

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 8 November 2006

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 8 November 2006

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good afternoon. Our first item of business is, as it is every Wednesday, time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Malcolm Rooney, of Glens and Kirriemuir Old Parish Church.

The Rev Malcolm Rooney (Glens and Kirriemuir Old Parish Church): Thank you for the invitation to do today's reflection.

I am very pleased to be able to do this, because it allows me to thank you, Presiding Officer, for a card that you sent almost 32 years ago—I am sure that you remember it well. It was the card that you, as the local MP for Clackmannan, sent to my wife and me to mark our wedding in 1974.

It was a small gesture—a card of congratulations—but, as you can hear, the gesture has stayed with me, although I have to be honest and say that I do not remember whether I voted for you at the subsequent general election.

It was a small, caring gesture and I want to reflect on such gestures today because it seems to me that they are the life-blood of organisations such as this that seek to bring a lot of people together into a working environment. Small gestures can make the difference between this being a place of welcome and support and an alien environment in which to work.

During the recent Ryder cup, it was small gestures of support to golfer Darren Clarke that marked the humanity of both teams. I do not know whether you saw the picture of Tiger Woods, who lost his father through cancer, hugging Darren Clarke, whose wife had just died from the same illness. They were arch rivals on the golf course, but through circumstance they were united in grief.

It was the small gesture of a hand on a shoulder that meant so much to hostage Brian Keenan as he and John McCarthy lay in the dark in captivity, Keenan ill and shivering. That hand, he said afterwards, contained all the prayers in the world.

Those small gestures are how many of us believe that God works in the world: through small gestures of love; small positive gestures; the good gestures of human beings from one to another.

I encounter them all the time in Kirriemuir and the Glens as people face the joys and trials of life

together: the card; the phone call; the flowers; the five minutes of listening; and the hand on the shoulder.

Presiding Officer, ladies and gentlemen, I commend the importance of small positive gestures of support, companionship and camaraderie.

I wish you well and God's blessing on your work.

Thank you.

Transition from School to Work

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-5098, in the name of Nicol Stephen, on supporting positive transitions from school to work.

14:34

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): Today's debate is on the important issue of moving young people from school into further education, employment or training.

The transition works well for the majority of young people. Leaving school marks the beginning of a journey that will lead them on to successful careers and rewarding activity. Indeed, Scotland does extremely well in international comparisons of youth employment and the number of young people who go into higher education. However, for too long now Scotland has had too many young people who fail to make the transition from school into education, training or employment as effectively as we would like. That group represents a wealth of undeveloped talent and untapped potential—a waste of human capabilities that is a huge missed opportunity for Scotland.

Our priority is to give those young people new confidence, new skills and new opportunities. We must support them more in their transition from school to work, education or training and we must ensure that they have the same chances in life as others have. As members know, we are taking new and substantial steps to tackle the issue and to reduce the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training.

We must be clear about the nature of the problem. The group of young people about whom we are talking is diverse and is not easily identified. Some—but by no means all—have complex needs relating to drug and alcohol misuse, mental health issues and homelessness, or they may be young parents. Many have problems that are less challenging and need significantly less support. Our commitment is to ensure that all young people who need support have the right help at the right time for as long as they need it.

Our strategy was launched in June 2006 and is Scotland's first ever action plan aimed specifically at stopping young people ending up out of education, employment or training. The plan involves action across five key areas of activity. First, it promises learning at school that is more personalised and relevant for the young person concerned, together with a greater choice of work-related vocational learning better to prepare young

people for life and the world of work. The issue does not begin when the young person is about to leave school; it starts far earlier and can be tackled far sooner.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): A vocational element in education is important and every effort must be made to improve job and training opportunities for young people. However, does the minister accept that the aim of education is not simply to prepare young people for work and that a good educational system should prepare young people for their future life, in all its aspects?

Nicol Stephen: I agree strongly with that point. As well as the basic academic skills, there must be an emphasis in our schools on physical activity and sport, drama and music. However, vocational learning should also be available. At times, we have not got the mix right. We need to restore the balance and give greater vocational opportunities to those who would be motivated by such opportunities and gain confidence in that way.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Given what the Deputy First Minister has said about schools, can he say whether he supports the First Minister's proposals for science academies?

Nicol Stephen: As I understand the situation, the proposals were made not by the First Minister but by the leader of the Labour Party. I look forward to seeing more of the detail of the proposals when manifestos are produced in due course. I am sure that all the parties will have different ideas on this important issue.

The second key area of activity in the action plan is a pledge to give one-to-one guidance to young people, so that they are not just left to plan for their future themselves. That will be available to every school leaver in Scotland who needs support.

The third area involves an improved range of financial incentives for young people to engage and stay in education and training, which will be provided in return for a clear commitment from the individual concerned.

The fourth area concerns more responsive, integrated support based on a young person's individual needs, tracking individual progress and measuring national progress against national and local targets.

The fifth area relates to the national effort that is required on the part of the public, voluntary and private sectors, which must pool efforts, resources and expertise to give young people the opportunities that they deserve.

The lead role in delivering the strategy will be taken by local authorities, but a significantly

increased role for the private sector is absolutely crucial to success.

The strategy is challenging and ambitious in its aims and scale of activity. Its delivery will target resources more effectively, build on current best practice, join up services and make funding more effective.

A range of national developments is in place to tackle the issue, and several involve increased funding to emphasise the priority that we give it. For example, we have now made £2.4 million available to Careers Scotland over the next two years to support improved careers advice for the people concerned and to inform them of school and college options. Funding includes additional resources for 13 schools in the seven local authority areas with the greatest challenges. The funding will allow targeted work with the young people who are most at risk of ending up out of education or employment.

We are rolling out pathfinder post-school psychological services to an additional seven local authority areas, bringing the total to 19. This innovative development will radically improve the transition process for young people and will build our ability—in schools, in the careers service, among training providers, and in Scotland's colleges—to support young people at this critical time.

The Scottish Executive and the Hunter Foundation are jointly funding two projects with City of Edinburgh Council and East Ayrshire Council to tackle the link between poverty and achievement. The projects will receive more than £3 million from the Executive and the Hunter Foundation over the financial year 2006-07 and onwards.

The Minister for Education and Young People is chairing a short-life working group to consider outcomes for looked-after children. As we all know, those children are disproportionately represented in the NEET group. That comment is easy to include in a document; what it means is that looked-after children sometimes have very poor prospects indeed of gaining further education, employment or training. We must do something about that.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I want to take the minister back a couple of paragraphs in his speech, to the point when he referred to local authorities having the lead role. If local authorities have the lead role and Government does not, is there not a concern that efforts to resolve the problem might be very diverse across Scotland?

Nicol Stephen: I could refer the member forward a few paragraphs in my speech, to the point when I will refer to leadership. It is important

that the Executive, the private sector and local authorities show a lead. To tackle the problem, we will all have to perform at our very best, in a focused and cohesive way. I will come to this in a few moments, but it is important that local authorities give leadership and emphasise the importance of the issue by prioritising it and by involving senior officials in initiatives.

Alongside its other work, the Executive is implementing the ambitious, excellent schools programme. As we know, that is a comprehensive reform and modernisation programme for our schools that is designed to meet the needs and challenges of the future. We recognise that turning around the performance of the lowest 20 per cent of schools could be one of the biggest single factors in improving the prospects of pupils who face challenging difficulties.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I appreciate the comments that the minister has made so far, but does he accept that if education is so important in tackling the problem, the absence of the Minister for Education and Young People and his deputy is an insult not only to this chamber but to the young people concerned?

Nicol Stephen: I strongly disagree with that. It is correct that the lead minister on this issue is the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning. The Minister for Education and Young People is also closely involved in the work and is focusing on it.

I am rapidly running out of time and I have some important information to give the chamber, so I will try to make progress.

We are supporting volunteering for young people through project Scotland and through work with partners such as Volunteer Development Scotland, the Prince's Trust and others. More than 800 volunteers are enjoying a vast range of placements of three months or longer to increase their confidence and improve their life skills.

The Executive has put in place internal working arrangements to bring a new and more focused approach to the NEET issue across all departments. Leadership is critical to the effective delivery of the NEET strategy—leadership from the Executive, from businesses and business leaders and from our schools.

As a mark of our determination and commitment to new leadership on this issue, we have already met the local authority chief executives in all seven of the NEET target areas. However, NEET is also a national priority, so we will meet the chief executives of all Scotland's local authorities. All local authority areas have received funding support for new strategies to tackle the problem.

Each of the seven priority areas has now delivered a local action plan that sets out how it

will pursue the strategy to support the young people in question. Some crucial issues have already emerged, including the need to improve the confidence, health and well-being of young people, to explore to what extent schools could retain responsibility for young people after they have left them and to think harder about what is on offer for people who leave school at Christmas.

It is difficult to praise too highly the support that we are receiving as a result of the significant commitment of our business community. Increasingly, business leaders realise that if we are to achieve our true potential, all our young people have a role to play in developing Scotland's economy. No one realises that more than the Smith group, which is an influential group of leaders from the business and education communities that is led by Sir Robert Smith. The group is working closely with officials to ensure that our approach is the best that it can be.

The work of the Smith group goes far beyond the simple provision of advice. I am delighted to announce that, with its help, we have identified and recruited a number of secondees from the private and voluntary sectors to work with us to engage employers, to identify and create opportunities and to improve the employability of young people. Mark Adams from Microsoft, David Watt from KPMG and Ray Perman from the Smith group all join us, along with Euan Davidson, who was director of the Prince's Trust Scotland. They will prove to be invaluable to the delivery of the NEET strategy.

Scottish Business in the Community will join the coalition. The organisation will bring its experience of partnering employers and bodies that work with young people to the task of developing a bespoke approach to employer engagement in Dundee, which is one of the NEET target areas.

Businesses are already giving enormous support to our determined to succeed strategy, which offers enterprise education to all our young people. Even more employers from the private and public sectors are now coming forward in support of our renewed efforts. MITIE, which is a United Kingdom-wide facilities management company, is working with us to develop a vocational centre for young people in North Lanarkshire. Barr Ltd wants to get involved by opening doors to employment in the construction sector. Scottish Power is doing great work in Glasgow. Scottish and Southern Energy is working with voluntary sector agencies such as Barnardo's, which runs the youthbuild project. We are talking to NHS Tayside about how we might develop its health care academies more widely.

I want to leave members in no doubt about our commitment to ensuring that progress is measurable and sustained. We want to focus on

results and to be able to demonstrate what we have achieved.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): Will the minister give way?

Nicol Stephen: I am sorry, but I cannot because I am running out of time.

The strategy commits us to setting national and local targets for tackling the problem by 2008. We are making good progress. We have a robust methodology for measuring success, both in preventing young people from falling into the NEET category and in helping those who are already in it. The Executive commissioned research from the University of Glasgow's training and employment research unit, which has recommended two key measures for monitoring change at local level—school leaver destination figures and data on Department for Work and Pensions benefit claimants. The new and more accurate information that will be available shortly—which we all agree is badly needed—will give us fresh insight into the issues.

All 32 local partnerships are setting challenging targets against those measures, from which we will derive a national target for reducing the number of young people in the NEET group. The release of the 2006 school leaver destination figures in December will give us an early indication of progress. By the middle of next year, the publication of data such as those on DWP benefit claimants will have given us a fuller picture.

We are determined to ensure that we make progress. The statistic that 35,000 young people are not in education, employment or training does not give the full picture. We want to focus on the young people who need the most support, of whom there are about 15,000 to 20,000. We need more detailed information.

Every person in Scotland must be given the chance to realise their full potential. More needs to be done for those young people who end up not being in education, employment or training. We have launched a big new strategy that is receiving strong support from our local authorities, the voluntary sector and, in particular, the business community and the business leaders whom I have mentioned. We must maintain the pace of progress. It is important that the Executive and politicians provide leadership, which is why today's debate is so important.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges that the transition to adulthood is an important stage in people's lives; welcomes the fact that the vast majority of young people successfully engage in education, volunteering, training and employment opportunities; agrees that supporting all young people to utilise these opportunities in the transition from school towards work is a national priority, and endorses the

leadership of the Scottish Executive, working with schools, colleges, voluntary organisations and employers in Scotland through the NEET strategy, in seeking a successful and positive outcome for all young people.

14:50

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): There is probably a lot of cross-party consensus on the issue, both on the importance of dealing with the problem and on the need to tackle it in a multifarious way and through a range of services. Although we need particular policies that are geared to the NEET group, we cannot divorce the problems that those people face from the wider issues of poverty, unemployment and poor housing in Scotland. Tackling the NEET issue must be part and parcel of an ambitious programme to tackle poverty and unemployment in Scotland.

One myth is that we have solved the unemployment problem but, according to figures from Scottish Enterprise, if we add up all the people who are fit, able and willing to work, including those who are on some form of benefit, we find that about 280,000 people in Scotland are still available to be recruited to the labour market. A fair proportion of them are in the 16 to 19-year-old age group. Not only do we owe them the opportunity to realise fully their potential for their sake—as the minister said—but we should realise that they are a vast untapped economic resource for Scotland. Business leaders sometimes say to me and others that far too high a percentage of our young people go on to higher education and that they cannot get young people for apprenticeships. I say to them that those young people are available for apprenticeships and for work. As the survey that was done for the strategy shows, they are willing to work and keen to get into the labour market. It is not an either/or situation. We should ensure that we get the requisite number of talented people to university and that we give the requisite number of talented people, including those among the NEET group, the opportunity of full-time education, employment or training.

I agree totally with the minister that the issue does not arise when young people leave school. We could probably go to families in many areas and, at an early age, identify the children who are most likely to end up in the NEET group. They are most likely to be from families of people who are unemployed or on a relatively low income, to be living in a deprived area and in some of the worst housing conditions and to be going to a school that has some of the lowest attainment levels. We can usually identify those people early on. I emphasise the need, where possible, to identify individuals who need particular help at the earliest opportunity. In some cases, it might be possible to

do that in pre-school education or primary school, but it should certainly be possible by the time that people are in secondary school.

I agree that those young people need one-to-one support. I once attended a presentation by the principal of Anniesland College, Linda McTavish, at which she put a triangle on the board and, beside it, an inverted triangle. The first triangle represented the numbers of young people who leave school to go into the labour market or on to university or college. The people at the tip of the triangle were those who go on to get a degree or a second degree; the next group down were those who go into degree or diploma level courses; and the ones at the bottom—the largest number—were those who leave school without enough qualifications. *[Interruption.]* The inverted triangle represented the amount of resources that are put in. No doubt that is the point that my good friend Mr McNeil is trying to make from a sedentary position. Linda McTavish's argument was that the people who need the least help get the most and the people who need the most help get the least. In other words, there is an inverted relationship between need and resource.

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): So why does the Scottish National Party propose to exacerbate the situation by spending £1.7 billion on writing off student debt?

Alex Neil: Obviously, arithmetic was not Allan Wilson's best subject when he left school. The reason for having policies such as ours is to tackle another issue that his Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council identified two or three months ago. Although we have had 10 years of a Labour Government and seven years of a devolved Government, only 14 per cent of people from poorer backgrounds in Scotland get into higher education—the same proportion that got into higher education 50 years ago. That is why it is important to have a range of policies that will allow that 14 per cent figure to get much nearer the 50 per cent figure for better-off areas.

