

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 16 January 2008

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 16 January 2008

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection, and our time for reflection leader today is Canon Andrew Mann from St Columba's Catholic church in Banchory.

Canon Andrew Mann (St Columba's Catholic Church, Banchory): I have noticed that various anniversaries take place this year. For example, it is the centenary of the birth of Jimmy Shand on 28 January, the quincentennial of the printing of the first book in Scotland on 4 April, and the 125th anniversary of the Melrose rugby sevens on 12 April.

One anniversary, known only to the cognoscenti, may have slipped from view. On Friday we begin the week of prayer for Christian unity, which I hope will be marked in cities, towns and villages up and down the country. The seeds of that ecumenical endeavour were sown in the 19th century and bore fruit in 1908, when Paul Wattson, an American Episcopalian priest, proposed an octave of prayer from 18 to 25 January, between the feasts of the chair of St Peter and of the conversion of St Paul. By the middle of the 20th century, the observance of the octave had spread throughout the church.

October 28 this year marks the 50th anniversary of the election of Angelo Roncalli as Pope John XXIII. It can be no coincidence that it was on 25 January 1959, at the end of the unity octave, that he announced his intention of calling the second Vatican council, a key milestone in the Roman Catholic Church's journey of faith. The council positively encouraged Romans Catholics to meet and pray together with other Christians.

At Bellahouston park in 1982, Pope John Paul II called on all Christians to make

"our pilgrimage together hand-in-hand ... doing all we can 'to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds us together'."

I can recall the enthusiasm of the 1980s, when Lenten faith-sharing groups were all the rage. Now that the initial zeal has settled down into a familiar pattern, some Christians have become slightly weary of the whole process. Perhaps this year we need to recapture some of that passion, commitment and dedication. Perhaps we need to support more enthusiastically the work of Action of Churches Together in Scotland. Since 1990, it has

brought together nine denominations in our country to act together in proclaiming and responding to the gospel.

A journalist once asked Pope John,

"How many people work in the Vatican?"

His reply was characteristic: "No more than half". Surely this anniversary reminds us that all Christians need to work and pray together if we are to fulfil the desire of Jesus that

"we may all be one".

Fisheries

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a statement by Richard Lochhead on fisheries. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions.

14:04

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I told Parliament last November when we debated our approach to the autumn negotiations that Scotland can rest assured that the Government will always treat our fishing industry as a major priority. With a Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment who represents the fishing communities of Moray and with a First Minister who has represented Scotland's most fishing-dependent constituency for more than 20 years, no one should have been too surprised.

When the Government came to power, I made it clear that we would bring a fresh approach for Scotland's fishing industry and fishing communities. So today, as evidence of that fresh approach and of the importance that we attach to fisheries, I make this statement on the outcome of the autumn fisheries negotiations, which are crucial to the livelihoods of Scotland's fishing communities and to Scotland's marine environment. I understand that today is the first time a statement has been made to Parliament after the negotiations, giving members an account of what has been agreed. I will range more widely than the December fisheries council—important though it is—and I will report on the other negotiations that take place over the autumn, such as the important negotiations between the European Union and Norway, in which so many key decisions are taken.

Before I go any further, however, I pay tribute to the work of the Scottish fishing industry and to the environmental non-governmental organisations that contribute so much to the development of our fisheries policies—I am grateful for the wise counsel that they gave me last autumn. Above all, I am grateful to them for the deep sense of responsibility that they have demonstrated and continue to demonstrate. I also pay tribute to the Government officials who fought hard to secure a good deal for Scotland. That sense of co-operation and partnership has allowed Scotland to grasp the initiative to deliver groundbreaking policy developments that are profoundly influencing the debate, both within the United Kingdom and Europe. Those policy developments position us in a leadership role for the future. I am proud to report that team Scotland came together

magnificently this autumn, and I am grateful to all those who played a part.

In the November debate on sea fisheries, I said that the Government was going into the autumn negotiations with two overarching aims. The first was to secure rewards for Scotland's fishermen, who have made many sacrifices and gone to great effort to conserve our fish stocks, and to secure fishing opportunities that would ensure the fleet's continuing profitability and allow it to plan for the future. The second aim was to secure a deal that promotes sustainability. I am pleased to report to Parliament today that we achieved both those aims.

I will outline the key achievement of the autumn negotiations, which is the historic agreement that provides unprecedented flexibility to run our own days-at-sea scheme. That is a landmark breakthrough. It is the first time since the inception of the common fisheries policy in 1983 that such significant management control has been passed back to Scotland from Brussels. We are already beginning to loosen the shackles of the CFP. One day soon we hope to shake ourselves free. The new agreement allows us to establish what we will call the conservation credits scheme. It will give us the flexibility to reward our fishermen with additional days at sea if they can demonstrate that they are signed up to initiatives that will have a positive impact on conservation of fragile fish stocks. The measures could include trialling and implementing new gear types to increase selectivity and to reduce the level of discards, as well as building on the innovative real-time closure schemes on which Scotland led last autumn.

In that connection, I am delighted to report today that the first real-time closure of a cod spawning ground was triggered at the weekend. That provides concrete evidence of the commitment Scotland is showing to protecting North Sea cod stocks. We are working closely with the industry and fishermen on this and we greatly value their co-operation. A successful scheme in Scotland will lead to its being adopted more widely throughout Europe.

The deal that was secured at the December fisheries council also included significant progress with respect to headline cuts in days at sea. For the west coast nephrops fleet, the cut was reduced from 25 per cent to 10 per cent, while white-fish fleets can avoid cuts altogether by operating under our existing system of automatic licence suspensions and/or in the west of Scotland, by fishing beyond the French line. The significant point is that headline cuts in days at sea will no longer be relevant to Scotland because our conservation credits scheme allows us to work altogether outside the Brussels-centred days-at-sea regime.

The concept of the conservation credits scheme was made in, and delivered by, Scotland. It was a hard-won achievement at the December council. It allows us for the first time to work together to devise and implement measures that are tailored to the particular circumstances that are encountered day to day by our fishermen at sea.

Members should not just take my word for it; here are some comments from others. Mike Park of the Scottish White Fish Producers Association said:

"This deal marks a new era for Scots fishermen. This is our opportunity to show that we are a responsible industry that wants to build a sustainable future for our seas."

Bertie Armstrong of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation said:

"One of our key aims was for Scotland to gain influence over the administration of a separate effort management scheme that will provide flexibility. This has been achieved and will hopefully pave the way for more effective fisheries management in the future."

WWF Scotland spoke of

"The greater power Scotland will have over fisheries management".

However, I make it clear that the deal that we secured from Brussels, and our conservation credits scheme, will be no easy option. The deal brings with it real responsibility—Scotland must now deliver and show the rest of Europe that we can achieve and maintain sustainable stocks—not least, of course, sustainable North Sea cod stocks. Many people will be watching how we deliver with those new freedoms. We must grasp the opportunity to demonstrate that our way is better. The issue is not about increasing effort regardless of the impact on fish stocks; it is about showing that we can reduce mortality and discards through other means than Brussels's tired old recipe of blunt cuts in days at sea. Scotland has won the major prize of securing more responsibility for what we do, but with that prize comes the responsibility to show that we are up to the challenge. I am confident that we will rise to that challenge and I believe that, together, we can deliver.

To make progress on the initiative, we have already convened a steering group that comprises representatives of the industry and of conservation and scientific interests. We are making good progress towards having the first stages of the scheme up and running by 1 February. The full involvement of the steering group and the fleet is absolutely essential to ensuring that we design a scheme that is good for conservation of our fish stocks, good for our marine environment and good for the fishing industry.

The autumn negotiations covered many more issues than just days at sea. The total allowable

catches and quotas are vital to Scotland's fishing communities and to the sustainability of our stocks. I was particularly pleased with the increase of 11 per cent in the North Sea cod quota in the EU-Norway negotiations, which is the first increase in the quota for 10 years and is long-awaited tangible evidence that the tide is finally beginning to turn. On other important North Sea stocks, I was pleased with the 8 per cent increase in the megrim TAC, given the high value of that stock and its importance to the Shetland fleet. On North Sea whiting, the original scientific advice was for an 80 per cent cut in the TAC, so the final 17 per cent cut represents a significant achievement and secures important fishing opportunities for the white-fish sector.

We also successfully resisted a European Commission attempt to push through draconian mandatory gear measures that could have had a serious impact on our nephrops fleet. On North Sea haddock, the combination of invoking Hague preferences and securing a substantial quota transfer from Norway meant that we restricted the reduction in the quota to 13 per cent. Even with that cut, the haddock quota for 2008 will be greater than the amount that was landed in 2007.

On North Sea herring, the scientific advice was particularly gloomy and painful decisions had to be taken. I was disappointed that the unanimous recommendation of the pelagic regional advisory council for a 35 per cent cut in the quota was not implemented in the EU-Norway negotiations, although we must keep a sense of perspective because mackerel still dominates pelagic returns and the 18 per cent increase in the Atlanto-Scandian herring quota is to be warmly welcomed. However, I acknowledge that the pelagic sector faces real challenges in 2008. I plan to meet the sector shortly to discuss how we can offer support to the industry which, through the employment that it provides in the processing sector, is the lifeblood of many of our fishing communities. A key priority for 2008 is to prepare for the vital pelagic negotiations in the year ahead, particularly on blue whiting and on improving the way in which our fishermen can contribute their knowledge to the scientific assessment of the mackerel stock.

Turning to the west coast, although disappointing decisions were made on cod and haddock at the December council, the decision to increase by 50 per cent the 2008 TAC for Rockall haddock was particularly satisfactory, as that is a vital safety-valve stock that offers some of the sector significant fishing opportunities away from the North Sea. There was also a satisfactory decision on west of Scotland herring. The scientific advice was for a 56 per cent cut in the TAC, which would have had a serious impact on parts of the fleet, but a 20 per cent cut was achieved thanks to the hard work of the Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's

Association, which led on the development of a revised management plan for the stock. Without the work of the association, we simply would not have achieved that satisfactory outcome, so I pay tribute to its leadership.

I also pay tribute to what I earlier called team Scotland. The meeting was my first December council as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, even if it was anything but my first attendance at the council. The hard-won successes were a direct result of the industry and Government working together as team Scotland.

I also had a good working relationship with my ministerial colleagues in Belfast, Cardiff and London, both in the run-up to the council and in Brussels itself. We worked very well together at times and, although Scotland was never afraid to take a robust stance where required, it was a co-operative relationship.

I believe that this Government's pressure on London to improve the decision-making processes paid dividends. We had crisper, more transparent processes in place as a result of this Government's pressure. Quite simply, we got a better deal as a result. However, it is also clear that the wider negotiating situation needs to be improved. The Brussels negotiating processes are tortuous: 25 Commission officials manning seven computers in a small room working through the night to come up with compromises on 136 fishery stocks for a score of member states is no way to do business and no way to decide the future of our fishing communities.

The December council brought home to me the strength of our argument that we should lead the negotiations. It brought home to me how much more we could achieve if we had greater influence. Nations that are the same size as Scotland—or which are even smaller, such as Estonia and Malta—sit either side of the United Kingdom in the Council chamber. When I see them taking their place at the top table of European negotiations, I fail to understand why anyone could say that Scotland, with so much of Europe's fishing waters off its shores, should be denied its rightful place alongside them.

Turning to the year ahead, it is clear that 2008 will be a year of many challenges. Tough decisions lie ahead of us in driving down cod mortality, in reducing discard rates, in implementing our conservation credits scheme and in rising to the challenges that face the pelagic sector. However, I am confident that the co-operation and mutual respect between the Government and fisheries stakeholders that has developed in recent months will continue to bear fruit. I am confident that we in Scotland can rise to the challenges that we face and that we will

continue to demonstrate leadership for the whole of Europe.

However, let us be clear that 2008 also brings many opportunities. Next week sees the inaugural meeting of the Scottish fisheries council, which will set the framework within which the sector as a whole can advise me on the best way forward for Scotland. Next week also sees the first meeting of the sustainable seas task force, which will consider marine legislation that can balance the competing interests of users and protect our seas at the same time.

In 2008, I will take forward our vital work on the future of fisheries management. That work will explore more democratic and suitable alternatives to the discredited common fisheries policy. Also in 2008, we must build on our new approach to inshore management. Inshore fisheries group pilots will be established and new strategies will be developed to deliver more benefit from non-quota stocks such as crabs, lobsters and scallops. I also want to see licensing and quota management arrangements in place that are properly tailored to Scotland's circumstances, explicitly recognising the importance of fishing to Scotland while providing stability for the future.

Almost 50 per cent of Scotland's key fisheries by value are embarking on the journey towards Marine Stewardship Council accreditation—the vital gold standard. I look forward to great progress being made this year towards that important goal. I am sure that we all recognise that sustainability is increasingly the key to the marketplace. We must grasp the challenges as they arise in 2008 and we must continue to demonstrate leadership to the rest of Europe.

Members may remember that the debate on sea fisheries in November was attended by 10 aspiring skippers who are currently training at Banff and Buchan College in Fraserburgh. I had the pleasure of meeting them after the debate and was delighted to hear of their enthusiasm for the sector and their optimism for the future. I said in the debate that the Government has the responsibility of ensuring that those young men can join a sector that has a bright future. I believe that the hard-won deals that were secured in the autumn negotiations will help to lay the foundations for a brighter future for those young aspiring skippers, for our industry, and for our marine environment.

Scotland today stands at the forefront of a new era of sustainable fisheries. It is clear to me that Scotland punches above its weight and that we should take pride in the leadership that has been shown by the Scottish fleet. We are surrounded by a priceless marine environment that gives us some of the most productive fishing waters in the world. Our waters produce a primary product that is in world-wide demand, of which we should be

proud. Yesterday, I launched the discussion period for the first-ever national food policy for Scotland. Our fishing communities will play a central role in that.

I firmly believe that the Scottish industry is sailing into calmer waters after too many years of pain and instability, even if there always remains a sense that, as long as we are in the CFP, we have to prepare for new storms around the corner. However, I am confident that we can deliver the greater certainty, optimism and hope that we promised our fishing communities. In the course of 2008, we will demonstrate to the rest of Europe not only that Scotland is committed to the goal of sustainable, profitable and well-managed fisheries but that Scotland now has the leadership and the ability finally to make that goal a reality.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. Around 30 minutes are allowed for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. I would be grateful if all those who wish to ask questions would press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I very much welcome the cabinet secretary's statement. I also welcome the presence of Jonathan Shaw, the UK fisheries minister, and Bertie Armstrong, who are in the public gallery today.

The chamber will be struck by the transformation of the cabinet secretary who, during his eight years of doom and gloom, opposed every one of the tough measures that we on the Labour benches supported, which have delivered the beginnings of a recovery in the North Sea and enabled Jonathan Shaw to negotiate an outcome that the fishing industry could not have dreamed of a few years ago.

I echo the cabinet secretary's tribute to the fishing industry, the environmental NGOs and the scientists for their sterling work in helping to deliver more sustainable fishing stocks. However, at the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, the cabinet secretary was unable to identify the specific differences in his negotiating position from the UK line. Given his boast in the chamber today that he could have achieved so much more, will the cabinet secretary now outline to us precisely what those differences would have been and how he would have ensured a better outcome in practice than we had in December?

Richard Lochhead: One of the reasons why the doom and gloom in Scotland's fishing industry is evaporating is because we now have an SNP Government that is fighting for our fishing communities with lots of results, as we saw just a few weeks ago in Brussels.

I say to Sarah Boyack that it is pretty churlish when the Scottish Government comes back with a deal that has been described as "historic" by all commentators and all sections of the industry—

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): By you.

Richard Lochhead: I have lots of quotes that I could give Mike Rumbles that prove the comments are not from the Scottish Government. As spokesperson for the Opposition, he gives zero credit to the Scottish Government and all the credit elsewhere, which is rather churlish.

Sarah Boyack asks how Scotland would have done better had we taken the lead in the negotiations or had an independent seat at the top table. At the moment, we are in the ludicrous situation in which we have 70 per cent of the UK's fishing industry, yet our efforts to influence the decisions that affect thousands of livelihoods in Scotland are compromised and diluted by going to the UK Government then to Europe among representatives of 27 member states who sit around the table. Surely if we had our own voice or could lead for the UK in the negotiations, we would be in a more powerful position to have much better, longer-term policies for Scotland's fishing communities. I do not see Malta or Estonia, who sit alongside the UK, asking to leave the table because they feel that they have no influence.

Sarah Boyack started her question by welcoming in part what I said in my statement. We have a genuine opportunity to take a fresh approach to how we manage our stocks in Scottish waters. That is largely down to the fact that we have wrested some control back from Brussels in respect of how we manage our fishing efforts.

I genuinely hope that we can all work together; there is a huge opportunity to do so. Fishermen from every sector in every part of the country are up for that. It is absolutely vital that political parties and members of Parliament all stand together and help those fishermen to move towards prosperity.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I begin by welcoming the cabinet secretary's statement and thank him for the advance copy of it. I also record the Scottish Conservatives' appreciation of the contributions that were made this autumn by the fishing organisations, the scientific groups and NGOs, as well as by our civil servants.

We welcome the conservation credits scheme of which the minister spoke earlier. It is a first and much-needed step in returning our waters to national and local control. I further welcome the first real-time closure—a happy response to my recent question on the subject.

The cabinet secretary noted the reduction in the proposed cut in west coast prawn fisheries from 25 to 10 per cent, which I welcome, but he must be aware of the dangerously low levels of other key species in the Firth of Clyde and elsewhere. Is he therefore able to tell Parliament about his specific proposals for restoring west coast stocks generally, and Firth of Clyde stocks in particular?

The cabinet secretary also noted that “draconian mandatory gear measures” were resisted. Will he tell us his plans to encourage greater use of selective gear, which will be essential if he and the fishing industry are serious about reducing the amount of discards and delivering truly sustainable fishing stocks?

