

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 22 March 2007

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 22 March 2007

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

Scotland in the United Kingdom

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. Our first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-5779, in the name of Margaret Curran, on Scotland in the United Kingdom.

09:15

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Ms Margaret Curran): I am delighted to be back in the chamber to open this morning's important debate. On the eve of the election, let us address the fundamental question that will be presented to Scotland's electorate: should Scotland stay in the union, or should we divorce and go our separate way? I will argue that Scotland's best interests are served through our continued partnership in the United Kingdom.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Can the Executive get its motion right?

Ms Curran: From a sedentary position, Mr Swinney is trying to provoke me.

Mr Swinney: It has worked so many times in the past.

Ms Curran: I was about to say that that is not a difficult thing to do. However, although the SNP talks about the words of the motion, Labour members are happier talking about the chancellor's budget and what it has achieved for Scotland.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Can the member clarify for the chamber which version of the motion she will discuss?

Ms Curran: We will focus on the substantial issues that face the Scottish electorate, not the words of a motion. It is clear that the road to separation will be costly, taking Scotland backwards and distracting us from dealing with the real issues that face the Scottish people.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Will the minister take an intervention?

Ms Curran: No. Scotland's separatists argue that our partnership in the United Kingdom has failed Scotland; apparently, we have been held back and undermined for many years. That does not quite match the facts. Under the union, we saw the 18th century enlightenment, when Scots such

as David Hume and Adam Smith led intellectual debate across the world. Under the union, Scottish discovery and enterprise flourished through the achievements of Watt, Logie Baird and Fleming, which still make Scots proud today. Under the union, we have seen the growth and influence of Scottish values and identity at home and across the world. Under the union, we have seen the Edinburgh International Festival and the fringe grow in international stature year on year. Under the union, Scotland is number 2 in the European league for employment. Under the union, Scots have been prominent in the worlds of the media and politics, as we saw yesterday, when Gordon Brown dominated the stage. All that has happened within the partnership that is the United Kingdom.

It is a changing partnership that demonstrates the capacity to renew itself and to adapt to new challenges. Scotland has faced challenges. Labour and Liberal Democrat members came to the Parliament to make devolution work. We came here to change lives, not perpetually to change the constitution. We came here to tackle poverty, to support enterprise and to deliver world-class education, and that is what we have done. We have created new opportunities and have stimulated new aspirations. In this session, we have achieved a new school every week, record attainment levels and universities in the world-class league. More people are in work than ever before, business performance is making Scotland dynamic and competitive, and we are leading the world in financial services and life sciences. We have prioritised health, improving services and tackling inequality with unparalleled levels of investment. Lives have been saved by our efforts to combat cancer, heart disease and stroke.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I want to support the minister today, but I am not sure that her going through the Executive's record is the best way of getting me to do that. Where do her comments leave our justice system, of which the Executive has made an absolute shambles?

Ms Curran: Phil Gallie's timing is perfect. I was about to say that we have tackled the tough issues—in the face of much resistance. We recognised, as the Tories did not, the existence of antisocial behaviour and were determined to tackle it. We gave voice to people who had found no one who would listen to them. We empowered communities with the force of law. We introduced tough powers on knife crime and licensing and we introduced tough powers to help the victims of crime.

We have taken social justice to the top of the political agenda. Some 130,000 children have been lifted out of poverty; the number of pensioners in poverty has been reduced by 46 per cent; and older people's lives have been improved

by the provision of free central heating and free travel. We have regenerated our most disadvantaged communities by targeting funding and transforming our cities. All that has been delivered by devolution—a strong Scotland with a strong United Kingdom.

When Scotland was isolated by the Tories, when the Tories did not listen to us and Mrs Thatcher did not respond to issues in Scotland, what did members of the Executive parties do? We reframed the constitutional settlement and we campaigned for devolution. Where were the Tories and the SNP then? They were nowhere to be seen. We delivered devolution.

Where has the Scottish National Party been as we worked hard to fulfil the promises of devolution? More particularly, where has Alex Salmond been? We all know the mantra of the SNP—we have heard it often enough. For SNP members, this Parliament is never good enough, more powers are always the answer to complex issues and separation is always the solution. The SNP wants to break up Britain—first, last, and always.

I have laid out some of the achievements of devolution. Let us consider the other road that Scotland could take. We are entitled to examine the consequences of a vote for the SNP. Last weekend we found out that the SNP would introduce tax increases in Scotland with immediate effect. That is what separation would mean for us: everyone else gets a tax cut, but we would get a 3p increase.

What about the other costs?

Mr Swinney: Will the minister give an accurate statement to the Parliament by acknowledging that the SNP's commitment is to abolishing the despised council tax, which has increased by 60 per cent under this Administration, and to putting in a system that is fair and based on the ability to pay?

Ms Curran: Mr Swinney is easily provoked, too. I think that he is so animated because we have exposed the real consequences of SNP policy, which would mean not only a 3p increase in income tax but drastic cuts in local services. It is time for the SNP to spell out exactly what those cuts would mean for families throughout Scotland. The position has been confirmed by expert after expert, as has the financial gap of more than £11 billion that would affect Scotland under the SNP. The individual bill for each family in Scotland would be more than £5000—and that would be just the beginning. The SNP's policies would affect every individual, family and business in Scotland.

Members should make no mistake about what would happen under the SNP on 4 May. The party would take the first steps of its strategy for divorce.

We should imagine the scenario: every issue would be a constitutional one and the purpose of Government would be to gain a yes vote in the referendum.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Is the minister arguing that the SNP's economic policies would bring penury or that independence, if the Scots chose that, would impoverish us?

Ms Curran: It is sad that the SNP never gave Margo MacDonald the opportunity to advocate her policy for independence. The policies of the SNP will be disastrous for Scotland, and Scotland's best future lies in partnership with the United Kingdom. With the SNP's policies on health, education and housing, there would be a battleground with Westminster, rather than improvement and betterment for the Scottish people.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Does the minister recognise that many of my constituents who receive pensions from Westminster are very worried about what might happen to those pensions under an SNP-run independent Scotland?

Ms Curran: That is a very good point, and it was very well put. That is an example of exactly the kind of issue and detail that we need to think through.

This is the key test and the fundamental question that the voters will be asked to decide on on 3 May. Do we continue our revitalisation of Scotland or do we divert our energies, skills and resources to do constitutional battle? Scotland, at the beginning of this new century, needs to look forward and live in the modern world of independence and partnership.

We undoubtedly have many challenges to face, ranging from the scourge of drugs to the challenge of climate change. Those issues cannot be tackled through romantic nationalism and media soundbites. Rather, we need decisive leadership, effective policies and a partnership that delivers prosperity and stability.

We have had much debate about leadership in Scotland over the years.

Alex Neil: Where is Jack?

Ms Curran: I have one fundamental question: where is Alex? I am not sure why the Scottish Parliament was not good enough for Alex Salmond before, and I am not sure why he wants to come back now. There are no limits to that particular cult of the personality. The last leader who put his name on the ballot paper was Tommy Sheridan. Here we have Alex Salmond doing exactly the same thing. He is such a modest man that he wants to be in two Parliaments at the same time. He is quite an interesting man.

The Minister for Education and Young People (Hugh Henry): With three jobs.

Ms Curran: Yes, with three jobs.

This debate illustrates the real choices before the Scottish people: tax and turmoil or prosperity and progress; improving education or confronting the UK Government; beating crime or negotiating break-up with the rest of the UK; creating the costs of separate regimes on pensions, regulation, defence and the rest or focusing on how to improve our children's health and keeping our communities thriving.

I have seen the changes taking place in my constituency in the east end of Glasgow. I have seen the educational opportunities that exist now that people never had before. We have some of the highest-performing schools in the east end of Glasgow. We have quality and choice in housing, which had been denied to people for too long. Businesses are flourishing, there are job opportunities and levels of poverty have been slashed, and the area is connected to a thriving city and a prosperous country. That is Scotland's future—partnership with the United Kingdom, not the costs and risks of independence. We will take Scotland forward as a thriving and prosperous country.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the United Kingdom is a mutually beneficial relationship for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England; notes that devolution "is a process, not an event"; notes the additional powers that have been devolved to the Scottish Parliament since 1999; notes that the majority of people in Scotland oppose separation from the rest of the UK; believes that such a course would result in either cuts in vital public services or massive increases in taxation; believes that Scotland should retain the benefits of being part of the UK; and notes the respective positions of the Labour and the Liberal Democrat parties on the powers of the Parliament.

09:28

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): I will move the only amendment in my name.

Behind this debate is the question whether a constitutional arrangement devised three centuries ago, in questionable circumstances in a pre-democratic age is still appropriate for Scotland or, for that matter, England, in the 21st century. Expressed another way, it is time for Scotland to move on.

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Alasdair Morgan: It is a bit early in my speech. I hope that I have said something controversial already.

Bristow Muldoon: Does Mr Morgan not recognise that Scotland has a new constitutional

settlement that is only 10 years old, not 300 years old? Is it not time to allow that constitutional settlement to deliver for the people of Scotland?

Alasdair Morgan: That is one of the questions that I will address in my speech. It is interesting that Bristow Muldoon's coalition partners do not seem to agree with him on that point. I noticed in the papers a few months ago that the member for Livingston chairs Labour's Scottish policy forum. I admit that that news greatly encouraged me.

The case for independence is positive and forward looking. It is based on modern values of national self-determination, equality, co-operation and mutual respect. Independence will put Scotland on an equal footing with England in Europe and in the wider world. It will give us the responsibilities that we need to achieve progress for Scotland politically, economically and socially. It will enable us to do things differently and better when we need to and not just when the Scotland Act 1998 allows us to. Links between Scotland and England will continue, not least because of our common membership of the European Union, which enshrines freedom of movement, of trade and of investment across all boundaries.

It is clear that Labour has a problem in coping with those concepts. One can tell that it is serious, because only last weekend, Geoff Hoon became involved in the argument. As members may recall, he was a close colleague of Tony Blair and was Secretary of State for Defence but, like many of Tony Blair's close colleagues, he has experienced a downwards spiral in his parliamentary career. In his most recent demotion, to Minister for Europe, he was first led to believe that his new demoted post would be in the Cabinet, but then he was told that he could not be in the Cabinet but could attend Cabinet meetings and see what was going on. Never mind. Even though Tony Blair no longer rates Geoff Hoon, he is wheeled out to rubbish Scotland's position in Europe, as if anyone would believe what another failed Blairite minister says on the future of Scotland's constitutional position.

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr) rose—

Alasdair Morgan: I am glad to give way on that point.

Mr Kerr: The member does not focus on the substance. Geoff Hoon pointed out that House of Commons library research says that if Scotland were independent, referendums would be required in France and perhaps in Italy and in Spain before it could return to the European Union. Apart from taking us out of the UK—our biggest market—the SNP would take us out of Europe, too.

Alasdair Morgan: Is the member finished? All the legal opinion is contrary to what he said. The member wilfully denigrates the good will that there

is in Europe towards Scotland; that would welcome us into Europe.

I move on to the last part of the Government's motion. Normally, we are blessed with only one Executive motion for a debate, but on this occasion we have had the rare fortune to have two motions. As the Minister for Parliamentary Business knows, it is not in my nature to rub salt into wounds but, helpfully, the Conservatives have lodged the original Labour position in their amendment, so both options are in the *Business Bulletin*. That is helpful, because surely the point is not just whether incompetence or inconsistency led to the fiasco. The coalition parties appear to seek another term in office, yet both motions offer a remarkably vague proposition.

When I saw the first motion, I thought that Labour might just have begun to move forward towards the main stream of opinion—that of nearly 70 per cent of Scots, who tell us that the Parliament should have more power over day-to-day life. However, Labour members have reverted to type and allied themselves with the 12 per cent who think that we are fine as we are. At least no one can accuse Labour of courting electoral popularity.

We are back at the position that Mr McConnell enunciated only last October in Haddington, when he said that the Scottish Parliament must

“make the fullest possible use of those powers before demanding lots more.”

Even in motion number 2, Labour does not rule out more powers—it is just that they can be applied for only after some unspecified time and after some unspecified test is met. The truth is that on that matter as on many other policies, Labour is happy to nit-pick at the proposals of other parties, which want to move Scotland forward, but is remarkably ideas-free in its own policies.

Ms Curran: We have had this debate many times in the chamber. As I made clear earlier, our frustration with the SNP, and the reason why we think it is not ready to put its proposals to the Scottish electorate, is that it will never put the case for independence. That is Alasdair's job today. The debate is “Scotland in the United Kingdom”. He must put his case—put up or shut up.

Alasdair Morgan: I am trying to put that case, and address the motion, and address the amendments.

It seems to be okay for the Labour Party to hint at the possibility of extra powers for the Parliament at some stage in the future, and okay for its coalition allies to be hardly any more forthright; but as soon as the SNP has the temerity to do what Government motion number 1 said and ask for any extra powers, that is the equivalent of bringing

the constitutional Government of the whole of the United Kingdom grinding to a halt. Never mind that some of the powers are ones that Labour itself has wanted, such as the need to move on firearms legislation north of the border, and on the return of the £40 million that used to come to Scotland as attendance allowance; and never mind that the vast majority of people in Scotland, not only nationalists, would probably agree that some powers should come to Scotland—powers such as the power to set up our own replacement to public-private finance schemes, and the power to lead in Europe on fisheries negotiations rather than sitting outside in an anteroom listening to the negotiations on loudspeakers.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Alasdair Morgan: No, I cannot give way any more, Elaine. I am sorry.

Things are clearly bad. As Tuesday's edition of *The Scotsman* told us:

“Jack McConnell's right hand was balled into a fist like a boxer's. His left hand was on a colleague's shoulder.”

We are not told what he did to that colleague with his right hand, but it could have been something severe, because we are told later that the First Minister said, “We are angry.” Unfortunately, the First Minister did not make it clear whether that was a use of the royal we, whether he was including Gordon Brown, or whether he was including his coalition partners. However, it is a fair bet that, if he was angry on Monday, he must have been incandescent when he saw the first version of today's motion on Wednesday.

To satisfy Mr Kerr, I want to make it clear that the decision on whether or not Scotland should be independent belongs to the Scottish people. That decision should be able to be expressed in a referendum and not in an election to a legislature. By its very nature, the result of an election is the outcome of a debate on a whole range of subjects. Not only does the SNP believe that the decision belongs to the Scottish people, the SNP trusts the Scottish people to make the right decision. That is why we will offer the Scottish people the right to choose in an independence referendum in the first four years of an SNP Government. Polls have shown that 80 per cent of Scots, whether they want independence or not, believe that a referendum is the right way to determine Scotland's future. It is a constant source of amazement to me that so-called democratic parties—even the one with the word “Democrats” in its name—should seek to deny that option to the Scottish people. Just because there was no democracy in 1707, it does not mean there should be no democracy in 2007.

Ms Curran: Will the member take an intervention?

Alasdair Morgan: I am in my final minute, minister.

We are told, as if it were the clinching argument, that the discussions surrounding a referendum decision would be “a distraction”. That is now Labour’s favourite attack on any proposition that it does not like. Mentioning the vote on Trident at Westminster was “a distraction”; asking for any more powers for this Parliament is “a distraction”; and holding a referendum on independence would be “a distraction”. We have had 2,000 years and more of civilisation, but the Scottish people apparently cannot cope with more than one concept or argument at a time.

I suspect that the people of Scotland will not be distracted by the nonsense from the Labour Party. What the Labour Party does in its arguments is insult the intelligence of the electorate. The party has shown itself to be unfit to govern and unfit to be entrusted with the future of this nation.

I move amendment S2M-5779.2, to leave out from “United Kingdom” to end and insert:

“current constitutional arrangements do not offer the right solutions to the challenges facing Scotland, that the natural state of independence, enjoyed by our most successful neighbours, offers the best opportunities for Scotland and that the people of Scotland should have an opportunity in a referendum within the next four years to make their own decision on whether or not Scotland should be independent.”

09:39

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives never make any secret of the fact that we believe in the union. It has given us 300 years of peace and prosperity and led to Scotland making a tremendous contribution to the wider world. We look forward to hundreds of years more of shared success with the other peoples of these islands.

However, I admit that I am somewhat confused this morning, because yesterday the Executive lodged a motion in the name of Margaret Curran, supported by George Lyon. It was a fine motion, if I may say so, which extolled the virtues of the union, said, quite rightly, that devolution is a process, not an event and, crucially, talked about extending the Parliament’s powers where appropriate—a stance that the Scottish Conservatives were happy to endorse. Yesterday afternoon, I set about diligently drafting a gentle addendum to the motion in order to strengthen it.

Imagine my surprise when, within the course of the afternoon, the motion was mysteriously withdrawn and another motion was lodged, without the crucial wording about the extension of powers.

What could be behind that unprecedented development? Did the Executive inadvertently lodge the wrong motion? Did Mrs Curran, in an uncharacteristic lapse, give too much ground to the Liberal Democrats when she drew up the wording? Did she not think to check with Jack McConnell what his position was before she lodged the motion?

All was revealed this morning when I opened my copy of *The Herald*. That fine journalist, Robbie Dinwoodie, as usual, got to the truth of the matter: it was, apparently, a clerical error. That is fine. I am glad that we have cleared it up. However—oh no—Mr George Lyon, who is strangely absent from the chamber this morning, disputed Mrs Curran’s version of events. He said, of the motion:

“It was agreed and signed off in the normal way. Labour saw it on the order paper this morning and panicked. I can see no way in which this could be described as a clerical error.”

Which is it? Who is speaking for the Executive? Is it Mrs Curran or the absent Mr Lyon? Perhaps we should be told. If Mrs Curran would like to intervene, I would be delighted to give way.

Ms Curran: In the interests of Parliament, I am happy to clarify matters. However, I am fascinated by the Tories’ contribution to defending the union. God help us if we had to rely on the Tories to defend the union. Mr Lyon was not around yesterday. The motion was not signed off by ministers. That is the absolute fact.

Murdo Fraser: Even if Mr Lyon was not around yesterday, he was still available to give quotes to Mr Dinwoodie of *The Herald*. He was happy to speak to the press, but not to his ministerial colleagues.

Mr Swinney: Perhaps I can shed light on the process. Mr Lyon was here yesterday for the vote on the Cairngorms National Park Boundary Bill—his name appears on the voting record this morning. Perhaps Mrs Curran could clarify that in a further intervention on Mr Fraser. She is perhaps in even more of a mess on this issue than she was to begin with.

Murdo Fraser: The fact is that this is an absolute shambles. If this Liberal Democrat-Labour coalition cannot sort out something as simple as lodging a motion for debate, how can we trust it to run the country?

We Conservatives are nothing if not helpful. Our amendment simply restates the original wording of the Executive motion. I trust that Mrs Curran, Mr Lyon and all those on the Executive benches will be happy to support their own wording. There is a particular test for the Liberal Democrats. I am sure that, true to their principles as they always are, they will want to support the wording of our motion, which represents their position. I am sure

that they will not want the Labour Party to dictate to them once again what they should say.

All this is a great pity, because this could have been an occasion on which three major parties in the chamber could have been united in support of a positive case for the United Kingdom.

Margaret Curran set out her defence of the union based on the Executive's record, which is not the strongest ground that she could have chosen. That is the problem: the more the Executive bases its defence of the United Kingdom on its record, the more it puts people off and the more the union is at risk. We Conservatives do not think that the union should be set in stone forever as it currently exists. We have already seen a significant change in the past 10 years, with the advent of devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and we are open to the idea of further change, if it is in the interests of preserving the union.

Alex Neil: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I hope that Mr Neil will forgive me, but I have already taken a number of interventions and I need to make progress on the substance of the debate.

In recent weeks, we have seen Labour and SNP politicians bandying around figures about the balance sheet on an independent Scotland. We have had debates on the Government's revenue statistics, on North sea oil revenues, and on the question of who subsidises whom. Frankly, the debate is sterile and unenlightening and it is turning the public off. We need to engage in a more mature debate about Scotland and its place in the union. We need to articulate new arguments for the union that are not based simply on economics or finance.

Scotland is a successful nation and one of the most ingenious nations ever. We gave the world television, the telephone, penicillin, whisky and golf. Adam Smith, who is buried a few hundred metres from the Parliament, gave the world capitalism and free markets. We did all that in our own right within the United Kingdom. The key point is that we do not want to separate ourselves from the rest of the United Kingdom. That is the view of the majority of Scots, and any poll that suggests otherwise is a product of disaffection with the Lib-Lab pact rather than disaffection with the union.

I compare the union to a marriage. I do not sit down with my accountant on my wedding anniversary every year, work out whether marriage has been to my financial benefit, and on that basis decide whether to sue for divorce. It is irrelevant to me whether or not I am better off married, because I am married for all sorts of other

reasons. Most people want to be married primarily for love, support, comfort and companionship rather than simply for economic reasons. I feel the same way about my Britishness.

Scotland and England have 300 years of shared history, traditions and culture that bind us together with the other nations in the UK. Millions of Scots have family members who live south of the border, and millions of people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have friends and relatives in Scotland. We speak the same language, use the same currency, eat more or less the same food, watch the same television programmes and have substantially the same culture. We should not think that those arguments are less important than financial arguments.

Christine May: Will the member take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer: No—he is winding up.

Murdo Fraser: What sense would there be in dividing us in Scotland from our neighbours in the rest of these islands, with whom we have well-established family, cultural and historical links? Doing so would be an insular and narrow approach in a world that is growing smaller, not larger.

Scotland has benefited enormously from the union in the past 300 years, and we will continue to benefit in the future. At the election in a few weeks' time, the good people of Scotland will do what they have done on every previous occasion and reject the narrow nationalist position of the SNP.

I have pleasure in moving amendment S2M-5779.3, to leave out from “; and notes” to end and insert:

“whilst, where appropriate, increasing the powers available to the Scottish Parliament.”

09:47

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): After hearing Executive politicians say for so long that the last thing the country needs is more constitutional debate, I welcome the fact that they changed their minds and brought a constitutional debate to the chamber in the last days of the session. Margaret Curran was her useful forceful self, but it is disappointing that her arguments in defence of the union were a little thin. Did she say at one point that an independent Scotland could not run an Edinburgh festival? Surely I am mistaken about that.

Ms Curran: The contention is that the union has failed and undermined Scotland. My argument is that Scotland has flourished. We have a strong Scotland in a strong UK. The Edinburgh International Festival is an illustration of the

strength of Scotland. It is clear that the union has not damaged our interests.

Patrick Harvie: My response is that an analysis of whether the union has been a good thing over 300 years of history is not the same as an argument about what is best for Scotland today, tomorrow and in the years ahead.

The Executive parties know my position. I cannot support the motion. I believe that there is a case for independence that does not rely on the politics of national identity. A country of the size and scale of Scotland can more easily achieve the fundamental change that is necessary to develop sustainably for the future by acting for itself on the widest range of issues. It can more effectively advocate for global justice by acting for itself on the world stage. That is my position and the Green position, but I want to examine the other parties' positions.

The Executive's motion—after its false start—now highlights the fact that Labour and the Liberal Democrats have different views. That is all well and good. For me, the most difficult aspect of the motion is the assertion that the majority of Scots are against independence. We have seen polls one way and polls the other way, but the question has never been put to the vote. We have never given all Scots an opportunity to engage in a debate on that issue alone and to put an X in a box to state their preference. Why are the Executive parties against giving people that opportunity? Because, they say, more constitutional wrangling would produce conflict and chaos.

Let us remember that Labour's suggestion that any Executive that sought to open a dialogue with Westminster about reserved issues would bring about conflict and chaos came in the same week that its Minister for Education and Young People, in a very welcome intervention, added his voice to the general outcry against the dawn raids that families in Glasgow are living in fear of. Mr Henry finds it possible to engage with London on a reserved matter, calling for a change to UK asylum policy, and the Executive has done so on other issues as well. However, we are asked to believe that any future Executive that did the same thing and engaged with London on reserved issues would spark off conflict and chaos. I find that to be a difficulty with the Labour position.

The Conservative amendment seeks to restore the motion to its original form. I do not believe that that is due to the Conservative team suffering from the same clerical problems as the Executive team; I think that the Conservatives are making a different point. Either way, their amendment is a slight improvement on the motion as it stands and is supportable. Even some on the Executive benches might think that in their heart of hearts.

One aspect that always puzzles me about the Conservatives' position is that, although theirs is the one party that goes to the polls with the word "unionist" in its title, the fact that they have not won an election in a wee while is politely not mentioned. No one takes that as a rejection of the—[*Interruption.*] If members do not want to hear the argument, they can carry on shouting. No one takes the Conservative result in a general election as a rejection of the union itself—and rightly so, as voters have so many other reasons to reject Conservative candidates. We do not take an election result as a referendum on a specific issue.

Phil Gallie: The Conservatives won elections consecutively and stayed in office for 18 years with the word "unionist" right at the helm. We are going to outface Labour on that point.

Patrick Harvie: I said that the Conservatives had not won an election for a wee while—that is all.

I want to move on to the Liberal position—I was going to throw in a few other adjectives, but I will restrain myself. The Liberals are open to bringing more powers to Holyrood and to the renegotiation of the current settlement, even proposing a fundamentally new framework of federalism within which that might operate. If anyone else in the UK wanted federalism, that one might even fly. However, they remain utterly closed to the one overriding point of principle, insisting that the only people who should be excluded from the debate are those outside the chamber—the rest of the Scottish population. The Liberal Democrats argue that it is the political parties, and not the public through a referendum, who should determine Scotland's constitutional future.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): That is rubbish. We live in a representative parliamentary democracy. On 3 May, the people of Scotland have the chance to vote for Patrick Harvie's party, the SNP or the Scottish Socialist Party, all of which advocate independence. That will be the voice of the people—Patrick Harvie should not misrepresent our position.

Patrick Harvie: As the Green party amendment points out, a parliamentary election is fought on a range of issues, on which people will vote as they see fit. Their motives are their own, not those that we as politicians ascribe to them.

In the election in May, some will vote for a change of Government because they are thinking about personalities, attitude and style of government, weapons of mass destruction or getting their bins emptied. Others will vote for a continuation of the Liberal-Labour status quo but be open to the idea of independence, merely placing it further down their list of priorities. The

election is not a verdict on any one issue, and nor should it be. It is a judgment on individual MSPs, candidates and party programmes in their totality.

That is why independence is an issue to be settled by referendum. I wish only that at least one party that supports the status quo was willing to put its arguments to the test and face the Scottish public on that issue—and that issue alone—in a referendum.

I move amendment S2M-5779.4, to leave out from “the United Kingdom” to end and insert:

“all political parties receive electoral support from people with a range of views on the constitution; considers therefore that the constitutional future of Scotland is a matter best decided by the people of Scotland through a referendum; believes that, regardless of the constitutional future chosen by the people of Scotland, there is a strong case for devolving power from government to local communities throughout Scotland, and considers that government in Scotland, whether under the current devolved arrangements or in an independent future, can do far more to empower communities than has been done to date.”

09:54

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP): The Executive's case for the union consists of three elements, essentially. It says that the union provides political stability, security for Scotland in an uncertain world and continuing economic prosperity. I want to consider those three elements, which the minister has mentioned.

First, I will deal with stability. According to recent opinion polls, David Cameron's Tories are 15 percentage points ahead of Labour. That was before yesterday's budget con. In yesterday's budget, Gordon Brown took from the poor and gave to the rich. He reduced corporation tax to 28p in the pound—it was 52p in the pound under Tony Blair's predecessor, Mrs Thatcher. A Tory victory at Westminster would be for Scottish political stability what the hyperinflation of the Weimar republic was for fiscal stability. The famous democratic deficit that led to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament will not go away. Scotland voted against Phil Gallie and the Tories for 18 years but was lumbered with them, and the Tories used Scotland as a kind of Gruinard island to try out their political anthrax—the poll tax, with all its accompanying problems. Imagine there being a Tory Government at Westminster and an anti-Tory majority at Holyrood. The word “stability” does not spring to mind.

The motion states:

“devolution ‘is a process, not an event’”.

Devolution is a process that Tony Blair conceded against his instincts in order to prevent full-scale independence. One is reminded of the words of

Lord George Robertson—the Rambo of NATO—who opined that devolution would kill off independence for a generation. He was wrong again. The issue of independence will return with a vengeance if David Cameron wins the next Westminster election.

The second reason that the Executive has given for Scotland remaining in the United Kingdom is that doing so provides security for Scotland in an uncertain world. However, the truth is that Scotland provides the United Kingdom with a militarism that we do not want. We have the Faslane nuclear weapons base and Scottish regiments fighting in foreign wars under UK direction and Scotland is an arms manufacturing base. Who protects the world from Britain? What must the world think of Britain after last Wednesday's vote on Trident at Westminster? We threaten the world with nuclear annihilation and we have troops in Afghanistan and involved in the illegal occupation of Iraq. We have form in invading other countries. It is to our shame that Scotland is implicated in such threats and slaughter.

The third reason that the Executive has put forward in support of Scotland remaining in the United Kingdom is that we have had continuing economic prosperity under the union. Tell that to the men of Calton in east Glasgow, whose life expectancy is less than that of people in Afghanistan. Tell it to the children who live in absolute poverty—there are 270,000 of them, according to the Child Poverty Action Group. Tell it to the 800,000 people in Scotland who are low paid.

The Executive's motion deals with economic prosperity. It states that independence would

“result in either cuts in vital public services or massive increases in taxation”.

That jumped out at me. I thought of Gordon Brown standing in front of the Parliament at Westminster, increasing taxes for working people and ensuring that there will be massive cuts in vital public services. Hideous, ulcerous inequality blights Scottish society, but the most effective measures to combat it are reserved. Labour will not lift Scottish kids out of poverty while there is much more of it south of the border. There is the rub. In our wealthy country, we watch helplessly as the levers for addressing endemic and chronic poverty are outwith our reach.

The Executive talks about additional powers for the Parliament. My goodness me, we need such powers. However, it does not talk about the power to stop nuclear power stations that we do not want being foisted on us, the power to stop asylum legislation that is wholly at odds with Scottish public opinion, the power to stop Trident or the

power to stop our soldiers being sent to fight in Iraq. The Parliament does not have enough power to make the changes that we want to make.

I hope that everybody in Scotland who is in favour of independence accepts that the issue is a democratic issue. A majority may be opposed to independence at the moment, but the job of those who, like me, support independence is to persuade our fellow Scots that we would be better off if Scotland were independent. We must persuade them of the case for independence. In that context, I take comfort from the fact that although support for independence goes up and down, the figures reveal time and again that there is an unmistakable underlying trend in favour of it. I also take comfort from the fact that support for independence is far clearer and more profound among younger Scots and working-class Scots.

In trying to persuade our fellow Scots to support independence, we must ensure that we persuade them that the vast majority of people will be materially better off with all our revenues at our disposal. That is what an independent Scotland means to me. An independent Scotland would take cognisance of the views of the majority of Scots. The majority of the people of this country want to scrap the hated council tax, prescription charges and Trident. They want to be non-nuclear, to have free school meals provided and to have wealth redistributed. They want the rich to pay higher taxes, not lower, and they want our Scottish soldiers to be removed from Iraq. We know that to be the political centre of gravity of the people of Scotland. The case for independence is the case for making the vast majority of Scots better off economically, socially, culturally and politically.

However, by quoting big business as they do, my co-supporters of independence in the SNP risk the demobilisation of independence supporters. By promising big business a corporation tax rate of 12p in the pound, they send a vision of a different kind of Scotland from that which the vast majority of people want to see. The SSP's vision of an independent Scotland is a modern democratic republic that is free from the antiquated feudal relics of the past—a peace-loving Scotland, not a warmongering Scotland. We want a Scotland that is socially just and whose priorities are not those of speculators such as Brian Souter, Tom Farmer and George Mathewson, but those of our children. We are currently 21st out of 21 in the United Nations Children's Fund's league table of deprivation. We also want a Scotland that is multicultural and proud of it, which welcomes those who come here and choose to invest their lives and talents here alongside the talents of our people.

Scots are neither better than nor inferior to other nations; we simply want the right to make our own

decisions. In my view, the break-up of the British state would be a progressive development for Scotland and the world—a world that we threaten daily with nuclear weapons, now and for the next 50 years; a world in which we invade other sovereign nations without reason; and a world in which we have the fifth-biggest arms manufacturer, which is virtually the only volume manufacturer that we have any more. For me, independence is a giant stride towards liberation from all that.

I move amendment S2M-5779.1, to leave out from “is a mutually beneficial relationship” to end and insert:

“thwarts Scotland's economic, social, cultural and political development; believes that Scotland would be better off if it were independent from the UK; believes that an independent Scotland would remove Trident nuclear weapons from the Clyde, scrap the hated council tax and prescription charges and redistribute the great wealth of Scotland to address widening inequalities and would never have agreed to send Scottish soldiers to fight a war in Iraq that is considered by many to be illegal; believes that Scots have the same democratic rights to self-determination as the people of any other country, and looks forward to a Scotland that is independent, socially just and internationalist in its outlook.”

10:02

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I am happy to support the amendment in Margaret Curran's name, noting the respective positions of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties on the powers of the Parliament.

A hundred and twenty years ago, the Scottish Home Rule Association published in the *Scottish Review* a paper entitled “The Union of 1707 Viewed Financially”. In that paper, the authors wrote:

“During last Session of the House of Commons ... the First Lord of the Treasury, discussing an estimate for expenditure incurred in connection with the defence of the Egyptian frontier, stated that the Government came to the conclusion that only a portion of this expenditure had been incurred with the authority of the ‘representatives of England’ in Egypt, and that for certain reasons the ‘English Government’ had not called upon the Egyptian Government to pay the sum. The member for Caithness thereupon put the pertinent question, ‘Where is this English Government the right honourable gentleman has spoken of?’”

Today, the frontiers may be those of Afghanistan and Iraq, not Egypt, but it is equally frustrating when “English” is substituted for “British” and it will continue to be frustrating even with the Scottish First Lord of the Treasury proudly claiming that “we” won the world cup in 1966. Nevertheless, such frustration is not the reason to break up the United Kingdom, nor will it ever pass.

As someone who was born on the border and now represents a borderland constituency that has more in common with north Northumberland,

where many of my former constituents merrily raided and murdered, I am frustrated when I see a Scottish Government funding displays of Scottish culture that is almost exclusively from the Highlands. I have nothing against my Highland colleagues, but Scotland has more than one part just as the United Kingdom has more than one part. The question that will face the people of Scotland in the years to come is what relationship Scotland has with its nearest neighbour.

A hundred and ten years after the Scottish Home Rule Association published its paper, the Labour Government published a white paper putting in train the formal procedure that set up the Scottish Parliament. The white paper did not go far enough, though, and the Liberal Democrat-led Steel commission, which provided the most authoritative review of the fiscal and legislative powers of the Parliament since devolution, came to some radical conclusions. It recommended, broadly, that the funds expended by the Parliament should be raised under the authority of the Parliament, which would mean a transfer of tax and fiscal powers commensurate with our legislative powers. Such a major shift would not only strengthen this institution but provide for a more federal approach to the United Kingdom. The structural flaw in our current devolution arrangements is that the expenditure that all parties will promise in the forthcoming election will be from revenues that are set by the Westminster Parliament. That is not sustainable.

Perhaps an alternative approach is independence, but not a week goes by without a different form of independence being promoted by the SNP. Mr Morgan's colleague who is at the top of the SNP's list for the South of Scotland—she will also contest my constituency—wants a republican, socialist, independent Scotland that, she said last week, should be outside the euro.

The second candidate on the SNP's South of Scotland list published a book last year in which he recommended a new union, in which the British Government would have only the minor powers of foreign affairs and defence. However, those are the very subjects on which the SNP has focused most of its debates over the past four years. In Mr Russell's view, the British Government should still have powers over foreign affairs and the military and the Queen should also be retained. I understand that the proofs of Mr Russell's book were returned to him with annotations from Mr Salmond. Some paragraphs—although not many—were annotated with "RH", meaning "relatively harmless". A few paragraphs had "D" for "dangerous". However, the book was peppered with "VD", meaning "very dangerous".

Mr MacAskill has suggested that UK agencies such as the Driver Vehicle and Licensing Agency

should still have responsibility for Scotland's cars. Most bizarre of all—

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): If the member wishes to quote me, he should quote me accurately. I said that some of those responsibilities could be shared, but Scotland would still have an opportunity to direct matters. Rather than simply accept what was dictated, we would have the opportunity to contribute to giving the directions. That would be power.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): You must be quick.

Mr MacAskill: Whether the agency is located in Bangalore or Swansea is another matter, but the issue is about control. It seems that Jeremy Purvis would prefer Scotland not to have any control.

Jeremy Purvis: I apologise, as the member has just given us a fourth option providing a different model for independence. The SNP seems to be on a roll.

Best of all, Alex Salmond has said that Scotland's fiscal policies should be set by the Bank of England. It is fair to point out that the Bank of England was set up by a Scot in 1694, but it is curious that the SNP leader believes that an independent Scotland today should have its fiscal policy determined by the Bank of England.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jeremy Purvis: No, I do not have time. When Mr Mather makes an intervention, the managementspeak never stops.