The other problem that we face is in school itself. We have heard about the back-of-an-envelope proposals for skills academies from the leader of the Scottish Labour Party, Mr McConnell. The way in which the proposals are being presented is as if to say, "If you're not bright enough to go to university, you must be pretty dull and so you should go down the vocational route." That is entirely the wrong way to present proposals. In Northern Ireland, the Costello report proposed that young people in second, third and fourth year at secondary school should receive one third academic training and one third technical training and be left to decide the other third on the basis of their own priorities and abilities. Adopting

such a formula seems like a much more sensible approach to the problem than setting up skills academies, through which we would be in danger of reinventing the two-tier education system that we thought we got rid of with the introduction of comprehensive education.

There are initiatives for which I think the Executive has been unfairly criticised by the Tories, such as the education maintenance allowance, which the Tories are committed to abolishing. All the evidence is that initiatives such as education maintenance allowance that target poorer sections of the community encourage young people to stay on longer at school.

There are major flaws and contradictions in the Executive's strategy. The third line on page 1 of the executive summary of "More Choices, More Chances: A Strategy to Reduce the Proportion of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training in Scotland" is:

"Our objective is to eradicate the problem of NEET the length and breadth of Scotland."

At the bottom of the page it states:

"We propose seven NEET hotspot areas."

The Executive is either going to target the problem in hotspot areas or throughout the whole country—there is an inherent contradiction there. None of the hotspot areas is a rural area; yet there are parts of rural Scotland where the NEET problem is proportionately greater than it is in parts of urban Scotland.

The other big flaw in the strategy is that it almost totally ignores the services provided as a result of reserved powers, particularly by the Employment Service, and how they integrate. The danger is that we have a multitude of agencies and initiatives and that young people do not know where to go, whom to go to or how to get into the system that maximises the support that they require. Given what is happening with the careers service, Jobcentre Plus, the new deal and all the other initiatives, there is a need to streamline the organisation so that young people know that there is one place where they can go to get the help that they need.

The point of contact in an urban area is often in the town centre but many of the young people who need to use it never go into the town centre. When I was a social worker in Dundee, I came across a lady who had lived in the Kirkton estate for 30 years and had never been in Dundee city centre. People like that are likely to be in the NEET category. We can learn from previous initiatives—some of which have now been binned—that located jobcentres and similar services in places such as Ferguslie Park so that young people had easy access to the services.

A range of issues needs to be addressed and there is scope for taking a much more imaginative and ambitious approach than the Executive has shown. However, we welcome the initiatives that the Executive has taken to date.

I move amendment S2M-5098.3, to leave out from "and endorses" to end and insert:

"regrets the poor performance of the current Scottish Executive which has led to far more of our young people, compared with their European peers, not in education, employment or training; calls for a fresh approach to engage schools, colleges, voluntary organisations and employers in Scotland to recognise the importance of early intervention for children, particularly those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, to realise their potential in later life and so secure the opportunities that other young Scots enjoy, and recognises that, for Scotland to achieve a situation where every 16 to 19-year-old can have the opportunity to secure a place in education, employment, training or volunteering, it will require a concerted national effort and support from all sectors in Scotland."

15:01

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Alex Neil on what must be a record: he spoke for 10 minutes and 46 seconds but did not mention independence once. I hope that he will keep that up in future debates.

I welcome the opportunity that the Executive has provided to debate an important subject, and I welcome the Deputy First Minister's announcement of the appointment of secondees from the private and voluntary sectors to assist in encouraging businesses to bring into the workplace more youngsters who are struggling with the transition from school to employment. That is an interesting initiative.

The debate originally started life as a debate on the NEET problem, but has now translated itself into a debate on supporting positive transitions from school to work. Whatever it is called, it is an opportunity to discuss a serious and significant problem. As with so much else in Scotland, there is good news and bad news. Many of our school leavers are achieving employment more easily than was the case in the past and wage levels are generally rising, but there are still problems for too many people.

Yesterday, a Lloyds TSB survey of more than 2,200 United Kingdom businesses identified the problem of skills shortages. The survey showed that 56 per cent of Scottish businesses are struggling to recruit skilled workers, compared with 47 per cent in England, and it showed that 45 per cent of Scottish firms cite the skills gap as being the number 1 threat, compared with 31 per cent in England. According to Lloyds TSB, the skills gap is worsening, which is putting additional strains on management in Scottish businesses as they try to attract talent ahead of overseas competition.

Jim Mather: Does Murdo Fraser concede that it is possible that the skills gap is a function of people being attracted out of Scotland by better terms and conditions elsewhere in the UK?

Murdo Fraser: That is an interesting question. We still have a problem in that many high-level graduates are leaving Scotland to seek employment elsewhere; for example, Mr Salmond's having sought employment at Westminster.

Many employers struggle with the standard of school leavers' education—in particular, their basic literacy and numeracy skills. Our amendment refers to comments that the Confederation of British Industry Scotland made a month or two ago when it drew attention to the problem of employers having to spend large sums on remedial work, in effect to pick up the pieces from the education system.

Fiona Hyslop: Will Murdo Fraser give way?

Murdo Fraser: If Fiona Hyslop will forgive me, I will not give way at this point, as I need to make progress.

Recently, there has been a large influx of workers from eastern Europe to Scotland, particularly from Poland. We should have no hesitation in saying that that has been a positive development that has been to Scotland's benefit. Employers to whom I speak say that eastern European workers are highly skilled and well motivated, but the sad aspect of the situation is that many employers would take on people from eastern Europe rather than take on native Scots. The long-term implications of that represent serious cause for worry. Alex Neil referred to the 280,000 Scots who could be working, but I am sad to say that, for many employers, it is easier to take on eastern European workers than it is to try to bring those Scots into the employment market. I do not blame the employers—that challenge is for the Government to address.

The most significant problem we have is with young people who are not in education, employment or training. We believe that about 35,000 16 to 19-year-olds can be classified as NEET—the highest level in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. That is a significant problem for Scotland and it is a significant issue for the people who fall into that category. The Executive's NEET working group has identified that, by the age of 21, a young man in the NEET category is more than four times more likely to be unemployed, three times more likely to have depression or mental health problems and five times more likely to have a criminal record than one who is not in that category. The lives and life opportunities of far too many young people are being wasted.

To its credit, the Executive has recognised the problem and has established a NEET working group and strategy. The formation of the Smith group to progress that agenda is a crucial step. That approach is absolutely right and I commend the members of the Smith group, in particular its chairman, for their commitment and for the resources that they are devoting to tackling this appalling problem. It is only fair also to commend Duncan McNeil for bringing together and convening a cross-party group on young people in Scotland not in education, employment or training and for bringing the issue to the heart of parliamentary business.

Our amendment identifies the important role of the voluntary sector in addressing some of the concerns that I have highlighted—good work deserves to be supported by the Executive. The Deputy First Minister referred to support for groups such as the Prince's Trust. I am aware of the work that is being done in my parliamentary region by the YMCA in Perth, for example, which is reaching out to youngsters who are disengaged from education and employment. That sort of voluntary initiative should be supported.

Voluntary organisations often face hurdles: they regularly complain that they are drowning in bureaucracy and red tape and that they are spending hours on form-filling exercises. Every tranche of money that can be accessed is hedged around by a myriad of conditions. Often, organisations end up supplying the same information over and over again to the different arms of government with which they deal and from which they are trying to access funds. We need a streamlined approach that aims to reduce the bureaucratic burden on voluntary groups. We must also avoid excessive interference in their activities by the Government at the centre.

Members will be aware of the good work that is being done by the Hunter Foundation. It has done a lot of work on international comparisons on the NEET problem. There is nothing new about this under the sun—other countries have had and are tackling the NEET problem, so the Hunter Foundation is examining what has been done in other countries in order to find out what we can learn.

The Hunter Foundation accepts that it is a long-term problem and that decisions that we take today might not have their full effect for 10 or 20 years. Alex Neil said that many youngsters will be members of the second or third generation to face exactly the same problem. We must accept and be patient about the fact that a long-term solution is required. It might be another generation before the full effects of work that is done now come to fruition.

The provision of vocational opportunities for youngsters is an issue that my party has raised on numerous occasions. I believe that for youngsters who have an aptitude for technical subjects, there should be more opportunity than is currently offered to allow them to go down the vocational training route, through developing school-college partnerships or—dare I say it?—science academies. I do not believe, and I never have, that we should have a one-size-fits-all education system. If we can have specialist schools that deal with music or sports, as we do, why not have such schools for science or engineering? It is a pity that the Deputy First Minister was reluctant to endorse the initiative that was announced by the First Minister at the Labour conference a few weeks ago, because we could have built a consensus across the political parties that that is the way forward. Perhaps he will come round to that in due course.

Our further education colleges have a key role to play in tackling the NEET problem. They are already involved in a wide range of work with young people and the varied programmes and support that they offer suit the different and changing needs of individuals. One ambition for the merger of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the Scottish Further Education Funding Council, which the Enterprise and Culture Committee dealt with, was that we should have parity of esteem between the university sector and the further education colleges. I do not know whether we are there yet, but that should certainly be our ambition. Our youngsters need to know, and their careers advisers need to be telling them, that it is as valid to go down the route of vocational training or an apprenticeship as it is to aspire to attend university.

There is much good work going on and I applaud all that is being done. At the core is a partnership with the voluntary sector, so I urge the Executive to consider what more it might do to assist that sector in tackling the serious NEET problem.

I move amendment S2M-5098.1, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“is therefore deeply concerned that so many young people in Scotland remain disengaged from education, employment or training; is further concerned by recent remarks from CBI Scotland that companies are having ‘to invest an unacceptably high proportion of the £2 billion they commit to training annually on what is effectively remedial education’; acknowledges, however, that voluntary agencies across Scotland are working hard to engage young people who are NEET; congratulates the Smith Group, which is dedicated to empowering such agencies already involved in this work; welcomes the Scottish Executive’s financial support provided to many of these agencies but, in light of the extreme difficulties voluntary organisations routinely face in terms of accessing secure

funding, calls on it to reduce the bureaucracy involved in applying for funds and to ensure that long-term funding is available for successful and proven projects.”

15:10

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland)
(Sol): Although I welcome the debate, I must express my concern about the way in which we tackle the problem. We build piecemeal projects that are never extended and which lack monitoring and review. The funds that we put in are akin to the money that was put into schools for social inclusion when I was teaching.

When I came to Parliament, we seemed at first to be repeating the debates over and over again without getting to the nub of the problem. The nub of the problem, as far as I am concerned, is that we need a strategy that takes our young people, as Alex Neil said, from pre-school provision through to their final years in secondary schools and on to the transition to further and higher education, work or training. We need to consider a number of things if we are to do that properly.

First, I point out that education is not solely about employability; it is also about the rounded young person of the future. That said, the transition from school to work is an important stage in a young person’s life and it should be supported by schools, colleges, employers and the wider community. As well as employability, education is about the opportunities that young people have. If they do not receive a correct and decent education, they will not be able to move on and make the transition when they reach the age of 16. That is where the problem lies.

We need to ask why young people are failing in the system. The Education Committee carried out an inquiry into pupil motivation and we have talked about the issues for three and a half years, but we have still not hit the nail on the head. If we are to ensure that all our young people get equal opportunities in education, we must do a number of things. Early intervention is one of the keys, and we need good support for learning in schools, with one-to-one support, if necessary, for literacy and numeracy. We need to reduce class sizes to no more than 20 and to no more than 15 for practical classes. Young people need a running commentary—they need someone to engage with them. Some of them come from homes where there is a lot of deprivation and they do not get opportunities, so it is down to schools to provide opportunities.

We also need to think about young people’s learning styles. Young people are not all made to sit in a classroom for five hours a day. We need to train our teachers to be aware of young people’s different learning styles so that we can accommodate their differences. I prefer to say that

young people have learning differences rather than learning difficulties, and those differences can be overcome if we challenge young people in the correct manner and engage with them in the way that they require. That means thinking about their learning styles.

We need to offer young people the opportunity to achieve. A sense of achievement is motivation in itself because it builds self-esteem and confidence, but many of the young people we are talking about have low confidence and no self-esteem. We need to give them access in and out of school to sport, leisure activities, drama, the arts, music and so on. As people who can afford to provide those things for our children, we know that they make all the difference in their lives. It is important that our communities are involved so that we can give young people opportunities in and out of school. It is not good enough for us to rely on parents' having the money to pay for those things. Unfortunately, many young people from deprived areas do not have access and do not have the money, and some do not have the bus fare to go to the leisure centre even if they have a free pass to get in there. We have to equalise things and ensure that young people get opportunities that will allow them to thrive in our communities.

As I keep saying, I am bitterly disappointed that the integrated community school projects seemed to fizzle out instead of building on what was started and making it better, strengthening it and ensuring that communities came into education via integrated community schools from pre-school all the way through to secondary school. That was a key project that we could have developed more and with which we could have made a huge difference.

We need to allow children and young people access to the services that will support them when there are difficulties in their families. All too often, there are waiting lists for child and family mental health teams and for psychologists and other psychological services in education. Limited counselling services are available in our schools, but we need to wrap all the care around our young people—that is what this is all about. It is not good enough to set up little projects here and there and to hope that they will solve this massive problem. That will not work.

The Executive is giving itself a pat on the back today, but it has no right to do that. The number of 16 to 19-year-olds not in employment, education or training in Scotland is about 35,000—13.5 per cent of all 16 to 19-year-olds. That is a disgrace. I have looked at the figures for Ayrshire. In East Ayrshire, the figure is 16.6 per cent, which is higher than average. In North Ayrshire, it is higher than average at 18.6 per cent, and in South

Ayrshire, it is higher than average at 18.5 per cent. In the Glasgow City Council area, the figure is 23 per cent. Many of those young people would welcome access to an apprenticeship, but if they live in North Ayrshire, for example, their chances are almost zero.

About a year ago I met people who run a skills centre and we talked about the number of young people who had applied for apprenticeships. Of the hundreds of young people who were interested, applications came in for more than 80. Only four were taken on, because only four employers were found who could take them on. What is the minister going to do to give those young people access to decent training courses? Many of them are very fit to go into apprenticeships and would be motivated at school if they thought that there was something at the end of it.

It is extremely important that those young people get opportunities. Some of them are in second and third-generation unemployment. We need to do something about that and we need to ensure that they know that there are opportunities for their future and that they can move on. We need to encourage employers to ensure that they have the means through which to bring on young people. What are we doing to encourage small businesses, for example, to take on apprentices?

I will finish there. I just hope that the minister will answer some of my points.

I move amendment S2M-5098.2, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"is concerned about the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training; recognises that there is a need to address the reasons why schools are failing these young people and to take immediate action to address these problems by reducing class sizes, offering a broader curriculum and engaging more with young people, their parents and their communities, and calls on the Scottish Executive to offer fully supported and resourced modern apprenticeships based on the needs of young people and communities."

15:18

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): In time for reflection today, the Rev Malcolm Rooney spoke about arch enemies united, and I suspect that, regardless of our views on the solution, this subject is one on which we are united.

The Herald today describes the situation as "Scotland's inconvenient truth" and puts the number at some 15,000 inconvenient truths at any one time—young people aged between 16 and 19 who are not in education, employment or training. Whatever the solution, we do not have a choice—the situation cannot be allowed to continue, and action is now being taken. I welcome the recognition of the issue, which the Enterprise and

Culture Committee flagged up during its business growth inquiry. The Executive has pulled together a number of on-going initiatives into a strategy and it has added others as a result of evidence that the task group provided.