Finally, in paragraph 39 of his statement, the cabinet secretary commits to exploring “democratic alternatives” to the CFP. Is he able to give us an early indication of what those alternatives might be? What discussions has he had, or will he have, with his UK and EU counterparts to achieve that end?

Richard Lochhead: I thank John Scott for his opening remarks and his questions. We introduced the first real-time closure because I wanted to ensure that I gave a positive response to his parliamentary question.

As the scientific advice that we have received—and that we have to take into account—makes clear, many challenges face us on the west coast of Scotland. We have secured an increase in the Rockall haddock quota, which should help much of the west coast fleet. As for the nephrops—or langoustines, as we are calling them now—on which the west coast fleet is also heavily dependent, that quota was not up for negotiation in the 2007 council, but is up for negotiation this year. That stock is being fished sustainably and is continuing to sustain the west coast fleet.

On encouraging the use of selective gear, that issue is linked directly to the conservation credits scheme. Fleets that adopt new technical measures such as better selective gear, or which sign up to real-time closures, will get more days at sea. Of course, different fleets in different parts of Scotland will find different measures more relevant and therefore more attractive to their fishery, but that will be a key approach to encouraging the use of selective gear.

As for finding an alternative to the CFP, we will this year appoint an expert panel to find the best fisheries management regime for Scotland’s unique fishing stocks and marine environments and our fishing communities. Instead of taking the top-down approach that has been taken by Brussels for the past 30 years, we will work back from there. That is what should be done and that is how we will take this matter forward.

Mike Rumbles: Last year, the minister set out 10 aims that he wished to achieve at the fishing talks, among which was the aim to achieve increases in quota. He has mentioned the three increases that were agreed at the talks, but has he mentioned the 11 cuts that were also made? He wanted increases in days at sea but, as of this moment, no such increases have been agreed. He also wanted a phased reduction in industrial fishing, but there has been no such reduction. Moreover, there has been no mention of attempts to end the practice of discarding healthy fish at sea. Finally, he demanded that he lead the UK’s delegation at the talks. Evidently, that did not happen.

I am fairly sure that he does not, but does the minister agree with me that, unfortunately, by the standards that he set himself, the negotiations cannot in any way be described as a successful outcome for his 10-point plan for Scotland?

Richard Lochhead: It strikes me that there is an enormous gulf between Mike Rumbles and the real world outside the Parliament. No doubt he spent a lot of time on his way to the chamber thinking about how he could attack the Government over the outcome of the December negotiations. Even his own local newspaper, *The Press and Journal*, which he often quotes in the chamber, said in an editorial that was published following the outcome of the talks:

“For the first time in recent memory, everybody seemed reasonably happy in general, apart from a few issues here and there.”

Moreover, an editorial in *The Herald* said:

“For once the European fisheries negotiations have produced a genuine breakthrough.”

That view is reflected throughout the industry and among all the commentators in Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order, Mr Rumbles.

Richard Lochhead: As I said, there is a huge gulf between Mike Rumbles and the real world.

If I had totally ignored the scientific advice with regard to the stocks on which quotas were cut—cuts, I should add, that were often supported by the industry—Mike Rumbles would have been the first member to attack us in the chamber for doing so. I ask him to put the deal into perspective. We have secured an increase in many vital stocks. For example, we have secured an 11 per cent increase in North Sea cod—the first increase in a decade.

I am confident that we met many of our priorities in the December talks. Perhaps if we had our own voice and more influence, we would achieve all of them.

The Presiding Officer: We come to questions from back benchers. I would be grateful if members could bear in mind the fact that this is a time for questions, not speeches.

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): I will stick with cod. I am conscious that cod mortality is falling, but it is still too high. That drives Commission thinking on a range of policy issues. What plans does the Government have to tackle the vital issue of cod mortality in 2008?

Richard Lochhead: Nigel Don's question goes to the heart of many of the issues that were discussed at the December council. We now have the ability to manage fishing effort in our own waters and to adapt it to Scottish circumstances. Key to that will be the conservation credits scheme, which represents the way forward on reducing cod mortality and increasing cod stocks. Cod stocks are going in the right direction and if some of the measures that we are implementing now had been put in place in Scotland's waters a decade ago, they would be in an even better state. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Richard Lochhead: The real-time closures will be aimed largely at protecting juvenile cod stocks in cod spawning grounds. Those new and innovative measures were not promoted by previous Scottish Administrations or by the UK Government. The initiatives that this Government is promoting will bear fruit.

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The west coast has led cod conservation measures through large all-area closures of mobile fishing methods for the past five years. As the minister will know, the windsock closure covers an area that is about 80 miles long, which runs from the north of the Butt of Lewis towards Orkney.

When in the run-up to the next negotiations can we expect a report to ascertain the benefits of the windsock closure? I would hope that such a report would allow us to consider whether the current all-year closure can be relaxed and we can move to a seasonal closure during the cod spawning season.

Richard Lochhead: That is a good question. We must balance the benefits or otherwise of permanently closing areas against the use of technical measures, seasonal closures and so on. Deciding which measure to use is an important fisheries management dilemma.

In the review of fisheries management in Scotland's waters, we are looking at the success or otherwise of all such measures, so the windsock closure will be considered as part of that process. I am happy to correspond with the member on that point.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): Scottish langoustines, as they have now been officially renamed, are in huge demand across the world. What does the Government intend to do for Scotland's nephrops fleet, which is so crucial to many of our communities, particularly on the west coast? In relation to the west coast fleet, will he comment further on the increase in the Rockall haddock quota?

Richard Lochhead: I hope that the 50 per cent increase in the Rockall haddock TAC will offset some of the more painful cuts that had to be imposed on the fishing of other stocks as a result of scientific evidence. That increase is important, because it should help to provide a reasonable income for the crews of vessels that would otherwise stand to lose income.

As Alasdair Allan says, the most important fishery on the west coast and in his constituency is the nephrops and shellfish fishery. The science on the nephrops stock will be reviewed in the run-up to this year's negotiations. If we are to support the nephrops fleet, it is vital that we have accurate science that allows us to make our case and to ensure that the sustainable fishing of that stock and the good volume of quota that Scotland has for it continue from 2008 into 2009.

We produce world-class food in Scotland and our langoustines, which command a premium in international markets, are near the top of the list of our products. That will be taken into account as part of Scotland's first national food policy.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): How does the cabinet secretary expect that the new agreement will affect the fish-processing sector? Does he recognise that the recent negotiations show that reform of the CFP, rather than withdrawal from it, is the way forward, particularly when his ministerial colleagues admit in written answers that membership of the CFP is a requirement of membership of the EU?

Richard Lochhead: Thankfully, given the vital role that they play in the member's constituency and elsewhere in Scotland, fish processors have benefited from the increase in fish prices over the past year or two. Although that is helping the viability of many fish processors, the cuts mean that they will face some challenges.

I am thankful for the increase in the Rockall haddock quota and for the fact that the mackerel quota, which represents the vast majority of the pelagic quota, received only a 9 per cent cut—that is within the existing management plan—and I hope that the supply of fish landed in Scotland, as opposed to imported from elsewhere, will continue to flow to fish processors.

On the common fisheries policy, Scotland has major fishing interests. If we had more control over

the ability of our fishermen to fish waters sustainably and over the overall activity that takes place, our fishermen would have a more sustainable fishery. We will work tooth and nail in the current regime to get the best possible deal for Scotland and to do what we can to protect thousands of jobs.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for providing an advance copy of his statement, in which he says:

“the key achievement of the autumn negotiations”

is

“the historic agreement that provides unprecedented flexibility to run our own days-at-sea scheme.”

Will he be able to use that flexibility to return the 28 days at sea per year that were taken away in error from the west coast prawn fishermen in 2006?

I raised the matter with the cabinet secretary on behalf of the Clyde Fishermen's Association, and in his reply to me of 10 January, for which I thank him, he said:

“my officials were given the impression that Commission officials accepted an error had been made.”

The cabinet secretary also said:

“The UK asked the Commission for copies of the papers showing where these previously unknown west of Scotland thresholds were established, but Commission officials explained that they were agreed verbally”.

That was not a satisfactory answer. Will the cabinet secretary assure me that he will fully investigate the scandal?

Richard Lochhead: The issue is important to the Clyde fishermen and to the west coast of Scotland. We devoted a lot of time and effort to negotiating with the European Commission to get the error—as we see it—on the 28 days rectified. The initial indication was that Commission officials acknowledged that perhaps there had been an error, but unfortunately at the December council officials did a volte face and said that there had been no error and that there was justification for the situation continuing. I will be happy to write to the member to follow up those details.

We were disappointed by that approach. Of course, given the number of negotiations that took place during the December council, the Commission refused to dwell on the issue for any length of time. We will continue to revisit the issue. The situation does not look particularly hopeful at this stage, but I hope that the flexibility that we have in relation to the days-at-sea regime in Scotland will enable us to offset potential loss for the fishermen concerned.

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): We have heard about the importance of fishing to Moray and the west coast, but we have heard nothing about the south coast—our Scottish riviera, with which the Presiding Officer is familiar—or the south-east coast. The cabinet secretary has received representation from Dumfries and Galloway Council on traditional Solway net fishing, which might be under threat from angling interests. What has he done to address the issue?

There is cross-party pressure on the cabinet secretary—even from his own party—to deliver fisheries-dependent area status for Eyemouth and the Berwickshire coast. Can he confirm that he will deliver on that important issue? When will that happen?

Richard Lochhead: My understanding is that there is no threat to the Solway fishery, but I will come back to the member with more detail on that.

On fisheries-dependent area status for the member's communities, as I said last week during question time, I am conscious of the importance of fishing to a number of communities in the south of Scotland. We are taking that into account. We will shortly issue a draft European fisheries fund programme. The member and everyone else will have an opportunity to respond—on that point or on others—to the consultation that will take place before we issue the final programme, which will set out fisheries-dependent area status for communities, by the end of the year.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I express my fervent hope that sustainability outcomes match the cabinet secretary's rhetoric.

Observation will be crucial to monitoring the impact of the conservation credits scheme. The cabinet secretary assured me during a meeting of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee last year that observers would be part of the package that is offered. That is the right road to go down, especially in the context of the real-time closures that have been announced, which are very welcome. How much observer coverage will be delivered next year in Scotland? How will the real-time closures be monitored? In the absence of the European fisheries fund next year, what money will be available to help fishermen pay for selective gear?

Richard Lochhead: I assure Robin Harper that sustainability will be at the heart of our fishing strategy in Scotland. I hope that I have given lots of evidence not only today but previously why that is the case. I cannot give him information at the moment on the number of observers that we will deploy in 2008 because this is only 16 January and the talks on the new deal concluded only two or three weeks ago. We are digesting the outcome and plotting with our steering group how we

should implement the conservation credits scheme and how it should be monitored, verified and so on. I know that he takes a keen interest in the observers issue and I will certainly keep him up to date. It was a successful initiative in 2007, so I see no reason why we should not continue it in 2008.

On assistance for selective gear, I am keen that we should find ways in which we can assist the fleet to adopt new selective gear and use technical measures. I hope that that will be possible with existing funds. We will look for routes to provide that assistance. I am keen that Scotland should lead the whole of Europe in the new technical measures that we put in place, including selective gear.

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): The Government announced last year that it will set up a Scottish fisheries convention and a Scottish fisheries council. In light of the fisheries talks and the associated agreement, will the minister tell Parliament what those bodies will do and when they will meet?

Richard Lochhead: The Scottish sea fisheries council meets for the first time next week, and the convention on the future of Scotland's fishing communities will meet in two or three months' time. We feel that the community dimension of fisheries policy in Scotland needs more attention. I am sure that the Parliament agrees that fisheries policy is about not simply TACs and quotas but the impact that it has on real, living, working communities on our shores. That is why it is important to recognise the community impact, as well as the cultural and social impacts, of decisions that are taken in Brussels. The purpose of the convention on the future of Scotland's fishing communities is to bring together local authority representatives with organisations around Scotland that might not be directly related to fisheries management issues but which have a clear interest in the future of our fishing communities.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As the minister will be aware, historic east coast fishing ports such as Pittenweem no longer have any white-fish alternative—they are totally reliant on nephrops. He will also be aware that a high percentage of the Pittenweem fleet is made up of under-10m and non-sector vessels. What impact will the deal that he struck in December have on the prospects for the new year of places such as Pittenweem?

Richard Lochhead: I hope that the deal has a positive impact on the under-10m sector, as well as on the rest of the industry. We will announce the next tranche of inshore fisheries groups in the next few weeks, and we announced three prior to the new year. The success or otherwise of the inshore fisheries groups will have a bearing on the

success of the under-10m sector, to which we are keen to give more of a say. We want to involve it in all kinds of conservation schemes, as well as let it have a say on local fisheries management. There is a bright future for the under-10m sector in Scotland, but it has to be carefully managed. We look forward to negotiating with the sector in the weeks and months ahead.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): As the minister knows, the kilowatt-days regime works only if the days go to the white-fish boats that need them and if costs are reduced. Can he assure me that that regime will achieve those two objectives?

Further, will the Government agree the precise criteria for establishing spawning areas with the industry?

Richard Lochhead: On the latter point, I assure Tavish Scott that the industry is at the heart of deciding the rationale for how the real-time closures are operated. We have to remember that as things stand that is a voluntary initiative. If our fishermen wish to get extra days at sea through the conservation credits scheme, they have to sign up to taking part in such initiatives. If they do not take part in such initiatives, they do not get any more days at sea—it is as simple as that.

I totally agree with Tavish Scott on the economic benefit of our new regime for the fleet in Scotland. Many fishermen have said to me that they are not happy with the idea of having to lease days to go to sea when those days are allocated elsewhere and are not being used. I am sure that Tavish Scott has heard that complaint many times in his constituency. We hope that the new regime will offset some of the economic costs involved. If the fishermen sign up to certain schemes, they will get extra days. We hope that that will, in some cases, remove the need for fishermen to lease days elsewhere and that it will save them considerable sums of money.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): The practice of discarding fish remains a huge problem for the sustainability of many of our key stocks. We all saw the television pictures of the practice at the end of last year and, during the sea fisheries debate in November, many colleagues expressed their horror at it. What will the Government do in 2008 to ensure that we tackle the level of discards in our key fisheries?

Richard Lochhead: I thank Ian McKee for raising the issue. Many members across the parties take a close interest in that horrific issue, which represents a waste of valuable fish stocks and of a valuable economic resource.

The EU is consulting on a discards reduction plan, and Scotland will have her say in that. Our contribution will comprise many of the initiatives that we have discussed today—the measures that

we want to implement in Scottish waters to reduce discards and, at the same time, protect juvenile stocks from being caught. There is a lot happening in that regard. The steering group has been set up and will, we hope, come up with new ideas on how to reduce discards in Scottish waters.

We will also ensure that Scotland's specific circumstances are taken into account in the EU consultation. We have a mixed fishery in Scottish waters and it might not be as simple as some people think to reduce discards. It could, in some cases, mean simply that no fish are caught. We must be careful about how we approach that matter, and we must take those factors into account.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): The minister will no doubt be aware that members of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee unanimously agreed an amendment to the budget that would have set aside the money that is currently unallocated within the marine budget line to support the improvements in conservation measures that he and Robin Harper talked about earlier. I am sure that he shares our disappointment that members of the Finance Committee, through the committee's Scottish National Party and Conservative block, have chosen not to support that unanimous amendment. However, the budget remains within his control and, in view of the unanimous opinion of members of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee—which includes members of his party—that there was a significant level of unallocated funds within his budget lines, will he reconsider the committee's amendment and ensure that, working within European state-aid rules, the resources are provided to enable our fishing industry to benefit fully from the deal that Jonathan Shaw negotiated on behalf of team UK in December?

Richard Lochhead: I had hoped that Karen Gillon would give us some credit for the outcome in December. Her point is important, but I must be up front with her and say that I have not had time to digest the committee's views on the use of the budget for such measures. However, I am open to such suggestions. I will not give a commitment on exactly where funding support for new technical measures in Scottish waters will come from, but if we are to pilot some of the new measures in Scottish waters, we must work closely with the industry to ensure that that happens, and I have an open mind as to how we can do that.

“Reviews of National Policies for Education: Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland”

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-1131, in the name of Maureen Watt, on the report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on Scottish education, “Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland”.

14:49

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): I am delighted to introduce this important debate on the OECD report into Scottish education, “Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland”, which was published on 11 December 2007. As a measure of the importance that the Scottish Government places on this extremely insightful external analysis of our school education system, we alerted all members of the Scottish Parliament to the report prior to the Christmas recess—knowing that they would of course wish to read the review from cover to cover during their Christmas and new year holiday.

I say at the outset that we are grateful to the previous Executive, in particular to the former ministers Peter Peacock and Hugh Henry, for their involvement with the OECD review. Peter Peacock had the insight and good sense to commission the review in the first place, and I acknowledge that it takes some courage to commission such a review. It shows his confidence in the Scottish education system, but I am sure that the Danish experience lay at the back of his mind. The Danes commissioned an OECD review following disappointing results under the programme for international student assessment and that might have given Peter Peacock a bit of worry, but he need not have worried. I thank Hugh Henry for supporting the work and for meeting the OECD review team when they visited Scotland in March.

Such an expert analysis is consistent with our overall wish to challenge Scotland's education ambitions against the achievements of other countries as a basis for improving performance. I am sure that all of us here aim to uphold Scottish traditions of being open to outside opinion and constructive in our response, and of trying

“To see ourselves as others see us!”

The OECD's seminal report helps us to do just that.