Alex Salmond will never be able to explain why the only powers that the Chancellor of the Exchequer of an independent Scotland would have would be to write a letter to the Bank of England about the interest rates that were set in Scotland. How bizarre—

Jim Mather *rose*—

Jeremy Purvis: Mr Salmond claims that the situation would be only temporary until we entered the euro. However, the Bank of England would set the Scottish interest rate before we got into the euro. That is an absurd proposition. Mr Mather might as well sit down.

Even if the SNP has decided what type of independence it wants, it needs to be honest with the electorate about what type of economy it proposes. On the one hand, the SNP proposes an Irish fiscal model, with low corporation tax. On the other hand, it says that it wants a Scandinavian social model, with perhaps 10 per cent more taxation. The SNP has not decided either what type of independence it wants or what type of economy it wants.

In 1945, George Orwell wrote:

"Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism. ... Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality."

Our aspirations go beyond national units. The future challenges that face our children in Scotland and elsewhere in the world require this institution and other institutions around the world to work together. We need to cede some of our sovereignty and pool some of our power to work with others around the world.

I am a patriotic and passionate Borderer, but I also know that this Parliament must develop, with more powers and responsibilities. However, we must realise that we have a shared burden and shared opportunities within the UK, with the UK and with the rest of the world.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come now to open debate. I will not be able to call all the members whose names are on my screen, but we will see what we can get through.

10:09

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I will focus my remarks on one of the issues that Scotland holds most dear—its education system. As we in the chamber all know, the Scottish education system has flourished while Scotland has been part of the United Kingdom over the past 300 years.

The politics of grudge and grievance typified by the SNP portrays Scotland as having been held back as part of the union, which somehow does not allow us freedom and diversity and which suffocates us. We all know that education has been vital to Scotland's success and will remain so in the future. Education is just one of the many areas in which Scotland has distinctive approaches to policy within a strong United Kingdom. Far from being held back by the union that the SNP so despises, we are supported by it in what we do.

We have the best of both worlds in Scotland. We are part of a strong union for those purposes that suit our national interests and yet we are free to determine our own policies and approaches across the widest range of issues. That is the deal that was put to the Scottish people in 1997 and overwhelmingly supported by the people. It is the deal that all the evidence shows the Scottish people want to maintain. The people rightly see no need to take ourselves out of possibly the most successful political union in history, which has let us flourish. The union is not rigid or inflexible but has evolved and will evolve further.

Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Peter Peacock: I am very short of time. I am afraid that I will not take any interventions.

Never more so than under a Labour Government have we demonstrated the flexibility of the union through the delivery of this Parliament and home rule for Scotland. It is perhaps the prime example of a union that is capable of adapting, recognising diversity and remaining united at the same time.

Nowhere is that clearer than in the field of education. Scotland has developed a distinctive education system; distinctive comprehensive schools; a distinctive way of training and inducting teachers; a distinctive and much-admired school inspection system that is the envy of the world; a distinctive rigorous and high-standard exam system that is also the envy of the world; distinctive approaches to supporting those with additional support needs; distinctive approaches to the curriculum; distinctive approaches to enterprise education; distinctive approaches to our four-year university degree; and distinctive approaches to student fees. I could go on and on. Those are all examples of where Scotland, within the union, has been supported to develop and meet our priorities. No ambition has been thwarted or limited by the union, but rather the reverse—ambition has been liberated by the union and the fiscal transfers that we get to support our education system.

The break-up of Britain offers education no advantage whatsoever—in fact, quite the opposite. The break-up of Britain that is planned by the SNP threatens our education system, just as it threatens every other aspect of our national life. It means disruption and uncertainty and a huge fiscal deficit that would threaten our spending levels and divert attention from what we must do to what we do not need to do at all.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Peter Peacock: I am afraid that I cannot; I have only another minute left.

While Labour would introduce an education bill in the first 100 days of the new session, the SNP would introduce a bill to start the break-up of Britain. While Labour would deploy every working hour of our civil service in building up Scottish education, the SNP would use every working hour planning punch-ups with Westminster. While Labour would build new schools, the SNP would see to it that the skills and jobs to deliver those new schools moved south to England where the work would continue. While Labour would establish new skills academies in Scotland, the SNP would deprive our skilled Scottish athletes of

the ability to win medals as part of UK Olympic teams—what a priority. While Labour would raise the school leaving age, the SNP would lower school budgets. While Labour would give more priority to science and languages, the SNP would introduce a new tax on work and savings.

No matter how cuddly the SNP tries to appear or how much it tries to play down its independence obsession, the SNP does not come without independence and independence does not come without a cost. Scotland deserves much better.

Scotland deserves much better than the SNP, a party without a single original thought about education. Scotland can continue to see education strengthened; it can do so within the United Kingdom supported by the United Kingdom, just as it has done over the past 300 years. The choice is clear: schools with Labour or separation with the SNP.

As we speak, the people of Gordon are preparing to reject Alex Salmond as their future MSP. I believe firmly that the people of Scotland more widely will reject him too. When they do that, they will help us to build Scotland, not break up Britain.

10:14

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Peter Peacock argues for Scottish solutions to Scottish problems in education, but I do not understand why a policy of finding Scottish solutions to Scottish problems is appropriate for education, health, housing and justice, but not for the economy, tax policy, social security policy, defence, foreign affairs and all the rest of it.

There was one sentence in Margaret Curran's opening speech with which I entirely agree. She said that we in Scotland should work in partnership with the rest of our neighbours in the United Kingdom. I agree 100 per cent, but the question is what the nature of that partnership should be. Should we continue with a partnership in which Scotland is subservient to London or should we pursue a partnership in which our status is equal to that of London? The word "partnership" was not used anywhere in Margaret Curran's speech in relation to the European Union. The reality is that we are not just part of a political union called the United Kingdom; we are also part of a much bigger union—a political and economic European Union that now encompasses 500 million people. Our relationship with London must be based on our relationship with the EU.

Ms Curran: One aspect of the SNP's position that has always intrigued me is that it seems to be extremely comfortable with all the other international unions such as the United Nations and the EU. Why, then, does the union that is

closest to home and which benefits us most cause the SNP such grief?

Alex Neil: One reason why is that our being part of the UK has resulted in one in four of our children living in poverty. After 10 years of a Labour Government in London, eight years of a Lib-Lab pact in Edinburgh and 300 years of the union, child poverty in Scotland is 10 times the level of child poverty in Denmark, for example. After 10 years of the Labour Government, child poverty in Scotland is four times higher than it was under Harold Wilson. That is the measure of the record of the union and of Labour in London and Edinburgh.

Ms Curran: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Neil: No—I have already taken one.

The main thrust of my remarks is the EU. We now have three centres of power: Edinburgh, London and Brussels. All the other successful small countries in Europe, including Sweden, Finland, Ireland and Austria, have control over their own affairs when it comes to macroeconomic management, defence policy, foreign policy and all the rest of it.

Phil Gallie: Will the member give way on that point?

Alex Neil: I will give way in a minute.

If we look at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development table for the 10 richest nations in the world—

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): The UK is up there.

Alex Neil: The UK is not up there—it is 17th on the list. I would have thought that the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning would have known such facts.

Eight of the 10 richest OECD nations are small countries that are similar in size to Scotland, and many of them have nowhere near the quantity of natural resources that we have. Why is it that even though we have vast natural resources—not just oil and gas, but many others—our economy and our society have been mismanaged to such an extent that the level of child poverty is so high? That is not to mention the fact—to pick up on what Christine May said—that a fifth of our pensioners in Scotland are also living in poverty.

Phil Gallie: The member referred to a number of small countries in the EU that have control over their economies, foreign affairs and so on. I understand that the nationalists support the European constitution, but if those countries sign up to the constitution, surely they will lose those powers?

Alex Neil: The SNP did not support the final draft of the EU constitution because it would have given the House of Lords more control over Scottish fishing than this democratically elected Parliament would have had. There were many other reasons why we were very critical of the constitution's final draft.

We should not listen to Geoff Hoon—he is a buffoon. Instead, we should listen to Eamonn Gallagher and Emile Noël, former directors-general of the EU, who have made the legal and political position clear beyond any doubt: if the people of Scotland vote for independence, we will automatically and without further negotiation become a member state of the European Union. Let us in this election campaign put an end to the scaremongering and nonsense and start telling the truth.

10:21

Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): When I was growing up in Glasgow, my late father, who was born about a century ago, told me cautionary tales of the general strike, the depression and life's daily struggles before Labour Governments introduced the welfare state and brought in full employment. As he regarded crime as being mostly economically motivated, he found the sporadic teenage gang violence of the relatively prosperous 1960s incomprehensible.

When, at the age of 15, I decided to leave school, I had my pick of apprenticeships. I took full employment for granted in the 1960s. Back then, youth disorder was not so prevalent as to interest me politically; I was more interested in international issues such as the Vietnamese revolution. In fact, I thought that by 1970 we would have had a revolution here. Instead, the Tories won the general election. Ted Heath tried to move away from full employment, but the miners who went on strike, the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders workers who staged a work-in and, ultimately, the electorate in 1974 had different ideas. By then, I well understood the importance of full employment. However, I had also become interested in home rule—an interest that I shared for a time with Alex Neil, with whom I briefly marched under the leadership of his mentor, Jim Sillars. I have to say that, when I see the relatively full employment that we have under the home rule of today, I wonder about the bitterness in Alex Neil that blinds him to reality.

After the fall of the Heath Government, Harold Wilson and then Jim Callaghan struggled against inflation and for full employment. However, Callaghan's proposed home-rule legislation was scrapped after the failure of a disgracefully rigged referendum, which was held 28 years ago this month.

The SNP then helped to bring down that Labour Government and ushered in the long dark night of Thatcherism. In 1981 alone, 40,000 people in my beloved home town of Glasgow lost their jobs. Tory initiatives such as the youth opportunities programme, the youth training scheme and the community programme merely disguised the true level of unemployment.

Alex Neil: Has it escaped Charlie Gordon's notice that we would never have had Thatcher had we been independent?

Mr Gordon: I have a good memory, and everything that I have recalled in this chamber is true—I can even remember the days when Alex Neil was a socialist.

When the Tories dropped the pretence and stopped disguising the unemployment figures—

Colin Fox: Will the member give way?

Mr Gordon: No—I do not often get a chance to say these things.

A Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer asserted that unemployment was a price that was well worth paying for low inflation. The Tories were not worried about the social consequences; after all, it was Margaret Thatcher who said:

"There is no such thing as society."

However, Scotland today still lives with the social consequences of Thatcherism. The teenagers of 1981 who were given no jobs, no chances and—worst of all—no hope by the Tories are now in their early 40s. They are the parents of today's teenagers, but many of them never accessed the collective discipline and respect that full employment helps to nurture—that gap shows in their parenting. They are Thatcher's children, and their teenage offspring, some of whom terrorise their neighbours, are Thatcher's grandchildren. Despite full employment and home rule, many Scots teenagers cling to a nihilism that manifests itself along a spectrum of noise, vandalism, intimidation and terrifying violence.

Inflation is a quarter of what it was 10 years ago when Labour took office at Westminster. Compared to then, we have 200,000 more jobs in Scotland, 1,000 more police officers on the beat and 500 new community wardens, backed by the raft of new measures in the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004, which the official Opposition in Parliament did not support. Labour is responding to the moral panic that Thatcher's grandchildren have caused in neighbourhoods. We must push on with the aim of full employment, especially for youngsters who are not in education, employment or training. The phrase "Tough on crime; tough on the causes of crime" is not an outdated Blairite soundbite—for us, it is about a moral crusade.

There is much more to do and it will be difficult, but that is what government and building Scotland are about. Government is not the same as gambling. Sure, we could gamble on hard-working families voting to pay five grand a year more in income tax or on turning local government into mere local administration by removing its right to raise finance locally, but cutting council funding by more than £1 billion, perhaps to pay for a million wee windmills at £1,500 a throw, would be a move from the quixotic to the chaotic. Councillors, including SNP councillors, are in the front line in tackling antisocial behaviour. They and their communities will curse the SNP if it abandons the respect agenda and plunges Scotland into the recession that its supporter Crawford Beveridge has predicted, and their children and grandchildren will curse the SNP, too.

10:27

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

Scotland is a great nation of which we should all be proud. Many members have spoken about Scotland's contribution to the world, of which I am immensely proud. Scotland provided the culture that reared and nurtured me and the background that gave me the political philosophy that made me want to become an elected member of Parliament. It is strange that, although we have been given an opportunity to discuss the union, very few members, especially among the Labour and Liberal members who have spoken, have been willing to do that.

Charlie Gordon spoke at length about his early political motivation. I, too, was motivated to get involved in politics back in 1974, when I saw the spectre of an independent Scotland rise with the rising popularity of the SNP. I was still at school then, but that was the first time I argued in debate for the union and against an independent Scotland. Although Scotland has contributed much to the world, it has achieved that within the current constitutional arrangement. The quality of some of the speeches in the debate has therefore been all the more disappointing. Margaret Curran put the union on the agenda—and rightly so, as the debate is a welcome opportunity to do so—but she then spoke about anything but the union. She sought to hitch together inseparably the Executive's record with the union.

Ms Curran: Perhaps the member misunderstood me. I was trying to make the case for devolution within the union. I am obliged to point out the successes of devolution, although Alex Johnstone does not like me to do so.

Alex Johnstone: By harnessing the Executive's record to the future of the union, Ms Curran puts the union at risk in a way that she does not understand.

We must understand that the Conservative and Unionist Party in the Parliament accepts devolution. I was out there campaigning against devolution and I voted against it, but I believe in the future of the union and in the current constitutional arrangements as the best way to achieve it. What does Labour contribute to the debate? Labour contributes a suggestion that there is rigidity in the current constitutional arrangements, that there is to be no further flexibility and that its record and the performance of the devolved settlement are inseparable. It makes the next election not a referendum on Scottish independence but a referendum on its record, and it seeks to take the union down with it. I cannot accept that.

What is the alternative? The alternative that Margaret Curran and I are equally afraid of is the Scottish National Party that sits opposite us. The minister suggested in her opening speech that the SNP seeks to make everything a constitutional issue. What evidence is there to support that? Every time the SNP speaks in Parliament, it seeks to make everything a constitutional issue. Almost every motion that is lodged by the SNP—even the ones that sound reasonably sensible—contains a bit at the end that suggests that everything would be better in an independent Scotland, without producing much evidence to support that.

The commonsense attitudes that are portrayed by certain members of the SNP are simply a smokescreen. On the SNP front bench today we see people such as John Swinney and Alasdair Morgan. I even see—sitting behind them, on one of his rare visits at such occasions—Jim Mather. All those men are capable of making sensible statements on some economic issues. Behind them, though, when they make those statements, sit row upon row of socialists who would, given the opportunity, drag Scotland down. If they make the electoral breakthrough that they seek to achieve, there will be more of them for us to worry about. Scotland is a nation that must concentrate on wealth creation, on partnerships, and how best to achieve all that we wish to achieve, regardless of our political persuasion.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member explain what is so different about Scotland that we have to depend on another nation for our economic well-being?

Alex Johnstone: That is exactly the point that I was about to make. Even today, there is no nation in the world that seeks to stand alone—partnership is the way in which nations achieve their aims and objectives. They enter partnerships on a military basis, on a political basis and on an economic basis. I believe that Britain belongs in the European Union and that Scotland has its role within that. Scotland was a pioneer in forming

economic relationships with its neighbours. The union of the United Kingdom is the strongest economic relationship between two countries in history. It is important that we remember that that key relationship and the political structures that underpin it are vital to the well-being of Scotland's people, and will continue to be so. We must be prepared to defend that at every opportunity.

10:33

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): It is worth reflecting that only 10 short years ago, Michael Forsyth was Scotland's premier politician. If anyone cares to examine what it means for rural or island Scotland to have a Labour Government at Westminster and two unionist parties leading this Administration in Edinburgh, they need only examine the transformation in the fortunes of those of us who live and work in the Western Isles. In 1997, unemployment in the Western Isles stood at more than 12 per cent. That depressing figure has been massively reduced as our economy ever improves.

For centuries, highlanders sought to dismantle the iniquitous system of land ownership that suffocated communities, stifled development and encouraged mass emigration. With the election of a Labour Government on 1 May 1997, and the creation of this Parliament, a blueprint for land reform was taken forward and converted into the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003—an excellent piece of much-needed legislation—and an aspiration that straddled three centuries was finally realised.

Today, 70 per cent of the Western Isles' population live in community-owned estates—communities where homes are being built and businesses are being located. At last, after centuries in which we prepared the best and brightest people for emigration, islanders are turning what were sadly desolate parts of Scotland into vibrant living communities. That did not happen by chance—it was delivered by people making positive and conscious electoral decisions in favour of my party and other parties that are committed to delivering improvement and are not obsessed with the break-up of the United Kingdom.

The same encouraging account can be given of the education system in the Western Isles. Historically, we used on average to build a new school in the islands every 15 years. Under Peter Peacock, this Administration sanctioned a £52 million school building and refurbishment programme, which is being implemented by Hugh Henry. Every parent, teacher and pupil should appreciate that investment, which the separatists would halt.

With the successful transfer of our council housing stock to community ownership, we are witnessing the beginning of the biggest housebuilding programme in the Hebrides since the programme that was commissioned in the 1940s and 1950s by the then Ministry of Works.

Investment in our health service is equally impressive. Islanders and other people in rural Scotland are receiving more services that can safely be delivered closer to home. A week on Saturday, the first dialysis unit in the Western Isles will open in Stornoway. No longer will patients have to spend the week in Inverness, away from their families, for life-saving treatment.

It is important that our transportation links have been greatly improved—it helps to have a First Minister and a Minister for Transport who are both islanders. We have two new direct air links—between Benbecula and Inverness, and between Stornoway and Aberdeen. The Administration has delivered a 40 per cent air-discount scheme for all island residents—a scheme that the separatists opposed. Last week the First Minister pledged that the Administration that he will lead after the election will offer the same discount to Scottish island residents travelling by ferry.

Phil Gallie: Alasdair Morrison paints a picture of a land of milk and honey in the Western Isles and says that nationalism does not work, so why have people in the Western Isles elected a nationalist member to Westminster?

Mr Morrison: Such are the ups and downs of politics. I am painting a picture of the reality of 10 years of a Labour Government at Westminster and eight years of unionist parties leading the Administration here at Holyrood. That has transformed life and work for many islanders in the Western Isles and people throughout rural Scotland.

The level of investment and change that we have realised has helped to stem population decline. For two consecutive years, the population of the Western Isles has increased—the first time that has happened since the early 1970s. Our economy is no longer in crisis: it is being assisted by old-fashioned intervention and favourable macroeconomic conditions, which are leading the private sector to create and locate more work and jobs in rural and island Scotland.

However, the massive shift in our fortunes is endangered by the corrosive spectre of separation and the constitutional quagmire into which Alex Salmond and his merry band desperately want to take us. If we look around the world, we soon appreciate that separatist movements are always flag-waving, border-obsessed movements. The Scottish separatists are no different. All separatist movements define and measure themselves

against other people—they need a bogeyman. For the Scottish separatists, England and Westminster are the bogeyman. Their leadership may pretend that they never espouse such politics, but at the end of the day we know that anti-Englishness galvanises many of the separatists and SNP activists. That is the bottom line. Many nationalists are happier discussing the battles of the 14th century than they are preparing Scotland's young for the challenges of the global economy. In my view, no one has better described nationalism than Albert Einstein, who rightly said:

"Nationalism is an infantile disease. It is the measles of mankind."

10:39

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The Liberal Democrats are strong supporters of our union with the other nations of the United Kingdom. However, the choice that we face on 3 May is not a simple one, as both Labour and the SNP would have us believe. The Liberal Democrats believe that we face a different choice—not a choice between independence and no change. We believe in firm powers for the Scottish Parliament. We need more control over the levers of power and we cannot continue to be a Parliament that relies on handouts from Westminster. I much preferred the Executive's agreed position yesterday, which acknowledged that we might, where appropriate, increase the powers that are available to our Parliament.

Murdo Fraser: Does that mean that Mr Rumbles will support our amendment, which clearly articulates the position that he is setting out?

Mike Rumbles: We will see. I am a firm believer in listening to all the speeches in a debate.

I have trouble taking seriously the economic scaremongering—perhaps I should just call it silliness—in the motion. It is silly to suggest that independence would lead to "massive increases in taxation". I am sorry, but the Executive has got that wrong. I have no doubt that if the Scottish people chose independence we would continue to be a successful nation. The arguments about independence or union should not focus only on economics. It annoys me tremendously when people argue that if we choose to be independent we will not be successful, either because we are too stupid or because we have been too economically dependent on English handouts. What nonsense.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The member said earlier that Parliament should not rely on English handouts. Is he suggesting that the new

Liberal policy is for the Scottish Parliament to raise taxes?

Mike Rumbles: No. I want the Scottish Parliament to reduce taxes. Labour members like Jackie Baillie talk complete nonsense. We must let the people decide on 3 May.

I wish that members would stop peddling the nonsense that we are not good enough to stand alone if we choose to do so and that we must rely on handouts from south of the border.

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Will the member give way?

Mike Rumbles: In a minute.

The union benefits us all, but Charlie Gordon's claim that under independence we would have to pay £5,000 more in income tax and Scotland would be pushed into a recession is complete nonsense.

Patrick Harvie was critical of the Liberal Democrats' opposition to a referendum on the union with our neighbours. It is not our policy to hold such a referendum. We think that the union with our neighbours is successful. We live in a representative parliamentary democracy and on 3 May the people will have a chance to vote for three parties that are against the union, including Patrick Harvie's party, and three parties that are in favour of the union.

Patrick Harvie: Over the years, Liberal Democrats have advocated various constitutional positions. When did they cease to believe that major constitutional decisions should be taken by referendum?

Mike Rumbles: That was a bizarre intervention. Patrick Harvie does not know his history or his politics—he is rather ignorant of the situation. We have been in favour of home rule since the days of Gladstone. The Liberal Party—our predecessor party—was always at the forefront of the home-rule movement. I must correct Patrick Harvie: we have not changed our position at all and we have never been in favour of such referendums. Patrick Harvie seems to be surprised, but he is completely ignorant of our position over the years. We believe in the representative parliamentary democracy that we have.

Mark Ballard: Will the member take an intervention?

Margo MacDonald: Will the member take an intervention?

Mike Rumbles: I will take an intervention from Margo MacDonald.

Margo MacDonald: I agree with much of what Mike Rumbles has said—

Ms Curran: She does not say that very often.

Margo MacDonald: There is a first time for everything.

Will Mike Rumbles make plain what he believes the benefits of the union are? Some members said that our education depends on the union; others think that our economic success or failure depends on the union. What does he think?

Mike Rumbles: I am stuck for time, so I will be succinct. We benefit more from being together than we would do from being on our own. There are advantages to the union, which include economic benefits, of course.

I will return to the point about a referendum and the decision that is facing us on 3 May. That is crucial to the whole debate. We can dismiss the economic debate as scaremongering, because I believe that the issue is not economics but choice. It is about whether people want to have an independent Scotland. If they want that, they can vote for the three parties that support that on 3 May. If they want to keep the union, they can vote for the three unionist parties whose members are putting themselves forward for election on 3 May.

We in the Liberal Democrats will abide by the decisions of the people on 3 May. I expect the Greens, the socialists and the SNP also to abide by the decisions of the people on 3 May. I believe that the union is a success and that the Scots people will confirm that on 3 May.

10:45

Campbell Martin (West of Scotland) (Ind): The Minister for Parliamentary Business said that she—I think she meant the Labour Party—came to the Parliament to manage devolution. I did not come here to manage devolution, which partly explains why I am sitting here as an independent. Personally, I came here to do the best for the people of Scotland. I do not think that we can achieve the best for the people of Scotland in a devolved, constrained, limited Parliament.

Ms Curran: Will the member take an intervention?

Campbell Martin: No thanks. We have had 300 years of apologists for the British union. We do not need to hear any more.

The people of Scotland have always known their place within the union, because we have always been told our place within the union. The Scots' role has been to be a labour force and, at times of war, cannon-fodder. It is not just British political parties or the British establishment that have kept Scotland in its place within the union; the north-British subsections of the British Labour Party and the other unionist parties, members of which have

spoken in the debate, have conspired to tell the people of Scotland that we are too wee, too poor and too stupid to govern ourselves. That is the reality.

I see one of those members nodding. He agrees that Scots are too wee, too poor and too stupid to govern themselves.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, the member was nodding to my visual signal that he has only five minutes in which to speak.

Campbell Martin: How do you know who I was pointing to, Presiding Officer?

It is not normal for one nation to be governed by another. However, that is the situation today, as this is only a devolved Parliament that is answerable to the Westminster Parliament. This Parliament is totally subservient to the Parliament in London. We need independence because only with independence can we deal with the bread-and-butter issues that affect Scots every day of their lives. The unionist parties have told us that they want the election to be about the bread-and-butter issues, not about constitutional change. I argue that we need that constitutional change to give us the full powers and full resources that we require to deal with the problems affecting Scots today. Without the powers that come only with independence, we will continue to target initiatives at symptoms, rather than at the actual problems.

We know that unionist political parties do not always tell the truth when they are talking about the constitution and independence. Back when the constitutional reality was a Scotland governed directly from London, we were told that devolution would be a leap in the dark and probably would be the end of civilisation as we knew it. That clearly was not true. Now we are told that, if we move to independence, it will be a leap in the dark and probably the end of civilisation as we know it. That, too, is untrue. Then again, unionist parties have a history of not telling the truth.

Charlie Gordon referred to the sweeping to power of the Wilson Government in the mid-1970s and how great that was. I remember that, too. I was a teenager in the mid-1970s, and I remember being told by the then Labour Government that Scotland was an economic basket-case and that we could not stand on our own two feet and govern ourselves.

Margo MacDonald: I was not at school in the mid-1970s; I was in Westminster. I was told by the Chancellor of the Exchequer a few years after that that Scotland was not an economic basket-case, that my case was watertight and that he would oppose me every inch of the way. That was Denis Healey.

Campbell Martin: Denis Healey was the man who said that we were an economic basket-case and could not stand on our own two feet. As I said, unionist political parties do not always tell the truth when they are talking about the constitution.

Dr Gavin McCrone supplied a report to the Labour Government at that time. That Labour Government had told us that Scotland was an economic basket-case and that we were too wee, too poor and too stupid, but it was being told that Scotland could quickly become one of Europe's strongest economies with embarrassingly large tax surpluses. It was also told that oil revenue would

"transform Scotland into a country with a substantial and chronic surplus."

I imagine that that would result from a plague of oil.

British unionist parties have a track record of not telling the truth. The people of Scotland would vote for independence if politicians did not lie to them. Those politicians know that they are lying because they are intelligent people—I clarify that: they are relatively intelligent people. They rush on to "Newsnight Scotland" and Michael Crow's rock around midnight or whatever it is called to tell us that we cannot stand on our own two feet—we are too poor and too stupid. That is not the case.

Why is Scotland—alone among all the nations in the world—unable to stand on its own two feet or to manage its affairs better in its people's interests? Why do unionist political parties have to do Scotland down and scare the people of Scotland away from their democratic right to retake their independence? Roll on the day—it is coming, and members know it—when the people of Scotland retake their independence for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

10:51

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): One of my main motivations for becoming involved in politics and joining the Labour Party was the desire for everyone in the country to have good opportunities in life through an excellent education, comprehensive and modern health provision, and the prospect of stable and rewarding employment. I also became involved in reaction to the devastation that the Thatcher Governments visited on the whole UK.

The motivation for many nationalists to enter politics is to establish Scotland as a separate country. In many cases, that is irrespective of whether they believe that that would be better or worse for individual Scots. The SNP's problem is that not enough of those unconditional nationalists exist for it to achieve its aims, which is why the economic case for and against separatism is a vital part of the debate before the Scottish

parliamentary elections. I disagree with Mike Rumbles about that.

Over the sweep of history, the union has been good for Scotland. Along with the other countries of the UK, Scotland was a driving force of the industrial revolution. Scottish scientists and engineers made a vital contribution to the ideas and ingenuity that made the UK the largest economy in the world.

Even now, the union benefits Scotland and England. As a nation of only 60 million people, the UK is still the fifth-largest economy in the world. Our continued membership of the UK means that Scotland continues to have a strong voice in the G8 and in the European Union.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Bristow Muldoon: I want to make progress.

At times, such as in the 1980s and 1990s, the Tories have devastated whole sections of our economy and abandoned communities. We should not forget the role—of which Charlie Gordon reminded us—that the SNP played in bringing Margaret Thatcher to power.

I will consider Scotland's modern constitutional settlement, and how our economy has developed in the past 10 years and what its prospects are. Scotland has 200,000 more jobs than it had 10 years ago and has one of the highest employment rates in Europe. We have had interest rate stability and economic growth and many sectors in our economy are strong, including finance, tourism, food and drink, life sciences and energy. Key sections of our manufacturing base, such as shipbuilding, benefit from access to the UK's defence expenditure, and much of the customer base for sectors such as finance—which is a Scottish success story—is in other parts of the UK.

Given that successful backdrop, what are the most important measures that we could take to enhance our economic prospects further? The answer is to retain the stable economic framework from which we benefit in the UK and to use the powers that we have under the devolution settlement to continue the programme of improving our people's education and knowledge. In the years to come, the leading component of our public policy should be to drive forward education, whether through improving our basic numeracy and literacy skills, through modern apprenticeships or through developing the internationally renowned research in our universities.

A modern integrated transport system is undoubtedly essential for Scotland's economic prospects. We are at the northern tip of an island that is on Europe's western edge, so if we are to give our economic prospects the best chance, we

should do everything that we can to enhance our connectivity in the UK and with the wider world.

A huge division has opened up between the transport priorities of Labour and the Liberals and those of the SNP. We are committed to major infrastructure improvements—the Edinburgh and Glasgow airport rail links; new and reopening lines such as those from Bathgate to Airdrie and from Stirling to Kincardine; the new tram services in Edinburgh; and the completion of missing parts of our motorway network, such as the M74 extension. Our position should be contrasted with that of the SNP, which has withdrawn its support for the Edinburgh airport rail link and the Edinburgh trams, either because of political expediency or because it knows that the costs of separation will be so high that it will not be able to match the investment in infrastructure to which we are committed.

I turn finally to taxation. Until recently, the SNP supported a local income tax system that would have given working Scots the highest income tax in the UK—it would have been 6.5p in the pound higher. Recently, the party has been trying to distance itself from that policy, but it remains clear that the SNP would either raise income tax by 3p in the pound—alongside its £1 billion of cuts in public services—or impose the full 6.5p increase. Even before we know the full cost of separating Scotland from the UK, it is clear that the existing long list of SNP tax-and-spend policies would result in every Scottish family facing an additional tax bill of £5,000 a year.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member take an intervention?

Bristow Muldoon: I am afraid that I am about to finish, Margo.

Scotland has been doing well in recent years, but because of increasing challenges from other parts of the world we will continue to do well only if we adopt whole-heartedly the skills and knowledge agenda that the First Minister has outlined. The alternative offered by the SNP is years of turmoil and introspection caused by separation from the UK, which would at best be a distraction but would more likely have a hugely detrimental impact on our economic prospects. Unconditional nationalists may want to take that risk, but I do not believe that families in Scotland want to take that chance over their children's future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I express my regrets to the three remaining members who wished to speak in the debate, but we must move to closing speeches.

10:57

Colin Fox: The debate has been interesting—perhaps even memorable. Like other Labour members, the minister claimed in her opening remarks that all Scotland's achievements in the past 300 years were products of the Act of Union 1707. The mind boggles when we think of John Logie Baird, Alexander Graham Bell or Alexander Fleming, and at the thought that when Archie Gemmill scored his goal in Argentina in 1978, the first thing on his mind was, "That's wan for the union!"

Above all, perhaps, the debate was memorable just because Charlie Gordon mentioned the S word, even if it was just a historical reference to a socialist he used to know.

The debate was also interesting in showing that the Conservatives should have taken advantage of the free eye tests that were offered in the Parliament the week before last. Alex Johnstone keeps seeing socialists on the SNP benches.

Mike Rumbles's speech was good. He completely stifled the nonsensical Labour scaremongering about independence. He put the view, fairly, that we should trust the people and let them decide. Democracy is more powerful than any constitution, and on 3 May the people of Scotland will have their say.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member make plain whether he believes that we need a referendum or whether there could be another way of advancing the case, if it is the will of the people? This institution could take the case forward, rather than us having a referendum that would divide the parties along party-political lines and confuse the concepts of independence and the union.

Colin Fox: Last night, Margo MacDonald and I shared a platform at the Edinburgh Tenants Federation hustings. It was a very nice event with eight speakers. A Labour member of the audience pressed Tricia Marwick to say whether, if the SNP won a majority in May, the party would press Gordon Brown to return money to this country. The Labour member was somewhat aghast when I spoke to them later and said, "Of course it should. That's what democracy is. If the SNP has a mandate, it is perfectly entitled to press Gordon Brown to return the money to Scotland and to press the case for independence."

It is inevitable that, in a debate such as this, Labour members will defend the union by saying that they believe that the current constitutional arrangement is the most stable and successful. I respect that point of view, but Labour will get a rude awakening soon with the impact of a Tory Government at Westminster that is in utter conflict with a Scottish Parliament of a different colouration—if I may put it that way.

It is inevitable that Labour and Conservative members will defend the union and that Labour members will defend the Executive's record. That is understandable, but, unfortunately, Labour members are hidebound by the fact that the Executive is entirely constrained by the limits of the devolved process and powers.

I am sure that everybody here knows—even the dogs in the street know—that Labour support is on the slide and that it expects big losses in the elections in May. Labour members have repeated the old story—it was rubbish the first time, but there is nothing wrong with hearing it again—that the SNP voted down the Labour Government in 1979 when Thatcher came to power.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): It is true.

Colin Fox: Yes, of course, but it is typical of Labour members to see the hundreds and thousands but not the cake. The fact is that the Labour Government of 1974 to 1979—I am sure that Bristow Muldoon and Charlie Gordon reflect on this in their saner moments—redistributed wealth from the poor to the rich, which is why it was brought to its knees. The Government of James Callaghan, Harold Wilson and Denis Healey failed because it redistributed the wealth from working people to the rich.

Bristow Muldoon: Does Colin Fox prefer Margaret Thatcher?

Colin Fox: I knew that it would come back to Labour members, now that I have mentioned it. They have remembered that there was a cake. The icing sugar was on the top and the cake was underneath.

Karen Gillon: Will the member give way?

Colin Fox: I am happy to give way now that Labour members have remembered the cake.

Karen Gillon: Does the member think that the 18 years of Tory rule that followed were beneficial to the people of Scotland?

Colin Fox: Of course they were a nightmare, but they were brought about by the failure of the previous Labour Government, which redistributed wealth to the rich. That is why Thatcher got in.

I am confident that, as Campbell Martin said, the demographics are in favour of those who support independence. I am also confident in the ability of the people of Scotland to run their own affairs and I am happy to trust them. I am happy to present the argument that Scotland would be better off if it had revenues of its own to spend—our oil and gas revenues.

I am not a nationalist—I never have been—but an internationalist. I do not claim that Scots are better than anyone else, but neither are we inferior to anyone else. I simply want the same rights for

Scots that I, as a socialist, would extend to everybody else in the world. I have a passion for England. My family is English. I am not anti-English—that is just plain silly, prejudiced, bigoted and ignorant—but I demand national liberation for Scotland from the UK state, which is artificial and designed to suit the British ruling class. Scotland's international reputation is denigrated by its being part of the union. I see an independent Scotland having a far greater standing in the eyes of the peoples of the world.

11:03

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): If today was supposed to be an exercise in nat bashing, as Murdo Fraser demonstrated in his delightful contribution, it went off the rails right at the start. Having heard the debate, if I was a unionist, as Murdo Fraser is, I would share his concerns about the state of the union and its preservation. Murdo Fraser and Alex Johnstone were quite right that the Executive seems to be missing the mood for change. If the defence of the union becomes a defence of the record of the Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive, the union is in a sorry state indeed.

I, like Margo MacDonald, will say something that I find myself saying rarely: Mike Rumbles was absolutely right. This is not a debate about the financial benefits or disbenefits of the union; we have to make a political and philosophical choice about what kind of union we want and what kind of relationship we want with our neighbours. Some of those neighbours are part of the UK; some, such as Ireland, have left the UK; and some, such as Norway, have never been part of the UK.

Listening to the litany of joy from Margaret Curran, one would think that Scotland was a paradise on earth, but Charlie Gordon reminded us of some of the other things that have happened in Scotland—things that Margaret Curran did not mention. He talked about the depression, about unemployment, about the upper Clyde shipworkers and about Ravenscraig. He gave the other side of the story, and explained why things happened. However, he said that we got Thatcherism because of the SNP, and not because of the 1979 election, at which millions of voters rejected the Labour Party and voted for other parties. I find his view bizarre.

