measure progress on quality issues. To further ensure high-quality experiences for pupils, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education will carry out evaluations of school and college contributions to the partnership activity within its inspection and review programmes. The SQA will develop the new vocational courses in close partnership with the education and training community. We will develop a new professional development award

within the teaching qualification in further education professional development for the teaching of pupils under 16 years of age.

By the summer, HMIE will publish a self-evaluation guide in its "How good is our school?" series on school and college partnerships. Also, by October of this year, we will establish a working group to consider matters concerning the qualifications of non-schoolteachers who teach pupils.

I recognise and commend the innovative activities that colleges have undertaken in recent years to satisfy local demand from schools. We need to build on the good practice that currently exists. Partnership with schools is an essential and significant part of colleges' work, but it is—and will remain—a minority activity for colleges. Colleges are predominantly for adult students, as their delivery of learning reflects. The distinctive contribution that colleges make to pupils' education arises from their role as centres of voluntary learning for adults. It is therefore essential to the success of partnership working that that ethos is not altered by the changes that we are making. Colleges' partnership work with schools is a priority for the further education sector that sits alongside its other priorities.

We recognise that school-college activity is supplementary to the education that is delivered by schools. It will therefore be financed separately from existing funding for schools. We will continue to fund the Scottish Further Education Funding Council and its successor body as the primary source of funding for college courses for school pupils. We are investing substantial resources to increase and enhance school-college activities and we will make available more than £41.5 million in the financial years 2005-06 and 2007-08 to implement our strategy. That is in addition to the resources—about £19 million in 2003-04—that colleges already devote to pupils' learning. Among other things, the funding will support more pupils benefiting from college learning; stable funding arrangements that do not disadvantage colleges in providing courses to pupils; training for college staff; college activity to implement the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004; and enhanced careers advice to inform pupils of school-college options.

Presiding Officer, I am conscious that time is moving on, so I will move to my conclusion. The purpose of the initiative is to increase and enhance opportunities for young people across Scotland, to give them clear and new choices, to tailor learning to suit individual students, to offer more choice to pupils and to ease pupils' transitions into further learning, training or employment. I commend the strategy to the Parliament. We intend to accept the

Conservatives' amendment—much to their surprise, I suspect.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes *Lifelong Partners*, the Scottish Executive's strategy for school and college partnership to increase and enhance further vocational and other specialist opportunities for S3 pupils and above to access high quality educational experiences and gain full recognition for their learning with colleges; acknowledges that further education colleges, as principally centres of voluntary learning for adults, play an important role in helping schools realise the potential of young people; supports the growth in college learning opportunities for pupils outlined in the Executive's strategy, and recognises that colleges' partnership work with schools is a priority for the further education sector.

09:33

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Before I come to the substance of my speech, I must reflect on the circumstances of the debate. It is not acceptable for members of the Parliament not to have the document that they are supposed to be debating. Back benchers might have more reason than I have to be outraged and angered by the situation. It is perhaps ironic that the debate is on a subject about which there is consensus. I have had an opportunity to read the document, which is actually very good. However, it is unfortunate that other members have not had the opportunity to read it and so are not able to make more constructive contributions to the debate.

My more serious concern is that, as was advertised, ministers chose to launch the document at the same time as the debate in the Parliament. The Parliament is where constituents and members of the public expect their views to be heard. Strategy launches should not be organised as photo opportunities for ministers. Moreover, the Conservative education spokesperson and I both represent the Lothians constituency. On any other occasion, we would have been more than delighted to welcome the minister to the Lothians so that he could find out about the good work that is going on in colleges. To add insult to injury, the strategy is to be launched at the meeting of the College Liaison Association with Scottish Schools—CLASS—which is taking place this morning at Telford College. That might have been appropriate if the strategy was about university entrance, but not in the context of this morning's debate. The minister's launch of the strategy has been flawed, which perhaps detracts from what is an important subject matter.

Peter Peacock: There may have been some misunderstanding. I am deeply flattered that Fiona Hyslop wants me to remain in the chamber all morning, but that is what I intend to do. Jim Wallace will launch the strategy outside. Because I

have respect for the Parliament, I will be here all day.

Fiona Hyslop: I am pleased to hear of the minister's change to his previously advertised plan.

A great deal of consensus exists in the Parliament on the subject of today's debate. In the summer of 2002, my party launched the concept of having greater links between schools and colleges. In the autumn of that year, our proposal was adopted by the Conservatives at their party conference. The policy then found support from the Liberal Democrats and, before the end of the year, from the Labour Party. Therefore, the policy is one of those issues that attract commendable cross-party consensus and agreement.

As Education Committee colleagues who visited Glasgow yesterday will confirm, some outstanding work is already taking place in respect of greater involvement of schools with colleges. All 29 of Glasgow City Council's secondary schools have embarked on a school-college liaison along the lines that are promoted in the strategy that is being launched today. The strategy document also highlights the situation in Banff and Buchan, where many pupils are able to attend their local college thanks to the well-organised articulation that exists between schools and colleges, as well as between schools and higher education institutions further on. However, given the document's reference to the fact that those links grew out of the lack of technology teachers in the local schools, we perhaps need to reflect on the figures that were released yesterday, which show a shortfall in the number of such teachers and a drop of 15 per cent in the number of technology students since 1997. Perhaps those warning bells need to be heard.

Our amendment highlights three issues that will be critical to the policy's success: college capacity, pupil accreditation and lecturer training. I acknowledge that those issues are addressed in the document, but our amendment simply identifies that they are key areas on which the policy will stand or fall.

I very much welcome the additional funding that is being made available to address college capacity, but that funding must reflect the differing experiences of colleges in different parts of the country. I suspect that Glasgow colleges have been able to provide some opportunities because of the falling population there, although the city has skills shortages in certain areas. However, in other parts of the country, colleges are bursting at the seams because they are oversubscribed. That is certainly the case here in the Lothians. A big challenge is to ensure that the opportunities that we provide for school pupils do not displace students in subject areas to which additional numbers of older students need to be attracted to

meet the urgent skills capacity issues in areas such as the Lothians.

For example, Jewel and Esk Valley College will need 8,500 student units of measurement if it is to return to the SUMs per head of local population that it had in 2001. That is a good example of an oversubscribed college in an area that has a growing population. In plumbing, the college is providing an example of good practice by aiming to have 20 school pupils and 20 apprentices on its introduction to plumbing course this coming year. However, the industry wants 35 apprenticeship places. We do not want a situation in which school pupils might displace prospective apprentices, who would be able to contribute to the local economy by putting their skills into action within the next year or two.

I very much hope that the resources that are being made available will address those capacity issues, especially in areas such as the Lothians, Perth and Kinross and Aberdeenshire where the growing population is placing increased demands on the colleges. In that regard, I know that West Lothian College in my area has particular problems. As the minister will know from the Auditor General's report, the problems stem from a damaging private finance initiative contract, under which 13 per cent of the college's revenue is automatically siphoned off to pay for the PFI. The college now has problems in developing new courses and in increasing capacity, because of the way in which its original construction was treated for capital purposes. I hope that that issue is addressed.

On pupil accreditation, I am pleased to see the progress that the SQA has made. One issue might be the pace of change, as we need to ensure that the courses are available in time. As the minister mentioned, it is also important that the articulation with higher education is considered.

It strikes me—my colleagues who visited Glasgow yesterday will no doubt agree with this—that, as the minister also mentioned, employers want to see confident individuals who can work together and who can communicate their ideas and express their suggestions with confidence. That is an obvious contribution that pupils should be able to gain from their experience of college. I must say that I was a bit disappointed with some of this morning's media coverage, which suggested that the strategy is about only the disengaged and disaffected and how those with behavioural problems might be displaced from the school to elsewhere. The striking thing about the young people from whom we heard yesterday was that they believed that their experience in subjects such as horticulture or construction could help them to re-engage in their studies in other subjects. That needs to be considered.

Another concern that must be wrestled with is the accreditation of college lecturers by the General Teaching Council for Scotland. Indeed, the issue of the relative status of lecturers and teachers, not least in relation to pay, will also need to be addressed. I believe that GTC accreditation is the right idea, but it will need to be carried out with a light touch, especially in the early stages. I am glad to hear that that will be the case. However, there is an issue with the optional status of the proposed professional development award for lecturers, which perhaps should be made mandatory during the programme's roll-out. I recognise the concerns of the colleges, which feel that they should be more aligned with higher education by being affiliated with a professional body for higher education lecturers rather than coming under the auspices of the GTC. Such bureaucratic and administrative issues are probably far removed from the experience of the pupils, but they will be critical to the programme's success.

We welcome the funding streams that have been announced. Already in 2003-04, the Scottish Further Education Funding Council was allocating 6 per cent of its budget to provide for some 44,000 pupil enrolment places in colleges. The additional resources will be helpful, but we need to consider some of the key issues that will be critical in making a difference.

I very much welcome the support that has been announced for the implementation in colleges of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. As the minister will recognise, the Education Committee pushed for that. I also took up the issue with Jim Wallace latterly in respect of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill. We need to think about the transition issues for pupils with special needs who transfer from schools into colleges, so I am glad that those issues are being addressed.

We still need some alignment of volume and quantity under the policy, given that an estimated 120,000 pupils—the minister might have the more accurate census figures—could benefit from it. The success of the scheme in Glasgow seemed to come from the fact that all pupils rather than just those who were perhaps underperforming were able to benefit from the experience, which provided a window into the world of work. It was also impressive that teachers recognised that the scheme had expanded their own experiences, which had perhaps been limited.

Partnership between schools and colleges helps to make the curriculum flexible, although it does not replace the need for further curriculum flexibility, which needs to be pursued. It does not replace the wider skills strategy for the economy, but it gives young people an opportunity to see the

world of work in a way that is responsive to their education needs. By making their subject relevant to the world of work, it provides a window into that world for them. I am pleased that there is cross-party support for the future provision of such valuable experiences for our young people.

I move amendment S2M-2793.1, to insert at end:

"but, in doing so, recognises that the success of the strategy will depend in particular on the effectiveness of measures that address college capacity, pupil accreditation and training of lecturers."

09:43

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I am grateful to have the opportunity to open the debate on behalf of the Conservatives. The Scottish Executive's initiative to develop effective partnerships between schools and further education colleges will benefit our young people immensely. Such a commitment to further education has been a key strand in Conservative policy for a number of years. Indeed, both the modern apprenticeship scheme and the young enterprise initiative were established under a Conservative Government. If I may say so, we are becoming accustomed to having Conservative policies absorbed into Labour policy a short time later. I shall not dwell on that point, because we welcome the Executive's approach, but it appears to be part of what is becoming a seamless web.

We warmly welcome the publication of the strategy and the implementation plan for school-college partnerships, which mark a welcome commitment to a broader curriculum in vocational training. Access to vocational training at further education colleges benefits school-age pupils in a number of ways. First, it allows pupils to gain a taste of college education, which may encourage them to enrol on FE courses after school. Secondly, it gives school-age pupils hands-on experience of the skill or trade that they wish to train for as well as of the demands of the world of work. Thirdly, it helps to enhance social development, self-esteem and personal responsibility. For all those reasons, we strongly support the initiative.

We recognise the need to give greater opportunities to 14-year-olds by allowing them to study in further education colleges. Access to a broader curriculum and to vocational training will undoubtedly help more young people to fulfil their potential and it will help to combat disengagement, as well as filling the skills gaps in our economy. The sector skills council has found that, if we trained up just another 1 per cent of the current workforce across the United Kingdom, £8 billion would be added to the UK's gross domestic product.

Dumfries and Galloway College is an example of best practice in the heart of David Mundell's constituency. The college is running an effective partnership with local schools at the Crichton campus and is currently taking around 300 pupils each year on to courses that the schools do not have the resources or specific and sufficient facilities to provide. The subjects include care—which the minister mentioned—psychology, hairdressing, hospitality and travel and tourism, to mention but a few. The college offers courses that lead to national qualifications at intermediate 2 and higher levels, thereby allowing for effective articulation with other school-based learning and qualifications. For those pupils for whom the practical, vocational route is more appropriate, such early experience of college life will be invaluable.

The Executive is supporting the creation of a more flexible curriculum that will address disengagement with, and disruptive behaviour in, schools. That said, the drive to enable more pupils to have extended access to vocational training must go hand in hand with raising awareness of the high standards that are demanded on those courses.

Some administrative issues remain to be addressed and they will require careful monitoring. I am referring to the need for adequate capacity in colleges in order to accommodate all eligible school pupils, the establishment of effective and fair systems for dealing with disruptive behaviour in colleges, if and when it arises and the essential requirement for funding for school pupils who are studying at FE colleges to be dealt with correctly.

We face a considerable challenge. Although the scarcity of people with good vocational skills and qualifications puts a premium on their value, the fact that manufacturing industry has declined in Scotland means that it may be perceived as a less attractive option for long-term employment. Only when we make the Scottish economy really competitive will the economic climate be conducive to growth for enterprising and aspiring businesses. I repeat that the Conservatives would like business rates in Scotland to be put on a level playing field with those in the rest of Britain, as that would help our economy.

Sir Digby Jones, director general of the Confederation of British Industry, said that young people should be encouraged to embrace responsibility and

"exploit risk if the next generation is to continue Britain's economic and business success".

Encouraging access to vocational training and enterprise in education is an important step in the right direction. In addition, the business climate needs to be attuned to economic growth if such

worthy measures are to attract the success that they deserve.

I welcome the minister's stance on the issue. In the short time that I was the Scottish Office minister with responsibility for education, I tried to raise the status and stature of further education colleges in Scotland. The Executive has a good policy, which should be strongly supported. I believe that, if we give it our support, it will be seen to succeed for our people.

Before I move our amendment, I thank the minister for accepting it. I move amendment S2M-2793.2, to insert at end:

"but notes, however, the need for the Executive to monitor issues of funding, college capacity and delivery of the strategy, particularly in rural areas."

09:49

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I give a warm welcome to the publication of the documents on school-college partnerships. The Executive has implemented yet another key Liberal Democrat manifesto commitment in the field of education. We Liberal Democrats practise what we preach: we give opportunities to young people, as was seen in the recent election of Jo Swinson as the youngest member of the House of Commons. I also welcome the £41.5 million injection of resource over two years, which will be extremely important in this area.

The ability to fulfil one's potential in life and to increase the life chances of and opportunities for young people in modern Scottish society have always seemed to be central to the concept of liberal democracy—certainly, they are central to my concept of it. Those are also many people's view of the purpose of the Scottish Parliament.

Particularly since I became the convener of the Education Committee, it has been my privilege to be able to visit schools and colleges across the land. Fiona Hyslop mentioned the committee's visit to schools in Glasgow yesterday to meet staff and young people and to see something of the work that is being done across the country to educate, motivate and encourage young people.

The country has, and the committee has met, some extraordinary young people. I call them extraordinary not because of their academic abilities or their personal qualities—although they have those in spades—but because of their enthusiasm and promise and the contribution that they will make to the future of Scotland. They are extraordinary young people because they have exceeded what was expected of them by overcoming difficult environmental circumstances or other barriers to learning.

The central point to make at the beginning of the debate is that Scotland has much to be proud of in

its children and young people. Their achievements do not come about by accident. They happen because of the dedicated efforts of staff, inspired school leadership, adequate public resource and the structures that make the most of all of those things. There has been recognition that the policies of the Executive and the Parliament, particularly in this area, are influenced by the contribution of the Liberal Democrats. We are delivering in Government on a long-term and comprehensive basis.

The Executive has examined the transitions: from nursery to primary; from primary to secondary; and from secondary to the world of work. It has also examined the curriculum and disadvantage and additional support needs, not least through the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. Above all, the Executive has considered the twin issues of disaffection and discipline, which are often two sides of the same coin.

Three things are clear: the first is that individual schools in similar catchment areas have substantially varied performances; the second is that the traditional school structures can sometimes seem meaningless and uninspiring to some children and young people; and the third is that, partly out of a desire to give more young people the opportunity to go into higher education because we want to be socially inclusive, we can lose sight of the fact that equally valid, equally useful and more relevant careers can often be found in what we have sometimes disparagingly called vocational areas.

The school-college review is at the heart of the debate. I congratulate the minister and his officials on the documents that have just been published. They are relevant and insightful and point the way forward to achieve the partnership agreement aim of allowing 14 to 16-year-olds to have the opportunity of spending part of their time in the more adult environment that colleges provide, where they are able to access a wider variety of vocational opportunities than is possible at school.

I turn to some of the stress points and difficulties that must be addressed in the debate. The issue is complex and we will not always get it right, although we can draw on the experience of the past five or six years and before that time. I was pleased to hear the minister stress the fact that the review is not just about dealing with difficult pupils or dumping them from our schools into some other environment. As I said, the issue is complex, and we must support young people in taking forward this work.

When the Education Committee visited Glasgow yesterday, we found that existing projects are making the school-college link by way of an option column in the standard grade options. That is the

right way to proceed. It gives vocational college courses parity of esteem with other courses, which is exactly how things should be. It strikes a major blow for the equality of different career choices. That said, vocational courses need proper certification.

I will be interested to hear what the Executive has to say on the subject of the timetable, as the minister did not touch on that in his speech. The timetable is important: people need to know that there will be something in it for them. College options need to be recognised, encouraged and praised—all of that is extremely important.

It is also important to recognise that different schools approach these matters differently. Some schools have embraced with enthusiasm the opportunity to develop school-college links. Other schools pay only lip service to the concept: they have not done things properly and have a good distance to go. It is important to stress that the school-college link must not be seen as the part-time duty of one member of staff who has many other things on their mind. If schools do not make it the dedicated responsibility of one senior official or teacher, the drive will be lost.

There are capacity limits. We must acknowledge that already, in some colleges, 600 pupils take part in college courses. There is much to build on, but we must link to the wider issue of how we encourage and support young people. How do we motivate them so that they are ready to take advantage of opportunities? There are linkages to work placement. The skills-for-work courses that the minister talked about are important, but they are only one of a number of ways forward.

There are issues about long-term career opportunities. Hospitality is often cited, and I have been struck in discussions by the fact that it sometimes does not provide the career opportunities that exist in other areas. That must be dealt with. The issue is not particularly one for the Scottish Executive Education Department, but it is important.

The way forward will require resources for transport, a focus on head teachers and dedicated people in schools. Stable funding arrangements are required to deliver the fee income to colleges, which I was pleased to hear the minister talk about.

Instinctively, we all feel that the proposals are an important and relevant way forward that affords many opportunities and advantages, but will we be able to test that? Will we check whether the result is less unemployment for school leavers? Will we ensure that we do things properly?

Today's announcements are landmark announcements that build on previous work, look to the future and set targets for what we can do in

education. New opportunities and choices are being given to pupils. The strategy has much to offer Scotland. On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I warmly welcome the announcements and the document, which will enable us to do a lot of work in the future.

09:57

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): As we seem to be continuing the election campaign that I thought had finished last week, I play my part by saying that other parties might have had the proposals in their manifestos, but local government in Scotland, which is largely Labour led, has been implementing them since the 1980s, when it was not politically expedient or particularly fashionable to do so. I was involved in that.

I welcome the strategy. I share the concern that Tricia Marwick expressed in her point of order that back benchers have been unable to get the briefing that was provided to Opposition spokespersons or to see the strategy. That has made it somewhat difficult to prepare a speech in advance, but I will do my best.

The strategy is consistent with what the Government in Scotland has been doing to bring coherence to lifelong learning, almost from cradle to grave. Although I could never compete with the Parliament's epitome of the benefits of lifelong learning—Stewart Stevenson—I have had a fairly varied working life. In 1988, as a new lecturer at Fife College in Kirkcaldy, where my boss was my colleague Marilyn Livingstone, I recall having a three-hour class on a Friday afternoon of what was known as schools link. The pupils were either disaffected, disruptive or otherwise disinterested—or, rather, uninterested. They did not want to be in school, and they did not particularly want to be in college, but that was marginally better than being in school. The amount of benefit that they got was questionable.

I confirm and support the comments of many members that we are not talking about some sort of dumping ground for disruptive or disaffected pupils. What we are talking about looks to provide the element of choice that pupils and young people need and will help them to make that choice rather than force choice upon them. That is an important distinction, and it is borne out by some of the evidence from Glasgow, where it was found that following their college experience during their secondary school years pupils were clearer about the choices that they wanted to make, and those choices were not always in the areas that they had studied when they were in college. If that alone is what comes out of the review, it will be of great benefit.

Robert Brown: Is Christine May aware of the Careers Scotland research that identified the close

link between people having a goal in life and attainment? Does she think that that is relevant to the debate?

Christine May: Yes, I do. I was privileged to have a lengthy discussion with the consultants who prepared the report for Careers Scotland on the benefit to young people of having a structured choice programme. I hope that Careers Scotland and Futureskills Scotland will, at the Executive's behest, continue to identify improvements that can be made.

The issue is the links between schools and colleges throughout the country, some of which are good and some of which are not so good, as Robert Brown said. As the minister said, from the start colleges have been firmly involved in the strategy that has been produced today. It might contain no surprises, but that is a good thing, because many of us have been involved with our local colleges in what is being done. A one-size-fits-all approach will not be taken. The approaches that are taken will be appropriate to rural areas and urban areas, and perhaps will be more advanced in some places than in others.

The adult ethos of colleges should not be compromised. We must be careful that we do not seek to turn colleges into schools or schools into colleges, because they are different institutions with different purposes. One interesting statistic is that the average age of students in Scotland's further education colleges is 28, which in itself presents problems for school pupils. The minister and his officials have had considerable discussions with colleges, school boards and parent groups about how that might be managed.

The strategy supports the curriculum development work and review work that have been going on in schools, such as the skills-for-work programme, to which the minister referred, the enterprise education programmes and various other measures. I welcome the additional funding announced by the minister, which will provide a firm financial basis. For too long, programmes have been funded by cobbling together whatever money might be spared, largely from colleges but some from the Education Department. I ask the minister how the funding will be continued and built into budgets.

Around 1,000 school pupils attended Glenrothes College in my constituency as part of their school work last year, and they all had meaningful experiences. However, as I said, they did not necessarily follow up what they did there.

We must define what we mean by vocational skills. The term applies not just to craft subjects; it can apply to skills that enhance people's ability to work. Vocational skills have long been part of the development of professional qualifications.

I congratulate the Executive and support it. I hope that at the end of today's debate we will be able to find a consensus for the benefit of all our young people and colleges.

The Presiding Officer: Tricia Marwick has withdrawn.

10:04

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): We all share the objectives that are set out in today's documents. We all agree that in principle we support the expansion of the role of further education colleges to include S3-plus school pupils. As Fiona Hyslop said, the documents were presented to us late last night, and I have not had an opportunity to study them thoroughly, but they appear to have the characteristic hallmarks of the programmes that the Executive launches; the ideas are good, but it is unclear whether the details have been thought through.

It is desirable to provide more opportunities for schoolchildren, but I want to focus on the impact that the proposals could have on colleges that provide both further and higher education. Our task is to distinguish between the important and the essential. I suggest to the minister that the essential issue for many colleges, including Inverness College in my constituency, is that the proposals will not address the financial problems that some colleges have faced for several years. If Inverness College were to be a participant in one of the pilot studies, it is unclear whether the impact of the new programme would compound the college's already difficult financial situation.

I have a letter from the principal of Inverness College, which states:

"The College's funding for the year is based on a target of student activity, which is sent to all FE Colleges in April for the coming year. For the past 3 years, there has been no increase in this target figure (and consequential funding for the College), although the demand for some courses due to external factors has increased dramatically (e.g. in Construction)."

Inverness College has a deficit of about £3 million, about half of which is attributable to the notional cost of pensions and half of which is historical. The college has already paid off £2 million of deficit. At present, a large number of staff are facing their P45s, at a time when the college could and would like to take on more adult students for construction courses. I put it to the minister that the immediate priority that faces him, as the minister responsible, is to sort out the institution's existing problems. I am mindful that a huge amount of effort by a large number of people is going into solving the problems, but the problems remain and there is no suggestion that they will be solved.

I had a meeting with Roger McClure, who argued that it would be wrong to use public money to eliminate or pay off part of the deficit of colleges, which, as he argued, have been poorly managed, because that would not be fair to colleges that have been well run. We all understand that argument, but it does not detract from the fact that colleges that have been badly managed in the past or are badly managed at present can address their problems only by making staff redundant, cutting courses and eliminating opportunities for students, which is what is happening now at Inverness College. Obviously, I welcome new ideas and aspirations, but I contrast them with the current unpleasant and unwelcome reality in which many of my constituents who have a professional pride in their job now see their P45s arriving.

Christine May: Perhaps Mr Ewing will explain to me how additional funding for activities that are carried out at present but not funded will, as he suggests, cause problems, rather than assist the college.

Fergus Ewing: We do not know what the impact will be because the documents do not say that. We know that the sum will be £41 million but, as Fiona Hyslop said, we have no idea what the impact will be on capacity, training or the number of staff. We know that pilot studies will be carried out, but we do not know where. We do not know the detail. Although the programme is worthy in principle, my question is whether it has been fully thought through. I have had only a short time to study the available information, but it does not seem to me that the answer is yes.

When Wendy Alexander, who I think was in the chamber earlier, occupied the minister's role, she made a contribution of around £7 million to reduce the deficit of some colleges. We can debate whether that was a proper use of public money, but what is not in dispute is that, unless the deficit that Inverness College faces is tackled, the victims will be the students, the potential students and the staff.

The new policy is rather like someone setting out on a journey, marching into the unknown without a map, a compass or a rucksack. I wish the minister well on his journey.

10:10

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): The Executive review, "Building the Foundations of a Lifelong Learning Society", is a most welcome document. Set beside the merger of the tertiary education funding councils, which we debated last month, it is to be hoped that it signals a shift towards parity of esteem for all post-school education streams. As Lord James Douglas-

Hamilton mentioned, the extraordinarily productive co-operation at the Crichton university campus in Dumfries, involving the University of Paisley and the University of Glasgow, is an excellent example of what can be done at the tertiary education level. As I set up and taught a course at the campus, I am aware of the importance of the institution to the local community.

The Executive has always maintained that it does not publish school league tables, but unfortunately many Scottish newspapers do publish them. In the past 20 years, an insidious and divisive ethos has been developing in Scottish secondary education, whereby all schools are judged simply by their standard and higher grade results and on how many pupils they get into universities. No league table in a Scottish newspaper has ever congratulated a school on the number of pupils who go on to develop the many and varied skills upon which the success of our economy entirely depends.

I will comment on one or two aspects of the "Lifelong Partners" report. The Scottish credit and qualifications framework is a good basis for understanding and is to be welcomed, as are many of the provisions and the nature of partnership activity. Many young people grow out of school well before the school leaving date. Some of them know what they want to do and want to get on with it; some of them know only that they want to get out of school. The provision for pupils in S4 to attend college full time is much to be welcomed and encouraged.

I am concerned that paragraph 3.18 of the guide for schools, which is on local delivery methods, leaves it up to schools and local authorities to decide whether they want to build vocational education facilities in schools.

Dr Jackson: I want to know whether I understand correctly what the member said a few sentences back. He seemed to say that he envisaged S4 pupils going fully into further education, but the thrust of the document is about supplementing school education.

Chris Ballance: The important point is that there is provision for pupils in S4 who want to have alternatives to school education, as well as school education. They should be able to go into college and take up what is on offer there. The important point is the diversity of possibilities to which the document opens the door.

Although, without local flexibility, the measures could lead to the unnecessary duplication of facilities, if there is no encouragement to go down the road, that might not happen at all, because extra investment will be required. In most schools, the demands of the academic sector could mean that the needs of young people who would benefit

from a vocational course at school will continue to be ignored.

Section 4 of the guide is on the roles and responsibilities of partners. I am delighted that learndirect Scotland has been included as a partner in that section. I pay tribute to the huge success of learndirect Scotland, as exemplified in its figures for the past 12 months. The organisation's learning centres are particularly useful and important where there are no local college facilities. We must acknowledge that learndirect Scotland makes a distinct, unique and important contribution at school and adult level, through its 483 learning centres and 1,300 providers, which give 94,000 opportunities for adult and school learners to pick up practical skills in informal settings. There is a huge demand for its services. Every 15 seconds, there is an inquiry about its services, which amounts to 500,000 calls per annum. It runs roughly 40,000 learning episodes a month. Of particular note is the work that it does with adults who have missed out on early skills development. Those adults gain skills that they would probably never have been able to access in any other way.

I welcome the Executive's commitment to support learndirect Scotland and I encourage ministers to do everything that they can to allow learndirect Scotland to meet the demand.

10:15

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I, too, am pleased to welcome the strategy, which is part of the Executive's modernisation of the school curriculum to provide greater flexibility and choice to pupils. We must consider it in the context of a package of measures that the Executive is introducing to increase flexibility and choice.

I am getting more perturbed as the debate goes on, because everybody other than me and my colleagues seems to have seen the strategy document. Unlike Fergus Ewing, I certainly did not see it last night. I was in the Parliament at 11 o'clock last night and I was here at half past 8 this morning and it still was not there, so, to a certain extent, I am talking off the top of my head. However, I will not hold ministers responsible for the vagaries of the printing system.

I notice that the Association of Scottish Colleges, which also seems to know something that I do not know, has also welcomed the strategy, in particular the increase in investment in vocational education and the promise of parity in funding for college courses that are offered to school pupils—a point that Christine May raised in an intervention.

In the absence of the strategy document, I read a piece of research on school pupils' attitudes

towards further education that the Executive commissioned as part of the consultation. It was undertaken by Carole Millar Research and involved 12 colleges and 26 schools. It was interesting to read that the pupils' perceptions of college were generally favourable. Indeed, 80 per cent of S4 pupils who had participated in school-college links found that college attendance had helped them to make decisions about their options for the future. The sorts of things that are being discussed in the context of skills for work will assist pupils in making such decisions.