The strategy emphasises the importance of early intervention to support those who are at risk of experiencing disadvantage in later life. Young people who are NEET often find themselves leading unstructured and chaotic lifestyles, but training or employment at any level can, at the very least, provide routine and structure to lives that have perhaps lacked them. By providing that purpose and structure, the strategy has a role to play in preventing further disaffection and unemployment in later life and—I suggest—in dealing with antisocial and criminal behaviour and, as others have mentioned, the risks of drug and alcohol abuse.

The strategy should be tailored to encourage people who have had negative experiences of education or training, because those who find themselves outwith formal training or education are likely to be there because they have had negative experiences. We need innovative approaches, but I commend to Rosemary Byrne in particular an article in today's *G2* about journalists who were sent back to their schools to see what had changed since they attended. One journalist was a former pupil of Linlithgow academy who reported that teaching practices and what pupils learn are far removed from his experience some 15 years ago. Things have moved on and are not the same as they were.

The continuation of funding is an issue. Consistent support is needed for the hoped-for outcomes, so that we do not have the revolving-door syndrome that we previously had. If the strategy is implemented and monitored properly, it will go some way towards raising expectations in communities in which expectations have been depressed by changes in the structure of employment and in the nature of communities. Given that, initiatives need to be area specific, and there is a need to design proposals and schemes so that they are likely to have job outcomes. That is where schools, colleges and voluntary organisations have a role to play in working with the Scottish Executive and in adopting the community planning ethos into which the Executive has asked local authorities to embed their strategies for working in partnership.

I tell those who argue that nothing is being or has been done that they should look at the determined to succeed initiative—the NEET strategy was not needed to implement that. They should look at schools of ambition, such as Buckhaven high school and Kirkland high school and community college in my constituency. They

should look at the links between schools and colleges, which have been developed over the years. My colleague Marilyn Livingstone will speak more about colleges. They should look at computer clubs for girls—a national programme that is run through Westminster and which the Executive is supporting. They should look at Adam Smith College: it has opened a campus in Leven, which the Scottish index of multiple deprivation has recently shown has greater deprivation than we would expect. I ask those people to look at the “Framework for Economic Development in Scotland”, “A Smart, Successful Scotland: Ambitions for the Enterprise Networks” and all the other strategic documents that the Executive has produced, elements of all of which concentrate on the group that we are discussing. I tell those people that it is wrong to suggest that all previous projects were failures—many successes grew out of the youth opportunities scheme, the employment training scheme and many other schemes and those lessons have been incorporated into teaching practices in schools and into what we have done with our colleges and universities.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Christine May: I am in my last minute, so I must continue.

Murdo Fraser talked about skills academies and science academies. At Friday's business in the Parliament conference, it was recognised in at least two workshops that a significant shortage of pupils and students are taking a range of courses from physics and technological subjects to craft subjects. Rather than deny pupils who wish to take those courses the opportunity to do so because there are not enough pupils to make a class, surely it makes sense to aggregate demand, so that those pupils are not disincentivised. That makes sense and if it means a skills academy or a science academy, that is fine—I am all for it. I do not care what we call it, as long as we acknowledge that we need to deal with the issue.

When sector skills councils have the support of training organisations, employers and others, they are extremely successful. Not enough employers recognise the opportunities that participation in sector skills councils can offer, so I encourage them to do so. I fully support what the Executive is doing and its motion.

15:24

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate and I applaud the work that has been done by the Smith group, which has been ably led by Sir Tom Hunter and Sir Robert Smith. They are good and successful people with the good sense to send the

elevator back down to kids in deprived areas and difficult circumstances whom they know could do better. They believe in education. Like Professor Tom Carbery, they believe that education is the isthmus from difficult circumstances to a better future. They are instinctively keen to define the word “stakeholder” widely and to involve all stakeholders. We have welcomed our involvement with them.

Sir Tom Hunter—who believes that education should be defined in exactly the same way that Rosemary Byrne and Dennis Canavan have defined it and in which I would define it—has made an interesting contribution to the debate. He has spoken about

“a challenging, ambitious but achievable programme of intervention ... if Scotland has its own ‘inconvenient truth’ it is that our system is failing 20 per cent of our young people—they are not failing it, we are failing them. We have procrastinated long enough on analysis to the point of paralysis.”

That is a welcome breath of fresh air.

The word “system” is key. I have spoken in the chamber about W Edwards Deming, who transformed Japan and whose ideas, I believe, will transform Scotland. He had a straightforward view of things: he believed that in any system, whether it is a production line, a company, a country or an education system, senior management is 97 per cent responsible for outcomes. That means that the Executive is 97 per cent responsible for the outcomes that we are discussing. We need the Executive to have an overarching vision, a messianic sense of purpose and a willingness to involve all the stakeholders, as the Smith group has done.

Christine May: Does Jim Mather agree that because the Executive is not a company it should not therefore be expected to behave as a company? However, if we extend his analogy, does he agree that businesses are not perhaps fulfilling their responsibilities for developing their workforces to achieve their desired outcomes?

Jim Mather: A country has a responsibility to develop the capability of its citizens. The Governments in London and Edinburgh control economic management, social security policy, education policy and skills and training, which all impinge on young people's life chances. I accept that others—the youngsters themselves, their parents, teachers, local authorities, colleges, employers and trade unions—are involved in the process, but I say to the minister with all respect that we cannot let local authorities be the leaders. We can involve them in the leadership, but that leadership must come from the Executive, otherwise there will be no cohesion, focus, continuing sense of purpose or constant measurement of results throughout Scotland and its individual areas.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I come from a singular part of Scotland and I realise that there are many different areas in Scotland. Does Jim Mather accept that the solution to the problem that we are discussing might be somewhat different in the rural Highlands from that in central Glasgow, that the role of councils should therefore be applauded rather than denigrated and that the councils should be at the top of the system, where they currently are?

Jim Mather: I accept that many systems that have worked well in the central belt have not worked in the Highlands and I am not for one minute saying that we should not give local authorities a major role to play, but they cannot have the lead role. There can be only one leader in any entity, and the Executive is responsible for the matters that we are discussing.

I do not apologise for coming to the matter with a business mindset. I am conscious of Dennis Canavan's preparation-for-life criteria, but I want our youngsters to be successful in commercial careers, which is not a bad thing. I am delighted to hear that I am not alone in thinking what I think—in that context, I refer to Scottish Business in the Community, KPMG, Microsoft, Barr and Scottish Power. Scottish National Party members are willing to share our best ideas because the matter is urgent—it is not a question of saving good ideas for manifestos.

As I said, the Government must show true leadership. There must be concrete mechanisms to address the needs of young people, which means that there must be true ownership of the system and a credible mechanism that will boost competitiveness and growth and increase economic vibrancy and opportunities that are open to youngsters.

There are lessons to be learned from people such as Deming. There are Tayside NHS Board representatives in the garden lobby today. That organisation has taken the Deming lessons and has transformed its proposition. We need to learn those lessons on the way we handle not just NEETs but the total economy.

Other lessons need to be learned from people such as Marcus Buckingham, who recommends that we put more effort into finding people's strengths and spend less effort trying to fix the weaknesses. Essentially, he suggests that we should aim for a precursor to a Deming-type transformation.

We should also note the work of Tony Buzan and that of the Gael Ltd software company here in Scotland. Introducing such mind-mapping techniques into educational establishments could provide a mechanism whereby kids who lack the literacy and numeracy that are afforded by a

traditional education can get their ideas on paper and so share their ideas and move things forward.

On top of that, we have many great thinkers who tell us what talent is. Steven Pinker gives a lovely definition:

"Talent is a recurring pattern of thought, feeling and behavior that can be productively applied."

The same man says that self-esteem is what drives us all. The key thing for us today is that we need to ensure that we provide as many children as possible with the route to that goal of self-esteem. There are lots of bright people out there and there are lots of simple techniques—such as time management, project management and how to project and sell oneself—that we can teach kids.

However, the most important thing is to pull together the community of interest—the stakeholders—to produce a better result. I have tried to do my bit on that by inviting to the Parliament organisations such as Lothian Quality Forum, Six Sigma Scotland Ltd, Ross International Ltd and NHS Tayside. Next week, I will be host to two academics from the University of Strathclyde and from Glasgow Caledonian University who will talk about how we can use such techniques and methodologies to boost people's confidence. By introducing such things into our primary schools, we can persuade kids that the process of perpetual improvement is as much about them as it is about the wider economy.

I support the amendment in my name.

15:31

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): We all agree that the fact that many of our young people have no opportunity to create a meaningful life for themselves is quite shameful. People generally agree that, if we do not get the self-esteem right, we cannot build model citizens who can participate in society knowing that they can get their share if they put something in to get it. As the Executive has said, quite rightly, this is the biggest challenge in Scotland, given that parts of generations are being wasted and almost written off. That is really quite shameful.

From all the evidence from the employer groups that have highlighted the problem, it is fairly obvious that we need to start remedial support early in school life. I like to think that some form of assessment could be made before children start school so that the individual's aspirations—they will not have many aspirations at that age—and abilities, talents and difficulties could be appraised in a holistic manner early on.

Fiona Hyslop: I appreciate the member's comments. Does he agree with the SNP that,

precisely for that kind of assessment, access to a nursery teacher should be available for all children, especially those from the most deprived areas?

Mr Davidson: I do not want to lower the debate to the level of ticking boxes and trying to score silly points. This is a major problem on which all members of the Parliament need to pull together. Members have done that on a cross-party basis in the Enterprise and Culture Committee, which has considered some of the issues.

The issue—this has always been my personal belief—is that we need to ensure that everyone has access to education or training that is appropriate to their ability. Government and society have a duty to ensure that such opportunities exist. People deserve a gateway to a future. That does not come free, but people should not just be given a pat on the head and be told, "Here you are; don't worry about it all." We need to engage with people and use the tools that they already have built within them.

We have talked a lot today about the role of colleges and of the workplace, but the fact of life is that colleges and workplaces—which are not very well funded for this—are having to spend billions of pounds on remedial support. That should not happen. Things should not come so late on. The issue needs to be grasped all the way through the child's formative years and into the teens.

I congratulate the Smith group, the Hunter Foundation, the charitable sector organisations, the Prince's Trust—the list goes on. They all play a role. However, the state also has a role in the education system. We need to look at the problems of families and, as others have mentioned, the background and baggage that surround some young people when they are brought into this world. We must recognise that their parents may have difficulties, for example. However, that is the role of social services, rather than education authorities. Such problems should be identified long before children get to school.

We must ensure that we have continual assessment throughout children's education—from pre-school level to the point at which they move on. As Murdo Fraser said, we have long advocated bringing further education into schools for those children who are best suited to vocational training. It is not about competition between education authorities and FE colleges; rather, we should approach the issue on the basis of what is important for individual young people.

We must ensure that schools are freed up and that there is real devolved management. One big issue is the fact that headmasters lack the power to hire and fire appropriate staff. They should have that power because, ultimately, they are

responsible for the performance of their schools. They should also have the right to exclude disruptive children—not to throw them into the street, but to put them into custom-built units that deal with the issues and get them back into mainstream education as quickly as possible. We should not throw out such children, but why should we allow them to disturb other children's lives and opportunities when we can provide them with the support that they need in order not to disrupt school and to make the best of it?

The issue of apprenticeships has been raised. I have spoken to local tradesmen who used to run apprenticeships in my part of Aberdeenshire but no longer do so because the youngsters who are coming forward do not have enough basic skills in the three Rs to be able to engage. They also do not have a work ethic—because they regard an apprenticeship as just another placement, they tend to think “How long will I be here?”

The Executive is obsessed with sending people to university, whether they are good or bad and regardless of whether there is a job at the end of it. That is a mistake. People should go to university if they have the ability for it, but sending people on some funny degree course that does not get them a job or provide them with fulfilment is not productive. In my view, the money would be better spent elsewhere.

The FE sector is now having tremendous success with two-plus-two degrees. Those involve two years in FE and, if people develop, possibly through workplace activity, going on to university. That is a key area that we must explore further. If we provided all the infrastructure that is needed for our transport systems, a huge number of construction jobs would be available for people.

We must simplify the schemes and reduce the bureaucracy. We hear ministers reel off one document and initiative after another, but it is just a guddle. Where is the joined-up thinking that needs to come from the Executive? The Executive should listen carefully to employers, for goodness' sake. This debate is all about turning out productive, engaged young citizens.

15:38

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Many numbers have been bandied about this afternoon, but no one could disagree with the Deputy First Minister when he said that there is a huge waste of potential and talent. As convener of the newly established cross-party group on young people in Scotland not in education, employment or training, which was mentioned earlier, I welcome the Executive's commitment to tackling the problem. Not only has the Executive chosen to hold this debate but, as has been noted, it has

published the first ever action plan to reduce the proportion of young people who are identified as NEET. It is also seeking to identify the complex problems that many of our young people face.

The transition from manufacturing to service industries has left whole communities behind. The break with work that working-class people have experienced and which has denied them the right to work has had an impact on our communities and on many families; that is not to mention the impact of drug addiction. In this debate we seem to have forgotten that there are very young children who do not go to school, because their parents are unable to support them in education. Some parents are not even able to support their children to get to school in the morning. Instead, taxis arrive at homes to take the children to school.

There are deep-seated and complex problems. In all that is going on—the cross-party group, the Executive's action, the cross-party consensus that Alex Neil hopes for and the Enterprise and Culture Committee's forthcoming round-table event—I accept that there will be differences in how we tackle the problem. As has been mentioned, children come in all shapes and sizes; they have different backgrounds, and some are fast learners while some are slow. We must remember that, instead of believing that the whole group has the same needs.

I support whole-heartedly the idea that young people should be given more choices in their education. We need to give them the chance to study topics and learn skills in which they are interested and have particular aptitude. Who would disagree that young people should be given the skills that they need in today's job market?

Dennis Canavan has left the chamber, but he said that we must be careful not to slip into a brave new world scenario in which everyone is conditioned to slot into their place in society and in which the level of education that they will receive and the type of job that they will do is fixed even before they are born. That should not be on the agenda and it is not part of our policy.

Jim Mather: Does not the member feel that the situation he has just described—in which children's futures are fixed—pertains to many children at this time?

Mr McNeil: It should not be at the heart of our policy, which should be about raising aspirations and promoting social mobility, not dividing children into roles for life when they reach secondary school, as some people have suggested.

We hear much from the business community of which Jim Mather is an advocate about the need for more plumbers and joiners. When business people start advising their children to become

joiners and labourers, I will believe that we have achieved some parity of esteem. In the past, apprenticeships were not the end of the road; they were a clear route to further education and into management to build a career. The suggestion that today's Executive is talking about turning back the clock to the days when leaving school at 14 and 15 was the norm, a supposedly secure job ceased to exist and the lack of broader and more formal education made it much more difficult to find work or retrain is simply not true. Any fair assessment of the Executive's policies would demonstrate that.

If proper education teaches us anything, it teaches us how to learn. We cannot deny that most fundamental skill to a swathe of young people just because they have not set the academic world alight by the time that they leave primary school. Education is about raising our young people's expectations, not confirming them. When discussing that point at the cross-party group earlier this week, I spoke to Tom Kelly, the chief executive of the Association of Scotland's Colleges. He argued strongly that there can be no more revolving doors in education and training that spin young people round in a carousel of bottom-end, useless courses. Instead, we need escalators that will take young people on and up to better prospects and better careers.

We need to learn from initiatives such as the one in my constituency. Despite our problems and the loss of the manufacturing and electronics industries, we have some of the highest attainers in Scottish schools, who come from all areas in that community. The suggestion that poor people cannot succeed is not true. We also have larger numbers of people going into further and higher education.

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mr McNeil: No, I am in my last minute.