Ms Curran: I am intrigued by Mark Ballard's analysis. He referred to Charlie Gordon's illustration of the experience of mass unemployment, but surely Mark Ballard would concede that one of the biggest successes in Scotland is our record levels of employment, with people back in work. Does he begrudge our being proud of that?

Mark Ballard: There has been a great increase in employment, but far too many jobs are low paid, and we still have the problem of the working poor.

Alex Neil: There has been some improvement, but does the member agree that, after 10 years of Labour Government, there are still 180,000 people in Scotland who are fit, able and willing to work but who cannot find jobs in Scotland?

Mark Ballard: That is a valid point from Alex Neil, which complements his previous point that 23 per cent of Scottish children still grow up in poverty. They do not grow up in the earthly paradise that Margaret Curran talked about.

We need a proper debate on our constitutional future. Mike Rumbles made the odd comment that the Liberal Democrats have never believed in referendums. Is this the same Mike Rumbles who stood in Aberdeen North in 1997 on a Liberal Democrat manifesto that said that the Liberal Democrats would give people more say in decision making? The manifesto stated:

"We will make greater use of national referendums for constitutional issues, for example, changing the voting system or any further transfer of power to European institutions."

The Liberal Democrats' federal manifesto in 2001 called for referendums on the euro and on the Jenkins commission. In their 2005 manifesto they called for a referendum on the European constitution. If it is right to hold referendums on the euro, the European constitution and the Jenkins report on proportional representation, why is it not right to hold a referendum to decide Scotland's constitutional future?

Karen Gillon: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Ballard: No. I am running out of time.

I turn to opinion poll data and how and why people vote. An ICM Research poll in November asked Scots whether they believed in independence in Europe. Fifty-two per cent of Labour voters said that they did not, but 43 per cent of Labour voters said that they did, and 80 per cent of SNP voters supported independence in Europe, but 17 per cent rejected it. In fact, more Labour respondents than SNP respondents supported independence in Europe, because people do not vote only on constitutional issues. The election is about far more than that. It is also about other issues, such as climate change and poverty.

If we want to decide the constitutional future of our nation, the best way to do so, as democrats, is through a referendum, which would answer the questions about distractions, because it would settle the matter. Whatever our position on the union, we are democrats, and a referendum would

enable us to make a decision on the future of the union. That is why I urge members, whatever their position on the union, to support the Green party's amendment at decision time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I call Jim Wallace. Mr Wallace, I can give you 10 minutes.

11:09

Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD): Deputy Speaker, this has been a lively debate—one might think that an election was in the offing.

I am delighted to wind up for the Liberal Democrats in support of a motion that expressly encourages me to set out the Liberal Democrat position. I thank Margaret Curran for her generosity in conceding time to me to make what will be my last speech in the Parliament, eight years after being elected as the member of the Scottish Parliament for Orkney and 24 years on from having been elected as the member of Parliament for Orkney and Shetland.

It greatly saddens me that, while I have this opportunity for a swansong, family tragedy has again cruelly intervened in the life of our colleague Dennis Canavan, who has indicated that he will not be with us again as a member. I am sure that I speak for members throughout the chamber in expressing sincere condolences on his sad loss. *[Applause.]* I have known Dennis since I entered the House of Commons in 1983. We have not always agreed, but to me and many others he has exemplified much of what is the best in being a parliamentarian.

A number of speakers have referred to formative political experiences. Forty-one years ago next week, on the eve of the 1966 general election, my father took me to my first ever political meeting, in my home town of Annan. He had recognised my interest in the election, and I recall him saying that he would take me to the Liberal candidate's eve-of-poll meeting, because it would be safe—there would not be many people there. *[Laughter.]* In fact, I think that the attendance was about the same as the number of people who I understand turned out in the same town earlier this month to hear Alex Salmond. My father was right—there were not many people there.

I am pleased that both my parents are in the gallery this morning, my father possibly reflecting on just how safe it was to take me to that meeting. My abiding memory was of the articulate case that the Liberal candidate Roy Semple made for a Scottish parliament within the United Kingdom. It made sound common sense to me, even at that young age, for Scotland to enjoy the benefits of a strong union with our neighbours while taking responsibility within Scotland for our own domestic affairs.

I am proud to stand here today in the Liberal tradition—the tradition of Gladstone, Asquith, Jo Grimond, Russell Johnston and David Steel, all of whom argued the case for Scottish home rule within the United Kingdom. In 1999, I was privileged to lead the Scottish Liberal Democrats into this democratic Scottish Parliament, for which as a party we had campaigned so long.

Perhaps it is because I was brought up so close to Scotland's border with England that I am instinctively repelled by the idea of erecting new barriers with our neighbours. That is in addition to the strong arguments against an independence case that is based on extravagant promises whose figures do not add up and will be met, as Angus Robertson has had the grace to admit, only by raising the tax burden in Scotland. In a global age, when young students in America can be tutored in algebra online by a teacher in India, why would we want to recreate a nation state of the 19th century, let alone the 14th century?

That does not mean that we are not proud of our Scottish culture and heritage. Of course I am—my surname resonates in Scotland's history. However, as George Black's "The Surnames of Scotland" points out, the name Wallace was possibly originally that of some who came from Shropshire as vassals of the Stewarts or alternatively were descendents of the northern Welsh who moved to Strathclyde. That testifies to centuries of people moving around the island, settling and intermarrying, not to mention welcoming waves of immigrants—people of Jewish origin, French Huguenots, African-Caribbeans, Asians and people from eastern Europe—right up to the present day. We may not be a melting pot of United States dimensions, but we are arguably a mongrel island race with a shared set of commonly held values and 300 years of shared history and heritage.

Margo MacDonald: Let me first say how much we will miss the member when he departs the Parliament.

The theme of his speech is the benefits that we derive from being part of a political union with the rest of the United Kingdom. In what way does that benefit us when Europe is deciding on an energy policy and we cannot take part in our own right?

Mr Wallace: Of course we take part. I have sat at European Council of Ministers meetings articulating a Scottish case on justice matters.

By all means, let us make a case for the union on the grounds of a stronger economy and securing greater influence on foreign policy. Let us not do it by pandering to and fostering a dependency culture. Let us also make a simple case for Britain, in keeping united a geographic entity in a world where so much diplomatic and

military effort is spent on addressing problems where islands, peninsulas and other geographic entities are sorely divided.

However, that is not an argument for the status quo. My party has long been a federalist party. A growing number of people in Scotland support the Liberal Democrat position of wanting new powers for the Scottish Parliament, and many more people support that position than support independence.

Jeremy Purvis referred to the Steel commission, which made the case for the Parliament having more power over energy policy and remaining aspects of transport policy, and for powers over marine policy and competition and mergers, for example, to be considered. We want reformed financial arrangements in order to improve accountability, increase transparency, encourage greater efficiency in the allocation of resources and allow the Parliament the opportunity to exercise fiscal powers that can have a positive influence on the Scottish economy.

However, we acknowledge the importance of building consensus. The first Scottish constitutional convention was successful in forging the blueprint for the Parliament on the basis of consensus. I hope that it will be possible to build wider consensus in a second constitutional convention to consider how the Parliament's powers can be extended and to address the challenges of a reformed financial settlement.

Alex Neil: Will the member give way?

Mr Wallace: I am concluding.

While we examine Scotland's relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom, we should not lose sight of the principle that many of us articulated in the run-up to devolution in 1999—that devolved government does not stop at Edinburgh. The reformed electoral system offers a fresh opportunity to build the parity of esteem between the Scottish Parliament and our councils that we talked about back in 1999. In the next session, the Parliament should resist any unnecessary tendency to centralise; rather, it should seek positive opportunities to decentralise.

That is a particularly important issue from the perspective of my islands constituency. As Alasdair Morrison said, the devolved Parliament has recognised many of our island communities' challenges. On the key issue of transport, Orkney has a new generation of ferries with supporting infrastructure, concessionary fares for pensioners who use the ferries, reduced freight charges and an instrument landing system for the airport. Furthermore, air fares have been reduced by 40 per cent. Undoubtedly there are challenges ahead for my constituency—not least as a result of its increasing elderly population—but there have

been regular increases in funding for public services. Looking to the future, the Executive has made significant investment, not least in Orkney, to establish Scotland as a powerhouse for renewable energy.

The Scottish constitutional convention recognised that our island communities “warranted distinctive constitutional consideration”. Already, our standing orders require bill promoters to indicate the impact of the proposals on island areas. In the next session the Parliament may wish to consider how that provision could be beefed up. In addition, I hope that members in the next session will support a Liberal Democrat proposal to encourage and support island areas that choose to move forward on establishing single public service authorities that will harness the advantages of distinctive communities, promote the more efficient use of resources and more effectively act against centralisation.

In conclusion, I thank colleagues in all parties for the friendship and courtesy that they have shown me in the past eight years. Over 24 years in one Parliament or another, it has been my experience that politicians are, with rare exceptions, motivated by a strong sense of public service and that they pursue their careers according to their sincerely held political beliefs. That is too rarely acknowledged and reported.

It goes without saying that many of us could not do the job that we do without the support of our families. In that context, I acknowledge the great support and encouragement that I have received from Rosie, Helen and Clare. However, above all, I want to express my gratitude to my constituents in the northern isles. The past 24 years in the House of Commons and in the Scottish Parliament, in which I have been Deputy First Minister, acting First Minister and, not least, a back bencher—for the first time—in the past two years, have been a rich experience, none of which would have been possible without the support of my constituents. They accorded me the privilege of electing me to represent their interests six times, for which I shall be eternally grateful. *[Applause.]*

11:19

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): It is a privilege to have worked with Jim Wallace for the past 15 years or so and to have participated in many debates with him at Westminster and in the Scottish Parliament. His speech on the union has probably been the best in the debate, principally because, rather than slagging off other sides for their views, he stuck to considering the union and its implications. I am being honest. I welcome the approach that he took.

Sadly, I have to contrast that with Campbell Martin’s speech, which I found sad indeed. He virtually branded all Conservative MSPs as liars. I do not believe that we are liars. He has his beliefs—he believes passionately in the nationalist cause—and I have no argument with that. That is what politics is about. However, there are Conservatives who feel just as passionately about the union, and we argue our case not by telling lies about it, but by being honest about the way in which we see it.

Campbell Martin: Will the member give way?

Phil Gallie: I am obliged to do so, given what I have said.

Campbell Martin: I fully accept that unionist members hold strong views about the union, but does the member accept that there is a difference between passionately believing in something and telling lies about it to further one’s cause?

Phil Gallie: Okay, but I cannot think of any lies that I have told about it.

For a change, I agree with Mike Rumbles. I believe that Scotland could stand alone. The difference between us is that I do not believe that that would be in the best interests of Scotland, England, Wales or Northern Ireland. We are a union. We have been a union for the past 300 years and we have worked well together through hard times. I am proud of that. Three hundred years ago, Scotland was a small nation whose greatest reputation was for being an irritant to its larger neighbour, England. Since then, Scotland has moved on—as we have heard from Margaret Curran and from Murdo Fraser—in the things that have been achieved in those 300 years.

One of those things was welding Europe together during the 1939-45 war. I wonder what would have happened if Scotland had been a separate nation, as opposed to part of the United Kingdom. At that time, Eire stood aside although many Irish citizens came to defend the United Kingdom, Europe and the world by joining our armed forces. Nevertheless, they were United Kingdom armed forces, not standalone English armed forces. That is an important issue.

Let us go back 300 years, to the heart of Scotland—Ayrshire. A great Ayrshire man and a great Scot was Rabbin Burns.

Members: Hurray!

Phil Gallie: Certainly, he is an icon. In his youthful days, Burns wrote a poem entitled “Such a parcel of rogues in a nation” in which he said:

“Fareweel to a’ our Scottish fame,
Fareweel our ancient glory;
Fareweel even to the Scottish name,
Sae fam’d in martial story!”

We all know that Rabbie got it wrong there, as Scotland's reputation has been built since then. Scotland's martial capabilities—to which Colin Fox referred—have been built on since then. However, Rabbie got it right, ultimately, in his poem "The Dumfries Volunteers", in which he wrote:

"Be Britain still to Britain true,
Amang oursels united;
For never but by British hands
Must British wrongs be righted."

Those words were well worth speaking. I like to think that, in this modern day, when we think about the European Union, we recognise that the best way of dealing with Scottish and British affairs is to deal with them here, on our own shores.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Phil Gallie: I can never refuse Margo MacDonald.

Margo MacDonald: Which is the union that is worth preserving: the social union among the people who live in the British Isles or the artificial political union that was set up to meet the needs of the early 18th century?

Phil Gallie: The union that we have is worth preserving—a union that recognises the social needs and which allows the combined wealth of our nations to be provided to assist and back up across the British Isles. On issues such as defence, we should stand united and on issues such as foreign affairs, we should have a common voice for the whole of the United Kingdom. We can project our views on those matters with a strength that we could never have if Scotland or England stood alone. Those are issues on which, I believe, the union has benefited us over the years.

Colin Fox made a very good speech. I did not agree with him, but it is right that we can all stand up to air our views and express the things that we feel most deeply about. Mark Ballard also presented his comments in a most worthwhile way. He advocated a course of action that I would not approve of or vote for, but at least he argued his case without being insulting and he was able to identify who he could agree with.

Finally, I say to Margaret Curran that I welcomed the motion that she lodged today but I am sorry that she tried to build the Executive's record into the argument. If she cannot see that the wider Scottish public are now disillusioned with the Labour Party, just as they once were with the Conservatives, there is a danger to the union. On this issue, we should be fighting not on the record of the Labour Administration or a previous Conservative Administration but on the powerful record of the United Kingdom. That is what we should be taking forward.

11:26

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): In both Mr Wallace's defence of the union and his commencing words—when he addressed the Deputy Presiding Officer as Deputy Speaker—it was quite clear that old habits die hard. His speech focused on the dilemma that we all know he has wrestled with, about whether he has been happier in the Scottish Parliament or in the House of Commons. I believe that he has been formidable in both Parliaments. His speech today brings to a close a very distinguished career in public service as Deputy First Minister and as member for Orkney in this Parliament. Across the political spectrum, Jim Wallace's contribution is respected. I also associate the Scottish National Party with the remarks that he made about Dennis Canavan, who is very much in our thoughts just now.

Turning to the substance of the debate—I have been very kind to Mr Wallace, but I have other words to say about the substance of his remarks; again, old habits die hard—I want to talk about two contradictions that have been implicit in today's discussions. First, Peter Peacock made a strong argument about how Scottish education has prospered under the union, but he rather missed the point that Scotland has had a distinctive education system that has been configured to reflect Scotland's needs. As Mr Neil pointed out very effectively, if there is a case for saying that the education service has developed a distinctively Scottish approach that provided a Scottish solution to a Scottish issue, why on earth should we restrict that approach to issues such as education, health and transport?

The second contradiction, which was pointed out by Patrick Harvie, concerns the treatment of asylum seekers in this country. All members have genuinely welcomed the steps that Hugh Henry is taking to enter a dialogue with the Home Office about how Scotland might take a different approach to asylum seekers. However, when any nationalist has suggested that such a proposition would be reasonable, we have been denounced as people who want only to jeopardise the workings of Government and to distract people from the priorities. In the banter that took place during Mr Harvie's remarks, Mr Kerr was heard to say, "Ah, it's not the same when you say it." He is absolutely right. When a Labour member puts forward an idea, the Executive thinks that it must be all right because it is a Labour idea. Half of the problems with the political culture in this institution arise from the fact that the Labour Party will not accept decent ideas from members of other parties—

Alex Neil: Not even from the Liberal Democrats.

Mr Swinney: Indeed, Mr Neil. I will have a little more to say about that in a moment.

During the debate, some substantial issues emerged about what we consider to be the limitations of the union. We are intolerant of the fact that one in four children lives in poverty and that Scotland has 10 times the number of children in poverty as Denmark has. For us, that is an intolerable situation. Equally intolerable is the fact that Scottish economic growth has trailed that of the rest of the United Kingdom in virtually every year for the past 30 years. That trend performance leads to the lack of opportunity and prosperity that affects many of the communities that Ms Curran represents, although she argued powerfully about transforming the life chances of people in the east end of Glasgow.

We cannot keep staring at the problems and just say, "This is awful, this is terrible, this is disastrous"; we cannot blame it all on Margaret Thatcher when the current Government has had 10 years in which to tackle the problem—time enough to make a quantum difference. We on this side of the chamber want to do much better for Scotland and to achieve a great deal more. That is why we are passionate about the argument for Scottish independence.

A number of smokescreens have been put forward to suggest what is wrong with the message on independence. Mr Wallace made the point that independence was all about erecting barriers and borders and said that, over the years, people from different parts of the United Kingdom had married. Have we ever heard of Europe? Have we ever heard of co-operation between countries? Margo MacDonald made a very fair intervention on Mr Gallie about the preservation of the social union and social connections. The SNP has absolutely no desire to jeopardise any of those social connections or that social co-operation. We want political structures to be right for Scotland, so that we can tackle the poverty, the lack of economic opportunity and the lack of a voice in the world.

Phil Gallie: Margo MacDonald also intervened on the subject of energy. Although energy is not one of the European Parliament's competences, it is an area in which nation states can work together without being bound by being in a particular union. Margo MacDonald's thoughts on Europe are worthy of consideration.

Mr Swinney: We have always made it clear that we believe in the European dimension, co-operation among countries and the achievement of wider goals.

Margo MacDonald: I thank the member for giving way to allow me to correct Mr Gallie right away. As we speak, a European energy policy is

being developed. I would like us to take part in that and not be excluded. Look what happened when we were excluded from decisions on fishing.

Mr Swinney: Margo MacDonald makes an absolutely fair point.

Parliament might be surprised to hear what I am about to say, but Campbell Martin also made a fair point in the debate. He put it on the record that at the same time that Gavin McCrone, a senior civil servant in the Scottish Office in the 1970s, was saying that Scotland could become a successful independent country with a chronic surplus, we were being told publicly that Scotland was an economic basket case. That is a salutary warning to everybody in Scotland to treat with great care and caution the rhetoric about Scotland's prospects that comes from the Labour Party and the unionist parties during the election campaign.

Margaret Curran made a case that Mr Gallie characterised fairly as merging the record of the Administration with the arguments for the union. She did not speak about some of the things from which we are excluded because we are not an independent country. She did not talk about some of the decisions from London that we get lumbered with, such as participation in the war in Iraq and the terrible impact that that has had on society and our communities.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member give way?

Mr Swinney: I would be happy to, but I have only a minute left.

Margaret Curran made no reference to the fact that the majority of Scottish members of Parliament voted against the renewal of the Trident nuclear missile system, which will now be forced upon us by the United Kingdom Parliament and Government. *[Interruption.]* Labour Party people, including Duncan McNeil, who has just arrived and is as usual ranting and raving from a sedentary position, were in high dudgeon about the application and implementation of the poll tax that the Tories sought to force on Scotland against our wishes. Now the Labour Party wants to force Scotland to take Trident nuclear missiles. That is the most compelling argument for Scottish independence that I have heard in a long time.

During the stramash, as I think it is called in football, over the lodging of a motion for today, the Liberal Democrats' position was clear in the motion that they wanted to put before us—Scotland should retain the benefits of being part of the United Kingdom while increasing appropriately the powers that are available to the Scottish Parliament. I recognise that as a true and fair representation of the Liberal Democrat position, and the Conservatives are obviously moving in the same direction.

It says something about the Labour Party in Scotland that it has absolutely no sense that it is out of touch with the mood of the people of Scotland, 70 per cent of whom want more powers for their Parliament. Our position is very clear—we want Scotland to be like Ireland, Iceland and Norway, which became independent in the past 100 years and which are three of the top six richest nations. We have the highest aspirations for Scotland and we will put them to the people on 3 May.

11:35

Ms Curran: I associate the Labour Party with the remarks that have been made about Dennis Canavan. He has been a true friend and colleague of ours and we offer him our best wishes.

I mention, too, our sadness at Jim Wallace's departure from the Scottish Parliament. He has served his country with considerable distinction in both Parliaments. He has been a constructive colleague and has demonstrated that the Executive parties have the capacity to work together in the best interests of Scotland. He has shown sharp intelligence, genuine commitment and good humour, and has been a pleasure to work with; I have learned a great deal from him. I thank him very much.

Alex Neil: I totally agree with what the minister has said about Dennis Canavan and Jim Wallace, but we should not forget that next week we will also lose Phil Gallie. Now that Mr Gallie is not standing again, I can say—as someone who lives in Ayr—that he is the best member of Parliament Ayr ever had.

Ms Curran: I send my best wishes to Phil Gallie—I am sorry, but I have just been told that Sandra Osborne is a better representative—and to all the members who are leaving the Scottish Parliament.

As the Executive has made clear, today's debate is about the fundamental question whether Scotland should stay or whether it should go. Has the union worked for Scotland or has it not? Today's debate is about examining the case for the union and the case against it. Members of all parties have made substantial speeches. Like Phil Gallie, I acknowledge that Colin Fox was the only advocate of independence who put his case. I did not agree with it—I do not think that Colin Fox would want me to agree with it—but at least he made it. Phil Gallie sounded as if he was lifting excerpts from his last Burns supper speech. In that context, I suppose that I am replying on behalf of the lassies.

I hate to disappoint, but I am perhaps not as gracious as Jim Wallace, in that I will indulge in a wee bit of slagging off the Opposition. Why was

Alasdair Morgan eight minutes into his speech before he mentioned independence? Why did he not advocate independence? His argument was about the need to make a decision on it. Patrick Harvie did not advocate it, either, although—bizarrely—he said that it had nothing to do with national identity.

Jeremy Purvis challenged the SNP on a number of issues. He threw down the gauntlet by exposing the fact that the SNP advances different models of independence, depending on who is speaking and what audience they are addressing. We have not forgotten Mr Mather's U-turn on third-party right of appeal. I would invite him to intervene, but it appears that he does not want to say anything. Oh—he does, after all.

Jim Mather: I welcome the opportunity to respond. When the Government ceases to impose a stealth tax on water that creates development blight across Scotland, it will find us much more amenable to its proposals.

Ms Curran: Sit down. The member was not in the chamber for the vote on third-party right of appeal. We know about his U-turn.

Of all the parties, surely it would have been reasonable to expect the SNP to make the positive case for independence. There is frustration among members of my party. Does the SNP favour the Scandinavian model or the Irish model? What are the complexities of the argument? At best, it is disingenuous of Alex Neil to imply that, with independence, all poverty would be abolished at a stroke.

Today the SNP had the opportunity to spell out the case for independence and in what way it would benefit Scotland. How would tax increases improve life in Scotland? How would emasculating local government benefit Scotland? How would cutting local services impact on poverty levels? It is surely reasonable to expect the SNP to defend its policies in the Parliament, but we have heard little of its defence of independence.

Members throughout the chamber have told me that we should not raise economic issues in this debate; for example, according to Mark Ballard, we are discussing a philosophical question. Well, I am sorry, but my constituents—indeed the vast majority of Scots—do not have the luxury or the privilege of not having to worry about these issues or their financial position. We stand on their side.

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

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): No, I am afraid that she is winding up.

Ms Curran: I say to Phil Gallie that I make no apology for defending either devolution or this Executive's record. The key point is that

devolution has revitalised and renewed the union; has given Scotland a new confidence after the decades of Thatcher; and has addressed the democratic dividend.

All the key decisions will be faced at the vote on 3 May, which is when Scotland will make the fundamental decision about its future. As we head towards that decision, I want to establish one fact: our belief in the union does not diminish Scotland one jot. The fact that we decide to work in partnership with other nations does not make us any less equal. I regard myself as equal, even if others in the chamber clearly do not. In fact, I would hazard that, as soon as we broke these bonds, we would have to set about re-establishing them. If the nationalists are arguing that challenges remain, they must explain the ways in which independence will address them.

The fundamental argument remains: devolution is the settled will of the Scottish people. We have the right political structures in place. However, we have never said that all the problems have been solved. We must let devolution work and focus on people's priorities, not on constitutional battles. Indeed, those priorities are what we will focus on.

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

General Questions

11:41

Affordable Housing (Highlands)

1. Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will address the shortage of affordable housing in the Highland Council area. (S2O-12455)

The Minister for Communities (Rhona Brankin): We recognise the housing pressures that face a growing Highlands and are doing a great deal to provide affordable housing. Just last week, I announced that next year we will provide £36.5 million for new housing supply in the Highlands. That is a six-fold increase in 10 years, and will enable around 500 new affordable homes to be started in the Highlands and the successful homestake shared equity scheme to be extended.

Maureen Macmillan: I thank the minister for her commitment to address the housing shortage in the Highland Council area and, particularly, for introducing an innovative way of promoting affordable home ownership.

Is the minister aware of the successful studies that are being carried out on the Ormlie housing estate in Thurso into the use of microrenewables to cut carbon emissions and to provide more affordable energy to the people who live there? Are there plans for the new developments that she has mentioned—and any future developments—to incorporate microrenewables?

Rhona Brankin: Tackling climate change and sustainability must be at the centre of everything that we do. After all, we are building the houses and communities of the future now, so we must ensure that they are sustainable.

I am interested in finding out more about what is happening in Thurso. Of course, other work is being carried out in the Highlands. For example, Communities Scotland will be supporting a partnership between the Highlands and Islands community energy company and seven housing associations to develop small-scale wind farms. That initiative, which will pilot a new method of creating community-owned assets, will help to reduce the carbon footprint.

Moreover, our current review of planning guidance on renewable energy will consider how the planning system can support moves towards low and zero-carbon development. A lot of things are going on, and the future looks exciting.

Dave Petrie (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

Does the minister agree that affordable housing requires significant additional investment? Does she support the introduction of a £100 million a year trust that, by offering grants to prospective homeowners, would significantly help first-time buyers throughout Scotland—and, indeed, in the Highlands and Islands—to get on to the property ladder?

Rhona Brankin: The member will be aware of the homestake shared equity scheme, which the Executive introduced in order to help first-time buyers to get on to the property ladder. For example, on a recent visit to Inverness, I met Janet MacMillan, a 25-year-old nurse, who, through homestake, has been able to buy a house for the first time. Although I am sure that the Conservatives feel that their proposal represents the best way forward, we feel that the shared equity model gives best value for money by, for example, giving the potential for funding to come back to housing associations when houses are sold.

**Homeless Persons (Unsuitable
Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004
(SSI 2004/489)**

2. Mr Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it monitors compliance by local authorities with the provisions of the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 and its associated code of guidance. (S2O-12449)

The Minister for Communities (Rhona Brankin): The Executive monitors compliance with the order in the following ways. First, data on local authorities' breaches of the order are gathered and consist of snapshot data for the last day in March, June, September and December. The latest data on breaches were published on 13 March. Secondly, Communities Scotland inspects local authorities' homelessness services to monitor compliance with their statutory duties, including compliance with the order. In addition to those routine activities, the Executive undertook a pilot study with local authorities to track their ability to comply with the order over a six-month period, from August 2005 to February 2006. The report on the study was published in September 2006.

Mr Gordon: Is the minister aware that, 9 months ago, I raised in the Parliament the systematic breach of the legislation and guidelines by numerous councils in respect of one particular premises in my constituency, where what I can only call the dumping of homeless people without professional support was taking place? The problems persist. Therefore, will the minister instruct an investigation into that chronic and substantial problem?

Rhona Brankin: We are aware of the issue for Glasgow and neighbouring authorities—it has been brought to ministers' attention by the homelessness monitoring group and by direct correspondence from the leader of Glasgow City Council. I know that Charlie Gordon takes the issue seriously. The issue is serious, which is why we are pleased that Glasgow City Council and the neighbouring authorities have agreed a protocol to address it. Glasgow City Council reports quarterly to ministers on progress. The reports show a significant reduction in the number of households that are being placed out of area. Some authorities have stopped making such placements and others have reduced the numbers dramatically and are making alternative arrangements in their areas. However, we are aware of the issue. I am happy to discuss with Charlie Gordon what further action can be taken to reduce the number of placements.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Does the minister accept that part of the reason for some local authorities' disappointing compliance levels as regards housing the homeless tracks back to the shortage of accommodation that is suitable not only for single homeless people, but for families? Will she consider approaching the Chancellor, whoever he may be, to have money restored to the local authorities whose tenants voted against stock transfer and which are now toiling to produce affordable housing?

Rhona Brankin: Margo MacDonald will of course be aware that we have more than doubled the funding for affordable homes. I recently announced record funding for affordable homes in Scotland. We believe that everybody has the right to a decent, warm and affordable home. We believe that we are approaching the matter in the right way, using a combination of the social rented stock and houses that are available for first-time home ownership. Some councils have taken the route of stock transfer and have had their debt written off. We think that that is a good way to go for many councils. Other councils have approached the issue differently. Councils must decide what the best route is for their tenants.

**Nigg Construction Yard
(Compulsory Purchase Powers)**

3. Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will support Highland Council in exercising compulsory purchase powers in relation to land adjacent to the former Nigg construction yard. (S2O-12476)

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Des McNulty): It is for the local authority to decide whether it wishes to use its powers of acquisition under the Acquisition of Land (Authorisation Procedure) (Scotland) Act 1947. If the authority

decided to use its powers, the Scottish ministers would thereafter be required to consider whether to confirm the compulsory purchase order. It would not, therefore, be appropriate to indicate at this stage whether ministers would support such action.

Mr Stone: Is it not a disgrace that one landowner can hold to ransom the future of the yard, which has benefited people in the past, myself included, and which could offer employment for the future? Is it not a disgrace that one man can jeopardise all that? Will the minister go further and tell me that, if Highland Council approaches the Executive on the matter, he and his colleagues will give full support to the compulsory purchase of the land?

Des McNulty: I refer the member to my previous answer.

I am aware of the importance of the Nigg construction yard to the economy in the Highlands. Jamie Stone and Peter Peacock have raised the issue. The act I referred to dates back to 1947, and we are considering whether there is scope for improving internal processes for CPOs, as part of the wider range of actions to oil the wheels of the development of land and property. Work is under way to consider how the Executive can enable local authorities to make full use of their compulsory purchase powers so that land can be effectively reassembled for regeneration. I hope that Highland Council will think along those lines.

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I acknowledge the minister's difficulty; he has a statutory position and cannot commit himself in advance. My understanding is that, as part of the strategic plan for Scotland, the Cromarty firth will be identified as of strategic significance, not just to the Highlands, but to the wider Scottish economy. Although he cannot rule in supporting compulsory purchase, can he not rule out supporting it if the case is strong enough?

Des McNulty: That it is exactly the kind of situation that we might be considering when we come forward with streamlining processes for CPOs. I am happy to say to Peter Peacock that nothing will be ruled in or out.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The Cromarty Firth Port Authority Order Confirmation Act 1973 was set up under a Tory Government. It precluded the compulsory purchase of the Wakelyn Trust ransom strip and, by December 1980, had ended other CPO powers for the Cromarty Firth Port Authority. Is it not time to redress the balance and authorise not Highland Council, but Highlands and Islands Enterprise with compulsory purchase powers to step in and break the deadlock, in order to gain control of the ransom strip, in the public interest, so that a

private trust cannot strangle the development of that major yard in the Highlands?

Des McNulty: I would have thought that, on the whole, CPOs were more appropriate for the local authority than for the enterprise agency. I do not often agree with Conservative initiatives, but the removal of compulsory purchase powers from port authorities is one that the Conservatives might have got right.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Does the minister agree that, in a local economy such as Invergordon, it is important for all agencies to work openly and positively with local businesses, especially to avoid displacement of employment and resources? Is he content that that is happening in Invergordon in relation to the former Nigg construction yard?

Des McNulty: I suppose that I am responding to questions on the planning issues. Planning powers should be used to facilitate economic growth, which is why the Executive has moved forward with the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006. There is an urgent need to reconsider the CPO arrangements in that context. As I said in response to a previous question, that is what the Executive is currently doing.

Coastal Pollution

4. Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it is taking to protect Scotland's coasts from industrial pollution. (S2O-12442)

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Sarah Boyack): The Pollution Prevention and Control (Scotland) Regulations 2000 (SSI 2000/323) are the primary means of reducing pollution and controlling emissions from industrial processes to water, including Scotland's coasts. Implementation of the regulations is the responsibility of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. In addition, in 2006 the Scottish Executive introduced a new regulatory regime under the Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 (SSI 2005/348), which provides for SEPA to regulate any discharges from industrial sources into Scottish coastal waters not covered under the PPC regulations.

At present, the United Kingdom, with the involvement of SEPA, is reviewing and setting new standards for pollutants viewed as posing a risk to the water environment. In due course, the Scottish Executive will consider where those standards may be applied under Scottish legislation.

Scott Barrie: I thank the minister for that comprehensive response. She will be well aware that there have been substantial changes of use in and around the Firth of Forth over the past couple

of decades. There have been changes in how we deal with agricultural waste; changes in water treatment and sewerage; and changes in industrial use. Given those improvements, ship-to-ship oil transfer has no place on the modern Forth. Does the minister support the aim of all the local authorities surrounding the Forth, and Fife and Lothian MSPs, to ensure that the proposal by Forth Ports plc does not go ahead?

Sarah Boyack: I do not think that the member would expect me to answer the detail of that question in the terms in which he has posed it. I will be absolutely clear. The Executive wants the European Union habitats directive to be fully upheld by Forth Ports, which has accepted that it is the competent authority under that European regulation. I reassure the member that the Executive has repeatedly pressed Forth Ports to ensure that it takes its full responsibility under the directive. There is no lesser test for a private organisation in discharging its responsibilities than there is for a public sector organisation.

Local Income Tax (Clydesdale)

5. Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what impact local income tax proposals, capped at 3p in the pound, would have on the revenue available to South Lanarkshire Council for investment in public services in Clydesdale. (S2O-12447)

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe): A local income tax capped at 3p in the pound would raise significantly less income than council tax. It follows that the funding available to South Lanarkshire Council for the provision of vital services would be significantly reduced.

Karen Gillon: As well as removing local decision making—a key part of local government—the proposals would jeopardise free access to leisure activities for the over-60s, free use of outdoor facilities—[*Interruption.*] SNP members laugh, but those are serious matters. They want to take away from local decision makers the ability to make decisions locally. Most important, will the minister indicate to the people of Clydesdale how the proposals will put at risk the ambitious, exciting school building programme, funded from conventional finance, that has already seen new primary schools open in Law, Carluke and Lanark, with further new primary schools planned across South Lanarkshire in the years ahead? All that will be put at risk by this stupid SNP policy.

Mr McCabe: The policy would put that programme most at risk because, when Scotland previously experienced a poll tax, vital services were placed under significant pressure. I have spent my political life describing the nationalists as

tartan Tories. If they introduce poll tax 2 and seek to strip local government of its authority and independence, we will find ourselves in the same dire circumstances in which we were 10 or 15 years ago.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Does the minister not recognise that a proposal to abolish the council tax—I repeat, to abolish the council tax—and to introduce an alternative based on income and the ability to pay would lead to a massive reduction in local taxation for thousands of pensioners in South Lanarkshire and other parts of Scotland? In case the minister was not listening the first two times that I said it, we propose to abolish the council tax. Is that not preferable to the inevitable revaluation of properties that will take place if the Labour Party is returned to office and keeps the council tax?

Mr McCabe: I am happy to tell the chamber what I recognise. The SNP wants to abolish council tax, but it wants to keep council tax benefit. That sums up the hypocrisy of the Scottish National Party: SNP members want to be independent subsidy junkies. Although under their proposals council tax would disappear, they still want £380 million from an Exchequer in London. Can they explain to us why, if council tax no longer exists, they will need £380 million from an English Exchequer? To the SNP's hypocrisy is added its foolishness. It is a party that talks about economic independence but that would be happy for the Bank of England—a foreign nation—to set Scotland's interest rates and to control its monetary policy. What other nation in the developed world would want a competitor nation to have its hand on one of the strongest levers of economic policy? That is nonsense.

Swimming Facilities (Aberdeen)

6. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what business case has been received from Aberdeen City Council in relation to the construction of a 50-metre swimming pool in the city. (S2O-12443)

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson): Aberdeen City Council wrote to me on 30 August 2006 with a proposal for a 50-metre swimming pool. I replied to that letter on 15 October. I have not published my response, but I am considering a request for me to do so under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. In my reply I recognised the need for a 50-metre pool in the north-east but expressed concern about the funding that was requested by Aberdeen, which was in excess of the awards that are available through sportscotland's building for sport programme and the national and regional sports facilities programme. I suggested that the council discuss the matter further with

sportscotland, in order to develop a realistic, viable and affordable proposal. I remain supportive of an affordable bid for a 50-metre pool, if the case is made.

Richard Baker: The minister's answer is welcome. Will she assure me that sportscotland and her officials are willing to meet Aberdeen City Council to discuss the expeditious drawing up of a workable business plan for the pool? Does she agree that it is irresponsible and counterproductive to call for the fast-tracking of such an important project without reference to a business plan or to how the project will be funded, as local Scottish National Party representatives have done?

Patricia Ferguson: There have been informal meetings between my officials and Aberdeen City Council and between sportscotland and the council, and there is a proposal to have a tripartite meeting, at which we can try to get some sense into the situation and make progress.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Cabinet (Meetings)

1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-2789)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Our thoughts are with Dennis Canavan. I pass on to him the condolences of my family and, I am sure, all members, at what must be a horrendously difficult time for him and his family.