Robert Brown, who was able to go on the visits yesterday—I was unfortunately prevented from doing so by a prior engagement—referred to the fact that pupils who are disengaged from education in a school environment often gain motivation and a sense of achievement in college. Many of the pupils in the research found that college increased their awareness of lifelong learning and that attendance at college helped to ease the transition between school and higher or further education. That is particularly relevant in the context of the discussion about boys not being engaged in higher education, which has surfaced in the media again this morning. The strategy provides opportunities to address some of the issues about the balance of boys' achievements within school and further education.

The research also seemed to provide evidence that there are fewer incidents of bad behaviour in college, although some pupils felt that, when behavioural problems occurred, the lecturers were not as effective in dealing with it as teachers—teachers might argue that themselves. However, I agree with Fiona Hyslop and the minister that it is extremely important that colleges are not considered to be dumping grounds for pupils who have behavioural problems. In the past, the pupils who have been sent to colleges have been those who, as Christine May said, are unable to cope or are disengaged from school, but we are talking about something different: offering college education to all pupils, not only those with behavioural problems or who find school difficult. That needs to be based on the individual child's needs.

The strategy is about bridging the gap between academic and vocational training, enabling students to move between academic and vocational courses and acknowledging the vocational content of many higher education courses. As I science student, I spent many hours in laboratories. I learned not only academic knowledge in those laboratories, but practical and vocational skills. My eldest child is at the University of Abertay Dundee studying computing studies, and he is learning many vocational skills as well as academic skills. We need to break down the rather false barrier that has grown up

between vocational and academic education over the years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton referred to Dumfries and Galloway College, which is located in Russell Brown's constituency—we are all making digs at the moment. I do not think that the college was involved in the research project to which I referred, but I will make a point that the Tories have rightly made: I hate to be thinking what they are thinking, but it is correct to say that there is a problem with timetabling for rural areas. I would hate to think that, although school pupils in Dumfries are able to benefit from the links with Dumfries and Galloway College, students from Langholm Academy might find it more difficult because they have to travel an hour to get to the college. The minister talked about piloting the schemes in other areas, and I hope that some of those pilots will be in rural areas where the transport and timetabling issues can be addressed.

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): I inform members that the documents for which we have all been waiting have arrived. I apologise again to members for their tardy arrival and recommend the speed-reading provisions that they will find therein.

To respond—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): Minister, you need to speak into your microphone. Dr Murray will not mind if you turn your back on her.

Allan Wilson: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

To respond to Elaine Murray's principal point on the roll-out of piloting, it is our intention to ensure that the pilots cover a geographical spread of all Scotland and that rural areas and their specific needs are considered within that.

Dr Murray: I am pleased to hear the minister say that, because it is extremely important.

I will be a little bit parochial. Chris Ballance mentioned the unique collaboration between higher and further education that exists on the Crichton campus in Dumfries—I will not mention whose constituency it is in. If we are now to have a collaboration between school and further education there, that will provide a great opportunity that I find exciting. The pupils who go into that environment will see not only something of what happens in colleges, but a tertiary transition that enables articulation between further and higher education, allows people to move between further and higher education, shows people the opportunities of lifelong learning and progression and helps to break down the barriers for people who, because they think that they are

not terribly good at school, decide to go into a job and not take part in education after the age of 16.

The partnership between the University of Glasgow, the University of Paisley, Bell College, Dumfries and Galloway College, Barony College and the Open University that exists at the Crichton campus and the wide range of courses and facilities on the site provide an exciting opportunity for Dumfries. If, as might happen, Dumfries and Galloway College eventually relocates to the same site as the university campus, school pupils who take part in education there will see people training as social workers or primary school teachers, people engaged in continuous professional development and a model of lifelong learning that could be inspirational.

After a general election, we might find it a little boring to see consensus breaking out across the Parliament, but I am glad that we all regard school-college links as a way forward for education that will improve the life skills and life chances of our younger generation.

10:23

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): I welcome the idea of partnerships between schools and colleges; I speak with experience of having explored that route in my previous existence as a principal teacher by trying to make links between my school and James Watt College of Further and Higher Education in Kilwinning and Reid Kerr College in Paisley. I am excited about the prospects, but I also have some concerns that need to be addressed, one of which is that we must not move away from introducing a more flexible curriculum; such links are part of the flexible curriculum, but they are not themselves the flexible curriculum. I emphasise that they are only part of what we must do to introduce more flexibility into our school curriculums.

The strategy should, as the minister said, also be thought of as a move to give children more experience—more enrichment and more specialist input—but should not diminish the quality and standards of education in our secondary schools. It is important to emphasise that.

The strategy will, I hope, not be used to paper over the cracks of the teacher shortage—to do so would be disastrous. Our schools offer a high standard of education and must continue to do so. We need enhanced provision so that we can give young people more opportunities within a structured and well-planned environment. I am concerned that a huge amount of planning will be needed to make the strategy work, and that key people in schools and colleges will have to devote much of their time to it.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I take on board the points that have been made by

Rosemary Byrne, but does she agree that much of the planning has already been done, and that the strategy adds value to that? Much work has been going on in respect of school-college links; I could cite many examples in Fife. The strategy will formalise that, and funding will be added so that it can be delivered, which should be welcomed as a positive move. We are not starting from scratch.

Ms Byrne: It is not about starting from scratch, but it has been about starting from small pilots and small experiments that people who have the will to do so have initiated in schools.

If young people are to select the right courses and make the right moves in their education, they have to be counselled. They need to plan with teachers and other key people the courses they will take and the moves they will make. That requires that time be set aside, which will have staffing implications for schools and colleges, so strategic planning will be key.

I am heartened that the local authority in whose area I live, North Ayrshire Council, has such strategic planning in place; it exists in some areas. I cannot, however, overemphasise the need to ensure that the appropriate staff are given the time that is required, otherwise young people will end up making the wrong choices. Colleges should not be a dumping ground for disillusioned young people; rather, they should be part of the curricular choices that young people make at the end of secondary 2 for S3 and S4. In that way, choices will be properly planned and structured.

We need to enhance the position of the careers service in all this. I know that the minister has mentioned and has been asked about the careers service, but I have not yet read anything that tells me what its role will be. I will be interested to hear what the minister has to say in response to that. As far as I am concerned, if careers advice is not fully linked to the strategy, wrong choices and mistakes will be made at key stages for young people. There are not enough careers staff linked to schools to do that job at the moment.

I hope that the strategy will not dump Christmas leavers, that we can achieve equality of opportunity across the board and that the dialogue that I have been repeatedly calling for can proceed among pupils, parents, teachers, college staff and careers staff, which will ensure that pupils' choices are correct and are made at the right time.

Fiona Hyslop and other members mentioned qualifications for teachers. It is crucial that college lecturers be suitably qualified to deal with our young people and that they have a teaching qualification and registration with the General Teaching Council or similar body. We must maintain standards and ensure that the quality of teaching is right.

The salaries of college lecturers are important, although they have not so far been mentioned. We cannot have a situation in which teachers are offering curriculums that must be joined up with college partnerships but are paid less than lecturers. That situation needs to be reviewed and taken care of, otherwise, disillusionment will set in. We must also ensure full disclosure for all college lecturers who deal with young people, as is the case for people working in schools. I would like some reassurance on that.

I was pleased to hear the minister refer to the role of the SQA. There are many good courses at access and intermediate levels that should and could be used—I am thinking in particular of a digital photography course at Reid Kerr College with which I was involved. We must be imaginative enough to include in courses what is available at higher still level. We should not completely ignore what is already there, because there is much development still to be done with some courses. There is great potential for the future, but I worry that the desire to plan strategically and to put key staff and resources in place will end up diminishing what we are trying to do. I hope that will not be the case.

I will mention rural areas, as much of my region is rural. We need equality of opportunity. We must give all young people access to appropriate courses, wherever they live, and we must ensure that transport and other links are properly developed, rather than provided piecemeal. The strategy is a long-term strategy and it will need to be built up. I will watch the pilot schemes with interest.

10:31

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the Presiding Officer for calling me and allowing what I hope is still my sunny disposition into the debate. There is considerable consensus in the chamber. I recall an occasion back on 6 November 2002, when Nicol Stephen, the then Deputy Minister for Education and Young People, accepted my amendment to a motion on this very subject. I have no doubt that, after 2007, Nicol Stephen will be keen to accept far more Tory-inspired motions and amendments.

Robert Brown: As First Minister?

Mr Monteith: We will not go there. It is open to debate where Nicol Stephen and I may be by then.

When I hear everyone in the chamber agree, I begin to worry. It is in the nature of democracies that, when everyone agrees, we might sometimes be making the wrong choices. I seek to stretch the debate a little and perhaps even to provoke a few members—although, of course, that is not my nature. I wish to examine the issues outside the

box. It is not difficult for Conservatives to talk outside the box at the moment, because we are clearly outside the box of political popularity in Scotland, although I assure members that that will change.

What more might colleges themselves do, and what more could they be liberated to do? I suggest that there should be not just partnerships between schools and colleges, with school pupils simply attending colleges, but that colleges could manage schools on local authorities' behalf or create schools within their institutions, which could provide particular facets of education. *[Interruption.]* Already I hear gasps of amazement, so I am clearly halfway towards my objective.

The fact that colleges are not under the control of local authorities, but are incorporated—a fact that nobody seems to be challenging—allows them greater flexibility. Colleges could more easily work with the assistance of private benefactors such as Tom Hunter or Irvine Laidlaw, with fewer constraints on giving such generous patrons a say in their development.

I will give members an example of where that approach might work: the skills shortage in football and rugby. Those are serious skills shortages, and football and rugby are large and important businesses in Scotland. It should be possible for colleges, in partnership with employers such as premier football and rugby teams, to establish schools that are not just sports academies in the morning, but which also teach English, maths and other courses in the afternoon. That would dovetail with the training regimes of sports clubs; it already happens in Barcelona, for example. We can see the results of that for Spanish clubs and the Spanish nation. I have seen many highly talented footballers of 13 and 14 years of age being signed up with professional clubs, but being released by those clubs at 15 or 16 because they have lost their way at school and have fallen into bad habits such as smoking, alcohol and drugs. Football or sport schools that were run by colleges could save those young people from themselves and help our local and national teams.

Dr Murray: Is the member aware of the exciting project in Dumfries whereby Queen of the South Football Club and the north-west resource centre, with its education facilities, do precisely the sort of things that enable young people to become re-engaged with education through their interest in sport?

Mr Monteith: I am not aware of that project, but it sounds like an example of what I would like to see developed throughout Scotland. If the member can provide me with further information, I will certainly read up on it.

As Christine May and others have said, the programme of involving colleges more in school

education is not about dumping children who are disengaged or disruptive; it is about catching them before they make that mistake and allowing them to make better, more productive and progressive choices.

I turn to the summary of research findings number 14/2004, with which members have been provided. The paper states:

"The need for local authority intervention and forward planning was identified as crucial in order to avoid ad-hoc provision."

What does that mean and what would that intervention entail? We have to acknowledge the independence of further education colleges. If the intervention is about creating a partnership to determine what can best be done, I would accept it. However, intervention in the college programme by the local authority holding out for agreement would be a negative step.

The paper also states:

"a few college contacts noted that they were currently less able to cater for girls due to their emphasis on providing courses in the skilled trades."

It suggests that the programme should be added to or changed to attract girls. I say no to that: although colleges must try to provide as many courses as possible that attract pupils, we must challenge the stereotypes that suggest that girls cannot take certain building courses because they have not done so in the past. We need to challenge that and ensure that girls realise that there can be a future for them in a wide variety of professions that were previously the domain of males. That way, we would provide girls with more opportunities and have a far more productive economy.

I welcome the motion and the amendment and I am pleased to support both.

10:38

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I support strongly the thrust of the discussion and the "Lifelong Partners" document. My colleague Robert Brown covered the main issues thoroughly in his usual highly competent manner, so I will not run over them again. As far as I am aware, neither he nor I are candidates in our party leadership election, so I can praise him without fluttering doocots.

We have inherited from Westminster the bad and anti-democratic procedure whereby we start debating documents before we have read them. No self-respecting teacher in a college or school would instruct their pupils to debate a document that they had not read, so why on earth should we do so? The procedure should be that the minister launches the document, gets his stuff on the

television—which is what the TV companies want—and then a day or two later, when we have read the document, we can have an intelligent debate about it.

The present position is futile. It reminds me of an excellent lady in Edinburgh who for many years made a good contribution to public life by denouncing what she thought were dirty shows at the Edinburgh festival fringe. She had never seen them, but she had acted on the basis of the hype and press publicity, which was always far more lurid than the shows. Here we are, debating a document that we have not read, on the basis of the hype and publicity about it. That is foolish and undemocratic and we should stop doing it.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Does Donald Gorrie accept that the usual procedure is for the minister to make a statement to Parliament and be cross-examined, after which we have a full-scale debate?

Donald Gorrie: That is a good procedure but, again, it is helpful for us to be able to read the document before we question the minister. I accept entirely that it is important to get ministerial statements.

The fact that there is such consensus on the main issues—even Brian Monteith made a constructive and reasonably consensual speech—shows that Scotland could manage its affairs in a number of ways. On many issues, it would be perfectly possible for a minority Government to negotiate with the Parliament and make progress with policy that was supported by consensus. There is scope for a considerable number of variations of coalitions or agreements between parties for governing Scotland acceptably. I throw out that idea for consideration.

The basic consideration is what is best for each young person. What is proposed will help many young people who are not turned on by school—who are in fact probably turned off by it—who would be re-enthused by having part of their education at college. We should extend that; there should be more use of voluntary activity to replace some school activity. There are good systems based on sport, outward-boundery or other character-building activities, which play a great part in helping many young people.

The biggest problem that many schools face is disruptive pupils. If we could find something that stopped pupils being disruptive we would do much better. If they could be taught outwith the school, whether in a college, voluntary organisations or in other milieux, that would benefit them and they would stop fouling up everyone else's education.

We are too classroom oriented. My experience is that education took place outwith the classroom. The things that I remember about my education

with satisfaction and which had an effect on me did not take place in classrooms; I refer to orchestras, rugby teams, visits and scout camps. We should pay more attention to things that excite pupils and open up such avenues for them.

We have to get over the idea that intelligent people go to universities and read books and less bright people go to colleges or do some other less intellectual activity. That is a false notion because we need a lot of intelligent craftspeople. The people who built up Britain's prosperity in the 18th and 19th centuries started at the bottom—as blacksmiths, for example—where they got to know their subjects and then invented, developed and manufactured railway engines, for example. If in the building trades we had intelligent people who qualified fully as plumbers and electricians and then built up businesses and worked in design and management, we would get somewhere. Given that we are in this building, we are fully aware of the fact that we need intelligent people to manage our building industry. Colleges should start attracting brighter pupils to learn trades and build up from that.

Disclosure was mentioned in the document. Disclosure Scotland is important, but the situation is hopelessly over the top. We are descending into the mental state that there was in Scotland during the witch-hunting mania in the 17th century. We must consider disclosure reasonably and with level-headedness.

There are issues to do with the GTC, funding colleges, and colleges and schools getting due credit for the success of their pupils, but there is huge consensus on this great subject. I hope that we will progress in the right direction.

10:45

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I welcome the two reports. Members will be glad to hear that I have scanned and digested the 100-odd pages in the past 10 minutes. Joking apart, I suggest that photocopies of the reports should be made available if there are printing difficulties. I am sure that it will be taken on board that it is unfair that most members in the chamber do not have copies.

I begin by referring to earlier documents on skills and lifelong learning in particular, because their underlying principles are key to the debate. The lifelong learning strategy that was published in February 2003 spoke about the links that had necessarily to be established between schools and further education colleges—which will obviously happen with the strategy that we are discussing—and with local employers. Brian Monteith tried to get members to argue with him, but for once there was a fair bit of consensus when he spoke. I agree that local employers

should be seen as being among the main stakeholders in debates on lifelong learning and skills, but we must go far wider when we consider skills and the definition of vocational skills.

The schools and colleges conference that was held prior to the consultation dealt with important principles, one of which Rosemary Byrne rightly mentioned. A national strategy and local strategies are necessary. Implementation issues with reference to careers have also been discussed and good points have been made.

One issue that arose at the schools and colleges conference was that there is no one model of collaboration, which is true. Members have said that there are issues especially in rural areas; the minister is particularly interested in a rural project that covers land-based skills at Balfron High School. Many former working methods have been lost and schools' curriculums have become much more rigid, but we have a big opportunity to become more flexible again and to meet local needs.

The conference also dealt with the fact that the pattern of engagement in further education colleges needs to reflect local circumstances. Lifelong learning strategies are a key issue. In my area, in which Falkirk College and Clackmannan College will merge, it has been identified that the rural parts of my constituency in particular are somewhat underprovided for in respect of further education and skills development. Elaine Murray talked about ensuring that rural development and pilot projects home in on and try to shore up provision, which has obviously been lacking in many areas.

I am pleased that Stirling Council has just unveiled its latest lifelong learning initiative—it has launched its community planning lifelong learning strategy. I do not know the details of that strategy—it was revealed only recently—but I know that much work has already been done and that the main stakeholders have been involved, as earlier documents suggested should happen. Careers Scotland has been involved and pilots in Bannockburn and the eastern villages—which are in the Stirling Council area—have delivered results. Enrolments on Falkirk College courses and, I think, at Stirling Centre for Further Education, which is an offshoot of Falkirk College, have risen dramatically. Things have worked: many people who left school disillusioned have used the learning centre at Cornton as a stepping stone to go on to courses in Falkirk College. Therefore, the thrust of what is being done is in the right direction.

I am a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland, which was concerned that achievements in further education college courses—whatever they are—should be accredited. The minister said

that we are going in that direction, which is welcome.

I also welcome what has been said about resources, but would like to hear more from the minister about careers. Pupil welfare and support is one of the two most important issues that the EIS has raised, and that in turn raises the issue of disclosure arrangements. We have not heard many details about disclosure arrangements, so I wonder whether the minister can give us more details about them in summing up.

There has also been concern expressed about the need for a professional body for further education. The EIS has recommended the GTC as that professional body; perhaps the minister will say what is happening in that respect.

Finally, I am sure that the Association of Scottish Colleges—which is also based in Stirling—will be happy with the proposals in the two strategy documents. It is keen that what is offered in further education colleges should supplement the school curriculum and that we should not get away from that vision. There must be no early specialisation in any form. Obviously, that is also an EIS matter.

I welcome the strategy documents and today's consensus.

10:52

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I have not speed-read the documents—indeed, I have looked only at certain paragraphs—so my speech will be quite short. I am reminded that Christine Grahame can be taken out of the classroom, but the classroom cannot be taken out of Christine Grahame. Christine May used the word “disinterested” and quickly and properly corrected herself. That word is one of my bugbears and I mumbled, “Not in an education debate.” If members do not know the difference between what she said and what she should have said, Christine May and I will take them to the side and explain the difference in detail.

I proceed to the matter in hand. I am not going to repeat the claims in all parties' manifestos. Obviously, we have all done very well. The point is that we are not talking about anything new. People were doing such things in the 1960s and 1970s. “I know”—as a rugby player once said—“cos I was there.” Schools had day-release and part-time release arrangements. However, stigma was attached because in those days, people who were not very bright did such courses. That stigma must go. Those of us who have been a pupil and a teacher—as I have been—in a classroom know from experience that children can be identified who are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time and would benefit from vocational experience. Such children are desperate and they

sometimes turn into problem or disruptive children, or they simply become completely detached from the system, which is unnecessary.

When I see what plumbers can earn nowadays, I think that I would love to have trained as a plumber. They earn more than lawyers earn and will not come into people's houses without a £60 or so call-out fee, after which they will simply change a washer. A career as a plumber, electrician or plasterer is a far better career for a young man or woman now than it was. Far too many pupils who have gone on to college or university tell me that they have studied politics and journalism. We are awash with people doing politics and journalism courses who will not get jobs and who will not contribute to the community.

I do not share people's great concerns about the skills shortage in football and rugby. I have been anaesthetised to that since the day of my birth—I am genetically opposed to sport. However, we have serious skills shortages in all kinds of trades. I note that 3,000 pupils at further education colleges move on to higher education, so the situation is open and flexible.

I will comment specifically on parts of the strategy that have been brought to my attention by Jewel and Esk Valley College and Borders College in my constituency. As I am sure the minister is aware, colleges are worried about the expectations that have been raised and their ability to deliver on them. There is a particular issue in relation to special needs pupils who may attend colleges. If the minister would listen, perhaps he could tell me whether colleges were consulted on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill, which is an important point.

A relevant issue that I would like the minister to clarify is who is legally responsible for pupils when they enter a college. I understand that the schools should be responsible because the discipline systems in colleges and schools are different and I understand that school pupils will go into colleges for only a few hours a week. They will have to learn to adjust to their new situations and adults in colleges will have to learn to adjust to the influx of young people, which can be mutually grand. When I started my law degree, I thought that I was awfully old—I was 38. I had to adjust to the fact that people of 18 who were in my classes kept asking me for the answers to questions. I told them that I did not know the answers, but they thought that somehow I knew stuff because of my age. Difficulties will arise from differences in age, but those differences can be mutually beneficial.

The minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I understand that the cost of an adult attending a college is about £200, whereas the cost in respect of a school pupil is nearly £800 because of liaison

costs, supervisory costs, disclosure and the legal costs of discipline.

One little paragraph of the document that I managed to read concerned delivery in rural areas, which Rosemary Byrne and other members mentioned. Paragraph 11.11 states:

"Further modes of delivery may need to be considered, principally in respect of ... distance-learning, including open and flexible learning and videoconferencing."

How much of that is in place and will be funded? How will it be funded? The part of the document that deals with extending delivery includes the statement that

"More than 70% of Scottish secondary schools have a broadband connection"

of a certain level—I do not know what the figure means, so I will not quote it—

"or better."

I want to know where the other 30 per cent of schools are located. Are they in rural areas to which broadband has not been extended? Will that disadvantage rural areas when they seek to take part in the strategy?

In general, the strategy is a good idea, although it is not new. Overall, it is welcome; it represents commonsense and pragmatic education development policy, which makes a change.

10:58

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I, too, welcome the strategy for schools and further education colleges that the minister has outlined today. I also welcome the positive way in which the debate has been conducted, which is good to see.

The strategy is an important part of the Executive's skills and economic strategy. We all know that Scotland's greatest resource is its people, and it is very welcome that today we are focusing on our young people. We need to equip them with the skills that they need for a modern, ever-changing economy. Given that this morning we seem to be in election mode, I take the opportunity to congratulate my colleague Gordon Brown, not only on his election as the member of Parliament for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, but on being the best and most successful Chancellor of the Exchequer that this country has ever seen. I remind the chamber that his handling of our economy has ensured that we have the funding necessary to realise his and our vision of equity and opportunity for all.

As I said, we have a modern, ever-changing economy. We need seriously to consider the issue of lifelong learning and to encourage change in our young people. When many of us left school,

we could look forward to having a career for life. Nowadays it is estimated that people will change their career 10 times in their working lifetime. We need to consider that issue. I believe that the strategy for school and college partnership will add value and will enable us to expand young people's further education opportunities and choices.

As Christine Grahame, Christine May and others have said, development of the vocational skills of 14 to 16-year-olds is crucial. Careers advice is vital. Having worked for many years in further and higher education, I know that it is crucial that such advice is on-going and well informed by the labour market. I hate to say this, but I agree with Christine Grahame. I have talked about sexy qualifications. If there is a programme about vets on television, we find that a lot of people want to work with animals. We must provide our young people with realistic choices, through good careers advice and labour market information.

We talk a great deal about motivation and aspiration, and we need to realise fully our young people's aspirations. We must also raise those aspirations. Today's edition of *The Courier* contains an interesting story entitled "Pupils gear up to student life". It is about a partnership between Kirkcaldy High School and the University of St Andrews—an excellent piece of work on which they are to be congratulated.

My colleague Christine May and others made the point that colleges should not become a dumping ground for difficult students, which is important. However, I make a plea to the minister to ensure that programmes resulting from new course development are available to all our young people. This week Cathy Peattie and I were in Thurso, as members of the Equal Opportunities Committee. We heard that lack of flexibility in course design can act as a barrier to learning, especially for those with special learning needs and impairments. None of us wants that.

Today we have heard again that it is important for us to build on best practice. I made the point to Rosemary Byrne that there is much best practice to which we can look. I welcome the additional resources that were announced this morning and draw members' attention to the view programme at Fife College in my constituency. The programme is different and gives young people tasters in areas such as construction and hospitality that they would not get if they were only at school. It not only gives them the opportunity to experience a wider range of vocational areas than they would otherwise experience, but aids transition from school to further education and from school to work. It introduces pupils to areas that they may not have thought were for them. Subjects such as information technology are offered in a different learning environment. In Fife,

we have seen that attending college not only helps school pupils to make the transition to further education and work and informs career choices, but improves their performance and behaviour at school. There are already many good examples from which we can learn.

The institute of applied technology, which is a partnership between Fife College and Glenrothes College, has a young engineers club. That is important, because it is encouraging young girls into engineering. As the chair of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on construction, I have seen the gender stereotyping that exists in the construction industry. We need to tackle that problem. If we are to realise the potential of all our young people, we must ensure that they are aware of all the opportunities that are available to them, whether those be professional or in plumbing. We must start to value people who have skilled trades, as other countries do. To do that, we must show our young people, especially girls, that there are opportunities in the construction trades.

I believe that the strategy for school and college partnership will play a major part in realising young people's aspirations. In particular, I ask the minister to take on board the point that I have made about people with special learning needs and impairments.

11:04

Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): I welcome the debate on "Lifelong Partners", even if it was announced at rather short notice. I certainly agree with Donald Gorrie, Elaine Murray and others that it was regrettable that we did not have sight of the document in advance. Although I am reluctant to admit that I have something in common with Christine Grahame, like her, I am not a speed reader. I look forward to reading the document later.

I take up a point that Lord James made in his speech. I was interested to hear him refer to the Executive adopting policies that had been proposed by others in the past. I suggest to him that that results from the use of proportional representation systems in our electoral system in Scotland. Perhaps he will now accept that after gaining no increase at all in the number of members of Parliament at the recent election, it is time that the Tories started thinking about PR for all types of elections.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: When I was in the House of Commons, there was a free vote on that subject. I voted for the additional member system more than 20 years ago.

Mike Pringle: The answer to that is that one learns a new thing in life every day. I congratulate Lord James on his vote and suggest that he

convince the rest of his party of that attitude to the right system for all elections.

The document gives us the opportunity to debate the key part of the partnership agreement that encourages 14 to 16-year-olds to obtain the vocational skills that they need for employment. The partnership agreement also allows more people to undertake such training at further education colleges. I say to Fiona Hyslop that that specific policy was in the Liberal Democrat manifesto in 2003 and we argued strongly for it to be in the partnership agreement, so I am delighted that it is and that we are adopting it today.

The minister used two words that were particularly relevant—"new opportunities". The programme is a new opportunity for pupils and others to go into further education and have a much wider choice of courses at FE colleges.

The key point about the announcement is that the extra £41 million is great news for colleges. I might be one of the few MSPs who do not have an FE college in their constituency, but many young people—and their parents—have contacted me about their problems getting into college. The demand in Lothian is especially great and there is not enough money in the pot to provide all the courses.

Plumbing is a prime example. Recently, I had a long conversation with the principal of Jewel and Esk Valley College in which he highlighted particular problems with his plumbing courses. He had space for 35 or 40 people and more than 200 applicants. Why could he not take more? There were two reasons: a lack of money and a lack of space. I hope that the £41 million will give colleges such as Jewel and Esk Valley the opportunity to take on more people—plumbers, electricians and others—as Christine Grahame said.

At present, colleges are doing tremendous work to provide courses for 44,000 school pupils. However, they have not received full funding. The new money that was announced will provide colleges with a stable footing on which to continue such courses and will allow resources to be put back into adult courses. Christine May said that the average age of an FE college student was about 28. We have to encourage not only school pupils but young adults to go into further education.

We need to provide more money for courses. My colleague Robert Brown spoke about the hospitality industry, which we all know is vital to Scotland's economy. Getting people to come here from abroad to be given good service and encouraging them to return can only encourage the tourism industry, which is also vital to Scotland's economy.

Fiona Hyslop: I agree very much with what the member says. There is a shortage of domestic

hospitality workers in Edinburgh in particular. Therefore, increasing the number of places for school pupils must not happen at the expense of places for older students, particularly for those whose training could serve the important needs of the Edinburgh economy.

Mike Pringle: I do not disagree. I just said that we need to encourage young adults back into education, not just in Edinburgh but throughout Scotland. If one goes into a pub in Edinburgh, it is almost certain that one will be served by an Australian, a New Zealander, a Canadian or a South African. We need to encourage our people to get into the hospitality industry.

I am pleased that the Executive has recognised the high-quality teaching that goes on in FE colleges. It is certain that young people benefit from that. Many pupils are not suited to the academic straitjacket that traditional subjects place on them. Schools can do only so much. I saw the excellent facilities on offer at the new Gracemount High School in Edinburgh South, but providing vocational training is better suited to colleges because that fits in well beside the lifelong learning that they offer. Colleges also have the expertise and skills needed for teaching vocational subjects.

The programme signals that the Executive is committed to developing a more enterprising culture in Scotland. Following the announcement of his resignation, I congratulate Jim Wallace on the work that he has done to create the smart, successful Scotland initiative, and lifelong learning is part of that work. The initiative will give pupils the skills that they need to contribute to the Scottish economy today, and the roll-out of enterprise in education in every school in Scotland creates a good platform for the future.

The announcement today has been welcomed by the Association of Scottish Colleges and I am glad that the FE sector is now getting the resources and recognition that it deserves. I support the Executive motion as well as the Conservative amendment.