As I said, we need to learn from initiatives such as James Watt College's routes to work programme.

Finally, we must make it clear that learning pays and that skills pay the bills. We should applaud not just the Executive but the Hunter Foundation, the Smith group, Barnardo's, the Association of Scotland's Colleges and the back benchers who formed the cross-party group on young people in Scotland not in education, employment or training for investing so much time and so many resources in solving this problem.

I hope that the cross-party consensus will work; that today's good will and warm words will be turned into action; and that money will be given to the have-nots rather than the haves.

15:45

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): As members have pointed out, there is consensus in the chamber on the issue. That is only right and proper, because debates on independence, single transferable voting systems or whatever are completely meaningless to the young people who are caught in the trap that we are discussing.

We should acknowledge that good work has been done. For a start, almost 60,000 college places will be accessed directly from schools in the time to come. Surely that is a step in the right direction.

The minister highlighted the necessity of tackling the problem early, and I agree that such matters must not be left until the last minute of the last term of the last year of a pupil's school life. Dennis Canavan, who is no longer in the chamber, asked the minister what was meant by education. In response to Mr Canavan—and, indeed, to Mr Davidson—I believe that education to the highest possible level is a human right and should be available to all. In other words, we can have qualified plumbers and joiners who have also benefited from a broad and liberal education.

I agree with Murdo Fraser that we should pay tribute to some extremely public-spirited parts of the private sector for their good work in this regard. However, the situation is not necessarily the same across the board. As a result, the Parliament and Westminster will have to examine the issue of corporate social responsibility and find out whether we can offer any carrots to the private sector to engage further with young people and to take them into its arms earlier in their careers.

As an aside, I mention that my own three children, early on in their secondary education, had after-school jobs in shops. At the time, I wondered whether it was right for them to take on those jobs as well as doing their homework, but now I think that it benefited them by connecting them with the real world. It certainly did not seem to hold them back. I see Jim Mather nodding at that.

In discussing achievement, Rosemary Byrne mentioned community schools, which I used to talk about in the early days of the Parliament. Some good work has been done in that regard but, if we look at the aspirations that we had for such schools in 1999, can we, in our heart of hearts, say that even the best of them are really community schools? Some—perhaps Balerno high school—might well be, but has social work, for example, been wrapped into the concept to the extent that it could have been? Of course, there are questions about the extent to which one can integrate services for adults with those for

children, bearing in mind issues such as the protection and safety of children. However, more could be done on planning and service co-ordination. By developing community schools even further, we could start to tackle the young people's problems.

Fiona Hyslop: Perhaps the member should reflect on the fact that the Executive has abandoned the integrated community schools initiative.

Mr Stone: The fact is that some of those schools still exist and are, indeed, doing well. I hope that the day will never come that the Parliament ceases to think outside the box, because such creative thinking can be helpful in dealing with such matters.

We need to reach out to young people. In community councils all over the country, people are still blaming the young for dropping litter and so on. I am profoundly attached to the notion of lowering the voting age to 16 and believe that the day must come when we have to incorporate 16 and 17-year-olds into some of our decision-making processes. We have heard about the Scottish Youth Parliament. I was involved in the early days of the Highland youth parliament. I would like to see the day come when two or three young people have seats on our community councils. When we start to include young people in decision making, we will reach out more. There is currently a gap.

Community schools should be looked at again and could be further developed; we should work on corporate social responsibility in conjunction with Westminster; and we should further empower and communicate with young people. Those three ideas, in conjunction with the other good suggestions that have been made by members all round the chamber, will help to tackle the problem.

15:50

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): The motion is in the name of Nicol Stephen, so the Executive clearly sees this as an enterprise issue. So it is, in that the motion refers to the vital move that we all make between education and employment. However, by the same token, I could make a good argument for it being an education issue. Either way, the relationship between school and work is a vital one that we ignore at our peril.

There is much in the Executive motion for us all to support. Of course the transition between school and work is one of the most significant changes in anyone's life: it is the time when we must put into practice all that we have learned during the preceding years. Clearly, we must constantly re-evaluate the role that education plays in preparing young people for a lifetime in employment.

Part of me agrees with Miss Jean Brodie's definition of education. I wish that I could use her accent:

"The word 'education' comes from the root e from ex, out, and duco, I lead. It means a leading out. To me education is a leading out of what is already there in the pupil's soul".

I always thought that it was a shame that Miss Brodie did not practise what she preached.

Although we need to explore and fulfil the child's innate potential, we cannot ignore the importance of equipping young people with the knowledge that is needed to play a full part in building the future. That includes the basic literacy and numeracy that everyone needs, not only in the job market but in life in general, and knowledge about our world, its history and the many challenges that it faces. In addition to the development of those academic skills, we must help young people to develop the soft skills that are valued by employers: the ability to communicate effectively; the ability to work in teams; and the social skills that cannot be assessed in an examination but which are just as important as being able to read and write.

Mr Stone: Does that mean that the member agrees that the fundamental right of everyone to develop their highest possible level of attainment will lead to them developing those extra communication skills and becoming better citizens?

Shiona Baird: I certainly hope so. It must be Parliament's aim to ensure that every young person is able to go as far as they can and to achieve the very best that they can.

If young people are successfully to make the transition from school towards work, they need to have the confidence as well as the technical ability to enter an evolving and shifting world of employment. Thirty years ago it was common for a person to leave school, go to work for an employer and remain there for the rest of their working life, but times have changed. Long service now means that someone has been with an employer for more than two years. As working patterns become more flexible, skills, too, need to be flexible.

What prevents some young people from failing to take full advantage of their school years and leads many of them into NEET status? For too many, there is a correlation between a deprived socioeconomic background and low achievement. We cannot ignore that. The profile of university entrants shows that the middle classes remain many times more likely to benefit from tertiary education than people of working-class origin. That cannot be acceptable. Vast sums of money are put into regeneration projects, but the problem of poor attainment and little expectation of greater achievement remains.

The Prince's Trust reports today that there is an underclass of not 35,000 but 100,000 unemployed

young Scots who have problems with severe depression and substance abuse. That is a wake-up call for a rethink on investment priorities. There is a mass of skills agencies, each with a skills sector to address. Perhaps it is time to rethink the skills sectors by asking whether those agencies are achieving the most desired outcomes in the most efficient way.

I welcome Barnardo's youthbuild programme, which equips young people from disadvantaged backgrounds with the skills to access long-term employment opportunities and I welcome the work that is being done by Scottish colleges to train many of the 16 to 18-year-olds who would otherwise be classed as being in the NEET category.

We must not forget the potential of the social enterprise sector. It offers training and meaningful employment to many people, particularly those with mental health problems and physical disabilities, who are ignored by the more profit-oriented employers. Often, those people have a great deal of talent to offer employers.

As ever, the problem is a holistic one. If we see children and young people as individuals with individual needs and aspirations, we are more likely to succeed in equipping them with the skills and qualifications that they will need to succeed in the future. We need to recognise all the social and economic problems that prevent many of them from doing so.

15:56

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): We are all aware that poverty of income and opportunity in childhood is likely to lead to poverty of experience as a young person, which will continue into adulthood. We must, therefore, maintain a strong focus on tackling poverty and disadvantage as young people from challenging backgrounds can suffer a range of lasting problems, such as poor educational performance, greater risk of long-term unemployment and, indeed, poor health in later life.

Substantial investment in social inclusion, centring on the connection between learning, social inclusion and, of course, economic competitiveness has affected opportunity of choice for many young people in my constituency. Education and training offer a route out of poverty for many in our communities. However, as many members have said today, there are still far too many young people who are not in education, employment or training. We must redouble our efforts in relation to that group of people.

Stretching the closing the opportunity gap targets will provide us with the opportunity to redouble our efforts to ensure that the help goes to

those who are most in need. Wide-ranging action is needed across education, training and children's services to ensure support for all our children and young people in relation to raising their expectations throughout their school career and beyond. We need to ensure that all the agencies that work in this field are working together and that any provision focuses on the individual needs of young people. Working together, we must identify the barriers—real or perceived—and ensure their removal if we are to succeed.

The recently published index of multiple deprivation shows that what we were already aware of is true: although the Fife economy is performing well overall, there are still communities in which there is deep-rooted deprivation. That must be our major challenge.

Adam Smith College, which is in my constituency, takes the view that the most important work we can do for the NEET group is to work in collaboration with schools and partners to try to bring about a situation in which young people do not become NEET in the first place. The college is concerned about the way in which the post-14 curriculum is addressing issues that result in young people becoming disengaged. The key to success is to develop a skill-focused agenda that will influence the shape of the curriculum, particularly in relation to the post-14 group.

The college works with local schools and has enabled more than 1,300 school pupils to gain experience of the college environment. Nearly 300 of those pupils are enrolled in the skills for work programme. Working with local schools, the college targets those who have a record of long-term non-attendance and has had spectacular success in bringing them back into education.

However, I have a major concern about Scottish Enterprise's policy on training provision. The get ready for work programme is a safety-net provision that is ideal for young people who are at risk of entering the NEET category. Earlier this year, Scottish Enterprise recontracted with providers of the get ready for work programme, setting a target of 50 per cent for positive outcomes—that is, getting people into work, further education or training. Although I agree with the minister that we have to develop national and local targets, those targets have to be designed to benefit individuals, not organisations. All parties across the board must have ownership of those targets, but the target of 50 per cent is unrealistic and unachievable and could lead to providers deliberately cherry picking young people to allow them to meet their targets. A question that has been raised with me on this issue is, "When is a safety net not a safety net?"

All this must be set against a background of a reducing number of skillseeker contracts. Fife

Council's skillseeker programmes are full to capacity. Scottish Enterprise must allow its local networks to work in partnership with other local agencies to ensure the very best provision for our young people. They must allow the measurement of soft targets. For this group of young people, that is the measurement of the journey travelled.

Many people who work in training are concerned about Scottish Enterprise's intention to retender its existing contracts. I have had several conversations with the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning on those concerns. I ask him to address them in his closing speech.

The Executive is to be congratulated on its strong focus on tackling poverty and disadvantage. I am pleased to see that the transition from school to work is a national priority. In my constituency, I have seen at first hand the Executive's commitment to removing barriers and have seen the development of sustainable opportunities for those who most need them. That has been done through the closing the opportunity gap initiative, the NEET strategy and the recent working for families strategy, which provides affordable and sustainable child care to those who need it most.

I was pleased to hear the minister announce that local government will play a leading role, because we will need local solutions to local problems, as my colleague Jamie Stone said. Only by working together can we start to address the short, medium and long-term challenges and ensure that our young people get the opportunity to reach their full potential.

I fully support the Executive's policies in this area and I ask members to support the minister's motion.

16:02

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): The Executive and all parties in the chamber are right to regard the issues that we are discussing as a major problem for Scotland. We are not talking simply about a drain on our economy or a loss to our society caused by people whose contribution, both economic and social, could be much more constructive. The problem impacts on a huge array of issues. It impacts on the health of those who are caught in the trap, and it impacts on criminality and justice, which is the area that I cover for the Scottish National Party. We all have to address the problem.

I agree with a great deal that has been said by members from all round the chamber. I agree with Duncan McNeil: some of the structural changes that started in the 1980s are fundamental to the problem. We have lost major employers and there

has been mass unemployment. As a result, a generation was out of employment. Indeed, in many families, different generations have never been employed. That has had huge social consequences.

We would ill serve the people of Scotland if we simply banded about accusations over who was to blame or how the problem started. I am thankful that we have not done so. We have to address how we can solve the problem. As Alex Neil suggested, there will not be one simple solution, as the problem is multifaceted. To be fair, we are not the only country that faces such problems.

We have lost major manufacturing industries and we have seen the start of a new industrial base for Scotland. Many people who were fit for the industries that we once had are not fit for the new industries. We have to address that and consider the people who are not in education, employment or training. It is not simply a question of cost; it is also a question of considering what the consequences will be if we do not address the problem. Indeed, the consequences can already be seen.

I am happy to contribute to this debate as the SNP's justice spokesman, because there is a clear correlation between issues. I should make it clear at the outset that I am not suggesting for an instant that all young people who are not involved in education, employment or training are up to mischief or will embark on a life of delinquency or criminality, but it would be foolish of us not to recognise that there is a clear correlation between unemployment and recidivism. I see that David Davidson is not in the chamber but, as he will know, the Justice 2 Committee yesterday discussed how to tackle recidivism, which is a huge problem in Scotland. A stable family life and employment are essential if that problem is to be tackled. The same two factors are what matter to youngsters who are on the edge of delinquency. They might not have employment opportunities, and their parents—regardless of whether one or both of them are present—might not be providing a stable family life.

We must address such situations. As Duncan McNeil was correct to say, dignity and discipline go with being employed and being in the workplace. A whole generation does not understand that, in many instances, it is necessary to get up, whether for work, a job interview or to attend a meeting with the social work department. When people do not receive the wraparound support of the family unit and the broader social unit, there is a social cost to us. For example, it costs more than £30,000 to keep someone in prison. If we do not tackle the problem at the outset, we will have to provide a huge amount of resources for police officers and social workers to

deal with repeat offending. If we do not address the social and economic requirements of young people who are not in education, employment or training, we will have to face the consequences. The loss to our economy and our society and the cost to our criminal justice system and to social work, health and education services will be far higher if we do not tackle the problem now, so that is what we must do.

No one is beyond rehabilitation, although we should not underestimate the difficulties that we face. The fact that there are no longer providers of mass employment is not an issue only for Scotland. I am reminded of the article that I saw in a magazine that said that the biggest employer on a single site in the United States was not Boeing or the Pentagon, but Disneyworld. The manufacturing base that used to exist has gone. We face similar problems in Scotland. We must work out how we can get the youngsters in the NEET group into skilled employment that provides not only the discipline and dignity that go with labour, but a sense of value, purpose and self-worth.

The possibility of engagement in criminality is not the only problem that those youngsters face. They risk feeling as if they have failed to achieve and to be all that they can be, the results of which can be drinking, taking drugs and so on. They might believe that they have no future and that their lives are worthless. That is why, rather than considering the costs of tackling the problem, we should be aware of the consequences of not doing anything. We must recognise that, tragically, the fact that some youngsters have lost interest in the three Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic results in their being sucked into drink, drugs and deprivation. We must break that cycle. Doing so will not be a cost to us, but will benefit us socially, economically and in areas such as health and justice.

16:08

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): I agree with the minister that the issue is complex. However, it is easy to identify the reasons for the problem. The Executive's own report shows that two primary determinants apply to 80 per cent of the young people who fall into the NEET group. The first is educational underachievement and dissatisfaction and the second is family disadvantage and poverty.

A few months ago, when the Equal Opportunities Committee was taking evidence as part of its disability inquiry, we asked how employers present application forms and whether the questions that they ask on them allow them to determine whether an applicant has a disability, which could lead to discrimination. The

representative of the Federation of Small Businesses looked slightly incredulous and said that most of its members did not employ through application forms. He said that most businesses took on one or two people—usually young people—who had not been to school since secondary 2 or secondary 3. I assure members that there was a collective intake of breath at that. The issue was not part of our inquiry, but it was shocking to hear that from the business perspective. That is the category of young people who are likely to experience not being in education, employment or training, although, luckily, some of them find jobs in local workplaces.

There are figures that are worse than the ones that we have been given. We are told that 35,000 people are in the NEET category, but that is only the figure at one point in time. Of young people who leave school at 16, almost a third of them—31 per cent—have been in the NEET group at some time during the three years from 16 to 19. The accompanying statistic is that people who have experienced one period of not being in education, employment or training are much more likely to experience another, longer period. That is an abject failure of the education system. I agree with Rosemary Byrne about the need for support in the classroom. We must start providing support at a younger age and we need smaller class sizes. Although the issue has been put under the enterprise heading, it is at root about education.