The Cabinet will meet next week to discuss issues of importance to Scotland. I suspect that we might reflect on the second session of the Scottish Parliament and the progress that we have made. We have the highest employment in the United Kingdom and the lowest unemployment since records began in Scotland, and a growing population. We have delivered reductions in crime, improvements in education standards and, of course, the lowest health waiting times on record. Next week, the Cabinet will celebrate the successful second session of the Scottish Parliament.

Nicola Sturgeon: I echo the First Minister's comments about Dennis Canavan. The thoughts of us all are with him at this difficult time.

I remind the First Minister that part of Labour's legacy is a council tax that has gone up by 60 per cent. A few weeks before the previous election, the First Minister promised to devise "a fairer council tax" system. Now that we are just a few weeks from the next election, can he finally tell us exactly how he will do that?

The First Minister: We will certainly do that. This is a bit like groundhog day, but I explain again that the Liberal Democrats and Labour have an honest difference of policy on the issue, as Ms Sturgeon knows. As a result, we sought an independent review of local government finance. That review, which was published last year and informs our decision making, shows that the Scottish National Party's plans for a poll tax for Scotland, announced last week, would not only add 3p on the income tax rate in Scotland but cut vital services locally and nationally.

We have suspected for months that Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon would make big mistakes just before the election campaign started, but we did not expect a mistake quite as big as that. Scotland will reject the SNP's poll tax and we will ensure that our taxation systems remain fair.

Nicola Sturgeon: The First Minister's reference to a poll tax is a rather stupid smear, but as he raised the issue, I remind him that when the Tory poll tax was in place he wanted to replace it with a—wait for it—local income tax. He said:

"If we cannot devise a system of local income tax ... then there is something wrong with us."

There might be something wrong with the First Minister, but there is nothing wrong with us.

I asked the First Minister about his policy on the council tax. My party will abolish the unfair council tax. Nine out of 10 people will be better off and most pensioners will pay nothing. In other words, there will be a tax cut from the SNP, instead of a tax con trick from Labour. If the First Minister does not agree with us, that is his prerogative, but if we are to have a real debate it is about time he said what he would do instead. I ask again, what is his policy to reform the unfair council tax? For once, will he give a straight answer to a straight question?

The First Minister: The answer is very straight. Labour and the Liberal Democrats—I am sure that the Deputy First Minister agrees—will publish their plans in advance of the election. It is right to do that as a party and outside this chamber. Our policy will not be for a poll tax; it will be for a fair system of property taxation.

If Ms Sturgeon checked her historical facts, she would find that the position in the quotation, from nearly 20 years ago, that she used was superseded, because I listened to the experts on the matter. Every expert on local government taxation—not just in the late 1980s but today—says that a fair property taxation system is right for local government in Scotland, just as it is right elsewhere in the world.

What would be wrong for Scotland—and what would be doubly wrong in view of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement yesterday of a cut in income tax, which encourages people to get into work—would be to increase income tax by 3 per cent. That would be a tax on everybody in Scotland who is in work. It would be a tax on two thirds of small businesses and on pensioners. Ultimately, it would be a tax that would drive hard-working, talented young people out of Scotland to lower-tax parts of the United Kingdom. It is one of the worst policies that even the SNP has ever come up with, and I believe that it will pay for that at the polls.

Nicola Sturgeon: Can I remind the First Minister that the chancellor's budget announcement yesterday doubled the starting rate of tax for the lowest paid in our society? That is presumably why the Scottish Trades Union Congress said that it would hit the majority of

workers. It is hard to believe that that came from a Labour chancellor.

I am happy to talk about SNP policy. I will announce it from the rooftops if that is what the First Minister wants. The SNP will abolish the unfair council tax. The First Minister might not like that, but the question for him—four years after he promised to make the council tax fairer—is what he will do instead. He will not answer that question because he has no plans to change the council tax. Is it not the case that if Mr McConnell gets his way, the people of Scotland will continue to be punished by the unfair, ever rising council tax? Is it not about time he had the guts and the honesty to stand up and say so?

The First Minister: That is of course entirely untrue, and Ms Sturgeon might regret saying it when she sees the plans that we will announce in advance of the election campaign and when she sees how right the detail of those plans will be for Scotland. They are unlike her plans, which would not only raise income tax for every working person in Scotland by 3p in the pound, but ensure that people on the average wage paid about £700 a year more—and not for the current level of public services in Scotland, but for fewer services. That is a cut of more than £1 billion in local and national services. That is what the SNP proposes—and an income tax increase to go with it.

I do not believe that Scotland should be the most highly taxed place in the United Kingdom. We have ensured, in every year since devolution, that council tax increases in Scotland have been lower than those elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and lower than in every one of the last years when the Conservatives were in power. We will ensure that, here in Scotland, people are taxed fairly and that they do not pay more tax than people in the rest of the UK. The SNP will not be allowed to drive talented, hard-working young people out of Scotland, because we will keep them. We will keep growing the Scottish population and we will keep growing the Scottish economy.

Nicola Sturgeon: Can I remind the First Minister that the SNP's plan to abolish the unfair council tax represents the biggest tax cut for middle Scotland and for pensioners in a generation? If the First Minister has a policy to reform the council tax, why on earth will he not tell us—four years after he first told us that he had one—what it is? Is it not the case that, whether they mean doubling tax for the low paid or sticking with the unfair council tax, Labour's policies hit the poorest hardest and pile on the misery for middle Scotland? Can I remind the First Minister that people want a fair local tax and a lower local tax? That is why more and more of them are backing

the SNP and our policy to abolish Labour's council tax.

The First Minister: Ms Sturgeon would have more credibility if she asked questions rather than read out prepared speeches, regardless of what the answers are. Whatever sets of policies the two Executive parties put forward in advance of the election campaign, both of them will be properly costed. Neither of these parties will do what the SNP wants to do, and set a flat-rate poll tax, which all of us campaigned against for years and which the SNP wants to bring back to Scotland. The SNP's plans would drive hard-working, talented young people out of Scotland when our population is growing, when our economic growth has been above the trend rate for nine quarters in a row, when our employment rate is higher than that in the rest of the UK, when unemployment is lower, and when our economy here in Scotland is moving in the right direction again.

The SNP wants to tax everybody who is in work and to make Scotland the most highly taxed part of the UK. At the same time, it wants to cut the vital local services that attract people here. SNP members' policy is wrong and they will pay for it in the opinion polls and in the election on 3 May. When we are back, we will reform local taxation fairly and properly for all.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland)

(Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues they will discuss. (S2F-2790)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I expect to meet the Prime Minister again next week, when we will discuss several issues on which the devolved Scottish Government and the UK Government can work together to improve the lives of people in Scotland.

Miss Goldie: I sincerely hope that at the top of the agenda for discussion when the First Minister and the Prime Minister next meet will be how the European convention on human rights has been incorporated into our law.

Stewart Potter is a 43-year-old prisoner who is in jail for assault and robbery—an incident during which he held a knife to a shop assistant's throat. He is aggrieved that when he makes a phone call, the recipient hears a recorded message to warn them that the call comes from a prison. Potter finds that “embarrassing”. Should not Potter be embarrassed by how he has wronged society? Is the First Minister embarrassed that, once again, the criminal is coming first and the victim a very poor second?

The First Minister: It would be wrong for me to comment on the case, as the Lord Advocate and

her team are considering whether to appeal against the decision. However, I can say that I fully understand why they might consider appealing against the decision that the judge announced earlier this week, given the widespread concerns about it.

I was pleased that the Parliament voted last Thursday to end the unconditional early release of prisoners, which has resulted in some such difficulties over the years. That law was introduced by the Conservatives and the Scottish Parliament has abolished it.

Miss Goldie: The public are becoming sick and tired of the First Minister refusing to take any responsibility for what is going on in this country. This contemptible farce is happening on his watch. Prisoners—people who have wounded and scarred our society, including some who have killed—now claim that they should be able to vote. Stewart Potter, who held a knife to a woman's throat, complains about his phone calls. It is pathetic.

I pledge that my party, with my Westminster colleagues, will review the integration of European human rights laws, so that victims, and not criminals, come first. Will the First Minister pledge to do the same?

The First Minister: We have debated automatic early release. Miss Goldie has the luxury of opposition to comment on court cases, but I do not, although I wish I did on this occasion. The Lord Advocate and her team are considering an appeal and it is right and proper for them to do so.

In recent years, we have had several debates in the chamber about automatic and unconditional early release.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): The question was about the ECHR.

The First Minister: The Conservatives introduced that policy, which they now disown.

Phil Gallie: What about the ECHR?

The First Minister: We have now, in effect, abolished that policy.

I remind Mr Gallie that the Conservative Government signed us up to the ECHR. The Conservatives cannot say that they do not like the decisions that follow from the ECHR when they signed up to it in the first place.

Because of our policies and because of the measures that the Executive and the Parliament are pursuing—tougher sentences, better regimes, community sentences, actions throughout our society to tackle violence in the community, tougher knife laws and tougher air-gun laws—the violent crime rate in Scotland is reducing. It is lower than it was under the Conservatives and

even in the Parliament's early years. That is the right course of action for the Parliament—to have proper measures that make a difference by building up our justice system and our police force resources and through sentencing and deterrence, to ensure that fewer crimes are committed.

Miss Goldie: Was that not just typical of this First Minister? He is Scotland's very own Pontius Pilate, washing his hands of this perverse system—a system that puts prisoners first. Some of us have a bit more courage. Today, my party unveiled a £1 billion assault on crime and drugs—the biggest programme to tackle the issues ever seen in Scotland.

I ask the First Minister, who is running this country—him or the criminals?

The First Minister: Dear oh dear oh dear. We hear this rhetoric from the Conservatives in the chamber, but it does not reflect in any way their record when they were in government—when crime in Scotland was nearly 25 per cent higher than it is today and increasing, and when there were 1,500 fewer police officers in Scotland than there are today.

Nonsense claims about the number of police officers on the beat have again been published by the Conservatives this morning. They claim, ludicrously, that only 140 or so police officers are on the beat at any one time, but they know that, even at five o'clock in the morning, there are several hundred in one part of Scotland alone. They have the proof of that.

Earlier this week, Conservatives were protesting about current bail conditions and laws, but Margaret Mitchell welcomed the provisions relating to bail and remand during the stage 3 debate on the Criminal Proceedings etc (Reform) (Scotland) Bill. They say one thing in the chamber during question time and something entirely different when voting and when speaking elsewhere. They did something entirely different in the past when they were in government. They have no record or reputation of integrity on this issue. Scotland was a worse country when they were in charge, but it is a better country now.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I will take one back-bench supplementary at this point.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I would like to ask the First Minister whether he will accept this 885-name petition from Lourdes secondary school pupils Cheryl Paterson and Lauren Bendford. It is about their school-friend Grace Waku, who has lived in Glasgow with her family for six years but was subjected to a dawn raid on Monday and incarcerated in Dungavel removal centre.

In light of this week's statement from the Executive on action that it will take on asylum seeker families who live in Scotland, will the First Minister personally intervene to ensure that Grace and her family can go home to Cardonald?

The First Minister: As I have said before, it would be entirely inappropriate for a Scottish minister to intervene in an individual case. In the consideration of such cases, there are due processes, involving members of Parliament and the Home Secretary, that are part of the political process as well as part of the legal process. That is the right way for such issues to be tackled.

It is also right that we, in our discussions with the Home Office over the past 18 months, have identified a particular issue in Glasgow. In a number of cases—partly because of delays in the system and partly because of appeals—asylum seekers have been in the country so long that their young boys and girls are, in effect, now Scottish in character and culture. Those individual cases have to be considered one by one by the Home Office, to ensure that the needs of the whole family are considered before a final decision is made.

The position of the Scottish National Party would have just a little more credibility here today if it had had the guts, in the document that it produced on Sunday, highlighting a range of issues about which it wanted to cause disagreement and conflict with the UK Government, to include—

Linda Fabiani: Will the First Minister accept the petition?

The First Minister: Of course I will accept the petition.

The SNP should have had the guts to include immigration in its list. In this chamber, the SNP has called over and over again for powers to be devolved to this Parliament and for an independent Scotland, but it does not have the bottle, a few weeks before an election, to mention immigration. It is a disgrace.

Poverty

3. Campbell Martin (West of Scotland) (Ind): To ask the First Minister whether tackling poverty among the working poor is a Scottish Executive priority. (S2F-2797)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): We are committed to tackling poverty and disadvantage in Scotland, including among the working poor, and we are working with the UK Government to do so. Our investment in child care and training is helping more and more Scots into work, and wages are now rising more quickly in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK.

Campbell Martin: Everyone wants to tackle poverty and eradicate low wages. Is the First Minister aware of the “Voices of people experiencing poverty in Scotland: Everyone matters?” report, which has been published this week, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and supported by 20 Scottish charities? There are a number of statistics in that report that relate to real people—they are not just figures, as the First Minister obviously accepts. Two of the most frightening statistics are that 900,000 people in Scotland—18 per cent of the population—live on a low income and that 0.25 million children in Scotland live in poverty, even though someone in their family is working. If the First Minister is re-elected, what new policies will his Executive introduce to eradicate poverty among the working poor?

The First Minister: I am aware of the report and of the important issues it raises. One of the most important ways for us to tackle the issue is to work in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions, the Treasury and the other UK Government departments on our responsibilities for education, skills, child care, the regeneration of our communities, the creation of employment and in areas such as the provision of school meals.

I hope that coalition partners will allow me to say that I believe that we should target an extension of free school meals on those families who had free school meals taken away from them by the Conservative Government in the late 1980s, when it hypocritically and deceitfully changed the benefits system and, by a sleight of hand, reduced the opportunity for a free school meal for a range of people who were in work but still in poverty. It is important that we target an extension of free school meals on those families, rather than adopt the universal approach that would allow free school meals for those who can afford them.

Campbell Martin: Does the First Minister accept that the main cause of poverty among the working poor is low wages and that we need to raise them to eradicate such poverty? I should apologise, because I said something earlier that is not true—I said that we all want to tackle poverty and eradicate low wages, but, unfortunately, that is not true. Does the First Minister support the Labour councillors in North Ayrshire Council who have an inward investment policy to try to attract business to North Ayrshire?

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): What a shock: the council is trying to bring jobs to Ayrshire.

Campbell Martin: I am coming to Frank McAveety. Under the heading, “Wage Levels”, the policy says:

“Average Gross Hourly pay in North Ayrshire is £8.75 compared to £10.17 in Scotland and £11.19 for Great Britain. It is 12% below the UK level of £9.60 per hour.”

Does the First Minister support the Labour councillors in North Ayrshire, who advertise the area as a low-wage economy and who, in essence, say to employers, “Our workers are exploited. Why don’t you come and join in?” Does he support them, or will he condemn them and support the people who want wages to be raised so that people are taken out of poverty?

The First Minister: I accept that Campbell Martin is committed to tackling poverty and I answered his first question positively for that reason, but I do not accept his attempt to misrepresent and demean the hard work of people in North Ayrshire to try to create jobs there.

I grew up in North Ayrshire and I know the economic challenges that it has suffered over the past 30 years. It has a number of communities that need support, proper infrastructure, inward investment and the development of new businesses that will create jobs there in the future that will retain the population and help grow it to ensure that those communities are sustainable. Our investment, not just in the M77 to the south but in the new bypass at the three towns, in improved ferry services, in regeneration in Irvine and elsewhere and in the urban regeneration company, will make a difference in North Ayrshire. If Campbell Martin really wanted to tackle poverty, he would support that investment, not run it down.

Budget

4. Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what impact the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s budget will have on Scotland. (S2F-2794)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The budget is, of course, set against a backdrop of unprecedented economic prosperity in Scotland and the UK. We have a record number of Scots in work, a historically low level of unemployment and, in the UK, the second highest income per capita in the G7.

For Scotland, the budget means good news for children, working families, pensioners, business and the environment. It is a budget for families, fairness and the future. If I was in another place, I would say that I commend it to the house.

Margaret Jamieson: I thank the First Minister for his reply.

Yesterday’s budget provides the lowest basic rate of income tax in 75 years, which of course will be of benefit to many of my constituents in Kilmarnock and Loudon. Does the First Minister agree that pensioners and hard-working families

are better off with a stable economy in the United Kingdom and that a Scottish National Party Government, by increasing tax by 3p in Scotland, would make our pensioners and hard-working families worse off than their counterparts in England and Wales?

The First Minister: I should make clear that my Liberal Democrat coalition partners would take a different approach on this issue. Having made that clear, I am delighted to defend the budget. The reality is that the budget cut corporation tax. Last week, the SNP was calling for that; this week, it is squealing about it. The reality is that the budget cut income tax. Last week, the SNP was proposing to put up income tax; this week, we are bringing it down. The reality is that we are giving people help to get into work and helping families through child benefit, which will make a difference to every family here in Scotland.

All this help and assistance, with stable growth in the UK economy, is painted against an alternative from the Scottish National Party that would see a rise in income tax of 3p in the pound. The SNP's poll tax is only the first instalment of the £5,000 or more that the SNP would cost every hard-working family in Scotland.

Everybody in Scotland knows that the SNP is unfit to govern and run our economy, and would create havoc with jobs and investment in Scotland. I am sure that the SNP will learn the cost of that over the next few weeks.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Does the First Minister realise that, as a result of Gordon Brown's budget yesterday, low-paid workers earning only £7,500 a year will see their income tax bill rise from £232 to £416 a year, which is an increase of 78 per cent, while Gordon Brown, earning more than £130,000 a year, will see his tax bill go down by 5 per cent? Is that what Labour is about: robbing the poor to pay the rich?

The First Minister: The only robbing going on in the chamber at the moment is the robbing of statistics by the SNP and, of course, the deception that it tries to pull on the people of Scotland whenever it talks about such matters. We all know what the SNP stands for—it stands for disinvestment and a backward step for Scotland in relation to economic growth, whereby Scotland could become the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom.

Over recent weeks, the SNP has come along to the chamber and claimed that it has business support for its policies, but it has not been willing to defend them and explain them properly in the chamber. I have only to quote one of the SNP's supporters, Mr Crawford Beveridge, who was hailed again by the SNP last week at its conference as one of the business figures who

speak for the SNP and therefore is an advocate for independence. Just five short months ago he said:

"I advocate the policy that Scotland should raise the money that it spends. I know that could potentially plunge the place into recession".

That shows how the SNP fails on independence. Its ability and willingness to cover up independence over the next six weeks will be exposed by my party and, I am sure, by others. The SNP is not fit to govern Scotland. It is playing fast and loose with the Scottish economy, and the Scottish people will reject it.

Asylum Seekers (Self-harm)

5. Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister how many instances of self-harm involving asylum seekers national health service boards have dealt with in the last four years. (S2F-2796)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The data collected from general practitioner practices and in-patient units on those receiving care following self-harm does not allow for the identification of patients as asylum seekers as they of course have the same right to confidentiality as everyone else.

Christine Grahame: That is a sad response, as I am sure that asylum seekers would like us to know. The recent case of the Nepalese asylum seeker, who had been here for six years, is only the latest tragic case to demonstrate the callous inhumanity of the United Kingdom immigration system. The much-trailed letter from the Minister for Education and Young People on the deportation of asylum seekers' families frankly changes nothing.

Further to the issue raised by Linda Fabiani, and following yesterday's landmark House of Lords decision in the case of Huang on proportionality and article 8 of the European convention on human rights as it will apply to established families in Scotland, will the First Minister instruct the Lord Advocate to initiate breach of the peace proceedings against officials who use force to attempt to remove established families—that is well within his devolved powers—so as to prevent more misery?

The First Minister: I am stunned that Christine Grahame thinks that my believing that it is important to protect the confidentiality of asylum seekers and to treat them in the same way as we treat other members of the population is a sad response. Hers is a shameful response. I believe that asylum seekers deserve the same protection and confidentiality as everybody else.

Christine Grahame's question exposes the hypocrisy at the heart of the Scottish National

Party's policy. She quotes the ECHR, but Mr MacAskill and others have trailed around the country in television studios for the past few months questioning our commitment to the ECHR. The SNP cannot use it and at the same time call for it to be taken away.

Nor can the SNP come to the chamber—it has happened week after week, month after month in the past four years—to call for the devolution of immigration powers and an independent immigration system for Scotland and then not have the bottle to mention it in its policy document, which was published last Sunday, or in advance of the election. The SNP should be ashamed. It has no principles and the people of Scotland will expose it for that.

The Presiding Officer: My apologies go to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton—we did not reach question 6 this week.

Crichton University Campus

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-5726, in the name of Alasdair Morgan, on Crichton campus and the University of Glasgow. The debate will conclude without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the work to develop an academic strategy for higher and further education in Dumfries and Galloway but, conscious that the failure of the University of Glasgow to recruit an intake of new undergraduates at the Crichton Campus in Dumfries this year may prejudice the outcome of that strategy, considers that the Scottish Executive should take all necessary steps to ensure that recruitment is resumed for the current year.

12:34

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): I thought for some time before lodging the motion for members' business because I was conscious that the proposed withdrawal of the University of Glasgow from the Crichton campus had been the subject of a members' business debate led by Elaine Murray only five weeks ago. I also knew that the participants would be much the same on both occasions. However, I am conscious that the issue remains crucial in the minds of a large number of people and institutions in south-west Scotland and that it has united both political and non-political forces in the region to an unprecedented extent.

Since the last debate, the process that led to it has moved on. First, the University of Glasgow has written to all those who had been accepted as first-year students for the coming academic year to say that their courses will not go ahead. I understand that it is helping them with applications to other institutions.

Secondly, discussions are on-going among various interested parties, including the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, to develop an academic strategy for higher and further education in Dumfries and Galloway. Some of us are a bit puzzled as to why, if such an academic strategy is necessary, it has taken so many years to start to develop one, given that the developments on the Crichton have hardly been going on in secrecy and, indeed, have attracted Government support. There is more than a little suspicion that part of the rationale behind the exercise is to provide a post hoc justification for what is happening or to spread out the train of events so that decisions become irretrievable, especially given the forthcoming dissolution of the Parliament and the hiatus that must inevitably follow that and the election to come.

I hope that the minister will notice that my motion is couched in terms that do not take that cynical view. Rather, the assumption is that if a strategy is being developed and all options are indeed open in the discussions that surround it, it would surely be better if no irrevocable decisions, such as the cancellation of first-year courses in the coming year by the University of Glasgow, should be taken. To make such decisions would surely be to pre-empt whatever will come out of the strategy discussions.

That is why I am calling on the Executive—to be frank, I do not know whom else I could call on—to take all the steps that it can to ensure that recruitment is resumed for the current year. Not all students who had been offered places on courses will still be in a position to avail themselves of offers if courses are resumed, but I am sure that it is not too late to attract a reasonable core of first-year undergraduates. I am equally certain that once one year's cohort of undergraduates is lost, staff will begin to move away, confidence in the possibility of the University of Glasgow's continuing presence will be significantly dented and it will be much more difficult to reinstate that presence if doing so should be the preferred outcome of the strategy review.

Many of us are becoming dismayed that, although there seems to be a significant readiness to refer to the Crichton in Government documents as an example of how things should be done, the continuing commitment is not clear in practical terms. For example, the original rural development white paper that I debated when the Parliament met in Glasgow in 2000 referred to the Crichton campus as an example of how innovative the Executive was being. Also, the consultation document on the merger of the two separate funding councils for higher and further education referred to the Crichton campus as an example of collaboration between the sectors and hence as a justification for the merger of the funding councils.

The development of the Crichton must be seen in the context of the rural development of the south-west of Scotland and the support that it can give to fulfil that area's economic and social needs. Such an approach seems to be taken with the UHI Millennium Institute in the Highlands and Islands. The most recent figures that are available, admittedly for the Crichton as a whole, show that 56 per cent of students there come from families whose members do not have a tradition of going into higher education. It is clear that the project has been working. I would have thought that Nichol Stephen's advice to the funding council on 3 November 2005 that it should ensure that

"there is fair access to further and higher education for all"

has been contradicted by what is happening at the Crichton campus.

It is clear—at least to me—that a fair breadth of curriculum is needed at the Crichton and that the collaboration of the new university of the west of Scotland and Dumfries and Galloway College will not, although excellent in itself, provide such breadth. Some have suggested that the Open University can fill that gap, but I do not think that it can, albeit that I yield to none in my admiration for that institution, having gained a degree from it after eight long years. What the University of Glasgow has been doing is not what the Open University was designed to do.

The current collaboration at the Crichton seems to fulfil many Government policy objectives. It is an innovative collaboration between different sectors; it encourages people who would otherwise be denied access to higher education to access it; and it contributes to rural development. In particular, it contributes to the local economy of an area that needs the high-quality input that academic institutions can provide.

Yet it now seems that much of this has been happening by accident. There is no grand design on the part of those who control the central purse strings. We should not be put in a position in which we are struggling to retain one of the main founders of the project. We should be exploring the extent to which the project can be expanded in further innovative areas, so that the economy of Dumfries and Galloway—which has underperformed too much and has been neglected by central Government investment for far too long—can begin to blossom. That is what the minister should be about today.

The Presiding Officer: I call Elaine Murray, to be followed by Murray Tosh.

12:40

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): Five weeks has elapsed since my members' business debate on the issue, on 15 February, and I am disappointed that the proposed meeting between the Scottish Executive, the Scottish funding council and the University of Glasgow has not yet taken place, as far as I am aware. I have been in regular contact with the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Allan Wilson, during that period and I know that, shortly after that debate, he asked the funding council to organise a meeting and to invite the various parties. I hear the sound of dragging feet. Either the University of Glasgow or the funding council—perhaps both—does not seem to be keen to sit at the table with the Executive to try to resolve the problem. I suspect that they see the fact that the Parliament is about to go into dissolution as an opportunity to kick the matter to the other side of the election, as Alasdair Morgan has suggested.

On Tuesday evening, I was pleased to join students and staff in demonstrating outside Easterbrook Hall, where Sir Muir Russell, the principal of the University of Glasgow, was giving a lecture that was rather ironically entitled "The Future of Higher Education". What a cheek, considering what he is doing to damage higher education in Dumfries and Galloway. The following morning, I was disappointed to hear Sir Muir Russell give an interview to BBC Radio Scotland on the Dumfries and Galloway opt-out in which he seemed to dismiss any reconsideration by the university court of the decision to cancel the September intake at the Crichton. To give him his due, however, he said that the University of Glasgow was participating in the joint academic strategy for the Crichton and that the university might have a future in Dumfries.

Staff and students also met Sir Muir Russell on Tuesday afternoon—difficult as that was for them, as the university at the Crichton is now on holiday, which meant that the students could not provide the presence that they might otherwise have had. However, I am sorry to say that, from the reports that I have heard of that meeting, it seems that he was not receptive at all to the points that were put to him by the staff and the students.

Since the previous debate on the issue, I have read the minute of the funding council's meeting at which it considered the University of Glasgow's request for 220 additional fully funded places. The funding council considered three options. The first was to accept the bid and to grant the places; the second was to reject the bid; and the third was to try to find a compromise. Contrary to the impression that is being given by the court of the University of Glasgow, the funding council did not reject the bid outright. However, the funding council said that it would be difficult for it to accept the bid because that could set a precedent for other universities. Other universities that had problems might say, "You did it for the University of Glasgow, why can you not do it for us?" The funding council decided on the third way, which was to try to find a compromise through the development of the academic strategy. I believe that a meeting of all stakeholders took place on 6 March, at which the University of Glasgow was represented.

It is unfortunate that the University of Glasgow's lack of commitment to the Crichton has overshadowed the statement by the university of the west of Scotland that it intends to increase its commitment to Dumfries and Galloway. That is good news, and I am pleased to say that my youngest son, who is a student, is considering studying at that university. Nevertheless, the university of the west of Scotland cannot substitute for the courses that are offered by the University of Glasgow.

I was pleased to hear in Alasdair Morgan's speech that the party consensus on fighting to keep the University of Glasgow's support for the Crichton has been retained. Mr Michael Russell, who is standing for the SNP in my constituency, issued a press release last week in which he stated that the SNP will make it

"absolutely certain that the Glasgow University presence at the Crichton is not lost".

The trouble is that he did not go on to explain how. I believe that Mr Salmond said the same thing at a recent meeting in Annan. Is Mr Russell saying that Mr Salmond is going to instruct the funding council to give the University of Glasgow all the money that it has asked for? If so, that would require the amendment of section 9 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005, which introduced a safeguard against ministerial interference in the funding council's decisions to prevent ministers from directing funds towards universities in their constituencies or in marginal constituencies. It is not that easy.

In wrapping up—I know that others wish to speak—I yet again make a plea to the University of Glasgow to reconsider its decision. The university is £2 million in profit and the Crichton campus was on course this year to deliver savings in the deficit. Account should be taken of further developments such as the comprehensive spending review and the review of higher education funding. The university does not need to take this decision at this time. It can hold back and see how things develop.

The Presiding Officer: Murray Tosh has indicated that he will drop down the list in favour of his colleague Alex Fergusson.

12:45

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): I would have been perfectly happy if Murray Tosh had spoken next, but I am happy to step in.

I congratulate Alasdair Morgan on securing the debate. Although the issue was debated only five weeks ago, that does not mean that the Crichton campus is further down the list of priorities in the region, half of which I represent. It would be very tempting and easy just to repeat the arguments that were made when Elaine Murray's motion was debated five weeks ago, but I will resist that temptation.

Too many people have been hinting that the new university of the west of Scotland, which will be brought about by the merger of the University of Paisley and Bell College, will fill the gap that will be left by the University of Glasgow. However, although I applaud that merger and the new institution's commitment to the Crichton campus,

the fact remains that the Crichton needs the University of Glasgow if it is to remain a truly credible project. That is because the University of Glasgow provides the education that is necessary to allow local people to be educated and trained in the region to fulfil local needs. To put the matter simply, if our young have to go away for their education and training, they are far more likely to stay away.

I can put the issue no better than by quoting a letter dated 9 March 2007 that was sent to the First Minister on behalf of Dumfries and Galloway's children's panel advisory committee. The letter states:

"The Dumfries and Galloway Council is required to meet its statutory duties and to maintain appropriate service delivery to support the care and welfare of Children in this region. A range of national and local initiatives has been developed to address the shortage of qualified social work staff.

The retention, recruitment and motivation of social work and social care staff is essential not only to sustain current child care arrangements but also to support the changes Scottish Ministers are driving forward and set out in the provisions of the Draft Children's Services (Scotland) Bill.

A partnership agreement with the University of Glasgow Crichton Campus to facilitate the delivery of a Master of Arts (Social Sciences) with honours in Social Work was agreed in 2004. Integral to this partnership was that Dumfries and Galloway Council would provide funding for a full time University Teacher position."

After continuing at considerable length on the importance of that aspect of the project, the letter finishes by stating:

"The Children's Hearing System in Dumfries and Galloway and the Children of this region require the Scottish Executive and Scottish Ministers to demonstrate the cross cutting, innovative and flexible approach to ensuring that the University of Glasgow is supported to continue its important presence on the Crichton Campus as it is looking for all those involved with the care and welfare of Children to embrace the changes set out in 'Getting it Right for Every Child'. ...the Children of this region deserve our best efforts and I would request that collectively Scottish Ministers cut across departmental boundaries and seek to work in partnership with Glasgow University to secure the future of the Crichton Campus."

As members will know, Dumfries and Galloway Council's social work department has had a pretty hard time recently following a damning report from the Social Work Inspection Agency. A major shake-up is taking place and some tough decisions are being taken. How much harder will those decisions and restructuring be if we cannot even train our local people locally?

Things are happening at the Crichton. Only this morning, I was made aware of a new type of institution—a cross between a business school and a research centre—which will specialise in renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainable products. That is an exciting, innovative and relevant development that wants to

be on the Crichton and that would—like the courses that are currently provided by the Crichton—be in touch with the region's needs.

As Alasdair Morgan's motion suggests, it is imperative that we reverse the decision that has been made about student intake this September. Thus far, frankly, I think that ministers have promised much but delivered little despite having more than a year's warning of the crisis. The Parliament may be about to go into dissolution, but the Executive is not. Ministers can still act during April to keep the matter on the table. I am afraid that, locally, the Lib-Lab Administration is being seen to have let Dumfries and Galloway down. That may not be easily forgiven.

12:49

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I congratulate Alasdair Morgan on securing today's debate. It is important that we have another debate on the subject because, although it has been only five weeks since we raised our concerns in the original debate, in that time we have seen very little positive progress from the Executive, a lack of successful and visible action and a lack of backbone in the discussions with the funding council and the University of Glasgow. The Executive has shown a lack of commitment to the Crichton and a lack of results.

Right at the heart of the matter is the lack of a national strategy for higher education throughout Scotland. We do not need an academic strategy for Dumfries and Galloway; we need an academic strategy for rural Scotland. We need a world in which £15 million does not go to the university of the Highlands and Islands when the Crichton receives only £1 million. We need a proper, thought-out strategy so that we may analyse and put on record the key role that is played by further and higher education institutions in rural areas and the support that they give to the economic and social needs of those areas through research based on local issues, as happens at the Crichton; through engagement with local practitioners, as happens at the Crichton; and through vocational teaching to strengthen the local structure of relevant services and professions, the sharing of facilities and the building of the local economy.

The achievements of the Crichton are many. It delivers into the local economy expertise in key services, such as renewable energy and tourism. It widens participation—as Alasdair Morgan mentioned, 56 per cent of the student intake consists of students who are the first in their family to go to university. That is a proud and important achievement of the Crichton, which we lose at our peril.

The Crichton puts Dumfries and Galloway on the map by attracting international students from more than 20 countries and it brings internationally rated research to the region. Like Alex Fergusson, I have been informed about the new type of institution at the Crichton that will be announced next week. It will be a cross between a business school and a research centre and it will work with local energy consultancy companies and voluntary organisations, such as the Southern Uplands Partnership. I trust that the minister will be able at least to support that initiative and to support research and development, postgraduate work and taught courses at the Crichton.

We have heard much from ministers about supporting the Crichton. We heard Jim Wallace say in 2004:

"The Crichton campus in Dumfries has proven to be a positive model of collaboration between HE and FE institutions which has successfully worked with local partners to widen access to those in the area who would not otherwise have experienced higher education."

Jim Wallace continued:

"I would look to the Council to continue to support this type of cross sectoral initiative."

I say to the minister that those have turned out to be empty words and rhetoric, with no positive action flowing from them. He is in danger of losing this flagship development, whose value his Executive has trumpeted.

I have two questions for the minister that flow from today's debate and the previous members' business debate. What has the minister done since Elaine Murray's debate to achieve the success that he was positive he would be able to achieve? What will the minister do over the next 10 days to ensure that he secures a positive result before dissolution?

12:54

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP): I thank Alasdair Morgan for securing a debate on Crichton campus and I thank Elaine Murray for doing so on a previous occasion.

Usually towards the end of a debate, most of the important points will have been made, but I will not apologise for repeating some, because the arguments in the fight to save Crichton campus cannot be made often enough.

Over the past few months, much of the discussion has focused on cost, profit and loss. There are conflicting views about who holds the purse and who can save Crichton campus. The University of Glasgow claims that because the campus is making a loss, new students cannot be admitted in September, but the university as a whole has a surplus that is far greater than the

current deficit at Crichton, so it could easily step in to save this valuable resource.

Given that Crichton has been up and running for only 10 years, it has not had a decent chance to bed in or to show its true colours in respect of what it can put back into the community. At the moment, the campus is not fully resourced—it lacks a students union, recreational and sports facilities and a canteen. If it were fully resourced, Crichton would be more than capable of balancing its books, so it should be afforded the chance to do just that.

The Executive has bailed out many a big business that has been in strife, but it will not get round the table with the University of Glasgow and the Scottish funding council to take positive steps to save Crichton campus. The university, the funding council and the Executive are blaming each other, but it is within their powers to step in and save the day, either individually or collectively.

The debate is not just about the current balance sheet; it should focus on the social aspects and the future. The fact that Crichton campus has a higher ratio of disabled students than any other higher education institution in Scotland means that it lifts barriers for many people and opens up the world of higher education to folk who would normally be excluded from it. As has been mentioned, we should celebrate that.

Crichton opens its doors to students who have families and jobs and to people who are carers. It offers a unique setting in which students feel supported and, therefore, comfortable and able to complete their education, which is about enhancing lives, expanding minds and empowering people. Crichton is growing the future—we cannot put a price on that, nor can we let the institution dwindle.

Is the minister aware that lecturers from Glasgow were encouraged to settle in the community, put their children in local schools and become part of the wider community? That was a good thing, but what are those workers to do if the campus is allowed to disintegrate? They made important changes when they brought their valuable skills and expertise to the campus in the name of education. What will be the effect on their families and on the local economy?

The Executive was made aware of the threat to the University of Glasgow's presence at Crichton campus in a letter from Muir Russell in June last year, but for some reason it has chosen to sit on its hands. It is now time to take action. I strongly urge the Executive, the University of Glasgow and the funding council collectively to do the principled thing and get their fingers out to find a solution.