11:11

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It has been a generally consensual debate. The most contentious issue has probably been the unavailability of the document "Lifelong Partners". I was one of the fortunate ones because yesterday I managed to get hold of a photocopy of the document, which I read with interest. That was helpful in informing my contribution, and those of my colleagues, to this debate. However, I have sympathy for the back benchers who were unable to be similarly informed and I am sure that the Executive will learn its lesson—indeed, the

minister was gracious enough to apologise to the chamber. I hope that the situation will not be repeated.

Some post-election partisan points have been made in different parts of the chamber, but I will try to steer away from that as best I can. However, I was interested to read paragraph 3.7 on page 9 of the document. The paragraph, which is entitled "Scottish Parliament—Skills and Continued Learning Debate", says:

"On 20 May 2004 the Scottish Parliament agreed to a motion that among other things urged the Scottish Executive 'to increase the opportunity for school pupils across Scotland to access courses in further education colleges from the age of 14'."

It does not say that the quote was from a Conservative amendment that I lodged and which was agreed to. I am delighted, therefore, that the Executive is taking on board Conservative policy.

Paragraph 3.7 also states:

"The motion had the support of 107 MSPs with five MSPs voting against."

It was the Scottish Socialist Party that voted against that amendment. I was rather surprised by Rosemary Byrne's speech, because she made it clear that she supported the initiative and yet on the day of that vote, the SSP voted against the amendment. No doubt the SSP can explain itself on a future occasion.

Mike Pringle: Will the member say, as Lord James did, that he is in favour of a proportional representation system? Will he also encourage his colleagues to adopt such a system?

Murdo Fraser: Lord James should perhaps have clarified in his intervention that he meant that he supported a proportional system for a devolved Parliament. He did not support proportional representation for the Westminster Parliament, which is an important distinction. Personally, I do not support—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Mr Fraser, do you think that you could talk about the subject of the motion?

Murdo Fraser: I will happily do so, but you will appreciate, Presiding Officer, that I was simply responding to an intervention on an entirely different point. However, I am sure that we will talk about PR on another occasion.

The arguments in favour of developing school-college partnerships have been well rehearsed. Dr Elaine Murray, Donald Gorrie and others set out the arguments for such partnerships. We all know about the difficulties with disengaged youngsters who are not interested in academic subjects. I absolutely accept the point made by Christine May and others that colleges should not be dumping grounds for those who find school difficult.

Nevertheless, we know that there are youngsters who are not academically engaged and the opportunity for them to pursue a more technical or vocational approach is therefore very welcome. When we look at the spectrum of education and consider the figures on truancy and discipline in the classroom, I am sure that the programme will have a beneficial effect. Giving pupils a wider range of opportunities is bound to help with such problems.

We also need increased vocational training for our economy, which has skills shortages and gaps. It will be better for everyone if youngsters can come out of education at 16 or at whatever age with additional skills that better equip them for the workplace. Indeed, various studies on pilot projects have shown that they are extremely successful in re-engaging youngsters who have not been otherwise engaged in education and in ensuring that they are better equipped for the workplace when they leave education.

The Conservative amendment, in the name of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, considers a number of specific issues that require careful monitoring. First of all, colleges must have adequate capacity to accommodate eligible school pupils, and effective and fair systems must be established to deal with disruptive behaviour in colleges if and when it arises. Finally, we must ensure that funding for school pupils who study at FE colleges is correctly dealt with. I will elaborate on one or two of those points and touch on the issue of rural areas, which is mentioned in the amendment.

On rural areas, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton mentioned the Crichton campus in Dumfries. At this point, I must correct Elaine Murray, because I understand that the Crichton campus is in the Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale constituency.

Dr Murray: I said that Dumfries and Galloway College is in the Dumfries and Galloway constituency.

Murdo Fraser: In that case, perhaps we can all agree on the matter. Crichton campus is in the constituency of Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale, which of course is that of my good friend David Mundell, who is now a member of Parliament.

Other examples have been highlighted this morning. Banff and Buchan College, which is mentioned in the strategy document, delivers to youngsters in a rural area with a scattered population. Clearly, certain transport issues have to be addressed and we must consider the development of distance learning. In my area, Perth College has a number of outreach centres in towns such as Crieff, Aberfeldy and Pitlochry, and

there is scope to use those to deliver services to pupils in remote and rural areas. However, the matter must be monitored carefully.

Funding must be put on a sound footing. I note that the issue is to be revised in August 2005, and it is important that we keep the matter under review.

Several members mentioned discipline. It must be pointed out that the college environment is different from that in school. For a start, the onus is much more on the student, which might, as a number of members pointed out, create a challenge for college lecturers in dealing with potential discipline problems. After all, they might have less experience than schoolteachers in such matters.

Robert Brown made a very good point about the commitment of schools. Schools must not simply pay lip service to the whole agenda and must show real commitment in encouraging youngsters to take up opportunities where they are suited to them. Moreover, the whole process must be continually monitored and evaluated to ensure that everything fits.

The exciting thing about this approach is that it opens up the prospect of a more diverse education system. Indeed, Chris Ballance conceded as much in his speech. Perhaps we should also look at the school leaving age and consider whether 16 is the right age at which our youngsters should aim to leave school. We are opening the door to a wider spectrum of available opportunities. As Brian Monteith said, we should allow schools to be as free as colleges are. If incorporation set colleges free and allowed them to expand and to follow their current successful path, why cannot we do the same for schools?

Last night, the Deputy First Minister, a number of other members and I spent a very pleasant evening in the spring sunshine on the Spirit of Fairbridge at Leith docks. As members know, the Fairbridge enterprise tries to give disadvantaged youngsters new opportunities in life. We all have a duty to look at our young people, particularly those who are disengaged from mainstream education and job opportunities, and try to bring them back in. That is why this programme is so welcome, and why we support it. We support the Executive motion, and I am delighted to support my colleague's amendment.

11:19

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): As my colleague Fiona Hyslop intimated in her speech, the Scottish National Party has long advocated the development of partnerships between schools and FE colleges as a means of broadening horizons and expanding opportunities

for our young people. Indeed, we made such a commitment in our manifesto for the previous Scottish Parliament elections. I am also happy to acknowledge other parties' commitment in this area.

We therefore welcome the publication of the Executive's strategy and plans. The minister will no doubt be gratified with the largely supportive consensus that has emerged this morning, but it is a pity that members have been allowed little time to digest the details of the Executive's proposals. As a result, the debate has been rather more broad brush than it could and should have been. Fortunately, as Robert Brown has indicated, the Education Committee's current inquiry into pupil motivation covers school-college partnerships and we will seek to drill down into the detail before we come back to the chamber with our report.

Given the evidence that we have already taken, I am sure that our report will feature a rejection of the notion that offering vocational training or more specialist provision to 14 to 16-year-old pupils will act as a panacea and sort out the problem of young people who are disaffected by or disengaged from school education. I am glad that the minister has confirmed that that will not be the case.

Pupils with deep-seated problems that are reflected in poor attendance or behaviour records at school are unlikely to alter their attitude just because they are given access to a college course. A different learning environment will not change their personal circumstances. Surely we require early intervention to nip those problems in the bud, but policy development in that area is still rather too thin. In that regard, ministers could even consider the approach that Brian Monteith outlined—he is a bit like a volcano: he spouts rubbish most of the time, but occasionally he comes up with a good nugget.

On the other hand, academically bright pupils who want to exercise a positive choice to access a college course should not be systematically denied that opportunity or dissuaded from taking that route because such a choice does not fit with teachers' expectations for that pupil. That happens too often. As Donald Gorrie pointed out, if we want to facilitate enterprise and to help our young people to realise their potential, we must move away from a slavish attachment to the old stereotypes. If this initiative is to be successful, it is critical that we identify the pupils who would benefit most from such opportunities and ensure that they are given access to them. I realise that local circumstances might influence targeting, but I would be interested in finding out whether the existing evidence can tell us what the guidance on such decisions should be.

Christine May: Does the member acknowledge that much innovative work is being carried out in

this area? For example, in my area, the higher still collaboration programme gives pupils the opportunity to take courses at intermediate 1, higher to advanced higher level in subjects that might not be on general offer in their local high schools because of the shortage of applications.

Mr Ingram: I am happy to acknowledge the good work that is being carried out up and down the country. However, as Christine Grahame has suggested, there is still a stigma associated with vocational courses, and more academically bright pupils are being discouraged from going down those routes. I do not necessarily mean the institutions and initiatives that Christine May is talking about. However, such situations happen, and we need to get rid of them.

Another critical issue is the accreditation of course outcomes and the question whether such qualifications will be well respected in the labour market. Existing schemes, such as those that the Education Committee visited in Glasgow yesterday, appear to be aimed at training that is suitable for people seeking future employment in local authorities, in construction or caring jobs, for example. How does the Executive envisage the development of links with employers in the private sector? Should not the proposed standing stakeholder forum—or whatever it is called—include business organisations from the outset? I note that trade unions are represented, as are pupils, parents, teachers and staff, but I do not see any representation from the private sector.

Sylvia Jackson mentioned careers advice, which is another area that needs to be developed hand in hand with increasing access to vocational training and specialist provision. At the moment, advisory services tend to focus on the last year or two of people's school careers, and particularly on Universities and Colleges Admissions Service applications. Does the funding announced today encompass extending careers advice to inform decisions in respect of school-college activities? We know from existing research that young people who develop career goals and aspirations early on are much more focused and get more out of their schooling in terms of attaining relevant qualifications for the career that they want to pursue. Surely the school-college initiative should be used to help more young people down that path.

Notwithstanding our caveats with regard to issues such as capacity concerns and the potential for displacement, we do not want to turn colleges into schools or vice versa, as Christine May said. There is a need for pupil accreditation that has full currency in the marketplace, and I would like to hear the minister's thoughts on that. There is also a need to ensure that college lecturers have teaching qualifications that are

appropriate to the tasks required of them, preferably with GTC registration. Having said all that, we welcome the extension of school-college partnerships and wish those initiatives every success.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Allan Wilson to wind up. Minister, I can give you about 12 minutes.

11:27

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): That is generous of you, Presiding Officer. I shall use the first of those minutes to apologise profusely again for the delay in getting the document to members. As our national bard said:

"The best laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft a-gley."

This is one of those occasions. We have asked for a report from officials and we shall make that report available to you, Presiding Officer. We shall have to reflect on its contents, as will the rest of the Parliament, I suspect.

It has been a useful debate, nonetheless, and I am grateful to members for their constructive contributions—with one notable exception, to which I will not refer. We all know the benefits that pupils derive from the learning opportunities offered by colleges, and I think that everyone in the chamber genuinely wants to increase and further enhance those opportunities for pupils across Scotland. They are opportunities that give pupils valuable vocational skills that will help to grow Scotland's economy. That is why our approach differs from that of the nationalists, whose amendment we will not be accepting, although we will accept the Conservative amendment.

Christine Grahame said that there was nothing new in what was proposed, but I beg to differ. We began our schools-colleges review by examining existing collaboration between schools and colleges in Scotland. That collaboration has worked well for us until now and we wanted to build on the good work that was already taking place. Collaboration is about joint working on joint projects, but what we propose, on the other hand, is partnership.

Partnership is much more than collaboration. It means building a relationship in which organisations work together for a common purpose. I believe that it is indicative of the depth and maturity of existing school-college links that we now embrace a partnership approach across the country that is founded on mutual respect and trust. That is the type of approach that will deliver a successful strategy. It is clearly not a short-term initiative, but a major realignment of both sectors.

That is what is new. Something else that is new is the funding that goes with that, and Christine May was right to point out that that funding must be sustainable in the long term. In addition to the existing resources of £19 million—a not insubstantial sum, as I am sure members would agree—an additional £35 million was put in by the 2004 spending review. That funding will support, among other things, more pupils to benefit from college learning and stable funding arrangements that do not disadvantage colleges in providing courses to pupils. It will also support training for college staff—as mentioned by Sylvia Jackson—and college activity to implement the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, which other members mentioned. It will also support enhanced careers advice to inform pupils of school-college options.

Robert Brown: I would like to sound a cautionary note. On our visit to Glasgow yesterday, members of the Education Committee learned that a considerable amount of European funding was going into supporting initiatives. As 2006 approaches and as that funding diminishes, there is a question about how we can replace that funding and sustain the initiatives. Does the minister have any comments on that?

Allan Wilson: One of my pleasant tasks in this new job has been to dispense large amounts of European structural funding to further education colleges the length and breadth of the country. Structural funds make an important contribution, as does the social fund, to further education college learning. We have to take those factors into account in our response to Commission proposals on the future of such structural funding.

Fiona Hyslop: The point that Robert Brown was making was that we know that that funding will be withdrawn in 2006. We also learned that the determined to succeed money is very much part and parcel of current funding. I would be interested in the minister's thoughts on whether the new money that he is announcing today will displace that current funding, or whether we can expect it to continue so that we have added value rather than circulation of funding pots.

Allan Wilson: This is neither the time nor the place to get into a debate on the contribution that structural funds make to the block grant, but the basic premise of the question is not correct. We do not know that structural funding will cease to exist after 2006, although there will undoubtedly be a reduction in our entitlement to the said structural funds, which we will have to factor into our budget considerations. In the next spending review, we must consider how we can build upon the additional resource that we have made available in the current spending review. In addition to all that, we have today announced an additional £6.5

million allocation from within the Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department budget, and the funding council will ensure, through strategic oversight, that colleges aim towards equitable access to provision for pupils across Scotland.

Decisions on the type and scale of provision will be taken locally, on the basis of agreements between colleges, schools and local authorities, and the community planning partnership process is absolutely vital to that outcome. Funding will include the usual funding supplements for pupils in rural or deprived areas. Again, those are important aspects of the additional resource. The funding methodology will also take account of pupils who require extended learning support. That point was made during the course of the debate.

I take the points that have been made about capacity and ethos. Given that there is an inevitable limit on capacity, as Peter Peacock said, and to maintain colleges' central ethos as centres of voluntary learning for adults, due regard will have to be paid to the pupils who will benefit most from activities that enhance their prospective life chances. School and college partnership is obviously not the only way in which vocational and other learning opportunities can be made available to pupils. In the short to medium term, it will be the principal means of delivering many skills for work courses, but other modes of delivery will need to be explored fully.

We know that it is important that school-college partnerships do not alter the fundamental characteristics of colleges. Their central ethos as centres for voluntary learning for adults needs to be retained. The partnership must be managed carefully so that adult learners are not dissuaded from returning to education. Moreover, the presence of too many pupils would undermine their experience of adult centres of learning, as Christine Grahame and others have said. The need to maintain colleges' distinctive contribution to pupils' education is reflected in all aspects of the strategy.

Elaine Smith: Will the minister clarify whether college lecturers will require to have teacher training and to be GTC registered, and whether their salaries will be similar to those of school teachers? How will the Executive ensure that school pupils are not dumped into college, which Peter Peacock mentioned?

Allan Wilson: The member has raised a number of points. I will not be able to cover every point that is made by every member, although I will do my best. I will obviously write to members about points that I do not deal with during the debate. I will come on to the GTC requirements in due course, so I ask the member to let me make progress.

First, I will deal with rural areas. By 2007, all secondary and special schools in Scotland will have effective, meaningful and appropriate partnership with at least one college, for pupils in S3 and above. Even the most remote school can have a successful relationship with a college. For example, we outline a likely new role for learndirect Scotland branded learning services. There will be funding supplements for pupils in rural areas and we will examine transport costs further. We have asked the GTC to confirm new, more flexible arrangements for lecturers who teach pupils in schools. As has been mentioned, we want online and distance learning to be explored locally; that will include the use of videoconferencing.

Several members have spoken about careers advisers, whose role is set out in the advice. One of the main findings of the research into the attitudes of school pupils to further education courses was that there was a need to improve the information, advice and guidance that we give to pupils when they are considering their college options. In the interim report, we explained that Careers Scotland had been asked to prepare a business case for its enhanced engagements. No decisions have yet been taken and we have asked Careers Scotland to discuss that case with the school and college sectors before funding decisions are made.

A number of members discussed pupil welfare and support. Schools and colleges have a duty of care to pupils. We recognise that pupils who attend colleges enter what is essentially an adult environment. We will ensure that advice to schools and colleges on important matters such as pupil welfare and support is provided in the guide that accompanies the strategy. Other issues that will be dealt with include the employment of appropriate risk assessment strategies, the disclosure of college staff and maximising campus safety arrangements.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton mentioned the disciplining of disruptive pupils. Although education authorities and schools have formal responsibility for the disciplining of pupils, colleges determine who can go on particular courses and can withdraw the relevant provision. At the outset, colleges and schools need to agree on the process whereby a college can withdraw a place because of a pupil's behaviour.

On sport and recreation, which is one of the key pilot areas, I agree with practically all of what Brian Monteith had to say. A number of colleges are already engaged in sports excellence. Two examples spring immediately to mind—James Watt College in my area of North Ayrshire and Falkirk College. In addition, many colleges deliver courses on sports management, coaching and

advanced coaching. All that is to be welcomed and I hope that it can be built on in the report.

During the debate, every political party in the Parliament has tried to claim political ownership of the strategy; I suspect that some of them were not serious in doing so. References have been made to local authorities that have collaborated with colleges for many years, such as Glasgow City Council, Fife Council and North Ayrshire Council, which all share the distinction of being Labour councils. Of course, that is no coincidence.

Who could forget the new Labour mantra of "education, education, education" with which our Prime Minister, Tony Blair, swept to power in 1997 for the first of his three terms? Ever since, Tony Blair and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, have been building on the philosophy of James Keir Hardie, the founder and pioneer of the Labour Party, who recognised that education was the route out of poverty and into employment, and that equality of educational opportunity was inseparable from his vision of a more egalitarian society. There is not a primary school, a nursery school, a secondary school, a further education college, a learning centre or a university in this country that has not benefited from that philosophy over the past eight years and we intend to continue with it.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:40

Child Detentions

1. Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how many children under 16 are currently detained in institutions in Scotland. (S2O-6652)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): There are different grounds on which under-16s may be detained, either for their own welfare or for the welfare of the communities in which they live. On 11 May, there were 80 young people under the age of 16 in secure units. All of those young people are in secure units because that is the best way of meeting their needs or because they have committed a serious crime and a court has ordered that they be detained. We are investing heavily to modernise the secure estate, provide more places and ensure the provision of the range of specialist programmes that are required. In 2003-04, 20 young people under the age of 16 were detained under mental health legislation in Scotland.

Christine Grahame: Wrong minister. What the minister did not mention is that, at one point, six children were detained at Dungavel house. They were referred to the reporter to the children's panel, as the Minister for Education and Young People confirmed in an answer that he gave to me in Parliament. He said:

"None of the children was referred to a children's hearing as a result of those investigations."—[*Official Report*, 24 March 2005; c 15759.]

However, he failed to tell the chamber that the children were deported before the investigations were concluded. Does the minister share my concern that six young children whose welfare was such an issue that their case was referred to the children's panel were sent furth of Scotland when the matter of their welfare had not been resolved? Will she and her colleagues undertake to give the Parliament a guarantee that that will never happen again?

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Although welfare is a matter for the Executive, deportation is not.

Cathy Jamieson: I put on record that if Christine Grahame has concerns on those matters, she should take them up with the appropriate minister. She asked the Minister for

Education and Young People about the children in question and he provided a response. I can only reassure the Parliament that if investigations were under way and the matter was not taken to a hearing, it must have been the case that, along the way, someone decided that those children were not in need of compulsory care measures.

Neurology Services

2. Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in improving neurology services. (S2O-6716)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr): Neurology is a diverse but important specialty. We have doubled the number of consultant neurologists in Scotland over the past 10 years, from 23 in 1994 to 47 in 2004. The stroke strategy has improved the quality of care that is available to stroke patients. Most national health service boards now have dedicated acute stroke units and over the past 10 years there has been a 14 per cent increase in the 30-day survival rates following a stroke.

Mrs Mulligan: I welcome the Executive's efforts to recruit more neurologists, but there is still an insufficient number of them. People with epilepsy are still having to wait for diagnosis and treatment. One of the ways of reducing the workload of neurologists is to use specialist epilepsy nurses to provide medical care and support to epilepsy sufferers. What progress has been made on increasing the number of specialist epilepsy nurses to work with neurologists?

Mr Kerr: Our strategy on epilepsy rests on the managed clinical networks that we are developing around Scotland and the national network for paediatric epilepsy, which has a significant part to play in that. We have four consultants who have a special interest in epilepsy. According to the number of posts that are available in the boards, we have 13.5 whole-time equivalent specialist nurses in Scotland. Given members' inquiries on such matters, I accept that I can encourage boards to increase the number of specialist epilepsy nurses. However, that is a matter for boards' local planning and the framework that they seek to deliver in their communities.

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): What progress has been made by NHS Quality Improvement Scotland towards producing clinical standards for neurological conditions?

Mr Kerr: Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network guidelines for epilepsy have already been launched. I have been advised that NHS QIS will soon begin work on a project to improve standards of care for people with all neurological conditions.

Migrant Workers (Highlands and Islands)

3. Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will support migrant workers in the Highlands and Islands. (S2O-6705)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace): There are a number of ways in which migrant workers are supported at present. Those include the fresh talent initiative's relocation advisory service, which provides a wide range of practical advice to anyone interested in living, studying and working in Scotland. There are also local initiatives, such as Ross and Cromarty Enterprise's work with Highland Council and other partners to provide a range of support, such as language training; further support is planned in areas such as translation services, information and communications technology training and citizenship training.

Maureen Macmillan: I thank the minister for that positive response. Is he aware that, in spite of the increase in reported racist incidents, community groups, Highland Council, Northern constabulary and other agencies are all committed to supporting migrant workers? The community education service is particularly concerned to help them settle in by providing English lessons, but I have been told that some employers are unwilling to allow the community education service access to their work force for such lessons. Can the minister encourage employers not to reject such initiatives?

Mr Wallace: I encourage the initiatives that a range of public bodies are implementing to ensure that migrants to Scotland, and specifically to the Highlands and Islands, are made welcome. I am concerned about what Maureen Macmillan says about the difficulties some employers may be putting in the way of the community education service getting access to allow the teaching of English. Two initiatives may be relevant here. First, Highlands and Islands Enterprise has commissioned research on migrant workers in the HIE area in order to establish a broader understanding of the issue. Part of the research is to obtain the views and opinions of employers and migrant workers. I will ensure that HIE is aware of the specific concern raised by Maureen Macmillan. Secondly, officials in my department are working towards the production of an English for speakers of other languages strategy for Scotland. The strategy will go out for public consultation next month, and Maureen Macmillan's point should be taken up in the context of that consultation.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): What specific steps is the Executive taking to attract more Highlands and Islands people to the area and retain them, thereby both augmenting

the impact of migrant workers and boosting economic activity in the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area?

Mr Wallace: I take Jim Mather's point. We want to retain people local to the Highlands and Islands as well. At 2.9 per cent, the unemployment rate in the area is lower than in Scotland as a whole, and manufacturing jobs in the Highlands and Islands increased by 41 per cent between 1997 and 2003. The employment rate—at 80 per cent—is higher than in Scotland as a whole. As we know, the Scottish level of employment, at 75 per cent, is higher than anywhere else in the European Union except Denmark. Much has been done by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the enterprise network in the Highlands and Islands to promote employment and activity, and I hope that the increase in manufacturing jobs at least will provide opportunities for people to stay and work in the Highlands and Islands.

Fife (Economic Regeneration)

4. Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how it plans to regenerate the economy in Fife. (S2O-6640)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): Our enterprise strategy, "A Smart, Successful Scotland", provides strategic direction to the enterprise networks and the framework for direct support available from the Executive. The strategy sets out the basis for economic regeneration, in Fife as elsewhere, with the aim of improving productivity and competitiveness across the whole of Scotland.

Mr Brocklebank: I thank the minister for that answer—I think. Does he accept that one of the most effective ways of boosting the Fife economy would be to abolish the tolls on the Forth and Tay road bridges, rather than to increase their cost? That would not only encourage people to visit Fife—where there is a feeling, particularly in the tourism sector that there is a conspiracy to close Fife down altogether—but it would free up commuter traffic at busy times. Does he further accept that the Executive should help to meet the spiralling cost of repairs to the Tay road bridge, and that regular users of the bridge should not have to foot the bill for what is part of the national road network?

Allan Wilson: As I said in response to a similar question last week on the Erskine bridge, transport infrastructure is a key driver of economic growth. That is a fact of which we are wholly cognisant in the Executive, hence the substantial resource that we have put into improving transport infrastructure both in road and rail transportation throughout Scotland. That is a pattern of investment that we intend to continue. How best we invest is a

decision for ministers that we take in the course of the spending review; toll charges, as an item in that expenditure programme, are always under consideration.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the central Fife action plan, which considers the particular problems that face the economy of central Fife, is crucial to the whole economy of Fife? Will he meet me to discuss how we can maximise its impact?

Allan Wilson: I look forward to meeting Marilyn Livingstone. Scottish Enterprise Fife has an effective strategy for developing and implementing national projects, as well as positioning Fife as a broader city region in contact with Edinburgh to the south and Dundee to the north, and helping Fife businesses to compete. All of those factors will be considered when we get the opportunity to meet.

Family Mediation

5. Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to support the work of the family mediation network. (S2O-6647)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): The Executive already invests in family relationship support through the national voluntary bodies, including Family Mediation Scotland. We also currently fund 10 local mediation services.

Roseanna Cunningham: Is the minister aware that Family Mediation Tayside, and presumably other regional groups on whom he will rely to deliver aspects of the Family Law (Scotland) Bill, are extremely concerned that their funding from the Executive will end in 2007? He suggests in written answers that they could then apply for further funding, but other sources are telling them that they will get nothing more from central Government after that point. Does he agree that they are doing important work, which needs to be properly funded? They cannot expect to plan in a vacuum. Will he clarify what appears to be a mixed message from the Executive in respect of that funding?

Hugh Henry: There is no mixed message from the Executive. We have already made clear our support for family mediation services, and we have significantly increased the funding available. However, there is an anomaly, in that we fund 10 local organisations. If Roseanna Cunningham—and her party, which consistently tells us that we should not interfere with local authorities in their decision-making process—wishes us to assume responsibility for making grants to local bodies, I look forward to her correspondence on that matter. However, the responsibility for funding local organisations is best made at local level. What the

Executive wants to do is to transfer the money that we are investing in a more appropriate way to those who are best able to make local decisions. We will not cut the money off; we will try to ensure that it is more appropriately placed. However, I repeat that if Roseanna Cunningham wishes us to make decisions about funding local organisations, it cannot be for only those 10 organisations; it must be for all others. I look forward to her submission on that.

Community Right to Buy

6. Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the right-to-buy provisions of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, which enable community bodies to register an interest in land after it has been placed on the market, are working effectively and are beneficial to rural communities. (S2O-6670)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Lewis Macdonald): Yes. I was pleased to announce the first consents to the community right to buy at Crossgates in Fife on 28 February. A number of other rural communities are currently making progress with registering an interest in land and with raising funds to allow them to put their plans in place.

Mr Ruskell: I thank the minister for that response and for the reference to Crossgates community woodland. Does he believe that, in circumstances where the idea of a community purchase arises only when the opportunity unexpectedly presents itself, all rural communities in Scotland should continue to enjoy the right to submit late registrations?

Lewis Macdonald: The legislation is designed specifically to be available and appropriate for rural communities throughout Scotland. It also provides for late registrations. That provision does not change; it remains part of the act. The requirements for late registration are different from those that are made timeously, and there are criteria in the act that need to be met whenever an application is made. It would be essential for ministers, in considering any application, to ensure that it meets those criteria.

National Health Service (Homoeopathy)

7. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether an estimate has been made of the benefits derived from the provision of homoeopathic medicine within the NHS. (S2O-6691)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr): The Executive does not monitor the provision of homoeopathic medicine directly. We accept that complementary medicine can be

beneficial to patients who suffer from a wide range of conditions, and it is open to national health service boards to provide homoeopathic medicine and other complementary treatment on the basis of their assessment of local needs.

Bill Butler: The minister will be aware of the excellent model of integrative care that is provided for patients with chronic conditions at the Glasgow homoeopathic hospital at Gartnavel hospital in my constituency. I am delighted that the minister has accepted my invitation to see that modern facility in operation. I am certain that he will receive a whole-hearted welcome from Dr David Reilly and his team and the patients who depend so much on the hospital. Will the minister do everything in his power to encourage Greater Glasgow NHS Board finally to come to a decision on whether its proposal to close the in-patient facility will go out to consultation or will be—at last, and quite correctly—rejected? Can the minister say when he will be able to clarify the status of the draft agreement, fourth revision, reference HB4/1/10 of 1974 regarding the Glasgow homoeopathic hospital and the in-patient service that it so ably provides?

Mr Kerr: I am well aware of the member's interest in the matter. He has represented the hospital effectively in all forums, including the Parliament. In the first instance, it is a matter for Greater Glasgow NHS Board. I am aware of the time that is being taken over the decision, which the board is expected to make soon. Irrespective of the content of the draft agreement, fourth revision, reference HB4/1/10, the decision regarding the significant changes to services that are provided at the homoeopathic hospital lies with Scottish ministers.

Organ Donor Register

8. Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is encouraging people to put their names on the national health service organ donor register. (S2O-6710)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Rhona Brankin): As part of our organ donation strategy, we have been running an award-winning campaign to encourage people to register and to tell their families what their wishes are. We have also published a teaching resource pack on the ethical issues relating to organ donation and transplantation. The pack is aimed at senior secondary school pupils and has the potential, over time, to raise awareness in the whole population of the importance of organ donation.

Michael McMahon: What progress has been made on bone marrow and blood stem cell donations? I remind the minister that, in April

2004, the then Minister for Health and Community Care advised the Public Petitions Committee that, in respect of the Anthony Nolan Trust,

"officials would investigate ways in which the Executive might be able to assist in the promotion of the work of the Trust in Scotland."—[*Official Report, Public Petitions Committee*, 28 April 2004; c 761.]