The OECD team presented their report to ministers at a special session of the OECD education policy committee in Edinburgh on 11 December. It was a pity that the BBC broke the OECD's embargo and, as a result of not having

the full report, ran a rather unbalanced story—but there we go. The special session meeting was a unique event, in that senior education representatives from 14 countries discussed the report and its findings with ministers for the whole day. I am pleased to say that there is much in the review team's report that aligns with this Government's strategic priorities, such as our commitment to tackling education inequalities from the earliest stages, our new relationship with local government, the skills and vocational learning agenda and the reform and modernisation of the curriculum through the curriculum for excellence. I also welcome the positive things that the review says about some of the key strengths of our system. For example,

"Scotland is a well-schooled nation by international standards."

I attended a seminar in London last week with education ministers from 60 countries and 180 senior policy advisers. Seventy-two countries were represented, covering 67 per cent of the world's population. As well as coming away with a better understanding of the digital divide, which the seminar was about, I came away knowing that many countries wish to know more about our education system.

Many participants told me that we do not shout loudly enough about our good system here in Scotland. We should not be surprised, therefore, that the report commended our consistently high standard in the OECD's programme for international student assessment, or PISA; the quality of head teachers in Scotland; our impressive system of near universal, high-quality pre-school education; the 2001 teachers agreement, with its impact on morale and on interest in the profession through improved salary and working conditions and continuous professional development; the renovation of our schools; and our approach to teacher induction, which was described as "world class" in the review.

In Scotland, we are in the vanguard of leading education nations. We are a learning nation—and it is reassuring to be told by external, impartial examiners from such an august body as the OECD that that is indeed the case.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I do not wish in any way to denigrate the findings of the report, nor to question the PISA standards, but how does the minister balance what the investigation into Scottish education standards found with the Government's own programme, which is running a television advert saying that one in five—almost one in four—adult Scots has difficulty with reading and counting?

Maureen Watt: I will come on to the matter that the member raises later in my speech.

As Professor Richard Teese, rapporteur for the review, said to us, the key question for the team was, "How do you improve a system that is already very good?" However, the review throws up some key challenges, such as the need to reduce the achievement gap that opens up at about primary 5 and continues to widen throughout the lower secondary years; the fact that young people from poorer communities and low socioeconomic status homes are more likely than others to achieve less; and the need to build on our strong platform of basic education through socially broader and more successful participation in upper secondary education and greater equity in Scottish higher education.

The OECD review states:

"In Scotland, who you are is far more important than what school you attend, and at present Scottish schools are not strong enough to ensure that 'who you are' does not count."

Inequalities in staying-on rates, participation at different academic levels of national courses and pass rates in those courses are a major concern of this Government, as they are in many countries in the world.

The review also highlights the number of young people who leave school with minimal qualifications and the comparatively high proportion who find themselves in precarious transition. Those problems are by no means unique to our nation. As Mrs MacDonald said, there are adults in Scotland today who have not had the basics in education to enable them to cope. We are addressing that issue.

Margo MacDonald: I am happy to hear that the Government is aware of the issue and plans to address it. Will the minister's starting point be people in the 50-plus age group? It might be found that people who left school in Scotland that length of time ago were better equipped in respect of basic reading, writing and counting skills than people who left school in Scotland 30 years ago.

Maureen Watt: The member makes an excellent point. The fact that our early years strategy and our early intervention strategy use the whole family to raise aspirations is in line with what she mentions.

In essence, the review makes it clear that our key challenge is how we improve a successful system to make it more equitable and to ensure that the benefits of a Scottish education are more widely shared, particularly at the latter end of school education and through the important transition period.

To help us address those challenges, the review makes a series of recommendations in five broadly-framed areas:

"National priorities funding through local government compacts ... Greater school autonomy in a local government framework ... A comprehensive, structured and accessible curriculum ... Continuous review of curriculum and teaching"

and monitoring of student destinations.

We will, of course, look carefully at the specific recommendations in all five areas and consider how they might help us to deliver our strategic objectives, particularly in relation to our smarter and our wealthier and fairer objectives, in partnership with local authorities and other key education community agencies and stakeholders.

We look forward to engaging with the Scottish education community, particularly within our new outcomes-focused landscape following the signing of our historic concordat with local government leaders on 14 November 2007, so that we can work together as partners in an atmosphere of mutual respect to consider what we can do to respond in a positive and constructive manner to the OECD's findings and recommendations.

The question is not so much, "What is the Government going to do in response to the review?" as, "What does the review mean for everyone in the Scottish education community and what are our shared responsibilities to engage with its findings?"

I welcome this opportunity for a mature debate that forms part of a continuing reflection on what we are doing and why, within the context of the review and other sources of evidence, both national and international, which are at our disposal. I had hoped that we could focus the debate on the merits of the review itself and address the issues raised, rather than debate amendments. I am sure that that is what most members will want to do this afternoon, but we should be mindful that the review team and other countries are interested in what we say about their report, rather than in party political points that speakers might score.

We can all be proud of the success of Scottish education and what we have achieved. However, as the OECD points out, it is not a success for all children. That is the challenge that we need to face up to collectively if Scotland and its education system are to be the best that they can be in the 21st century.

We need children and young people who are effective contributors, responsible citizens and confident individuals, as well as successful learners, if we are to achieve a smarter Scotland. More importantly, people deserve that for

themselves, to improve their own life chances and opportunities.

Our ambitions for Scotland are challenging—and rightly so. In our first eight months in government, we have taken important first steps towards shaping tomorrow's Scotland and making Scotland smarter. The challenge is to ensure that Scotland's reputation as a smart, learning nation is maintained and enhanced and that Scotland becomes a country that can build on firm foundations, harness the talents of our people and create opportunities for all to flourish and excel.

We want Scotland to be everything that it can be. Good teaching and learning lie at the heart of that. A love of learning is a liberator for learners of all ages—which relates to what Margo MacDonald said—and that is what we want to see throughout the system.

We welcome the review and today's debate because we believe that Scotland should be in the vanguard of educational thinking on the international stage. Our ambitions are high. We should be engaged with, and leading, cutting-edge thinking in education across the world and we should be reflecting, on an on-going basis, on how the evidence that we have from both national and international sources, including this important external review, can help us to achieve a smarter, wealthier and fairer Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) *Reviews of Policies for National Education: Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland* and its findings; notes the many positive aspects of our school education system highlighted by the OECD, and agrees that this report is an invaluable international evidence base on which to debate and develop Scotland's educational policies for the future, recognising the significant challenges identified by the OECD.

15:02

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): A debate on education has been a long time coming to the chamber, but I do not wish to be churlish, as I welcome the opportunity.

As has been said, in 2006, Peter Peacock commissioned the report from the OECD to examine the strengths of Scottish schools and the challenges that they face in the attempt to attain high standards for all our children. The report found many strengths in education performance. We perform at a consistently high standard in the programme for international student assessment. There have been reductions in underachievement, greater consistency in the early years of primary school and a rise in the number of students achieving higher grades in the final year of schooling. Further, our induction programme for

new teachers was highly praised, as was our near universal, high-quality pre-school education. Indeed, the comprehensive secondary school system was seen as

“another major strength of Scottish education.”

Two key challenges were identified. First, there is the challenge to reduce the gap in achievement that opens up in primary school and widens in secondary school, of which I am very conscious. When I used to visit students who were working in nurseries and primary schools, I saw that they never failed to be amazed at the wide gaps in areas such as language development that existed even in groups of children who had been at school for a few years.

The second challenge is to improve participation in upper secondary education and to create greater equity in higher education. Of major concern are the young people who leave school and become people who are not in education, employment or training. Indeed, the Labour Party was particularly concerned about that when we were in government.

Importantly, the report underlines the relationship between disadvantage and educational attainment. The report says that children from poorer homes are more likely to underachieve, disengage from school work and leave school earlier than others. This is nothing new, and it is a particularly difficult area to tackle. Our closing the opportunity gap measure was to raise the attainment levels of the worst performing 20 per cent of students, which was a stubborn target to achieve—that is not easy to do.

The report chimes with what Labour is saying about our existing social justice policies on parenting and early intervention and our strategy to support pupils who will potentially leave school without education, employment or training. I ask the cabinet secretary, in responding to the debate, to clarify whether the Government will honour its manifesto commitment to introduce a £30 million additional support for learning fund or whether that will be another broken promise. Will the cabinet secretary also clarify whether she will commit to the provision of nursery education for vulnerable two-year-olds?

The report expresses concern that the two key instruments of change and adaptation in schools—innovation in the curriculum and schools’ flexibility in teaching resources—are currently limited and recommends that the Government create greater management freedom and encourage innovation and risk taking within a clear mandate. We support that very much. In addressing the challenges, the OECD welcomes the development of the new curriculum and points out that, now that higher staying-on rates have been achieved, the

challenge is to increase demands on students. The key recommendation—which, again, we very much support—is to continue to develop our approach to vocational studies in schools. Importantly, the report says that that should not be viewed too narrowly—just in terms of employability. That is an important lesson for us to learn. It also emphasises that the learner perspective is absolutely essential in all this.

We support what the report says about the move to greater autonomy in curriculum and finance; however, importantly, the report says that that must be achieved with greater transparency and accountability. That will be a genuine issue for the Government, as it intends to move to an outcome-based approach. We have major concerns about that, relating to transparency and accountability, and many stakeholders share our concerns.

The report points out that the Government does not currently have reliable information on the extent to which educational standards are being reached in each of the local authorities. I add to what Margo MacDonald said about there being a major concern about literacy and numeracy in Scotland. I have already asked the cabinet secretary whether she would be prepared to show leadership in that area, as there has been a clear failure to show leadership in tackling the issue at a national level. What has happened in West Dunbartonshire has shown us a way forward, and I would be interested to hear whether the cabinet secretary is prepared to reconsider her decision to leave the matter to local authorities. I call on her to show some leadership in that very important area.

The report voices concerns about the current formula allocation of block grants and emphasises, again, the need for reliable data on student achievement and performance throughout Scotland. We know that there are still inequalities throughout Scotland, so we need a national strategy. It cannot just be left to local authorities; there must be a clear national strategy and transparency as well as, of course, regular assessment of impact.

Overall, we think that the report is a perceptive piece of work by the OECD. Its analysis of the challenges that are faced by Scottish education should not surprise us—it does not surprise those of us who have been in government. Labour is only too well aware of the inequalities in Scottish education, of the impact of poverty and deprivation and of the challenges that we face in tackling them. That is why we frame our policies on children and education as we do.

However, a key point for us is the need to change an education system that can lack flexibility, that does not always reward innovation and, importantly, that still leads to huge regional variations in performance. That is a big challenge

for the Government. There is a fundamental inability to make informed judgments at Government level about the effectiveness of policy and resources in the absence of comprehensive data on outcomes throughout Scotland. There will need to be some hard thinking about our current assessment regime and the information that is available to us. That might be a challenging debate, but we need to have it.

Although the report advocates greater devolution to local authorities and schools, it also points to the clear need for leadership at Government level. That is important because of the huge variations and challenges that we face at local authority level and the difficulty with monitoring the assessment of students. The Government intends to take the huge leap of introducing outcome agreements and performance indicators without having the ability at the centre to make informed judgments on performance. That is a significant risk, and the report states that it could lead to greater local variations. I will be particularly interested to hear what the cabinet secretary has to say about that.

Maureen Watt: The member is wrong to think that we will not have a handle on what is happening locally. With single outcome agreements, we will have more of a handle on performance at the local level. Indeed, we had a meeting earlier today with representatives from Aberdeen City Council with responsibility for children, families and education to find out precisely what is going on locally. We can find examples of best practice from throughout the country and put people in touch with each other.

Rhona Brankin: I repeat what I said, and indeed what the report says. At the moment, in the absence of comprehensive data on student outcomes throughout Scotland, the Government has a fundamental inability to make informed judgments about the effectiveness of policy and resources. I would be interested to hear exactly how you are going to do that.

Overall, the report reflects Labour's analysis of the continuing barriers of poverty and deprivation. Importantly, it supports a targeted approach to tackling equity issues. We support such an approach, but we know that the SNP has difficulties with it. Bodies such as Save the Children and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People have expressed concerns and stated the importance of tracking spend on education and children, and the report adds weight to that.

The report is hugely important and we are keen to develop policy around it. It gives us a huge opportunity to drive our social justice agenda in education, social policy and health policy. We challenge the Government to develop the national

plan that is needed to tackle equity issues and ensure that the devolution of funding and powers to local authorities is not simply used as an excuse for a total abdication of leadership on social justice and education by the SNP Government. I ask you to support the Labour amendment to the motion.

I move amendment S3M-1131.2, to insert at end:

"recognises the challenge in closing the gap in achievement associated with poverty and deprivation and the need for improved vocational education and high quality training; calls on the Scottish Government to take leadership and place an emphasis on literacy and numeracy, devolve power further to head teachers, develop leadership in schools and further develop vocational studies linked to high quality training, and regrets that this government has failed to address these priorities and has failed to deliver on key pledges made in the SNP manifesto."

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. At this stage, I remind all members that the only time they should use the word "you" is when they are speaking to me.

15:13

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Conservatives welcome the opportunity to debate the important challenges that Scottish schools face. Four of those challenges are given a high profile in the OECD report and they deserve urgent attention if we are to improve education standards in Scottish schools. Indeed, we believe that the debate should not only build on the undoubted strength of the system, which the Minister for Schools and Skills outlined, but set the priorities for education policy in the immediate future.

The first concern, which comes through loud and clear in the report and which came through loud and clear from Margo MacDonald this afternoon, is that a worrying lack of basic skills remains among too many of our pupils, especially when it comes to reading, writing and arithmetic. I am conscious that politicians will use the evidence that suits their case or, in some cases, scaremonger on the topic, but nonetheless there is convincing evidence on the difficulties that we face with the three Rs. I will put our cards firmly on the table because I believe that, if we address the problem properly, we will go a long way towards unlocking the other problems with education in Scotland.

I believe that there is a way through for the three Rs. I will not accept any suggestion that success or failure in the three Rs necessarily reflects social background, although of course that can have a major impact.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): The report contains strong evidence that that is exactly the

case. As Rhona Brankin said, a person's background determines their success. It should not, but unfortunately, as the report says, it does.

Elizabeth Smith: I am saying that background does not necessarily determine performance, although of course it can have a big impact.

I point to what both Clackmannanshire Council and West Dunbartonshire Council have done, which Rhona Brankin mentioned in her speech. They have had remarkable success in combining good teachers with the right teaching methods, high expectations and good discipline for pupils right across the ability range. There is a lesson to be learned from that.

A second interesting finding in the report is the fact that the attainment gap in Scotland begins to develop in earnest in primary 5, rather than in earlier years, which is sometimes assumed to be educational wisdom. The attainment gap gets bigger when children are aged around 10. If the problem continues to worsen in the early years of secondary school, that is an important lesson about where remedial help is most required.

The report's third important finding is that our curriculum and its accompanying exam structure do not currently serve the best interests of our pupils. Although there are many exciting developments in the curriculum for excellence, especially the initiative to ensure that education is about developing a well-rounded and responsible citizen, as well as one who is fit for the workforce, there is a key message in the OECD report that our system is failing too many youngsters. It is failing them because it is not providing enough focus for those who do not wish to pursue a purely academic career. I know that the Government is interested in developing that line of thinking.

The public exam system needs to be simplified, to be made much more rigorous and to put greater emphasis on basic competence in literacy and numeracy than it does at present. As we have said before, we entirely agree with the OECD that there needs to be a much more radical approach to vocational opportunities.

It is my contention that public exams should continue to start in secondary 4. Standard grades should be replaced by an exam that takes on board the best of the current intermediate 2 courses and puts much heavier focus on the use of literacy and numeracy. If that means that pupils take slightly fewer but more rigorous exams at that stage, so be it. The Scottish higher, which by and large retains its place as a highly respected qualification, remains the focus for the end of S5 and, therefore, the basis for university and college entrance, but we need to think about what happens post higher. The advanced higher, which is an excellent exam in many cases, far superior in

some areas to the English A-level, is not being taught in enough schools, and the danger is that universities will soon start to disregard its worth. During the Christmas holidays, there were many calls on that issue. I hope that the Government will take up the cause of listening to what people are saying about reform of the exam. The debate about a Scottish baccalaureate is still to be had.

Finally, I come to the OECD recommendation that schools should have more autonomy in their governance. Members will not be surprised when I say that Conservative members are delighted to hear that, because if there is one fundamental problem that is holding back the whole system, it is the straitjacket of central control, which pays no heed to regional differences, the needs of different types of schools or the needs of individual pupils. Conservative members believe that standards in schools will improve only if we put control back into the hands of the professionals on the front line and take it away from the bureaucrats. The same is true of all other public services.

The OECD has said some extremely important things about what Scottish schools do well, and rightly so. However, it has also said a lot about the important challenges that we face. It is incumbent on all members of the Parliament, including members of the Government, to address those specific challenges without further delay.

I have pleasure in moving amendment S3M-1131.1, to insert at end:

"further notes that the report's key challenge to Scottish schools is to make them work consistently well and equitably and that this outcome is dependent upon greater autonomy within school management, much greater emphasis within the curriculum on basic skills in English and mathematics and greater opportunities for pupils to follow vocational opportunities."

15:19

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Like others, Liberal Democrats have held for a number of years that the Scottish approach to education is one of our country's greatest assets. The OECD report is a vote of confidence in our country's teachers, who are shaping a profession and a sector that the OECD recognises as having very few peers. Page 30 of the report states:

"To the OECD observer, Scottish schools are very energetic and committed enterprises. It is not surprising that the country performs so well on international measures."

Scotland was pioneering in the 17th century, with a school in every parish—there was little point in people understanding the law of the Bible if they could not read it. In the 18th century, a reaction to unwieldy Presbyterianism led to education transformation in our universities. We have

progressively developed and honed an education system and protected that core community asset.