Finally, I congratulate the students from Crichton campus who have spoken up, demonstrated and

asked difficult questions of the powers that be, and who continue to fight tooth and nail to save their education and the future education of people they do not even know. I ask the powers that be, who are letting go of a unique and valuable resource, to please show the same courage and determination to save Crichton. It is often argued by MSPs that we need to keep Trident to save jobs. I strongly disagree with that argument, but if we apply the same principles, keeping Crichton will cost a lot less and will produce a much more positive outcome. I sincerely hope that the minister will tell us that a solution will be found and that Crichton campus will be saved, resourced and developed.

12:58

Murray Tosh (West of Scotland) (Con): As a former member for the South of Scotland, I would have wished to participate in the previous debate on the subject that was held some weeks ago, which was initiated by Dr Elaine Murray but, as members will recall, personal circumstances prevented my being in Parliament. I am therefore grateful to Alasdair Morgan for facilitating a second debate in which he, as other members have done, made an excellent and forceful speech.

I read the *Official Report* of the previous debate and found much in it with which I agreed strongly. Members made clear then—and have made clear again today—the importance of the Crichton campus and the University of Glasgow's participation in it. They have also focused on the impact of the decision on the south-west's economy, and have highlighted in particular the importance of many courses in sustaining local services including, as Alex Fergusson pointed out, local government services; in providing opportunities for people who not only live in, but move to, Dumfries and Galloway; and in ensuring a sense of equity.

I understand why, in the previous debate, Allan Wilson cautioned members against making inappropriate regional comparisons. The UHI is, indeed, based on a different model, and any comparisons that are made between and among regions must depend on such factors being taken into account. Nevertheless, in the previous debate, Dr Murray made some very telling comparisons—that have since been circulated by, among others, Mrs Hilary Grieve on behalf of the Crichton Trust—about the investment that appears to be available to sustain higher education in the south-west of Scotland and that which is available in other areas. By drawing such comparisons, we are not knocking what has been done for UHI; instead, we are demanding that resources be made available equitably throughout the country.

I also acknowledge the point that Allan Wilson made in the previous debate about the difficulties that are faced by the Executive in telling universities and the Scottish funding council how to operate their budgets; indeed, Dr Murray made that point again in this debate. However, we must point out that the funding that is made available to the funding council and the universities is public money that is provided by taxpayers. The people who discharge the responsibilities that have been given to them are, through ministers, accountable ultimately to the people who have been elected by taxpayers.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Does the member agree that a constructive way forward might be to focus on Dumfries and Galloway's teacher recruitment problems? Perhaps ministerial guidance on how the retention of arts and humanities courses can provide people with a route into teaching might help to influence the funding council in its search for a positive outcome.

Murray Tosh: That suggestion sounds perfectly sensible. I do not know whether ministerial guidance is necessarily the right mechanism to use, but I have no doubt that the minister can play a very important role.

This issue poses a very significant challenge to the minister's political skills, because it has become clear that, in this case, he does not have the levers to direct. Of course, that raises profound philosophical questions about whether anyone should have the power to direct. Nevertheless, people in Dumfries and Galloway are entitled to expect not only that their services are sustained but that the opportunities that exist in other parts of the country flourish in their region.

No matter whether the minister has 10 days, 10 weeks or even 10 years left in office, he is faced with the challenge of finding some way of brokering a deal that will ensure that the University of Glasgow and, perhaps, the Scottish funding council understand their responsibilities. After all, an issue of equity is at stake: there is a perception in the south-west of Scotland that what is being done is not fair and must be put right. That is the challenge for the current Executive—or, should the matter not be resolved by 3 May, for whoever forms the Executive after the election.

13:03

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): I congratulate Alasdair Morgan on securing this welcome debate, which allows us to continue to acknowledge the Crichton campus's important contribution to improving access to higher education in the south-west. Members have already highlighted that

contribution, which I expect to continue over the piece. Although I appreciate people's genuine concerns about the University of Glasgow's announcement that it will not have an undergraduate intake at Crichton for 2007-08, I believe that that must be seen in the wider context of other significant developments at Crichton.

At this point, I must correct Rosie Kane. This is not a fight to save Crichton campus, and I am sure that other members will wish to join me in reassuring the good people of the south-west and beyond that the Crichton campus is not under threat in any shape, manner or form. As several members—including Alex Fergusson and Elaine Murray—have mentioned, since the previous debate on the issue, ministers have approved the merger of the University of Paisley and Bell College, which, subject to the will of Parliament after the election, will be implemented from August. Significantly, the new merged institution will operate a four-campus model that will provide local delivery to meet the needs of people in the west of Scotland.

Contrary to what Alex Fergusson and, to an extent, Murray Tosh said, the Executive has a good record in supporting and funding the expansion of such provision, and provision in rural Scotland more generally. The University of Glasgow and the University of Paisley receive a combined total of 150 funded places, which is worth a total of £775,000 at this year's prices. Funding per place stands at £5,165, which is 4 per cent more than the funding per place for the UHI and a full 13 per cent more than the average for all higher education institutions in Scotland. The funding per place for the Crichton campus is calculated on the basis of the average funding for Glasgow and Paisley universities.

Alasdair Morgan: Should it be an objective of public policy that higher education courses of the type that the University of Glasgow currently offers be available somewhere in the south-west of Scotland? If so, can the minister achieve that objective through guidance to the Scottish funding council?

Allan Wilson: It should be the objective of public policy to secure not a regional approach to higher education provision throughout Scotland, but an approach that determines that quality education provision is available throughout Scotland to everyone who has the ability to access it. We can, and do, secure quality provision in the range of institutions that we fund in Scotland through the Scottish funding council. The reason why we are in the process of establishing the UHI and why our funding for rural provision is higher than our funding for urban provision is that those are means by which we can ensure that quality

provision is available across the broad spectrum of urban and rural Scotland.

For the first time at the Crichton campus, there will be the potential to deliver engineering and science courses in collaboration with Dumfries and Galloway College, which is a major advance. Dumfries and Galloway College's co-location at Crichton is continuing to progress, supported by the Scottish funding council's £28 million investment. That funding has been provided to the college for the relocation, and to the Crichton partners for shared facilities, such as the new library, which is an important factor in the introduction of honours courses. Other possibilities for co-location and sharing of facilities will be explored.

Chris Ballance: Does the minister accept that there is a difference between higher and further education and, if so, does he accept that if one of those no longer takes place at the Crichton campus, it will be a real loss?

Allan Wilson: Through close working with Dumfries and Galloway College and other colleges, the newly merged institution will be able to provide strong transitional support for students who transfer from college to university. Scottish colleges are successful in providing that transitional route from further education into higher education, through the important higher national certificate and higher national diploma. The role of encouraging more people to access higher education is fundamental to the future expansion of further education and will, I think, help to develop the Crichton campus exponentially. However, I acknowledge the point that the member makes.

What I have said does not mean that we are complacent in any way about the commitment that we have given to engage with the Scottish funding council, the University of Glasgow and other Crichton partners about the issues that have been raised over the future delivery of higher and further education in the region.

As I have emphasised previously—Murray Tosh and Elaine Murray made the point, too—such discussions should not be based on the incorrect premise that ministers should, or indeed legally can, direct funding to a particular institution. I assume that we would all agree that that is not the solution. Our key aim is to ensure that adequate further and higher education is available in the south of Scotland, and that that provision is quality provision. I very much welcome the funding council's clear commitment to that, and the engagement of the academic partners and other stakeholders in taking that forward for Dumfries and Galloway through development of the academic strategy, which is welcomed in the motion.

Alex Fergusson: I hear what the minister is saying, but can he confirm for the sake of clarity that he believes that the quality of educational provision, to which he referred, on the Crichton campus can be provided without the presence of the University of Glasgow?

Allan Wilson: I do not envisage the University of Glasgow's not being present on the campus. There is a danger in the member's point that he may be arguing that provision from the University of Paisley and Bell College is inferior to that which is provided by other academic institutions. The University of Glasgow is a prestigious academic institution, but I do not believe that its provision is higher quality than that which is provided by other academic institutions.

The Deputy First Minister and I met a cross-party delegation from Dumfries and Galloway Council and representatives of the Crichton campus on 22 February. Following that helpful meeting, I discussed Crichton with the chair of the Scottish funding council and the principal of the University of Glasgow. Earlier this week, I met the principal of the University of Glasgow and the chief executive of the Scottish funding council, which is what I gave a commitment to do at the previous debate on this issue. At that meeting, the principal confirmed the university's commitment to its involvement in development of the academic strategy for the region. The university has written to its staff at Crichton indicating that there will be no fundamental change in its staffing in 2007-08. The university has also made no decision at this time on its undergraduate provision at Crichton beyond 2007-08 and is continuing to deliver its social work and initial teacher training courses.

In respect of student places for 2007-08, the Scottish funding council has confirmed that it is willing to fund additional places at Crichton for the University of Paisley and Bell College. As I mentioned earlier, the merger provides new opportunities to enhance existing provision both in subject availability and level. The Open University has also indicated that it may be able to offer liberal-arts provision. Discussions on those areas continue to be taken forward by the Scottish funding council. As Alex Fergusson mentioned—I know other members have been involved in discussions—it may be possible to establish new postgraduate provision in the region. I fully support that development and expect the funding council to do all in its powers to help to take it forward. I discussed that with partners on Monday, and my officials continue to progress the matter with the sector, including with the University of Glasgow.

I am sure that members will agree that those are welcome developments since we last debated the issue. I agree with Alasdair Morgan that development of the academic strategy is

fundamental to maintaining the important role of Crichton and to continuing and enhancing the level of provision there. It is absolutely fundamental that the people in that area are wholly engaged in developing their local academic strategy. The first meeting on development of the academic strategy took place at the beginning of March and I welcome the funding council's proposal that the strategy should be prepared by late spring. It is important that the strategy be made available as soon as possible to enable it to inform the planning that is being taken forward by the academic partners and other stakeholders. It should—I believe that it will—provide a shared vision for the future and identify the academic programmes that will best serve the needs of the people of Dumfries and Galloway and its wider economy.

I close by re-emphasising the Executive's continuing support for the Crichton campus. We recognise fully what it has achieved to date for the south-west, and we want to ensure that it is able to develop, to grow, to provide the range of courses that are best suited to the area, as determined by local people in their local academic development strategy, and to provide access to those courses.

13:15

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Enterprise, Lifelong Learning and Transport

Alginate Industry (Western Isles)

1. Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment its enterprise department has made of the contribution of the alginate industry to the Western Isles economy and how it supports that industry. (S2O-12462)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): The Scottish Executive has undertaken no assessment of the contribution of the alginate industry to the Western Isles economy. That would be for Highlands and Islands Enterprise, through HIE Innse Gall, to undertake, as would the provision of support.

I am encouraged that HIE has supported the industry and that its support has resulted in the establishment of a new processing facility in Stornoway, which is entering full production and is creating new employment opportunities for the good people of the Western Isles.

Mr Morrison: I thank the minister for his answer and his observation. Will he join me in congratulating two enterprising young men, Martin MacLeod and Malcolm MacRae, who have successfully resuscitated an age-old industry in the Western Isles, employing cutters, lorry drivers and factory operatives—a total of 28 workers? Does the minister agree that that is exactly the type of business that the Executive and its agencies should be supporting? Will he join me in wishing and hoping that, in the not-too-distant future, Mr MacLeod and Mr MacRae will be expanding their business in the Western Isles and adding value to the seaweed that they are so successfully drying at the moment?

Allan Wilson: The Executive values all such entrepreneurial activity and we pay tribute to all the young entrepreneurs out there who are building Scotland's economy. We pledge to continue to give them ever-increasing support.

It is interesting that sometimes our economic future can be rooted in our past, and I think that the alginate industry has a strong future. The last time that attempts were made to resurrect the industry, a stock market crash in the far east put paid to the resurrection. That was an example of

how Scotland cannot hide from the effects of the global economy.

We wish the two individuals mentioned by Mr Morrison, and everyone else who is involved in resurrecting the alginate industry, well for the future. We pledge to give them whatever support we can to ensure their future success.

Knowledge Transfer (Colleges)

2. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what contribution the knowledge transfer activities of Scottish colleges have made in terms of impact on business creation and growth. (S2O-12454)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): Nearly all colleges in Scotland participate in knowledge transfer activity. The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council is committed to working with colleges to increase their engagement particularly with small and medium-sized businesses.

Marilyn Livingstone: Will the minister congratulate Adam Smith College on its Round House creative business centre, which is supporting the development of the creative industry sector and small business sector in my constituency? Does he agree that funding should be made available for such innovative developments, which support and nurture entrepreneurship? Will he ensure that funding is available, even outwith Scottish Enterprise's six key sectors?

Nicol Stephen: I am pleased to congratulate Adam Smith College, which is one of the best examples of knowledge transfer activity among Scotland's colleges. I know that the chair of Adam Smith College is a member of the funding council's knowledge transfer college action group, through which work is being done. Indeed, a conference on the issue was held in October last year. The funding council will consider the issue of future funding and future support, which will be an important issue for the spending review.

Regional Transport Partnerships

3. Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what form of parliamentary scrutiny there will be prior to the implementation of the regional transport partnerships' strategies being collated by Transport Scotland under the 10-year national transport strategy. (S2O-12420)

The Minister for Transport (Tavish Scott): All seven regional transport partnerships' strategies will be submitted to Scottish ministers for approval in keeping with guidance issued in March 2006.

Ministers are of course accountable to Parliament through the normal mechanisms.

Rob Gibson: We are coming to a period in which parliamentarians, for the first time, can be a part of the process of policy making on rail projects. Many people in the region that I represent want to see an ambitious list of priorities for appropriate road and rail developments in the transport strategy. Does the minister agree that parliamentary scrutiny could augment the proposals that are made by regional transport partnerships if they blatantly ignore the wishes of local people? For example, democratic scrutiny would be needed if the Dornoch rail link, which could revitalise the post-Dounreay economy in Caithness, is ignored by the Highlands and Islands transport partnership.

Tavish Scott: I have no doubt—I am sure that Mr Gibson shares this view—that the proposals that come from the north and far north in respect of all modes of transport will be exacting and will make considerable requests of local and central Government in developing projects. I do not believe for a minute that regional transport partnerships will disregard any views from elected parliamentarians in this place or from local people, constituent councils, community councils and other bodies. We have been clear in our guidance that RTPs should ensure that the widest possible consultation is conducted in respect of the transport services that we all agree are essential in the far north of Scotland.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does the minister share my concern that the draft Tayside and Central Scotland transport partnership strategy makes no reference to the need to dual the A9, which is regarded by many in the area as the top priority for investment? Does he agree that unless the TACTRAN strategy corrects that omission, it will not deserve public support when it is finalised?

Tavish Scott: It would be inappropriate for me to comment on a strategy that is still in its final stages. We will look closely at the strategy when it is submitted, in terms of both the project that Mr Fraser mentioned and the wider issues that it raises. The whole purpose of regional transport partnerships in the area that Mr Fraser represents, as well as throughout Scotland, has been to focus on the development of transport priorities that recognise the concerns of businesses and local people about how they are to function properly and to take into account essential spending issues at regional and central Government level, irrespective of who is in power.

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Perhaps I can get the minister to comment on the process that has been adopted by TACTRAN. It is clear that in the draft plan that

TACTRAN is working towards, there are a number of projects that are not reflected in local councils' structure plans. Will the minister comment on the process that has been followed, whereby projects are being put forward without consultation with communities and without their prior inclusion in structure plans?

Tavish Scott: I would be very surprised if proposals came forward from any regional transport partnership that had not been subject to some scrutiny by local communities and some detailed consideration by constituent local authorities, community councils and other such bodies. If there is an example of that, I am sure that it will be picked up in our assessment of the strategies that are developed and produced throughout Scotland. If the member wants to raise specific issues, I am happy to consider them.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): On the HITRANS submission, one issue on which constituents approach me is the A9 at Berriedale. Will the minister assure me that that will be looked at closely in the future?

Tavish Scott: I can certainly give Mr Stone that assurance. As he knows, we visited the Berriedale braes last year and looked closely at the engineering solutions and their budgetary implications. I was pleased, on the member's invitation, to be able to meet local campaigners, some of whom have campaigned on the issue for many years. We will continue to look at the project. The formal position with regard to the whole A9 is of course that it will be considered as part of the strategic projects review. That is the correct way to take forward the project, so that is what will be done.

Manufacturing

4. Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it has in place to support manufacturing industry, what the value is of such support and how many jobs have been created or sustained by these measures. (S2O-12457)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): Scottish ministers provide a wide range of support to manufacturing companies in Scotland. That includes financial support, innovation grants, practical support for companies to improve productivity and efficiency, and business and product planning services that are delivered through our enterprise agencies.

On practical support, in its first year of operation our Scottish manufacturing advisory service undertook 119 hands-on manufacturing reviews with Scottish companies, identifying a potential

£19.6 million in productivity and process improvements to manufacturing companies.

On financial support, in the past five years manufacturing businesses have accepted more than 500 offers of regional selective assistance totalling some £189 million for projects that involve the planned creation or safeguarding of more than 23,000 jobs.

In addition, in the past five years our research and development support schemes, which are the small firms merit award for research and technology, support for products under research—SPUR—and SPURplus, have offered nearly £40 million to 340 projects across Scotland.

Christine May: It is often suggested, particularly by the Scottish National Party, that RSA and other grants are exploited by rapacious foreign companies, which grab a grant, create low-skill screwdriver or call-centre jobs and, having screwed every penny that they can from the system, relocate overseas. Does the minister support that view? Or does he agree that recent grants to companies such as Semifab, CRC Glenrothes and Naylor Industries—I hope that will include Tullis Russell Papermakers Ltd, too—which are all in my constituency, are for local manufacturing companies to support innovative processes that raise the manufacturing game in Scotland? Does he believe that such assistance is vital for the stability and growth of manufacturing in Scotland?

Allan Wilson: I do indeed and I note that in the same period to which I referred, businesses in the Fife area accepted 72 offers of RSA totalling more than £20 million. Those offers relate to projects that aim to create or safeguard more than 3,300 jobs, which is a significant contribution to the Fife economy. Of course, RSA makes an important contribution to the creation and safeguarding of jobs across Scotland.

I believe that it is folly on the part of our political opponents to level criticism at the scheme in the manner in which they do. The only people who gain from that are our competitors in places such as Ireland, who would welcome with open arms some of the inward investment that would be diverted from these shores to other parts of the country if our opponents' advice were to be followed.

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I cannot help but wish that, when I was an IBM salesman, the minister had been my manager because he seems to be able only to record gains and never to account for losses. Can the minister tell me whether, in measuring the extent of manufacturing in Scotland, job losses are accounted for and confronted? Should that not be recorded and reported to ensure a true and fair

view of Scottish economic performance and Scottish jobs?

Allan Wilson: It would be helpful if the official Opposition, too, gave a balanced account of the performance of the Scottish economy in these and other debates. The decline in manufacturing output, to which Mr Mather refers, is of course not uniform across the sector. Areas such as chemicals, refined petroleum and food and drink have exceeded their expectations.

As far as our calculations of employment and job losses are concerned, of course we take account of losses in the manufacturing sector. However, those losses have been more than compensated for, as Mr Mather is well aware, by expanding sectors such as the service sector, the financial services sector and the construction services sector. That is why we now have a record high employment level and are second only to Denmark in the European Union 25 for creation of jobs. It is also why, for the first time in my memory, we are exceeding the rest of the United Kingdom in keeping unemployment below the rate experienced elsewhere.

Nigg Construction Yard

5. Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what it considers the significance of the former Nigg construction yard on the Cromarty firth to be for the economic development of the Highlands and Scotland. (S2O-12467)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): That strategically important site is of considerable significance for the economic development of the area, not least given its access to deep water and a skilled labour force. Against that background, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, in consultation with Highland Council, is looking at all available future options that would see the yard return to productive economic use to the benefit of the Highlands and Islands and Scotland as a whole.

Peter Peacock: Sadly, those who are involved in the ownership of the site have been unable to conclude an agreement about its long-term future. One of the parties involved has made no significant investment in the site and has a history that has made economic development difficult to secure.

I was pleased to hear the minister indicate that he will do this, but can he confirm that he will ensure that his officials take a close interest in the matter and continue to work with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the council and the local Cromarty Firth Port Authority to seek to secure by whatever means necessary the future use of the

yard for significantly expanded economic activity? Further, will the minister undertake to consider any reasonable approach for resources to assist local partners to secure the yard?

Nicol Stephen: In short, yes we will. There has already been an approach from the convener of the Highland Council and from Highlands and Islands Enterprise to the First Minister on 15 March. That letter has not yet been responded to, but I can place on record today the Executive's willingness to consider this important issue and try to play a role, in partnership with the others involved, in reaching a satisfactory solution. The issue is important for the whole of the Highlands, and I believe that the public sector can play an important role in making progress on the current problems involving the site owners, Kellogg Brown and Root and the Wakelyn Trust, and on the potential for a deal to be struck with the Cromarty Firth Port Authority. Working with HIE and Highland Council, the Executive is prepared to play a significant role.

Broadband

6. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it is making on expanding access to broadband. (S2O-12421)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): The Executive has made significant progress, bringing broadband coverage to every Scottish community and to more than 99 per cent of households. We are determined to go further, which is why I have allocated £5 million to make access as widespread as possible.

We have now agreed with BT that it will increase broadband availability in at least 20 exchanges that currently have limited broadband capacity. A further £3.5 million has been allocated to support solutions for remaining clusters that are experiencing access problems. Further proposals will be announced over the next few weeks.

Mr Swinney: The minister knows my concern about many hard-to-reach locations in my constituency in which broadband access remains a significant challenge. Can he give Parliament any idea of how many individual connections the investment package that he announced can make in hard-to-reach locations, in order that we have some idea of how many people in rural areas will be able to be connected as a result of the investment?

Nicol Stephen: We are not in a position to make detailed announcements today. The negotiations with BT are not yet complete, but I expect the first set of exchanges to be announced by the end of next week. The final stages of the

discussions are taking place, and I can assure John Swinney that at least one exchange in his North Tayside constituency will be upgraded as a result of this first step in the next development of broadband in Scotland.

Thereafter, the priority is to invest the further £3.5 million. The first tranche of activity will require £1.5 million, and an additional £3.5 million will be allocated to reach another set of exchanges. The exact numbers involved have yet to be agreed with BT and the other contractors that could be involved in the project, but I assure John Swinney that every representation that has been made, not only from his constituency but from other Highland and remote constituencies, has been logged. We will attempt to make figures available in due course, and we will attempt to explain clearly and openly what percentage of those who are currently outside access to broadband will be helped by the £5 million investment.

Crichton Campus

7. Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that it will be able to achieve a successful outcome to its negotiations about retaining a University of Glasgow presence at Crichton campus, Dumfries. (S2O-12484)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): I met the principal of the University of Glasgow and the chief executive of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council on 19 March. The university has confirmed that it will continue to deliver initial teacher training and social work at Crichton and that it remains committed to developing the academic strategy for the region.

The university has subsequently written to staff indicating that there would be no fundamental change to academic staff in 2007-08 and that administrative and support staffing structures should also substantially remain in place. It has also confirmed that a decision has yet to be made on undergraduate intake beyond 2007-08.

Chris Ballance: Some of us might think that stopping the intake of students represents a substantial change of approach. Be that as it may, it seemed clear from the earlier debate that the minister has given up any pretence of supporting the long-term provision of liberal arts courses that the University of Glasgow has been offering at the Crichton campus. For the sake of clarity, will the minister say whether he is committed to keeping the University of Glasgow's liberal arts courses at the Crichton—yes or no?

Allan Wilson: The one consistent thing about Mr Ballance's comments in the chamber is that

they are consistently wrong. I said no such thing in the earlier debate.

Mr Ballance must be aware that the University of Glasgow is an autonomous institution that takes its own decisions on the provision of education within its sphere of influence—on the Crichton campus and elsewhere—without ministerial interference or influence, which should be the case. We remain committed, as the University of Glasgow is, to developing an academic strategy for the region in concert with other higher education providers. The University of Paisley and Bell College are fundamental contributors in that process. We expect the Crichton campus to continue to expand and to provide broad and quality education for the foreseeable future.

Justice and Law Officers

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Question 1, which was lodged by Nora Radcliffe, has been withdrawn.

Legal Services (Competitiveness)

2. Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has, or discussions it is having, with the legal profession to benchmark and improve the competitiveness of Scottish legal services compared with those in other developed countries. (S2O-12415)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): Scotland has a long and proud record with respect to the quality of its lawyers and legal services, and we are considering how to maintain and strengthen Scotland's standing, in consultation with legal professional bodies and leading law firms. The research working group's 2006 report provides a starting point. We are also monitoring developments south of the border.

Jim Mather: "The Future of Europe: Reform or Decline", which is a significant new book by a gentleman called Alberto Alesina, highlights and debates the need to benchmark and improve the speed and cost effectiveness of legal services. Does the minister agree that it would make sense to bring together the Faculty of Advocates, the Law Society of Scotland, Scottish Enterprise and business organisations to address the speed and cost effectiveness of legal services and to make Scotland a more compelling place in which to invest and in which to source legal services?

Cathy Jamieson: Several issues must be considered in that respect. We want our legal services to take their rightful place among the range of services that are provided, and we agree that they should be up there among the best in the world. Recently, I met representatives of several top law firms in Scotland to consider how such issues might be progressed. However, those

matters are obviously for a future Administration to consider.

Whatever we do, it is important to build on the research that has already been commissioned and to consult law firms and professional bodies. Of course, there are issues for the wider business community and Parliament, but it is important to remember that the reforms that we have progressed in this session were based on work that a justice committee had done in the previous session. That work was a priority, but I expect that there will be different priorities for a future Administration. I look forward to being around to debate them.

Youth Crime (Edinburgh West)

3. Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to tackle youth crime in the Edinburgh West parliamentary constituency. (S2O-12481)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): A good range of multi-agency actions is being taken to prevent and address youth disorder in Edinburgh West, which Margaret Smith represents. For example, the Drylaw neighbourhood centre offers a variety of provisions that are aimed at young people who might otherwise become involved in low-level antisocial behaviour. It also runs targeted services for young people in the youth justice system, the aim of which is to support those young people and to challenge and change their behaviour.

Margaret Smith: I support what the minister said. Youth action teams are doing a great job.

The minister may be aware that, at the weekend, a group of youths carried out a particularly bad attack on a 12-year-old in my constituency. That attack has shocked the community and reminded all of us that young people are often the victims of young offenders. Does she agree that young people could have a place on youth panels and that positive peer pressure could be used to try to reduce youth offending? Such an approach would be rather like the approach that has been taken in the United States, where there is a positive recidivism rate as a result of young people helping other young people.

Cathy Jamieson: I cannot comment on the specific case—I am sure that Margaret Smith does not expect me to. I very much recognise the fact that young people can be the victims of crime; indeed, that understanding was central to work that we have done in taking forward our agenda on antisocial behaviour. Often, young people cannot access the provisions that are made in communities because of the actions of a small minority.

I understand what Margaret Smith says, and I am sure that she is genuine in her approach to involving young people in tackling peer pressure and improving behaviour. There is a place for that. However, I would be concerned if that was to take anything away from the notion that the criminal justice system ought to deal effectively with those who breach the law. In cases of people being assaulted, bullied or harassed, we must ensure that the processes are robust.

Police Numbers (West Lothian)

4. Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what change there has been in the number of police officers serving West Lothian since 1999. (S2O-12463)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): The number of police officers in Lothian and Borders police has increased by almost 200 since 1999 to 2,783.

Bristow Muldoon: I welcome the fact that the number of police officers in Lothian and Borders police has increased. Will the minister join me in commending West Lothian Council for setting up, in partnership with Lothian and Borders police, a specialised unit to tackle antisocial behaviour? Does she see that as a model that should be followed by local authorities and the police throughout Scotland?

Cathy Jamieson: The member will be aware that it is for the police to decide the most appropriate ways in which to use their resources. That is why I did not give a figure specifically for West Lothian.

If the police, local authorities and others coming together to set up specialist units to deal with antisocial behaviour is the right thing to do to give communities a better quality of life, they will have my 100 per cent backing for that. People in West Lothian are to be commended also for the work that has been done in relation to the plans for the new civic centre. I was delighted to go along to see the new facility recently. A sheriff/district court complex and a divisional headquarters for the police will be located in a local community.

Community Policing

5. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland about prioritising community policing. (S2O-12480)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): Promoting safer communities is already an overarching priority for ACPOS. From my discussions, I am confident that it shares Scottish ministers' commitment to providing a strong and visible police presence in our communities.

Jeremy Purvis: I thank the minister for the "Scottish Policing Performance Framework" that she sent to members of the Justice 2 Committee this week. It outlines the expectations of the police services in Scotland, after consultation of the police forces and the authorities. Does she recognise that there is now a need for more community police officers, and for doubling in many areas the presence of dedicated community officers? Does she agree that the performance framework would be more robust if it included information about shift-by-shift deployment, drawn up in consultation with local police forces and chief constables, to ensure that communities receive police cover across shifts and that police officers are not pulled away? One of the biggest concerns of local communities is that community police officers are not policing their communities.

Cathy Jamieson: As I have said before to Jeremy Purvis, it is of course important that chief constables are responsible for deploying their staff appropriately. As I have also said before, some chief constables have decided that they do not want their community police officers to be abstracted for other duties and have given assurances on the protection of local communities' interests.

I am glad that Jeremy Purvis welcomes the new performance framework, which is a significant move forward that will allow us to benchmark and measure performance at the local level. I add that this is not simply about the need for more police officers or community police. Community wardens and some of the other initiatives that we have put in place as part of our general drive to create safer communities and tackle antisocial behaviour are also very important.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Will the minister acknowledge the valuable work that is performed by special constables in Scotland's policing? I hope that she will join me in welcoming the presence in the public gallery of a large number of special constables, although they have not been required to keep order this afternoon—

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Not yet.

Fergus Ewing: Indeed.

Inverness, which I represent, is the fastest-growing city in Europe, so does the minister accept that its growth means that it needs extra police officers? Is she aware that we are currently about 20 officers short of the complement that is required to keep order in Inverness?

Cathy Jamieson: I am delighted to welcome the special constables who are in the public gallery. They are here at my invitation to see the work of Parliament and so that I can thank them for the

work that they have done throughout Scotland. The delegation includes representatives from all Scotland's police forces and from the British Transport Police. I hope that members will join me in congratulating them.

In response to Fergus Ewing's question, I stress that decisions on deployment are for chief constables. However, we have increased the number of officers overall and we have put in place strategies to ensure that funding is available for recruitment to deal with the retirement bulge that will appear in the next couple of years. I have every confidence that the chief constable of the force that covers Mr Ewing's constituency will have plans in hand to deal with such matters.

Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004

6. Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to ensure that the provisions of the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004 are used effectively. (S2O-12460)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Johann Lamont): We have provided over £130 million to local partnerships to tackle antisocial behaviour and to promote community safety. Every local authority now has a dedicated antisocial behaviour team and a community warden service. Increasingly, local agencies are working with local communities and making effective use of the powers available to them to tackle the scourge of antisocial behaviour. We expect continued progress in implementing local antisocial behaviour strategies.

Mr McNeil: The minister will be aware that, although we have given local authorities the tools to do the job, some local authorities are less than enthusiastic about using those tools on behalf of their residents. Will she assure me that councils will not be rewarded for such an indifferent, half-hearted attitude? Will she make it clear that, in respect of the powers and money that local authorities have been given, they must use them or lose them?

Johann Lamont: First, I recognise that a significant number of local authorities have embraced the new powers. Understandably, local authorities that wish to represent their communities want the tools and resources to support those communities. When I have visited Duncan McNeil's constituency, I have been struck by the energy of community activists, who are also a crucial resource.

We have made it clear that we will support local authorities with resources and by providing advice, support and a challenging approach through our national co-ordinators, in order to ensure that the powers are used and the strategies are

implemented properly. I agree with Duncan McNeil that we should not hesitate to withdraw funding from local authorities that are not making sufficient progress in implementing their antisocial behaviour strategies. Local authorities have a responsibility to their communities and we are committed to supporting those communities. Given the resources and the powers, local authorities must be challenged to ensure that their commitment to making communities safe is taken forward.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Is the minister aware of the answer to parliamentary question S2W-32271 that Robert Brown provided to me on Tuesday this week? The answer states that, although the pilot for parenting orders started on 4 April 2005, no such orders have been made, despite the fact that we are now more than halfway through the three-year pilot period. The minister will recall that during the debate on 2 October 2003—I know that both she and I were present during that debate—Margaret Curran stated:

"We cannot simply ignore the terrible damage that bad parenting can cause."—[*Official Report*, 2 October 2003; c 2271.]

In the light of Duncan McNeil's criticism of councils for not using the new powers, will she take money away from all the councils in Scotland that have not used the parenting order power that we agonised over, or does the responsibility for the situation lie at the door of the Minister for Justice?

Johann Lamont: The member has the advantage over me, in that I cannot report verbatim Robert Brown's answer to that question. However, I can say that the Executive and I are committed to the use of parenting orders. We have given local authorities the legislative framework and the funding for parenting orders, the need for which was identified by Parliament. Parenting orders are a means not just of dealing with parents who are acting inappropriately—they are not a threat to families—but of supporting families and ensuring that children are protected. We will continue dialogue with local authorities to challenge what seems to be their lack of use of a power. I emphasise that a blanket refusal by any agency to use any of the measures in the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004 is unacceptable, so we will take action in that regard.

Environmental Law

7. Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive when it expects to announce what action it will take as a result of its consultation on the enforcement of environmental law. (S2O-12486)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): The consultation period closed at the end of

February. Responses are being collated and will be published on the Executive's website. A report will be published by the summer and ministers will thereafter consider what further action to take.

Mr Ruskell: I thank the minister for that useful answer. As regards criminal law, what comment will the minister make on whether environmental procurators fiscal will be better resourced in the future? On the civil side, will the Executive revisit consideration of having an environmental court for civil and administrative matters rather than one for criminal matters, which is what the consultation refers to?

Cathy Jamieson: It will not surprise Mark Ruskell to hear that we have a consultation specifically to gain views on matters such as those. The whole purpose of having a consultation is to gather views, to consider them carefully and then to lay out a way forward. It will be for a future Administration to decide on the appropriate way forward, but I want us to look closely at the results of the consultation and to consider all the points, which Parliament will have a future opportunity to debate.

The Presiding Officer: Question 8 is withdrawn.

Legal Aid (Civil Cases)

9. Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP): To ask the Scottish Executive how much legal aid has been provided to those pursuing civil cases in the last year. (S2O-12432)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Johann Lamont): In 2005-06, the cost of providing legal aid on matters of civil law was £50.3 million. That includes advice and assistance as well as civil legal aid. In 2005-06, the Scottish Legal Aid Board made almost 11,000 grants of civil legal aid and solicitors provided more than 117,000 intimations of advice and assistance and assistance by way of representation.

Rosie Kane: Is the minister concerned that many people who try to pursue civil cases under employment and family law or to tackle big business are unable to access due process because legal aid is capped in such cases, which leaves solicitors unable to carry out the required work? That situation has created what are described as "advice deserts", which means that poorer people in society do not have adequate access to justice. Will the minister guarantee that everyone in society can fully access justice in all areas?

Johann Lamont: I make it clear that 60 per cent of all civil legal aid applicants are successful and that of those, three quarters make no contribution whatever.

There is a clear issue about value to the public purse and very significant amounts of money have already been committed. On the other side, there is also a commitment to access to justice. The member spoke about advice deserts. We are particularly mindful of the issues that are faced by women fleeing violence and have said that we wish to address them. Although a new funding review was agreed earlier in the year, as a consequence of some of the concerns about problems for people who wish to access justice, we have agreed to a full review of civil legal aid and financial eligibility. Such issues can be addressed properly as part of that review.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Will the minister advise me what proportion of that £50-plus million has been paid under civil law for people who are incarcerated in Scottish prisons? If she can tell me that, can she advise me how many of them have made claims under the European convention on human rights?

Johann Lamont: I do not want to mislead the member. If my officials have those figures available, I will make sure that he receives them. We are clearly committed to a civil legal aid system that meets needs and allows people access to justice. On this side of the chamber, we are not interested in those who wish to abuse the system.

Grampian Police (Funding)

10. Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made towards allocating Grampian police a more equitable share of national funding. (S2O-12414)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): We are providing a record £1.1 billion for policing in Scotland. Grampian police receive £93.7 million—an increase of £32.6 million or 53.4 per cent since 1999. Police funding was reviewed in 2004 and the outcome, which was endorsed by all eight chief constables, was that Grampian police should receive additional resources. By 2007-08, that will deliver an additional £8 million to Grampian over and above what they would have expected to receive.

Richard Lochhead: The minister has failed to compare the funding of Grampian police with the funding of forces elsewhere in the country. The point of my question was to ensure that Grampian police get a more equitable share of national funding.