Has that been done, and what positive effect, if any, has resulted?

Rhona Brankin: I do not have that specific information to hand, but I am more than happy to furnish the member with that information and to meet him to discuss the matter. The Executive is concerned about the serious shortage of organs that are available for transplant. There are currently 659 people on the waiting list for a transplant. We are very keen that everybody—including everybody in the chamber—registers as quickly as possible to become a potential donor.

Nuclear Waste

9. Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what responsibility it has for the high-level and intermediate-level radioactive waste produced at Torness, Hunterston and Chapelcross nuclear power stations and from the nuclear site at Dounreay. (S2O-6668)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): Radioactive waste policy is a devolved matter. Scottish ministers have responsibility for the policy on the management of intermediate-level and high-level waste in Scotland and for overseeing the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority with regard to matters affecting nuclear sites in Scotland.

Mark Ballard: The minister will be aware that the radioactive waste that is produced by nuclear power generation can remain harmful for exceedingly long periods of time and that the plutonium that is produced at Torness and Hunterston, which has a half-life of 25,000 years, will become harmless only after 250,000 years. Ministers have this week given permission for the low-level waste that is produced at Dounreay to be stored on site. Can the minister say for how long the radioactive waste that is produced and stored in Scotland will need to be monitored and how much that will cost?

Ross Finnie: I assure the member that the subject of low-level, intermediate and high-level waste has been a matter for intense consultation and we are waiting for the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management's report on intermediate and high-level waste. I do not have the figures to hand for the precise number of years nor for the cost, but I will certainly provide them to the member.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Cabinet (Meetings)

1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): On behalf of everyone in the chamber, I am sure, I take this opportunity to wish Jim Wallace the very best for the future. [*Applause.*]

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-1630)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): At the next meeting of the Scottish Cabinet we will, as ever, discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland. Yesterday's meeting of the Cabinet of course noted the impending resignation as Deputy First Minister of Jim Wallace and his considerable achievements in that post; the contribution that he made in advance of the creation of the Parliament to the design of its powers and the consensus for devolution that was built throughout Scotland; the contribution that he made to the successful referendum; and, of course, the massive contribution that he has made as a minister to building a better Scotland.

This week, we also celebrate the 60th anniversary of victory in Europe day. On Sunday, I had the immense pleasure of attending the national celebrations in Dundee. They were organised very ably by Veterans Scotland and Dundee City Council and I congratulate both on the way in which they organised that event, which was the first of what I am sure will be many such events this summer. We all owe an incredible debt of gratitude not just to those who died during the second world war but to those who survived, and to all those who made a contribution to the victory in Europe and then elsewhere. We will never forget those who died and we continue to honour and salute the bravery, courage and success of those who survived. [*Applause.*]

Nicola Sturgeon: I warmly echo the First Minister's comments about the victory in Europe day anniversary.

I now turn to an issue on which Jim Wallace and his colleagues agree with the Scottish National Party: the unfair council tax. Is the First Minister aware that Iain Smith, a senior Liberal Democrat, says that Labour has

"secret property revaluation plans that will lead to many houses rising up the council tax bands and hit pensioners particularly hard"?

Iain Smith is right, is he not?

The First Minister: Iain Smith might welcome being praised in the chamber, but I am not sure

that he will be pleased to be described as “senior” by Ms Sturgeon. However, I am always happy to talk about Iain Smith in the chamber, as members will know from last week.

A healthy debate is taking place about the future of the council tax but, as I have said previously in the chamber, it is taking place within the context of Scotland having the lowest council tax increases in the whole of the United Kingdom. In every single year since devolution the council tax increases in Scotland have been less than they were during the latter years of the Conservative Government. I hope that the context for the debate is also that people think seriously about the realities of change.

I believe that the council tax system requires to be reformed and changed. Others believe in a local income tax, and they have to justify that position. However, across the board, I hope that we can work hard during the next 12 months to contribute to the debate and to ensure that the commission that we have established produces robust recommendations. We in the Parliament—perhaps across all parties—should then think about how we implement the commission's recommendations.

Nicola Sturgeon: I asked the First Minister whether Labour favoured a policy of property revaluation and he did not answer the question. I refer the First Minister to Labour's submission to the commission on the council tax. It argues for

“the introduction of additional upper and lower council tax bands to better reflect the changes in property values.”

Is it not a bit of a no-brainer that we cannot reflect changes in property values without doing a revaluation? We could introduce an upper band of £300,000, but if we stuck to old property values, there would be very few houses in that band. Will the First Minister come clean with the Parliament today? Will he have the courage of his convictions to admit that Labour favours a policy of property revaluation?

The First Minister: My hopes for a serious debate and discussion on the issue have been dashed. There are no plans for a property revaluation in Scotland.

Nicola Sturgeon: Is it not the case that Labour's stated policy in its submission to the commission depends on a revaluation? Labour in Wales has already carried out a revaluation and Labour in England is about to carry one out. The truth is that the First Minister cannot admit that he has such a policy because he knows that revaluation would be, to quote Iain Smith again, “disastrous”. Can the First Minister not see that he is in this mess because he is wedded to a fundamentally unfair system? Instead of siding with the Tories to shore up the unfair council tax,

why will he not join the Scottish National Party, the Liberals and other parties in arguing for the council tax to be replaced with a fair, progressive system of taxation that is based on ability to pay?

The First Minister: There are no plans for a property revaluation in Scotland for the council tax or for any other purpose at this time. Ms Sturgeon should simply accept that.

The only person who is in a mess is Ms Sturgeon. Any attempt to pretend that there is some hidden strategy to revalue Scottish properties will not detract attention from the revaluation that the SNP underwent between the beginning and end of last week. At the beginning of the week, Alex Salmond was absolutely confident that he would gain ground in Thursday's election with more votes and more seats. That was his position as late as 4 May, which was the day before the election. Of course, that was re-evaluated by Thursday night, when the number of votes no longer mattered to him. Perhaps Ms Sturgeon should come clean by re-evaluating the SNP's position. Will she admit that her party had a disastrous night last Thursday?

Nicola Sturgeon: The best revaluation of last Thursday was the one that was carried out by the voters of Dundee East and the Western Isles.

The First Minister's policy on council tax depends on a property revaluation. I know, as do the Liberals and everyone else, that a revaluation would be disastrous for people throughout Scotland who are on low and fixed incomes. Why can the First Minister not come clean and have the courage of his convictions? If he believes in the policy, why will he not argue for it instead of, as usual, hiding and ducking on the issue? Why does he back the Tories in shoring up an unfair, regressive council tax?

The First Minister: Ms Sturgeon does not even have the basics of the argument right. She needs to try to understand local government finance, the system of taxation and the issue of fairness and redistribution before she raises the issue.

The independent commission will make a judgment between systems that are based on income and systems that are based on property. If its judgment is for a property-based system, I think that it needs to consider a better, more redistributive property-based system. That is a principled position, which should also be the position of SNP members if they believe anything that they say about social democracy. Let us have a bit more honesty in the debate. We need a bit more knowledge and a bit more application of ideas to the debate. If we have that, we might come up with a better system in the end.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)

(Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues will be discussed. (S2F-1631)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I have no plans for a meeting with the Prime Minister.

David McLetchie: When the First Minister gets round to meeting the Prime Minister, I hope that they will discuss the subject of health service reform, on which the Prime Minister very much likes to lecture the First Minister on his failings. The First Minister will recall that he told me two weeks ago that the Minister for Health and Community Care, Mr Kerr, had

“talked about a national price list in this chamber back in December. It was as clear as a bell.”—[*Official Report*, 28 April 2005; c 16535.]

Indeed, the First Minister told me to read the *Official Report* of that debate, which I did. It was as clear as mud. There was no mention of a national price list or standard tariff in Mr Kerr’s speech on 15 December, so I read “Fair to All, Personal to Each: The Next Steps for NHSScotland”. I looked in vain for the words “national price list” and “standard tariff”, but they are not in that document either. Can the First Minister tell me why Mr Kerr was so coy? What is really happening on the subject of reforming our failing health service in Scotland?

The First Minister: First, there will be a national tariff; secondly, there is no failing national health service in Scotland; and, thirdly, reforms are taking place in Scotland that are absolutely right for the Scottish context. Those reforms will make better use of the independent sector, but they will subsidise neither the sector nor those who can afford to pay in the way that the Tories would like to do. The reforms will make proper use of the independent sector, but they will do so with the values of the Scottish national health service at their core and heart. The reforms will ensure that people get treatment according to their need. That is precisely why, over the past six years of devolution, we have borne down on the longest waits first and met all the targets on in-patient treatment and why we will meet the target on out-patient waiting, too.

David McLetchie: I think that we can take it from that response that the First Minister acknowledges that, contrary to what the First Minister told us two weeks ago, Mr Kerr said no such thing either in the chamber or in the document. We can understand the First Minister’s hypersensitivity on the subject of the NHS in Scotland. In recent times, he has come under a lot of friendly fire on the subject from the Prime

Minister, the Secretary of State for Scotland and Scottish Labour MPs, to name but a few.

In a panicked response, the First Minister and his Minister for Health and Community Care started to talk about the greater use of the independent sector and about standard tariffs. However, nobody was fooled. Is it not the case that the First Minister and his Minister for Health and Community Care have lost control of policy on the health service in Scotland? Is it not also the case that, after eight wasted years, the man who trumpets Scottish solutions is being forced to acknowledge that it is Tory solutions that work?

The First Minister: I am flabbergasted. I recognise that Mr McLetchie has at least to try this week. Last week saw the fourth successive comprehensive defeat not just for the party that he represents in the chamber but for the ideas and values that his party represents. The people of Scotland rejected the values of subsidising people who have money in their pocket and who can afford to pay. The people of Scotland chose instead the values of our national health service and the way that it contributes to the quality of life by providing for people at the point of need. That is a core value of our health service in Scotland, and it is one that the Executive is not prepared to diminish.

When we ensure that we make the appropriate reforms and modernisation of the Scottish health service, we do so regardless of whether it will show up in the statistics. When we encourage nurses to do more of the things that doctors used to do, it is not because it will show up in the statistics but because more patients will be treated as a result of the policy.

Our policy is the same when we ensure that changes are made in accident and emergency and out-patient and in-patient treatment. When we build new clinics across Scotland and reform, modernise and rebuild existing clinics and facilities, we do so to ensure that patients are better treated as a result and not because it will show up in the statistics. We do all that because the Scottish health service is a national treasure, which we will continue to improve as the years go by. The people of Scotland will never allow the Tories to get their hands on the Scottish health service again.

David McLetchie: That is a most bizarre policy: Labour has a wonderful record in the health service, but it just does not show up in the statistics. I have never heard such nonsense in my life. It must be hard for the First Minister to admit that he and his party were wrong in rejecting Conservative NHS reforms. The Prime Minister has adopted them for England and the better results are there for all to see. Why does the First Minister not follow suit? Why the delay? Is he

worried about the lack of support from the Liberal Democrats and his own back benchers for what are in effect—let us face it—Conservative policies?

The First Minister: Mr McLetchie can carry on saying that until the cows come home, but it will neither make his party's policies right nor make the Executive adopt his party's policy of subsidising those who can afford to pay for private sector care—

David McLetchie: But the Executive is going to do that.

The First Minister: No, we will not subsidise those who can afford to pay for private sector care. We will not take money out of the national health service and use it to subsidise those who can afford to pay. The policy of Mr McLetchie's party is crystal clear on that point and the Executive will not adopt it in Scotland. We will ensure that inside the national health service and with national health service resources in the independent sector, more patients are treated more quickly, quarter after quarter and year after year. That will continue in the Scottish national health service, but it will be done from the point of view of clinical need, not from the point of view of how much money people have in their pockets.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

3. Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to discuss. (S2F-1634)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I do not have a formal meeting planned with the Secretary of State for Scotland. I met him on Monday.

Shiona Baird: The fragile nuclear policy in the partnership agreement states:

"We will not support the further development of nuclear power stations while waste management issues remain unresolved."

How does the First Minister define "resolved"?

The First Minister: Decided upon, preferably by independent bodies.

Shiona Baird: Yet again, the First Minister has not answered my question.

The First Minister: Decided upon, preferably by independent bodies.

Shiona Baird: I will give the First Minister a choice of two possible answers. Would he define the issue as resolved when the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management produces its report in July 2006, or when a poor community has

been identified and a facility has been built for nuclear waste? It is quite simple.

The First Minister: I think that Shiona Baird is trying to get at whether the decision is made when the general principle of handling nuclear waste is resolved or when the specifics of where nuclear waste might be stored on a permanent basis are resolved. Would that be right? Shiona Baird's questions are a bit unclear. I am looking for a nod—I might have a nod; right, let us have a go. The general principles of the handling of nuclear waste will be resolved when we see the recommendation on the general principles and the best method of handling from the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management. The individual sites will be resolved when they have been identified and agreed properly by Government.

Shiona Baird: There is a significant difference between the two, which is why I want the First Minister to be absolutely clear. Nirex states that it could be up to 25 years before a facility is built and our current waste is stored in it. Is that the First Minister's understanding of resolution? That means that we have to consider the matter 25 years before we commission new nuclear power stations. That is the crucial point.

The First Minister: We are crystal clear on this. The issue of radioactive waste management must be resolved properly before we make any decisions on any new nuclear power stations. That is the position of my party and of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, and it will be the position of this partnership Executive for as long as it requires to be maintained until the final decisions are resolved. Whatever attempt Shiona Baird makes to cloud the issue and carve out a little bit of ground for the Green party, she cannot possibly disagree with the very reasonable position of saying that we must resolve waste issues before any decision is made on new nuclear power stations. She will not manage to cloud the issue today.

Planning (Community Rights)

4. Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): To ask the First Minister, in light of recent media reports, how the Scottish Executive will ensure that the rights of communities are properly represented during the planning process. (S2F-1636)

The First Minister: We are determined to ensure that local people have better opportunities to participate in the decisions that affect them. Our planning white paper will detail a range of reforms to secure that as part of a wider modernisation.

Cathie Craigie: I am sure that the First Minister will join me in welcoming Lord Robertson to the public gallery. *[Applause.]*

I do not support a blanket third-party right of appeal; I am in favour of a meaningful and robust local plan process that involves local communities fully. However, if local authorities deviate from agreed local plans, communities as well as applicants should have a right of appeal to the Scottish ministers. Will the First Minister assure me that the soon-to-be-published planning white paper will strike a balance that involves local communities and protects them from the sort of issues that have troubled us so much in the past?

The First Minister: I am sure that Cathie Craigie understands and recognises that I have had a particular interest in the issue for many years. In the context of the current planning system, I understand the demand and pressure for a third-party right of appeal. However, as we have stated again and again in the chamber in the past few months, we have twin objectives on the issue: one is to create a more efficient and modern planning system that ensures that local authorities and Government deal with the needs of communities and applicants properly and efficiently; and the other is to ensure that individuals and communities have a better opportunity to influence the decisions of local authorities and Government at each stage of the planning process. Those twin objectives remain in our sights and we believe that the proposals that we are putting together, which we will announce in detail when we publish the white paper, will meet them.

I echo Cathie Craigie's comments about Lord Robertson's attendance in the public gallery. I am delighted that he is here today, given the remarks that I made earlier about the Deputy First Minister. When the two of them worked together in the mid-1990s leading the Scottish constitutional convention, they did a tremendous job. I hope that both of them go down in history for that. *[Applause.]*

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Further to Cathie Craigie's question and to the delicious questioning by Shiona Baird, is it not the case that the First Minister and his Liberal Democrat colleagues have a wee bit of a problem, because energy is a reserved matter, whereas planning is devolved? The solution is simple: designate nuclear power stations as developments of national significance, bypass democracy and then build them. What will the Lib Dems do then?

The First Minister: Mr Wallace says that the Lib Dems will beat the SNP again, which is perhaps appropriate, although I hope that the Lib Dems will remain in second place.

I want to be clear about nuclear power stations. We have the powers to stop new nuclear power stations being built in Scotland and we will use those powers until the issues of nuclear waste

have been resolved. That is the clear view that the Liberal Democrat and Labour parties hold and we will stick together on the issue. No attempt to distort the picture or create scares among the people of Scotland will work, because the position remains crystal clear: the powers exist.

It is interesting that although the SNP talks about economic growth, as soon as we scratch the surface we find that it is no longer interested in that. The planning reforms that we will implement will be designed to ensure that communities and local people in Scotland have a better say and a better opportunity to contribute to planning decisions. On the other hand, our reforms will ensure that proper sustainable development comes about efficiently through a modernised planning system. I challenge the SNP to support that system when we make our proposals.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): The First Minister's comments are encouraging. Will he ensure that the white paper and the bill that comes after it include an effective and robust system of consultation on development plans with communities, business interests and planners? Likewise, will he ensure that effective consultation is compulsory in the early stages of major developments, as that would much reduce the need for a third-party or business right of appeal? If we have early consultation, we will have much better democracy.

The First Minister: Donald Gorrie's comments are encouraging, too. I assure him that I will not sign off or be party to plans that come to the Parliament unless they include a robust system of early consultation and involvement. The system must ensure that local people and communities, as well as applicants, businesses, local authorities and others, have a proper opportunity to influence development planning and the strategies for local areas. We must also ensure that local authorities and Government carry that through consistently as they implement their decisions. That should be our clear objective. The best decisions are made when the most people are involved at the earliest stage, and the planning proposals that we introduce to the Parliament will ensure that that is the case.

Bail (Electronic Tagging)

5. Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive is satisfied with progress being made with regard to the electronic tagging of persons released on bail. (S2F-1629)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The bail pilot schemes were commenced as recently as 18 April but, since then, we have already seen that the system works in practice. The use of electronic monitoring means that breach is visible and immediately reported to the police, who can

make an arrest. The pilots will evaluate the impact that electronic monitoring has on reoffending for this group of offenders, which is an important objective for us.

Miss Goldie: The First Minister's remarks will come as something of a surprise to the sheriff court areas of Kilmarnock, Stirling and Glasgow, because although no one is denying that tagging might have merit in cases in which the accused does not present a threat if released on bail, the pilot schemes are in chaos. I am sure that he will be aware that that situation has induced the Scottish Police Federation to use expressions such as "meltdown" and to express concerns for public safety. Is that not yet another example of the Scottish Executive betraying victims and witnesses and allowing fear and intimidation to pervade our communities?

The First Minister: Not at all. That is complete and total rubbish. I believe absolutely that the new system that we are introducing can work in practice. Those who are being released in the community can be more carefully monitored if they are electronically tagged. Not only can we monitor where they are and whether they are complying with the conditions of their bail; we can tackle reoffending because we can monitor what they do on bail and their progress thereafter. The circumstances in the pilot schemes include an incident in the Kilmarnock area in which someone breached their bail conditions and was arrested because they were tagged and could be traced. To describe that as a "meltdown" rather than a success is entirely wrong.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I wonder whether the First Minister has had the opportunity to read the *Official Report* of the meeting at which the Justice 1 Committee considered the secondary legislation that enabled the pilot. Members of all parties—my colleague Bruce McFee in particular—challenged Hugh Henry strongly on the subject. I was assured at that meeting that tagging took 30 minutes to set up. Will the First Minister explain why there can be a gap of up to four hours during which the accused is at liberty after leaving the court and before the tagging system is in operation, and why that four-hour window is creating safety concerns for members of the public?

The First Minister: To be frank, I am depressed that somebody can sit through all those committee hearings and learn nothing about the system. If Mr Stevenson had learned anything about the tagging system in the course of those discussions, he would know that if an accused is a threat to safety, they should not be released in the first place, never mind tagged in the home or on leaving the court. He would also know that to tag someone in the area in which they live, there must be a phone

line in the house and the tagging has to take place in that area. It is therefore no surprise that, as I would have thought that Mr Stevenson might have learned, some time delay is required. He should also know that the system is being piloted to ensure that we can thereafter introduce any improvements that are required.

I hope that Mr Stevenson and others on the committee have learned something from those committee discussions and from this discussion. The idea of tagging persons released on bail deserves to be given a chance in Scotland. I believe that it can help to tackle reoffending and help to secure public safety, not threaten it. It is time that the SNP and the Tories stopped moaning for the sake of it and tried to help us to implement a measure that could improve the system in Scotland.

Nuclear Power

6. Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive has advised the Department for Productivity, Energy and Industry of its position on the construction of nuclear power stations in Scotland. (S2F-1644)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Yes. The United Kingdom Government is aware of the position of Scottish ministers on the issue. It is clearly stated in the partnership agreement between the Scottish Labour Party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats that we will not support new nuclear power stations in Scotland while radioactive waste management issues remain unresolved. I thank Nora Radcliffe for the clarity of her question, which it was a pleasure to answer.

Nora Radcliffe: We do try to achieve clarity. My question, like others today, was triggered by reports that Joan MacNaughton, the director-general of energy policy at the DPEI, has suggested that before the summer recess the United Kingdom Government should come out in support of new nuclear power stations. She has also suggested that the Government will not meet its 2010 renewable energy target. Will the Executive ask the DPEI to put some effort into renewable energy, especially given the massive environmental and economic benefits for Scotland and the UK that would result from a marine energy industry?

The First Minister: Considerable efforts are taking place on that, particularly here in Scotland, where we have stretching targets on renewable energy. We are investing in and supporting the development of not just onshore but offshore wind farms, including what could be the largest one in the world. That wind farm will be well offshore and out of sight and therefore, I imagine, much more acceptable to the public as well as being likely to

make a significant contribution to the generation of energy in Scotland.

We are also investing in the marine energy research that is taking place in Orkney. We could be leading the world if that research proves fruitful, productive and successful. I hope that those examples of work that is being done here in Scotland can be replicated elsewhere in the United Kingdom and that, as a nation, we can make our contribution not just to improving renewable energy generation here in the United Kingdom but to tackling climate change and global warming.

12:31

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Finance and Public Services and Communities

Planning (Community Involvement)

1. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it intends to involve communities in the planning system. (S2O-6712)

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): Our planning white paper will set out a range of reforms to ensure that local people have better opportunities to participate in the planning system.

Pauline McNeill: The minister will be aware of my persistent lobbying for a qualified community right of appeal. Although I do not believe everything that I read in the press, I think that some reassurances are required. Will he make a commitment today to consider all the proposals to redress the imbalance between the rights of developers to challenge planning decisions and communities' lack of rights to do so? If the Executive is not going to support a qualified third-party right of appeal, will he consider removing, reducing or qualifying developers' rights of appeal?

Malcolm Chisholm: We are giving full consideration to rights of appeal, with regard not only to third parties, but to how the system can operate more effectively and more fairly in relation to developers—Pauline McNeill is right that that is one aspect that we are examining. More generally, it is well known that there are disagreements in society and in the Parliament about the details of the most effective way in which to introduce more community participation into the planning system. However, we are determined to pursue that objective and to create better opportunities for local people to have a say. In many cases, local people feel alienated from the planning system and unable to have the input that they want.

There are disagreements. Some people think that third-party rights of appeal are the key way of achieving greater participation, whereas others think that that is not the most effective way. However, let us be clear about the principles. We are determined to deliver better community participation in the planning system. That is one of the two key pillars; the other is, obviously, the

efficiency of the system. For me, community participation is absolutely central to the reforms that we will deliver.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): The minister will be aware that I have resubmitted my bill on third-party rights of appeal, but is he also aware of the widespread anger in communities about the Executive's complete refusal to consider third-party rights of appeal? He has mentioned clarification, but he must clarify to the people whether he is willing to have third-party rights of appeal. Does he agree with me and others that the consultation process was essentially a sham to get rid of third-party rights of appeal and that the real—

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Question.

Ms White: I am asking whether the minister agrees with me. Does he agree that the Executive's real purpose is to centralise the planning process?

Malcolm Chisholm: Sandra White should wait to see the whole package of reforms that we will bring forward in the near future before she makes sweeping statements that are based on selective quotations from allegedly leaked documents. She makes the charge that we have given no consideration to third-party rights of appeal. If I can exaggerate slightly, I have considered little else for the past seven months. We have given serious—and I mean serious—consideration to the issues and we have examined the underlying problems of the planning system. We want to ensure that we are governed by the principle of greater community involvement in the system.

Sandra White emphasises that aspect of the issue, but I have heard other people say that, if I really want to help their community, I should do other things. One of the key things that we certainly will do—Donald Gorrie introduced the idea in a question this morning—is to ensure that people have a right to be involved early in the process, in respect of not only development control, but development planning. Communities will be more effectively involved at an early stage.

Let us be clear. Some of the details are still being worked out, but I believe that, when we introduce our proposals to the Parliament, they will be broadly and widely welcomed by communities throughout Scotland.

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): In addition to the point that the minister kindly referred to, I raise an issue from the same angle as Pauline McNeill did. Does the minister accept that there could be a level playing field between developers and communities in a limited appeal process if we took account of the fact that councils are increasingly involved with developers in joint

development and so are not a neutral referee, which is how their role was originally conceived in the planning legislation? The aspect of council involvement must be considered in a right of appeal.

Malcolm Chisholm: I am not sure that I fully understood the details of what Donald Gorrie said, but we certainly want to involve communities at an early stage. In answer to the charge of centralisation, we also want to ensure that local authorities are at the centre of the planning system. Of course, we fully recognise the crucial role of local authorities in speaking for and being accountable to local communities. However, I think that people should wait until they can see the full range and detail of our planning reforms before making wide-ranging criticisms of them.

Scottish Executive Staff (Accountants)

2. Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how many accountants it employs and what their annual cost is. (S2O-6642)

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): The Scottish Executive and its associated bodies employ accountants in a wide range of roles throughout the organisation. The Scottish Executive and its executive agencies employ 99 qualified accountants under the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies standard, at an average cost of £44,000 each. Forty-seven of those are employed in core departments and the remainder in agencies and the Crown Office.

Stewart Stevenson: On the basis of the minister's answer, the Executive is spending in the order of £4.4 million in employing 99 accountants. Why, therefore, is it spending an additional £2.5 million on hiring accountants at high rates of pay from firms such as Ernst & Young, which it paid £2 million in the most recent financial year? We do not want to get in a position where we rely more on people who do not understand public services, at the expense of those who are working in the public services and whom we should trust and rely on for their decisions.

Mr McCabe: That is a strange position for a party that alleges that it is open about the entire economy in Scotland. The Executive appoints consultants only where there is an ad hoc need for specific skills and where those skills are not available within the organisation. Very careful consideration is given to whether we appoint external consultants.

Nuclear Power (Planning Applications)

3. Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how it

envisages that the Parliament will be involved in consideration of any planning applications for new nuclear power stations. (S2O-6655)

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): The Scottish Executive's policy is clearly set out in its programme for government. We will not support new nuclear power stations in Scotland while radioactive waste management issues remain unresolved. In the event of an application coming forward, it would require the consent of Scottish ministers under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and the Parliament would be fully involved in the consideration of such an important matter.

Richard Lochhead: Does the minister agree that the communities of Scotland and, indeed, the Scottish Parliament should have the ultimate say on whether new nuclear power stations are built in Scotland? Is it the case that he has attempted to grab new powers so that ministers can take those decisions and bypass the people of Scotland, who would not be allowed to object on the basis of need?

Malcolm Chisholm: As the First Minister made clear this morning, we have powers to prevent nuclear power stations from being built in Scotland. I make it absolutely clear that none of the planning proposals that I or the Executive have been considering during the past few months will make any difference whatsoever to the arrangements for nuclear power stations. It is absolutely disgraceful that such an allegation has been made without one shred of evidence for it.

Relocation Policy (Highlands)

4. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive which Highland locations are currently being considered for the relocation of its departments and agencies. (S2O-6685)

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Tavish Scott): The Scottish Executive is currently working with local authorities and local enterprise companies including Highland Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to identify suitable locations for the relocation of departments, agencies and sponsored public sector bodies. The list of potential locations will be published on the Scottish Executive website in June.

Mr Stone: I look forward to the publication of that list. I draw the minister's attention to the possibilities arising from renewable power—a subject that will be of great interest to him in his constituency. As we develop nuclear, I mean, renewable power—[*Laughter.*] I say to my nationalist friends that that was not a Freudian slip. As we develop renewable power, we should

try to maximise job relocation potential. I am thinking particularly of academic and research jobs. Working with the UHI Millennium Institute, Highland Council and others, we could consider relocating whole departments. In that way, we could have the academics and the brainpower on the sites where renewable energy is being developed.

Tavish Scott: Mr Stone makes a pertinent point on the connection between the development of renewable power and the potential for considering the various bodies—from industry and the public sector—that might be involved in the process. We will be happy to consider proposals. Another point worthy of note is that Highland Council has itself been a leading light in relocating posts within its area. It has already relocated harbour management to Lochinver. That is a good precedent that I can only encourage other bodies in the Highlands and Islands to follow.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister show his commitment to partnership working when relocating jobs from Edinburgh? Will he speak to the Minister for Health and Community Care about the review of NHS 24 call centres and will he consider setting up smaller call centres throughout the Highlands, given that many nurses have to leave their home areas to find a job?

Tavish Scott: I will be happy to discuss with health ministers the issues raised by Ms Scanlon. She raises important points on NHS 24 and she is of course aware that a review is in progress. I would not wish to mislead her, so I must say that I do not think that the review is considering location. However, I will be happy to take up the points that she makes with colleagues in the Scottish Executive Health Department.

Relocation Policy (Guidance)

5. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is applying new guidance for the relocation of civil servants. (S2O-6680)

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Tavish Scott): New guidance on the relocation review process was published in January 2005 for consultation. Responses are being considered and finalised guidance should be available in June. However, many of the principles in the guidance are already being applied. For example, reviews are now being published and they show that locations are being compared more consistently. That demonstrates an improvement in transparency and consistency in the review process.