Unlike south of the border, we continue to have an holistic and community-based approach to education. We have not heard in this debate or seen in the OECD report mention of skills academies, grammar schools or pupil passports—if the Conservatives remember those. Those approaches south of the border have meant fragmentation and have set pupil apart from pupil. It is to our credit that we have rejected them in Scotland since devolution. As an example, I quote from page 68 of the OECD report:

“Scotland has succeeded in building a widely accessible and high quality system of secondary schools which are shared by most families as a community asset.”

We are now tasked with developing our education system for the next generation. We know, because of the OECD report, that we are building on secure foundations, but in doing so we need to address the valid comments on the achievement gap for some pupils that are outlined in section 4 of the report.

Even a casual observer of the OECD report will find references to its statement that few countries can outperform us on the key aspects of education, in all areas of learning and at each stage of learning. Indeed, the OECD points to the fact that Scotland has a fair, open and equitable education system that operates under good management by local authorities and good leadership by teachers and heads, but it notes that there is an issue with some pupils—predominantly from poor backgrounds—who do not progress as well as others through the formal compulsory years of education.

It is with regret that I say that we have a Government that is complacent at the very least—so far, we have even seen some negligence. The Scottish National Party approach has been to present a small number of headline-grabbing education policies that have questionable coherence and little consistency.

Consistency has been only one victim of the massacre of the manifesto that we have seen since May. One of the most concerning issues has been class sizes. We have heard this afternoon from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning that someone's background and the area in which they were born should have no relevance to the standard of education or quality of provision that they receive. However, on the Government's own flagship policy of reducing class sizes to a maximum of 18 pupils in primary 1 to 3—regardless of the gymnastics that we have seen on whether it should be delivered in this session of Parliament—the established policy, which is enshrined in an agreement with local authorities, is that the reductions will be delivered

by demographics. Demographic change—in other words, the population trend of the area where someone is born—will determine whether someone's class will be smaller than in other areas. That is not acceptable as Government policy; neither is it acceptable to enshrine it in an agreement with local government. It is wholly inconsistent with the thrust of the OECD report.

Let us consider enterprise and vocational education. It is concerning that funding for the determined to succeed programme, which provides enterprise education in schools and is a core part of our citizenship agenda, has been frozen at the current year's level for three years, which means a cut in real terms of 8 per cent. There is no clarity about whether that education will be delivered by a national body, local authorities or colleges. Indeed, the £16 million set-up costs for the national skills body alone is nearly the sum of money for the whole skills development agenda, which is critical if we want to catch young people in secondary education and support the skills for work programme and adult literacy.

Of course, it is not just a question of catching young people in secondary education—early intervention is critical. On that, we also have a lack of clarity from the new Government. In its policy on early intervention and nursery teachers for every nursery, it has gone from promising to double provision to a 50 per cent increase in hours, and we still do not have clarity on the Government's definition of access to a teacher for every nursery-age child. That is simply not good enough. We have given the Government some element of freedom in its first few months. It has stated that it has delivered more in seven months than was delivered in seven years, but surely it takes less than seven months to put in the public domain a definition of access to a teacher for every nursery-age child. That indicates the lack of transparency in the Government. The situation is exactly the same with further and higher education, and the youth services that have critical links with schools.

The Government is silent on the curriculum for excellence, so we must assume that it is content with the direction of travel. Teachers are asking the Government for its vision, but seven months in we have not heard whether it is content with the curriculum for excellence strategy, whether it is seeking changes or, indeed, how the strategy fits in with the wider issues.

We will work with the Government in many areas on early access and developing better support for young people, but we will resist the approach to class sizes, which would mean potential group sizes of 25 in nurseries, moving to artificially low groups of 18 in primaries 1 to 3, potentially moving back up into the 30s for the rest of primary school, and then on into another

inconsistent model for secondary schools. We want a gradual and progressive approach to reducing class sizes at all ages, and a better transition from primary to secondary. However, that cannot be done in isolation, without transparency and published definitions from the Government, as well as the funding commitment to back it up.

We have seen real progress in the past eight years, and the OECD report confirms that the direction of travel has been correct. It will continue to be the right direction of travel if we get additional support from the Government and can see what direction it is taking, instead of the Government just noting the success, as ministers have done, while Scottish National Party back benchers deny it has happened. We need more clarity from this Government, and we will work with it to bring that about, but we will hold the Government to account when it does not offer it.

I move amendment S3M-1131.3, to insert at end:

“welcomes the recognition of the success of educational innovations and developments in Scotland since 1999, and believes that the OECD recommendations for further development of the vocational provision of education, for the development of further leadership in school head teams and for a greater emphasis on transition into primary and between primary and secondary education, with greater devolved but more transparent funding to deliver them, should be the priorities of the Scottish Government in improving even further Scotland’s strong internationally renowned education system.”

15:26

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):

I am, not surprisingly, delighted to support Maureen Watt’s motion. I agree with her that the OECD report indicates the strength of the Scottish education system and the challenges that we face in improving it for the benefit of us all.

I am delighted that the SNP Scottish Government has begun the enormous task of improving Scottish education, including refreshing and renewing the partnership with local government and freeing local decision making from the dead hand of ring fencing.

There is a range of interesting amendments. The Conservative amendment has some merits, especially in its call for greater opportunities for vocational education. I am sure that Elizabeth Smith agrees that Scotland’s colleges have been driving that agenda, and we have a lot to be grateful to them for, but more needs to be done. We must take time to examine the possible ways forward, the routes that Scottish pupils can choose and the resources that are available in our schools. We can be sure that the Minister for Schools and Skills is carefully examining the

issues around vocational education and that she will report to Parliament in due course. I look forward to examining the issues and grilling the minister—gently, of course—on the options that she chooses.

I take issue with one part of Elizabeth Smith’s amendment. I am inclined to agree with her that there is scope for placing a greater emphasis on English and maths, because of the beneficial effects of using the basic tools of those subjects, and because later and more in-depth study of them can offer benefits to the whole country. In particular, the study of maths is a prerequisite for much of the further study of technology and science—we have heard several calls for a greater number of students to travel those routes. However, I point out that, for quite some time, Scottish politicians have relinquished direct control over the curriculum, and for very good reason. In Scotland, we trust education professionals far more than is perhaps the case elsewhere in these islands. I am sure that Elizabeth Smith appreciates that. I am also sure that she agrees that it should not be any other way.

I also agree with some of Rhona Brankin’s amendment, if that does not cause her too many problems. I agree that there is a massive challenge for Scottish education to close the achievement gap that is associated with poverty and deprivation. It is shocking that such a challenge still exists in Scotland. In 1997, Labour promised us an end to poverty in Scotland—it was not delivered, of course. That was one of Labour’s many broken promises. In 1999, Labour came into this Parliament promising continuous improvement in Scottish education—again, that was not delivered, and it was another broken promise from Labour.

Rhona Brankin: Does the member accept that when we were in government we reduced child poverty?

Christina McKelvie: The member should look at page 144 of the OECD report, which shows that three in four primary schools are still in the highest poverty band. I will not take any lessons from the Labour Party on that point.

In 2003, the partnership agreement for the Labour-led Administration suggested that improving attainment was a matter of providing more staff in schools rather than any other Government function. There was supposed to be a focus on improving numeracy and literacy but, by the end of the 2005-06 scholastic year—the most recent year for which figures are available—no improvement in attainment had occurred at all. Several cohorts of Scottish pupils have reason to regret Labour’s failure to address those priorities and to deliver on key pledges in its manifesto. Like

the rest of Scotland, Scottish pupils were failed year after year by Labour's broken promises.

Rhona Brankin's amendment calls for the devolution of more power to head teachers. Can we dare to hope that Labour members are beginning to understand the purpose of removing ring fencing? Like the principle of subsidiarity, removing ring fencing allows decisions to be made at the most appropriate level. Given that Labour now displays a desire for decisions to be made at the most appropriate level, I hope that we can expect support from the Labour group for the principle of removing ring fencing.

In that spirit of consensus, I note that the removal of the derived grades procedure from the Scottish Qualifications Authority marking process has resulted in a far more equitable system. Without doubt, we now have a far more level playing field than when we had the skewing factor of derived grades. We should be pleased that pupils can be absolutely confident that they gained the grades that appear on their certificate and that they have not been inflated artificially—pupils can be proud of their true achievement. That is certainly an improvement.

One main underpinning of the Scottish education system's reputation throughout the world is the inherent honesty in our approach, which has led to the insistence that it is the abilities of the individual that matter, not their place in society. That is a prime support of the Scottish education system and I am glad that we have it. The debate on the direction of travel for Scottish education will, rightly, continue, and from it we will plot a sensible route forward. I am pleased to support the minister's motion.

15:31

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the debate. I found the OECD report informative, as I am sure many other members did. I did not read it during the Christmas holidays, but I have had a good look at it since then. The report provides much food for thought, but I will concentrate much of my speech on the "Staying on at school, building on school" section, which is important.

I am sure that members agree that decisions that people make between the ages of 14 and 18 significantly determine the shape that their life takes as they get older. I recall my decisions at that time and those of my friends, who in some cases were eventually left with no choices. Even in 1989, leaving school at 16 was a vastly different experience from doing so in 2008. Then, we had a declining number of apprenticeships and lots of youth training scheme courses—on which people were paid about £20 a week—and the number of

people who entered higher education was nowhere near as high as it is now. There were fewer employment opportunities and those that existed did not enjoy the protection of the national minimum wage or the right to paid holidays. The employment picture was vastly different from today's situation, as we now have more opportunities in the labour market.

The OECD report highlights a concern that we all share about those who are not fortunate enough to be in employment, education or training, and it recognises the importance of earlier intervention for young people. That thinking lies behind the Labour Party's support for skills academies. In our opinion, the establishment of such academies would provide a vital link in the transition from compulsory education to further or higher education, and therefore into the world of work.

As I said, I was fortunate to find an apprenticeship on leaving school, but many of my friends did not find an apprenticeship or suitable employment and they found themselves in low-paid and low-skill jobs that they struggled to get out of for several years. That is why schools should develop strong vocational programmes to provide young people with the grounding for the best range of opportunities when they leave compulsory education.

One recommendation in the report is that vocational courses be made available to all young people from secondary 3, spanning the ages 14 to 18. If Government is to make the right policy decisions, it is vital that it knows about and understands the implications of young people not having the right opportunities at that time, whether in education, employment or training.

Colleges have a hugely important role in providing accessible and flexible vocational learning. The best of the existing school-college links utilise that role effectively, although most people would like more such activity. However, the report outlines clearly that, without the expansion of vocational education programmes in schools, there is a danger that colleges will be used as a dumping ground for low achievers and that the attainment and social deprivation divisions that exist between communities in Scotland could increase.

Equally important to young people between the ages of 14 and 16 are the opportunities that are available to people between the ages of 16 and 18 once they have finished their compulsory education. I am always looking to other European countries for ideas and for ways of increasing the level of vocational training. I am sure that many other members do the same. However, in this case we do not have to look too far from home to find the right type of direct Government

intervention to maximise vocational development opportunities for people over the age of 16. The United Kingdom Government recognises the importance of that period in people's lives, therefore it is introducing measures to raise the education/training age to 17 in 2013 and then to 18 in 2015. That is part of the Education and Skills Bill. The Westminster proposals will not raise the school-leaving age, as some might suggest; rather, they will extend the educational opportunities for young people. If young people are not at school, they will be able to participate in a number of different ways. For example, they will be able to benefit from the extension of modern apprenticeships or they will be able to work while also taking training courses.

It seems that every time I speak in the chamber I talk about modern apprenticeships. I hope that members will indulge me a little further, because I know that many of them share my interest. Apprentice numbers have increased significantly over the past few years, as has the range of courses. Good progress has been made, but the argument for the need to get more skilled people ready for the economic challenges of the future has never been more compelling.

As part of its proposals for apprenticeships, I urge the Scottish Government to consider the Westminster proposals. The forthcoming apprenticeship reform bill will seek to get more young people into skilled employment in the longer term. Measures in the bill will include giving a right to a modern apprenticeship by 2013. That right will be offered to all who meet the proper entry requirements. Can members imagine that? If someone wants an apprenticeship, they will get one, full stop. To back up that right, the bill will propose a duty on public bodies—

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member take an intervention?

John Park: I am sorry, minister, but I am in my last minute.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): I will let you take the intervention if you wish.

John Park: I am quite happy to take the intervention.

Fiona Hyslop: Is the member aware that there has been an historical right to apprenticeship and training in Scotland, but that that right has not been properly exercised? The value of what he is suggesting might therefore be questioned.

John Park: The Leitch report and other studies have identified that we need to compel people to push modern apprenticeships much further up the agenda. That is why I believe that the apprenticeship reform bill will be innovative legislation.

As I was saying, the bill will propose a duty on public bodies to provide modern apprenticeships. It will also propose a duty on the equivalent of our enterprise companies to provide modern apprenticeships. People will have that opportunity.

Thank you, Presiding Officer, for giving me some extra time. This is an issue on which we have to put party politics to one side. If good things are happening in other parts of the UK, the Government should not simply pursue a wholly Scottish solution. We all recognise that more unites the United Kingdom than divides it. Without a shadow of a doubt, our concerns about the skills problem are similar to those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We could all learn a great deal from each other.

15:38

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in this afternoon's debate on the findings of the OECD review of the quality and equity of schooling in Scotland. As others have said, it is important to acknowledge that much in the review is to be welcomed. By and large, our education system compares favourably with many of our international competitors. For example, we are above average in the three literacies of science, maths and reading; we have one of the lowest levels of poorly performing pupils in OECD countries; and the gap between the top quartile and the bottom quartile is below the OECD average. However, the PISA findings show that our international position has slipped compared with 2003.

Figures also show that the number of our students who end up in the not in education, employment or training category remains stubbornly and worryingly high: the 1999 figure was 37,000 and the 2005 figure was 36,000. I do not use those facts to criticise the previous Executive; I am simply stating the present position. We have to go forward together in the education debate in order to achieve success for our schools and our schoolchildren.

It is in that context that we view the OECD review and its concerns about inequality in educational attainment. I note the point that the report makes about that:

"Little of the variation in student achievement in Scotland is associated with the ways in which schools differ. Most of it is connected with how children differ ... children from poorer homes are more likely to underachieve, disengage from schoolwork, leave school earlier than others, and—if they continue—study at lower academic levels and record lower pass rates."

Rhona Brankin touched on a similar section of the report.

The previous Scottish Executive attempted to progress the situation, and we must examine the schools of ambition scheme in that context. After a bit of research, I found that Springburn academy is working to incentivise parents from deprived areas to take a real interest in the progress of their children. The situation is not all bleak, but we have to improve and move forward together.

The Government's early years strategy will assist in tackling social inequalities in education, and it is right that it should be monitored in years to come. Indeed, it will take a number of years to see the benefits that our youngest children will derive from the strategy and carry through to their secondary education experience.

We must also ensure that pupils who are at secondary school today have the best possible education experience in terms of educational attainment and the quality of the learning experience. With the curriculum for excellence and the very interesting recommendations in the OECD report, we could be entering a period of great change in secondary schools in the next few years.

I turn to one of the OECD recommendations—that standard grade examinations should be phased out as part of the new three-to-18 curriculum. There is much reasoning behind that recommendation, and much of it might even be logical, but ditching standard grades could be the proverbial throwing the baby out with the bath water, although I remain open-minded.

When standard grades were introduced, there was a belief that students of all abilities could study across a full range of subjects and be assessed at an appropriate level. The concept was meaningful certification for all. Many students and teachers might now believe that a system in which the majority of students study, say, eight standard grades across a range of subjects and courses that seem to some to drag on for two years is in need of review and reform. However, I am not sure about scrapping standard grades completely.

The OECD contrasts what could be achieved by abolishing standard grades with how it interprets the current system. It refers to

“a reformed programme of studies that is seen as purposeful and meaningful and can aim at high accomplishment in a range of areas or a transcript of examination results which shows how little academic learning has occurred”.

The OECD says that that is the choice to be made.

Margo MacDonald: I might be a bit of a greybeard, but the concept behind standard grades built on the foundation of comprehensive education. What people got wrong was the fact

that comprehensive education was meant to be social education, and that transferred to how standard grades were used in schools. The idea was not that everyone had to do exactly the same courses at the same time in the same way. If the member reads his history books, he will find that that is what standard grades did not get right.

Bob Doris: I thank the member for that intervention. I was one of the guinea pigs in the first year of the standard grades intake. It was put to us that standard grades meant certification for all. I do not know whether that is a good or a bad thing to say about the standard grades system.

Although there is an element of truth in the OECD review's comments, it misses the point. It may be true that some students are sitting in low standard grade sets waiting for two years to get the grade 6 that they and perhaps their teachers anticipated anyway. On entering S3, the standard grades route may not be the most appropriate for many. Greater flexibility and a variety of provision are needed in S3 and S4 to ensure that many students are not left disillusioned and simply marking time. That is what much of the new skills for work programme is about. I recognise the need for change.

However, there is another story to tell. Although many students might not be high achievers or at the top end of the academic spectrum, they still enjoy the subjects that they study. Indeed, they might gain satisfaction from accessing the curriculum at an appropriate level for their needs and they might not want that opportunity to be taken away.

In that context, I note Liz Smith's comment that if standard grades are to be replaced they should be replaced in S4 with intermediate 2 qualifications, which are at credit level and beyond. I am incredibly wary of such a move, as it could mean that summative assessment at the end of S4 would be for only the very highest achievers in academic subjects. I am open-minded on the matter, but I want to ensure that elements of choice and diversity in the current system are not lost. The OECD's apparent suggestion that summative assessment should be removed requires closer examination. However, I agree that it might be possible to merge the higher still S5 and S6 curriculum with what is happening at standard grade.

As I have said, I remain open-minded about the future of certification and the curriculum in S3 and S4, and I am interested in hearing other members' comments on the issue.