Is the minister aware that many communities in Moray and Grampian feel that the police are all but invisible? According to the Grampian branch of the Scottish Police Federation, Grampian police have the lowest number of police officers per head of population in Scotland. Does she agree that that is

related to the unfair funding formula that has penalised Grampian for far too long? Is it not about time we reversed that situation by giving Grampian a fair share of police funding, to help not only with the policing of Balmoral when the royal family is there, and the policing of the offshore industry, which is an additional responsibility on the Grampian force, but with tackling the many challenges that face our communities?

Cathy Jamieson: I find Richard Lochhead's questions astonishing, when I have just given figures that show that Grampian police's funding has increased by 53.4 per cent since 1999. The review of grant-aided expenditure funding considered precisely the question that Richard Lochhead raised, which was whether the funding of some police forces was out of sync. In response to that review, all eight chief constables in Scotland signed up to the recommendation that Grampian police should receive additional resources. That was the right thing to do. There has been an overall increase in the number of police officers.

If Mr Lochhead is seriously suggesting that Scottish Executive ministers should take on chief constables' operational responsibility for the allocation of resources at local level, that represents a significant change, and I would like to know whether it is now SNP policy.

Education

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-5775, in the name of Hugh Henry, on celebrating success in Scottish education.

14:57

The Minister for Education and Young People (Hugh Henry): I am delighted to open a debate that gives us an opportunity to put on record all the significant developments that are taking place in Scottish education.

As Robert Brown and I travel around Scotland visiting schools, we hear a remarkably consistent message: our head teachers are positive and excited about the future; our teachers are engaged in a highly positive agenda and are delivering a superb quality of education; and our support staff, who come in many forms, are making a remarkable contribution to Scottish education. Perhaps the most significant feature of what is happening in our schools is the optimism, excitement and enthusiasm with which pupils of all ages have responded to it. We cannot overstate the change that has taken place in Scottish education since the advent of devolution and the resulting decisions by the Parliament.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): If such substantial progress has been made since the Labour-Liberal Executive came to power, can the minister explain why in 1997 there were 1,707 teachers in secondary schools in Fife but by 2005 that figure had fallen to 1,691?

Hugh Henry: The Executive has delivered on its commitment to bring in more teachers. Indeed, by August, we will have met our target of 53,000 teachers in Scotland. As the bald statistics will make clear to Tricia Marwick and others, class sizes in primary and secondary school have been falling year on year. That is the reality of Scottish education, and that is the reason why our teachers have been responding so well.

We should shout it from the rooftops: we have a good education system that is already delivering for our children. However, the Executive has further ambitions. We want to be the best in the world, which means building on the system's strengths while continuing to adapt, modernise and innovate to meet the challenges ahead.

As Tricia Marwick has demonstrated, there is a tendency to dwell on the negative and to talk ourselves down. The Scottish National Party's glass is always half empty, never half full. It moans, it groans, it is full of despair and it never has anything positive to say. It does not sing about our achievements or highlight the positive things

that are happening. It looks for failure, it seeks to criticise and it tries at every turn to be negative.

Just for once, the nationalists should try to be a bit more positive, because there is much to celebrate in Scottish education. Indeed, as I said earlier, Robert Brown and I have seen those achievements at first hand. Susan Ward from Juniper Green primary school, who won the United Kingdom teaching award for outstanding new teacher, exemplifies the excellence in our teaching profession. She is one of the new young teachers who are making teaching their profession, making a difference for our children and inspiring others to achieve. I want to do everything that I can to promote such excellence in the profession.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): The minister is not the only one who visits schools in Scotland; as he would expect, we all do. Secondary schools have been telling us that a quarter of primary 7 pupils are failing numeracy and literacy standards, which means that the senior schools have to carry out more remedial teaching. What is the minister doing to address that problem?

Hugh Henry: We can address some of the issues that still have to be tackled. The fact is that Scotland's performance ranks in the top third of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, and our 15-year-olds are among the best performing in the world. However, we need to address the transition from primary to secondary school.

That said, I do not know what schools David Davidson has visited. In the past couple of weeks, Robert Brown and I have met teachers in different parts of the country, and we have not only brought them together and thanked them for their remarkable contribution to Scottish education but thanked the janitors, classroom assistants, cleaners, learning support staff and clerical and administrative staff who are often overlooked as team members. We simply do not do that often enough.

This week, we visited St Mark's primary school in Barrhead, which, under its inspirational head teacher and highly motivated teaching team, has achieved the best results from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education of any primary school in the country. Other schools are beginning to show the same results. For example, Bannockburn primary school has a fantastic head teacher who is carrying out terrific work with children who have emotional and learning problems.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): Does the minister agree that it is unfortunate that many of the rural schools in Moray that have received excellent inspection reports in recent years have been threatened with closure and merger by a

local council seeking to cut costs? Should education not always be the first priority in any decision on the future of rural schools?

Hugh Henry: Any such decision—and, indeed, the quality of education in the area—is a matter for the local authority in Moray. However, we are determined to raise standards, which is why HMIE carries out such rigorous inspections. This week, I visited Forthill primary school to celebrate not only the opening of an extension but its excellent education provision. Margaret Jamieson and I visited St Joseph's academy in Kilmarnock, and Alasdair Morrison and I visited the Nicolson institute to find out what was going on there. Tremendous work is also being carried out at Laxdale primary school with children whose first language is Gaelic and with others.

The examples are numerous. Cathie Craigie and I went to St Maurice's high school in Cumbernauld, which is trying to encourage excellence in sport. With Councillor Brian Fearon, I visited the ABC nursery in Clackmannanshire, which is stimulating children at the youngest possible age. I could name schools in my constituency that are doing a fantastic job. Excellence is being delivered in Scotland, and we do not want anything to disrupt that or to challenge or stop the progress that has been made.

We are not complacent. We want to know how we are doing, so we have asked an OECD team of experts from Finland, Australia, New Zealand and Belgium to come to Scotland to do a country review and tell us what they think, from the outside, about Scottish education. We have nothing to fear from that. If improvements need to be made, we will make them. We will build on the foundations of our system.

The Executive has delivered free pre-school education for all three and four-year-olds in Scotland, which is a major step forward. The latest statistics show that 96 per cent of three-year-olds and 99 per cent of four-year-olds take up pre-school education places.

We are making progress on the curriculum. The curriculum for excellence programme will produce a single curriculum for three to 18-year-olds that takes into account the significance and importance of early years provision in children's education. We are revising the early stages of the curriculum and considering a child-centred approach in primary 1. Work is being done to build on the investment that we have made and the measures that we have introduced, such as extra teachers, new schools, the 49 schools of ambition and improved standards for headship. We have made huge progress in the eight years of devolution. For example, we have delivered 320 new and refurbished schools and we are on course to deliver at least another 100 by 2009.

I am fascinated by the SNP's amendment, in which Fiona Hyslop yet again points to the weakness in the SNP's proposals. The amendment refers to giving councils "an alternative funding scheme", but the experts say that that funding scheme will not work. The SNP says that it will match our proposals brick for brick, but how will it do that? We are told that it will issue Scottish bonds in its futures trust, but the Scottish Executive cannot issue such bonds. The delivery of the bonds relies on the break-up of the United Kingdom. The SNP talks about trying to borrow money, but how would it do that without ruining economic stability, even if it had the financial wherewithal?

The reality is that the SNP's proposals will not and cannot work. We have asked questions about them week after week. Peter Peacock asked questions, but the SNP would not answer. I have asked questions, but it will not answer. The SNP cannot tell us what will happen to the proposed new schools. I say to parents in Dundee that the proposals for eight new schools there are under threat from the SNP, as are the proposals for three new secondaries in Clackmannanshire, eight new schools in Edinburgh, nine new schools in Perth and Kinross, four schools in Falkirk, three secondaries in the Scottish Borders, 10 schools in Dumfries and Galloway, four new schools in Inverclyde, two secondaries in West Lothian, 10 new schools in Aberdeen, six new secondaries in East Dunbartonshire, six schools in West Dunbartonshire, two schools in Moray—I point that out for Mr Lochhead—five schools in the Western Isles, for Alasdair Morrison, and two in Orkney. Proposals for 82 new or refurbished schools are under threat from the SNP. That is the reality of what the SNP says.

We have a record of which we can be proud. We can celebrate the success of our children and the excellence of our teachers. The Parliament has nothing to be ashamed of when we talk about education, but we have everything to fear from the SNP.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the commitment shown by the Scottish Executive and its partners to the most comprehensive programme of modernisation of Scottish education for a generation; recognises that the Executive's investment in over 320 new and refurbished schools, increased teacher numbers, a world-leading induction scheme, reduced class sizes, strong parental involvement and stable industrial relations has rebuilt the foundations of a successful school system; welcomes the significant increase in pre-school education entitlement that has been delivered since 1999; further welcomes the high quality of leadership in Scotland's schools and congratulates the 973 teachers who have achieved the Scottish Qualification for Headship; welcomes the Executive's investment in Scotland's 49 Schools of Ambition, and congratulates staff, teachers and pupils in schools and centres across Scotland

for the contribution they are making to the delivery of excellent learning and teaching.

15:09

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I greatly appreciated the minister's list of visits to schools in marginal constituencies with Labour members who are in their final days in office.

The SNP is pleased to congratulate teachers, other staff and pupils on their role in contributing to excellent teaching and learning in the Scottish education system. Government can provide stewardship, leadership and direction, but the heart and dynamo of Scottish education are the teachers, other staff and pupils, and it is they who should receive plaudits from the Parliament for their efforts in delivering teaching and improving learning.

As this is likely to be his last debate in the Scottish Parliament, I would like to give the best wishes of the Scottish National Party to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton. [*Applause.*] We may not have agreed with all of his policies when he was education minister, but we should put on record our recognition of his public service, and in particular his role in steering the important Children (Scotland) Act 1995, which holds the interests of children as paramount in Scots law.

The duty of politicians is to look to the future, and to offer fresh thinking and a new approach. The SNP will do that today. The Executive's claims for success go so far back that its motion looks like a tribute to Sam Galbraith. Indeed, many of the points in the motion reflect the McCrone agreement, with its genesis in the previous century. Indeed, its content and disposition could be characterised as so last century. The Executive may look backwards, but we will look forwards. Our education system must match and draw out every child's potential. Early intervention and support are critical for success. We would, for example, increase nursery provision by 50 per cent, to give every child access to a nursery teacher, starting with provision for those from the most deprived backgrounds. It is such a pity that the Government has failed to expand nursery provision, despite promising to do so in 2005.

Children with additional support needs should have those needs identified early if possible, and services from agencies should be provided promptly. Initial teacher training needs to be revamped to give training in supporting special needs. Teachers' co-ordinated continuous professional development programmes on additional support needs must be driven forward.

Class sizes matter in the delivery of one-to-one attention to deliver firm foundations for life. Labour and the Liberal Democrats have dropped their

pledge and changed the goalposts on class size reductions. There are too few teachers and they cannot get permanent jobs, and there are too many pupils in classes that are too big. The reality in Scottish schools is that 41 per cent of primary 1 pupils are in classes of more than 25, and 48 per cent of new teachers are unable to find permanent positions. Scotland should be cutting class sizes to 18 in the first three years of primary and delivering firm foundations for learning and more one-to-one support from teachers for reading and writing.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Does the member have any information on the geographical location and sociological demographics of the classes that she describes as being too big?

Fiona Hyslop: Margo MacDonald makes a good point. Indeed, in the debate on the Crichton campus at lunch time, the issue was raised in relation to Dumfries and Galloway. Perhaps one of the ways in which we can ensure that teachers are not only on the register but employed in classrooms is to work on that with the Crichton campus, the University of Glasgow and others.

Up until the age of eight, a child learns to read. From then on, they should be reading to learn. Let us help them to get the best start in that lifelong learning. That means recruiting and employing teachers sooner rather than later in a term of Government. In the face of falling school rolls, we should be maintaining teacher numbers to deliver smaller class sizes. Decisions should be made locally to take account of local circumstances. Our schools should be fit for purpose and open for use by all in the community, with playing fields, pitches and halls for use by youngsters.

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

Fiona Hyslop: I want to move on.

We should be introducing a baccalaureate as a group award in highers for top performance, first in languages and then in science, to encourage pupils to take those subjects in school, college and university. We should be making available vocational education opportunities for all pupils over 14, to encourage them to excel where they can. Vocational learning should have parity of esteem with academic learning. All the parties signed up to that in 2003, but no progress has been made by the Executive, and its promises now look hollow.

Mr Davidson: Will Ms Hyslop enlighten us on the science baccalaureate? What plans does the SNP have to fill the current shortages in science teachers at the top end of school, given that such teachers seem to be few and far between?

Fiona Hyslop: The SNP plans to maintain teacher numbers in the face of falling school rolls.

We will encourage people to become teachers, particularly early years, science and language teachers. To encourage them to become science teachers, we have to get pupils to take more than one science—that is what universities are telling us. If we can get them to take more than one science subject at higher level, they will be more likely to take a science course later on. Thinking ahead in that way is part of the SNP's approach to education.

We want to ensure that pupils have a sense of themselves and of their country, which is why Scottish history, culture and heritage should be at the heart of the curriculum. We should teach through the Scottish prism and from the Scottish perspective on the world.

There is a desperate need to renew the school estate, which deteriorated through lack of investment under Conservative stewardship. Its renewal needs to continue apace. An SNP Government will match the planned school building and refurbishment programme brick for brick. Our not-for-profit trusts will give resources back to teachers, instead of lining bankers' pockets with excess profits. Public-private partnership is Labour's school tax. The cost of Labour's PPPs is almost £1 million for every school in Scotland over 30 years. PPP finance brings with it an opportunity cost that will hold back education in Scotland.

Hugh Henry: Will the member take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: I am in my last minute.

The extra cost of PPP finance means that schools will lose at least £900,000 that could be spent on more books, better equipment and more teachers—and that is just a conservative estimate.

Leadership in education is about not just technocratic management—as produced by the Executive—but the drive for self-improvement of the individual, society and the nation. Renewing the sense of purpose of all those who are involved in education must be the lodestar of leadership. Opportunity, achievement, progress and confidence are what our children deserve and what our nation needs. The SNP will be delighted to rise to the challenge of driving Scottish education forward to a new era of excellence.

I move amendment S2M-5775.3, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"congratulates staff, teachers and pupils in schools and centres across Scotland for the contribution that they are making to the delivery of excellent learning and teaching; recognises that it is the duty of government to provide stewardship to drive standards forward, providing leadership and direction for a strong Scottish education system for the purpose of self-improvement and a healthier, wealthier and socially and environmentally more

responsible Scotland, and notes that the following can all contribute to this aim: early intervention to increase nursery provision and identify and serve additional support needs at an early stage, cutting class sizes in primary 1-3 to 18 and maintaining teacher numbers in the face of falling school rolls to cut class sizes in secondary so that every child gets the attention they deserve and to ensure that essential literacy and numeracy skills are developed, embedding Scottish history, culture and heritage in school life, offering vocational courses from S3 onwards with parity of esteem for academic courses, introducing a new languages and science baccalaureate recognising top performance at Higher level to encourage take-up of these subjects, focussing on support for those pupils particularly from families living in poverty who are currently left behind in society and continuing the planned school building and refurbishment programme but providing councils with an alternative funding scheme to provide better value for money and access to communities and clubs to schools at evenings and weekends."

15:16

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians)

(Con): Like Fiona Hyslop, we all believe strongly in the pursuit of educational excellence. I thank her for her kind words about the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. It was a great joy to take that legislation through Parliament, even though I was strongly reprimanded by the Speaker for accepting too many Labour amendments. I am completely unrepentant about that, as they were good amendments.

General Patton summed up leadership with the following comment:

"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."

From time to time, that approach can work in education, but I fear that the current Lib-Lab pact may be producing too many strategies, initiatives, targets and—dare I say it—glossy brochures.

Hugh Henry: I pay tribute to Lord James for the contribution that he has made to public life in Scotland over many years. He has played a distinguished role not only in the House of Commons but here in the Scottish Parliament. It is magnanimous of him to accept that Labour amendments improved greatly the bill that he introduced. Does he recognise that Scottish education has improved significantly since the Parliament was established?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There have been substantial improvements to Scottish education since before that time. Those improvements have been steady and we must learn from them. However, not everything is perfect. Too much paperwork is thrust on teachers, and anything that the minister can do to lessen that burden will be greatly appreciated. Teachers are not always as interested in or preoccupied with a gale of creative new policies as ministers are; they may be more interested in

teaching their subjects and getting on with the job. Too much outside pressure can represent at best a distraction and at worst an impediment.

HMIE has pointed out that school leavers' attainment has flatlined during the Executive's current four-year term. That is true of those who leave after S4 and of pupils who stay on for S5 and S6. The problem of young people who are not in education, employment or training remains stubborn. Nearly 8,500 young people did not enter work, education or training when they left school last year.

We believe that a change in culture is necessary. We propose an education bill to redress the balance of powers between the Executive, local authorities, head teachers and parents. Local authorities are best placed to make decisions at local strategic level, so they should have a more focused role and should control the level of the education budget, the infrastructure and the catchment area system. However, local authorities should no longer be allowed to impose artificial caps on school places. Such caps can frustrate head teachers and parents. Pupils who wish to attend schools with spare capacity are being turned away. Local authorities should also, in conjunction with head teachers and further education institutions, develop an action plan for furthering science and technology in their areas—Fiona Hyslop referred to the need for such action.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will take a brief intervention, but I have quite a lot to say.

Margaret Smith: Does the member agree that it is important that Scottish history be taught in our schools, if for no other reason than to remind children of the important role that he and his family have played over the years?

If the Presiding Officer will indulge me, I want to pass on to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton my good wishes and the good wishes and thanks of the people of Edinburgh West, whom I represent in this Parliament, for his hard work and his commitment and service to them over many years in the Scottish Parliament and in the Parliament at Westminster.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I thank Margaret Smith and Hugh Henry very much for their kind words.

I support the teaching of history in schools, although not for the reason that Margaret Smith suggested—all families have a few skeletons rattling around in their cupboards. [*Laughter.*] The curriculum should be geared to satisfying the demands of young people throughout our country.

Head teachers are a huge, untapped pool of potential for improving our state school system. In order to become a head, a person must have a teaching qualification and extensive training and experience, not to mention proven leadership qualities. Heads quickly become best placed to know the needs of their schools. In contrast, the Scottish Administration might appear somewhat remote, and the level of micromanagement that it attempts is not achievable through national policy. It would be desirable for every head teacher to be given more freedom to respond to local requirements.

The Executive's policy on devolved school management has been more successful than we anticipated it would be, although there has been variation from area to area—if the minister is wondering how I know that, it is because we checked up under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, which the Executive introduced.

This is the last education debate in the Parliament before the election. We pledge ourselves to making certain that Scotland will have an education system that lives up to our proud traditions. Our education system must be a shining example to the world and it must be second to none. I wish my colleagues who, subject to the electorate's wishes, might be here in the next session of the Parliament every good fortune in making certain that Scotland's education system is every bit as good as the very best in the world. *[Applause.]*

I move amendment S2M-5775.1, to leave out from “notes” to end and insert:

“supports giving top priority to ensuring that our education system enables every child to find fulfilment according to his or her ability, aptitude and inclination; believes that head teachers should have greater freedom to make decisions relating to their schools, in co-operation with parents and pupils, and further believes that particular areas for giving greater control include budgets, permanent exclusions, wearing of uniforms, setting, and the continuing professional development of teachers in their schools.”

15:23

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I am pleased to follow Lord James Douglas-Hamilton in the debate, because that gives me an opportunity to pay tribute to him after his final speech in this place.

I have had the privilege of working with Lord James Douglas-Hamilton in a number of capacities in the Scottish Parliament. In the early days of the Parliament, we were members of the Parliamentary Bureau and, more recently, he was my deputy after I took over the role of convener of the Education Committee. I was also fortunate to be part of two Commonwealth Parliamentary

Association branch visits that he led to Canada in 2001 and 2003. Both visits were valuable and enjoyable experiences.

In an earlier life, of course, Lord James was a minister in the Conservative Government, as Fiona Hyslop said. I might not agree with everything that he did, but he can take credit for and be rightly proud of steering the Children (Scotland) Bill through the House of Commons. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 remains the definitive piece of children's legislation in Scotland.

I thank Lord James personally for his generosity and kindness in everything that we have done together in this Parliament, and particularly for his support to me in my role as convener of the Education Committee. I wish him well in his retirement to another place. He will be missed here.

Today's debate gives the Parliament an opportunity to take stock of the progress that is being made in Scotland's schools, which the minister ably did earlier, and allows each party to lay out its stall for the next session.

It is sad that the debate so far has merely shown the lack of vision of the other parties. The Conservatives remain stuck in another decade, harking back to a golden age that never existed. They are irrelevant in Scotland. They talk about an education bill, but they will not be able to introduce it because, as they have said, they will not go into government, which means that they will be unable to deliver any of their policies.

The Scottish National Party, on the other hand, tries to hide its dearth of policy in a lengthy amendment that adds up to little. Of course, that is not a problem for the SNP because its sums never add up.

The SNP's ambition is to match the current Scottish Executive rebuilding and refurbishment programme “brick by brick”—my, that is ambitious. However, the SNP plans to dismantle the funding system that enables that programme to take place, which will immediately prevent any new school building or refurbishment programme from starting. Not until some point in the future will the SNP will be able to replace the public-private partnership/private finance initiative arrangement with its fantasy funding mechanism—which will basically be the same as PPP/PFI but called something cosier. In the meantime, it will abandon hundreds of thousands of kids, leaving them stuck in crumbling old schools. That is the reality of the SNP's policy.

Margo MacDonald: Will the Treasury have an interest in whether the PPP-style mechanism can be replaced with another one, or will it be something that is just for the Scottish Parliament to determine? I ask the question seriously.

Iain Smith: My understanding is that the Scottish Parliament does not have the power to create the bonds that the SNP proposes to have, which means that the policy would not work. The Treasury would have to be involved in the introduction of such a scheme—if, indeed, it proved to be possible to introduce it. Therefore, the process would take a considerable time and many school refurbishment or rebuilding projects could not be started until it was complete.

The SNP also claims that it will provide more teachers. However, at the same time, it says that it will introduce council tax capping, which will starve councils that they keep claiming are already underfunded of the money that they need to pay even the current teachers.

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): We are going to abolish the council tax, not cap it.

Iain Smith: Whether it is the council tax or the local income tax that is capped, it will starve local authorities of resources.

Worse than that, the SNP will put all the money for early years education into increasing hours for three and four-year-olds—even though there is no evidence that that increase would provide any additional educational benefit—and ignore the under-threes, even though all the evidence suggests that that is where new investment is urgently needed.

We think that our children deserve better. That is why the Scottish Liberal Democrats will be going into the election with a series of policies that will look to the long-term needs of Scotland and our children. We will be investing in our youngest children, which is where investment is needed most and where all the evidence suggests it will make the biggest difference. We will ensure that every two-year-old has access to a free place in a local supervised playgroup, if their parents wish them to have one, where they can learn language, social and physical skills through play, supported by a skilled workforce.

We will build on the investment that the Liberal Democrat-Labour partnership Government has made in extra teachers by continuing to increase the number of teachers in our schools, despite falling school rolls, by driving down primary and secondary class sizes and by increasing opportunities for children by providing more specialist teachers, particularly in sport and physical education, to build on the active schools initiative to help to develop active and healthy kids. Further, we will continue to invest in new and refurbished schools to ensure that our children are taught in schools that are fit for the 21st century.

We must ensure that local councils deliver. It is not acceptable that councils such as Fife Council strive for mediocrity and use the extra cash that is

meant for extra teachers to pay for overspending and financial mismanagement. It is unacceptable for Fife Council to sit on its hands and do nothing about the appalling accommodation at Madras college in St Andrews, about which nothing has been done, even though it was condemned by HMIE in its inspection report a year ago. Young people in Fife are being let down by Labour's administration in Fife and the Liberal Democrats are determined to change that.

Only the Liberal Democrats think that young people matter, and nothing matters more to young people than the quality of education that they get and deserve. We think that education is the single most important issue for our nation's future, which is why Liberal Democrats will continue to invest in that future.

15:28

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I start by adding to the tributes to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton. Some 30 or so years ago, Lord James was my MP, although I am afraid that I did not vote for him. Whether or not people agree with Lord James's politics, we all agree that he is a gentleman in every sense of the word.

As this might be my last speech in the chamber—this session—I hope that members will allow me to be a little self-indulgent and talk about some of the educational successes in Dumfries and Galloway. Unfortunately, Dumfries and Galloway's progress in refurbishing and replacing its schools estate has been slow and, compared with other local authorities, the ride has been rather rocky.

In 2002, the Scottish Executive offered Dumfries and Galloway Council £103 million for the refurbishment and replacement of its schools estate. Councillors could not give the ambitious original proposals political approval, because they were too controversial. The council produced a rejigged proposal, which was eventually considered not to offer best value, because it could not attract more than one interested bidder.

The council returned to the drawing board and made further proposals for rebuilding 10 schools in the region. Those proposals have been much more successful and councillors will decide on and announce the preferred bidder next week. The final contract is expected to be signed in the summer.

Lockerbie academy will be rebuilt and Lockerbie primary school—which burned down some 10 years ago—will be rebuilt on a shared campus with the academy; Moffat all-through school will be rebuilt; a new Roman Catholic primary school will be built in Dumfries; and the community of Heathhall in Dumfries will have its own primary

school for the first time. That community has aspired to that goal for at least 20 years. Some people who now have children of their own had been expected to attend a Heathhall primary school. The construction of that primary school and of the Lockerbie and Moffat schools is planned to start before the end of this year.

In addition, because the PPP bid is smaller and because the Executive provided additional capital consent to the council, Troqueer primary school, Cargenbridge primary school and Lincluden primary school in my constituency will be rebuilt with conventional funding. Construction of those schools is also expected to start before the end of this year.

The only thing that can go wrong for those schools is the election of an SNP Executive that is committed to cancelling all PPP contracts that have not been signed. That would set the PPP schools in Dumfries and Galloway back to square 1, as alternative funding would have to be sought. In that scenario, how much longer would the community of Heathhall have to wait for its much-wanted primary school?

There is other news of progress in Dumfries and Galloway, where the council has embraced the Executive's determination to promote healthy eating in schools. Primary pupils are offered a healthy two-course lunch. Cafe DG, which was launched in September 2006 as part of the Executive's hungry for success programme, offers secondary school pupils a healthy meal with a pre-order facility and express food bars to reduce queueing. That is important, because when the Communities Committee took evidence on the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Bill, it heard that one factor that puts secondary school pupils off school meals is the length of time for which they must queue.

Dumfries and Galloway Council has successfully participated in the Executive's determined to succeed programme and it was one of only four councils to have received supplementary funding when its further bid for £84,000 was awarded in full. That funds the gift of the gabs speaking competition, which started in January.

The council's determined to succeed team, which Janice Rough leads, is also using the funding creatively. She has worked closely with partners to prepare a bid to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's socioeconomic fund to use the Chapelcross legacy to promote science and arts in schools. Local pupils wrote poems to commemorate the power station's 50th anniversary and I look forward to attending a presentation by secondary 3 pupils of Lockerbie academy on research that they have done into what could be located on the Chapelcross site in future. I will hear all about that on Tuesday next week.

Further up the age scale, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council has allocated £28 million to rebuild Dumfries and Galloway College at the Crichton site. That is one reason why it is disappointing that the University of Glasgow has decided not to fund its intake of new students there this year. One reason to take the college to the Crichton site was to achieve better progression and better interaction between the college and higher education institutions. The college will be larger than it needs to be to provide dining and library facilities, for example, at the Crichton site.

I believe that the Crichton campus has a great future and I hope that we will overcome the current difficulties. We need seriously to consider how we provide further and higher education opportunities for people throughout Scotland—in rural areas as well as urban areas. For that reason, I welcome the University of Paisley's recent announcement of its merger with Bell College and of the increase in the number of courses that it will offer at the Crichton site, which will contribute much to my constituents and offer them opportunities to progress further than they could in the past.

15:35

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, pay tribute to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton; the House of Lords' gain is our loss. I hope that when Scotland becomes independent he will come back here. We look forward to both those things happening.

Mr Davidson: Does Mr Neil intend to set up a House of Lords in Scotland?

Alex Neil: Mr Davidson will be disappointed to know that we are not planning to have an unelected house in an independent Scotland.

I want to go back to the opening speech by the Minister for Education and Young People. At the time of his appointment, it was said in the press that he was not Jack McConnell's first choice for the job. Having listened to his speech, I can understand why. Perhaps Jack made a mistake; perhaps Rhona Brankin should have got the job instead.

I want to deal with the nonsense that was put forward by the minister, and then by Iain Smith and Elaine Murray, about PPP—profit, profit and profit; profiteering, profiteering and—

Hugh Henry: Will the member give way?

Alex Neil: I will in a minute. If Hugh Henry will let me finish my point, I will give him a chance.

Audit Scotland has assessed the impact of PPP on the cost of school building in Scotland over a 30-year period. It found that, compared with the

traditional ways of funding capital projects in the public sector, the additional cost to the taxpayer over a 30-year period of using PPP was up to £134 million a year. Over 30 years, we will be paying up to £4 billion over the odds because of the PPP way of funding. Given the number of schools that we could build with £4 billion, I would argue that it would be far better not to use PPP but to use the traditional method of public sector funding. That would allow us to have all those extra schools.

I will let the minister in now.

Hugh Henry: Thank you for that. Now, leaving aside that the report to which Mr Neil referred is outdated, that interest rate issues have changed, that the gap has narrowed significantly, and that his figures are therefore outdated, we come back to the nub of the argument: how will Mr Neil use conventional methods to deliver the scale of building that we require in this country within a short period of time? It cannot be done with conventional methods. Fiona Hyslop is reluctant to do so, but will Mr Neil answer the 34 questions that we have posed to the SNP about how it intends to make things work?

Alex Neil: It is amazing that the Executive is making such a meal of this. If we consider one of the largest infrastructure programmes not in Scotland but in the whole of the UK—namely, the regeneration of the London underground—we see that the vast bulk of the programme is being funded through the kind of bond mechanism that we are recommending to replace PPP. The idea that we cannot do that for Scotland's schools and hospitals, but instead have to allow the level of profiteering that we have seen under Labour, is nonsense.

The minister has a long history in local government. Has he never heard of municipal bonds? Municipal bonds have been used for 100 years to fund physical projects in the public sector. All the evidence shows, and all the expert opinion outside shows, that not only can it be done, it should be done, because it is a lot cheaper than using PPP. The price tag on schools alone is £4 billion for PPP under Labour and the Liberal Democrats—and I shall now let the Liberal Democrats come in as well.

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Robert Brown): Will Alex Neil explain precisely what will happen if and when the SNP brings in the futures trust? When will it cancel, or stop progressing, existing PPP projects? For projects for which contracts have not been signed, will that be when the SNP takes office or at some later point?

Alex Neil: The documents that we have published make clear two fundamental things.

First, any agreement that is already signed and sealed cannot be reversed; we cannot reverse a contract, no matter how daft or costly it is. Secondly, every project in the pipeline for which a contract has not been signed will be funded by our funding mechanism, which will be far cheaper.

Iain Smith rose—

Dr Murray rose—

Alex Neil: Nothing will be stopped. We have said that the same projects will be delivered brick for brick and within the same timeframe. I notice that one of the people jumping up and down is Mr Smith, who has just told us that the Liberal Democrats want to introduce a local income tax that is not capped. How much will that cost every taxpayer in Scotland?

The reality is that we are hearing all the scaremongering again from a second-rate Administration that cannot add up. PPP has been a disaster for schools and hospitals. We will replace it with a system of funding that is cheaper and will allow us to use the money saved on more schools and hospitals, not just for the next four years but for the next 30 years.

15:41

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I preface my remarks with my own tribute to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton. It has been a pleasure to know him for the past eight years and I hope that he keeps in contact with us. He is definitely not retiring but going to another place. In my view, he has been a long-term example to us all, given the elegance and clarity of his presentations and his ineffable courtesy at all times.

The debate has been a political one, although some serious points have been made. However, the one statement to which I take exception is Iain Smith's remark that only the Liberal Democrats think that young people matter. I do not think that that applies to the SNP, Labour Party or Conservatives, because we all think that young people matter, although we might want to address their problems in different ways. I hope that the debate proceeds on that basis. We are all united in the common hope and aim that Scottish education is the best in the world.

I will pick up on one or two points on which the Green party has concerns. I am glad to hear about the Lib Dem commitment to nursery education and playgroups for children from the age of two and the Executive's dedication to pre-school education. Having spoken to many people, I am concerned that nursery education could be seen simply as preparation for primary education. It must be appropriate to the needs and developmental stages of the children who are in it.

It should not be seen simply as preparation that gives children numeracy and literacy advantages when they go into primary 1. We got a hint of that when the Executive indicated that it was looking at child-centred education in primary 1, which is an advance that should be encouraged.

Having met teachers from throughout the country, I echo the concerns evinced by Lord James Douglas-Hamilton about the amount of paperwork in school. I remember that, when I was a guidance teacher, I found that if a child misbehaved, my school had invented so many back-covering pieces of paper that I could generate 32 different pieces of paper to fill in for one example of minor misbehaviour by one child. The school addressed that, I have to say, and things are now much simpler.

There is something missing from the debate that we have had on PPP schools. Malcolm Fraser resigned from Architecture and Design Scotland not just over the cost of PPP schools but over the quality of design of some of them.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): One of the schools that Malcolm Fraser took exception to is a school in the Black Isle that I visited recently. I found that his comments on the school are nonsense. I will show Robin Harper the photos to prove it, if he wishes.

Robin Harper: I would be happy to see the photos and engage in conversation about the design. However, one exception does not mean that we can ignore the point that Malcolm Fraser drew to the Executive's attention through his resignation. He was trying to make what he feels is an important point.

Hugh Henry: I invite Robin Harper to visit Carlibar primary school in Barrhead, which has a stunning design and is a fabulous environment in which to learn. Where lessons can be learned for future contracts, they should be learned, but it would be wrong to ignore the excellent design work that has already been delivered.

Robin Harper: I was going to come to that. I have never said that the use of PPP necessarily results in poor design. Councils that take advice from architects who know how to use the procurement regulations and who dedicate themselves from the beginning to securing the best designs manage to secure those designs, and the PPP process does not interfere. It is councils that do not prepare properly that make the mistakes. They find themselves being rolled over by developers who want to make as much profit as possible.

I was reassured last week that the Executive is looking into the matter, but I call on ministers to pursue it with the utmost energy and as quickly as possible so that we can, if possible, put right the

things that are going wrong in the PPP process. As the minister said, we are engaged in the PPP process. We are halfway through it. If it has to go ahead, it should do so in the best possible way. It should not deliver poor schools that we will be saddled with for the next 25 to 30 years and from which pupils will not benefit. The best—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be finishing now, Mr Harper.

Robin Harper: Sorry.

The best design can increase pupils' performance by 10 per cent. That improvement can come simply from the design of schools.

15:48

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): James Douglas-Hamilton and I go back to the early 1970s, when we were both councillors on Edinburgh Town Council. I will draw a veil over that.

I am happy to support the motion, which sets out the Executive's position on education, but I would like to add to it. The motion, like many motions for debate on education, deals with young people as learners. We do not consider trying to make young people rounded individuals and appropriate members of the community. We concentrate too much on learning. We should widen our policies to provide young people with a richer experience. In some respects we deny them that, as I will try to explain.

Fiona Hyslop: I agree with the member. The SNP amendment identifies the need for a more rounded education system. We recognise all the points that he raises.

Donald Gorrie: I am sure that there are good points in the SNP amendment but, for reasons that the member will appreciate, I will not be voting for it.

My first point is that we are denying our young people ordinary, civilised human contact. We have tried to approach the issue through the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Bill, which improved as it went through Parliament. I am arguing not about the bill but about the background. The current ethos is that it is considered a crime to touch a child. If someone picks up a child who has fallen in the playground or if they cuddle a child who is weeping and obviously under stress, they are somehow doing something wrong. That is a profoundly uncivilised attitude for which we will pay because young people will be stunted emotionally as a result.

My second point is about robbing children of the chance to take reasonable judgments about risk, whether that is in climbing mountains, playing

games or doing ordinary activities. Part of growing up is evaluating risks, and now children are not allowed to do that. We are completely under the control of the lawyers of the insurance industry or local councils or whoever draws up the ridiculous rules that prevent children from doing ordinary childish things and learning what is safe and what is not. We have to get that issue sorted out.

We also need more enriching activities. The Executive has recently produced a youth strategy, which has some good ideas. It is up to ministers or their successors to deliver them. For example, we need to brace up our attitude to sport—both individual and team. Many children are still being denied the exhilaration and pleasure that they can get out of sport and learning individual and team activities. It may be a Victorian attitude, but I believe that learning about teamwork is a profoundly civilising and community-type activity. Many children do not learn that at all. We can learn how to accept defeat and victory, to play hard but fair and to achieve a bit of health. In many areas, children are denied that. In some areas, things are done well, but in others they are not.