If I and many other members could barely keep up with the minister's long list of initiatives, projects and pilots, how can we expect young people in the NEET group or their families to know where to go or what to access to get the help and support that they need? It sounds like a scatter-gun approach. How do people go about finding and getting a modern apprenticeship? Is the process easily understandable? How do young people who are in the NEET group know whether they need qualifications, for example? Are they headhunted or recommended?

In the run-up to the debate, we were lobbied heavily by many voluntary sector organisations that run projects for young people who are in the NEET category. The big issue was about finances and European structural funds. We were also lobbied heavily by colleges, which were worried about the money that comes in for the courses that they run. I am concerned about the colleges' approach, which is almost that we should solve the problem by getting young people into projects and on to a conveyor belt. I agree with Marilyn Livingstone's point about Scottish Enterprise—there is money to be had for some projects. The money is important for projects, so they must ensure that they get young people. With some projects, there is an element of simply getting bums on seats.

I am also concerned that, although the young people whom we are talking about have low levels of educational attainment and were dissatisfied with their educational experience, in many cases, we try immediately to put them back into a classroom. There are some good projects. I recently visited West Lothian College's get ready for work project, which gives people individual support to get employment and which receives funding. However, all the young people whom I met were sitting in classrooms. I wonder whether that is the answer—it sounds like an easy option.

There are other ways to tackle the problem. An example is the GalGael project in Govan—an area with high deprivation—which involved older and younger people from the community in a hands-on scheme to build a boat using shipbuilding skills. They then sailed the ship down the Clyde. That project was hugely successful. The other day, I heard a radio programme about the project, in which one of the trainers said that when the young people came out of their houses with their overalls on and walked up the road, they connected with the period when there had been a lot of employment in the area. In Renton, when the community tried to run such a project, it could not get a penny for it, yet there are plenty of colleges in West Dunbartonshire.

I wonder about the Executive's approach, which needs to be much more focused. Let us draw in the number of projects that the minister mentioned.

16:15

Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP): As others have said, there is a degree of cross-party consensus on the need to address the fact that 35,000 young people are not in education, employment or training. That consensus is reflected in the recent establishment of the cross-party group on young people in Scotland not in education, employment or training, of which I have the honour of being vice-convenor. I offer praise where it is due to Duncan McNeil for pushing for the establishment of the group.

I welcome the input of the Smith group and the Hunter Foundation. I was pleased to attend the launch of the action plan "More Choices, More Chances" at Braeview academy in my constituency in June. I heard Sir Robert Smith talk about the national disgrace and shame of society failing those young people. He said that tackling the issue is not just a moral imperative but an economic necessity, although I would stress that it is a moral imperative.

Dundee is regarded as one of the NEET hotspots, with 14.2 per cent of young people in the NEET category. Of course, it also has the highest

level of benefit claimants per thousand population in the NEET league table. There are obvious connections between poverty and achievement, which have been discussed in the debate.

I welcome the fact that Braeview academy is a school of ambition; I also welcome the funding that comes with that. The focus at Braeview will be on early intervention in the under-16 group—the potential NEETs of the future—through the involvement of Careers Scotland and others. I look forward to seeing progress being made.

However, I add a caveat. Staff and parents at Braeview also want to ensure that the basics are right and that we see an end to the problems from which the school has long suffered, such as staffing shortages and an overreliance on newly qualified staff. It is all very well for the First Minister to talk about science academies, but some of the pupils at Braeview did not get a science lesson for the first six weeks of the school term. We have to ensure that schools such as Braeview are attracting the brightest and best teachers—the ones who have aspirations for the children. We need more of them.

The building blocks are crucial, which is one of the reasons why, as Fiona Hyslop said, it would have been useful for the Minister for Education and Young People to be here, given that so much of the discussion has been around the role of schools and the need for them to get the culture right. The culture of a school is so important, but it is also the hardest thing to measure. How do we measure the ambition and aspiration that are instilled in young people in school?

Young people get to know at an early age that their life chances are being written off and that no one has any aspiration for them, whether at school or at home. A number of members have, quite rightly, made the point that the home environment is crucial. It is all very well for us to talk about what happens in school, but if the child does not get to school because of the chaotic life that they experience in the home, we have not even taken the first step. We have to ensure that we have the basics right and that the child is, if required, assisted to get to school. For example, we have to ensure that breakfast clubs, which are important in ensuring that children get a nutritious meal during the day, are in place. For some children, none of that exists, which is why our getting the basis right is so important.

We must restore aspiration and ambition for the most vulnerable young people in particular and ensure that they are not written off as no-hopers or told, as one senior teacher told a concerned parent who asked for more help for his son, "Someone has to clean the streets." I do not want that attitude to have any place in Scotland's schools in the 21st century.

If we are to be successful, not only will we have to put in place measures that will lead to the obvious benefits of having more young people stay on at school and go into further or higher education or training or employment, but, as Kenny MacAskill said, we will have to have a reduction in teenage pregnancies, alcohol and drug abuse and crime and antisocial behaviour.

Most important, the vast talent of those young people is being wasted, and our opportunity to tap into that vast talent is also being wasted. I hope that the debate will be a start in ensuring that the plan not only sounds good and looks good on paper but makes a difference to the lives of young people in my constituency—and in all the other constituencies in which young people require Government intervention—and to their aspirations and hopes for their future.

16:20

Ms Byrne: There have been many good speeches, and I will summarise some of the key areas that have been explored in the debate. I admit that some of the following points are on my wish list, but I am not ashamed of that.

If we are to ensure that all our young people achieve their full potential, it is important that additional support needs are identified early and that appropriate support is put in place to ensure that those needs are met. We also need smaller class sizes and integrated community schools, which Jamie Stone mentioned. I am disappointed that the Executive has dropped the integrated community schools initiative, which has not been allowed to grow in the way that it should have grown.

My vision of integrated community schools includes the provision in the school of family support services, social services, community education services and school nurses. We could reduce the number of girls who get pregnant at 14 and 15 years old by having such advice on hand. Parents could go into integrated community schools to learn about parenting without stigma and get part of the education that they need to move their lives on. Everyone should feel that they belong in an integrated community school and that the school belongs to the community. I am very disappointed that they have been dropped from the agenda and, like Fiona Hyslop, I wish that the Minister for Education and Young People had been here to hear the debate, because there is a strong link with the education portfolio.

Access to all outside agencies, such as psychological services and child and family mental health teams, is also necessary. We also need a broader curriculum in our schools. We need to understand that one size does not fit all, that

children will learn in different ways and at different paces and that they will get a sense of achievement from being offered a broad range of different subjects.

Access to activities in and out of school is also extremely important. It would help greatly if we went back to the model that we had in the 1970s, when youth workers were attached to every community and we had thriving community centres with activities and youth workers who knew the families, children and young people in our communities.

Above all, we need jobs. In the areas where the majority of the young people in the NEET category are, there are not enough jobs to go round and not enough opportunities for training and apprenticeships.

Frances Curran, Duncan McNeil and other members talked about further education. One of the problems with our FE colleges is that we are not structuring what we do. Good practice exists, but some FE colleges have become nothing more than dumping grounds where young people who are challenging in school are placed to try to encourage them and give them a different setting. That would be fine if we had the quality that such young people need but, unfortunately, FE colleges struggle with funding and class sizes. In many areas, FE college lecturers are not paid the same as teachers and therefore the professional quality is not so good.

Although the colleges do a very good job, we need to look into building up morale, which has become very low in the FE sector. We have to be realistic that, in some areas, FE colleges are really struggling with discipline and the very same young people whom we have been discussing.

Whatever the minister wants to call the apprenticeship colleges or skill academies, young people need their education—they do not need to be dumped. If we are going to ensure that they get good-quality services between school and college—I have no problem with such arrangements being made—let us ensure that college class sizes are small enough and that the courses that young people are offered are of a good quality. Running colleges as businesses does not mean that we will get the best. I would like FE colleges to be brought back under local authority control, which would help them to integrate with schools much better. That would make a huge difference.

Duncan McNeil was right to raise the impact of drug addiction, which is a huge issue. I am extremely disappointed that my Treatment of Drug Users (Scotland) Bill, which provides for treatment and rehabilitation, has been dropped from the Health Committee's agenda. I hope that I will get

the Parliament's support to get the bill through stage 1. It offers a lot of solutions that would help communities.

Jim Mather spoke about Tony Buzan and various teaching methods. It is time that we looked into some of the good stuff that is going on. Kenny MacAskill spoke about value and self-worth. Ensuring that our young people feel valued and have self-worth is what this is all about.

16:26

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): This has been a slightly strange debate. That is because, first, very few people seem to have spoken about the motion and amendments that are in the *Business Bulletin*. Secondly, I found that the person with whom I agreed the most is Duncan McNeil—that does not happen every day, and it probably will not happen often again. Much of what he said made a great deal of sense. This is a deep-seated and complex problem, and there is a need to ensure that we do not describe the whole NEET group as having the same needs. We are talking about individuals with individual needs that ought to be addressed. That is the third thing that I have found strange about the debate. We have been talking about “NEET” as if it is some sort of big lump somewhere that we can deal with and sort out. It is not. It is about individual kids who are being failed by society and by us because they are not able to develop to their full potential as individuals or make their full contribution to society.

I do not think that there are any easy solutions to the problem. If there were, we would have waved a magic wand a long time ago. The action plan that the Executive has produced, “More Choices, More Chances: A strategy to reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training in Scotland”, offers a helpful way to deal with some of the issues of immediate concern regarding the NEET group. However, we need to consider the deeper, complex problems, to which Duncan McNeil referred.

I found some of David Davidson's comments slightly strange. He said that parts of our generation are almost being written off and that that is disgraceful. I agree that it is disgraceful, but those comments came from a member of a party that wrote off generations as an economic management tool back in the 1980s. Generations were put into unemployment because Mr Davidson's party wanted to use unemployment as an economic management tool. That was a disgrace, and we are still dealing with the consequences of it. The reason why we have such a big NEET problem now is that the consequences are still arising. In many communities and sectors, the traditional jobs went. I refer in particular to the

shipyards, the steelworks and the coal mines. More recently, the jobs that were generated in silicon glen—in the electronics industry—have begun to go.

Nothing was done to replace those traditional jobs, and we ended up with thousands on the scrapheap. Generations of school pupils do not know an adult in their family who has ever had a full-time job. That is why there are problems with NEETs in many communities.

Mr Davidson: Does the member have any understanding of the economic history of this country—of the world recessions, of how they were dealt with, of how the economy burgeoned under Thatcher, of how jobs came to Scotland, of the development of silicon glen and of the additional money for the Scottish Office? The list goes on and on. He needs to have a reality check.

Iain Smith: The reality is that millions in the United Kingdom were put on the economic scrapheap under the Conservative Government. As an economic management tool, hundreds of thousands of people in Scotland were left unemployed. For many years, young people left school with no job opportunities, apart from various training schemes. I was a member of a local authority at the time and we fought against the problem of the unemployment that was caused by a Government that was happy to close down industries but did nothing to deal with the social consequences of that. As I said, we are still dealing with the consequences today.

We need to look back to pre-school education rather than wait until people are 14 or 16. In many cases, sadly, it is too late by that stage. It might take a generation to deal with the generational problem. We need to ensure that we invest properly in pre-school education. The Executive's positive response to the Education Committee's report on early years education is helpful. I hope that all parties will pick up on that in the forthcoming election campaign and propose positive strategies to invest in early years education. I agree that we need to ensure that there is a proper educational element in pre-school provision—I think that it was Fiona Hyslop who made that point, but it might not have been. That educational element does not necessarily have to be provided by teachers but it should be provided by professionals who have pedagogical understanding.

All the evidence suggests that, for many people, the problems happen at the transitions from nursery to primary school, from primary school to secondary school, from the early years of secondary school to the period of studying for more academic qualifications and from school to work. We need to ensure that we address those problems. Although the three-to-18 curriculum—

perhaps it should be a nought-to-18 curriculum—will address them, we must ensure that it is kept on track and that it starts to deliver results with some alacrity. There is concern that the process is taking rather longer to come through the system than is ideal. However, over time, the curriculum will start to deal with some of the fundamental issues.

We need to deal more urgently with some of the current issues, and I welcome some aspects of the Executive's NEET strategy. The Executive has set a challenging national target and local targets for year-on-year reductions in the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training. I hope that we can deliver on those and use the action plan for the under-16s to ensure that there are more vocational opportunities in schools. I disagree with whoever it was—I think it was a speaker from the Conservatives—who suggested that such opportunities should be available only to those for whom normal schooling is not appropriate. Vocational opportunities should be available to all young people in our schools, and that is what we are trying to deliver.

FE colleges need to play a much more central role in our thinking. They are central to economic development in local communities, but I am concerned that there is a lack of joined-up thinking on training programmes. Marilyn Livingstone made that point. Scottish Enterprise and the Department for Work and Pensions are considering how they provide training but their work is not joined up and might damage the fundamental basis of the work that the colleges do in our communities for the NEET group. The Government and the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning might want to consider the issue of joined-up thinking in the training sector.

There were a lot of useful contributions in the debate. The Executive is moving in the right direction, but we need to ensure that we start to invest in year nought rather than when pupils are 14.

16:33

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): I begin by warmly welcoming the initiative that the City of Edinburgh Council has developed in conjunction with the Hunter Foundation and the Scottish Executive to enhance the life opportunities of some of the most disadvantaged young people in our city. Nicol Stephen, the Deputy First Minister, described the initiative in his opening speech this afternoon. I particularly welcome the fact that Wester Hailes education centre, which is in my Edinburgh Pentlands constituency, is one of the three high schools in Edinburgh that have been identified for participation in the initiative.

I pay tribute to the generosity of Sir Tom Hunter and his foundation and acknowledge the Scottish Executive's matching contribution. I was pleased to note that the initiative focuses not just on those young people who are most at risk of leaving school and falling into the NEET group but on talented young people in the schools who will be inspired and encouraged to aim higher—for example, to be the first in their family to go on to college or university, as I was.

I had the pleasure of presenting awards at Wester Hailes education centre's secondary 3 awards ceremony in June, and there was strong awareness of the need to recognise wider achievement in our schools. In this afternoon's debate, I was particularly struck by Rosemary Byrne's perceptive comment that a sense of achievement is important in boosting self-esteem. From that recent visit, I know that the head teacher of Wester Hailes education centre, Alex Wood, and his committed staff will use the funding to good effect in enhancing opportunities for their students.

Although I come genuinely to praise the initiative and not to bury or diminish it, I know that members would be disappointed if I did not point out that it is yet another example of the direct funding of particular schools for particular purposes by the Scottish Executive. It comes on top of its schools of ambition programme, which covers 27 of Scotland's 385 secondary schools. As we know from the First Minister—but not, apparently, from the Deputy First Minister—it may be followed by the establishment of science academies and something like 100 skills academies. I presume that there will be some selective process to determine who attends them. I have no doubt that, should they ever come to pass, they will all be directly funded in some way or another by the Scottish Executive. Slowly but inexorably, the Executive is coming round to the Scottish Conservative point of view that direct funding of our schools is the way ahead.