15:46

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I very much welcome not only the debate, but the

tone of the minister's opening remarks. I am also delighted to find that Bob Doris can speak in a reasoned and moderate manner. I hope that he will continue to do so.

I regarded it as a major privilege to serve as Minister for Education and Young People. During my time in that role, I knew that, as the OECD report has confirmed, we were part of a very successful and strong education system. Indeed, the report shows that the Scottish education system is not only strong but leads world thinking on certain subjects. However, my concern was that that very strength might lie at the root of what could turn out to be one of our biggest problems. Because we were strong, we might become complacent and feel no need to change. Indeed, over the years, there was some resistance to certain reforms.

I was always—and remain—acutely conscious of the effects of the changing world and the globalisation of world markets. With better and cheaper transport, human capital is globalising as the world economy itself globalises. That means not only that jobs are moving across the world to people who are better skilled than our people, but that people are moving across the world to take jobs in this country. As a result, our young people now face more competition for employment than at any other time in the past and we all have an absolute obligation to ensure that they can compete effectively in the new world. Because of globalisation, our education system is in direct competition with other education systems and their product.

As minister, I was concerned whether we really knew how we were doing in the world context. The PISA results showed that we were strong and doing well—as Bob Doris and others have pointed out, we were in the top third—and, despite recent challenges, we are still in that position. However, PISA is only one measure of how well an education system is doing; for me, a more important consideration was how well our policies were doing. How did we compare with our world competitors? Was our direction of travel the right one? Could we innovate more? Who was innovating more? Were there any blind spots in our thinking about what was going on in the rest of the world? Were there any approaches working elsewhere that we were not trying? Who had better approaches to dealing with social disadvantage and why were they better? Were our curriculum developments complete enough? Which systems took a better approach to personalising learning and improving young people's motivation?

As a result, I began to look at what was happening elsewhere in the world. Every time I attended European council meetings in Brussels—

which, I have to say, are the most interminably boring events imaginable—I always tried to fix up meetings with ministers from countries of similar size to Scotland to find out what they were doing. Those very valuable discussions showed clearly that we were seeking answers to questions that many other countries had not even begun to ask, and I was confident that we were ahead of the game in many respects.

I visited New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Singapore and Finland, and chaired the conference of Commonwealth education ministers when it met in Edinburgh. Those experiences confirmed to me that compared with the rest of the world we were in the vanguard of much of the thinking and action on this matter. However, it was clear that many other countries were getting smarter, investing heavily in education, copying us and even beginning to overtake us with their own very successful approaches.

That is why I concluded that we needed to take a much more comprehensive, in-depth look at our education system. As Maureen Watt suggested, I might have feared such a review, but I did not fear it at all, because I knew that, in some respects, our performance would be strong. I also knew that, in other respects, we would be criticised, or given the opportunity to improve. That is why the OECD report was commissioned. I am delighted with its outcome, which has exceeded my expectations in a variety of ways. It is perceptive and extremely honest. In parts, it is beautifully crafted in its analysis and in posing some of the key questions that Scotland must answer and, at times, it is hard-hitting. That is why the report was commissioned. It confirms the good things that we do, but challenges us to do more.

The review contains a huge number of recommendations, but I want to pick up on just two of them. The first relates to the biggest challenge that we face, which has plagued our system for many generations and continues to be an intractable problem—social disadvantage or low economic status and how it impacts on education. Other members have mentioned the issue.

As the report puts it, we in Scotland are exceptionally good—better than most other countries in the world—at “formal equity”. Wherever in Scotland a young person lives, they can expect to go to an extremely high-quality school that has good provision, resources and staffing levels, and in which the staff are well trained and, in most cases, well led. Despite that formal equity, it is ever clearer that the outcomes for our young people are unequal. Because of their socioeconomic status, some young people simply cannot reap the benefit of the excellent service that we provide across the country. The system has not adequately supported them to

perform better and has thereby failed to address our societal needs. Broadly equal inputs result in unequal outcomes.

We have done a great deal to tackle that situation—Bob Doris spoke about some of the measures that have been taken—but it remains a major challenge for any Government, for local authorities, for schools and for the teachers organisations. Curriculum changes, different teaching approaches, teacher training changes, people support, the parental/home link with schools, more personalised learning and more personalised support of young people through the provision of individual learning plans will all be part of the answer.

However, perhaps the biggest challenge of all is how we distribute resources. At the root of the issue is how we can impact on the problem through the allocation of resources. We must now consider making unequal inputs to get more equal results. The Government has a role to play in that in how it distributes cash to local authorities. As the report indicates, local authorities have a role to play in how they distribute cash to schools. Headteachers have a role to play in how they allocate resources to particular pupils to challenge social disadvantage. That is one reason why the report—rightly, in my view—argues for more headteacher freedom.

In the future, we must move towards a model of anticipatory education and support, just as we have done in the health service through anticipatory health measures. We can anticipate who will struggle in our education system, just as we can anticipate who will struggle as regards health. In the future, we can apply our knowledge of communities and families to the issue more effectively.

I am quite sure that the Scottish education system knows how to do some of that, but I am just as sure that we do not know how to tackle all those issues effectively. We must challenge thinking in the system, break conventions and be prepared to do things differently. Open debate, piloted approaches and better sharing of results across the system are necessary. That is partly why today's debate is so important. Tackling social disadvantage is a huge challenge, but the OECD says that we must meet it; we know that we must meet it, for economic and social reasons, and to give people a greater sense of self-worth.

I am acutely conscious that I am well over time, so I will try to be extremely quick in addressing the second issue on which I wanted to comment, which is vocational education. The section of the report on that is a joy to read. It confirms that the steps that we have taken on skills for work courses were steps in the right direction, but that they were highly tentative. It shows just how much

further we must go—we in Scotland have a huge distance to travel to catch up with the rest of the world and the rest of Europe in our thinking on vocational education.

We must take a much wider, more significant and deeper view of vocational education than we have done in the past. It is not about unrelated courses for kids who are struggling with the current curriculum. It is not just about preparation for work. It is emphatically not about laying a trap for young people—albeit unwittingly—that ushers them out of learning altogether. It is not just about colleges. It is about what we do in schools. It is about improving the status of vocational learning. It is about keeping people in learning through vocational study, so that they are more motivated to engage in wider, academic learning. It is about developing a range of new approaches to vocational learning, so that such learning is part of the system, rather than occasional and unplanned. Scottish education must take vocational learning to a far greater depth. Vocational education must be a firm part of all aspects of our education system. It must be more legitimate than it currently is and it must enrich the whole education system. It is not about siphoning off difficult pupils into cul de sacs or out-of-school systems.

I have not mentioned standard grades. I have comments on that issue, which I am sure I will make in the future.

I have not talked about many aspects of the report. Scotland has been handed a hugely significant instrument, with which we can re-examine where we stand and challenge what we have done in the past, and from which we can take pertinent lessons. We can develop the report's perceptive recommendations in a Scottish way, for the future of our system. If we take that opportunity, we can look forward in 20, 30, 40 or 50 years' time not just to Scotland continuing to be one of the top nations in the world for education but perhaps to Scotland becoming the top nation in that regard.

15:56

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I agree with much of Peter Peacock's speech and particularly with his comments about the part that multiple deprivation plays in reducing young people's chances throughout their education. Investment in community regeneration and early intervention—not just when children are three years old, but from birth—will do at least as much, if not more, in deprived communities than will increasing resources for education.

I remember the inspiration of a headteacher with whom I worked in the early part of my career. Bob Mackenzie, at Braehead secondary school,

wanted to get rid of examinations and made that suggestion as early as 1958, if I remember correctly, when I was teaching at the school. If we took away exams we would have to ask what education is for. We would have to put on our thinking caps and consider what should be in the curriculum.

The previous Government developed the curriculum for excellence, which I enthusiastically supported, because it provides a framework on which we can build. I commend the previous Government for commissioning research from the OECD. Peter Peacock was right to say that there is no reason for complacency, but we should congratulate the people who work in our education system on their successes and the fact that across a range of criteria we come out well in competition with other countries. Of course, we should set our own standards. We should not just accept the OECD's criteria; we should have our own criteria for success.

An impartial observer who visited our country would learn that the visiting teachers of art, music and physical education, for whom schools must pay, are the first things to be cut when a primary school is short of money. They would learn that in secondary schools art and music are always the first subjects to lose a teacher—however good their departments are—if something else needs to be squeezed into the curriculum. The impartial observer would be forgiven for thinking that we place no importance on those subjects.

An impartial observer who visited this country would find that there is, I think, only one full-time teacher of outdoor education at secondary level in Scotland and that we rely to a great extent on private provision of outdoor education, although the Scottish centres do an excellent job. Such an observer would be forgiven for thinking that we do not consider education in the outdoors and outdoor education—two separate things—to be of any importance in the Scottish education system. However, I know, and I think that all members know, that those subjects are important and we would disagree with anyone who said the opposite. Teachers and parents know that those subjects are important, and yet they are squeezed.

Over the next two years—at the most, I hope—we have a chance to debate what part those subjects should play in our curriculum and how they feed into things like being a responsible citizen and a confident individual. There is plenty of research to show that those subjects have an enormous part to play in developing confident individuals. According to research, 25 per cent of the children who leave Scottish schools—even now, despite the successes that we have had—have found schooling to be relatively negative, because it did not offer them the full range of skills

and the possibility of developing those skills. Despite the comprehensive nature of schooling, children can still get only a relatively narrow range of experiences at school, not just in Scotland but in many other countries. However, Norway, which I have mentioned previously, is different. One example of the difference between Norway and Scotland is that in Norway children have to spend one day a week out of school, either in education in the outdoors or in outdoor education. That is the law. How far away from that are we here? How many children have a guarantee of even a week?

I signed Elizabeth Smith's motion—I hope that many of the members present have signed it, too—and support her plea for more importance to be given to outdoor education.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Given the importance that the OECD report places on the breadth of the curriculum, does Mr Harper share my concern about the removal of funding for cultural co-ordinators in our schools?

Robin Harper: Yes, indeed. The previous Administration appointed 600 sports co-ordinators but only 60 cultural co-ordinators. Even the previous regime could have given a bit more assistance than it did, although now the figure seems to have retreated to zero.

Within the framework and ethos of the curriculum for excellence, there is room to express an implicit but clear commitment to an education system that will develop all the innate skills and potential of our young people. There is room to express a commitment that is geared not only to literacy and numeracy, to getting children into universities and colleges, and to the requirements of industry and the commercial world, but to encouraging the development of all the skills—spiritual, artistic, empathic, social, communication and kinaesthetic—and potential of these living beings with beating hearts. I would welcome a commitment from the minister and the cabinet secretary to extend our vision of the potential of education to add all those areas. We can build on the curriculum for excellence. Over the next four years, let us think deeply and creatively not just about doing things better, but about doing better things.

16:04

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): How long do I have, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can take seven minutes.

Margo MacDonald: I will try to speak for less than that, because I am grateful to the members who took interventions.

I said in one of my interventions that I did not want to denigrate the OECD's report. However, I hope that it makes the comparisons that we would want to be made, because I have a horrible fear that education in its widest application is greatly influenced by a creeping Americanisation of all cultures—not only the United Kingdom, but Europe—and that, in the satellite technology that is now to hand, what we would have considered to be the essential building blocks of any civilised culture are short-changed. I say that to start off with, but I will not be too philosophical.

Robin Harper talked about the purpose of education and got right to the core of it. The OECD report refers a great deal to examinations but, as he asked, what do we have exams for? It is to test what we have learned. Why are we learning? It is to cultivate—we hope—a civilised, compassionate and humane society and the civilised, educated and humane man. If we do not do that, or if we think that we are cultivating people who do not reach those standards, is our education system what we would want it to be?

Peter Peacock asked the OECD to undertake the research. In passing, I pay tribute to his excellent speech, which I thoroughly enjoyed—more please! However, the OECD did not go into the reasons for education or consider how it is measured. For example, the report talks about the teaching profession in Scotland and, although it does not say that teachers' morale is high, everything implies that it is. Morale in the teaching profession in Scotland is not particularly high, but that has nothing to do with what the OECD examined and everything to do with the behaviour of the young putative citizens in the teachers' care. The report does not refer to the lack of discipline in schools and greatly undermines what many excellent teachers and headteachers are trying to do.

The report does not compare the timetable that we have now with the one that we had when I was at school—although it does not look it, that was quite a while ago. The timetable is grossly overcrowded now and, as a result, we have overstressed and overstretched teachers. We would do well to greatly reduce the number of formal teaching blocks per subject in the timetable. Some subjects that are taught in schools are imaginative—not necessary informative, but certainly imaginative. Teachers are required to prepare and correct lessons in those subjects, all of which diminishes the energy and enthusiasm of teachers and perhaps gives us a clue why many of them opt out before they have reached their requisite length of teaching time.

However, the OECD talks about standard grades. There might be agreement in the Parliament—with the exception of Bob Doris, who

was cruelly done down by them—that the standard grades have outlived their usefulness. I prefer the OECD's recommendation of adopting a Scottish certificate of education that is flexible and can reflect all the different strands of learning.

Fiona Hyslop: Margo MacDonald raises an important point about what the OECD says or does not say about the curriculum. She identifies the assessment and qualification aspects of standard grades and a kind of leaving certificate. However, she does not address—and Robin Harper did not acknowledge—that the four capacities in the curriculum for excellence are precisely about what education is for, which is not necessarily qualification, assessment and achievement. I suppose that she wants to put more emphasis on that, which is the right thing to do. Education is not all about qualifications; it is also about the experience and being a responsible citizen.

Margo MacDonald: I agree with what the cabinet secretary said but, with all due respect to her, far too much emphasis is put on entrance into university, for example. Students are processed down that pathway, which presupposes that they have to think about attainment within the curriculum for excellence, rather than achievement.

I move on to the socioeconomic argument that was advanced as the main indicator of the gap between those who achieve and those who do not. 'Twas ever thus. In the 1930s, people leaving junior secondaries—as they were called in Scotland—were usually a lot poorer than the people leaving senior secondaries. However, many of those who left the junior secondaries could go to night school and get a qualification that, although it was not a university qualification, would qualify them for the sort of job that a university graduate might do.

We threw out a baby with the bathwater with our attitude to how people from poorer backgrounds would learn. That is a disgrace. I would not expect the OECD to tell us this straight to our faces, but we let down people like me, my brother and my sister, who were maximum grant students. We were able to learn because we had ambition to learn and there was nothing to stop us learning. We are letting down children because the right sort of attitude is not inculcated in parents. I want much more work to be done in that regard.

I was glad to hear Peter Peacock—I think that it was him—saying that we should have pilot-led studies. Could we please have a pilot for learning English grammar, alongside Latin grammar? I am convinced that we should go back to basics and learn grammar. One of the ways in which we could teach ourselves might be to go back to that tried and true method.

Peter Peacock was right to say that the OECD report has given us a lift-off. However, it has not given us absolution. There is a great deal that we must still get much better.

16:11

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):

There is no doubt that education is one of the most important issues that the Parliament deals with. It is fundamental to Scotland and to the future life chances of our young people. Like other members, I strongly welcome the OECD's report on Scotland's education system. I hope that the Scottish Government will study its findings closely and act on the key challenges that it has identified.

We Scots are rightly proud of our education system. Scottish schools continue to outperform most competitors and are truly world class. It was right that the OECD report highlighted Scotland's success and praised the excellent work of our teachers and our comprehensive school system. However, the report also raised concerns that we cannot afford to ignore. It pointed out that too many children in our primary schools and even greater numbers of secondary school pupils are falling behind, and that those who fall behind tend to stay behind. The report said:

"Who you are matters a great deal more in Scotland than what school you attend, and 'who you are' is defined largely in terms of socio-economic status."

As I represent some of Scotland's more deprived communities, I understand that and I take a little bit of an issue with some of the things that Liz Smith said in her speech.

If our education system is to continue to be world class, changes are needed to ensure that it better meets the needs of all our young people, and to ensure that every young person, whatever their background, can benefit from a high-quality education and learning experience—an education that meets their needs and aspirations and equips them with the confidence and self-esteem that so many young Scots continue to lack.

I hope that members understand—today more than ever—why I want to highlight some of the things that are happening in my constituency, in North Lanarkshire. As part of the OECD's review, a team of independent international examiners visited four Scottish local authorities, including North Lanarkshire. The OECD team visited two schools in my constituency: St Andrew's primary school and St Margaret's high school, both in Airdrie. I have always known that both schools set very high standards and constantly strive to build and develop on existing good practice, so I am very proud that the OECD report also recognises that.

I have always believed in the importance of traditional academic education, but I believe that a vocational education should have equal status. I am therefore delighted that North Lanarkshire's approach has been singled out, with its innovations in vocational education described by the OECD as "outstanding". Supporting vocational studies should not be driven only by a desire to improve a student's employability but should be part of a wider strategy to raise achievement for all. The experience in North Lanarkshire has proved that to do that effectively there must be extensive consultation in schools; expert support and guidance for schools; emphasis on flexibility and choice for students; and partnership working with external partners in industry and in colleges to deliver choices within the school environment. Taking those steps can lead to a reform and redesign of the curriculum to better meet the needs of all students. That good practice, which the OECD states should act as a benchmark for local authorities throughout Scotland, is being delivered every day in schools throughout North Lanarkshire.

We must ensure not only that every child can access high-quality vocational education and training but that the academic curriculum is more accessible and inclusive, which will lead to effective engagement in learning for everyone. Developing and nurturing self-confidence is essential for all young people, but it is especially important for students in communities such as the one that I represent. Their parents and carers have not always had the most positive experience of school and their education did not seem relevant to the outside world of work. That is why it is important that we get vocational education in the classroom right. I hope that the Scottish Government will learn from the successes of North Lanarkshire.