The next point is on the creative side and the pleasure that can be got from a creative art. That can include singing in a choir—we have made some advances on that recently—playing a part in a play, playing in an orchestra or band, and painting. However, the creative arts are still not in the main stream of education, which they should be. They are much more important than some of the ritualistic things that we make children learn.

Many young people are also denied civilised socialising because there are no youth clubs or facilities in their area where they can learn to associate with their peers in a reasonable way. There is also a lack of outdoor education, which is beneficial to people and widens their views on life. They can learn about nature, the environment and attitudes to risk. Often related to that, we deny children residential education, which again teaches them to mingle with others when away from home. In many cases, we do not give children a chance to learn to manage activities or to get involved in youth clubs and suchlike. There are many youth clubs that young people get involved in, but many children have no opportunity to do that.

Those are some of the areas that I think we have to address in order to produce a good educational system. It is not just about learning; it is about what in another sphere are known as soft skills and developing human beings. We want the future generation of Scots to be really good-quality human beings. That is a noble aim that, regardless of party, we can all share.

15:54

Dave Petrie (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I echo what Donald Gorrie said about extra-curricular activities in schools—which the Conservative party greatly supports—and pay tribute to my esteemed mentor, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, for his support and for his excellent speech in his final parliamentary debate. As a former teacher, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

When I heard Tony Blair give his triple education pledge more than a decade ago, I thought that he was a politician who understood the importance of education. I thought that he would mess up, but no one could doubt that education was a Labour priority. True to form, Labour has spent a huge amount of money on our education system in Scotland—indeed, the £2 billion McCrone deal was heralded as a bright new future for Scottish education—but there are still major resource shortcomings throughout Scotland's education system in information technology, smart boards and text books, for example. I have mentioned that to Hugh Henry in the past week. The priority should be not only making extra money available, but greater achievement, progress and attainment. If more money is going into the education system, I want to see the results.

Hugh Henry: I look forward to receiving from Dave Petrie a letter that lists the schools in which such problems exist. My experience from going round schools is that the extra money that we have given directly to schools is making a significant difference to the provision of the materials and equipment he mentions.

Dave Petrie: I had not realised that we have reached such an agreement, but I look forward to sending the minister a letter.

If the results of the extra money that has been made available are not good enough, I want to know why that money is being wasted.

The Executive wants to talk up the successes of its education policy in this debate as much as possible, but it is interesting that there is not a mention of pupil attainment records in its motion. I will try to fill in the gaps. Literacy and numeracy levels are falling. Some 15 per cent of school leavers are in the not in employment, education or training category. That is the highest rate in the UK. The performance level of the lowest 20 per cent has not been raised. There is an attainment gap of two whole standard grades in the 15 per cent most deprived areas. Ill discipline and violent behaviour in schools are increasing. Those are not achievements to be proud of and that is not an education record to be proud of. Our young are not being supported.

The motion mentions reduced class sizes, but the Executive has failed to meet its own S1 and S2 targets for maths and English. It has simply moved the goalposts.

Robert Brown: Will the member take an intervention?

Dave Petrie: I am sorry, but I have a lot to get through.

Attainment is clearly important to pupils and parents, but the Executive has not prioritised it.

Lib-Lab policies are damaging our education system, but the Scottish National Party's proposals are just as reckless. It is astounding that SNP members claim to be in favour of increasing investment by abandoning PPPs and moving to a system of public bonds, because the Scottish Executive cannot legally issue bonds. Therefore, from the beginning of a theoretically SNP-led Executive to Scotland being duped into separation, the SNP would have no means of funding its planned investment in our education system.

Fiona Hyslop: Is the member aware of the SNP's policy to introduce a Scottish futures trust, which would be able to issue the required bonds? Is he aware that every contract will be continued and that PPP will be squeezed out for a better, not-for-profit alternative?

Dave Petrie: We should clarify that nothing of the sort could happen until there was full independence.

We are faced with a number of options. The Lib-Lab pact is prepared to invest money, but it has failed to raise attainment levels. The SNP is prepared to spend money, but it would not have the means to raise it. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Rather than the Government controlling matters, telling teachers what to do, tying teachers' hands behind their backs and increasing the bureaucracy that teachers must deal with, teachers should be given greater freedom to run the system and parents should be given more freedom to be involved. After all, they know best what is needed. That is why our party proposes a new education act that would involve teaching professionals far more actively in the education system. By strengthening devolved school management, giving head teachers greater powers over discipline, restoring school boards and giving school boards greater influence over the curriculum, the Scottish Conservatives' proposals will bring power back to schools, involve parents more and ensure that education in Scotland does not run on a one-size-fits-all basis. We will give the state sector the best from the private sector and consequently create a renaissance in Scottish education.

The Scottish Conservatives represent the best interests of children and the professionals. We are on the side of teaching professionals and are focused on how to give them more freedom to provide Scotland's children with the best start in life. Politicians should not always assume that they know best. I want teachers to use their professionalism to improve the education system and I want parents to feel that they are involved in their children's schools.

I am disappointed to be delivering such an indictment of the current Executive's performance on education, but I am happy to speak up for a range of Scottish Conservative policies that have real potential for a bright future for education. It gives me great pleasure to support our amendment in the name of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.

16:00

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): It is fitting that, in the penultimate week of the current parliamentary session, we have returned to a subject that is central to much of our vision of what Scotland can be, to mark it by celebrating the success that is Scottish education. We are not only celebrating success in the remarkable transformation of Scottish education over the past decade; we are looking forward to a future in which success is rewarded and in which achievement, in all its forms, is recognised and praised—a future in which we celebrate the talents and success of all our young people.

It is fitting, too, that we are having this debate during a week in which we have all shared in the success of one of Scotland's schools—St Mark's primary school in Barrhead, East Renfrewshire. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education introduced the category of excellence in its school inspection reports a little over a year ago. The first school in Scotland to be so recognised, with five excellent commendations, was Netherlee primary school, in East Renfrewshire. Last year, Our Lady of the Missions primary school in Thornliebank, East Renfrewshire, was declared the best school in Scotland after receiving nine recognitions of excellence—a truly outstanding achievement. Earlier this week, St Mark's primary school in Barrhead was recognised as achieving excellent status in 11 of the 15 categories, with the other four categories all starred as very good. That was an absolutely remarkable report by any standards.

How have those schools done so well? In short, it has been due to the efforts of the staff, the pupils and the parents, working together. When both ministers joined me at St Mark's on Monday, I asked Mrs Kennedy, the head teacher, where the school would go from here. She said, in all seriousness, that she was a little annoyed and

disappointed that the school had not got 13 rather than 11 excellent commendations, which she thought it deserved. That is the sort of attitude that has transformed our schools and the life prospects of our pupils. There is a head teacher who wants to give every young person in Barrhead the best start in life, whatever their circumstances. St Mark's is a truly comprehensive school, with the whole range of abilities, social backgrounds, talent and disadvantage. With the investment that we have seen in buildings, in staff, in classroom assistants and in new technology, we have liberated teachers and schools and have allowed them to transform the life chances of our young people.

On the matter of celebrating achievement and success among our pupils, I suggest to ministers that there are still some areas that we need to address. For example, when my daughter came back from her school sports day last year and I asked her how she had got on, she said, "Daddy, we don't have first, second and third place any more—but I won all my races."

I pay tribute to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton's contribution to public life and in the Parliament. In a Parliament in which we have to reach across partisan divides on occasion, he has shown how to play a constructive role from the Opposition benches. If we will miss him, I feel truly sorry for his colleagues on the Tory benches. Heaven knows what David Mundell will say about the lack of thinkers and leaders in his absence.

Talking of partisan divides, I think it is fitting that, as we mark the end of the parliamentary session and look forward to the new, we look at our choice of futures. Do we want to look forward to a Parliament that debates, discusses and celebrates the success of our youngsters, or do we want to focus on division and difficulty? Do we want to continue to invest in our children's futures and to build new schools—a new Barrhead high school and a new Eastwood high school, for example—or do we let the SNP's ideological fixation with and opposition to PPP blight the chances of a whole new generation? Do we want to spend our time in the Parliament working for the betterment of all young people and their families, improving the economy and giving them opportunities, or do we want to spend our time picking fights with Westminster?

The Parliament has made genuine political choices of which we can be proud. The investment in the McCrone settlement, which has radically improved teachers' pay, conditions and status, the investment in school buildings, and the investment in reducing class sizes and in classroom assistants are all feeding through and leading to improved attainment and results in our schools. However, we are not doing that alone; we are

doing it in the context of a Government in the United Kingdom that is also committed to doing what is best for our families.

For example, yesterday's budget invested millions more in education, so we will get a consequential uplift in our budget. Yesterday's budget also made a huge investment in families by increasing the level of child benefit—which was £11 a week back in 1997—to £20 a week in just two years' time. The nine out of 10 Scottish families who benefit from child tax credit will continue to gain from the increases that were announced yesterday.

Bringing up a family can be one of the most difficult financial times for all working people, so we should contrast the Labour Party's commitment to a 2p cut in income tax for all working people with the 3p increase on all workers that the SNP proposes. The choice before us is between a Labour Party that believes in celebrating the success of our young people and investing in their future and a Scottish National Party that is obsessed with ripping apart the family that is the United Kingdom. We want to open up opportunities to allow our young people to make their way in the world; in cutting us adrift, the SNP would narrow their horizons and close off opportunities. I urge colleagues to vote for success.

16:06

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I think that Ken Macintosh forgot to mention the plague of boils that will hit us all if the SNP is successful.

I associate myself with the genuine and warm tributes that have been paid to James Douglas-Hamilton. I also notice that Donald Gorrie may well have delivered his last speech to the chamber and that Susan Deacon is about to make her final contribution. I would not want to allow things to pass without expressing my gratitude to Donald Gorrie for the help and support that he has given me and for the patience that he has shown with my impatience. I wish Susan Deacon all the best. I can tell her that it is my experience that, when people take a while out to see and learn a bit more, they are better when they come back. I have probably known James Douglas-Hamilton longer than any other member—we met at a murder trial, but I will not go into that—and I am certain that he will continue to adorn the House of Lords in a way that many of the newer arrivistes might not. To protect the innocent, I will say no more than that.

I almost decided to vote for James Douglas-Hamilton's amendment—not just on sentimental grounds, but because it is well expressed—but I have doubts about the extent of autonomy that we

should grant to head teachers. I am not at all certain about where the limit should be set if our local authorities are to provide an organised and orderly system of education.

I agree that the Executive deserves perhaps a bronze star. I would not give it a gold star or a silver star—out of principle—but it has done much to improve education. The Executive has tried to identify many areas that should have been priorities. That said, the Executive should not ignore the points that Dave Petrie made. As I have mentioned in the chamber on previous occasions, our universities need to run catch-up classes on basic literacy. That should not be ignored when we are congratulating ourselves on some of the good things that have emanated from the Parliament.

An indeterminate thing that has emanated from the Parliament is the emphasis on class sizes. I urge ministers not to get hung up on class sizes any more than they should get hung up on waiting lists. We are dealing with people, and people do not fit lists. In China, maths classes may have 100 children but, because there are 100 motivated sets of parents behind those children, the teacher does not have to cope with the ill-discipline that our teachers face. As I tried to suggest when I asked Fiona Hyslop for more information during her speech, in the more affluent areas, where parents are self-confident and work with teachers, larger classes could easily be accommodated even in subjects for which the teacher must do a lot of preparation and jotter work the night before, but in areas that are under stress it will be true to say that the smaller the class, the better it will be. In those areas, the more direct one-on-one communication pupils have, the better.

I have noticed that we have begun to slip into the bad habit of looking at class sizes as we looked at waiting lists for hospital treatment—and look at the mess that that got everybody into. Furthermore, can we please admit that subject setting in schools is a sensible way to teach? Comprehensive education was meant to be a socialising policy; it was not meant to be about trying to teach children of all abilities in the same way in the same class at the same time. Subject setting according to ability is better for the child and will improve their confidence and attainment levels—and make life a little more bearable for teachers.

As the minister will know, I have a particular interest in PE. Much has been done in that area—I appreciate that a target of each pupil having two hours of physical education a week has been set—but much remains to be done. For example, we talked at lunch time in the cross-party group for sport about the difficulty of meeting that two-hour target in two-stream schools that have only one hall that serves as the dining hall, the assembly

hall, the gym hall and so on. There are particular difficulties, and if the minister and I are back in the next session I will let him know about them.

There is also the question of the PE content in the teacher-training modules that are undergone by general classroom teachers. It is not good enough and must improve. A new goal should be set—for primary schools at this stage. It should not be about having two hours of physical activity a week, but about having some form of physical activity every day. That would require a more imaginative use of facilities and could involve other forms of physical activity that are perhaps neglected and which could be undertaken off the school premises. Again, if the minister and I come back, we will talk about that.

I commend to the minister what Donald Gorrie said about the socialisation that goes on in sport. I also commend to him the sensible remark passed by Ken Macintosh's child, who knew fine that she had come in first in a race. It does not matter how we try to fool kids, they know—so we should allow them to learn how to win and lose gracefully. While we are doing that, because we cannot do it all through schools, we must go to really good football clubs, such as the winners of the CIS cup last Saturday, and ask them how they manage to imbue their young players with a standard of behaviour on the pitch that acts as a standard for young followers. Poor behaviour by young people is one of the things that teachers should not be blamed for. We must look more widely than schools for encouragement of socialisation and good behaviour through sport.

I will not vote for the SNP amendment because, although I share the SNP's attitude to PPP, I doubt its methodology on this one. I am not quite sure that it has worked out all the wrinkles. I have decided, however, that I really cannot vote with a party that tells me about education with syntax as atrocious as is found in its amendment. Therefore, I might yet vote for James Douglas-Hamilton's amendment.

16:13

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow Margo MacDonald. As ever, she made a genuinely independent contribution—in every sense of the word.

Perhaps this is a time for reflection and confession. I do not mind admitting that a certain by-election in the early 1970s, when I saw a very strong and, dare I say, attractive young woman triumph, sparked something in me. I was at primary school at the time, I may say—just for the record—but the occasion let me see what perhaps could and should be done in politics. I may not

have followed in the same direction as Margo MacDonald in terms of views, but I believe that she has been an inspiration to many of us.

Not going quite so far back, I reflected, when I was preparing for this debate, on the fact that at this time eight years ago I was Labour's campaign spokesperson on education. I well remember the huge amount of hope and expectation during that period. A vast number of meetings took place with all sorts of stakeholder groups, with all their competing and conflicting demands and agendas. Looking back over the past eight years, I can say in all sincerity that I think that we on this side of the chamber can hold our heads high about what we have done and, indeed, about much that the Parliament has taken forward. I think we can say that a lot has been achieved.

I am certainly very proud of the investment that has been put into education. Huge developments have taken place in nursery education and in the use of information technology in our schools. New school buildings have been built and not only are there more teachers, but we have had stability in the classroom. Crucially, there have been great developments in health promotion work in schools and a massive expansion of breakfast and out-of-school clubs. In addition, as other members have mentioned, the provision of extra-curricular activity—the value of which, in my view, must never be underestimated—in areas such as sport, music, the arts and drama has expanded.

There is a positive story of achievement to tell and I would like to hear my party tell it even more often. I hope that that will happen in the weeks to come. That said, complacency is our biggest enemy. We all face the challenge of striking a balance in celebrating the successes of the Scottish education system and talking up its strengths without becoming complacent. The world is changing, and we cannot rest on our laurels and our achievements in a bygone age. Nor can we rely in the future on the reputation that our education system has gained in the past. We cannot assume that, because our education system served us well in the 20th century, it will serve us well in the 21st century. We should be willing to challenge ourselves and each other as we determine the education system that we need for the future.

As well as continue to improve standards of educational attainment, the system must unlock human potential by fostering confidence, creativity and ambition in our youngsters, by stimulating innovation and by operating in a truly dynamic way. I share other members' belief that we must acknowledge that there are limitations to what legislation, guidance, rules and inspection can achieve and that such an approach often has unintended consequences, in that it can sap

energy and resources and sometimes get in the way of, rather than add value to, what goes on in our schools and communities. That is a big challenge that the Parliament will face in its next session.

Another issue that has been mentioned is our propensity to count. Of course we need to monitor and evaluate effectively, but we must recognise that not everything that matters can be counted or measured. There are dangers in encouraging too much teaching to the test and there are risks associated with placing too much emphasis on a tick-box culture. Playing things too safe can present a danger. Over the years, I have become increasingly concerned about how we handle risk, especially in relation to young people. Our aim should not be to eliminate risk—that would be impossible—but to ensure that the right risks are taken. Of course we want our youngsters to be safe and secure, but we must not breed a generation of cotton-wool kids. Of course we need good rules and procedures, but we must not stifle innovation.

We must build a culture in which we encourage a certain freedom of expression and in which we allow our teachers and our children to take the right risks. There are three areas that I would like to highlight.

Robin Harper: Does Susan Deacon agree that, in effect, she is reinforcing the point that Donald Gorrie made and which I make frequently, which is that outdoor education has a tremendous part to play in how we approach risk?

Susan Deacon: I entirely agree.

In that context, I highlight the role of enterprise education. Although it has developed tremendously, it needs to be much more about fostering an enterprise culture. It should not just be about teaching business; it should be about encouraging people to be entrepreneurs. We must recognise that not just business, but society, needs entrepreneurs.

We must also encourage and foster talent. Every child has a talent. It is a question of bringing it out and ensuring that the child is able to shine. Carol Craig has talked about the dangers of having a conformity culture in Scotland, which we must be alive to.

We must ensure that our schools encourage our youngsters to learn for life, as the national education priority says, so that they are equipped to engage with the world around them. We live in a complex and challenging world and, as colleagues will know, I worry about how we deal with some of the challenging social issues that we face.

Our young people need to be equipped with the information, knowledge and confidence to make

informed choices about issues such as sex and relationships, drugs and alcohol. In giving them that information, that knowledge and those skills, we must not run scared of what tabloid headlines or other voices say.

I will end by paying tribute to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton. Over the years, I have listened to his speeches on many sensitive social issues, and I have very often found his contributions to be among the most sensitive, thoughtful and informed.

It is not fashionable to say this in the run-up to an election, but the truth is that no party, minister or politician has all the answers. The real challenge for the Parliament in the next session will be for politicians to work together to ensure that our next generation of children get an education system that enables them to be true individuals and ensures that they—and our nation—can compete effectively on the world stage.

16:20

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):

That was one of the finest speeches that I have heard in the chamber for a long time, and I am very sorry that it marks Susan Deacon's final contribution to Parliament.

Like everyone else, I want to pay tribute to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton. I was working with Shelter when the Children (Scotland) Bill was going through Westminster. I think that I am right in saying that, in the Scottish Grand Committee, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton was steadfast in ensuring that, for the first time, local authorities had a duty of care to young people and a duty to assist older children who were leaving care.

However, I will remember Lord James best for what he did not do. As Minister of State for Home Affairs and Health at the Scottish Office, he ensured that homelessness legislation that the Tories introduced in England and Wales was not introduced in Scotland. He, his officials, Shelter Scotland and many other organisations fought very hard to ensure that that regressive legislation did not see the light of day in this country, and we should pay great tribute to him for that. I wish him well in whatever he does in the future. He has graced this Parliament and has been a real gentleman to most of us.

Before I turn to the motion under debate, I should also say that Parliament was visited by a group of Madras college pupils, led by Lynn Brown, who is an inspirational modern studies teacher. Despite the HMIE report that Iain Smith referred to, which slammed the college's physical state, the institution itself does extremely fine work, and teachers such as Lynn Brown must be

congratulated on their commitment to the young people in their care.

Iain Smith mentioned Fife Council's education service. Last month, the council's latest education budget indicated a cut next year of £5 million, which comes on top of the £10 million cut that was made in 2006-07. Over the years, it has been almost impossible to find out from Fife Council the number of teachers who are employed in Fife—in fact, one official document gives two separate figures. It is hardly any wonder that the council has never allowed the information to emerge. As I made clear to Hugh Henry, in 1997, 1,733 teachers were employed in Fife; however, that number has now fallen to 1,691. That has not happened because pupil numbers have fallen: the current teacher pupil ratio in Fife is exactly the same as it was in 1998. The Labour mantra might well be, "Education, education, education", but any analysis of the figures for Fife's education service as set out in the statistical bulletin will show that there has been cut after cut after cut.

I am not the only one who is saying these things. I have a leaflet from two Labour candidates that was distributed in Levenmouth, which is part of Gordon Brown's Westminster constituency as well as being in the Central Fife constituency for this Parliament. Of course, none of the existing Labour councillors is standing for election in Levenmouth, as they have all taken the money and run, but one of the Labour candidates states:

"Labour in Fife will conduct a root and branch review of all funding with the objective of cutting out waste and bureaucracy and getting more money to the front line, to teachers, to classrooms and ultimately to pupils".

That says it all. Labour has been in power in Fife for more than 30 years, the Labour Executive has been in power since 1999, and we have had a Labour Government at Westminster since 1997, but despite that, teacher numbers in Fife have gone down and levels of attainment in our secondary schools continue to fall.

I visited a school in Glenrothes recently, where the children were wonderful. They put on a debate for the MSPs who were present, the subject of which was whether school trips are necessary. Of course, most of us would say that school trips are necessary and that it is good for children to get out of their environment and visit places such as the Scottish Parliament. However, the two sets of children in the debate argued about whether school trips are necessary. The argument that was articulated against school trips was that they are too expensive and the money should be used for books and other equipment. The money that they were talking about is money that schools and pupils raise in open days and jumble sales. That money should be used for school trips and other

extras, but it is being siphoned off to pay for essentials, such as books.

That is the record of Fife Council and the Labour Party in Fife in the past 30 years. If the Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive is prepared to put up with that, that is disgraceful. Those parties have let down the pupils and parents of Fife through their refusal to get involved in the difficult situation in Fife Council's education service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): We come to the closing speeches. I call Frank McAveety to close for the Labour Party.

Alex Neil: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In the light of previous correct strictures from the chair about members who participate in debates sitting through them, is it not rather offensive to Parliament that the Minister for Education and Young People has not been present for at least half an hour and that we are now at the summing-up speeches but he is still not present? Oh—here he comes at long last.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is back in time for the closing speeches. That is, of course, good practice that the Presiding Officers encourage at all times.

Hugh Henry: Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer, I point out to Mr Neil that I was invited to meet children from the Children's Parliament, who wanted to meet the Minister for Education and Young People. The only time we could do that was during the debate. Given that we are talking about our children's future, it was entirely appropriate that I went to meet them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That just goes to show that one should never ask a question until one knows what the answer is.

16:28

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): I thank the minister for rushing back to hear the concluding speech from the Labour spokesperson and for giving me more time to write the concluding paragraph of my speech.

Like other members, I welcome the debate and, obviously, I welcome the Executive motion. No one can say that education is not important, given the number of discussions that we have had on it in the Parliament. The case loads of parliamentarians of all parties and their visits, whether to pre-five provision, primary schools or secondaries, show that much of our important work is on education and how we use it as a tool for self-improvement.

I served as a local councillor in the 1980s and 1990s in Glasgow and, at the same time, taught in the east end and south side of Glasgow, so I can

testify to the marked difference between teachers' experience now and their experience in those years. Confidence now is markedly better. At that time, we talked about teacher unrest. Another issue that was fundamental to the students whom I taught was their limited expectations about the opportunities that they should have. That has changed markedly because of the progress that has been made by the Labour Government at UK level and by the partnership approach in Scotland. I welcome Margo MacDonald's recognition that progress has been made, even though there are caveats about issues that need to be addressed.

To take a simple example, the high schools in my constituency which serve some of the most disadvantaged communities in Scotland, have either been totally refurbished under the Administration or have been replaced with brand new schools. Much of the debate about how we fund such programmes—and the heat that is generated—is legitimate, but what has been ignored is the fact that if we waited for a conventional funding mechanism, some of those schools would not have been improved and the experience and quality of the education of the children in those schools would have been diminished. That does not come out in an audit report, but it comes out in real-life experience. Those who have a fundamental ideological opposition to using elements of funding that include PPP ignore them at their peril.

Alex Neil's contribution was a PPP—pure political posturing—of the best order, which he has learned over the years. The SNP has had eight years in Parliament and even now, just before we end this session, we have heard no rigorous detail about how it would develop a replacement funding mechanism. Despite the language that is used by the SNP, both in public and in the chamber, when pressed it is all down to that lovely little qualifier at the bottom of the page—a bit like an insurance claim—saying, "All dependent on whether we have independence." We cannot wait for independence. We have been given promises. Alex Neil was one of the architects of a remarkable promise that I heard when I was a younger man: "Scotland free by 1993". We are still waiting. If that was the SNP's prediction, I lack confidence in the future. The SNP is obsessed with not only how things are funded but the constitutional arrangements and how funding decisions are made. Pupils, parents and communities do not necessarily need to wait.

I see that Margo MacDonald is back in the chamber. We have heard about the heady events of Sunday and Hibernian Football Club's victory at the league cup final. There are well-known Hibs supporters called the Reid brothers—the Proclaimers—who also have strong nationalist political affiliations. When I consider the threat that is posed to our school programme and the limited

funding mechanism that is proposed by the SNP, I think of a song by the Proclaimers. Unfortunately, it is not "Sunshine On Leith", which I have heard every day for the past four or five days here in Edinburgh. It is a paraphrase of "Letter From America". I shall call it "Letter From Alex", and it is to all the communities across Scotland that will have their school investment threatened. It goes: "Lochaber high no more. Portree high in Skye no more. Nicolson in Lewis no more. Linwood high no more." That is the reality of the SNP's position.

Eastbank academy, St Andrews secondary, St Mungo's academy and Holyrood secondary in my area have, year on year, made progress in some of the most disadvantaged communities in Scotland. Only last week, one of Scotland's entrepreneurs, Willie Haughey—who I admit has Labour affiliations; at least we concede that when we send letters to or write articles for newspapers—who attended Holyrood secondary, was invited back as a high achiever after the head teacher said that he had rescinded his expulsion programme. Willie said last week to students in the south side of Glasgow, "I can take you on in my company, which now employs 10,500 people, for £25,000 a year as a university graduate in accountancy, but I can take you on for £40,000 a year if you're a plumber or an electrician." That is a remarkable transformation of the economy in Glasgow and in Scotland because of the stable economic structure.

I have served on the Education Committee with Lord James Douglas-Hamilton. He attended Eton; I attended All Saints secondary. We are both here—I do not know which of us is lucky or unlucky, but the one advantage that he has over most other members is that at least he knows he is going. The important issue to reflect on is that those who want to continue to make their contribution can do so. All I ask is that another product of Eton is not given significant political leadership in Scotland and the UK over the next few years. I could have lived with Lord James, but I am not convinced that I could live with David Cameron.

16:34

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland)
(Con): I was not aware that David Cameron was offering lodgings to Frank McAveety.

The debate has been interesting, especially as there is a lot of common ground, despite the rants that we have heard. The minister's rant against the SNP was very enjoyable. Amazingly, for once, a minister's speech actually had some content. Those little bits I agree with, but the rest of it I am not sure about. The minister cannot take credit for everything because things progress gently.

However, Conservative members support the minister in thanking staff, who make it all happen, despite the bureaucracy and tedium of some of the systems that are forced on teachers, to which Lord James Douglas-Hamilton referred.

All members are grateful and pay tribute to Lord James. He was a great guiding light when I first entered Parliament because he has a wealth of experience. As a friend and colleague of Lord James, I know that he uses his experience for the benefit of others. It has been an abiding passion of his life to put children first. The legislation that he has steered through, his tenure of the education brief and his time in Parliament have been all about giving children opportunity in life—helping families to help their children and helping teachers to help children. We must put children at the centre and ensure that the systems that we put in place are not centrally run but exist to benefit the individual. When we talk about special needs, I worry that we are telling people that their only option is mainstream education. That is nonsense. We must look at education in a new light and consider individual children's needs.

Today Susan Deacon and Donald Gorrie made excellent speeches. I do not disagree with anything that either of them said, and their going represents a great loss to the parliamentary process. However, I was puzzled by some of Fiona Hyslop's speech. She talked about nursery provision, but did not mention parental choice. SNP members made no mention of where parents come into the scheme of things. I agree with Fiona Hyslop that there needs to be better continuous professional development for teachers—that is true for all the professions—and about the problems that exist with regard to training places. We all get letters from potential teachers who cannot find training places or permanent work, so Parliament should address that issue.

I agree with Fiona Hyslop on community access to school establishments. My local primary school is being rebuilt, in combination with another school, and will be a community facility. That is a good way to spend our money. However, the member did not answer my question about how to attract senior science teachers. We cannot leave the problem until the people who are now in primary school have grown up, because by then we will have missed the market. I am not sure whether I heard Fiona Hyslop right, but it sounded as if she wanted to nationalise banks because they make a profit. That is a matter for another day.

Everyone who has spoken has had a go at the SNP's proposed bond scheme—once again, the SNP has failed to recognise the facts of life. There may or may not be an independent Scotland, depending on what the people choose, but the

scheme cannot be happen if the SNP ever leads an Administration under the Scotland Act 1998.

James Douglas-Hamilton discussed a number of aspects of our proposed education bill and covered all the points that many of us have agreed over the years, although he ran out of time because members were being so kind to him.

We must bring back school boards, involve parents and deal with the discipline problems in schools. I agree with Iain Smith's comments on the SNP's proposed bonds, but not with what he said about coalition. Coalition can be discussed only after the election—it is not an issue to blather about now, when people want to know what policies are so that they can decide whether to support them.

Alex Neil: I draw the member's attention to Glasgow Housing Association, which has a legal status similar to the trusts that we propose, is able to raise money on the market and has done so successfully to fund part of the housing programme in Glasgow. Why cannot we fund schools and hospitals in the same way?

Hugh Henry: That is nonsense.

Alex Neil: It is not. Hugh Henry does not know what he is talking about.

Mr Davidson: It would be more useful for us to concentrate on children. If Mr Neil wants to come outside to be talked to about what is wrong with his policy, I will be happy to oblige him. Robin Harper and I agree on one important point—dedicated PPP planning advice needs to be available to authorities or organisations that wish to use it. I saw that in action in Stirling, when a PPP scheme was in operation at Balfron high school. The scheme was supported by both Labour and Conservative councillors. We got it right because we planned it correctly. There is a need for central Government to provide such advice.

Dave Petrie, who is a former teacher, was right to talk about pupil attainment, which is a scandal, as the report of the programme for international student assessment demonstrates. I ask the minister to have some ambition and not just to tick boxes about what has worked. What about children who need remedial teaching when they move on from primary 7 to secondary school? What about the children from the poorer parts of society, who are being left behind? Those are major issues, which must be addressed in the next session of Parliament.

Margo MacDonald spoke eloquently and I agreed with everything that she said, which is amazing.

Although I have no doubt that the debate will generate headlines that bash the SNP's proposed

Scottish futures bonds, members—particularly those who have made their final speeches in Parliament—talked much common sense. Once in a while the parties have to agree, but the public wants to know the difference between our policies. Conservatives put children at the centre of our policy and we support teachers and parents. We need to get politics out of the education system wherever possible and give people choices in child care and nursery care. We must ensure that the professionals are not interfered with and are given the tools and opportunity to deliver their professional capability.

The SNP's approach is still pie in the sky and the Lib-Lab pact has failed in many ways, although it has had one or two successes. Some 25 per cent of children entering secondary school do not have the right standard of literacy and numeracy, which is a major failure.

I thank members who are leaving Parliament for their contributions and I wish them every success in the future.

16:41

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): I associate myself with the tributes to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, who truly deserves them. He will be missed in the Scottish Parliament.

Given the everything-in-the-garden-is-rosy motion, we might have predicted that the debate would be an electioneering stunt on the part of the Executive parties. As the debate has progressed, the stunt has backfired on the Executive. Iain Smith said, "Only the Liberal Democrats think that young people matter". As for Labour members' speeches, I am sure that I am not alone in having had a bellyful of Labour's fears, smears and despicable scaremongering.

Hugh Henry: Will Adam Ingram give way?

Mr Ingram: No, I will not. I have heard enough from the minister today.

Hugh Henry: Will the member—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Henry, the member is not giving way.

Mr Ingram: Let us consider what is behind the bombast and the bluster in the Executive motion, starting with the claims for the school building programme. The motion does not say that current and future taxpayers are and will be paying through the nose at credit-card rates of interest for the privilege of Labour's chosen finance vehicle, PPP, which is a rebranding of the Tories' private finance initiative.

Hugh Henry: Will the member give way?

Mr Ingram: No.

Audit Scotland estimates that the higher costs of capital under PPP as opposed to conventional borrowing methods, which Alex Neil mentioned, add costs of between £200,000 and £300,000 per year for each £10 million invested. That means that in my patch in the South Ayrshire Council area, where six schools are being rebuilt at a capital cost of £76 million, an extra £45.6 million must be paid by South Ayrshire taxpayers during the next 30 years.

Hugh Henry: Will the member give way?

Mr Ingram: Will the minister please sit down? We have heard from him throughout the debate. Now we have an opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mr Ingram: The taxpayers of South Ayrshire have started paying for the schools, because the Tory administration in the council, supported by Labour, has imposed a 1 per cent levy on council tax to help to bridge the PPP affordability gap.

Iain Smith: Will the member give way?

Mr Ingram: No, I will not.

The Scottish National Party, by contrast, offers a far better deal. We cannot undo existing contracts, of course, but we will match future rebuilding programmes brick for brick, at a significantly lower cost than would be possible under a PFI or PPP deal, by using our funding vehicle of a Scottish futures trust. We will provide new schools without new Labour levies.

To answer Elaine Murray's point, I say that we will not prohibit councils from signing up to PPP projects. However, we will offer an alternative, cheaper vehicle in the Scottish futures trust.

Hugh Henry: How?

Mr Ingram: We therefore expect PPP to wither on the vine. It will be squeezed out over time. As for the practicality of the trust, if the likes of the Glasgow Housing Association can go to the market for housing investment, which Alex Neil mentioned, why could an independent trust not go to the market for schools? The minister will have to explain that.

Hugh Henry: Is that a guarantee?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members should not intervene from a sedentary position. I have never had the pleasure of expelling a member from the chamber and it would be embarrassing for us all if I were to begin with a member of the Cabinet.

Mr Ingram: The Labour motion makes no mention of the biggest challenge facing Scottish education, which relates to the system's failure to improve the performance of the lowest attaining 20

per cent of our pupils, which has resulted in Scotland having more young people not in employment, education or training than most of our European neighbours. As *The Sunday Times* illustrated the other week, using HMIE statistics, tens of thousands of our youngsters are failing to master the basics of literacy and numeracy by the age of 14. Why is this happening? It is happening because Labour has failed to keep its promises on cutting class sizes. We need to give our teachers time and space to teach the basics and not overload them with endless Government initiatives, overassessment and bureaucracy. We also need to break the vicious cycle of poverty, deprivation, low educational attainment and poor employment prospects, which prevents many of our children from fulfilling their potential. That situation has been brought into stark prominence by the publication the other week of the United Nations Children's Fund report, which concluded that Britain is a "picture of neglect" when it comes to the well-being of children.

Unlike the Executive, the SNP is determined to break the vicious cycle. We will give all our children a head start by investing heavily in health and child care in the early years of a child's life, intervening where necessary and supporting responsible parenthood. We will increase nursery education by 50 per cent, with a nursery teacher for every class. We will cut class sizes to no more than 18 in primaries 1, 2 and 3, so that every child gets the attention that they deserve.

The SNP's programme for government has, at its core, the aim to make Scottish education truly world class once again. It contrasts sharply with the smug, self-satisfied and self-serving attitude of the Executive parties that is shot through the motion. Scotland has suffered that lot long enough. It is time they were shifted.

16:48

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Robert Brown): Am I alone in detecting a certain note of irascibility in the SNP's contributions to the debate? I hope that that is not what this debate is remembered for.

I want to place on record my thanks to head teachers, teachers and support staff in schools across Scotland for their outstanding work in leading the education and development of our young people. I also want to acknowledge the achievements of the pupils themselves. In doing so, I hope that I can return to the positive note on which Hugh Henry opened the debate.

One of the few points that Fiona Hyslop made with which I agree is that Governments can provide the structures, national policies, funding and inspection regimes, but it is the people in the

schools who deliver the goods and make Scotland's education system one of the highest performing ones in the world and who impart dynamism, confidence, tolerance, respect and values to the next generation.

We still face many challenges from outside the system. Some children have truly appalling starts in life, some young people struggle in the care system and other young people are not motivated by the school system and leave without the skills and personal resilience to survive and prosper in adult life. Those are the wider political challenges that we must increasingly focus on. Resolving those problems entirely will be a long-term job. However, those issues should not disguise the huge successes of our schools and our young people or how far we have come since the Parliament was established. Dave Petrie is a nice guy and I have a lot of time for him, but I was struck when he spoke—oh, is he not a moaning Minnie, is he not negative and is he not ungenerous about such matters?

Dave Petrie: The criticism was realistic and positive.

Robert Brown: Thank you. I hope that we see Dave Petrie back in the next session.