I notice that one aspect of the new initiative sponsored by the Hunter Foundation will be the development of leadership learning activities in our schools. That links in with the Hunter Foundation's financing of a leadership academy for head teachers to the tune of £8 million. That is excellent, but what is the point of developing leaders in our schools if we deny them the opportunity to lead? We deny them the opportunity that would flow from giving them direct control over their budgets. We do not give them the freedom to develop their schools in the way best suited to the needs of their communities and pupils, and we do not enable them to provide the diversity and choice in our education system in Scotland that are sadly lacking. As I said, there are 385 secondary schools in Scotland, but

apparently there are only 27 for which the Scottish Executive has ambition.

The total education budget for our schools is more than £4 billion, and it is under the control of our councils. Let us put the initiatives in their true perspective. They are worthy and worth while, they may herald further developments, and they are small steps in the right direction, but they are only small steps and small change in comparison with the total resources devoted to education in Scotland. That is why I believe firmly that the Scottish Executive needs to have the courage to tackle the vested interests that are holding us back and to boldly go in a direction where to date it has feared to tread.

In tackling some of the specifics of the NEET problem, we need to consider several things. We need to examine the basics of numeracy and literacy. Standards are simply not good enough. It is a disgrace that many of our people have to go to adult literacy classes after 11 years of compulsory school education, which for each pupil costs the taxpayer £45,000. We need a disciplined environment in our schools in which not just to learn but to inculcate ideas of personal discipline, including the importance of attendance and punctuality. Someone can never hold down a job if they do not turn up every day and on time.

We need to develop a work ethic, which is visibly present in many of the thousands of immigrants whom we have welcomed to Scotland in recent years but is sadly lacking in too many of our young people. We need an appropriate balance in rewards to show that learning pays, as Duncan McNeil highlighted, rather than a benefits system that undermines that or a culture in some of our communities that crime pays as opposed to learning pays. We need to tackle that.

The problem is multifaceted. We could be bolder and go a lot further, as I have illustrated. However, the debate has demonstrated the commitment of members from all parties to tackle the problem and our determination to ensure that that is translated into effective action by the Scottish Executive and other public and private agencies and bodies.

16:39

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): The debate has been thoughtful and some important comments have been made. By and large, it has been a consensual debate. If one message comes out of it, it is that all parties are determined to tackle the problem. The Executive can count on the Parliament's support for that.

I congratulate the Executive on producing an action plan seven years on—it is better late than never. As the action plan document shows, we are

presented with some challenges. The child who was nine years old when the Executive came to power is now 16 years old and could well be a person who is not in education, employment or training. The document separates the pre-16 situation and the post-16 situation. The blue-headed pages of the document, for which the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning is not responsible, are perhaps more detailed and have more content, and have been the subject of most of the debate. The pink-headed pages, for which the minister is responsible, are perhaps a bit lighter and have not had as much consideration in the debate. When the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning sums up, perhaps he will address the points about the situation post 16.

We have a big problem and we recognise the scale of it. Why did what was done before not work? Much of what is in the document justifies current strands of thinking. What has changed? We know that the welcome contributions from the Hunter Foundation and the Smith group are new and did not exist before, but I am interested in what the step change is. As Nicol Stephen said, it might be the fact that the document is the first action plan that brings everything together, and that people have a sense of ownership and of tackling the problem collectively. That might be the difference, but we deserve to hear so.

The problem is enormous, and we are not the only country that is tackling it. The main factors in young people finding themselves not in education, employment or training are disadvantage and educational dissatisfaction. The debate has reflected that.

The situation is unsustainable for the individuals concerned and for the country. A few people have said—rightly—that the group is not homogeneous. The cohort that is not in education, employment or training includes a number of categories. One main category is care leavers, 59 per cent of whom are not in education, employment or training. Would anyone like their child to have a 59 per cent chance of being in that situation? None of us wants that, yet that is the reality for children who are under the state's care and for whom the state has parental responsibility. I welcome the development of a strategy for looked-after children, but I remember that Cathy Jamieson was the minister who was previously in charge of that strategy, which has been a long time coming. That has contributed to our frustration. Carers form 5.8 per cent of the NEET group and young parents form 20 per cent—Shona Robison touched on teenage pregnancies.

The issue is not just opportunities for people post 16. The key argument that many of us make is the need to make early intervention a priority. If

we can take a message from the debate, it is that early intervention has consequences for teenage pregnancies, health and justice issues, which Kenny MacAskill talked about. We have debated why Scotland has one of the highest suicide rates for young men and we have debated mental health problems. The consequences of early intervention are deep and manifest.

Why is early intervention important? Nine per cent of young people have physical or mental health problems. When we talk about early intervention, we mean additional support for learning and the need for nursery teachers to identify problems early in education—David Davidson spoke about that. The children concerned generally have problems that relate to wider societal issues. If we can do anything today and give ministers a message, we should say that, by and large, the issue is about education, family responsibilities and social breakdown, which we must address. That is one of the clearest messages that we can send.

This is one of the few times that I have agreed whole-heartedly with Duncan McNeil, who made a thoughtful speech. Self-esteem, wanting to learn, knowing how to learn, dignity, discipline and respect are important issues. I will touch on the points about pupil motivation, skills and vocational and technical training, which Alex Neil mentioned.

Parity of esteem is essential. Things will not work if skills academies and vocational education are seen as a dumping ground or ghetto—we have been told that in the schools and colleges review and the pupil motivation inquiry. It is essential that every child has an opportunity to gain vocational or technical experience. Providing such opportunities takes us back to “A Curriculum for Excellence”, reviewing the curriculum and opening up space and time to provide those opportunities.

There was an interesting polarity between what Frances Curran and Murdo Fraser said. Both mentioned project funding for voluntary organisations, which is a strong theme. The Prince's Trust's work on xlerate with xl represents an important contribution that can make a big difference. Working with the few is essential and can benefit the many.

Colleges do not have the capacity to cope with the sheer scale of what has been proposed; rather, we are talking about skills opportunities within schools, on which we have heard announcements in recent days. However, there are challenges in pupils going to colleges or colleges coming to pupils. A big issue for colleges if more 14-year-olds go to them is understanding the new child protection issues. We must get our heads round such things.

Big businesses and small businesses can make an important contribution in our communities. A sense of identity can be promoted. Long-term investments can be made for long-term improvements. That is what early intervention is about. It is about encouraging businesses not only to work with 14 to 17-year-olds but to get in earlier to support communities and schools and to give people a sense of discipline, identity, self-esteem and dignity, as has been discussed.

The minister will have sensed from members that a community of interest exists in Scotland to make things work. The cost of not doing what should be done is too great for individuals and for Scotland. Individuals' lost opportunities are opportunity costs for the country that cannot be afforded.

16:47

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): This has been an enjoyable debate. After it, I will write to members whose speeches I am unable to deal with about the issues that they have raised.

I have been encouraged by Iain Smith to deal with the amendments. We reject the amendments not because we do not agree with some sentiments that are expressed in them, but because their analysis is fundamentally wrong. I largely agree with what Murdo Fraser said—it was interesting—and with what Kenny MacAskill said from a criminal justice perspective, but Fiona Hyslop's speech probably best exemplified the wrong analysis that has taken place.

Scotland does not have a problem with young people making the transition from school to work per se. In fact, we have the best employment rate for 15 to 19-year-olds of any Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country and the best rate in the developed world. That is testament in no small way to the success of the modern apprenticeship programme and the new deal for young people programme, which were designed to assist that transition. That is not to say that no challenges exist. Murdo Fraser has pointed out the challenges, and they have been clearly identified by Futureskills Scotland from employers' surveys of the skill sets of those who are making that transition, but the vast majority of young people are making a positive transition to a positive school-leaver destination, whether in employment or in training in employment.

I say to David Davidson that we do not have an obsession with sending people to universities. However, Scotland is in the upper quartile of OECD countries in respect of school leavers who go on to higher education. We want that number to grow in order to maintain our competitive position

in the global knowledge-based and skills-based economy in which we require to compete.

Where we have a real challenge is in the proportion of 16 to 19-year-olds who do not enter employment or higher education and do not have a positive school-leaver destination in either vocational education or training. On that issue, we have a cross-party consensus—as Nicol Stephen stated and as Duncan McNeil and many others reiterated—that every young person who falls within that category represents first and foremost a waste of human potential but also a missed opportunity and a missing link in the chain that eventually leads to the economic prosperity that we all seek.

One issue on which I agree with Rosemary Byrne is that the existence of that group and the relatively high numbers within it are simply no longer acceptable to either the Government or society more generally. We must take action to reduce those numbers and we should do so quickly. However, I fundamentally disagree with Rosemary Byrne that education, employment and training will not be right for all young people. For example, 40 per cent of the 16 to 19-year-old cohort engage in voluntary work, take time out to travel and work outside Scotland, care for others or have health problems such that they need to be cared for. Clearly, we need to focus our efforts on those young people who are not in positive transitions and who need support to get back on track so that they can pursue positive adult lives.

Jim Mather: Does the minister have a feel for how that 40 per cent figure compares with figures for other countries? Has he taken steps to find out how we compare?

Allan Wilson: The first thing that I did when the First Minister tasked me with this job eighteen months or two years ago was to improve our statistical base. However, comparisons with the relative positions of other countries are complex because, as I will come on to later, the compulsory school leaving age differs significantly among countries.

The analysis in our strategy suggests that about two thirds—circa 60 per cent—of the group that we are discussing are not in a positive transition and, therefore, need to be our priority. Such young people—the type of young person that members have generally talked about this afternoon—are neither students in higher education nor people who are in apprenticeships or in employment. Currently, no employment, education or training solution is available for some of those young people, such as those with a temporary disability or with caring responsibilities. That is why we have sought in today's debate to focus on positive transitions from school to work. That is also why the subject of the debate changed, as Murdo

Fraser said. Our motion better reflects the nature of the challenge and the steps that are being taken—in large part successfully—to address it.

The first challenge, which Jim Mather flagged up, is one of leadership. I disagree with Jim Mather that we need a single leader to lead us to the promised land—a sort of Kim Il-sung figure to provide a North Korean solution—but I agree fundamentally with Iain Smith that the solution must be tailored to individual need. Each young person in the NEET category must be considered as an individual. That is why we are confident that the publication of the action plan “More Choices, More Chances: A strategy to reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training in Scotland” marked the way forward. Through the implementation of the strategy, we are making positive steps at local and national levels to improve the outlook for young people throughout the country. The strategy allows us to target our efforts specifically at those who have been identified as being most in need. We are providing significant financial backing to assist in the development and delivery of local authority plans and additional services. Thus, we have a national strategic focus and local delivery that is tailored to individual need.

That leadership will be supplemented by today's welcome announcement that, with the help of the Smith group, secondees from both the private and voluntary sectors will work with us to engage employers, to identify and create opportunities and to raise the employability and skills of the young people concerned. With their skills and knowledge of business and voluntary sector needs in Scotland, Mark, David, Euan and Ray, along with Scottish Business in the Community, will be a valuable additional asset.

Alex Neil, Murdo Fraser and, most effectively, Duncan McNeil addressed the performance of the lowest-attaining 20 per cent. Implementing the curriculum for enterprise and developing suitable models such as skills for work courses help students to develop their vocational and employability skills. Regardless of whether we call institutions skills academies, science academies or centres of excellence, the issue is parity of esteem. We need to hold the vocational route for further education and training in the same esteem as we all hold higher education. Not all young people are higher education students, and we should not tailor our policies to assume that they are.

An examination of the situation elsewhere demonstrates that a myriad of different cultural, social, educational and economic approaches to smoothing the transition to work exist. I am pleased that there was not the ubiquitous reference to other small European countries

throughout the debate, but one small European country that is worthy of further study is the Netherlands. In large part, this debate is about rights and responsibilities. It is about training, further or higher educational opportunities and the right to beneficial employment, but it is also about the responsibilities of young people to avail themselves of such opportunities and to contribute positively to wider social cohesion.

I say to Murdo Fraser that the Executive is well aware of the fact that there are many different approaches throughout Europe and the wider world to dealing with young people who are NEET. Those include a variety of measures that are designed to keep young people in some form of education—including part-time education—after the compulsory school-leaving age. We are aware of the proposal in some countries to increase the school-leaving age to 18, and will watch those developments with interest to ascertain their impact and whether there are any lessons that we might learn from them.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the minister give way?

Allan Wilson: I am about to conclude.

Devolution has given us the power to tackle the problem in a new, fully comprehensive way. We must take this opportunity to ensure that all of Scotland's young people, regardless of their background and personal circumstances, have the means, the confidence and the ambition to reach out and grasp every opportunity that we can give them. We must create more choices and more chances if we want to have a real impact on their lives. I argue that the time has come to act. We are confident that the strategy represents the best way of ensuring that no one is held back and no one is left behind. I ask members to support the motion.

Business Motions

16:58

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-5106, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 15 November 2006

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Planning etc. (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 16 November 2006

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Continuation of Stage 3 Proceedings: Planning etc. (Scotland) Bill

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time—
Environment and Rural
Development;
Health and Community Care;

2.55 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Conclusion of Stage 3 Proceedings: Planning etc. (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 22 November 2006

2.15 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Question Time

followed by Executive Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 23 November 2006

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Executive Business
 11.40 am General Question Time
 12 noon First Minister's Question Time
 2.15 pm Themed Question Time—
 Justice and Law Officers;
 Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong
 Learning
 2.55 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Executive Business
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

and (b) that the period for members to submit their names for selection for Question Times on 11 January 2007 ends at 12.00 noon on Wednesday 20 December 2006.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-5102, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Rights of Relatives to Damages (Mesothelioma) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be completed by 2 February 2007.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S2M-5103, in the name of Margaret Curran, on the office of the clerk.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk will be closed on 27, 28 and 29 December 2006.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S2M-5098.3, in the name of Jim Mather, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5098, in the name of Nicol Stephen, on supporting positive transitions from school to work, 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) (Sol)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

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)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)

Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 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)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 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)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, 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)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 34, Against 64, Abstentions 13.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-5098.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5098, in the name of Nicol Stephen, on supporting positive transitions from school to work, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)

Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 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, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 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)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 38, Against 74, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S2M-5098.2, in the name of Rosemary Byrne, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5098, in the name of Nicol Stephen, on supporting positive transitions from school to work, 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) (Sol)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (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)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)

Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, 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)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 37, Against 77, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S2M-5098, in the name of Nicol Stephen, on supporting positive transitions from school to work, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

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)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)

Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 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)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 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)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 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)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, 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)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (Sol)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)

Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Watt, Ms Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 19, Abstentions 30.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament acknowledges that the transition to adulthood is an important stage in people's lives; welcomes the fact that the vast majority of young people successfully engage in education, volunteering, training and employment opportunities; agrees that supporting all young people to utilise these opportunities in the transition from school towards work is a national priority, and endorses the leadership of the Scottish Executive, working with schools, colleges, voluntary organisations and employers in Scotland through the NEET strategy, in seeking a successful and positive outcome for all young people.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth and final question is, that motion S2M-5103, in the name of Margaret Curran, on the office of the clerk, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk will be closed on 27, 28 and 29 December 2006.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Community Health Projects

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-5045, in the name of Mark Ballard, on community health projects. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the great importance of community health projects in tackling the health problems that our nation faces; believes that community, independent and voluntary sector organisations addressing health inequalities play a crucial role in meeting the Scottish Executive's targets on health improvement; in particular, congratulates the Edinburgh Community Food Initiative on 10 years of working to remove barriers to a healthy diet by consistently developing innovative and effective programmes such as the Snack Attack project; notes that the future of this project, like many others, depends on its ability to continue to identify, secure and manage a wide variety of short-term funding sources; notes with concern the sense of fragility across the sector due to the uncertainty inherent in the funding system, and considers that the Executive should show much greater support to community health projects and act to reduce the financial insecurity that they are forced to face.