It continues to be of great concern that about 36,000 young people aged between 16 and 19 are not in education, employment or training. As my colleague John Park said, the UK Government is taking action to ensure that all school leavers can access an apprenticeship place. A failure to make a similar commitment in Scotland is a missed opportunity.

If we are to ensure that no young person is left behind in 21st century Scotland, we need an education system that is tailored to the needs of all our children, whatever their needs, abilities, aspirations or interests.

I hope that the Government will consider the OECD's recommendations carefully and act to ensure that North Lanarkshire's innovative approach is adopted throughout Scotland, thereby enabling all young people to access vocational courses within the school environment. That

approach is helping to ensure that our young people are enthused and engaged and that every child, from every background, can reach their full potential—every child in Scotland deserves nothing less.

16:17

Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): Many good speeches have been made in an important debate about a substantial report on a crucial subject: education.

Education is a huge determinant of our future. It very much decides the economy and to a large extent the progress of the country itself, so it is a subject worthy of considered discussion. For those reasons, I welcome the OECD's review.

I congratulate the OECD, an esteemed international organisation, on its methodology, which, in placing Scottish schooling in international rankings, recognises that although we may not have our independence as a country we at least have it for our education system. I am looking forward to what the new Scottish Government will do with that independence and I am glad to see that evidence from the OECD endorses the Government's educational priorities.

The SNP has already recognised the importance of the earliest years, with our proposals for the expansion of pre-school provision by 50 per cent. Not only does pre-school provision improve attainment but, in the words of the OECD report,

"Pre-school moderates the gap in achievement which tends to widen during primary school and which, unchecked, undermines compulsory secondary education in comprehensive schools."

The report's title refers to "quality and equity". No one could object to those priorities and I hope that no one in the chamber would object to the focus on pupil-teacher ratios in the early years of primary school. An investment in our children at the earliest stages pays off over their whole time in school and, beyond that, over their whole lives.

The Lib Dem amendment highlights the importance of the transition between primary school and secondary school. Having spent 11 years on an education authority, I know that that is a stubborn problem, which is at the root of how we can solve the problems in our secondary schools.

As a former council leader, I find it rewarding to see that we are now starting properly to recognise the autonomy of local authorities. During my time at Clackmannanshire Council, as has been mentioned by Liz Smith, new ground was broken with the much talked about synthetic phonics method of teaching reading. Not only did synthetic phonics have an immediate impact but it meant that primary 7 reading was consistently ahead—up

to three years ahead, by some measures—of where it was previously. It reduced the differences between socioeconomic groups and, interestingly—as this is not really touched on in the report—between genders. It has been interesting to hear some of the discussion about the purpose of education and the extent to which socioeconomic inequalities are still being reflected in the education system. Of course, one of the original purposes of education was to reduce and eliminate those socioeconomic inequalities. However, that is not happening sufficiently at present.

I hope that the lessons of local authority experiments feed into the curriculum for excellence—not just the lessons of Clackmannanshire but those of West Dunbartonshire, which has taken on the methods as well. Rhona Brankin asked for a national strategy based on the West Dunbartonshire experience, but I would ask her why there was no national strategy based on the Clackmannanshire experience eight years ago.

For years, the SNP has made commitments in its manifestos regarding more vocational opportunities. Admittedly, the Labour Party has done so too, but the difference is that we have not been in a position to implement those commitments before now, whereas Labour has.

I was also disappointed to see from the report that, in the past eight years, socioeconomic status has become more of a factor in how well young people do in education. The number of young people who left school and ended up not in education, employment or training has gone up as well. The Labour Party often talks the right talk—as they say, a stopped clock is right twice a day—but now we can see just how short on action it has been.

Earlier, some of us—including Peter Peacock, I think—listened to a Scottish Trades Union Congress delegate talk about dyslexia in the workplace. In that man's experience, there were two shocking things. The first was the bullying, harassment and hostility that he received when it was discovered that he had dyslexia—his employer was the Department for Work and Pensions. The second shocking thing was that it was not until he was 41 years old that it was discovered that he had dyslexia.

There is a lot of evidence in the report about the confidence and professionalism of our teachers. There are also a lot of recommendations in the report—a few are imaginative and quite a few are controversial.

Rhona Brankin: I was interested in what the member said about the failure to identify dyslexia. Will he support what the SNP said in its manifesto

about the targeting of continuing professional development of teachers on the subject of additional support for learning? The SNP promised that an additional £30 million over three years would be provided for that.

Keith Brown: The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning and the Minister for Schools and Skills are well seized of the opportunities to improve on the previous Executive's attainments in that area, so I am confident about the issue that Rhona Brankin raises.

A few of the recommendations, such as replacing the standard grade or increasing the role of pupil feedback, are interesting. Of course, the 18 recommendations are only opinions, although they are expert ones. We should remember that. I do not think that they all deserve to be put into practice, but they all deserve to be examined and discussed in the chamber, in committees and by parents and professionals.

There are also issues that are central to the wider role of education in society, which the OECD missed, as it focused on reading, writing and science. In that regard, I have in mind especially our national heritage. Ian Bell has an eloquent article on that subject in today's *Herald*. He argues that our literature and history have become

"university specialisms, the preserve of dedicated museums and authors, or held in trust by autodidacts."

I admit that I had to refer to a dictionary for the definition of that last word.

Scotland's history and literature are not mainstream subjects in Scotland's schools, although they should be. I believe that that situation is improving under the current Government. I am sure that the situation will change further, just as it will for the provision of support for the early years of school and innovating and learning from experience—two things that are argued for strongly in the OECD report, which takes a position that is supported by the experience of local authorities.

It is a new time for education. We are now in an era in which the performance of Scotland's teachers will finally be matched by the performance of Scotland's Government.

16:24

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I welcome this opportunity to consider the OECD report. I wish to join other members in congratulating Peter Peacock on his courageous decision, when he was the Minister for Education and Young People, to commission the report. It would have been easy for him simply to accept the improvements that there had been since the introduction of the

McCrone report. McCrone recognised the strength of our teachers and rewarded them for their contribution, which raised morale among teachers. Implementing McCrone brought stability to the Scottish education system, which allowed year-on-year improvements, as evidenced by inspection and exam results. However, the commission of the OECD was to test that improvement and find out whether we were seeing the whole picture.

The OECD report stresses the positives about Scottish education. It says:

"Scotland performs at a consistently very high standard".

It also flags up a number of challenges. One of the major challenges that Scottish schools face is the need to reduce the achievement gap that opens up, as other members have said, at about P5. I disagree with Elizabeth Smith's comments, as the report clearly recognises that children from poorer communities and homes of a low socioeconomic status are more likely than others to underachieve. Nevertheless, the report also acknowledges the notable progress that has been made in improving the achievement of children living in poverty. It is clear that efforts have been made to target children living in poverty and raise their educational attainment. Although those measures have helped, several issues remain to be resolved.

Margo MacDonald: I wonder whether the member is as puzzled as I am about the gap in attainment regarding children who are classified as coming from poorer homes. According to all the measurements that we can produce, if those children were taught using the older methods of teaching, they would achieve a higher standard of attainment in the basics that provide entry to employment—reading, writing and counting. However, that is not how children are being taught now. Does the member agree that that is one practical thing that we could do to narrow the gap?

Mary Mulligan: I agree that that is one practical measure that would make a difference. I was about to say that there are two issues that still need to be resolved. First, which measures—what Margo MacDonald suggests may be one of them—have the greatest impact in reversing that trend? Secondly, why is the improvement that we have seen sometimes slow and inconsistent? We need to do some work on those questions.

Let us be clear that I am not talking about failing schools or failing teachers. As the OECD report points out,

"Little of the variation in student achievement in Scotland is associated with the ways in which schools differ ... Socio-economic status is the most important difference".

We need to go back to the home. At the bottom of the issue, the first and major influence on a child's development is their parents. That is why we must

support all parents so that they support their children. Labour recognised that in our manifesto promise to improve and integrate parenting programmes to ensure that families receive support.

That support is particularly important for parents who have to overcome poverty or who have other issues. We have frequently debated in Parliament the problems that parents have in raising their children when they have substance abuse issues themselves. We also need to consider the challenges for parents who cannot read, write or count; parents who are still very young and do not have wider family support; and parents who have simply become disillusioned with school. The chance of those parents getting involved in their children's education is limited, which is why Labour's support for parents was so important. This is not about being a nanny state. As Save the Children suggests in its briefing, it is about

"support for parents to develop the necessary skills in order to be able to engage in children's learning."

We need to have a discussion about how we support parents in those circumstances.

Christina McKelvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Mary Mulligan: Yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Very briefly. The member is almost finished.

Christina McKelvie: Will the member join me in congratulating the SNP Scottish Government on its leadership in ending the derived grades system, which is a change that supports people from the socioeconomic background that she is describing?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in her last minute.

Mary Mulligan: Clearly, I am not going to welcome that.

Once they are in school, some young people appear not to be helped either by the curriculum or by the way in which it is taught. Again, that is not meant as a criticism of individual teachers, but I question the way in which teachers are trained to teach. As my time is short, I simply refer members to paragraphs 147 and 148 of the report, which specifically address that point.

I hope that my comments have recognised the benefits of the education system in Scotland for the majority of pupils. Like others, however, I believe that a sizeable number of children do not benefit from the education system as we would hope because they live in poverty. I spoke to some children today—as did the Minister for Children and Early Years, Mr Ingram—who have disability

issues, and for them, too, there are issues that we need to tackle.

I ask the minister to consider the recommendations that have been shared by Save the Children—that improving educational outcomes for children who live in poverty should be a national priority and that we should investigate the initiatives that are aimed at that group and identify the successes and any gaps. If the minister accepts those recommendations, will she tell us how she will take them forward? If she does, that will be a positive outcome of the debate.

16:30

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): This has been a good debate and a positive one in all regards. I will try not to touch on points that other speakers made adequately and probably much more knowledgeably than I could.

We can see from the OECD report that Scotland has many reasons to be pleased with the progress that we are making, although there is no room for complacency. Much of the progress is a result of the significant investment that the previous Administration made, and it would be disappointing if the SNP failed to build on that work. I will briefly touch on a couple of things that need review and further consideration.

First, the chartered teacher qualification has many merits, but there is at least anecdotal evidence of problems with the way in which the system works. A cost-benefit analysis of study for the qualification shows that some teachers would be disadvantaged. The cost is about £500 a module and teachers must complete 12 modules to achieve the full status. Depending on other commitments, there is a timeframe of up to three years. The structure poses some problems, given that teachers are likely to have other commitments. It appears that, thus far, only 53 of the 521 teachers with the qualification obtained it through the modular route.

Audit Scotland found that only 32 per cent of teachers were interested in the scheme. That raises an interesting financial problem. Based on 2006 salaries, if 32 per cent of teachers took up the scheme, the additional cost of funding it over 10 years would be £110 million. I know that the Government is providing funding for the scheme, as did the previous Executive, but that is a consideration for local authorities as well.

Audit Scotland also expressed concern that the scheme has not had the expected impact on the career structure of classroom teachers. The figures that I obtained from the General Teaching Council for Scotland show that, to date, uptake has been relatively slow. Although the work of McCrone, which was partly designed to free up

teachers to teach, recognises the professionalism and expertise in the profession, it does not quite take account of the pressures that exist in schools. Often, the time that is available for continuing professional development for teachers is constrained by the availability of supply staff, by timetables, and perhaps by departmental budgets.

The other area that needs more attention and clearer thinking is NEETs. First, we need to be careful about labelling young people, because the term "NEET" has developed a life of its own and its negative connotations are not welcome. The last thing that we need is yet another negative label for young people. Previous speakers commented on the number of young people in the category; the figures range from 20,000 to 36,000. However, we need to be careful, because we are not talking about the same 20,000 or 36,000 young people. There is a huge amount of churn. We need to be careful about how we analyse the figures, and we need to consider how we develop mechanisms to access those young people. We need to take a flexible approach and not a one-size-fits-all approach.

As the report states, one key to reducing the number of persistent members of the group is earlier intervention. Raising the attainment of the lowest performing 20 per cent of pupils is a challenge, but we need to do that much earlier as part of a preventive, rather than a curative, approach. We can use the excellent schemes that are provided by external agencies such as Rathbone in Kilmarnock, Barnardo's, Save the Children and Fairbridge.

We must take a multi-agency approach to the issue. In my region, education authorities in both North and South Lanarkshire are doing first-class early intervention work with troubled young people at schools such as Ridgepark and Fallside. The community alternatives project in Coatbridge is also doing groundbreaking work. I recommend that either the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning or the Minister for Schools and Skills finds an opportunity to visit those projects, to see the early intervention work that is being done with the type of young people who, without it, would go on to become part of the NEET programme. As always, such innovative projects are expensive to run and maintain and can be a drain on local authority budgets. I would like us to develop a system that allows them to be given additional funding, over and above the grants that they receive from local authorities.

There is much in the report that is worth commenting on positively, but the Government must ensure that the resources that were committed by the previous Administration continue to be provided, so that we can tackle the long-standing problems in our education system.

16:36

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con):

This has been an interesting and well-informed debate that has drawn on the OECD report, which members from all parties have welcomed. We may even welcome it as a rare example of a report delivered by an independent scrutiny panel established by Labour when it was in government.

It is particularly interesting for me to participate in a debate outwith my normal responsibility—it has highlighted some key themes and messages to me. One substantiated conclusion of the report, although alarming, is not a surprise. I refer to the finding that, for all the attention and investment that is given to education in primary 1 to primary 3, the differentiation in achievement really takes root in primary 5. Many members have drawn attention to that point this afternoon.

The finding must call into question the Government's obsession—and that of some other parties—with early years class sizes. I note how often the Government is chastised for failing to deliver on key education pledges that it made in its manifesto—Jeremy Purvis was hot to trot on that this afternoon—but, ironically, the OECD report's conclusion on early years class sizes may be that the Government's failure to implement its manifesto should be welcomed.

The fact that the differentiation in achievement takes root in primary 5 is not a surprise, because those who are involved in schools routinely confirm that when they are asked. Children arrive at primary 1 keen to learn. By and large, they see the school, in partnership with their parents, as the source of all knowledge and influence. As any parent will know, P5 is for many, if not for all, a measurable point at which many other influences intervene and the parent ceases to be the source of all wisdom.

Apparently, it is at P5 that social inequalities kick in and influence—profoundly—likely formal education outcomes. Although that is easily said and noted, it is an extraordinary challenge for us all. We can be tribal and argue ritualistically for and against whether all would be well if this or that were different but, as Elizabeth Smith said in opening for the Conservatives, our ambition must be to ensure that success is achieved anywhere with the right and locally appropriate approach, even while we legislate and act elsewhere to tackle obvious social inequality. The differences between us, to which Mary Mulligan drew attention, may not be as real as she imagines.

It is also a false argument to say that building a lot of new schools is a solution. In Ken Macintosh's constituency, pupils at the new Williamwood high school, which is consistently one of Scotland's best-performing schools, must

maintain the high standards of their predecessors, which were achieved regularly in much older and less suitable buildings. The logic of overstating the importance of new buildings is that standards will fall when those buildings cease to be new.

New builds are desirable, especially as they provide new facilities in which a wider social networking and out-of-hours platform of activity can be established, but in themselves they may not produce more engagement or better results. No, it is the recommendation that schools be afforded greater autonomy that offers head teachers the potential to create bespoke schools, to respond to the needs of their pupils and communities, and to act to engage P5 children and sustain that engagement into secondary years.

An interesting aspect of the report is that it points to the fact that some of our comparator countries with best educational practice are those where there is greater autonomy and diversity in the system. That is particularly true of countries such as Sweden and Australia, although we need look no further than my part of the world—Glasgow—where Jordanhill has boasted an outstanding educational record, many would say directly because of its autonomy within the Scottish system. Giving schools greater autonomy is central to our policy, and we wholeheartedly welcome OECD support for it. We hope that the Government will support it too and allow schools more control over how money is spent.

Jeremy Purvis: There can be overall agreement on devolving greater responsibility for operating schools to head teachers if that is within a local education authority setting. Is that the Conservatives' position? That would be different from some approaches south of the border, where schools are taken outwith the local education authority, which is more concerning.

Jackson Carlaw: It could be, but I do not necessarily agree that it would have to be.

Greater autonomy may come as a result of the ending of ring fencing, which was referred to by Maureen Watt and what now seems to be a ritual series of SNP members, who mentioned the historic concordat, concord or concordski. More noise is made about it than was ever made by the engines of its airborne equivalent—and we will all have to hope that it does not end up being the same expensive luxury.

Giving schools greater autonomy is central to our policy. Elizabeth Smith has made plain our support for the OECD report's proposals to restructure public examinations. She also made a key point of our continuing and historical support to allow children access to vocational education. As a former employer, I can confirm just how

many young people entering the employment market strongly expressed the view, when asked, that the education that they received meant less to them. They were not engaged by a concentration on what they saw as irrelevant to them.

We support the report's emphasis on the need for complementary vocational education to be structurally integrated and note the OECD's concern that we have much to learn from comparator nations and our own best practice. We would not dismiss the involvement of colleges, although we acknowledge that for school pupils there should be an holistic approach rather than one tailored to an immediate and particular employment opportunity—a point that John Park made. We support a pilot city academy to deliver vocational education.

I reaffirm our welcome for the report and our support for its central recommendations to avoid any complacency. Peter Peacock made that point and many others with which I agree. We need to devolve greater autonomy to schools to allow them to make the most of their local situation and talent. We also need to ensure that while we tackle social inequality elsewhere, all schools are able to act to ensure that their P5 pupils remain engaged into their secondary years. The public examinations at standard grade need to be restructured and deliver greater ability in the core skills of literacy and numeracy. There must also be greater and earlier development of the vocational option.

16:42

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I thank the minister for laying the report before Parliament and for giving us the opportunity to take stock of Scottish education—not just to stand back and look at what we have achieved in the past few years but to outline how we intend to tackle some of the challenges that lie ahead.