We are entitled to say that, since the days of the Conservatives and the Parliament's establishment, our efforts across parties to support, nourish and improve Scottish education for all Scotland's children have made a difference. The investment in schools, in teacher numbers, in teacher training and CPD and in educational leadership has been unprecedented.

As Hugh Henry said, in our travels throughout Scotland, he and I and many members have seen fabulous schools, hugely impressive and motivated teachers and head teachers and many extraordinarily talented, confident and impressive young people. We have seen schools that are wellsprings of innovative and creative ideas and at which music, art, drama, sport, international education and outdoor education, on which Donald Gorrie and others touched, provide the depth and the lateral approach that we need in our schools. Those subjects are provided to a high standard of technical excellence and are used to inspire and motivate young people. We want to celebrate such success.

A few weeks ago, I indulged myself in a little nostalgia and visited my old school—the Gordon schools in Huntly—where I was taken round by the head girl and the head boy. They are enormously talented and impressive young people, as are so many. They were surrounded by a mind-boggling range of sporting, musical, artistic and educational opportunities. Earlier on the same day, I went to Rothienorman primary school near Inverurie,

which is one of the 320 new schools on which Hugh Henry touched that are making much difference. That is a fabulous school in all respects. It has an Astroturf pitch, a super gym, lots of storage space, which is important to teachers, and a chill-out facility. The school has a very able head teacher and staff, who are highly tuned in to the surrounding community and parents.

We have touched on St Mark's primary school in Barrhead. It is important to mention that Barrhead is not a leafy middle-class suburb; St Mark's is a typical school in an ordinary Scottish community, but it has received the best HMIE report under the new inspection system. It is a beacon of excellence for what can be done in all our schools. In my area of Glasgow and South Lanarkshire, Shawlands academy supports with panache about 50 languages in the school and it is right to describe it as one of the most international schools in Scotland. It recognises the opportunities rather than the challenges of the bewildering mix of cultures and languages in the school. Cathkin primary school in Rutherglen, which is just up the road from me, is another new-build school that—TARDIS-like—is much bigger on the inside than it appears to be from the outside. The school's superb facilities are outshone by the staff's talents and commitment. The school faces many social challenges but has an atmosphere of purpose and direction that hits people when they walk through its doors.

I have instanced five schools, but they represent many schools throughout our country. We realise that there is more to do. We need to foster and increase a sense of common purpose throughout the sectors of our education system to deal with the transitions, which one or two members mentioned, from nursery to primary school to secondary school and through to further education, higher education and the world of work. We need to do more to engage young people. Learning must be made relevant to them, to help them to lead more productive lives. Young children are keen and active learners with natural curiosity and it is vital that the eagerness and enthusiasm for learning that many young children in early years settings have are maintained throughout their school career.

It is clear that Scottish education is being transformed by our agenda for change. We are and have been a modernising Executive. We are delivering on our commitments to improve learning and teaching and to create a dynamic and progressive education system that is fit for the 21st century. It has been increasingly clear for some time that there is largely consensus on the main direction of our education investment and reform—David Davidson was right to touch on that.

The debate represents Lord James Douglas-Hamilton's swan-song in the chamber. I will pay tribute to him, as others have—I feel that I am coming along at the end. When I was convener of the Education Committee, no meeting, however poor my performance, would pass without his saying to me afterwards, "Very well done, Robert. Extremely well chaired." There have been few debates at which he has not wished me good luck beforehand and offered congratulations afterwards. Again, that has been quite independent of my merits and the superbity or otherwise of my performance. I say to Lord James that his support, encouragement and friendship were enormously important to me. I will miss him very much when he leaves us, and I am sure that I speak for the chamber in that regard. [*Applause.*]

Make no mistake about it, consensus or not, the achievements that we rightly celebrate today will be put at risk by the approach taken by the main Opposition parties in the chamber. It is extraordinary how obsessed the Conservatives are with structures, with school boards and with messing about with local authority involvement, and how much less obsessed they are with what actually goes on in schools. Schools already have the powers to deal with the sorts of things that the Conservatives talk about in their amendment to the motion.

However, the real threat to Scottish education, as we have heard so often during the debate, comes from the SNP. The SNP threatens investment in schools. The party pays lip service to early intervention and makes uncoded promises to double nursery provision—or is it to increase the provision by 50 per cent? There was little clarity on that earlier. As we discovered during our previous debate on that issue, the SNP had no policies at all for the under-threes. We now hear in Adam Ingram's winding-up speech that the party will provide teachers in every pre-school facility in Scotland. At some point, I would like the SNP to explain what its position will be on the voluntary and private sectors and whether it will fund that particular promise in those sectors.

We have heard it all before, but the SNP has promised to match, brick for brick, the school building programme of this Executive. "Brick for brick" is a good public relations phrase, but like so many of its kind it is hollow and meaningless. The SNP alternative does not stand up to examination. The SNP supports—

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
rose—

Alex Neil rose—

Robert Brown: The members will let me make the point. The SNP supports a Scottish futures trust. Who could not warm to a "Scottish futures

trust"? It is a warm expression, and nice things would go with it. However, the borrowing for that body would have to be guaranteed by the Scottish Executive in order to produce the borrowing rate that the SNP requires. Accordingly, that would count as public expenditure and would be on the balance sheet.

I will take an intervention from Alex Neil.

Alex Neil: Why does it make sense to waste up to £4 billion on the profiteering from PPP? How many extra schools could we have if we saved that £4 billion instead of wasting it on profiteering as the Executive is doing?

Robert Brown: We have not had any enlightenment from the SNP. What we want are the details of how its system would work. The SNP's key education policy is built on sand. It should be consigned to the same room in never-never land as the £11 billion price tag of independence and the infamous, unending list of SNP spending pledges that the party thinks it can finance with tax cuts. If I were the SNP, I would keep that room in never-never land very tightly locked.

Education lies at the heart of the philosophy and approach of the Liberal Democrats and of Labour in this partnership Executive. We have built on solid and stable foundations the path to even greater success for Scotland's education system. I believe that we can be, not among the best, but the best in the world. Scotland's success in the global economy of the 21st century depends on having such an education system. When people come to vote in the Scottish election, they will perhaps bear it in mind that the SNP will cancel the progress that is to be made in schools.

I take great pride and pleasure in supporting the motion before us on the achievements of the Scottish Executive in education.

Business Motion

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-5781, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to next week's business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 28 March 2007—

after,

followed by Final Stage: Airdrie-Bathgate
Railway and Linked Improvements
Bill

insert,

followed by SPCB Motion on the Reappointment
of the Scottish Public Services
Ombudsman—[Ms Margaret
Curran.]

Motion agreed to.

Point of Order

17:00

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I see that Mr Lyon has suddenly appeared in the chamber. Will he explain his comments in *The Herald* today, given that what he said was flatly denied by the Minister for Parliamentary Business this morning?

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I am most certainly not responsible for what Mr Lyon says or does not say.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S2M-5779.2, in the name of Alasdair Morgan, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5779, in the name of Margaret Curran, on Scotland in the United Kingdom, 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)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 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)

Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (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)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 31, Against 77, Abstentions 5.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-5779.3, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5779, in the name of Margaret Curran, on Scotland in the United Kingdom, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 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)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)

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)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (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

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 24, Against 64, Abstentions 25.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S2M-5779.4, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5779, in the name of Margaret Curran, on Scotland in the United Kingdom, 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)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 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)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (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)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 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)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 33, Against 77, Abstentions 3.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that amendment S2M-5779.1, in the name of Colin Fox, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5779, in the name of Margaret Curran, on Scotland in the United Kingdom, 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)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (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)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 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)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (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)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGregor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 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)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 35, Against 76, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S2M-5779, in the name of Margaret Curran, on Scotland in the United Kingdom, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)

Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 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, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (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)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (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)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 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)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (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)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 58, Against 51, Abstentions 3.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament believes that the United Kingdom is a mutually beneficial relationship for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England; notes that devolution "is a process, not an event"; notes the additional powers that have been devolved to the Scottish Parliament since 1999; notes that the majority of people in Scotland oppose separation from the rest of the UK; believes that such a course would result in either cuts in vital public services or massive increases in taxation; believes that Scotland should retain the benefits of being part of the UK; and notes the respective positions of the Labour and the Liberal Democrat parties on the powers of the Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that amendment S2M-5775.3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5775, in the name of Hugh Henry, on celebrating success in Scottish education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 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)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 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)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (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)
 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)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 25, Against 78, Abstentions 10.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The seventh question is, that amendment S2M-5775.1, in the name of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S2M-5775, in the name of Hugh Henry, on celebrating success in Scottish education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)

Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Petrie, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)

McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 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)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 18, Against 87, Abstentions 8.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The eighth and final question is, that motion S2M-5775, in the name of Hugh Henry, on celebrating success in Scottish education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 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)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (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)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (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)

AGAINST

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)
 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)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)

Lochhead, Richard (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)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (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)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 61, Against 43, Abstentions 9.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the commitment shown by the Scottish Executive and its partners to the most comprehensive programme of modernisation of Scottish education for a generation; recognises that the Executive's investment in over 320 new and refurbished schools, increased teacher numbers, a world-leading induction scheme, reduced class sizes, strong parental involvement and stable industrial relations has rebuilt the foundations of a successful school system; welcomes the significant increase in pre-school education entitlement that has been delivered since 1999; further welcomes the high quality of leadership in Scotland's schools and congratulates the 973 teachers who have achieved the Scottish Qualification for Headship; welcomes the Executive's investment in Scotland's 49 Schools of Ambition, and congratulates staff, teachers and pupils in schools and centres across Scotland for the contribution they are making to the delivery of excellent learning and teaching.

Point of Order

17:10

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Order. Will members either take their seats or move very quietly out of the chamber?

Margo MacDonald: It has come to my attention that many of us who were in the chamber this afternoon attempted to put on record our feelings of sadness at the departure of some members, regret at the departure of others and—I will say no more. However, I do not think that anything in our standing orders precludes us from having a proper greetin meeting, which would be a much better way of doing it.

Presiding Officer, will you look at the standing orders and, if we are allowed to do that, see whether it could be accommodated before the end of the session?

The Presiding Officer: The business programme has been agreed, but members will have heard that point. If at all, it is a matter for the Parliamentary Bureau.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-5521, in the name of Sylvia Jackson, on Duchenne muscular dystrophy. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament expresses concern that people who suffer from Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD), a severe and progressive genetic muscle wasting disease predominantly affecting boys and for which there is currently no cure, are dying in Scotland on average 10 years earlier than their counterparts in England; believes that an improvement in the life expectancy and experiences of these young people must be a priority for the Scottish Executive; considers that, in addition to enhanced medical research, better support services, equipment and adapted housing can make a massive difference to the quality of life of people with DMD and can contribute to extending their life expectancy; welcomes the development in 2003 of the Scottish Muscle Network, based at Yorkhill, as a national managed clinical network benefiting patients in Stirling and across Scotland, but believes that more must be done to improve both life quality and life expectancy for people with DMD in Scotland.

17:12

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I am pleased to speak to the motion in Sylvia Jackson's name, which I was involved in drafting. Unfortunately, Sylvia is unwell. She is upset at missing the debate because she is totally committed to gaining improvements in the life expectancy and experiences of young people suffering from Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

The issues were first brought to Sylvia Jackson's attention by her constituent Dean Widd on behalf of DMD sufferers in Scotland. On Sylvia's behalf, I put on record her thanks to Dean for his work. I know that, if re-elected, like me and others Sylvia will continue to press the Government on behalf of her constituents.

I first became aware of the issues to do with DMD when I was contacted by Sheila Crilly, gran of a lovely wee four-year-old boy from Coatbridge, Alan James Gilmour—otherwise known as AJ—who was diagnosed with DMD just over a year ago. AJ and his family visited the Scottish Parliament as part of a lobby last June and the family attended a meeting in the evening organised by Sylvia Jackson. The family and friends of AJ are currently fundraising to allow him to swim with dolphins. I wish them all the best.

DMD is a rare condition that is caused by an absence of dystrophin, which is a protein that helps to keep muscle cells intact. The lack of that protein causes a generalised weakness and muscle wasting, first affecting the hips, pelvic

area, thighs and shoulders but eventually affecting all voluntary muscles, and possibly the heart and breathing muscles. DMD almost exclusively affects boys and signs can appear as early as three years old. Children who are affected are often late in learning to walk and most lose the ability to walk between the ages of eight and 11. DMD affects about 100 boys a year in the United Kingdom, it can be genetic and there is currently no cure.

Young boys in Scotland who are affected are dying on average 10 years earlier than their counterparts in north England and much earlier than those in some other countries such as Denmark. Scottish parents of children with DMD, including my constituents, were recently very saddened to hear of the death of Graham Jackson, an 18-year-old Duchenne sufferer from Lanarkshire. I pass on our condolences to Graham's family.

Those parents have many questions for the Scottish Executive, some of which were asked in the recent race against time campaign. I will come to them shortly. However, I say to the minister that the most important question is, why are Scottish children dying prematurely? That is a shocking state of affairs. I would be grateful if he would tell us how the Executive intends to increase the life expectancy of children with DMD.

Colleagues will no doubt raise specific issues. Before they do, I will highlight concerns that have come to my attention.

Improving the quality of life of children with DMD is important if we want to improve their life expectancy. We must ensure that their experiences are as good as they can be. Access to physiotherapy is patchy, but good physiotherapy support can play an important role in helping future mobility. Access to neurorespiratory services is a significant factor in adult survival rates for those with DMD. In that context, assisted ventilation in Scotland requires more funding.

The attention that has been given to diagnosing spinal curvature and the surveillance of heart and breathing muscles has improved. I note the work of the Scottish muscle network in that regard. I am sure that the minister will have more to say about its work in his closing remarks. However, AJ's mum, Clare, has told me that Glasgow leads the world in cardiac research, but not for boys whose hearts are affected by DMD. She wanted that point to be made in the debate.

Wheelchair provision is another major issue. Wheelchair provision can substantially improve the quality of people's lives, but it is very patchy. Indeed, the matter has been a news item this week following the outcome of the review of

wheelchair services. I would be grateful if the minister would comment on that.

Suitable housing and the provision of appropriate adaptations are extremely contentious issues, but suitable housing and appropriate adaptations are vital for improving quality of life. In Denmark in 2005, only one adult with DMD over the age of 23 did not live in his own home; in Scotland that year, only one adult with DMD lived in his own home. That is unacceptable. Perhaps the minister will comment on the relevant provisions of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 and say whether they will change the current means-tested approach that is taken under the housing improvement grant scheme. Elsewhere in the UK, there is a set grant amount up to £30,000, which is not means tested.

Finally, I would appreciate comments on the steps that have been taken to encourage and support research on DMD in Scotland and on the lessons that are being learned from research elsewhere. I lodged written parliamentary questions on those matters earlier in the year, but I did not receive robust responses. I am particularly interested in research funding for exon skipping as a possible treatment for DMD.

The issues that I have mentioned are the main issues that people have raised with me. I am sure that colleagues will raise other issues.

I will finish by quoting from a letter that was sent to me by AJ's other gran, Violet Gilmour, who has said things much better than I can. She said:

"My heart aches for A.J. when I think of the hurdles he will have to face in the future but we will be there for him to help him over the hurdles. He is such a happy and funny child, when A.J.'s around sadness is put aside.

We all hope and pray that things will change in Scotland and more help and grants will be made available to families of boys with DMD to give them a chance of a much better quality of life.

Hopefully this will happen soon and bring Scotland up to the same high level of care they have in Denmark."

I say to the minister that time is running out for young Scottish boys with DMD. If those boys were our own children, we would move heaven and earth to help them. The Government in particular has a responsibility to do all that it can to improve the life expectancy, quality of life and life experiences of those young people. It must make that responsibility a priority.

I welcome the people in the gallery who have come to listen to the debate and look forward to hearing what colleagues have to say. I hope that there will be a positive response from the minister. Again, I apologise on behalf of Sylvia Jackson, who would have liked to be here.

17:19

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)

(Con): Like Elaine Smith, I am sorry that Sylvia Jackson has apparently been dumbstruck by laryngitis and is unable to speak in this members' business debate on a motion in her name. In her absence, I thank her for securing the debate and commend Elaine Smith for her comprehensive and moving opening speech.

Thirteen months ago, I knew nothing about Duchenne muscular dystrophy. I had not even heard of the condition until one morning in my mail I received a letter from a woman called Cecilia Keaveney, a member of the Irish Parliament who represents a constituency in County Donegal. She is also a fellow member of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, on which I sit as one of the Scottish Parliament members. She told me that three young boys in her constituency had been diagnosed with DMD and that the prognosis was bleak, but that, here in Britain, a consortium that was working in collaboration with scientists in the Netherlands and Australia was developing exon skipping as a possible therapy. I will not attempt an explanation of that therapy, as the science of it is well beyond my capabilities. Suffice it to say that, if the therapy works, it could greatly improve the quality of life and increase the length of life of young men who suffer from the disease. Cecilia Keaveney's concern was that the initial funding for that research project was committed only until 2007 and that further support from the Government was necessary to sustain research into exon skipping.

As a result of that and a follow-up inquiry, I have taken up the matter with our Minister for Health and Community Care. I leave it to Lewis Macdonald to tell the chamber what he has told me about what is being done north and south of the border. It is interesting to note, from the terms of Sylvia Jackson's motion and what Elaine Smith has said tonight, that the survival rate in Scotland is inferior to that in parts of England—a fact that has been acknowledged by the minister in his correspondence with me. I know that we aspire to do better in Scotland and to match the English results.

I do not consider my own efforts to prod matters along on this subject to be anything other than extremely modest. I am grateful to the minister for the very full responses that he has given to my inquiries, which I have been able to relay back to our friend and colleague in Ireland. I describe the story of my involvement in the matter and how I came to learn about DMD simply to illustrate how dependent we are on one another. There are parents of young boys in Ireland who are waiting anxiously to see what our researchers can achieve to improve therapies and survival rates for their

sons. That makes us reflect that, in this field of medical research, by looking after our own we are also looking after others and that the international sharing of knowledge and experience is vital. It also gives us, as members, a better appreciation of the value of political co-operation across borders and of the co-ordination of funding and research efforts.

I wish our doctors and scientists every success in their research into DMD, and I commend everyone who is involved in the care and treatment of young people who suffer from this dreadful disease.

17:23

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan)

(SNP): Yesterday, we legislated with a glad heart to help sufferers from mesothelioma. In this important debate, we address the needs of a not dissimilarly sized group of sufferers of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. The difference, of course, is that we are addressing a condition that affects the young, whereas yesterday we discussed a condition that generally becomes apparent later in life. I join David McLetchie and others in thanking Sylvia Jackson for bringing the motion to the chamber for debate, and I thank Elaine Smith for stepping in with such good grace and effectiveness.

What quality of life does a young boy who suffers from DMD have and what should it be? As with everyone else, young DMD sufferers should have the widest possible experience in life. There should be humour, excitement and participation with peers in activities that are appropriate for young boys. At that level, having a short lifespan should not be a gloomy matter that we should worry about; the need is to cram into that shorter lifespan the experience that the rest of us can spread more thinly. Clive James, the Australian humorist, said:

"Do not take life too seriously. You will never get out of it alive."

None of us is going to get out of life alive, anyway.

We need to have a network of support and activities that allows youngsters with a seriously restricted lifespan to get as much out of life as those of us who are fortunate to live longer. Their expectations of quality of life should be as high as ours—that is only reasonable.

The boys—from the reading that I have done, there are few girls—who suffer from DMD are not yet getting the quality of life that is available, given that their life expectancy is 10 years less than their counterparts south of the border. I was particularly disturbed by the fact that only one in 25 sufferers is able to stay at home. Next week, I will join the Marie Curie bus as part of a campaign to ensure

that people can spend all their life at home right to the very end. It is a cruel deprivation to deny kids with DMD and their families that opportunity. I hope that the minister will indicate how that issue might be addressed.

Clearly, not enough research is being done. Research on DMD is not the kind of research that is likely to be undertaken by commercial companies because, frankly, there are not enough sufferers to guarantee the commercial returns that might be available from work on more widespread diseases, therefore the state, as the proxy for wider society, has a particular role in funding such research. Of course, genetics research now receives much more funding than was previously the case, and such work can be spread across the world thanks to good communications. I hope that Scotland can play its part, as it has done so often in the past, as a leader in this important area of scientific research.

As well as all that high-flown stuff, we also need to work on the practical stuff, such as our ability to provide wheelchairs to support sufferers when their mobility becomes seriously restricted. For such a rapidly progressing condition, we need to ensure that wheelchairs that are specific to the child's condition at a particular point are delivered quickly enough to ensure that they are still appropriate. The wheelchair review highlighted the disturbing point that wheelchairs often seem to be delivered too late to be useful to people whose condition has progressed.

I conclude by making an obvious point that has not been made so far. A number of organisations support people who suffer from DMD and support their families. We need to ensure that we support the families, because having a child whose life expectancy is restricted and whose condition is severe may have a significant effect on parents and friends. I hope that, like other members who are supporting DMD sufferers in this short debate, the minister will offer some words of encouragement in whatever policy areas he can.

17:28

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): When I was a community paediatrician, I came across perhaps four or five cases—I was trying to count them—of boys who had Duchenne muscular dystrophy. I want to tell the story of one of them. I knew him from the moment of diagnosis, because he attended one of the schools for which I was responsible in my role as a school doctor. He immediately sprang to mind when I saw the motion for this debate, which I am glad is taking place.

The boy was first diagnosed at the age of about four and a half. He was in the nursery at the

school that I attended. One day, the nursery teacher called me over and pointed him out to me. The boy's physical development was a bit slow, but he was walking and he seemed to run around with the other kids. However, he was clearly a bit different. His gait was awkward. He could not really jump and he could not brace himself to land if he jumped with both feet. As it was summer and the kids were outside playing, he had shorts on, so I could see that he displayed one of the classic signs of Duchenne muscular dystrophy in its early stages, which is that, although the muscles are weak, the calf muscles appear enlarged. They look like big muscles. I thought, "Oh, for goodness' sake, this looks bad."

Duchenne sufferers also have a characteristic way of getting up off the floor to stand. My heart sank when I saw that. The diagnosis was eventually confirmed in hospital—it is quite a simple diagnosis once the condition is suspected. A diagnosis of Duchenne muscular dystrophy is not just a matter of telling the parents that their child has a serious medical condition; it means telling them that their child has a completely different future from the one they thought they would have.

I could have mapped out what was going to happen. When the boy started primary school he could walk and he could just about keep up with his peers. Gradually, however, he could no longer manage the stairs, and we had to put in railings. We then had to put in ramps when he started to use a wheelchair. The journey that the boy took towards adolescence involved so many people, including doctors; physiotherapists; occupational therapists; the fire service—I will explain why in a moment; nursing staff; teaching staff; builders, who had to make the adaptations to the school and to the boy's house; and, primarily, the parents. This is where I will follow up something that Stewart Stevenson said. That normal, ordinary family, faced with a devastating diagnosis, showed the most amazing strength, and I will mention some of the ways in which they showed it later.

When the boy was due to transfer to his secondary school, it did not have a lift in it. Parts of it were on three floors, so we had to put a lift in. Nowadays, such a school would have been built with a lift, but it was an older building. The installation was carried out. By the way, that was where the fire service came in. An electric wheelchair is heavy. In a fire or fire drill, lifts cannot be used, but an electric wheelchair is much too heavy to bump down stairs. We had to get the fire service to show us how to evacuate the boy safely, which involved a special stretcher with straps on it that was kept at a particular place in the school. We might never think of having to do such things.

The boy had physiotherapy. There were issues around the use of the wheelchair and the need to get splints that fitted, that did not hurt and that kept pace with his growth. It was a labour-intensive process just to keep the boy going and to supply everything that was needed. Everybody showed great good will and tried to do what was required. However, there were many times when things could have gone wrong, simply because so many things were needed.

When the boy got an electric wheelchair—obviously, a child with a serious medical condition is entitled to transport to school on medical grounds—he did not avail himself of it often, but instead went with his pals and walked to school.

His parents showed immense strength. Their hearts must have been in their mouths when he was out on busy streets in his electric wheelchair. However, it was important to them that their son was socially integrated with his peers—and he was one of the crowd throughout his time at school. He was in a wheelchair, but he was very much one of the boys, which echoes what Stewart Stevenson said.

Research is very much needed, because although the number of sufferers is small, the diagnosis is devastating and there is no cure. We also need the basics to support the children, their families and everybody else who deals with them in the schools where they are taught, the houses where they live and the communities of which they are a part. The plea is not just for research money but for basic humanity in supporting these boys in their everyday lives, which should be as rich and full as possible.

17:33

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I thank Elaine Smith, Sylvia Jackson and all the members who are present for their work in bringing the debate to the Parliament and raising the profile of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Like many colleagues, notably David McLetchie, I thought until relatively recently that I knew at least a little about muscular dystrophy, although I remained entirely ignorant about Duchenne muscular dystrophy, but when the disease hit the sister of one of my best friends, its impact registered on me.

First, I heard that one of Sarah's sons had been diagnosed as having Duchenne muscular dystrophy and that it is a degenerative and ultimately fatal condition. Then I heard that her other son had also been diagnosed as having the condition. I find it difficult to comprehend how any family copes with such a diagnosis, but people are remarkably resilient. My reaction was shock, possibly horror. It was also fear. As a parent, I was

frightened by the thought of what such a diagnosis would mean to my children or to me. I would describe my reaction to the news as quite negative. I will come back to that later.

It was the next challenge to my ignorance that, for me, moved the subject from personal tragedy to something on which political action is called for. Parent Project UK, or PPUK, gave a presentation here in the Scottish Parliament last summer. We heard from parents, their children, specialists, voluntary organisations and charities. They impressed on us not just the impact of the disease but the fact that, if people are unlucky enough to be diagnosed with Duchenne, they are better off if they live in Denmark, Wales or England. In fact, it appears that they are better off in many places other than Scotland.

I apologise if I repeat some of the points Elaine Smith made, but I think that they are worth emphasising. In Denmark, the average age of death from DMD is 37. In Norway, it is only a little less than that. In the north-east of England, most young men with the disease survive to the age of 29, but in 1999 only 17 out of 236 DMD patients in Scotland had survived into adulthood. Although the figure has improved recently—there are now 37 adults in Scotland with the condition—there are 75 such adults in Denmark.

From what we were told at the PPUK presentation, it appears that there is nothing on offer in Denmark that is not available in this country, but patients in Denmark with DMD have far greater access to those treatments and to a level of care that is denied patients in Scotland. From an early age, patients in Denmark have access to therapeutics and to electric wheelchairs that lift them upright, and all adults with the disease have access to a car driven by their carers. In Scotland, only one of the 37 adults with DMD lives independently and it is interesting that he uses direct payments. In Denmark, 60 of the 75 adults with DMD live on their own in specially designed accommodation.

Patients with DMD need respiratory help such as that provided by ventilators. Although that can be expensive, it is available. Just as important is the fact that, in Denmark, the state addresses the vocational, social and employment needs of the young men concerned, which gives them a remarkable quality of life compared with that of sufferers here.

I mentioned that my initial reaction to the news that my friend's sister's child had DMD was quite negative. Unfortunately, it appears that such a response is all too typical. According to one of the parents who attended the lobby event, the attitude in this country seems to be along the lines of, "Your son has a terminal condition, so best make the most of your time with him while you have the

chance.” It is not about being encouraged to look forward to a life that is still full of potential. We must learn from the Danes and celebrate the lives of such people to the full.

At the presentation, we heard the familiar story of parents battling for resources for their children. I am sure that we have all come across families who are already struggling with very difficult circumstances and feel that they have to take on the authorities that, in theory, are there to support and help them. One of the key differences between what happens in this country and elsewhere is in housing provision. We heard that, in Wales, £30,000 is made available to patients for house adaptations, whereas here the figures do not even come close to that amount. Patients are often the victims of a geographical lottery, depending on the local authority area in which they live. I hope that the minister can reassure me that when they are implemented, the reforms that were introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 will reflect the needs of patients with DMD.

The recent wheelchair review is potentially highly encouraging, but patients are worried about its funding and implementation. Improvements could be made in cardiac care. If we were able to support a clinical trial for patients with DMD in Scotland, that would offer hope. NHS Quality Improvement Scotland should become involved in driving up standards of care, as I believe the Scottish muscle network has suggested.

Parents want to see movement on two fronts. As one grandparent put it, they want help with the practicalities dictated by their children's changing needs, while they continue to dare to hope that one of the many avenues of research worldwide will lead to a cure or, at least, to a means of making the symptoms less severe and prolonging life. I understand that it is difficult for ministers to make special cases and that policies must apply to all patients even-handedly, but I hope that the minister acknowledges the frustration that exists among families. We are not talking about a large number of sufferers, and a relatively small investment or improvement in services could make a huge difference to individual lives.

17:38

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Chronic neuromuscular conditions often feature as subject matter for members' business debates, but this evening's debate is one of the few to highlight a condition that strikes in childhood and which predominantly affects young boys. All such conditions have a common thread—they are all relatively rare in population terms and they tend to be the Cinderellas of the NHS, because its focus is inevitably on the more

common diseases that affect the bulk of the population.

The needs of the groups of people who suffer from such conditions are similar. Medical research into the causes needs to be stepped up and better support services and equipment must be provided. Advice from specialist nurses and physiotherapists, adaptations to housing on the recommendation of occupational therapists and, in the case of DMD sufferers who also have learning difficulties, the support of specialist teaching staff can all make a tremendous difference to quality of life and, as the motion suggests, can enhance life expectancy.

In preparing for the debate, I read the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign's daily living factsheet, which made it clear that boys with DMD do best when they are educated in school and that, with careful planning, it is possible to ensure that a child's time at school can enhance his range of experiences and quality of life and provide opportunities to enjoy a wide variety of activities and develop friendships. Without that, life for these children can be very restricted and isolated.

Many boys with DMD have done very well at school, passing exams and even attaining university degrees. Some move on to jobs and many gain enormous pleasure from swimming, reading, painting, playing musical instruments or operating computers. However, such achievements are possible only if their talents and abilities are recognised and supported from an early age. Scotland is clearly some way behind other countries in that respect. As a result, the choice of school—mainstream or special needs, day school or boarding school—is important. The fact that pupils with DMD have different needs should be taken into account when their education is being planned, although it is reckoned that, with the right planning, most boys can be educated in a local mainstream school.

Future planning is also essential to ensure that, as the condition progresses, the necessary facilities, equipment and support are readily available. Regular reviews and assessments are therefore required and, as the children grow, there should be early planning for transition between schools or to college. Moreover, children should not just become the passive recipients of care; they must be allowed to develop independence of thought and given the freedom to make choices.

Social integration is another essential ingredient of a happy, fulfilled life, and ensuring that that takes place will prove easier the earlier a child can be integrated into school. Although life can be very hard for sufferers, parents, teachers and friends, it is clear that with a positive attitude, appropriate training and proper support, most children will be

able to enjoy their time at school. They certainly deserve no less.

As most children with DMD will, by the age of 12, need to use a powered wheelchair at least some of the time, I want to touch on the issue of wheelchair supply. Although the minister's announcement this week of £1 million of interim funding for the wheelchair service in Scotland was very welcome, if long overdue, I have been told by the NHS wheelchair steering group that that is not enough to satisfy demand and that a £2.5 million shortfall in 2004-05 might rise to more than £3 million this year. There is a fear that future upgrading of funding could now be put on the back burner, which will allow provision to slip again.

According to the steering group, wheelchair services must be considered in the forthcoming spending review and should be properly funded thereafter. I hope that the minister will give that commitment this evening in the interests not only of the DMD sufferers for whom I am principally speaking but of the many people with chronic neuromuscular conditions who might need appropriate modern wheelchairs to achieve mobility.

I thank Sylvia Jackson for initiating this debate and support her motion.

17:43

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Lewis Macdonald): First, I must thank Sylvia Jackson, who is absent, and Elaine Smith for giving Parliament this opportunity to focus on the impact of Duchenne muscular dystrophy on people's lives, including those of family members.

I acknowledge the points that have been made by members across the chamber. The case has been made that enhanced medical research, better support services, better equipment and adapted housing can make a major difference to the quality of life of people with DMD and, indeed, can help to extend their lives. I want to respond positively on that range of issues. We, too, want to ensure that people in Scotland with this condition can live as well as possible and enjoy the best possible quality of life.

Elaine Smith was right to highlight the important question of why the life expectancy of those with DMD in Scotland has been poorer than that elsewhere. As the commonest cause of death in such cases is respiratory failure, aggravated by scoliosis of the spine, our focus in improving survival rates must be on spinal and respiratory care.

Through the Scottish molecular genetics consortium and local genetic counselling services,

all affected Scottish families now have access to the necessary molecular genetic tests, which are essential to allow diagnosis to take place as soon as possible. We have carried out a review of genetic services to consider how we might improve access to highly specialised expertise and ways in which we can supplement the voluntary sector in providing user-friendly information and resources, such as family care advisers. A key recommendation of the review was on the appointment of a clinical geneticist and a physiotherapist with expertise in genetic neuromuscular disorders. We have now approved funding for those posts as part of a two-year demonstration project in the first instance, and we hope to make appointments this year. The posts will have a pan-Scotland remit to standardise patient care protocols and improve equity of access to diagnosis and treatment.

Elaine Smith mentioned the importance of the Scottish muscle network in improving treatment. Although there is still much to do, it is worth acknowledging the positive impact that the network has had since its inception in 1999. The network aims to improve the care of everyone in Scotland with a neuromuscular condition regardless of where they live by ensuring that they have access to local health, social care and education professionals who know about their condition and its complications. The network has also been working with respiratory physicians to develop a respiratory care strategy for muscular dystrophy that is standardised and equitable throughout Scotland. There has also been significant investment in the national service for the treatment of scoliosis, which has helped to increase capacity and reduce waiting times for the service and which is a start in reducing the impact of scoliosis on those with DMD.

Improvements have been achieved. One or two members mentioned that, since the establishment of the Scottish muscle network in 1999, the death rate has halved, which is significant, and the rate of survival beyond the age of 18 has increased threefold. That is not to say that we are complacent—far from it. Significant further improvement is required if Scotland is to achieve survival rates and quality of life that are comparable with those in other places. However, progress has been made and we want to continue in that direction.

People with muscular dystrophy of all types will benefit from the approach to the management of long-term conditions that we set out in "Delivering for Health", which describes a model of care in which services are provided as locally as possible and which regards patients and their carers as partners in the delivery of their care. Several members highlighted the issue of whether people with DMD will be able to stay at home. Clearly, the

direction of travel that we set in “Delivering for Health” is that we want to enable people to do that wherever possible. As a consequence of the changes in priorities in the health service that arise from “Delivering for Health”, we want people to have an increased ability to remain at home.

Community health partnerships have a role in ensuring that NHS services are offered and delivered in an integrated way that responds to the individual’s needs. Those with complex and frequently changing needs should have a key person who is charged with actively managing and co-ordinating all their care needs. A single shared assessment can help to co-ordinate a package of equipment and adaptations—members have mentioned that issue—which may come from health, housing and social care services. In that context, consideration of the person’s home environment should become a routine part of the assessment process. “Getting it Right for Every Child” aims to ensure that children and young people and their families obtain support when they need it, through integrated working, joint assessments and better information sharing among agencies. That has a clear and direct relevance to the conditions that we are discussing.

Last month, we published the rehabilitation framework, which aims to help to equip patients and their carers with the skills that they need to manage their condition more effectively. For example, children with DMD can access community rehabilitation teams—specifically, physiotherapy services—either in specialist or in mainstream schools. For young adults with DMD, the rehabilitation framework should ensure that those services can be accessed at home. I hope that the framework’s promotion of the use of assistive technologies will make them more readily available to people in future.

One or two members asked about the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006. The act will give all disabled people in Scotland a right to mandatory assistance for adaptations to their principal home and will allow ministers to specify the circumstances in which assistance must be in the form of grant. It removes the current statutory cost limit, allowing local authorities more freedom to assess the level of assistance that is needed. I hope that that produces benefits for many people.

Equipment has an important role to play. Some members mentioned that a review of national health service wheelchair and seating services has been carried out, to which the Executive responded formally in January. One of the key recommendations is that the wheelchair assessment process should clearly document the optimum rather than the minimum equipment requirements, to ensure that user and carer needs are met. I was pleased that, as Nanette Milne

mentioned, we were recently able to provide some short-term interim funding to assist the wheelchair services. I can confirm that the wider recommendations in the review, with their larger financial implications, will be subject to the spending review later this year. I expect that they will be given full consideration in that context. However, it is not simply a case of waiting until those large-scale financial decisions are made. There are ways in which local services can respond quickly to the review—I look to them to do that.

We are working hard to ensure that services for people with a neuromuscular disorder are properly integrated; delivered by a multidisciplinary team; provided as close to people’s homes as possible; and delivered in a way that is responsive to each person’s needs. There is further encouragement to be had from the medical and genetic research that is under way internationally, giving hope to the families concerned.

Meeting closed at 17:51.

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