Jeremy Purvis: Notwithstanding the interest of my colleague Mr Stone in his constituents, will the

minister ensure that the new and welcome guidance on relocation is applied to senior civil servants and that their departments and agencies are considered for relocation to the Borders, in particular to Selkirk and Walkerburn in my constituency? Does he agree that, if the departments and agencies were relocated to those areas, their productivity, effectiveness and efficiency would be improved?

Tavish Scott: Mr Purvis was at the Finance Committee when the issue was scrutinised. He raises points about effectiveness and efficiency. The operational effectiveness and efficiency of government can generally be enhanced by relocation. He mentions particular areas and I commend him for his perseverance. However, while he was speaking, I heard Mr Robson, who is sitting to my left, quietly mention a couple of other places. The exciting aspect of the relocation policy is that there is no lack of choice.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): In the new guidance that the minister will introduce on the relocation of civil servants, has he considered setting targets for areas of the country that have small numbers of civil servants? I am thinking in particular of Angus and Perth and Kinross, in my area. Will the Government focus on boosting the number of civil service organisations in those areas?

Tavish Scott: I will make two points. First, I hope that Mr Swinney will be pleased that the Scottish Executive is considering the strategic overview of relocation to ensure that socioeconomic factors, which are already a big part of the process, will be enshrined in decision making—I hope that that will enhance and augment the arguments that he makes for parts of his constituency. Secondly, the small-units aspect of the relocation policy will be of particular importance to the areas that he mentions. We encourage local enterprise companies and local authorities in his part of Scotland to suggest locations. We will be happy to consider those suggestions along with the suggestions from other areas that make similar cases.

Fresh Talent Initiative

6. Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive why there is a need for the fresh talent initiative, given that the level of inward immigration in 2003-04 was 27,000, three times the fresh talent target. (S2O-6636)

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): It is encouraging to see the registrar general's mid-year population estimates for 2004 showing an increase. However, there remain long-term demographic challenges. Taking the short-term view that is implied in Mr Gallie's question would do our people and

economy a disservice. We will need a constant flow of fresh talent over the next decade if we are to succeed in our twin ambitions of reversing population decline and strengthening Scotland's position in the global economy.

Phil Gallie: The fresh talent initiative is based on concerns that the minister and others have expressed about Scotland's birth rate. However, our conception rate is extremely good. Does he agree that it might be practical to encourage mothers who are considering having abortions—12,000 of which are conducted every year in Scotland—instead to have those babies adopted?

Mr McCabe: It will come as no surprise to the chamber to learn that I have no intention of agreeing with those sentiments. A better idea would be for Phil Gallie and his colleagues to stop offering such ridiculous suggestions, accept the decision of the people of Scotland and just go away and allow our country to enjoy its new position in the world.

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): Given the chronic shortage of language teachers in Scotland, is the minister aware that a fully qualified Canadian French teacher was refused General Teaching Council for Scotland recognition because she had not spent enough time in a French-speaking country, even though she had a university degree in French, German and linguistics, a second degree in French translation and technical writing from a French-language campus, a Canadian bachelor of education qualification, for which she had studied in French, a teaching certificate and teaching experience, as well as a specialisation in teaching French as a second language, with the majority of tuition in French? Of course, all of that had been achieved in a country in which French has equal-language status. How can we attract fresh talent when the GTC displays that kind of attitude?

Mr McCabe: I understand the member's concerns. It is always useful if such cases are brought to us and I would appreciate it if he would write to us with further details. Clearly, I will take an interest in the matter and will ask the Minister for Education and Young People to do so as well. We will ensure that a comprehensive reply is forwarded to the member.

Civil Service Reform

7. Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it is making on its plans for civil service reform. (S2O-6693)

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): We want the civil service in Scotland to be the exemplar of efficient and innovative government in the United Kingdom.

Through our changing to deliver programme, we have made significant progress in relation to the way in which the Executive works with stakeholders and how it develops and delivers policy. We have made progress in all the specific areas of change listed in the First Minister's reply to Susan Deacon of 8 September 2004.

Susan Deacon: Does the minister share my concern about the continuing underrepresentation of women in the civil service, particularly in its senior ranks? Will he share with the chamber what measures are being undertaken within the changing to deliver programme to address that situation and to enhance the opportunities for career development and progression for women, particularly at the most senior levels? Will he even go so far as to agree with me that an increase in the number of women around the top table in the civil service might, in itself, have a positive impact on efforts to change the culture within the organisation?

Mr McCabe: I have no hesitation in agreeing that the increasing representation of women in all walks of life in Scotland has contributed significantly to our society. It is self-evident that an increasing number of female representatives in this chamber has changed the nature of our debate for the good. We stand in a positive position compared to other parts of the world, including our neighbours south of the border.

With regard to the civil service, we hope to attract as wide a range of people from as broad a range of groups within our society as possible, whether those groups are based on gender, ethnicity or whatever. We know that a civil service that is as multirepresentative as possible will be stronger. As we recognise in our programme, we need a civil service that is more outward looking and that is prepared to engage much more actively with key stakeholders. We know the worth of an open and inclusive civil service and I can assure the member that we will continue to pursue those aims.

Education and Young People, Tourism, Culture and Sport

London Olympic Bid

1. Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how much it and its agencies are committed to spending to promote London's bid for the 2012 Olympics. (S2O-6662)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): Direct expenditure incurred by the Scottish Executive to promote the United Kingdom's bid for the 2012 Olympics to be held in London amounts to £653.71, with no further commitments planned. SportScotland and

EventScotland have jointly spent £36,075 and have committed, but not yet incurred, a further £17,365, excluding VAT and staff costs.

Alex Neil: Is the minister aware of the conclusion of the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee that the cost to Scotland, through lost lottery money, of holding the 2012 Olympics in London will be in the order of £70 million? Given that £65 million of applications for sports lottery funding have been turned down in the past three years, that represents a huge dent in expenditure on sport in Scotland in the period to come.

Patricia Ferguson: I am aware of the report to which Mr Neil refers. I say to him and to the Parliament that the amount of money that is spent on good causes in Scotland as a result of lottery funding is guaranteed until 2009 and consultations will take place shortly on where lottery money will go thereafter. I also say to Mr Neil that it is clear that sporting interests in Scotland back the bid and so does business. Last time there was a poll on the matter, we found that 71 per cent of Scots support the idea of the UK bid. Unfortunately for Mr Neil, less than 18 per cent of Scots decided to vote for his party last week. It is clear that Scotland backs the bid; it just does not back the Scottish National Party.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Does the minister agree that the 2012 Olympic bid would be stronger if it included rugby sevens as a proposed Olympic sport and Melrose as a proposed venue? Notwithstanding the fact that the bid, unfortunately, does not include those proposals, will the Executive give support to rugby sevens over and above the amount of money that the minister indicated in her answer to Mr Neil?

Patricia Ferguson: I would not want to indicate that our support for rugby sevens would be restricted to any one part of Scotland. We are keen to ensure that sports in Scotland are given the support that they need and we also want to ensure that they have the proper governance in place to allow them to go forward. Rugby sevens is one of the sports in which Scotland excels. I had the pleasure of watching our youth team compete in the Commonwealth games and although it was not particularly successful on that occasion it shows a great deal of potential for the future. We should applaud it and watch it with interest.

Sportswomen (Equality)

2. Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures are taken to guarantee that sportswomen receive funding, provision of sports facilities and respect equal to their male counterparts. (S2O-6696)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): The Executive is committed to promoting equality of opportunity for all people in Scotland. The announcement earlier this week of an award of £138,000 to the Scottish Football Association to help the continued growth of women's and girls' football is a clear demonstration of that commitment. In addition, the recent appointment of a women, girls and sport officer by sportscotland will lead to a comprehensive programme of positive action to encourage participation, leadership, performance and excellence among women and girls.

Marlyn Glen: Will the minister join me in wishing the Scottish women's international football team every success in its game against Finland on 20 May? Women's football is one of the fastest-growing sports in the world. Also, will the minister emphasise the importance of the link between sport, exercise, diet and health and outline any further plans to promote female participation in sport?

Patricia Ferguson: Marlyn Glen is right to highlight women's and girls' football as one of the growing areas of sport in Scotland and the United Kingdom. The Parliament will want to join me in encouraging our women's team and wishing it well for its game against Finland.

The national physical activity task force's report highlighted the fact that teenage girls in particular are not physically active enough. We must ensure that barriers real and perceived that deter teenage girls from participating in sport and physical activity are removed. That might be achieved by offering teenage girls activities that they particularly want, such as dance, yoga or aerobics in single-sex classes. It is hoped that the active schools programme will help to tackle that.

Autistic Children (Schools)

3. Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what guidelines exist to ensure that parents of autistic children have a choice in whether their children are educated in special educational needs units attached to mainstream schools or in stand-alone special educational needs schools. (S2O-6666)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson): The Executive issued guidance in April 2002 to help education authorities to review their policies for all children with special educational needs in the light of section 15 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000.

Mrs Milne: Will the minister accept that parents of the 40 autistic children—many of whom have complex conditions—who attend the stand-alone St Andrew's special school in Inverurie in

Aberdeenshire should have the right to have their children educated in a stand-alone unit in future and should not be forced to send them to special needs units that are attached to mainstream schools? Will he encourage Aberdeenshire Council to follow the lead of councils such as Highland Council, Angus Council and Glasgow City Council in building new stand-alone special educational needs facilities in the interests of children with severe autism?

Euan Robson: Such decisions are for Aberdeenshire Council to take, in consultation with parents. I understand that the council's consultation will close on 30 September, so parents have adequate opportunities to make their views known. Thereafter, the council will consider provision in the light of those views. It is not for ministers to intervene directly with local authorities in such circumstances.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the minister agree that a key part of Executive guidance is the requirement to review the progress of children with special educational needs who enter a mainstream setting, so that if that does not work, they have the opportunity to return to a special school? Does he share my concern that Aberdeenshire Council should take that fully into account and should reconsider proposals that are, understandably, causing parents anxiety?

Euan Robson: The answer to the member's first question is yes—that is entirely the case. The policy's purpose is to address the individual child's needs, so continuing review by professional staff of the efficacy of education, whatever the setting, is important. That takes place all over the country. Peter Peacock and I recently visited a special school in Edinburgh, where we saw partnership working between a mainstream school and the special school. Children go to and fro or progress into the mainstream school when it is right for them to do so.

The member's second point was about what Aberdeenshire Council should consider. I am sure that the council will take on board what he has said about the issues as part of its consultation, which will close at the end of September, as I said.

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): The minister mentioned the importance of the consultation process on St Andrew's School. Does he appreciate and accept that for consultation with parents to work and be effective, they must understand and have explained properly to them the options that are on the table from the local authority? If so, will he express concern about the vagueness and confusion about the exact options, which the parents find extremely distressing? Will he take the matter up with

Aberdeenshire Council, so that it clarifies the options for the future of St Andrew's?

Euan Robson: Our guidance to local authorities is that they should make their proposals very clear to parents and all who have an interest. The guidance has been published and is available. Local representatives must ensure that councils in such circumstances throughout the country abide by the guidance and make clear their proposals, how those proposals were developed and how they intend to consult. A clear display is needed of the options that are available in any circumstance.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Is the minister aware that there is an extremely impressive school for children with autism in Alloa that is performing an outstanding public service? Does he accept that, in the sensitive matter of weighing up the arguments on the best solution for a child who suffers from severe autism, the interests of the child should be paramount?

Euan Robson: I agree entirely that the interests of the individual child must be paramount and I am aware of the school concerned. It might be of interest to Lord James to know that, during the year to March 2006, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education will carry out an inspection of educational provision for young people with autistic spectrum disorder throughout Scotland. I have no doubt that examples of good practice will be highlighted in that comprehensive inspection.

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): As autistic spectrum disorder is such a broad disorder and many parents have been forced to educate their children at home, does not the Executive feel that it needs to take the lead by setting up a full inquiry into education for autistic children in Scotland? Does not the Executive feel that it must try to fill the need for autistic-appropriate education—rather than autistic-friendly education, which is often what is provided in units attached to schools at the moment—and to train staff appropriately?

Euan Robson: I hope that Rosemary Byrne will join me in welcoming HMIE's inspection, the purpose of which is to address the issues that she identifies. I hope that the inspection will draw out examples of best practice from which we can learn as we develop provision.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): During the passage of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill, the Minister for Education and Young People made specific commitments to the Parliament that the needs of children with autism would be fully recognised and provided for by local authorities and that local authorities had the resources to ensure that that was the case. Is the minister satisfied that the

policy is being implemented fully by every local authority in Scotland?

Euan Robson: Yes. Somewhere among my papers, I have the details of the specific amounts that we have made available. We made considerable resources available to local authorities over a three-year period and we expect them to make best use of those resources during the preparatory period. Not only will the HMIE inspection of provision for autistic spectrum disorder reveal how such provision is developing, but continuing inspection and discussion with local authorities will help us to develop implementation and the code of practice on the matter that is to be laid before the Parliament soon.

Outdoor Education

4. Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is addressing any decline in outdoor education caused by teachers' concerns about the increasing risk of insurance claims for accidents. (S2O-6676)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson): Schools in Scotland currently offer a wide variety of outdoor education opportunities to pupils. To enable us to drive forward progress and to improve that provision further, we have commissioned a development programme for outdoor education. Through a national development officer, we will map out current outdoor education provision and establish what barriers there are to outdoor education, including concerns around litigation and insurance claims, and how best we can overcome them.

Donald Gorrie: That is partially encouraging, but the minister must acknowledge that, over the years, there has been a serious decline in the amount of outdoor education. Will he assure us that it is considered a high priority in the education system—up there with any other subject—because of the benefits that it provides? When will he be in a position to make positive proposals to help outdoor education as a result of the programme?

Euan Robson: Outdoor education should have a high priority. In "a curriculum for excellence", we state our aspiration that our young people should become

"successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors"

and outdoor education helps to achieve that. We are working closely with the sector. I mentioned the development programme, designed specifically for outdoor education, that will take forward the plans for outdoor connections. In December 2004, we issued guidance on health and safety for educational excursions, and we look

forward to the development work that Learning and Teaching Scotland and the development officer will take forward.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): Given the concerns expressed in at least one local education authority area that teachers do not have adequate insurance cover in the event of sports injuries to pupils, will the minister investigate the matter and consider issuing a circular to all local education authorities to clarify the situation and to ensure that all teachers have adequate insurance cover? Otherwise, there is a distinct danger that fewer and fewer teachers will volunteer their services for outdoor activities and school sports and that pupils could lose out on sports and other outdoor opportunities.

Euan Robson: I agree with Mr Canavan that we want to avoid that. Work is being carried out to determine what the real barriers are. If Mr Canavan cares to write to me about the specific case to which he alludes, I will certainly investigate it, or look at it in any event. Discussion has been continuing at official level with representatives of the insurance industry. I hope to be able to engage in that in due course.

Authorities themselves have a duty to ensure that proper arrangements are made. We have issued guidance on health and safety. I will consider the proposal that Mr Canavan has made this afternoon.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Does the minister agree that one of the greatest things that we could do for the well-being of this country is to provide every child with the opportunity to take part in outdoor physical education and sport every year? The minister mentioned barriers. He and I have been in correspondence about the swingeing costs of public liability insurance to private sector providers of outdoor sporting opportunities. Does he agree that, as the insurance companies have shown no sign of cutting their extortionate premiums, sportscotland should investigate the possibility of establishing a Scottish block policy to which every business could subscribe, thus obtaining cheaper insurance cover and, possibly, commission for sportscotland in the by-going?

Euan Robson: The member is indeed in correspondence with me, and a reply to his most recent letter is being drawn up. The point on insurance is well made. I had the opportunity of holding a meeting with representatives of the insurance industry recently. We did not get to the specific point about outdoor education. They recognised that insurance premiums had risen in general terms, but they felt that some premiums had come down recently.

If premiums are a barrier, steps will need to be taken to address that. Fergus Ewing's point about

sportscotland is worthy of investigation. I hope, too, that local authorities and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities might take on board some of the points that have been raised to ensure that insurance is not a barrier to participation in outdoor education.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): May I make the minister aware of an initiative in my constituency, at Broomhill sports club? The club is run by parents for the benefit of local kids, and is now reaching a capacity of 250. It uses outdoor facilities and the local school. Will the minister encourage such initiatives, notwithstanding the issues of insurance liability? Will he do all that he can to ensure that, where local parents take the initiative to get kids to take part in outdoor sporting activities, as far as possible facilities are made available, whether school or community facilities?

Euan Robson: I regret that I am not aware of the specific initiative mentioned by Pauline McNeill. I will be happy to discuss with her exactly what parents are doing—of course, it is vital that we encourage parental participation. I am sure that local authorities would want to pursue with parents projects such as the one described by Pauline McNeill and to make facilities available for them. It would certainly be my wish for that to happen. I offer Pauline McNeill my congratulations, as the involvement of so many parents would seem to indicate a very worthwhile scheme.

Class Sizes

5. Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made on reducing class sizes. (S2O-6638)

The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock): Very good progress is being made. We are training the teachers needed to reduce class sizes and are on track for delivering our commitment in 2007.

Ms Byrne: I am sure that the minister is aware that in the past seven years the number of maths teachers has fallen by 18 per cent. That flies in the face of having better standards of literacy and numeracy, as there are also shortages of English teachers. Does the minister agree that the current policy for recruitment and retention is clearly not working and that it will be a struggle for the Executive to achieve all its ambitions in education by 2007? Does he agree that the Executive will probably not achieve them, given that primary class sizes are now increasing as well?

Peter Peacock: No, I do not agree with that, because it would paint an entirely false picture to suggest that class sizes are increasing. The figures show that there was a clear reduction in

primary class sizes between 1997 and 2004. In primary 1 to primary 3, average class sizes are as low as 23.2 pupils. On our recruitment policies, this year the number of maths teachers we recruited increased by 85 per cent. In addition, we are recruiting teachers through external recruitment campaigns. All that is designed to ensure that we meet our targets by 2007. We are confident that we will do so, which will mean that primary class sizes, English class sizes and maths class sizes in secondary 1 and 2 will come down. That will ensure that we are embedding the literacy and numeracy skills that young people need as a foundation for the whole of the rest of their lives. We ought to celebrate the progress that we are making, not criticise it.

Scotland's Veterans

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-2794, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on commemorating Scotland's veterans.

14:57

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): Close to the entrance to the Kohima cemetery in north-east India there stands a second world war memorial to the British Army, Second Division. Upon that stone are inscribed the following words:

"When you go home, tell them of us and say,
for your to-morrow, we gave our to-day."

Some 57,000 Scottish soldiers, sailors and airmen gave their todays between 1939 and 1945 so that we here in this chamber, and everyone the length and breadth of Scotland, could have our tomorrows.

Last Sunday marked the 60th anniversary of the end of the war in Europe, and on 15 August we will commemorate the anniversary of the end of the war with Japan. In commemorating those dates we are doing much more than simply celebrating the cessation of hostilities in a war that ravaged much of Europe and the far east; we are showing our respects, paying our debts of gratitude and remembering those who fell so that we could have the opportunity to live in peace and freedom. We are saying to the Scots men and women who served between 1939 and 1945—and indeed to all those who have served in the armed forces—that we recognise their contribution, their commitment, their courage and their valour. We, as the Scottish nation, are saying to them that we will not forget their comrades who made the ultimate sacrifice, who gave up their today and all their tomorrows and who, sadly, never returned.

The Executive, and, I am sure, the Parliament, is happy and deeply honoured to have placed on record, on behalf of the Scottish people, its recognition, respect and utmost gratitude to those Scots who have served in defence of their country and way of life.

On Sunday past, the nation commemorated victory in Europe day when we remembered those who fought for our futures. The First Minister paid his and the nation's respect to the veterans of the 1939-45 conflict when he attended a VE day service and parade in Dundee. Throughout the summer months the Executive will continue to represent the Scottish people at similar events, including the national commemorations of the end of world war two in Edinburgh on 10 July.

However, war is fought not simply on the battleground, and considerable recognition of and credit for the civilian element of the war effort on the home front has to be given. Perhaps it is difficult for most Scots nowadays to imagine what life was like at home between 1939 and 1945. Britain was an island under threat of invasion and towns and cities lived in fear of bombing raids by the Luftwaffe. Food supplies were dwindling and rationing meant that people had to do the best that they could with limited provisions. However, the people of Scotland showed tremendous resilience and courage in standing up to threats and fears. They showed that the battle against tyranny could be fought as well on the home front as it could be fought in Europe, north Africa and east Asia.

An advertising poster of the day might have described a job in the Women's Land Army as "a healthy, happy job", but in reality the work was hard, strenuous and dirty. Women would work for up to 50 hours a week with the minimum of equipment to bring food to the tables of the nation. Those in the Women's Voluntary Service gave their time unconditionally to relieve the hardships that many families suffered as a result of bombing raids. More women contributed as nurses and air raid precaution wardens and in civil defence. Industry would have been severely diminished if women had not contributed to the war effort in munitions factories such as that at Bishopton and in heavy industries more generally.

The officers and men of the merchant navy also deserve special recognition. Their tireless and heroic work while under constant threat from the invisible U-boat enemy did much to secure food supplies to Britain and to our allies in the Soviet Union by means of the Arctic convoys. It is only fitting that 30 veterans of the Arctic convoys should receive special medals this week from the consul general of the Russian Federation in recognition of their efforts. [*Applause.*]

Finally, and not least, on the home front, we should acknowledge the work of the Bevan boys—the young men who, with minimum training or experience, worked alongside Scotland's miners to ensure energy for industry and warmth for the people. The work of none of the people whom I have mentioned should be underestimated, and we must never forget people's contribution on the home front.

However, another group of veterans needs to be recognised—those who spent time incarcerated in prisoner-of-war camps. A great many people endured terrible torture and suffering in camps in the far east or experienced indignity and humiliation in Hitler's stalags. Many did not return, but succumbed to the torture and pain or were executed while trying to escape. War—sadly—brings out humankind's brutality as well as its

resilience and tenacity. We must never forget the Scots and people from all the other nations who suffered or died while being kept as prisoners.

The Executive fully supports the efforts of Veterans Scotland and the Royal British Legion Scotland in organising the commemorative events that are planned for July and August this year because we must never forget. I ask members, through supporting the motion, to record their gratitude to, and recognition of, organisations and charities for the sterling and committed work that they undertake. The list includes Erskine, the Scottish Veterans Residence, Combat Stress, the Royal British Legion Scotland and the Earl Haig Fund Scotland, and it goes on. Without the dedication of such organisations, Scotland's veterans community would lose valuable services that are specifically tailored to their needs.

The Executive is working closely with those organisations in considering ways to help veterans to meet the challenges of the present day. It is important to the Executive that veterans are treated like everyone else in Scottish society and are not denied, because of their circumstances, opportunities for training and employment or access to decent and affordable housing and to the health and social care that they need. Through discussions with veterans organisations, we know much about the problems that are faced by some service personnel when they leave the forces. Of course, the majority make a successful transition back into civilian life, but a minority need extra help to make the transition as smooth and trouble free as possible. Unfortunately, we know that there are veterans who need care and support, who are in danger of falling into poverty and social exclusion, who are at risk of becoming homeless or who face barriers as a result of physical and mental health problems.

Veterans can face particular problems in integrating back into civilian life. For example, some who joined up at a young age may have little experience of adult life outside the services, which can make independent living hard. Others may have health problems, which can lead to and exacerbate homelessness. That is why the Executive is liaising closely with the Ministry of Defence to advance the homelessness task force recommendations in this area. In particular, we have revised legislation and guidance to ensure that homeless people who are vulnerable as a result of their service background are entitled to permanent accommodation. Moreover, we will reissue updated guidance on housing for veterans to local authorities and registered social landlords during the summer.

The Ministry of Defence has also taken a number of initiatives to tackle homelessness. I look forward to continuing to work with the MOD,

the armed forces, Veterans Scotland and the wide range of veterans benevolent services to ensure that the risk of homelessness is averted.

A successful move to independent civilian life is not simply a matter of housing. A lack of qualifications or transferable skills can make finding employment difficult for ex-service personnel. Employment is important for all of us, but for veterans it can be especially so. I have stated previously the Executive's belief that employment is the best way for people to avoid or to get out of poverty. For veterans, employment can also provide the basis for establishing new social networks and friendships that can have a positive impact and assist them in making a successful transition from military life.

The Executive's new closing the opportunity gap approach puts employment at the heart of the Executive's social inclusion and anti-poverty strategy. As part of that, we are developing an employability framework that aims to improve the co-ordination of services that can improve the employment prospects of those in our society who face particular barriers to employment. The framework will be published in the summer.

At a meeting with veterans organisations and the MOD in January this year, officials from the Scottish Executive were interested and concerned to hear that many veterans are beginning to suffer from psychological problems—on average, 14 years after leaving the services. During that time, their lives in civvy street may have been uneventful, but once problems arise they can be seriously affected. Safeguarding the mental well-being of Scotland's veterans is important to the Executive, not only because of the debt of gratitude that we owe, but because we recognise that veterans risk not only their physical health but their mental health during active service.

Each year the Scottish Executive Health Department sends a letter to all national health service boards reminding them of the arrangements for priority treatment of war pensioners. In addition, this year we have sent a letter to NHS boards drawing their attention to the gulf health pack and asking them to bring it to the attention of all general practitioners. Moreover, all Scotland's veterans have access to care, treatment, advice and support from NHS Scotland. Local authorities and voluntary organisations provide a range of mental health care services, treatments and supports that are available to all ex-services personnel.

It is evident that the reintegration of some veterans into civilian society can be accompanied by a wide and diverse array of problems, barriers and situations that they need extra assistance to overcome. That is as true for veterans as it is for any other vulnerable group in society, but how

often do we think of veterans when we talk about excluded or disadvantaged groups? It can be all too easy for veterans to become the invisible group.

One of our immediate tasks is to raise awareness, not just across government but among service providers and the public, of the issues that veterans face every day across Scotland. That is why the Executive is fully supportive of the efforts of Veterans Scotland, the Royal British Legion Scotland and others to promote the welfare of veterans during veterans awareness week this summer. Veterans must not be denied opportunities for training and employment or access to decent, affordable housing and health and social care. We need to provide assistance while always recognising that veterans, like everyone else, deserve to live with dignity and respect.

In recent times, significant progress has been made on veterans-related work in Scotland. We will continue to work closely with our colleagues in the Ministry of Defence and the veterans organisations, so that we can continue to make a real difference for those members of the veterans community who are most in need of our support.

This time last week, millions of Scots went to the polls in the United Kingdom general election. Without victory in Europe and over Japan, we can only imagine whether we would have had that opportunity. Unfortunately, it took six years of total war, costing on average 10 million lives a year, to secure that democratic freedom. Tens of thousands of Scots gave their today to secure our tomorrows. For that, the Executive, the Parliament and the nation will be forever grateful.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges a debt of gratitude to all Scottish veterans who served their country in World War II; recognises the ultimate sacrifice made by 57,000 Scots during that period of conflict, and encourages everyone in Scotland to support the commemorative events this summer.

15:10

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity for Parliament to recognise the sacrifice made by men and women in the forces and as civilians from many countries—many with their lives—which delivered democracy to western Europe, although, regrettably, not yet world peace, as we note when we scan the international headlines and see wars around us. That sombre thought becomes even more sombre when one counts the losses in world war two. The loss of 57,000 Scots accounted for 20 per cent of all UK deaths—double our share of the population. Russia lost 29 million, 17 million of whom were non-combatants; China lost 3 million;

6 million Jews and 5.5 million Germans were lost; and Poland lost more than 6 million. However, all those figures are only estimates.

How timelessly true the following quotes are. The Greek philosopher Plato, who died in 347BC, said:

"Only the dead ever see an end to war."

Hiram Johnson, governor of California, said in 1910:

"The first casualty when war comes is truth."

Mao Tse-tung, the chairman of the Chinese communist party, who died in 1976, said:

"Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed."

Perhaps the most apposite and oft-quoted line was from another European empire builder, Napoleon Bonaparte, emperor of France, who died in 1821. He said:

"On ne fait pas d'omelette sans casser des oeufs."

Figures in the millions can mask not only the myriad individual lives lost but the tales of those who survived, so I will tell the story of two men. One was my father's friend, Jock Hunter from Hawick, who volunteered the day on which war was declared and joined the King's Own Scottish Borderers. Jock, whose war ended at Arnheim in the month and year of my birth—I was my father's first child and was born in September 1944—was shot down as the parachutes unfurled in the sky. Walter Hirst, my assistant's grandfather, was a survivor of the Lancastria, which sank on 17 June 1940 with an estimated loss of life of 4,000—the worst naval disaster in British history. This is his story:

"I became an enlisted man in December 1939 before being sent to Clacton-on-Sea for basic training with the Royal Engineers. We were billeted in chalet accommodation at the Butlins Holiday camp in Clacton. The winter was bitter. We—663—had two weeks basic training with 1914 armaments before embarkation to France on or around the 26th of January 1940. Prior to leaving we were described by an officer in the Duke of Wellington's regiment as 'civilians in soldiers clothing'.

Once in France we were quickly put to work on a variety of construction jobs at an airfield just outside Nantes. Around the middle of June we were assembled and informed of the pending embarkation to England. It was a long, hot march. Eventually we reached St Nazaire around the 15th/16th of June amidst an air raid alert. That night I spent sheltering under a stairway with another member of 663 whom I was teamed with, Charles 'Chick' Napier. Myself and Chick were from the same county in Scotland, Coupar Angus.

On the 17th we boarded the Lancastria late in the afternoon. We immediately grabbed a couple of life jackets which I thought would make ideal pillows. We were ordered below and shortly after witnessed, through a porthole, the Oronsay being hit. Both myself and another Sapper decided then that it would be healthier if we were topside and so we did against orders.

Soon after the Lancastria was hit. It was a massive explosion. There was total panic and chaos. Soldiers, including some from 663, positioned at either end of the ship began to open up with Bren guns at the circling enemy craft. I managed to get myself into a lifeboat but as it was being lowered the ropes on one end became jammed in the davit. A panicked sailor suddenly jumped up and started to hack away at the ropes with a knife. Myself and others yelled at him to stop, but immediately we were all thrown into the sea.