17:06

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): We all know that Scotland faces some major health problems and that the big killers such as heart disease, cancer and stroke and new threats such as obesity, diabetes and stress are all chronic, lifestyle-associated conditions. However, throughout the country, hundreds of voluntary and community health projects are, along with community nurses, health visitors and others, working to improve our health. They work locally as part of their community in response to pressing needs and they address underlying causes of ill health and health inequalities such as unequal access to knowledge, resources and support, which our conventional health services are simply not equipped to challenge.

Tonight, I welcome to the Parliament members of those voluntary and community health groups. We should all celebrate their work. In particular, I pay tribute to the Edinburgh Community Food Initiative, which I know well and which, this year, celebrates a decade of working to improve the diet of communities throughout Edinburgh.

Recognising that systemic, external factors and a lack of information prevent people from eating healthy foods, the initiative sees its role as promoting healthy eating and positive lifestyle choices, as well as providing access to healthier foods. It supports food co-operatives and educational events and provides more than 40,000 pieces of fruit a week to primary, nursery and special schools across Edinburgh. Community

health projects such as the ECFI play a key role not only in addressing Scotland's health problems but in dealing with issues such as employment, equality and education. However, even such long-lasting and successful projects face problems with future core funding.

I have been heartened by the fact that, since the Parliament was established, the importance of community health has been increasingly recognised in a string of Scottish Executive policy documents. For example, in "Delivering for Health", which was produced in 2005, the Executive stated:

"there needs to be a shift towards preventive medicine, towards more continuous care in the community, with targeting of resources and anticipatory care to reach out to those at greatest risk."

Such sentiments are welcome and I am sure that the minister will give us a long list of other positive commitments that the Executive has made. However, words are not enough. Despite all the policy support, the community health sector is under immense financial strain—79 per cent of voluntary health providers are struggling with shortfalls or are seriously concerned about their future finance.

The reorganisation of funding for the delivery of health services through community health partnerships has not led to an improvement in the situation. According to the community health exchange, core funding has significantly diminished over the past year. It estimates that in the area now covered by the Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board, core funding has decreased by 50 per cent. There has been a 50 per cent reduction in funding at a time when voluntary and community health projects are increasingly being relied on to deliver Executive policy in tackling ill health.

Projects are being forced to spend their time chasing funding and dealing with massive job insecurity. They are unable to plan effectively because funding streams are constantly shifting and being reduced. I congratulate the Executive on having a policy that is going in the right direction, but it is not doing enough to ensure that the policy is being implemented properly by local authorities and health boards.

The time has come for a national strategy on community health, which would give the sector the standing that it deserves. I draw the minister's attention to the suggestions in that direction in the community health exchange's briefing. It sees the need for health boards and local authorities to be required to produce a clear statement—including strategies and targets—on how they will support community-led and voluntary sector health initiatives.

Health boards and local authorities are allocated large amounts of money by the Executive specifically to support community-led and voluntary sector health initiatives. That is welcome and the policy is moving in the right direction, but the minister should ask those bodies to account for the funds that they have been given. I have tried to get information from health boards and local authorities to establish how they spend the money that the Executive—the Parliament, in fact—gives them, but the information is not there. Health boards, local authorities and other publicly funded agencies should commit themselves to the national standards for community engagement and should agree voluntary sector compacts, as the Executive has done.

I welcome the work that has been undertaken throughout the country by the national task group on developing and supporting healthy communities. I look forward to the publication of its final report and I hope that the minister will endorse its recommendations and, most important, ensure that proper funding is available for their implementation.

Community health groups have been a Cinderella for far too long. I hope that the debate will ensure that the Parliament pays more attention to this vital aspect of delivering health care. It offers us unparalleled opportunities to tackle social exclusion, improve people's quality of life and—because money spent on prevention will always be more effective than money spent on a cure—reduce expenditure overall.

We must back words with action. We must support the community health projects that carry out work that is vital to tackling our nation's chronic ill health. We have heard positive words from the Executive and positive decisions have been made by the Parliament, but implementation is lacking. That is why we need real action and strategies to tackle chronic ill health through community-led projects. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind people in the gallery that it is not appropriate to applaud.

17:13

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): The motion is excellent. When I first became an MP, I was very excited by an organisation called Barri Grubb. Malcolm Chisholm will remember it because it was an active community co-operative in Pilton and Muirhouse. He and I shared representation of the area at Westminster for a while.

The briefing produced by Voluntary Health Scotland is one of the best that I have ever seen—it agrees with what I have been saying since the Parliament started. I hope that Voluntary Health

Scotland has some effect, because nobody has ever paid attention to anything that I have said. It hits the nail on the head in saying that what we need is a better system of funding from the Government. We probably also need more funding.

However, if the funding were better directed in a continuous manner so that organisations could be sure that they would exist next year and the year after—as long as they kept on doing a decent job—and if there were core funding that enabled good projects to continue rather than new projects constantly having to be invented to match the latest flavour-of-the-month funding scheme, the groups would be able to do much better fundraising in commercial and charitable areas. That would enable them to bring together funding from many sources instead of living hand to mouth. The small number of staff in the organisations spend far too much time grovelling for money from here and there. What is needed is a steady stream of money that will support them as long as they are doing the kinds of things that the Executive and the local authority want them to do. All this seems to be desperately obvious, but common sense is the rarest quality in politics and government and we are yet to win this argument. However, I think that Malcolm Chisholm is pointing roughly in the right direction. We must push him along a bit, but I have more hope that he will do what is necessary than I have of many other ministers.

This is important across the voluntary sector, but especially for the organisations that are involved in matters relating to health. We must support them in a more intelligent way. I hope that, as a result of this debate and the efforts of many people who are saying the same things, we will achieve that. I say to the minister that the road to Damascus is open before him.

17:17

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): I can verify that Donald Gorrie is a broken record on this subject and I congratulate him for continuing to be so.

It is clear that the issues that face voluntary organisations, particularly in community health, are about core funding and the ability to sustain funding for projects that work quietly to provide services, rather than having to develop new, bigger and brighter projects. There are 1,600 voluntary sector organisations in Scotland that focus on health, with 14,000 employees and 72,000 volunteers. That meets a lot of need. How does that need get met when those organisations are facing cuts of 50 per cent?

Voluntary Health Scotland estimates that 45 per cent of voluntary health providers have a current

funding gap or shortfall and that 34 per cent are concerned about their future funding. Who will meet the need if that funding is not available?

It is important for the minister to tell us how he is liaising with the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform and the Minister for Health and Community Care about this issue, as it clearly spans departmental portfolios. Are they talking to each other in an attempt to ensure that they achieve their goals?

The issue is related to that of local government funding. Malcolm Chisholm knows that I have consistently raised the issue of funding equal pay. Glasgow City Council's failure to fund equal pay adequately has helped to lead to a situation in which its programme of budget cuts for 2006-07 has resulted in the scrapping of two thirds of its contributions to community health projects across the city, despite Steven Purcell's claims that there would be no cuts to frontline services. If ever there was an example of the need for joined-up government, this is it. There is no excuse for the Development Department, the Health Department and the Finance and Central Services Department not getting together to ensure that that need is met and that the successful voluntary health organisations that we are discussing can get on with their job of delivering services.

It is disgraceful that, for example, the Maryhill community health project lost half of its funding as a result of Glasgow City Council's cuts. It had been open for 10 years and had pioneered support for breastfeeding, which, as a midwife and a mother, is close to my heart. Many years ago, in Castlemilk, I started a voluntary support group for breastfeeding mothers, who were very much in the minority in Castlemilk at the time. I started that group with the help of my health visitor. She worked voluntarily and had no funding; indeed, the group sprang up from the grass roots and never received any funding. When initiative is shown at grass-roots level in communities, it really ought to be supported. Our group died a death when the health visitor could no longer afford to offer her time unpaid.

It is really sad that a project such as the Maryhill project, which was successful in supporting breastfeeding, had to close. That is just one example of a closure that completely flies in the face of the Executive's and the Minister for Health and Community Care's commitments to promoting breastfeeding. Where is the joined-up government that can sustain such services?

The Possil project in Glasgow is another that provided a range of services. One of its services was breakfast clubs, which the Executive promotes as an alternative to free school meals. However, the Possil project has had to close. Again, where is the joined-up government?

I have run out of time, but there were a number of questions there for the minister. I congratulate all the organisations that provide community health services in difficult times. I hope that they will be able to continue and that we will see a shift in the Executive's position.

17:21

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie)

(Lab): Like other speakers, I congratulate Mark Ballard on securing the debate. The topic is close to my heart.

It is interesting to look back at the origins of the health service and at the aspects that characterised its early years. I was brought up in the 1950s and was aware of school doctors, dentists and audiology services, and of immunisation and radiography services going out to communities. In a range of ways, the health service moved away from the hospital and into the community. Many of the services were channelled through schools, but many were channelled through community organisations. There was a process of community engagement that, sadly, has become diluted in recent years as the health service has focused on hospitals on the one hand, and on primary care as delivered by general practitioners on the other. Both those things are obviously valuable, but health is not delivered exclusively by doctors or by technologically driven medicine. One could argue that society's health needs are increasingly to do with changing our lifestyles and shifting away from destructive patterns—in diets, in alcohol and drugs, or in poor exercise—and away from other ingrained behaviours. Only through a community process will we achieve such changes.

The minister will know—because I remember discussing it with him before we both became parliamentarians some eight years ago—that I was chair of Glasgow healthy cities. That was the umbrella organisation that dealt with many community health projects in Glasgow. The projects were highly successful. There were diet-based projects; lifestyle projects aimed at women, such as the maternity and child care projects that Carolyn Leckie mentioned; men's health projects; sexually transmitted diseases projects; and a whole range of other health improvement projects that were actually community projects as distinct from hospital-based projects.

I happen to think that in Glasgow we were at the forefront, not just of the United Kingdom but of Europe. Glasgow was part of a healthy cities network that covered most European countries. Interestingly, people would come to Glasgow not because we had wonderful health, but because we had wonderful community health practitioners who had relevant experience that others wanted to

learn from. It is of some regret that Finland, for example, which had a lot to learn from Glasgow, has now put our health lessons into practice and appears to be driving further ahead than we are.

Priority needs to be given to a community focus on health, to community engagement and to linking health improvement with other forms of community involvement. In many deprived communities, the people's best health champions are not doctors and nurses, but other people who live in those communities. Many of the best professionals who work on community health projects understand that and act not as deliverers of services—professionals who do something about people's health—but as advisers or supporters who encourage people to stop smoking or drinking, or to change their diet. Such work is done collectively in a community context, not in doctor-patient relationships.

There is a great deal that we can do to improve our health by putting more emphasis on community health. Not just the Minister for Communities, but the Minister for Health and Community Care should take that on board.

17:26

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I congratulate my colleague Mark Ballard on securing the debate and echo his welcome to the people who have joined us in the public gallery. Given that many community health organisations are under a great deal of pressure and are unsure about their futures, it speaks volumes that so many people have come to the Parliament to listen to the debate.

My experience of voluntary sector health organisations relates to the field of sexual health, which Des McNulty mentioned. I am talking about the other side of the coin—not health services that have been moved out of clinical provision, but areas of health that were not identified until the community got involved and responded to them, with the result that they were subsequently picked up by the national health service and other providers.

Community-driven health activism alerted the rest of society to the problem of HIV and, later, to the specific needs of gay and bisexual men. That is not the only group in society whose needs were first recognised by the community health sector. Asylum seekers and refugees are another example of such a group. The people who live in those communities or who are connected with them are often the first to be able to respond; they can do so more quickly than policy makers and large service providers. When community health activism drives provision in a particular field, it helps to fill some of the gaps that the larger service providers have not been able to fill.

Clinical services are crucial to Government policy and targets, but they are not enough on their own. Community health can pull in the same direction. It is a matter of some regret that politicians, especially in the run-up to elections, focus on hospitals and doctors and nurses, and sometimes lose sight of the need to adopt a broader approach to responding to health problems.

It would not be an overstatement to call the present situation a national funding crisis. Des McNulty said that Glasgow had been at the forefront of community health provision, but in the space of one year, the Greater Glasgow and Clyde area has experienced a 50 per cent reduction in funding for community health. That is a huge change to cope with.

With the introduction of community health partnerships and the advent of changes in funding, the Glasgow healthy city partnership commissioned a review that mentioned the benefits that community health services provide. It said:

"Termination represents a radical departure from current policy and practice which point towards increased community and voluntary sector involvement in the health improvement agenda. In this context, termination presents a politically unacceptable option."

One year later, by the summer of this year, two out of the eight projects that were studied had been terminated and four others faced such drastic funding cuts that they were forced to consider merging. Even if they can pursue that option, they will not be able to provide the same level of service that they have done in the past.

I echo Mark Ballard's point that, if the Scottish Executive is to meet its policy priorities and put its agenda into practice, it must get a grip on the problem nationally and ensure that organisations that work hard to deliver health improvements through community projects in Scotland can continue to do so in the future with secure funding.

17:30

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): I, too, pay tribute to Mark Ballard for bringing an important motion to the Parliament. The motion is important for three reasons: first, because we often underestimate the important role that community health projects play in broader public health matters; secondly, because of the funding difficulties that Patrick Harvie and others have mentioned; and thirdly, because of the important role that volunteers and volunteering play in our society. I will touch on each of those issues.

To deal with the last one first, it was appropriate for Mark Ballard and other members to pay tribute to those who volunteer and give their time for

nothing. The Parliament has made it more difficult to volunteer, although for the best of reasons. As a result of the provisions on disclosure for those who deal with children and a variety of other measures, we have introduced hurdles to volunteering. It is therefore appropriate for the Parliament to record its thanks to those who dedicate their time to volunteering. In the more complicated 21st century world in which we live, with a 24/7 society of split shifts and split and dislocated families, finding time to volunteer is arguably harder than it has been previously, yet it is ever more necessary. The Parliament should therefore pay tribute to those who volunteer. They do not ask for much and the least that we can do, given the difficulties that we have imposed, is to thank them.

Funding issues apply not only to community health projects, but to a variety of voluntary agencies. The Executive must, correctly, check against delivery, balance the books and ensure that funding is not given in perpetuity. However, that causes difficulties that result in many organisations being unable to continue—we have heard examples of that. The situation can also be fundamentally debilitating for organisations that are doing a difficult job in difficult circumstances, involving people who give their time voluntarily. They face not only the challenges and problems with which they are dealing, but the difficulties of managing and balancing the books. As a body politic, we must do more to address that. We must ensure that public funds are best used and not used wrongly, but we must also ensure that such organisations, which contribute immensely, can continue and are not undermined. As I said, organisations sometimes simply cease to exist or are undermined by the hassle and wear and tear and the anxiety that goes with that. We must address that.

Community health projects play an important role in addressing the difficulties that Scottish society faces. Modern medicine has resulted in a huge swathe of changes that we clearly welcome. We do not now simply have heart transplants; we have face transplants and a plethora of other wonderful procedures. However, at the end of the day, we must realise that some of the most significant changes that the Parliament and the Scottish people can make will come as a result not of the wonders of modern science, but of measures at the basic grass-roots level. Part of the issue is about improving affordability and accessibility and making services available and part is about changing attitudes, for example, in tackling smoking.