I will comment on some of the issues that have been raised. First, as many have commented, the main thrust of the report is the importance of poverty and deprivation. The report highlights the need to address socioeconomic inequality through wider policy initiatives as well as through education. Secondly, on the skills agenda, which many members have referred to, I want to talk about the need to progress vocational education. Finally, if I have time, I will comment on an important issue that is mentioned only briefly: the teacher induction scheme.

First, though, I would like to thank the SNP for lodging the motion. It is rare that we get an opportunity to celebrate eight years of achievement by a Labour-led Administration in a motion lodged by the SNP Government. We have

become well used in recent months to the mantra, whenever criticism is levelled at our schools, "Oh, it wisnae us—it was that Labour lot." I am delighted to accept the glowing tribute that the report offers to our work in investing in and improving Scottish education. Indeed, let me quote the contribution of Mr Doris who, reflecting on Labour's years, said:

"The situation is not all bleak."

That is high praise indeed from Mr Doris.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member give way?

Ken Macintosh: I will make some progress first.

I know that ministers will have read the report from cover to cover, but there are some sentences to savour and to which I would like to refer. For example, it says:

"Scotland performs at a consistently very high standard in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Few countries can be said with confidence to outperform it in mathematics, reading and science. Scotland also has one of the most equitable school systems in the OECD."

Perhaps more significant, the report highlights the difference made by key decisions taken by Labour in the Scottish Parliament:

"There have been significant reductions in under-achievement. There is now greater consistency of achievement in the earlier years of primary school. Higher proportions of students in the final year of compulsory school are passing at the highest levels of the examinations. Notable progress has been made in improving the achievement of children living in poverty."

I am grateful to Peter Peacock for commissioning the report and for his comments today on the perceptive recommendations in it. I digress slightly to agree with him on how well written it is. Many members will wade through countless official documents and reports that delight in their use of obscure language and jargon. The OECD report is clear, accessible and well constructed. There is a beautiful use of language of which I am envious. I pay tribute to Mr Teese and his team. On further inquiry, I was disappointed to find out that Mr Teese is a product of the Australian, rather than the Scottish, education system.

The problem is that the SNP's motion does not prioritise anything. It makes no choices. As several SNP members have claimed, the report emphasises the importance of providing flexibility and of removing constraints from local schools so that they can best adapt to their pupils' needs. However, it also emphasises the necessity of clear national leadership. It is all very well for the minister to talk of collective responsibility, as she did in her opening remarks, but that does not allow the Government to abdicate its responsibility for providing leadership.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way on that point about leadership?

Ken Macintosh: If I may, I will make some more progress before I take another intervention.

Leadership involves making choices. Without such political decisions from the SNP, its education policy is more akin to a wish list. The SNP is willing to give local government freedom, but where are the targets and priorities by which the Executive can be judged? I have said before that I do not doubt the good intentions of many SNP colleagues or their desire to improve Scottish education, but if they promise everything to everyone, they could end up delivering nothing of any substance. As we are beginning to realise, it was only a matter of time before election promises were shown to be hollow and undeliverable.

Poverty is the most important challenge to be identified by the OECD report. It concludes that the benefits of our excellent education system and the strengths across the board of our schools cannot and do not compensate for the disadvantages of deprivation or the possible lack of support in the home for education. As Karen Whitefield and Mary Mulligan pointed out, the report says:

"Who you are in Scotland is far more important than what school you attend",

which is exactly where the SNP Government is at its weakest.

The SNP portrays itself as a party of social justice and claims to be progressive, but the evidence does little to back that up. To be fair, Christina McKelvie talked about the importance of tackling child poverty, but she then suggested that Labour had not made a difference and drew members' attention to page 144 of the report as evidence to support her conclusions. When I turned to that page, the words jumped off the page:

"Child poverty has been falling in Scotland—from 30% of all children in the mid-1990s to 24% in 2004/05"

I am grateful to Ms McKelvie for highlighting such evidence.

Perhaps Ms McKelvie would like us to look at the SNP's record. One of its first flagship education policies was the extension of free school meals, but as members will be fully aware, students from the most deprived communities are already entitled to a free school meal. Yes, the SNP has emulated Labour's policy of extending that entitlement to families at the margins, such as those who are on child tax credits, but the biggest gainers by far are higher earners—middle class, better-off families. I do not believe that we should be spending millions of pounds of taxpayers'

money on middle class families whose children do not need free school meals.

The SNP plans to abolish the graduate endowment, but most students from non-traditional backgrounds do not pay the graduate endowment. In fact, we know that full-time higher education is generally dominated—up to 80 per cent—by people from a middle class background. Those from more disadvantaged backgrounds tend to study part time and pay for their education. Who are the biggest gainers from SNP education policy? Yet again, the better off.

If we look further afield, we find that the famous concordat does not set a target for child poverty—a point that Rhona Brankin highlighted. I am sure that I do not have to remind the chamber of the SNP's plans to freeze and abolish the council tax, but those who are on the lowest incomes do not pay council tax. The SNP Government has every right to propose those policies, but it cannot pretend that they are anti-poverty initiatives. It cannot dress those decisions up in the language of tackling deprivation.

The report also identifies the need to improve our vocational education and to return to the skills agenda. Every party now agrees that we need to do more on skills, not just for the educational benefit and advantage of individuals, but because we need to improve the country's productivity.

Once we get beyond the basic fact that we have a skills strategy—for which I am grateful and which I acknowledge as a step forward—what is in the strategy document? What has the SNP added or offered? Where are the targets on modern apprenticeships? Where are the skills academies? Where is the beef? John Park commented on the contrast between what is available in Scotland and what our Labour colleagues are offering young people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

I will briefly mention the probationary teacher scheme. The report singles out our innovation as world class, but it raises a concern about probationers' ability to secure a teaching post at the end of their induction year. The minister cannot pass responsibility for that to local government, because the scheme was introduced by the Executive. I ask the minister to bring us up to date on her plans to ensure that teachers do not suffer from anxiety and that trained teachers are not lost to the profession again this year.

Inequality and inequity can be easy to identify, but they are hard to eradicate. The SNP has shown that it can make easy choices; it is now time it started to make difficult choices, too. Otherwise, the progress and achievements that are highlighted in the OECD report will mark a high point in Scottish education rather than a starting point for future improvement, and

Scotland's children and future generations will pay the price.

16:51

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): The Government wanted to provide an opportunity for a thoughtful and informed debate that would be a credit to the stimulating and challenging OECD report and that reflected the importance to all members of Scotland's education system. By and large, we have achieved that.

In a globalised world, Governments cannot operate in isolation. We all face many of the same economic and social challenges and are working towards finding the best answers. It is essential that Scotland continues to take an international perspective that develops to meet new challenges. I place on record my thanks to Peter Peacock for having the foresight to commission the report, which clearly managed to get under the skin of Scottish education in understanding it. I agree with many of Peter Peacock's comments, which I will come to later. I discussed the report and the new SNP Government's response and policies with the OECD experts at a full-day session on 11 December. I will reflect on some of our deliberations.

The publication of the OECD report coincided with the latest PISA report and progress in international reading literacy study—PIRLS—report. Therefore, by necessity, the OECD report is informed by the 2003 PISA results, not the 2006 results, which were published at the end of last year.

In the 2006 PISA study, our overall performance in science, mathematics and reading was still strong. In all three areas, Scotland scored well above the OECD average and was still among the highest scoring of the OECD countries, but in all three areas Scotland's relative standing in the international rankings has fallen since 2003. Scotland's mean score in science stayed the same, but the mean scores in reading and maths decreased. That happened under the previous Administration. More encouraging is the finding that Scotland has one of the lowest levels of poorly performing pupils among the OECD countries. Only Finland outperforms us significantly.

The biggest single challenge in Scotland remains the impact of poverty as a key factor in underachievement, not least because of the number of children who live in poverty. I say to Mr Macintosh that 25 per cent is not something to be proud of. As page 77 of the OECD report notes, in Glasgow, every second child in S2 underachieves in reading.

Margo MacDonald: Will the minister give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I want to make progress.

Many of us believe that education is a route out of poverty, but the OECD report is clear that, for too many children, poverty is the route into educational underachievement. In the period ahead, the Parliament will hear more about the Government's drive to tackle poverty. The OECD is clear that the difference between pupils in our schools is more striking than the difference between our schools. Peter Peacock is right: we have formal equity as identified in the report. The danger is that it masks social disadvantage.

In my discussion with the expert panel, which was drawn from 14 countries, I asked for views on the new Government's emphasis on early intervention as a policy to tackle inequalities. As Jackson Carlaw said, we should bear it in mind that the panel noted that inequalities become manifest more at primary 5, when achievement differences become more obvious. As tackling poverty is key, the OECD appreciated that our efforts to provide more support in the early years to develop the resilience of families and children and to raise their self-esteem and ability to withstand the disadvantage that poverty brings could lead to resilience to the establishment of the poverty and attainment gap in primary 5.

Rhona Brankin: Will Fiona Hyslop commit the SNP to supporting the extension of nursery education to vulnerable two-year-olds?

Fiona Hyslop: The former minister makes an important point. We have to consider whether we are offering support by taking the child away from the family and parental support, or whether—as Mary Mulligan suggested—we have to offer collective support to families and mothers from the early years. The OECD recognised that our policy of early intervention is critical in identifying and dealing with poverty. We have to have universal access, but we have to target those in need.

Peter Peacock rightly spoke about anticipatory support, which we could also call early intervention. The Government supports the early years. In the context of the OECD report, it makes sense to keep nursery teachers in areas of deprivation and to ensure more time for reading, writing and literacy in smaller class sizes in P1 to P3.

Jeremy Purvis rose—

Fiona Hyslop: I am sorry, but I need to move on—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order. There is too much background noise in the chamber.

Fiona Hyslop: The OECD report has much to say on vocational training. It makes some criticism of the previous Administration and is concerned about the “farming out” of vocational education away from the mainstream school experience, and suggests that that is one of the reasons why we do not have parity of esteem. The OECD report suggests that a two-tier system will not work.

In “Skills for Scotland”, the Government has clearly set out our commitment to, and our vision for, vocational learning. The OECD agrees with this Government that vocational learning should be available to all pupils as part of the curriculum and not as a separate experience perceived to be of lower value. That point was reflected in some of Elizabeth Smith's comments.

I say to John Park that the OECD's advice is that vocational education should be mainstreamed and not put out to standalone skills academies that are just for academic underachievers. It is important to have vocational education in schools and in partnerships with local authorities. That has been identified in the concordat and resourced by this Government in our deal with local government.

On decentralisation, the PISA results show no clearly and obviously successful system of educational organisation. For example, Finland has more than 430 local education authorities running education, whereas in New Zealand—another top performer—the Government runs the whole shebang itself and has control of 2,800 schools, the curriculum, and the employment of all its teachers. Both countries managed to score well.

The Finnish expert reporter was very complimentary about the new Government's concordat, even if Jackson Carlaw is not. He was complimentary about our relationship with local government and stated that it had somewhat pre-empted his presentation and recommendations. I say to Rhona Brankin that the ending of ring fencing for additional support for learning does not mean the ending of the policy. I will meet the deans soon to discuss additional support for learning.

It will be important to embed literacy and numeracy in the early years. Phonics is important and it is taught throughout Scotland. That experience can be shared, but we cannot have a policy that says decentralisation is important for education in local authorities and have a policy that wants to be prescriptive.

We will consult on the qualifications system and standard grades in the spring. Bob Doris is a product of the first year of standard grades. Like others, I am not sure whether that is a good thing or a bad thing.

The challenge is to ensure that Scotland is renowned as a smart, learning nation. The OECD report will not sit on a shelf. Under this Government, it will continue to be a catalyst for change. It challenges us all, including the Government, about educational thinking.

Scottish education has always been outward looking. Exchanging views and ideas is part of the character of our system. The OECD report is a welcome and invaluable contribution to that.

Business Motion

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-1143, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 23 January 2008

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Budget (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

Thursday 24 January 2008

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Health Improvement

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

followed by Members' Business

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Justice and Law Officers;
Rural Affairs and the Environment

2.55 pm Ministerial Statement: Waste

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Report

followed by Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Motion: Reappointment of the Scottish Information Commissioner

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 30 January 2008

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 31 January 2008

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

11.40 am General Question Time
 12 noon First Minister's Question Time
 2.15 pm Themed Question Time
 Finance and Sustainable Growth
 2.55 pm Scottish Government Business
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business.—[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S3M-1131.2, in the name of Rhona Brankin, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1131, in the name of Maureen Watt, on the report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development into Scottish education, "Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland", be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 55, Against 47, Abstentions 19.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S3M-1131.1, in the name of Elizabeth Smith, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1131, in the name of Maureen Watt, on the report by the OECD into Scottish education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)

Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 57, Against 46, Abstentions 18.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S3M-1131.3, in the name of Jeremy Purvis, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1131, in the name of Maureen Watt, on the report by the OECD into Scottish education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)

Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of 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)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)

Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 106, Against 15, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S3M-1131, in the name of Maureen Watt, on the report by the OECD into Scottish education, as heavily amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (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, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)

Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 59, Against 46, Abstentions 16.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament welcomes the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) *Reviews of Policies for National Education: Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland* and its findings; notes the many positive aspects of our school education system highlighted by the OECD; agrees that this report is an invaluable international evidence base on which to debate and develop Scotland's educational policies for the future, recognising the significant challenges identified by the OECD; recognises the challenge in closing the gap in achievement associated with poverty and deprivation and the need for improved vocational education and high quality training; calls on the Scottish Government to take leadership and place an emphasis on literacy and numeracy, devolve power further to head teachers, develop leadership in schools and further develop vocational studies linked to high quality training, and regrets that this government has failed to address these priorities and has failed to deliver on key pledges made in the SNP manifesto; further notes that the report's key challenge to Scottish schools is to make them work consistently well and equitably and that this outcome is dependent upon greater autonomy within school management, much greater emphasis within the curriculum on basic skills in English and mathematics and greater opportunities for pupils to follow vocational opportunities; welcomes the recognition of the success of educational innovations and developments in Scotland since 1999, and believes that the OECD recommendations for further development of the vocational provision of education, for the development of further leadership in school head teams and for a greater emphasis on transition into primary and between primary and secondary education, with greater devolved but more transparent funding to deliver them, should be the priorities of the Scottish Government in improving even further Scotland's strong internationally renowned education system.

Young People in the Workplace

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-1074, in the name of Cathy Peattie, on young people in the workplace.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that young people are making a significant contribution to economic development and social progress in Scotland; notes that younger people often experience poorer job security, pay and conditions of employment and are significantly more likely to be injured in the workplace than older workers; recognises that trade unions play a vital role in protecting and training young people, contributing to a safer working environment in all workplaces and promoting and supporting the learning and skills development of young people; recognises the important role of trade union bargaining on issues such as apprenticeship schemes and workforce training, for example at Ineos in Grangemouth where, as part of the wage deal, apprentices are guaranteed employment on completion of their apprenticeships, and commends all those involved in the Unions into Schools Project, funded by the previous Scottish Executive and now the Scottish Government, which works in schools to ensure an understanding of the contribution made by trade unions.

17:05

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): I welcome trade unionists young and old to the gallery tonight and members in the chamber who have stayed for this debate. I also thank the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the individual unions that have contributed to trade union week in the Parliament.

There are almost 400,000 young workers in Scotland, and they make a significant contribution to our economic development and social progress. Across Europe, 18 to 24-year-olds are at least 50 per cent more likely to be hurt at work than older people. Young people are also more likely to suffer from occupational illness. In Britain, every 12 minutes of every working day, a worker aged between 16 and 24 suffers a reportable workplace injury requiring more than three days off work; every 40 minutes, a young worker is seriously injured; and every month, there is a fatality.

Fatal and major injuries are on the increase. For example, a couple of years ago, Falkirk Football Club was fined £4,000 after the death of 17-year-old apprentice player Craig Gowans, who was electrocuted when training equipment that he was carrying touched an overhead cable. Since then, Falkirk FC has employed health and safety consultants and has carried out risk assessments of any locations where its employees are working. Such a move is welcome—but it should be the norm, not just a response.

Around 50,000 young Scottish workers are only 16 or 17 years old. Although they have little

previous experience of work, they can be placed straight from school into most jobs to face most hazards. They are more likely to be in a first job, in a new job, or in an insecure or temporary job. All young people are especially vulnerable in the workplace.

Young workers are killed or injured not because they play around or because they are immature, but because of inexperience. Whatever their age, the newer that someone is to a job, the more likely they are to be injured. Young workers are less likely than older workers to recognise the risk of accidents or ill health and even if they do they are less likely to be able to take appropriate action. They are at the bottom of the pecking order, with little influence, power or knowledge of workplace culture and rights, and that can be a dangerous combination at the start of someone's working life. If we add to those young workers the half a million school students who go on work placements every year and the quarter of a million on apprenticeship schemes, we see that a lot of young people are facing a lot of risks in a lot of workplaces.

A Trades Union Congress survey in 2000 suggested that many employers were not doing enough to protect young workers. For example, 37 per cent of 15 to 24-year-olds had received no health and safety training, despite a legal duty on employers to provide such training.

Young workers might work fewer hours and are supposed to be protected from a range of risks, but many of them are involved in trades such as construction and agriculture, or work in warehouses. Health and Safety Executive statistics show that although many types of accidents affect all ages, young people have the highest risk of injury by object or by moving machinery.

By playing a vital role in protecting and training young people, trade unions contribute to a safer working environment in workplaces and promote and support learning for and the skills development of young people. Trade unions play an important role in bargaining on issues such as apprenticeship schemes and workforce training. For example, as part of a wage deal, at INEOS in Grangemouth in my constituency, apprentices are guaranteed employment when they complete their apprenticeships. I think that that is important.