Although I had a lifejacket on, I still had my doubts about being in the water as I was a non-swimmer. We were all saturated with oil. I kicked off from the side of the Lancastria on my back. I kept thinking, 'Got to escape the suction of the ship.'

The Lancastria continued to roll over to port. Hundreds of men were now clinging to the upturned hull. Some of those standing on the turning hull began singing 'Roll out the Barrel'. Then one tenor voice began with 'There'll always be an England'.

During this time the enemy continued to strafe the men on the ship and in the water. They also began dropping incendiaries in an attempt to light the leaking oil. At some point a seemingly crazed man tried to remove my life jacket, but I manage to fight him off. Even with the jacket on I stayed as still as possible in the water hoping this would improve my buoyancy. I believe I was in the water for around two hours. At one point a large dog swam by. I briefly held onto it because it was swimming away from the ship and I thought it would take me with it. I believe it had belonged to some refugee Belgian children who had been on the boat. They did not survive.

Eventually I was picked up. We finally arrived in Plymouth the next day. We were forbidden under 'King's Regulations' to mention any word of the Lancastria."

Some of the relatives of the people who did not survive did not hear anything for nearly 18 months until they received a War Office telegram that stated that their husband, father or son was lost in action in France, presumed dead aboard HMT Lancastria.

Walter Hirst, who survived what happened to the Lancastria, had his own long history; Jock Hunter was survived by my father, who is now 90 and has family, friends and his own long history. However, Jock and the millions of others who became part of that awful history had none of their own. Some people once thought that the first world war was the war to end all wars. As we remember the dead and the injured and VE day, we should always remember and regret all those who continue to die in wars and because of wars now, tomorrow and the day after, in Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan and on and on.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose—or, as the Erskine poster on the way into the chamber today says:

"War isn't a thing of the past".

15:17

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I commend Christine Grahame for her very moving account of family and friends.

How does one acknowledge, as the motion states,

“a debt of gratitude to all Scottish veterans who served their country in World War II”

and recognise

“the ultimate sacrifice made by 57,000 Scots”,

who, as the minister said, gave their tomorrows for our todays? No words are enough to acknowledge our debt to the war veterans of world war two. However, in our daily lives as MSPs, we all meet war veterans and their families, and we can help to ensure that they, and all elderly people in Scotland, receive the public services that they deserve with the respect and dignity that they deserve.

About a year ago, a war veteran called Alex Bochel from Nairn came to my surgery to say that his chiropody appointments had been cut from once every three months to once every six months. Indeed, hundreds more people throughout the Highlands had their appointments cut in the same way. When Alec dared to complain that his feet needed professional podiatry treatment every three months, he was offered the alternative treatment of having his toenails removed. Now he pays for private treatment twice a year and receives NHS treatment twice a year. However, he is in a better position than many people, including other war veterans, who used to receive free podiatry and chiropody treatment and who are now forced to pay the full cost of that care.

How many of our old soldiers or their widows now reside in care homes? When the Parliament came into being, there were 1,724 incidents of bed blocking—which is better known as delayed discharge. The latest figure is up by 61 to 1,785.

Despite the millions invested in care in the community by the Government, too many people—mainly elderly people—are still not being given appropriate care in line with their assessed needs. Many of those people are waiting for a place in a care home. How can we sit back and let councils such as Highland Council pay £600 per person per week for residential care in one of their own homes while paying only £450 per person per week for the provision of more costly and complex nursing care in the independent sector?

Many veterans' families and others have asked me that question for six years, and I cannot give them the answer. They also ask why it is that they have saved all their lives in order to self-fund their care, only to find that they are paying more per week than other residents who are funded by the council are paying. Is that fair?

As a member of the committee that passed the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Bill, I

know that it was commonly and generally understood and stated at the time that every elderly care home would be—

Kate Maclean (Dundee West) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was under the impression that members should debate the motion in the *Business Bulletin*. I suggest that Mary Scanlon is not doing that. Could you rule on that?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I have some sympathy with that comment and was about to make one myself. I would be happier if you stuck more closely to the motion, Mrs Scanlon.

Mary Scanlon: In fact, the motion states:

“That the Parliament acknowledges a debt of gratitude to all Scottish veterans who served their country in World War II”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In my opinion, you have strayed slightly from that. I would be grateful if you would address the motion.

Mary Scanlon: I think that we will acknowledge our debt of gratitude if we ensure that war veterans get the excellent high-quality public services that they deserve.

I finish by saying that it is unfortunate that the strong and fit men who fought for our freedom are now becoming old and vulnerable. We owe it to them to ensure that they are at least given dignity and respect in their old age as an acknowledgement of this Parliament's debt of gratitude for their fight for our freedom.

15:22

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I am happy to speak in support of the motion. I thought that Malcolm Chisholm spoke particularly well in covering many aspects of the subject. Although our Conservative friend went a bit over the top, it is true that we have to ensure that veterans and other people who serve in the forces get proper treatment. Without getting party political, I think that our present pension system is not satisfactory and is in a bit of a muddle, and we must collectively ensure that that is sorted out. We must also ensure that housing and other support for veterans and other people coming out of the forces are organised as well as possible and that the excellent residential and support organisations run by various charities get the best possible support.

So that there is continuity, we must ensure that the forces, which have a different role to play now, continue to attract people who are well suited to that sort of life. We must ensure that recruitment of suitable people continues. The best way in which we can pay our debt to those people who fought

and died, and to those people who fought and are still with us, is to learn the lessons of history. First, we have to know our history. Many people in Britain do not know any history at all, and that should be remedied. We must learn from history, but not live in the past. There is a certain unhealthiness in watching reruns of wartime movies on the telly, as I do, but we must learn from history.

We could learn, for example, from Germany, which, since the war, has become a successful democracy and a successful country that has made a good contribution to Europe. It has faults like anywhere else, but we must acknowledge that people can change. We have to look back and learn that a nation largely composed of decent and civilised people can be taken over by a tyrannical and hateful Government, and that people go along with that. There is a lesson to be learned from that. We should make quite sure that that does not happen here or in other places. It is possible for a bad clique to take over a country if people do not stay awake and continue to be actively democratic.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The member talked about tyrannical Governments and protecting democracy, but does he have a message for us about how we can protect democracy in situations in which tyranny results from the election of a leader within a democracy, as was the case with Hitler? How do we handle that?

Donald Gorrie: That is the whole point—such people can take over. There are parties in this country—at the moment, they are small minority parties—that put out a highly pernicious message and we must ensure that they do not succeed in corrupting us.

A lesson that is perhaps harder to learn is how to repeat in peacetime conditions the enthusiasm and effort that went into contesting the war and ensuring that we won. If we could harness some of that energy to work collectively to create a better life for all our people, that would ensure that people's efforts during the war were not made in vain. We should continue to create a better country.

We must also learn ways of preventing wars from happening and support as vigorously as possible the United Nations and organisations such as NATO, which were designed to try to prevent wars. We must support vigorously any efforts to create peace.

Wars create an atmosphere of comradeship and working together, especially among the forces on the front line. Today's society is perhaps too selfish—in it, individuals look out only for themselves. I might be trespassing on dangerous

territory when I say that more people must recognise that some of their personal habits—such as smoking in certain places or drinking far too much and making a thorough nuisance of themselves or even worse—are just not acceptable. People must think about the community rather than just seek their own gratification.

There are many lessons to be learned from the war. Although it was a terrible thing, it had good sides. It made people work better together for a better world and a better country. We can learn from that and try to keep that going in peacetime. By doing so, we will make all the efforts that people made during the war worth while. Through our efforts, we can create a better Scotland.

15:28

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): Like other members, I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate. Over the past few weeks, we have all listened to the testimonies of people who experienced the great sense of joy and relief that permeated the whole United Kingdom on VE day. Today's senior citizens have recounted stories about the street parties and large-scale communal activities that took place throughout the UK following the announcement of victory in Europe. We have also heard the tragic tales of those who lost loved ones during the war.

It is right and proper that we continue to commemorate the sacrifice that was made by so many in the battle against Nazi tyranny. I am sure that we all have family tales to tell, as Christine Grahame eloquently demonstrated. My grandfather, John Brown, served as a leading torpedo operator on the minesweeper HMS *Circe*, which was part of the north Atlantic convoys that sailed into Murmansk. Such minesweepers cleared the way for the convoys. As has been highlighted in many news items over the past few days, the men on those boats braved U-boats, aerial bombardment and icy seas to ensure that the supply lines to the eastern front were kept open. Their courage and determination helped to sustain Russian forces and, as a result, brought a speedier end to the war.

It is impossible to imagine how those young men must have felt, setting off on such perilous voyages and with such a high probability that they would not return. On 5 July 1942, one of those convoys, PQ17 to Archangel, lost 23 of 36 ships to U-boats and Condor bombers. Members of the Army and the Royal Air Force faced similar perils in locations throughout Europe, north Africa and the far east, but that was not the only way in which my grandparents and many other Scottish citizens helped the war effort.

My grandmother, like many women, was a crane driver in the steel works in Mossend. During the war, the plant provided much-needed armour plating for ships and tanks. Many women were engaged in jobs that, prior to the war, had been the sole domain of men; indeed, many of the men and women of Lanarkshire played a vital part in the war effort by ensuring that coal continued to be mined and that steel continued to be pressed. In commemorating victory in Europe, it is right that we record our gratitude to the many men and women who ensured that the raw materials for waging war continued to be produced.

In addition, the war galvanised communities and helped to forge strong alliances and shows of solidarity. A wonderful example of such solidarity in the battle against Nazism existed in my constituency and that of my colleague Elaine Smith. The women of Airdrie and Coatbridge, moved by the plight of the citizens of Leningrad, which was under siege by the Germans, decided to send messages of support. More than 2.5 million citizens were trapped as the German army tightened its grip around the city. The women members of the Anglo-Soviet aid committee of Airdrie and Coatbridge sent a book containing 5,000 messages of support to the women of Leningrad. In return, they received what became known as the Leningrad album, which is now on display in the Mitchell library. The album has watercolours and prints by Russian artists and 3,000 messages from the women of Leningrad. One of those messages reads:

"We have been moved to the depths of our soul by the words of love and greetings from those distanced from us in far off Scotland. Our husbands and brothers are cut off from us, our homes are in danger, our children are doomed to destruction or bondage. The women of Airdrie and Coatbridge have risen to the defence of their homes. We are proud to have such a worthy ally as the people of Great Britain."

Democratic processes that we now all take for granted have been made possible only because of those people who were willing to fight to protect and preserve them. The fight for devolution would have been impossible had the battle for Europe not been won by the allied forces. It is important that each new generation of Scots understands the sacrifice that was made by many millions of people to preserve their way of life. It is important that we pay our respects to those people, and that their stories continue to be told. Commemoration and remembrance are also important to ensure that the lessons of history are learned, so that future conflicts can, wherever possible, be avoided. I am pleased to support the motion, and to join others in commemorating the lives and deaths of those who have fought for our country.

15:33

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): We have just heard a speech that illustrates how hope and the human spirit can arise through and survive the worst of conditions—it was a reminder of what is possible. Although we concentrate on remembering the veterans of world war two, the debate is dedicated to all who risk their lives to defend our democratic freedom and values whenever and wherever they are threatened. In saluting the military, we should also recognise the civilians who, on land, in the air and on the oceans, were part of those events and gave their yesterdays for all our tomorrows. None of us can ever truly imagine the reality of war: no book, film or battlefield visit can ever convey the experiences of the 50,000 Scots who were killed or went missing in action during the second world war, or the 6,000 civilian and merchant navy losses.

War memorials in even the tiniest of Scottish villages tell of the sacrifices that were made by the world war one generation—quite apart from the massive contribution from the Commonwealth and other armed forces. The debate belongs to them and to those who thankfully survived those turbulent years and set about rebuilding the nation to which they had gifted peace.

The Chinese call the first and second world wars the European civil wars—it is easy to see what they mean. Powerful European states stopped exporting wars and Europeans turned inwards on themselves in the slaughter of 1914 to 1918.

World war two confronted humankind with its greatest global threat. The kind of world that we would now live in, had the democracies and their allies not prevailed, is unimaginable. All of us will be forever indebted to the soldiers, sailors, airmen and civilians who fought and died for the democratic society that we have all inherited.

That debt has not always been fully recognised by UK Governments. My own constituency cases include that of a civilian who volunteered for the Army and was captured and imprisoned by the Japanese when Singapore fell. He was denied a pension because he was not considered to be part of the British armed forces. Christmas island nuclear test veterans who are ill with cancer have been denied compensation. United Kingdom war widows received smaller pensions than their German, Japanese and Commonwealth sisters. Those injustices had to be overcome. I pay tribute to the work and past campaigns of the Royal British Legion, which I have been honoured to support.

I will not introduce an overtly partisan element, but if anyone reads the battle honours and combat record of the Black Watch and our other Scots regiments, they will know exactly why the Scottish

regimental tradition has to be cherished and defended. The Black Watch took part in some of the most important events of the second world war. They defended against the first ever airborne assault and they fought in the besieged fortress of Tobruk. They fought at the battle of El Alamein, which was the turning point of the war in Africa. They took part in the invasion of Sicily and the beginning of the Italian campaign. They fought at Monte Cassino, the Gothic line and in Greece against communist insurgents. They landed in Normandy on 6 June. They aided in the breakout of Caen and the Falaise gap. They also helped to liberate Holland and they were the first allied troops into Germany. They were in India and took part in the second Chindit expedition—for five months they operated behind Japanese lines. Participation in one of those would be amazing, but participation in all of them is extraordinary. That history, loyalty and service is typical of the Scottish regimental families. That gives an indication of what will be lost if we do not defend the traditions of the Black Watch and its sister regiments.

When we commemorate our veterans we should always remember organisations in Scotland that make that their daily occupation. For example, the British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association, the Earl Haig Fund and Erskine hospital heal and care for veterans of the second world war and other conflicts. As a society, we thank Erskine hospital and the other hospitals and their staff for looking after those who sacrificed so much in looking after us.

I recommend a visit to the newly refurbished Montrose Air Station Museum. It is fitting that the young men who risked their lives should be remembered in this way. This is not to glorify war, but to humbly and positively acknowledge the debt that we owe. They live on in our recognition of what they were and what they did in our name.

The need to be ever vigilant in our protection of freedom and democracy has not diminished, nor has the Scottish contribution to defence of those values. I can think of no better place to commemorate the sacrifices of the Scottish nation and people during the second world war than here in our new national Parliament. This Parliament is a statement about democracy, which we could not have made if those whom we commemorate today had not made their past sacrifices on our behalf.

We meet here in this Parliament to discuss how best to commemorate our war veterans. I suggest that the best way to do that is by participating in democracy, by demonstrating that democracy in Scotland is vibrant and alive and by carrying on the democratic ideals that we came so close to losing in those dark days of our nation's past. It is

in that living and positive way that we can best commemorate all Scotland's veterans.

15:39

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I should declare an interest as I am president of the Scottish Veterans Garden City Association, a charity that provides 594 cottages in Scotland for disabled ex-service and merchant navy personnel.

Today's debate rightly focuses not just on the courage and heroism of men and women who put their lives on the line for their country, but on the care and welfare of those who have been severely affected through disability, trauma or shellshock as a result of warfare. Some 57,000 Scots servicemen died in the second world war and a great many more were wounded, however much they may have made light of their injuries.

Andrew Welsh was right to sound a cautionary note. All too often in the past, veterans returning from the wars were forgotten. There is no more poignant example of that than what occurred after one of the greatest military debacles of all time. I refer to the charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean war, which was immortalised by Tennyson. However, the grisly truth was told by a less nostalgic individual, namely Rudyard Kipling. He wrote, accusing the powers that be in London, as follows:

"There were thirty million English who talked of England's might,
There were twenty broken troopers who lacked a bed for the night.
They had neither food nor money, they had neither service nor trade;
They were only shiftless soldiers, the last of the Light Brigade."

Happily, we live in a much more caring society and two of the words on our mace to guide us are "wisdom" and "compassion". If I may say so, I hope that the Ministry of Defence will enlighten all those veterans from the second world war and others who might be suffering from conditions that were derived from warfare, whether it be gulf war syndrome or anything else.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to our servicemen and women who were prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for our freedoms. That leaves us with a moral obligation and responsibility to care for those who survived the battle or, in other cases, for their widows and orphans, and to ensure that future generations are aware of their sacrifice. We believe and hope that the Executive, the local authorities and the voluntary services will get together and thrash out a deal that will keep care homes open. We also hope that there will be a review of military pensions.

As I said at the outset, we have to care for those who gave of their best and who should live in a country that is fit for heroes. I do not wish the finger of accusation to be pointed at any Scottish MSP in the way in which Rudyard Kipling gave his withering denunciation of the London Government when he wrote:

"O thirty million English that babble of England's might,
Behold there are twenty heroes who lack their food to-night;
Our children's children are lisping to "honour the charge they made-"
And we leave to the streets and the workhouse the charge of the Light Brigade!"

It is necessary not only to look after veterans and their families but to give the necessary support to the British armed services to enable them to provide a service that is second to none. In that connection, in dealing with the Scottish regiments and all the services in the future, if young men and women are asked to put their lives on the line for their country, they should be backed up with all the necessary resources and support, and they should be seen to be receiving that support. I make that recommendation because it is the least that those who made the supreme sacrifice would have expected. That came home to me during the recess when I visited the Commonwealth war cemetery at El Alamein in Egypt. I found myself opposite the grave of a young Scottish soldier. Inscribed on the tombstone were the words:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

His name was Private J Fleming of the Black Watch. It is because of the example of soldiers such as him that we owe a duty of care to all our veterans.

15:44

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): We need to understand what it means to pay the supreme sacrifice and what it means to have someone who is close to you killed in war. In my case, my father fought in the war with the 14th Army under General Slim. My mother worked in London during the blitz. I had two great uncles—Walter and Arthur—who were killed in the first war. In a way, it did not mean a huge amount to me or my generation; I think that that was because I had never known them and they were long dead.

I would like to tell the story of somebody who came from my home town of Tain; if members do not mind, I will go to go back to the first world war, the great war, the 1914-18 war. His name was Ian Mackenzie. He had been to Tain Royal Academy. He was a brilliant scholar and went on to Balliol, from where he passed out very near the top. The

family always proudly boasted that he did rather better than Harold Macmillan. Ian Mackenzie volunteered for the Seaforth Highlanders in 1914 and fought his way right through the war, rising through the ranks to become a young officer. Tragically, he was shot during the closing weeks of the war. His name is rightly at the top of the war memorial in Tain.

When I was in my early teens, I knew his two surviving sisters, Catherine and Dorothy Mackenzie. One November, my parents had gone away for some reason and I was sent to stay with the two Mackenzie sisters in their house just outside Tain. I remember, on remembrance Sunday, being embarrassed to find the two old ladies in tears. I am ashamed to say it, but I was embarrassed; I was young and I did not understand, but then it came home to me in a blinding flash what it was to have lost a dearly beloved elder brother—the man who was the scholar, so brilliant at Balliol, and who was the apple of his father's eye and could have done so much.

I am glad that I saw the two Miss Mackenzies' tears. It was tragic, but it leads to the question of how we can get the next generation to understand. I look at war memorials, and I go to the remembrance Sunday services that we hold faithfully in my home town. Sometimes I think that the numbers are diminishing. Do the young, the next generation, understand? There is hope. My three children are going through the same Tain Royal Academy that Ian Mackenzie attended and that I attended, and they went on excellent trips to see the war graves and battlefields of France. Oddly enough, I think that the message has stuck with them. There is hope.

We also owe something to the way the stories are told—sometimes in graphic and harrowing detail. I am thinking of Spielberg's "Schindler's List" and "Saving Private Ryan". The latter did not spare the detail of what it was like to go on to the beaches of Normandy with the bullets whistling past. Through culture and the teaching of history—which Donald Gorrie was right to emphasise—we have to pass the message to the next generation that it is terrible that anybody should have to give their life in war, and that it is terrible that wars continue.

War is a black, black prospect, but I hope and pray that through education and dissemination of culture we can move society on. There is hope. In honouring the veterans—some of whom are with us today—and in honouring the memory of their comrades who fell, we owe it to them to ensure that the generations to come understand what the two Miss Mackenzies' tears meant.

I have waited a long time to mention Ian Mackenzie, who would otherwise be unknown.

Now, at least, he is in the *Official Report* of this Parliament. His life and millions of other lives were wasted. We should not forget; I hope that we never shall.

15:48

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): Today in this Parliament we honour courage, bravery and sacrifice, and we pay a debt of gratitude.

"World Peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it. ... Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements, which first create ... solidarity."

Those were the words of Robert Schuman, the French foreign minister, speaking on 9 May 1950, five years after VE day. Schuman's groundbreaking speech was the French response to two world wars. It was a proposal to regulate coal and steel, the raw materials of war. The speech was made in the aftermath of major reconstruction across Europe. It was a concrete proposal for peace in Europe for future generations—a peace that, thus far, has stood the test of time.

Members will have varied views on the European Union, but I think that all parties could agree on the contribution that the European Union has made to peace. I thank members across the chamber for their support for my motion on VE day and Europe day.

No sacrifice could be greater than the sacrifice of life that was made by 57,000 of our Scottish servicemen. VE day serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of ensuring that future generations understand the sacrifice and horror of war.

Across Scotland, communities have expressed their appreciation of the efforts of our soldiers in different ways. In my constituency, primary schools have participated in a war detectives project, whereby children have interviewed veterans and their families to ensure that we document and collect for all time the wartime experiences that will soon be lost as this generation of veterans becomes older and passes on.

We welcome to the public gallery this afternoon members of the Royal British Legion and veterans associations. On Sunday night, I was pleased to meet members of the Royal British Legion for an evening of music, reading and drama performed by young people from our schools, depicting life in wartime Scotland. Schools performed sketches of various facets of wartime life, from the horrors of the Holocaust to the lives of the women in the munitions factories, the vagaries of rationing and

the fear of evacuees who were leaving families in the city for life in the country, sometimes to live with strangers. Across Scotland, communities made sacrifices in the interests of freedom.

During wartime, many of our schools in Ayrshire were bursting at the seams as they coped with the volume of evacuees. According to the "War News", which was published by our young people, Ayrshire schools did everything that they could to help the war effort, growing 500 tons of vegetables in the year up to February 1941.

Of course, for people in Ayrshire, there was the constant threat of bombs as the Germans tried unsuccessfully to locate and destroy the Nobel munitions factory at Ardeer in Stevenston. I cannot imagine how frightening that must have been. Indeed, on 7 May 1941, German bombers blitzed the factory, causing fires that were so severe that eye-witnesses reported that they could be seen from miles away.

The horrors of the Holocaust across the channel must never be forgotten. They must serve as a poignant reminder that we must guard against the extremes of racism and xenophobia that can infiltrate political systems and, regrettably, gain respectability by the back door. In recent years, Europe has seen the rise—and, fortunately, the fall—of Jorg Haider in Austria. In Italy, too, within the National Alliance party—the party of Mussolini—there are ultra-right-wing fascist tendencies. The recent emergence of support for Jean Marie Le Pen in France and the Vlaams Blok in Belgium is extremely worrying and we should put on record at every opportunity our opposition to those ideologies.

As we commemorate VE day, it is important that the common values and principles that decent-minded people share, that our soldiers gave their lives for and that ordinary people throughout the United Kingdom and Scotland made sacrifices for—freedom, equality and justice—are not forgotten. Let us always hold true to the words of Wilfred Owen:

"At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them."

We will remember them. It is an honour to support the motion.

15:53

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I, too, very much support the motion and associate the Scottish Green Party with every word and sentiment that has been expressed in the debate. I particularly congratulate Christine Grahame on what I thought was the most moving speech that I have heard in this chamber.

The best way in which Parliament can commemorate the veterans and Scots who made the ultimate sacrifice and show our debt of gratitude to them is to ensure that veterans of all conflicts—including the most recent ones—receive the proper care and treatment that they require. Since the second world war, there has been only one year—1968—in which no British service person was killed in active service. We need to remember every one of those servicemen and women and their families. Each year, the Royal British Legion answers 300,000 calls for help that are made to its helpline, Legionline, and about 11 million people in the UK are eligible to ask for its help.

According to Shelter and the Government's social exclusion unit, one homeless person in four is a former member of the armed services. Thousands live rough or in sheltered accommodation and many self-medicate with drugs or alcohol. Returning armed services personnel often end up on the streets with severe mental health problems, or even in the courts with undiagnosed problems. It is essential for the MOD thoroughly to assess all service personnel for post-traumatic stress disorder and other problems. MOD figures from 1991 on the gulf war reveal that 20 per cent of returning servicemen and women from that conflict were diagnosed with psychological problems, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts and anxiety. We must take care of all our servicemen and women.

Last year, I was honoured to visit Hollybush House in Ayrshire and to meet a veteran of the Normandy landings. I do not wish to be party political on the matter, but I hope that the Executive will respond to the concerted campaign by myself, Mr Gallie and, I am told, the Minister for Justice and give Hollybush House and Combat Stress every penny of the money that they require, regardless of the cost. We must make support for returning veterans a priority.

It is necessary to track the mental health of veterans for a large number of years in case symptoms emerge at a later date. That requires the creation of appropriate mechanisms to keep in touch with ex-soldiers and to deliver expert assessment and treatment if necessary. At present, that is not done. I do not think that the MOD responds appropriately to the needs of victims. I look forward to a future in which we do not see the MOD appearing in pensions courts to try to disprove the existence of gulf war syndrome or the health effects of depleted uranium. I hope that the MOD and the pensions system will properly reward all veterans and will look after them.

I finish by highlighting Donald Gorrie's comment on the need for us to support, in Parliament and in the country, the work of the United Nations. In particular, we must devote ourselves to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation goal of creating a culture of peace in Scotland, in the United Kingdom and around the world.

I repeat my deep support for the motion. I have found today's debate to be deeply moving and I trust that the commemorations throughout Scotland will receive the support of the whole nation.

15:58

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): It is right that every speaker in the debate should start by paying tribute to those who died or were injured, brutalised and traumatised during world war two or other wars throughout the world, both now and historically. The fallout permeates the generations and I am sure that everyone has a personal tale to tell. My mum was a child in the London blitz. She survived that, but spent years alone in a sanatorium because of the effects of that experience. Her experience has definitely permeated the generations of our family.

Whenever I have met anyone who was involved in world war two I have been impressed by the quiet dignity with which they bear their memories, of which I can have absolutely no concept. When I try to imagine their experience, multiplied by tens of millions throughout the world, my head bursts with the enormity of it all. I am sure that many people grew up listening to relatives' stories through only semi-attentive ears. Indeed, lots of us will have complained about being bored by tales that, from a child's point of view, seemed to be ancient history.

It took the war poets—Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and others—to open my eyes when I was a teenager and hammer home some of the enormity. We should be grateful to them for the illumination of their work and the sacrifice that they made, which enables us to have a slight understanding now, many years later. I certainly regret any hurt that I may have caused by not listening and not trying to understand, even though the attempt to understand would probably have been in vain.

I pay tribute to millions of working-class men and women—not to Governments, war ministries or the arms industry or to the imperialism, greed and brutal ideologies that cause wars. Ordinary men and women pay with their lives and their livelihoods for the wrongs of world powers. While we commend those people, we should condemn

those who are prepared to sacrifice them in the pursuit of power.

I have no doubt that Hitler's fascist regime represented the worst of that brutality and disregard for human life and had to be confronted. World war two should have been the war to end all wars, which was the claim for the first world war. World war two should have led to genuine and equal international peace. Unfortunately, imperialism still stalks the globe. The pursuit of riches and power adds hundreds of thousands every year to the toll of human sacrifice. Iraq and Afghanistan are but two recent examples of that shame.

The scale of the human suffering and sacrifice takes my breath away. As we have heard, in world war two, 57,000 Scots died. I do not subscribe to the theory that such figures are statistics rather than tragedies—every one is a tragedy. In that war, 388,000 British people died. We should remember them and ensure that they receive unending respect.

It would be wrong not to remember that the effort was international and involved huge international sacrifice. The Soviet Union lost 25.568 million people—some estimates can increase that number by millions. That is more than 37 times the undoubtedly huge sacrifice of Britain and the United States of America added together. The battle of Stalingrad, which was pivotal in the defeat of fascism, saw the loss of more people of the Soviet Union than Britain and the United States of America lost throughout the entire war. That is not to diminish each individual's sacrifice, but it is important to recognise the huge scale of that sacrifice. I did not grow up with that fact, but it is one that all our children should grow up with, as is that of the sacrifices of 61 million people from countries throughout the world, including the millions of ordinary men and women of Germany who were caught up in the horrific vice of fascism.

Recently, I was in Italy, where I visited the Polish war cemetery at Monte Cassino. The cemetery was constructed in the year after the battle there by the comrades of those who fell in that battle. The cemetery is beautiful and awe-inspiring; it was a labour of love if ever I saw one.

The greatest tribute that we can give all those who gave their lives is to build an equal and peaceful world that is based on co-operation, not coercion; to build a society that avoids the inequalities and injustices that give fascists and dictators succour; and to build a society in which the resources for life are infinitely greater than those for death.

In commemorating VE day, we should remember that it was not the end of the brutality of

world war two; that culminated in the horror and brutality of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. It is important to put that on record. We have many problems yet to solve. I aspire to a world where we do not have to hold debates such as this while wars and the risk of wars continue. I want a better world.

16:05

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I support the motion in the name of Malcolm Chisholm remembering all wars as well as victory in Europe day. The loss of 57,500 lives in the fight against fascism and for freedom and democracy devastated towns, villages and families throughout Scotland. The loss of 27 million Russians and of many others who died throughout the world—whose deaths Christine Grahame enumerated in her very special speech—was also devastating.