Other small nations reward and support those who volunteer by ensuring adequate funding. Des McNulty mentioned Finland, which, as a consequence of such measures, has moved from being the sick man of Europe to being the country

that most of us in Scotland would emulate. I congratulate Mark Ballard on the motion.

17:34

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Mark Ballard on securing the debate. Community focused health provision is vital in building a healthy Scotland. I welcome the motion's recognition of independent and voluntary sector organisations, which are often somewhat overlooked by Government and whose work in providing services is essential in addressing health inequalities in our society. I also congratulate the Edinburgh Community Food Initiative on its 10 years of work throughout the Lothians, and especially on its efforts to improve the diet of many local people.

In north-east Scotland, which I represent, similar organisations, such as Gordon Rural Action, for which I will be sponsoring an exhibition in the garden lobby next week, are working to support and promote local voluntary action and services in central Aberdeenshire, including the provision of access to a wide range of community and self-help groups. I recently went along to one of Gordon Rural Action's drop-in days in Inverurie to see for myself the services that are on offer, which include not only information on health matters but access to money and debt advice, and to rural housing and local employment services. We must encourage such innovative and effective organisations and we must work to reduce and remove the barriers and red tape that often prevent community groups from starting out in the first place.

Often, the personal contact that comes with community, independent and voluntary services is as valuable as the service that they provide. I cite the example of the WRVS meals on wheels service. It provides our old folks—although not only old folks—with a healthy hot meal each day, but it also provides human contact. Many older people who live on their own, and adults who have mental health problems or physical, sensory or learning disabilities might lack that human contact. I suggest to the minister that it cannot be provided through weekly delivery of frozen ready meals which, I am sorry to say, many local authorities are moving towards.

Community based and focused groups provide invaluable assets but, as we have heard repeatedly this evening, many of them are bedevilled by the problem of future funding. Voluntary organisations throughout Scotland increasingly operate in what can be described only as a guillotine situation, in which they never know when vital funding will be cut off.

I know from my involvement over the years with different groups in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire

that day-to-day costs—or working capital—are a pressing issue. As the motion says, “the sense of fragility” that that brings often impacts on the services that such groups can provide.

The funding and support of community health organisations is an area that we as politicians must consider in order that we can provide the stability that is essential to forward planning in the community health sector. The difficulty in identifying and securing continued long-term funding and funding for existing services must be addressed so that the great work that we have heard much about this afternoon can continue and expand to reach more of our communities.

We need to develop and build a confident and well-informed society, which will help Scotland's parents to make the health choices that will enable their children to become healthy, well-educated and passionate young Scots. We must continue to educate community groups on health matters, promote good health and encourage individuals and communities to share health-improvement responsibilities and activities. To do that, community based and focused voluntary groups need to be free of Government interference, but financially secure. I—as other members would—would welcome a commitment from the Executive across portfolios to review funding of the voluntary sector, which plays such an important role in our communities, with a view to securing and sustaining its long-term viability.

17:38

Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)
(Ind): I congratulate Mark Ballard on securing what I consider to be a very important debate. Community health is very important, given that the majority of health issues are dealt with in the community, which we forget. There is a lot of focus on the acute sector, but 98 per cent of health matters are dealt with in the community, so if we do not get it right, people will end up in hospital.

We thank all the people who work in our community; they include primary care workers such as general practitioners, nurses and allied health professionals, and independent and voluntary service organisations. It is important that we use many ways to address inequalities throughout communities, which is close to the Executive's heart—we want to eradicate inequalities.

It saddens me that projects such as the Edinburgh Community Food Initiative might be under threat because of the effort that they have to put into getting their funds together. We have heard about that problem and what we have heard is true—it is happening in my constituency. So much of the energy that should go into doing good

work goes into finding funding. Local authorities and health boards should help to fund such organisations, but there has been a decline in support over time. As Des McNulty said, Glasgow was good at supporting projects, but the effort that we put into the community has decreased, probably partly because health boards have to try to get rid of their deficits—the millions that they owe—before they start their building programmes.

The energy that goes into organisations such as the ECFI should be used to encourage people to eat healthily and to exercise in order to help them to lose weight. It is extremely important to do that because it has been proved that to lose a modest amount of weight, such as 5kg to 10kg, has a significant effect on reducing the chance of type 2 diabetes, hypertension, atherosclerosis and raised cholesterol. I refer to what is known as the metabolic syndrome: the heavier we are, the greater is the cumulative effect of those factors, so it is important to get our diets right. Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network guidelines from 1996 say that if we get weight down into the low-risk range, we can reduce total mortality by between 20 per cent and 25 per cent, diabetes mortality by 30 per cent to 40 per cent and obesity-related cancers by 40 per cent to 50 per cent. That must be good. We need to inform people and prevent them from becoming overweight and we must target those who are at high risk.

How can we do that but by everybody working to keep people's weight down? It is extremely hard work to educate people about the important reasons why they should lose weight and to support them in doing it. I would like school nurses to be brought back—they exist, but there are not enough of them. It is important to get the waistline down. For a man, 37in is low risk and 40in is high risk. For women, the low risk figure is 32in and 35in is high risk.

At one meeting of the cross-party group on loss of consultant-led services in Scotland—solutions, Professor Colin Waine, who is connected with the National Obesity Forum, gave a presentation. He ended by saying that the metabolic syndrome is a public health time bomb. He also said that the report “The Cost of Doing Nothing—the economics of obesity in Scotland” shows that obesity is already costing as much as smoking but that smoking is, we hope, decreasing—it keeps going down—while obesity in the United Kingdom rises at a rate of 1 per cent per annum.

The status quo is not a viable option, and I would like the minister to address the issue. Some moneys are not available, such as the supporting people fund, which I have been told has been cut. Perhaps the minister could say something about that.

17:43

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): Other members have congratulated Mark Ballard on securing this important debate: I add my congratulations to theirs. It has been more than useful and I support the general terms of Mark Ballard's motion. As other members have said, it is important to welcome and celebrate the work of community health projects. The debate also provides an opportunity to thank volunteers—and paid staff—for their efforts and endeavours.

I regret that I am not intimate with the details of the Edinburgh Community Food Initiative, but it clearly has a distinguished track record and history and obviously fits well with the current raft of initiatives on better diet and healthy living. It seems to be complementary to national policies such as hungry for success, which is the programme to improve school meals. It and other such projects demonstrate how much value strong local community input can add to national policy initiatives. As Jean Turner said, 98 per cent of health contacts take place in the community. It is clear that community health projects add immense value to that input.

Mark Ballard rightly referred to the Scottish Executive's success in taking forward the community health agenda. He mentioned a number of initiatives and important policy documents. It is fair to say that we are much further ahead than we were eight years ago, but there is a risk of falling backwards: it is all a question of funding. The need for constant fundraising is a long-term problem because it is debilitating to the efforts of the sector and loss can result from it. The debate has rightly centred on continuity of funding. Core funding is critical to the work that is done at the local level.

The role of health boards is also key. They need to take greater responsibility and should place greater priority on funding community health projects. The Executive can provide better resources via health boards and councils, and it can give a strong lead to both types of organisation in supporting and valuing community health projects. It is not sensible to have micromanagement from Edinburgh; local input is immensely important.

I will mention a constituency example, as other members have done. The Dry Dock in Eyemouth in Berwickshire is a first-rate project that has been scaled down because of an inability to access core funding. The club is still there, but not in the way that it should be, in my view. It started off as a youth club with a dry bar and developed into an education and health project. I was there one day when a postman arrived with a parcel. One of the young people said, "Ah, our baby has arrived," which caused slight consternation on my part. It

was in fact a full-size medical dummy, which is used to help young mums to understand how to cope with babies—there were pregnant teenagers there. The dummy was also used for another education and health project.

Warm words are important, and it is right to thank people for their efforts, but that is not enough. We need to ensure that strong support is given to projects. It is important to emphasise community health, which I am sure will be expressed in a number of manifestos for next year's elections. I add my support to the motion, and I repeat my congratulations to Mark Ballard on securing the debate.

17:47

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I add my congratulations to my colleague, Mark Ballard, on securing the debate. Mark has given us a good overview of the sort of projects that we are talking about and the problems that they face. It is clear from the briefing that we all received from Voluntary Health Scotland that organisations face real difficulties. The Executive has a stated commitment to work in partnership with voluntary and community-based groups. However, in practice, it is not an equal partnership. Groups face particular difficulty in securing the core funding that would give them a certain future and would allow them to plan their projects effectively.

We all have local examples and here is mine. In Scotland, we tend to think of deprivation as an urban or central-belt problem, but in 2003 the seventh most deprived ward in Scotland was Merkinch in Inverness. The community got a five-year lottery funding package to convert the janitor's house at Merkinch primary school into a healthy living centre, known—because we are down-to-earth folk in the Highlands—as the janny's hoose. The janny's hoose is led and managed by a user group from the community. It offers a variety of services, including education on diet and dental health, with a school toothbrushing programme; a variety of activities to promote good mental health, including stress management and counselling; support for parents; and joint work with the school and professionals in the community.

I will quote from a representative of the janny's hoose:

"At this stage it is uncertain whether we will continue. The Health Minister maintains that funding for these projects should come from local sources (Community Planning Partnership and Community Health Partnership). The CHP say they have only just over £2,000 for health promotion, the council have problems with us as we don't fit into their structure anywhere."

The project might get some funding from the regeneration fund, and possibly some from the

community health partnership, but nothing is certain. An organisation cannot continue to be effective if it is on a continual funding knife edge. If the janny's hoose folds, the progress that has been made in tackling health inequalities in that deprived area will be lost.

I turn to another aspect of the partnership between the NHS and community groups in delivering community health projects. I understand that the Minister for Health and Community Care will publish the Executive's review of nursing in the community next week. It has become clear that the final report is likely to contain a proposal to move away from health visitors, district nurses and so on towards generic community nurses, but many professionals have deep concerns about that.

I remember working as a school doctor with triple-duty nurses, who combined the roles of health visitor, district nurse and school nurse. When the pressure of work meant that something had to give, as is always the case in the NHS, it was always the health promotion activity that went. Such activity is no less important than reactive health activity, but it is less immediately urgent. Whenever we had a single-duty school nurse who had no other duties and could do the health promotion work that was so necessary, that was always hailed as a huge benefit.

The national strategy that Mark Ballard proposes would ensure that health promotion and community health could not be allowed to slide off the bottom of budgets or be left on a funding knife edge. It is not enough to give money to local authorities and health boards in the hope that it will find its way down to such projects. Our communities need projects such as the janny's hoose and nurses whose specific role is to engage with the community. We must ensure that they get those.

17:51

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): I congratulate Mark Ballard on bringing this important debate to the Parliament and I welcome the representatives of voluntary and community health groups who are in the gallery.

The voluntary sector is vital to our communities and delivers responsive, innovative services such as the community health projects that we are discussing. Community projects arise from and are embedded in the communities that they serve. They can persuade people and engage with them in ways that statutory providers often find much more difficult. Last December, we published "A Vision for the Voluntary Sector: The Next Phase of Our Relationship", which recognised the sector's

vital contribution to our joint policy aims and made it clear that we need to do much more to understand, build on and learn from best practice in the sector.

Seen from the perspective of "A Vision for the Voluntary Sector", community health projects make a substantial contribution to addressing the health issues that communities in Scotland face. We need the commitment of the independent, community and voluntary organisations that work with the statutory sector to meet the challenging targets that we set for improving the health of the people of Scotland and closing the health inequalities gap. Without those organisations, it might be impossible to achieve our objectives.

Like Mark Ballard, I pay tribute to the Edinburgh Community Food Initiative's remarkable achievements in the past 10 years. They are a tribute to the energy, commitment and vision of the staff and volunteers who have contributed so much over the years to make the initiative such a great success. I hold up the Edinburgh Community Food Initiative as an exemplar of how a community health project can work successfully with and within the communities that it serves to identify where positive change can be brought about in community health and well-being. The initiative demonstrates how a community health project can respond and adapt to the changing priorities in health improvement—and to changes in community and partnership demands—and ensure that it remains sustainable.

There are, of course, many other examples, and I will mention just one. Just around the corner from the Edinburgh Community Food Initiative, which is based in my constituency, is the FareShare project, which is run by the Cyrenians. It distributes food to more than 40 hostels and day centres for the homeless. A film about the project will be shown in the Parliament two weeks today and speakers will describe the project's work. I hope that members will attend to hear about its important work on health and homelessness.

I recognise that achieving sustainability remains a major concern for community health initiatives. A key principle in the Executive's approach to improving community health and well-being is to allow community partners to agree on local priorities and to target their resources accordingly. Therefore, it is important that community health initiatives are able to work with the statutory sector to identify the priorities and decide how they can best be met. The Edinburgh Community Food Initiative can act as a model for others in that respect. It has secured a wide range of funding partners as well as generating its own income as a social enterprise.

Among its deliverables are activities that clearly link to enabling its partners' objectives to be met.

An example is the snack attack initiative, which delivers on the Scottish Executive's free fresh fruit for primary 1 and 2s initiative and provides free fruit for children who are eligible for free school meals and subsidised fruit for primary 3 to 7s. That is joined-up delivery and true partnership working, and I believe that much can be learned from it.

Mark Ballard: I welcome the minister's positive comments, particularly about the Edinburgh Community Food Initiative. He has talked a lot about partnership working, but the examples given by my colleague Patrick Harvie indicate that partnership working does not seem to be happening in Glasgow and Clyde. Despite the large amounts of money that the Executive has given to support community health and health promotion, it is still impossible to hold local authorities and health boards to account for how much of the money gets to the bodies. I have tried using freedom of information legislation, but the information does not exist. Does the minister share my concern that, despite positive words from the Executive, implementation is still not working?

Malcolm Chisholm: I was about to say that decisions about funding for the projects that we are discussing are made by local agencies and partners, and members cannot really suggest that it would be right for the Executive to take steps that would constrain community partnerships in their funding decisions on individual projects. However, I acknowledge the problem that Mark Ballard described in both his intervention and earlier speech.

We are determined to expand the role of the voluntary sector and, as part of that, we are working on ways of supporting the continued sustainability of community health initiatives. One important development is the work of the community-led supporting and developing healthy communities task group. The group has been examining ways of enabling statutory and voluntary community organisations to deliver better on community-based health priorities. It has been considering issues such as sharing best practice, ensuring adequate stakeholder engagement, developing support for building capacity to deliver effectively, and gathering evidence of what works and, equally important, does not work in improving health and well-being through community-led initiatives.

The task group is due to launch its report before the end of the year and its findings will be of great interest and importance. The Executive will work with the relevant stakeholders to consider how its recommendations can be translated into actions that will provide support and reassurance for community health initiatives.

Returning to resources, I point out that the

Executive already provides the voluntary sector directly with a significant level of funding—some £656 million in the current year, based on three-year funding packages that can be renewed. However, it is not possible or appropriate to fund all of Scotland's 50,000 voluntary organisations from the centre. Most of the locally based organisations rightly seek funding from strategic agencies in their areas, since their work is about determining local need and local solutions for local people.

However, as a priority the Executive will promote the further use of and support for the voluntary sector. We will encourage local authorities, health boards, enterprise companies and other agencies to work with the voluntary sector in their area to meet the needs of communities in the most appropriate way.

Understanding those needs and demands is a central ambition of "A Vision for the Voluntary Sector". The vision means new working methods and new partnership approaches based on working together. That is what communities are about, and we have seen real successes all over Scotland. Putting the power of the community to the challenge of health may be the way to a truly healthy population. The challenge is there, and the community undoubtedly has both the strength and potential.

Meeting closed at 17:59.

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