It is important to raise awareness in young people before they enter the workplace. For many young people, work experience is their first contact with the workplace. They will be limited in what they can do but, even at that stage, it is important to raise their awareness of issues that they will face in their working lives. The unions into schools project works in schools to ensure that pupils have an understanding of the work that trade unions do by representing workers and fighting for safer and

better working conditions. This evening's motion recognises the contribution that trade unions and the unions into schools project have made to ensuring that young people have a clearer idea of what they will face in the workplace. I recognise and praise that work; long may it continue.

17:11

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I take great pleasure in participating in the debate. As some members will know, I have a long-standing commitment to fighting from within the trade union movement. Over the past 10 years, I have fought on behalf of people—especially young people—who have faced injustice in respect of their employment rights.

I welcome the work that the Scottish Trades Union Congress and individual unions have done in campaigning for young people's rights in the workplace, and the work that is being done in schools to make young people aware of their rights before they go into the workplace. That will help them to promote those rights and to ensure that they are not undermined by employers who may believe that young people do not know what those rights are. Such work is crucial in preparing young people for the workplace.

As members should be aware, one of the main problems in enforcing employment rights in the workplace is the low level of union membership throughout Scotland and the United Kingdom. I hope that the work that the STUC is doing in schools will encourage more people to become active in unions when they enter the workplace. We must continue to fight to establish such representation because, despite all the employment legislation and regulations that have been put in place in the United Kingdom by the UK Government and the European Parliament, many employers still try to take away the rights of the workforce or to not apply them as they should be applied. As Cathy Peattie said, we must address that by getting more people to join the unions and to appreciate their relevance, after many decades in which people have felt that the unions have not played a vital role.

I want to focus on apprenticeships and traineeships. For the five years before I entered Parliament, I worked hard on pay scales for trainees and apprentices. The end of this year will mark the 10th anniversary of the UK Government's introduction of the National Minimum Wage Act 1998, but the UK Government has not taken the opportunity to include apprentices and trainees in the national minimum wage framework. Although, after a great deal of lobbying by the unions and low-pay organisations, it decided to take on board the issue of 16 to 18-year-olds, we still have a major gap as regards the pay of apprentices and

trainees. Indeed, the Government recently extended the exemption from the national minimum wage to cover people up to the age of 26 who enter apprenticeships and traineeships. We must address that issue.

Cathy said that young people who move into employment, particularly apprenticeships and traineeships, need to be protected. Examples have been given about pay scales in such jobs. In my previous job, I learned that young workers in so-called traineeships were being paid £1.50 per hour. Young workers must not be abused in that way; they must be protected.

I urge members to support the motion. I hope that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning will take on board the points that are made and continue to support the work that the STUC does.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that they should use full names when they refer to other members.

17:15

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Cathy Peattie on bringing a debate on young people in the workplace to Parliament. There is no doubt that young people make a significant contribution to economic development and social progress in Scotland. However, young people, who have a vital role to play in the country's future prosperity, are often discriminated against in their first and subsequent experiences of work, in the context of their pay, terms and conditions and job security. At a time when charities such as Rathbone, which works with young people who are not in education, employment or training, are striving to encourage a work ethic and to assure young people—some of whom come from families who have been unemployed for not just one but two generations—that it is okay to work, it is essential that young people who have found employment are not deterred by their first experience of work.

In that context, the unions into schools project comes into its own. Through school visits and presentations, the project's organisers seek to promote understanding of and awareness about how to achieve a good working environment. That helps young people to gain the experience and skills that they need and to access full-time employment.

Modern apprenticeships, which were introduced by the last Conservative Government and developed in 1994 by employer-led partnerships between national training organisations and local enterprise companies, and which are supported by the TUC, the Confederation of British Industry, and a wide range of employers, provide an excellent

example of how the TUC works with employers to ensure that young people and others gain necessary skills. However, although UK-wide modern apprenticeship take-up rates have increased, the number of apprenticeships in Scotland has remained relatively static during the past year or so. The new Scottish Government has given no guarantee of how many extra apprenticeships it will make available. Perhaps the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning will say that in her closing speech.

Apprenticeships are important, as is illustrated by the Grangemouth experience, in which trade unions worked with the sector skills council for chemicals, pharmaceuticals, nuclear, oil, petroleum and polymers—Cogent SSC Limited—and succeeded not only in providing access to apprenticeships for a wide range of people, including applicants from non-traditional backgrounds, but in securing guaranteed employment for apprenticeships on completion of training.

I welcome the debate, which highlights crucial employment issues for young people. I am a lifelong TUC member—which is perhaps unusual for a Conservative member of the Scottish Parliament—and I wish the STUC well with the remaining events that are part of the Scottish Parliament's trade union week.

17:19

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I commend Cathy Peattie for raising awareness of the challenges that young people face when they enter employment.

Two workshops were held this morning as part of the STUC's trade union week in the Scottish Parliament, at which participants learned about the additional challenges that are faced by young people who have dyslexia or who are deaf. On dyslexia, we heard that since 2002, through the Scottish union learning fund, the STUC and individual trade unions have been working to facilitate provision and support for adults and young people in employment who want or need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Some of those folk will be facing increasing demands in the workplace, but others will want to improve those skills for their personal development.

Through that work, it became apparent to the unions and the STUC that some learners had dyslexia, which for many was undiagnosed. It is estimated that 10 per cent of our population are dyslexic, and that 4 per cent have severe dyslexic difficulties. It is also estimated that 75 per cent of all dyslexic people are identified as being so after reaching the age of 21, which means that many adults with dyslexia did not fulfil their potential at

school because they did not have the right support. They might have inadequate literacy skills, which can impede their opportunities for employment.

The problem goes wider than difficulties with reading and writing. Many aspects of the workplace can create problems for people with dyslexia, such as time management and repetitive errors—when someone does something wrong, is told to change it but continues to do it. A dyslexic person's attention span and the speed at which they complete tasks can also be problems. Recent research states that 45 per cent of people hide their dyslexia from employers and colleagues and that 56 per cent do not believe that their employers would be able to adapt to their specific needs. Many people are not aware that they are dyslexic and assessments can be expensive. The process is complex, and people do not know what help might be available to them—access to work schemes for example—if they are identified as being dyslexic.

Trade union learning reps have been trained to identify and support people in the workplace with adult literacy and numeracy needs. With further training, it is hoped that they will be able to support people with dyslexia. Employers have responsibilities to dyslexic employees, and the aim would be that the union learning reps could help employers to understand their responsibilities and the ways in which reasonable adjustments can be made. Quite often, that can mean simple and inexpensive adjustments, such as using pastel-coloured paper, large font size and quiet time for reading instructions.

At lunch time, we heard from Chris Williams and Neil Bell. Unfortunately I do not have time to go into their experiences, but suffice it to say that they have had difficulties. The STUC is working towards a Scottish trade union strategy to achieve a dyslexia-friendly workplace, and it believes that a national strategy is required.

Another group who face additional barriers are young deaf people. Employers need clear information on their responsibilities to provide good access to work arrangements for both groups. Young deaf employees need to get a good start in fulfilling their employment potential for their own job satisfaction, as well as to ensure that they make their full contribution to the economy and to social progress. For some of those young people, British Sign Language is their first language. As with dyslexic young people, there is evidence of significant under-attainment in English skills at school among the whole population of deaf pupils.

I would like to say more, but I do not have time, so I will finish by saying that although a lot has undoubtedly been achieved in legislation and policy, there is still much for the unions and

Government to address in ensuring that young deaf and dyslexic people, and others, are able to fulfil their potential in the workplace. I am pleased that Cathy Peattie has given us this opportunity to commend the trade unions for leading the way in supporting and promoting the learning and skills development of young people in the workplace.

17:23

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I was not due to speak in the debate but, possibly in the best emerging traditions of the Parliament, I stayed behind after the vote and became drawn into the subject. I congratulate Cathy Peattie on securing the debate and on making an excellent contribution. I apologise to members because my remarks will necessarily be off the cuff. I should apologise also to the trade unions for not having been able to attend any of the events thus far this week, but I have been unwell. I have got my woolly cardy on to keep me warm, although I have already been accused on the Liberal Democrat floor of the MSP block of looking a little like Harold Macmillan.

In the 1970s, as a young working person, I was a member of the Transport and General Workers Union. I was involved in building an oil terminal up in Shetland, and I can remember how important my union and the other unions were in all the ways described by Cathy Peattie, such as the safety of young people. I have cause to be thankful to my shop steward and what he did for me back then. I will not go into detail, but I know what has been said in the debate to be true.

Wrapped up with that subject is one that I would raise, being a Liberal Democrat. We must empower young people and take them seriously—I am talking about lowering the voting age and enabling young people to get into placements. In the Highlands, it is not always easy to obtain quality work placements for our young people. There are some extremely good examples of businesses and companies that provide them, but more could be done on that front, so a more holistic view should be taken on that.

My second point takes me back to the importance of trade unions. If members look at the shirt or blouse that they buy, they might well see “Made in Sri Lanka” on the label. We know about off-shoring of such work, and we wonder—we know, do we not?—about the conditions that those people, who are very young indeed, work under. The trade union movement will have an important role to play in the future, just as it did in the 1970s. That may sound odd coming from a Liberal Democrat. It is easy to decry the trade union movement, talk about the winter of discontent and say that everything changed in 1979, but the trade

unions’ role is every bit as important today, as I know from my own experience.

I make no apology for my final point—and yet, to be polite to members, I will apologise. With the rundown of Dounreay and the complete standstill of the Nigg yard—which is a national scandal—in my constituency, I remain extremely worried about what sort of work, if any, we will be able to offer our young people. I am grateful that David Stewart and I are hosting an event in a few weeks’ time with the unions that are involved in Dounreay. I give members advance notice of that. Those unions have been instrumental in bringing the issue to the Government’s attention, but more work will have to be done.

I say for the third time that the unions have a role to play in securing jobs for young people in the future. It is a privilege to work alongside them.

17:26

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): As other speakers have done, I congratulate Cathy Peattie and commend her on securing this important debate. I am particularly proud to speak in it because of my trade union links. I can say with my hand on my heart that, without the support of my trade union—Unite the Union—and the wider trade union movement, there is no way that I would be standing in the chamber or would have the opportunity to take part in the Scottish Parliament’s proceedings.

I had an interesting conversation today with a Prospect member who told me about the unions into schools project that Cathy Peattie mentioned. Union members go and speak to schoolchildren, who find out that unions such as Prospect represent a wide range of people. I was surprised to find out that Prospect represents football referees. Members might think that that is a task in itself but, if they consider the situation that football managers are in just now, they will be pleased to know that the League Managers Association is part of Unite, and I am sure that the union officials are busy looking after the managers just now.

I also pay tribute to the work that trade unions do in developing young members as active citizens. It is important to recognise that. I also need to declare an interest as a former chair of the STUC youth committee—albeit that it was a few years ago, as I am sure most members will remind me. I know at first hand the real difference that trade unions make to young workers in ensuring the best standards in the workplace. The campaign activity that has been evident as part of trade union week in the Parliament over the past few days only emphasises the force for good that trade unions are in society.

A number of young trade unionists from throughout Scotland are in the gallery, and it is positive that they have been involved fully in trade union week as well. Although it is not always recognised, the STUC youth committee carries out a lot of work behind the scenes on issues of discrimination that affect young workers. I will focus on the work that it has done on the national minimum wage. Some members might be aware of that issue—John Wilson spoke about it—and some may not. In recent years, the youth committee has given evidence on differential minimum wage rates to the Low Pay Commission, held meetings with Government ministers and organised lobbies of Scottish MPs at Westminster on the national minimum wage and support for young people in education and training.

If members look at business at Westminster, they will see that the issues that the STUC has campaigned on time and time again are now beginning to be addressed as part of the draft apprenticeship reform bill that is now making its way through Westminster. I reassure John Wilson that the Westminster Parliament will consider the differential rates in the minimum wage. Of particular note is the proposal to close the loophole that meant that there was no minimum wage protection for young workers in their first year of a modern apprenticeship.

In the debate on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's report on Scottish education this afternoon, we heard about the importance of providing young people, who can be at the most vulnerable stage of their working lives, with a solid educational grounding to support them as they make the transition into work.

The need for apprentices to be supported adequately is highlighted forcefully when we consider issues of occupational segregation in modern apprenticeships. Unsurprisingly, the traditional gender divides in construction, engineering, hairdressing and hospitality also exist at trainee level. Young women who move into apprenticeships in sectors such as hairdressing can look forward to higher drop-out rates, lower wages and less of a guarantee of a decent job at the end of their training. It is those vulnerable workers who deserve minimum wage protection, and I am glad that moves have been made at Westminster to address that.

In Scotland, we are in danger of missing out on the opportunities that will be afforded to young people south of the border, with the Education and Skills Bill and the draft apprenticeship reform bill—opportunities that are not reflected in the Scottish Government's current skills strategy. Young workers need concrete commitments that their training and jobs will be invested in and supported

by the Government. It is not just their future that will be affected; it is ours, too.

17:31

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): I welcome the chance to debate the motion on young people in the workplace, particularly during trade union week. Elaine Smith mentioned workers who had experienced problems in the workplace because of their dyslexia, although she did not have time to discuss their experiences. On the subject of literacy and numeracy in the workplace, and referring to the previous debate on the OECD report, my colleague Keith Brown related some of the views and opinions that were expressed in the workplace session that he attended. I encourage all members to attend those sessions when they can.

I agree with what Cathy Peattie said. I support her and I congratulate her on securing the debate, particularly in this week. Our young people make a significant contribution to the economic and social development of Scotland and they will continue to do so in the future. I agree that unions have a key role to play in helping us to deliver on our ambitions for Scotland.

We have had quite a reflective debate. Jamie Stone introduced an international dimension. John Park is a very useful addition to the Parliament, bringing important insight from his experience and trade union background. When he was speaking about Prospect and football referees, I thought that he was going to touch on health and safety and frustrated, aggressive, partisan fans. He made a point about gender issues, which it is important for us to address, particularly in the workplace.

Unions have a key role in the unions into schools project, which Margaret Mitchell and other members spoke about. The initiative is aimed at raising young people's awareness of their rights and responsibilities in the workplace. Throughout the project's pilot, the STUC's resource has proved to be a great success with pupils and schools. I am certain that, following its official launch in the spring, the schools pack will play an important part in developing a strong, skilled and fair-minded workforce for Scotland.

That is consistent with the aims of determined to succeed, our strategy for enterprise in education, which has supported the development of the STUC resource. We recognise the real results that determined to succeed has achieved so far, so we have committed to retain its level of funding in the recent spending review. It is important that young people who are about to enter the world of work are made aware of the issues that they will face when they get there. I am sure that all members

will agree not only that having that resource in schools is a benefit today, but that it will continue to benefit young people in years to come. John Wilson stressed the importance of embedding knowledge of workplace rights from an early start.

It is of course unfortunate that there are young people who need initiatives to help them become work ready. Futureskills Scotland was concerned that 34 per cent of employers believed that school leavers were poorly prepared for the workplace. That was one of the drivers for the Government developing a comprehensive skills strategy and producing the "Skills for Scotland" document. If we are to be more dynamic and if we are to have a vibrant workforce, we need to consider skills and learning as a whole, which is what the skills strategy does.

Margaret Mitchell urged the Government to set targets for the number of apprenticeships. However, employer organisations, colleges, employers themselves and others have congratulated us for not setting such targets, which can distort policy. That said, we need to consider the quality range and the positive outcomes and completion rates for apprenticeships.

Being work ready has as much to do with building confidence and aspiration among our young people as it does with gaining the technical skills that are needed for work. That is why we want to promote a range of opportunities to allow everyone to achieve their full potential. The curriculum for excellence is at the heart of that. It builds into its core the vocational and essential skills that are needed to deliver the competitive and responsive workforce of tomorrow. Giving more school pupils opportunities to experience vocational learning is one of the 12 specified commitments in our concordat with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and our spending review settlement for local authorities and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council reflects that.

Cathy Peattie identified the importance of the health and safety issues that we will all have to address as vocational learning becomes part and parcel of our education system.

I recognise the important role that unions at Grangemouth played in securing future employment at Ineos. Therefore, I will close the debate by saying something about the unions and their place in learning. The "Skills for Scotland" report clearly sets out the important role that the STUC and the unions will play in the delivery of a more skilled Scotland. We recognise that, for many people, their union acts as their main source of information and support when they undertake learning. The unions have provided an excellent opportunity for individuals to address their literacy

and numeracy problems, in a way that those individuals do not feel is open to them if they go directly to their employer.

However, unions cannot address all those issues by themselves. If we are to get the most benefit from the role of unions in the workplace, it is vital that they work in close partnership with employers—there is a big obligation on employers in that regard. I fully support the work that unions are doing to embed the learning culture in the workplace. It is important to help individuals to raise their aspirations and to allow them to reach their full potential and to progress in the workplace. A large number of people need to improve their skills and training in the workplace—it is not only about new entrants into the workplace.

That is why I announced, at the STUC's lifelong learning conference last November, that the Government has committed just under £4.25 million over the next three years to union learning in Scotland. That has ensured, for the first time, that the funding of the STUC skills and lifelong learning team has been baselined and that the Scottish union learning fund is secure for three more years.

I am pleased to announce that that is the largest single investment in union learning under any Scottish Government, which demonstrates the value that we place on union learning. I am sure that members will welcome that and agree that the unprecedented level of funding shows that this Government is committed to Scotland's unions.

There is a great deal more to do, and Cathy Peattie's motion alerts us to what that may be. I hope that, working together across the Parliament, we can give union learning in Scotland its rightful place. I would like to have come to the reception this evening, but unfortunately I have to be in Fife—John Park will no doubt tell me how long it takes to get to Fife at this time of night. I wish the reception well, and all those involved in the trade union week in the Parliament.

Meeting closed at 17:37.

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