I remember too all the soldiers from the Dunfermline East constituency who made the ultimate sacrifice. It is always invidious to single out any one constituent for a mention, but there is one person whom I would like to mention today: Edgar Read from Cardenden, one of the Normandy veterans to whom the French Government last year presented the Légion d'honneur, which is one of the highest honours in France. We salute and honour Edgar Read and all the other veterans and we pay tribute today to their bravery and commitment.

Others have remembered their family members who served in the war. Today, I remember and honour my Aunt Nellie, after whom I was named and who was killed by a bomb in the Paisley blitz while she was serving at home as a nurse as part of the civilian effort. I remember my mother telling me as a child about the whole sky being lit up in places as far away as Stirling and Falkirk when the Paisley blitz was happening.

When anyone asks me why I have campaigned for and supported the ideals of a united Europe all my adult life, I need only remember that more than 50 million people died throughout Europe fighting against fascism and for freedom and democracy. They made the ultimate sacrifice. Europe was a continent where, in Winston Churchill's words,

"a vast quivering mass of tormented, hungry, care-worn and bewildered human beings gaped at the ruins of their cities and homes."

As Irene Oldfather mentioned, history books remind us of the Schuman plan, which was born not only because of world war two, but because of world war one.

I recall a visit that I made last summer to pay my respects at the war graves at Ypres and at the Menin gate, which is perhaps the most visited memorial to the great war on the western front. There, I read of the chlorine gas attacks that

Germany launched against the British and French troops at Ypres in Belgium on 22 April 1915. That attack changed the world. It lasted only five minutes, but allied forces were not ready for it and lost about 15,000 soldiers and officers; it opened the era of weapons of mass destruction.

I also saw how, every evening at the Menin gate, volunteer trumpeters salute the fallen. Hundreds of people gather every night to remember and to join in that salute. The Menin gate is remarkable: not only are the names of soldiers and their regiments listed there, but the memorial combines the architectural images of a classical victory arch and a mausoleum and contains—inside and out—huge panels into which are carved the names of 55,000 officers and men of the Commonwealth forces who died in the Ypres salient area and have no known graves.

However, that figure does not represent all the missing from that area. It was found that the Menin gate, immense though it is, was not large enough to hold the names of all the missing, so the names recorded on the gate's panels are those of men who died in the area between the outbreak of war in 1914 and 1917. The names of a further 35,000 of the missing—those who died between 16 August 1917 and the end of the war—are recorded on carved panels at Tyne Cot cemetery on the slopes just below Passchendaele.

Every night of the year without exception, policemen close the road to traffic at 8 pm and stand at the salute while buglers from the Ypres fire brigade play the last post. That ceremony takes place whatever the weather, and there is always someone there to watch. The people who live near the Menin gate often open their doors and stand on their doorsteps to join in the daily act of remembrance in honour of the young and brave who came from all over the world to die in defence of their town. Sometimes, during the summer battlefield tour months, many hundreds of visitors attend the ceremony. Indeed, 400 were there the night I visited. On especially significant days such as 11 November, the last post ceremony will take place at 11 am as well as at 8 pm. When that date falls on a Saturday or Sunday, there will be large parades, with thousands present. The ceremony is a moving one. No matter how many people have been there, it has taken place almost continuously since 1927. During the second world war, when the Germans occupied Ypres, the ceremony was banned. The bugles were kept safe, however. The day the Germans left Ypres in 1945, the plaintive notes of the last post rang out under the Menin gate that very same evening.

One of the most tragic features of the great war was the number of casualties reported as missing, believed killed. When peace came and the last ray of hope was extinguished, the void seemed

deeper and the outlook more forlorn for those who had no grave to visit—no place where they could lay tokens of loving remembrance. It was resolved that, there at Ypres, where so many of the mission are known to have fallen, there should be erected a memorial worthy of them to give expression to the nation's gratitude for their sacrifice and to express sympathy with those who mourn them. A memorial has been erected. In its simple grandeur, it fulfils that object. It can now be said of each one in whose honour we speak today:

"He is not missing. He is here."

I hope that people from all over Scotland will take the same route that I did from Rosyth to Zeebrugge and then a short train journey to Ypres, to pay respects in remembrance of all those men and women.

Only a few weeks ago, I travelled to Phuket in Thailand and visited one of the areas where the tsunami struck. Afterwards, we went to Kanchanaburi, about two hours' car journey north of Bangkok, and visited the bridge over the River Kwai and the war graves there. From late 1942 through to May 1943, prisoners of war were ordered to build two bridges over the Kwai in Burma, one of steel and one of wood, to help to move Japanese supplies and troops from Bangkok to Rangoon. It took eight months to build a bridge, rather than two months as in the film. It was used until it was destroyed just two years after its construction, in late June 1945.

The famous bridge over the River Kwai is about three miles north of downtown Kanchanaburi. It was brought from Java by the Japanese army and was assembled at the River Kwai by the prisoners. It was bombed several times in 1945, but it was rebuilt after the war. The curved spans of the bridge are the original sections. An estimated 16,000 POWs and 49,000 forcibly recruited labourers died during the construction of the bridge and the death railway that leads to Burma. The railway line was hewn from the solid rock cliffs. Workers would lower themselves from the top of the cliff, bore a hole and plant a charge of dynamite in it, light the fuse and scurry up the rope. If they did not get far enough away, they did not stand a Chinaman's chance. At the time of construction, the whole region was jungle. The railway opened the land for cultivation and made the transport of produce possible. I read items and saw paintings by some of those who had survived their terrible ordeal. Their experiences were horrific and cruel.

We visited a war grave nearby. The cemetery contains the remains of nearly 7,000 prisoners of war who lost their lives during captivity in the camps of the Japanese army, who forced them to build the bridge over the River Kwai and the death railway. We saw the names of the Argyll and

Sutherland Highlanders, the Black Watch and many other regiments from Scotland, in whose honour we stood for a moment and paid tribute.

I hope that this debate will result in all of us going away with renewed energy to work tirelessly to serve the needs of those who fought for our futures. We should work for ever and without complaint on their behalf.

16:14

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan)

(SNP): Much of war is about very hard choices and the agony of making them. On Saturday, I was at the RAF Banff memorial at Boyndie, with Polish, Canadian and our own air services personnel to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the final mission flown from RAF Banff. With the wee cup of tea and other stimulants that we had afterwards I heard a poignant tale, which I had not heard before, about the death of a young boy when Fraserburgh, in my constituency, was bombed. It turns out that he was almost a victim of friendly fire. A Norwegian, under the influence of the Nazis occupying his country, was sent to Scotland by submarine and landed near Fraserburgh as an enemy agent. Immediately upon landing he contacted the British authorities and offered to work for them. He remained in place as an agent for the Germans, but worked on our behalf for a number of years. The Germans had to deliver to him a new radio and supplies, for which the bombing of Fraserburgh was a cover. Of course, the agony for those who were making decisions on our side of the war was that they knew that the bombing would happen, but did not dare do anything to defend Fraserburgh, because it would compromise the contribution that that brave Norwegian, working as a double agent, was making to the war effort. A young boy—the only casualty of the bombing of Fraserburgh—was the price that was paid. That was the kind of hard choice that I hope we rarely, if ever, have to make again.

Helen Eadie mentioned visiting a war grave in Thailand. I commend the work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and point to its website, which has photographs and lists of casualties from around the world. I know of many families who have used that resource to see where their loved ones have ended up with their memorial and where they fell. Many of the graves are beyond the realistic reach of relatives and friends who might want to travel to see them.

I was in Burma in 1978, which was in chaos at the time. Every street corner in Rangoon had an armed submachine-gun post. One hotel operated next to the presidential palace around which was a ring of tanks facing outwards. I was inside the ring, protected along with the President for the two days

that I was there. The one place that worked north of Rangoon was the Commonwealth war graves. All the grass was cut to exactly the same height—12mm—the book of remembrance was in pristine condition and the graves were kept in apple-pie order. Nothing else in that country worked, but our servicemen and women were honoured.

Many of our civilians have contributed to the war effort. My Aunt Daisy was a canary; she worked in a munitions factory and lost the middle finger of her left hand. She carried, in a relatively minor way by comparison with other sacrifice, the memory of her contribution. Many others did likewise and many paid a much higher price. My great-great-grandfather served in the navy. He was on HMS Medway from 1780 to 1782—I have his certificate of discharge. We will all find papers about our family military history.

Herman Himmler died on 15 October 1946 at his own hand, two hours after I was born—he obviously knew what was coming and took the easy way out before I, and others, got to him.

In Moscow in 1972 I met a thrice decorated hero of the Soviet Union who was a KGB general and, interestingly, a Jew. We had little in common in language, but what the interpreter was able to tell me about his experience at the battle of Stalingrad was deeply moving. Around the world, people have made sacrifices.

Barra is one of my favourite parts of Scotland. It is where we have probably the most modern of our war memorials. It stands on the hill above Castlebay, to the west of the town. The memorial is a triangular obelisk and 132 names—from an island with a population of 1,200 people—are engraved on its granite. There is a cemetery down the hill on the west coast in which German sailors rest. They were the losers, were on the wrong side and were conscripted by fascists and therefore are not remembered as our people are.

Our remembrance nowadays is primarily an emotional matter—we want to register our debt of gratitude to our veterans. The issue is not administrative, but administratively we must ensure that we can support the march and celebration in Edinburgh, for example. There must be no constraints in respect of police power and resources to make that march and celebration a success.

There are 3,500 people in Scots regiments today. Some 57,000 died in the war. We are but grains of sand on the beach beaten by the ocean waves of war. Without the grains of sand there would be no beach and without the beach, there would be no land. Without the land, we would be overwhelmed and we would have nowhere to live. Our duty now is to win the peace for all those who gave us a peace to win.

16:21

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):

I vividly remember the VE day celebrations on 8 May 1945 and thank all those who served in the armed forces during that conflict. However, it would be remiss of me if I did not help to colour the picture a bit more fully by pointing out that the war effort was not limited to the efforts of the armed forces—the whole nation played a full part from 1939 to 1945. Countless thousands of women were involved in munitions production and went out to work in every imaginable capacity, thus releasing more and more able-bodied men to be recruited into the forces. Many other women joined the Army, the navy, the air force and the land army to help the war effort. The Local Defence Volunteers—which grew into the Home Guard—and the air raid precaution wardens were formed and non-combatants flocked to join them in civil defence. We should not forget the Bevan boys.

Malcolm Chisholm spoke eloquently about the resilience and courage of everyone on the home front. I have never known a nation so united in its determination to overcome all odds to achieve victory—there was, for example, a nationwide dig for victory campaign. Sixty years on, we do not treat our heroes of the conflict too well. For example, when they reach their 80th birthday, our veterans receive a massive boost to their finances—they get an extra 25p a week. We do indeed have a land fit for heroes to live in.

Many veterans must find some of what goes on in modern society rather perplexing. For example, there has been a great outcry from politically correct people in the Parliament about identity cards—I have such a card with me. Those individuals would not have been quite as vociferous from 1939 to 1946 because if a person did not have an identity card during the war years, they would not qualify for a ration book and they would therefore face starvation. I simply cannot remember any kids in my classes at school suffering from obesity, which was one good feature of rationing. I had better not read the next bit of my speech, as it might not be as politically correct as members would like it to be.

Donald Gorrie also spoke eloquently about the sense of togetherness in the nation. Brian Monteith pondered why a democratically elected German Government could have become such a strong force for evil. I say to Brian Monteith that Goebbels was probably the first-ever spin doctor. Any society that could countenance the final solution must have been completely brainwashed by that propaganda expert. By the way, I must correct Mr Stevenson, probably for the first and last time. He referred to Herman Himmler, but his name was Heinrich Himmler.

The 1939 to 1945 war took place during my formative years, from the time when I was nine years old until the time when I was 15. It has had a tremendous influence on my outlook ever since. It was humbling to live through the dark years of the war and to come through those harrowing times enriched by the enormous sacrifices that were made on the nation's behalf by all those who served.

My abiding memory of VE day is the great joy of seeing the end of the hated blackout. The lights came on once again after six long years of darkness all over our nation—long may that continue. I thank every veteran who did anything to help the war effort.

16:25

Mr Andrew Arbuckle (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(LD): This has been a reflective and, at times, emotional debate. For me and, no doubt, for many others the most poignant point in the annual calendar is the remembrance day celebration. In cities, towns and small communities throughout the country, we stand at war memorials and listen to the lingering notes of the last post. We read on the war memorials the names of those who died and annually we are reminded of the youth of those who gave their lives—young men, often not out of their teens. In my town, where many families have lived for generations, we find the names of long-lost sons, nephews, brothers and uncles on the memorial. We listen to readings that bring out the horror of war. In part, that is how we pass on the message of the inherent wickedness of war, an issue that Jamie Stone raised.

November 11 is a time for reflection. In contrast, victory in Europe day has been, is and should continue to be largely a celebration. The date of VE day may be a subject of debate, as the final surrender was signed on 7 May, a day earlier than the one that we are commemorating. Sadly, 7 May was marked by the sinking of a commercial ship by a U-boat in Scottish waters.

To me, VE day is a celebration of the overthrow of Hitler, although for many of those who were involved it is also a day for reflection on the casualties of war. It marks a victory for the rights of man over the evils of the fascist regimes and the moment when a free Europe emerged from the toils of war. We are right at this time to reflect on the ending of the European war. However, as Carolyn Leckie mentioned, we must recognise that many of our countrymen were still involved in bloody conflict in Asia, the other sphere of war.

As the First Minister, in Dundee, paid his tribute to those who fought in Europe, at a much smaller gathering across the River Tay I stood alongside the residents of the hamlet of Balmerino as they

acknowledged their indebtedness to the generation that gave so much. That is how it has been and should be, with each town and village remembering its own.

The speeches that we have heard today have included many personal and family memories of war. None was more striking than that of Christine Grahame, whose strong, simple language scraped my heart and the hearts of many others who heard her. My family roots are largely in farming, which, like coal mining, was regarded as a reserved occupation. Reference has rightly been made to the contribution to the war effort that was made by miners, munitions manufacturers and steelworkers. I would like to add to that list those who produced the food. Malcolm Chisholm mentioned the Women's Land Army, but there was also the work of the war agricultural executive committees, which set food production targets for farmers and thereby ensured that the country was fed. Many in reserved occupations also played their part by joining the Home Guard. Although the Home Guard has been gently mocked by a younger generation as Dad's army, for those who donned their uniform after work it was part of their contribution to the war effort. As John Swinburne said, it was the country that was at war.

As I said, my family roots are largely in farming and despite the opportunity not to go to war, two of my uncles volunteered and went through the war from day one to the very end. They went out with the expeditionary force, happily survived Dunkirk and D-day in the tanks of the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry and then on to German soil. They and tens of thousands more put years of their lives into securing victory in that ghastly war.

As Carolyn Leckie mentioned, many veterans in post-war years retained a quiet dignity. My uncles never related any of their experiences until they were old men. However, as I listened to their tales of war, it made me realise just how lucky I was to grow up in a generation free from major conflict. I support the motion and its sentiments.

16:31

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Today my script is gone. Today I have heard speeches from every political side of the chamber and each contribution merits an individual response.

Few if any of us in the chamber have experienced military service. A member who did was my colleague Ben Wallace, who gave up at the last election to fight a seat at Westminster. I am pleased to say that Ben won the Lancaster and Wyre seat last week and is now a member of Parliament. It is important to have military experience in every parliamentary chamber, although I welcome the fact that members do not

have that front-line experience principally because there has been a dearth of front-line experience to be had, as we move towards a more peaceful future. Sadly, I suspect that that is a forlorn hope, given human nature as it is today.

I mention one aspect of my experience that relates to Carolyn Leckie's comments about her mother moving here from London to escape the blitz. My reason for being in the chamber today is because my parents were bombed out twice in Portsmouth right at the beginning of the war and, sadly for some, they brought me to Scotland, which I believe to be my home and in which I take great pride.

The debate was commenced with the right words and the right feeling by Malcolm Chisholm. He made a tremendous speech that got to the heart of the issues about which we are thinking today. His emotive words reflected the principles that lie behind our requirement for remembrance and certainly registered with me.

The generations in the chamber will not forget the war veterans, but when I look at the remembrance services in London and see the veterans going past the cenotaph, it worries me how that will register in the future with our younger generations. Each and every one of us—every parliamentarian—has a duty to ensure that those younger generations remember what happened in the past. That is all important. Donald Gorrie referred to that and I go along entirely with his comments.

Malcolm Chisholm spoke about the 57,000 people from Scotland who died, but I wonder just how many more were injured or maimed and lived with the scars of the war for the next 40, 50, 60, and, hopefully, a few more years. I suspect that at least five times the number of dead gave much and should not be forgotten. Indeed, Mary Scanlon tried to emphasise that point when she highlighted some of the current deficiencies in our services. I hope that all of us in the Parliament will work to rectify those deficiencies. John Swinburne took a slightly different approach to highlighting them. In any case I believe that, with such an emotive debate, they must be taken on board.

Malcolm Chisholm and other members were right to emphasise the input of our civilian population and how much of a part they played. The country was at war. Everyone stood behind the coalition Government of the day, the troops and the industries. Most important, they stood side by side with one another in trying to combat the tragedies that they were learning of daily.

People talk about the stress that is felt by people in today's society. However, I cannot imagine the stress that individuals must have felt at that time. Christine Grahame referred to civilians dressed in

soldiers' clothing. That was our army in 1939. Those individuals were plucked out of their families and thrust into the front line, not to return home—if they were lucky enough to return home—for five years or more. I believe that today's stress levels cannot compare with those felt at that time. We should simply think about the stress that was felt by individuals during the war and be grateful.

Malcolm Chisholm mentioned that veterans feel the psychological effects of war up to 14 years later. It is with some shame that I greet the efforts of the Conservative and subsequent Governments to disprove the effects of post-traumatic stress that Chris Ballance mentioned. I also fully endorse Mr Ballance's comments about Hollybush House. Governments of different political shades have not done credit to our troops, particularly those who participated in the Kuwait war, by trying to avoid their responsibilities on this matter.

When we think about the veterans of the war from 1939 to 1945, we should also remember the great war, which people were told was the war to end all wars. However, that was not the case either with that war or with the war that ended in 1945. Since 1945, there have been conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Malaya—you name it, there has been a war there. Indeed, we went to war in the Falkland Islands. Stewart Stevenson's story about Fraserburgh highlights the horrendous decisions that politicians have to make. When politicians decide to go to war, they are probably taking the most important and serious decision that they can be faced with. Such a decision cannot be easy; indeed, I hope that I will never have to face it during my political life. Given that that life is now relatively short, I doubt that that will happen.

When Andrew Welsh mentioned the Scottish regiments, I was reminded that, before 1939, we were taken in by the claim that we had had a war to end all wars and we laid down our arms. When war broke out, we were unprepared, which is why we put civilians in soldiers' uniforms and sent them to the front line. It is the Government's duty to ensure that that never happens again. No matter how serene the international scene might be, some usurper somewhere in the world is lurking and waiting to take advantage.

It is the responsibility of the Government, particularly in this country, to ensure that we are prepared. There are often words of condemnation when Governments spend money on defence and armaments, but every penny spent on a defence matter that secures peace in the longer term is money well spent. If we pick up that message and Donald Gorrie's message about ensuring that our young people do not forget, perhaps we will do a service to those veterans who have done so much

for our country and for every one of us in the chamber today.

16:40

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): First, I apologise on behalf of my colleague Andrew Welsh, who asked me to do so because he had to leave the chamber for an urgent appointment.

The motion that has been lodged by the Executive can meet with no disagreement from anyone in the chamber or in the country. The debt of gratitude that we owe to all the veterans who served their country in world war two is immense. I am pleased that we are having this debate to record that gratitude again in the *Official Report* and to give the recognition mentioned by the minister not only to the individuals but to the organisations that assist veterans and work tirelessly on their behalf.

I was interested to hear about the on-going programme of veteran-related work, because it is true that there are still difficulties with perceptions of neglect and, in some cases, actual neglect. For example, the ex-personnel of Christmas Island have an on-going campaign and of course there are on-going debates about gulf war syndrome.

All the contributions have been extremely interesting, as have some of the personal stories that we heard. Christine Grahame talked about a friend of her father and about Mark Hirst's grandfather, and Karen Whitefield talked about a member of her family who was directly involved. Those personal stories bring home the absolute horror of war when we sit and listen to them. When Jamie Stone asked how we can bring it home to children, I thought back to my own childhood.

I was born in the mid-1950s and I did not really have a conception of what war was about. I remember—in fact, it is one of my earliest memories—sitting and watching a television programme that those of my age group and older will remember. It was called "All Our Yesterdays". I can tell by Johann Lamont's smile that she remembers it. It featured stark black-and-white figures who talked about the war, and there was a clipped BBC-pronunciation presenter—whenever I listen to James Douglas-Hamilton, I remember that TV programme. It was like stories that did not quite seem real. It did not really touch us at all. I was interested in what Carolyn Leckie said about the war poets, because I had to study them at school. I am not a great poetry lover, but there was one poem that made me think for the first time about war in a different way from all the glory stuff that we often heard about. I think that it was by Wilfred Owen. I cannot remember the name of the poem, but I have never forgotten the first line, the

first three words of which were, "Our brains ache". That was a powerful image to me as an adolescent, thinking of that level of pain.

One thing that I learned when I started reading about the war was that the second world war was a very, very just war, because it had a concrete reason for people going to fight an enemy. That enemy was the offensive politics moving across Europe at that time. The second world war was, of course, preceded by the Spanish civil war and the contributions that were made by the international brigades, from our country and others, in the Spanish civil war have to be recognised as well. Irene Oldfather is right to say that we have to guard against that happening again, because these things are still there in Europe. Whatever problems anybody has with the European Union, at least by having it we are recognising where these things are growing and we are able to take action to fight against them.

Karen Whitefield, Andrew Welsh and John Swinburne spoke about the efforts that everyone made during the war. Everyone who is involved in war makes some sort of effort.

I pay tribute to the foreign nationals who were interned during the war in the north of Ireland, the Isle of Man and Orkney, the majority of whom were Italians. I am talking not about those who went on to be deported but those who came back home to their own families and communities in Scotland during the war. They contributed to the war effort of the entire civilian population because they felt that they were in it for Scotland and were fighting against the same enemy against which the rest of the country was fighting.

Donald Gorrie mentioned the United Nations, which grew out of the League of Nations after the second world war. As Irene Oldfather said in relation to the European Union, international organisations that preserve partnerships between nations are vital and must be kept. We can talk about the corruption that exists in the UN and how that institution must be reformed, but let us never forget the importance of having international organisations that strive to preserve peace.

Scottish people are very international in their outlook—they are internationalists—so although the motion is about acknowledging the ultimate sacrifice that Scots made, I want to pay tribute to those from other countries who fought on our part in the war. Those countries have their own veterans. More than 1.5 million Indians were in the services and we all know about the legendary tales of the Gurkhas. Labour market shortages meant that 800 forestry workers from the tropics were brought to work in the Scottish Highlands. Of the 300 West Indians who flew for the RAF, 90 received medals for bravery. Britain's west African colonies in Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and

Nigeria served as staging posts and military bases during world war two. When the French colonies in west Africa were freed from Vichy domination, the west African British troops who were no longer needed in such great numbers for Home Guard duties were moved to Burma together with some of the east African brigades. Today, I was fascinated to learn that, in all, some 166,500 Africans were involved in helping to defeat the Japanese. All those people fought for freedom against the tyranny that would have triumphed in Europe had we not managed to stop it.

I will read out a quote from the Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League, which asks:

"What made 5 million people from the Commonwealth volunteer to fight the Second World War alongside the 6 million British Forces? Who were these people and what motivated them? They were people who believed in freedom and were happy to fight alongside"

us

"to make this World a safer place ... They came from all over the Commonwealth, a million from Canada; 2.5 million from the Indian sub-continent; from South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean, the Far East and from across Africa."

Some of those people have become new Scots; the members of their families are now second and third-generation Scots and believe themselves to be truly Scottish.

Sadly, we still have wars, as Chris Ballance mentioned. We have wars within, between and among nations. There is a vast amount of conflict going on in the world. We must pay tribute to those who still fight in conflicts and lay down their lives on our behalf. It is not just regular soldiers who go to the front line; there are peacekeepers all over the world who act on the part of the UN.

There is also the Territorial Army, which goes to front-line conflict situations alongside the regular Army. The other day, I was disturbed to learn from the radio about the number of TA volunteers who need to go for therapy because, in the aftermath of war, they are suffering from post-traumatic stress. The 14-year issue was mentioned. I pay tribute to the members of the TA, who work very hard to defend this nation.

We are at war at the moment, although now is not the time to discuss that in any great detail. We are saluting the veterans of a past war. Regardless of political views around the chamber, we should and could all say that we hope for an end to the conflict that our countries are involved in as soon as possible, so that we have fewer veterans to salute in future.

16:50

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): It is a great privilege to respond to what has been a good and moving debate. When I was first appointed to my current position, I was aware of some of the difficult challenges that might face me, but it was when I was informed that I was the veterans minister that I felt overwhelmed and humbled. I feel humbled today to know that there are veterans in the gallery. It is an honour to have such a responsibility.

Like Linda Fabiani, when I was at school I learned, through poetry, about the horrors of war. There were some who thought that there was a contradiction between understanding the horror of war, and marking and commemorating those who had suffered in war. For me, one reinforced the other. Remembrance day is always a significant day, for no matter why we fight we know that those who suffer and pay a sacrifice have to be respected. In cherishing the development of our new Parliament, it is fitting that we reflect that, as Sarah Boyack pointed out to me, our nearest neighbours are the veterans of Whitefoord House, without whom we would not be here. In our work, we should respect the sacrifice that they have made for us. Today we seek to mark, commemorate and acknowledge the courage of all those involved in the war effort. We are all too aware that no matter how carefully we have chosen our words—and I believe that everybody has done that today—we can never truly capture the courage and comradeship that was shown. It was not an unthinking courage, nor a bravery without fear, but surely, amazingly, a bravery despite the dangers and fears that people faced.

Last year, I had the privilege to visit the site of the D-day landings and to see where the soldiers fought. On one occasion, I visited a war cemetery in Crete and was overwhelmed by the way in which it had been maintained. I remember not only the cenotaph in my own great city, which marks the sacrifice made there but the little graveyard on the island of Tiree, where we can see the price that was paid by a small island community. The merchant seamen paid greatly as well. In the graveyard on Tiree, there are gravestones to unknown soldiers and to seamen of the first and second world wars. We have to remember that people suffered.

Phil Gallie: Malcolm Chisholm mentioned the Arctic convoys. Successive Governments have failed to recognise the sacrifices that were made by those in the convoys. Is there anything that the minister could do to encourage recognition, even at this late stage?

Johann Lamont: We are trying to mark the sacrifice of all those in the war, and I will reflect

further on the points that have been made about what we could do in relation to those matters.

I remember my mother talking of people who came back to Tiree who had been prisoners of war. They never spoke about it. We wonder what pain they suffered on their own. Across Europe and north Africa, and in the jungles of the far east, Scots servicemen fought alongside their allied comrades, always with the same objective: to turn back fascism and tyranny. The people of Scotland and the Parliament owe a great amount to those men and women who fought to preserve our freedoms, our democracy and our way of life. The debt of gratitude can never be greater than when we remember those who fell in combat, or who died incarcerated in prisoner of war camps. In this, the 60th anniversary of the cessation of hostilities, we remember the contribution not just of those who died on active service—and those who still die on active service—but of those who remained here in Scotland, on the home front. We remember men and women—perhaps, as has been said today, in our own families—whose resilience and resourcefulness saw them through conscription, rationing, evacuation, the blitz in 1941 and the fear of invasion. Their contribution in keeping the agricultural, industrial and civic machinery of the nation running cannot be dismissed lightly.

Life was difficult. We should remember what was at stake. It was not a given that fascism could be defeated and it was not assumed that fascism would be destroyed. Fascism represented a huge and terrifying challenge to the nature of our society. We need to be vigilant, because fascism emerged out of a democracy and it could be argued that it emerged from a failure of our international endeavours. We must remember the importance of being vigilant and hold tight to the importance of what Europe and the international community represent. When we describe one another in political debate we must remember what we share and what divides us from what we were fighting in those days. We should show, in our language, a respect for our democracy and perhaps not run too quickly to condemn others for what Nazism represented.

Thankfully, the allies prevailed, in the far east as well as in Europe, but as we commemorate the end of the second world war this year we do so knowing that it is perhaps the last major commemoration that veterans of that war shall be able to attend. That is why throughout the summer a whole series of commemorative events will take place throughout Scotland. Those events are too numerous to detail now, but I urge people to make contact with Veterans Scotland, the Veterans Agency or the Royal British Legion Scotland, which will all have details of what will happen in local communities.

Do not underestimate the importance of those events in keeping alive awareness of what happened. The commemorative events that took place last weekend prompted my seven-year-old son to ask what happened and why the celebrations were taking place. I noted his shock when I told him about the second world war. He asked me, "Did 6 million Jews really die simply because they were Jews?" His shock brought afresh to me a realisation of the horror of what the second world war was about. When we commemorate, we bring alive the history for our young people and that brings a capacity to learn the lessons of what it represented.

In addition to local events there will be two further major national events of commemoration. At the end of veterans awareness week on 10 July, the national service of commemoration will take place in the high kirk of St Giles in Edinburgh, following an impressive parade down the Royal Mile. On 14 August, the Royal British Legion Scotland will mark the anniversary of victory in Japan day with a major parade in Glasgow that will be attended by up to 2,000 veterans. That will be followed by a beating of the retreat at the Kelvin Hall. I encourage everyone who wishes to do so to attend those events and to show their gratitude and respect for Scotland's veterans community.

Veterans awareness week will run from 3 July to 10 July throughout the entire United Kingdom. Although commemoration will feature during the week, the focus will be on raising the awareness among the public—and indeed among politicians—of what it is to be a veteran in 2005. Many people define a veteran as someone who fought in one of the world wars and therefore think that they should be old and venerable. However, a veteran is defined as any person who has served in the armed forces for any length of time, their spouses and their dependants. They do not require to have seen active service in a combat zone.

As has been said, our words of commemoration are important but, as Lord James Douglas-Hamilton and others have said, they must be matched by a commitment to address the needs of veterans. We know that the vast majority of ex-service personnel make a successful transition back into civilian life when they leave the forces. However, that is unfortunately not the case for some, who, for any number of reasons, can face seemingly insurmountable barriers to transition.

For those veterans, the first port of call is often one of the many veterans benevolent organisations and charities that work so selflessly throughout the country. In some cases all that is required is some understanding, some helpful advice—on anything from benefit claims to

housing applications—and perhaps some practical assistance, for example to gain employment. That is another example of how powerful harnessing the voluntary sector and working with charitable organisations can be in delivering the aspirations of the Government and the Parliament. Those charitable organisations understand the need better than we do. Our commitment must be to drive policy from where they have identified that need.

More specialist care and support are required by many who have mental or physical disabilities. That is where charities such as Combat Stress—I am mindful of the comments that were made about the issues there—and Erskine come to the fore. I know from the Deputy Presiding Officer, Trish Godman, who is unable to speak in the debate today, how important and effective the work of Erskine is. It is important that those organisations and charities receive not only our recognition but our support.

The Executive has already put in place a series of programmes and policies that will support our veterans and help to prevent them from dropping into social exclusion. That reflects our determination to understand inequality and disadvantage, however it is expressed, and challenge its causes. Veterans have to be part of that overall approach to dealing with those who are disadvantaged. Of course, more could always be done, and often it will not be the Government that is in a position to deliver it. That is why we liaise closely with our colleagues at the Ministry of Defence and are building on our relations with Veterans Scotland and the Scottish veterans community at large.

We have to think about veterans when we are talking about employability—what will help them and support their particular needs in the labour market? We have to understand the needs of veterans when we talk about homelessness and we are going to work hard to implement the recommendations of the homelessness task force. We have to form new partnerships across Government and work with the veterans organisations to see where we can help to meet the needs of Scotland's ex-servicemen and women. Were it not for the allied victory in 1945 we might not be here, in a democratically elected chamber, to debate the motion in the first place. We owe it to them to ensure that the Parliament is a power for good, for veterans' families and for generations to come.

Fifty-seven thousand Scottish men were lost in a total of 61 million people killed. That represents 1 per cent of Scotland's resident population in 1945. More important, it represents thousands of grieving widows and mothers, devastated families and orphaned children. It represents a sacrifice

not just for the nation's defence but for its values, its freedoms and its democracy, and it is a sacrifice that allows today's veterans the opportunity to live with dignity and pride.

I urge Parliament to support the motion. It has been a privilege to be part of the debate. We have to send a clear and unequivocal message of recognition, thanks and support to all in Scotland's veterans community, young and old. Today's debate marks our respect, but it also represents a huge challenge for Government and all of us in our actions to understand the needs of veterans; to understand the power of what they did on our behalf; and to ensure that we do our bit to make Scotland a place where people are treated with respect and equality.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S2M-2793.1, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2793, in the name of Peter Peacock, on the schools-colleges review, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 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)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 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)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 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)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Home Robertson, 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)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 35, Against 78, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-2793.2, in the name of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S2M-2793, in the name of Peter Peacock, on the schools-colleges review, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S2M-2793, in the name of Peter Peacock, as amended, on the schools-colleges review, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament welcomes *Lifelong Partners*, the Scottish Executive's strategy for school and college partnership to increase and enhance further vocational and other specialist opportunities for S3 pupils and above to access high quality educational experiences and gain full recognition for their learning with colleges; acknowledges that further education colleges, as principally centres of voluntary learning for adults, play an important role in helping schools realise the potential of young people; supports the growth in college learning opportunities for pupils outlined in the Executive's strategy, and recognises that colleges' partnership work with schools is a priority for the further education sector but notes, however, the need for the Executive to monitor issues of funding, college capacity and delivery of the strategy, particularly in rural areas.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth and final question is, that motion S2M-2794, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on commemorating Scotland's veterans, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament acknowledges a debt of gratitude to all Scottish veterans who served their country in World War II; recognises the ultimate sacrifice made by 57,000 Scots during that period of conflict, and encourages everyone in Scotland to support the commemorative events this summer.

Inclusion Scotland

17:05

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-2707, in the name of Sandra White, on support for the Inclusion Scotland manifesto. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates Inclusion Scotland on the recent launch of its "Manifesto for Inclusion" document which seeks to promote, amongst other things, independent living for disabled people, allowing them to have the same choices, controls and freedoms as any other citizen; notes that the document calls for a significant transformation with regard to expenditure between institutional and non-institutional care, and considers that all of Scotland's politicians should read and support the calls made in the document, such as the right to live in the community with appropriate support and not in an institution, a greater emphasis on self-assessment in the existing community care assessment process, that the "duty of care" retained by social work should be redefined, that all planning partners should develop advocacy services for all people with a mental health disorder to meet the requirements of the Mental Health Care and Treatment (Scotland) Act 2003, and that there should be varied and flexible housing across all tenures for disabled people, the inclusion of key disabled stakeholders in the formulation of transport strategies and associated legislation at all levels, increased resources to support mainstream educational opportunities for all disabled children and adults, a coherent strategy to meet the needs of disabled job seekers and employees, improved portrayal and inclusion of disabled people in the mainstream media, inclusive access for all to all public spaces, the enactment of a single equality bill as an urgent priority, a complete review of wheelchair/power chair services in Scotland, acknowledgement that disabled people are also sexual beings with attendant health and emotional needs and, finally, increased awareness and funding of disabled patients' independent advocacy services.

17:06

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): When I look at the *Business Bulletin*, I realise that the text of the motion is rather long. I have been told that it has set a record. However, the "Manifesto for Inclusion" covers so many meaningful and important areas that I felt I could not leave anything out.

I congratulate Inclusion Scotland on producing such an excellent report and I welcome its representatives to the Scottish Parliament. They are behind me in the gallery. I thank them for all the work they have done. When I took them for a coffee earlier, they were at pains to tell me that the manifesto was written not only by them but by disabled people throughout Scotland. I thank them very much.

I am a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee and I want to thank the committee and its staff. At this very moment we are carrying out an inquiry into disability issues. Many people have spoken to me about the motion and they will agree that all the groups we have spoken to, and all the people who have contributed to our investigation in every area we have visited, have raised exactly the same concerns that the manifesto highlights. That says something about the work that Inclusion Scotland has done in producing its manifesto.

It is estimated that one in five of the population of Scotland is disabled. That is 1 million people—an awful lot of people. More than one in three households have a person who is either disabled or suffering from a long-term illness. Those people face discrimination in everyday life—in housing, education and employment. That is appalling.

In my speech, I want to cover a number of areas, highlighting particular concerns raised in the manifesto. The first is poverty. Approximately four in 10 of all households with a disabled person—42 per cent—have an income of £10,000 or less.

The second is employment. Among the population of working age, 45 per cent of disabled people are in employment, compared with 82 per cent of non-disabled people.

Next is housing. Households with a disabled person, or a person with a long-term illness, are more likely to rent accommodation than they are to own their own home.

The last is education. A total of 58 per cent of disabled people, with or without a long-term illness, have no qualifications, compared with 24 per cent of non-disabled people.

On top of all that, one in five disabled Scots has experienced harassment at some time or other because of their impairment.

Poverty is a real issue for disabled people. The benefits system is a reserved matter but areas such as community care assessment and direct payments are within the powers of this Parliament. We can address them. We must have a comprehensive review of the assessment process, and greater emphasis must be placed on self-assessment in community care.

Direct payments go some way towards increasing social inclusion, which is obviously welcome. However, the take-up rate is quite low, especially among those with learning difficulties and mental health issues. From constituency cases, I have experienced at first hand just how difficult it is for people from certain areas to get their local authority to fund community care packages that are tailored to their needs—I am sure that many other members will have

experienced that, too. We must look into that if we really want to give people the choice of living independently rather than being in residential care. The issue is raised with me continually in my constituency office and in letters.

Transport has figured highly in the Equal Opportunities Committee's investigation and also features in the "Manifesto for Inclusion". Although we all appreciate the moves towards integrated transport services, disabled people still face various difficulties. Without access to services, people are excluded from participating in activities that most people would consider to be normal. We welcome the concessionary fares scheme that is being rolled out across the country but, when we read the legislation, we discover that the scheme will not be fully implemented until 2016 or 2017. People will have a concessionary card to travel, but the transport might not be available because it does not have to be in place until 2016 or 2017. The latest date for implementation—2020—seems quite far away, as is highlighted in the manifesto. It would be advantageous if the Scottish Parliament could set a date for implementation that is well ahead of the designated timescale. I leave that in the hands of the minister and suggest that she could address the issue when she responds.

Of all the services, access to meaningful education is one of the most important. Education can open doors to employment, lift people out of poverty and lead to a fulfilling life. However, we hear over and over again—not only in the evidence that has been given to our inquiry but in the manifesto—that disabled people are being let down by our further education colleges. They are sent on courses that do not benefit them. Young adults and others are being given colouring books and are being told to clean windows and given other tasks that do not lead to fulfilment or qualifications. During our inquiry, we heard of one young woman who was told to clean the classroom. Rightly, she said, "No. I am here to get a qualification." That sort of thing is happening everywhere and we must examine it further.

This morning, we had a debate on further education and I hope that the needs of disabled people will be considered closely by the Minister for Education and Young People. We must tackle inequalities in that area if the lives of disabled people are to be improved and social inclusion is to have any real meaning.

I would like to cover many other areas but I expect that other members will deal with them.

I admit that there have been improvements in the social inclusion of disabled people. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 should make a positive difference and we must ensure that it does. The "Manifesto for Inclusion", which is written by disabled people, gives a voice to

disabled people that we must listen to. As legislators, we must implement policies that will fully integrate all of the peoples of Scotland.

I end by quoting article 1 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

17:13

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): The four most important words in the "Manifesto for Inclusion" are the ones that are written on the front: "Written by disabled people". Those people are standing up and speaking for themselves, not being patronised or having others speak for them but talking directly about the barriers that they face and what they think about them. That is a powerful message. The Equal Opportunities Committee's inquiry is carrying that message forward by making an effort to go out and allow disabled people to speak for themselves about what prevents them from achieving their full potential, such as the things that we put in their way because of our assumptions and our lack of awareness about what we can do to give people equality of opportunity, which is a basic human right.

I detest waste and I think that there is an enormous waste of human resource because we do not make it possible for people to have access to education and work, to make a contribution to society or to socialise and enrich the lives of others around them. Often, that happens because of a lack of small adjustments and expenditure; sometimes, that happens because of a lack of large adjustments and expenditure. That expenditure ought to be made.

I congratulate Sandra White on her motion, which is almost a speech. I could almost make the contribution that I want to make to the debate just by reading it out. There is an enormous amount in the "Manifesto for Inclusion" and we cannot pretend that it will all happen tomorrow. However, we must ensure that we make steady progress towards providing everything in the manifesto so that there is no longer a need for it. At that point, we will see people as people and will not regard their disabilities as a barrier to their full inclusion in society.

17:15

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I say at the outset that I regret that I cannot stay for all the speeches because I have a family duty to carry out tonight.

I thank Sandra White and Inclusion Scotland for the debate. Like others, I note that there are many

issues in the motion and I am sure that I will be forgiven for picking out just one or two. The motion states that the "Manifesto for Inclusion" promotes

"independent living for disabled people ... the right to live in the community with appropriate support and not in an institution ... advocacy services ... and ... housing".

I have a particular interest in advocacy services in relation to the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. On housing, I am pleased to say that at this week's meeting of the Communities Committee we took evidence from a panel of representatives of disabled groups, who highlighted many issues and discussed whether or not they should be covered in the Housing (Scotland) Bill.

Another issue that I have picked out from the manifesto concerns the needs of disabled jobseekers and employees. Sometimes, we get so focused on the care and support of disabled people that we forget that if they are to be socially included and lead independent lives, we should also encourage them into employment.

There is no doubt that much is happening to address many of the issues in the motion. As Nora Radcliffe said, we are looking for steady progress, and change will not be achieved overnight. However, I am reminded of the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and of one of my favourite glossy brochures from the first session of Parliament, "The same as you?" It is an excellent document and only one of its recommendations is still to be implemented: the closure of all long-stay hospitals for people with learning disabilities.

I welcome the manifesto from Inclusion Scotland and appreciate its value, particularly as it represents—as Nora Radcliffe said—the collective voice of those whom it plans to help, which gives even more weight to its conclusions. It represents a diverse group of people and its theme is that disabled people should be allowed independence and self-determination. Inclusion Scotland clearly seeks to aid and encourage everyone to accommodate the distinct impairments of disabled people and allow them a leadership role in that.

Manifestos such as the one that Inclusion Scotland has produced help to give a voice to people who are prevented from participating fully in society as a result of their impairment. I welcome that, and no organisation should think that the manifesto or debates such as this one do not carry significant substance. The debate has forced us to read the manifesto and think about it, and as we go about our parliamentary business in the two years until the next election we will think about the aspects that we are talking about tonight. That applies not only to MSPs who are in the chamber but to others who are listening in their offices. It is clear from organisations and

individuals who contact MSPs and cross-party groups that one of the most infuriating aspects, which many people talk about, is the feeling that people in positions of power are not listening or paying attention. Tonight we are undoubtedly listening.

I will pick up on one or two comments from the manifesto. One aspect that we discussed quite often during the first session of Parliament is unmet need in care in the community. We know that there is unmet need in the health service and it is time for us to consider how long people wait for home care or the care package that they need. Another aspect is independent advocacy and the fact that disabled people should be recognised as the real experts. They, and not the need to fit into existing services and budgets, should be the focus of support. We have often heard that disabled people have to fit into what is provided rather than the service fitting their needs.

I will read just a couple of comments from the manifesto, which says:

"charging disabled people for services which they rely upon to achieve a basic degree of social inclusion is fundamentally unfair."

We must consider that in future. The manifesto also says:

"Means-testing also effectively double-charges those who have already paid national and local taxes."

The argument about that will continue.

The Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 is to be implemented in October. I still have concerns about staff shortages and whether we will have enough social workers, mental health officers, psychiatrists and psychologists. When the 2003 act was passed, we needed an additional 57 psychiatrists and the national health service had 58 vacant posts. Perhaps that need will be met by October; I sincerely hope so.

I have already mentioned the evidence that we heard on the Housing (Scotland) Bill this week, so I will move on to direct payments. I could not agree more with what the manifesto says about the low take-up of such payments. It also says:

"Direct Payments are potentially the most significant statutory measure ... since The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990."

I have advocated direct payments and have probably asked more questions than anyone about them. I know the Executive's commitment, but the facts about the very low take-up speak for themselves.

I could talk for another five minutes about the merits of direct payments, but I am sure that listeners to the debate know about them.

However, at a recent meeting of the cross-party group on autistic spectrum disorder, I was shocked to find that many parents had not heard of them. The issue is not just that local authorities are reluctant to implement such payments; a huge communication exercise is required to inform carers of them.

My final point is about advocacy. We might not be totally there yet, but I commend many of the services that are up and running and particularly the Highland advocacy service, with which I work regularly and which provides wonderful support to many people who are in need.

17:22

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): As is normal, I pay tribute to my colleague Sandra White for lodging the motion. It is lengthy, but that illustrates the complexity of the multifaceted issue that must be addressed. Numerous problems transcend an array of matters that are covered in Parliament and elsewhere.

It is appropriate that the debate follows the debate—in particular the deputy minister's speech—about victory in Europe day. She stated eloquently that the war was waged against fascism and tyranny. We should remember that people gave their lives, limbs, youth and whatever else not only to defeat fascism and tyranny, but to create a better world. That is why, in the election in 1945, a war hero who was instrumental in delivering the defeat of fascism was overwhelmingly defeated by Labour. People returned from the war or left the factories desiring not simply the benefits of victory, but to change the world to make it a better place for them and future generations. The battle had been waged and they expected the world to benefit all, not merely some or a minority.

I pay tribute not to Labour Governments that have been elected recently, but to the Labour Government that was elected in 1945, which sought change. It did so and made many advances, but as time has moved on we have perhaps not made the changes for which we hoped. There is still a long way to go—that is not a criticism of any Government or party.

As I said, we have failed to deliver some of the changes that were sought to create a fairer world. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 provides one way to make progress, but it is appropriate to recognise that not only legislative change, but cultural change is necessary. I know that today has been a long day, that earlier debates were heavily attended and that numerous other events are taking place elsewhere, but it is perhaps symbolic that the turnout is lower than it has been at other junctures.

People do not necessarily see the problem, which is that many of the difficulties that disabled people experience and many of the issues that the manifesto raises are hidden. Therefore, it is important not only that we introduce legislation to ensure that rights are available to those who suffer from disabilities of whatever form, and that we enforce that legislation, but that we address the cultural attitudes that exist in us all. I have to put my hand on my heart and confess that I have often been guilty of ignorance of the difficulties that people who have mental or physical impediments face.

We must acknowledge that we need not only legislative change, but cultural change, but if we wish to achieve cultural change—whether in this matter, in respect of binge drinking or something else—we have to set a tone at the top that makes it clear that we desire a society that includes everyone. Therefore, it is important that we have this debate and that we address all the issues. I welcome the progress that is being made on the DDA, whether in Westminster or on aspects that the Executive brings to Parliament.

Inclusion is not simply a question of imposing a moral right that those who have disabilities should be included in aspects of society that the rest of us who are able-bodied take for granted; in Scotland in the 21st century, it is also an economic imperative. We know that we have a demographic crisis, that we must get fresh talent and that we need all hands to the pumps. When I walked up Holyrood Road yesterday, all the cafes, bars and hotels on that street were advertising for staff. We do not have the labour supply to meet Scotland's economic needs. It is not only a matter of imposing a moral right that disabled people should be able to participate in the fruits of the society in which they live; if we wish our society to maintain its economic progress—never mind its social progress—we must take steps to allow disabled people to participate. We need them on board, just as they have every right to participate, like the rest of us.

I am happy to join in the debate. I pay tribute again to my colleague Sandra White for having brought this important matter to Parliament's attention. The DDA is the way forward, but we must get to cultural attitudes and change minds as well as law.

17:27

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I add my congratulations to Sandra White on securing the debate and to Inclusion Scotland on the contents of its manifesto. The motion covers so much ground that members have the luxury of choice, which does not always present itself. I will touch on a few issues.

In the first instance, I will discuss housing. Mary Scanlon mentioned the Housing (Scotland) Bill, with which the Communities Committee is dealing. I am sure that the minister has already been made aware of some of the discussions that took place at the committee's meeting this week. For example, Ownership Options in Scotland argued that the bill's proposals would

"diminish ... the financial support given to disabled people to adapt their homes"

and that the Executive

"can afford to give Scottish disabled people the same right to grant as disabled people in the rest of the UK."

That is something that we need to take every bit as seriously as employment legislation, because the right to request that an employer make reasonable adaptations to the workplace is of little use if a person cannot get out of their house to go to work, or if the emotional barriers that are a consequence of a physical barrier in the home prevent them from job seeking and getting ready for work. I am sure that the minister is already considering those matters, and that we will have opportunities to discuss them.

The motion also mentions the need for a single equality bill. I very much support that and, if the Queen's speech includes a commitment to early introduction of such a bill, I will welcome that move. At some point, we will need to go further and not only amalgamate the Disability Rights Commission, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality, but raise the level of protection—including on provision of goods and services—in all strands of equalities, not just those that are currently covered by European directives. However, any progress in the right direction is to be welcomed.

I thank the few members who managed to come to the reception that Cathy Peattie and I hosted in Parliament a couple of weeks before the election. Perhaps one should not host receptions a couple of weeks before elections if one wants MSPs to turn up at them, but I am grateful to Malcolm Chisholm for speaking at it. We also heard from the Department of Trade and Industry and from Scottish equalities organisations.

I was particularly pleased to see the references to sexual health in the "Manifesto for Inclusion". I previously worked in a role supporting a group who experience society's assumptions about sexuality, sexual behaviour and sexual identity. Many people of various identities and walks of life have assumptions placed on them by society about their sexuality. Disabled people often have the assumption made about them that they have no sexuality, so I was pleased to see that the manifesto challenges that assumption and acknowledges that people should be treated

equally with respect to the delivery of information and services about sexual health matters.

The Executive's recently launched sexual health strategy was originally developed by a working group that included people who have from their professional lives significant expertise regarding disabled people and the issues that they face. Because of that, the original strategy was quite strong on issues of diversity. I have about seven pages in front of me that show the differences between the original strategy and the final strategy, which most people would acknowledge to be weaker on some issues.

It is important that the national advisory committee on sexual health, for which the Executive is currently recruiting, make a significant effort to bring back that level of expertise to ensure that the targets that are set, and on which the Executive will monitor progress on sexual health, include targets that challenge service delivery in terms of accessibility, outreach and providing information and education to different communities, including disabled people. I very much hope that we will hear soon from the Minister for Parliamentary Business that we will have a debate on the sexual health strategy, so that the issues can be debated more widely and with a few more MSPs present.

I will share an observation that I have made before, which arose from a meeting I attended at Glasgow City Council quite a number of years ago, before I was an MSP, when I was representing the city's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organisations. That meeting was a coming together of various different equality strands and organisations. I ended up having a bit of an argument about the social model of disability. The social model is very much part of the basis of the manifesto. It has great value and has helped to move the debate on and to increase understanding of how people are disabled not necessarily by their condition, but by the condition of society and the barriers that society places on them. There are difficulties applying that model to other equality organisations, however. A representative of a disabled people's organisation tried to argue that we should apply social models to racism, homophobia, sexism and so on, but there are limits to how that model can be applied. It is not so long ago that other minority groups in society were medically marginalised, as disabled people have been medically marginalised. Application of the social model carries the danger of going backwards for some groups who have already overcome that problem.

We need to support disabled people and their organisations and representatives in challenging the physical and social barriers that still apply to them.

17:34

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Johann Lamont): I am delighted to add the Scottish Executive's congratulations to those of other members, who have already expressed their recognition of the importance of the debate. The issue is very dear to my heart.

Perhaps I may make a gentle point to you, Presiding Officer. I recognise that the number of members attending the debate this evening is low. I ask you to take back the reflection that the late notice of the subject of the debate might have excluded some people who would have wished to prepare themselves and make a contribution to the debate. I would like to devote a lot of time to the matter. I think that some people were not able to rearrange their commitments to be here this evening. That is simply a procedural point.

As I said, the issue of disability is dear to my heart and I am delighted that the Equal Opportunities Committee is conducting an inquiry on it. I very much look forward to its consideration of the issue.

I understand that representatives of Inclusion Scotland are here tonight. I am pleased that the organisation has taken the initiative and provided a clear account of disabled people's views and an indication of the kind of things that it believes should be done at Westminster, by the Scottish Executive and locally. I make the commitment on behalf of the Executive that we will work with Inclusion Scotland and other organisations that represent people with disabilities in developing an agenda that ensures that there is equality, access and a lack of disadvantage.

To respond to Kenny MacAskill's point, when we have this kind of debate about disability issues we can mark progress that reflects a change in what people believe politics to be about. When I became politically active many years ago, there was a view that politics was about the economy and giving people sufficient income, for which the trade unions were a powerful lever, and that other things could be sorted. Over the years we have seen a growing understanding that inequality, exclusion and disadvantage come in many forms and that it is the business of politicians and our broader community to address inequality however it is expressed and to understand how it expresses itself in order to challenge it.

That is why the Executive has been working closely with Inclusion Scotland for a number of years. We consider it a key partner in delivering our equality strategy and our work to tackle prejudice and discrimination and promote equality of opportunity for disabled people. A feature of the work of the Parliament and the Executive is an understanding that to change people's lives we

have to work with those who best understand how inequality is expressed now. We work with people to deliver change; we are not in the business of doing things to or for people. If we act on that basis, we will never get policy right. By understanding that people have the solutions and that we must work closely with them to develop policy, we will have more success.

I am delighted that we have been able to support Inclusion Scotland through funding of more than £650,000 to help it deliver its programme of engagement with disabled people and disability groups throughout Scotland. That has been tremendously valuable for us and we have learned a great deal through our work with Inclusion Scotland. It contributed a huge amount to our work on the European year of disabled people in 2003 and we are continuing to work with it in our strategic disability working group, which aims to establish priorities for the Scottish Executive and partner organisations, to promote equality for disabled people in Scotland and to develop proposals for longer-term mechanisms for engaging with the disability sector.

Promoting access to services and equality of opportunity are fundamental to ensuring that disabled people can participate in Scottish society at all levels. The Executive has a long-standing commitment to promoting equality for disabled people and has taken significant action across departments through legislation and partnership working. I believe that we have made a real difference to disabled people's lives.

I remember talking to a friend of mine whose child, who is now a young adult, has a learning disability. He described to me how caring for his child was often a battle to get the appropriate help and support to meet their needs and to support him in allowing his child to reach their full potential. It ought not to be a battle. I salute those who have not only battled on behalf of their children and the people for whom they care but have taken the time to contribute and demand policy changes at every level. People who have experienced that battle will ensure that the battles will diminish for others in future.

The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 introduced a duty on education authorities to educate pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools unless certain specified exceptions apply. Education within mainstream school is the norm for the majority of pupils with additional support needs in Scotland. That is not, however, about closing special schools. Ministers are committed to ensuring that a range of provision exists to meet the needs of the individual child.

The Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Records) (Scotland) Act 2002 requires education

providers to have in place accessibility strategies to improve access to education for children with disabilities. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 modernises legislation on the assessing and recording of special educational needs. Some £12 million was set aside for 2004-05 and some £14 million was set aside for 2005-06 to support the implementation of that.

I heard what Patrick Harvie said about housing. We will ensure that there is a rigorous debate on the implications of the proposed housing legislation for people with disabilities and I reassure him that the Executive will not act in a way that reinforces discrimination.

I highlight the fact that there has been a great increase in the number of direct payments over the past three years and in their value. In 2001, there were 207 payments; in the year to 31 March 2004, there were 912 payments. The value of payments has increased by nearly £6.2 million, from £2.1 million in 2001 to more than £8.3 million in 2004. It looks like the interventions that have been made are beginning to have an effect. The focus for 2005-06 will be on increasing direct payment uptakes by groups that are currently eligible, particularly by users of disabled children's services and mental health services. We will work closely to deliver such uptakes.

On transport, I heard what Sandra White said about timing and so on, but she will be aware that the matter is Westminster's responsibility. However, people at every level have responsibilities and I will ensure that the Scottish Executive makes its contribution so that where there is a connection between our areas of responsibility and our commitments, we will ensure that people work in the best interests of those with disabilities.

We are working to understand disabled people's transport needs and we have established a Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland to advise ministers. I feel strongly about transport. In my city, being part of the parallel transport liaison group—which works with users of internal services that take people to special schools, adult care centres or wherever—has been a great privilege. The group works with those people, carers and groups that advocate on behalf of people who use the transport services and it sits beside those who deliver the service.

If everybody sits in a room together, they will understand better how a service can be delivered—that has been a powerful lesson. It is not the theory that matters. Somebody said to me that it was just a bus that was being discussed. I am talking about making a difference for somebody who cares for a parent with Alzheimer's disease and worries about the time a bus will

come because of the consequences for the rest of their day that will result from the distress that will be caused if a bus is late.

I commend Glasgow City Council for recognising that harnessing people's energies and their understanding of their own experiences is a powerful way to deliver a quality service. Taxi drivers in Glasgow now have to go through disability awareness training in order to get their badge. We know that such training will improve the experience of people with disabilities. That also fits in with the message on advocacy and the power of talking to people who understand how services impact on them.

In the national health service, as part of the fair for all overarching equality and diversity strategy, a fair for all disabled people initiative has been established. The initiative is a joint initiative with the Disability Rights Commission to support NHS Scotland in implementing the requirements of part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The initiative will provide strategic guidance to NHS Scotland and implement a range of activities to support the development of good practice.

We are also funding disability organisations throughout Scotland. For example, we are supporting the development of the local access panel network across Scotland and progressing the recommendations of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations' review of access panels in Scotland. Some £800,000 has been allocated to date, including a £500,000 package to support the network of local access panels. We are trying to make real the idea that we can harness that energy.

Patrick Harvie talked about the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which is an important tool. It is possible to raise, address and scrutinise issues as the bill progresses rather than wait until the legislation is on the statute book.

Of course a great deal of work has still to be done if disabled people are to participate fully in public life. There are people in the disabled community who have the energy and drive to ensure that that work will be done. The new duty to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people, which has recently been introduced through the UK Government's Disability Discrimination Act 2005, will help to ensure that we eliminate discrimination and promote equality in all that we do. The new duty will mark a shift in the nature of disability legislation from compliance to proactivity and will drive the mainstreaming of disability equality across all activities of the public sector, which is a critical element in challenging discrimination.

The issues can, of course, be complex. Disabled people are not a homogeneous or a small group.

Some estimates suggest that there are around a million disabled people in Scotland. The range of impairments and diversity of needs are also broad. We must have policies that recognise that.

Meeting closed at 17:45.

Clearly, there are many issues that we need to consider in order to deliver the new duty. We should not underestimate the challenges that we face or the complexity of some of the issues. The Inclusion Scotland manifesto reminds us of the many issues that disabled people see as key to achieving change. However, we should not be deterred from addressing those issues. As members from all parties have said, it is in the interests of all of Scotland that we have a Scotland to be proud of, which means a Scotland with equal opportunity for all.

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