

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 19 March 2008

Session 3

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2008.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Licensing Division,
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ
Fax 01603 723000, which is administering the copyright on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate
Body.

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by RR
Donnelley.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 19 March 2008

Debates

Col.

TIME FOR REFLECTION	7055
CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE	7057
The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop)	7057
Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)	7062
Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	7066
Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD)	7069
Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	7071
Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab).....	7073
Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP).....	7076
David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)	7078
Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green).....	7081
Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP)	7083
Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab).....	7084
Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP).....	7086
Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)	7089
Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)	7091
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	7094
Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)	7097
The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt)	7100
HOUSING AND REGENERATION BILL	7104
<i>Motion moved—[Stewart Maxwell].</i>	
The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell)	7104
Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)	7104
David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)	7105
Stewart Maxwell.....	7107
BUSINESS MOTION	7109
<i>Motion moved—[Bruce Crawford]—and agreed to.</i>	
The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford)	7109
DECISION TIME	7111
FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT	7112
<i>Motion debated—[Patricia Ferguson].</i>	
Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)	7112
Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP).....	7114
Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	7116
Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)	7117
Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD).....	7119
Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)	7120
Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP)	7122
James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab).....	7123
Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)	7124
The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani).....	7126

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 19 March 2008

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good afternoon. The first item is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Anthony Wedgwood Benn, probably better known to all of us as Tony Benn.

Tony Benn: Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. What you have done is an enormous honour, which I deeply appreciate.

My theme is the relationship between religion and politics as I learned about it in my own family. My great-grandfather, James Holmes, was a steeplejack in Irvine and a member of the Irvine Brethren. He was so severe that he would not allow a single book in the house other than the Bible, and that drove my grandfather to atheism. He was a schoolteacher, and became member of Parliament for Govan. His atheism worried my mother when she was a little girl. She said that if we were born with no God, we were all born in an orphanage. At the age of eight, she went alone to the Church of Scotland in Paisley, became a Christian and ended up as the president of the Congregational Federation and a great supporter of the ordination of women. In 1920, she married my father, who was then MP for Leith. My father was a Congregationalist too, and his grandfather was a Congregationalist minister. The Congregationalists have a clear idea that everyone has a hotline to the Almighty—we do not need bishops to show us the way. That was a revolutionary and radical idea.

Every night, my mother read the Bible to me. She taught me that the stories in the Bible were of the conflict between the kings, who had power, and the prophets, who preached righteousness. She taught me to support the prophets against the kings. That has got me into a lot of trouble in my life, but the older I get the more relevant it seems.

The teachings of Jesus are about how we should lead our lives. Although the myths and mythology of religion are moving and exciting, for me it is the teaching that matters. All the great teachers—Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Darwin, Marx and Gandhi—taught us that we are brothers and sisters, and that we ought to treat each other in that spirit, the spirit of solidarity. An injury to one is an injury to all.

The people whom I fear are the kings, who use religion to frighten and divide us, so that they can gain power for themselves. In doing so, they contradict what the prophets said. That is why I believe that churches, mosques, synagogues and temples should be kept absolutely separate from the state.

However, faith and politics are inseparable one from another. Even though we live in an age of science and technology, all the big decisions that we make in life and politics essentially are moral decisions: is it right or is it wrong? We can argue about what is right and wrong, but that is the right question to discuss. I believe that the 10 commandments are a better guide to the good life than is a study of every hour of the Dow Jones industrial average. That is my own conviction.

We live at a time in history when the power of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons to destroy the human race is as never before, yet it is also a time when we have the resources, the technology, the know-how and the money to solve the problems of the human race. That is the most important choice that humanity has ever had to make, and it raises fundamental moral questions. If we are to make the right decisions, we would do well, I believe, to listen to the prophets, rather than the kings.

Curriculum for Excellence

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on curriculum for excellence.

14:34

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): The origins of curriculum for excellence lie in the national debate of 2002. Between 2002 and 2003, the curriculum review group developed “A Curriculum for Excellence”, which was adopted by the then Scottish Executive to address concerns about overcrowding in the curriculum; transitions between stages; the academic-vocational balance; skills development; how assessment and certification support learning; personalisation and choice; and the pace of learning.

Learning and teaching need to emphasise the capacity of education to equip young people with skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work. The balance has swung too far in favour of equipping young people primarily with skills for passing exams. Scotland has always valued breadth in learning. I want to reinforce that value and I want a sense of enjoyment and engagement in learning.

Curriculum for excellence is not a top-down imposition. It has been and will continue to be developed in partnership with the education profession. Since September 2007, a set of draft curriculum learning experiences and outcomes has been produced by Learning and Teaching Scotland, with support from the Government, and made available for discussion and comment. The draft experiences and outcomes for the three remaining areas will be released in April and May. Trialling of the draft experiences and outcomes will also take place this year.

A crucial factor in all this is the qualifications system, which needs to be simplified and designed to support the curriculum and young people’s learning. I shall return to that point later.

Curriculum for excellence is a programme of reform that represents the biggest change in education in Scotland for a generation. Its fundamental purpose is to ensure that, by providing the best possible learning opportunities from the ages of three to 18, our children and young people are enabled to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

The Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee is examining curriculum for excellence. Today’s debate is therefore timely, and it affords us all in the Parliament an opportunity to reflect on

the role and purpose of curriculum for excellence in Scottish education and to identify challenges and opportunities. I look forward to hearing views.

If all our young people are to benefit from curriculum for excellence, we will require leadership from the education profession—from directors of education, leading their schools, headteachers, teachers and employers; from headteachers, leading their teaching staff and school communities, pupils, parents and others; and from teachers in their classrooms, leading their colleagues and pupils. For my part, I accept my responsibility to provide leadership at national level by engaging Scotland more widely. Curriculum for excellence should not be seen as party political, and I look to MSPs and the Scottish Parliament to recognise their leadership role in engaging Scotland and the schools that they visit.

I want to see a Scotland-wide campaign for curriculum for excellence. I am investing time in building up support for curriculum for excellence with scientists, academics, employers, sector skills councils, colleges and universities to build the required community of support, trust and engagement. For example, I am asking the seven university deans of faculty to help support the trialling activity. To date, around 280 schools in 28 local authorities have signed up to trialling the full range of learning experiences and outcomes.

Given that curriculum for excellence is not a top-down initiative, there is a genuine debate about the extent to which materials should be provided centrally and the extent to which teachers ought to create their own classroom materials. My view is that there is much to be gained from the centre providing a kick-start in terms of support, and I expect LTS to co-ordinate that. However, the principle that teachers create and exchange their own materials must not be lost.

The new all-schools intranet, glow, which is being rolled out to local authorities, can play a significant role in facilitating support materials. Curriculum for excellence is about far more than just the content of the curriculum, and it extends well beyond schools.

Our aim is to provide overarching coherence for all aspects of education in Scotland, for every child and young person, covering assessment, qualifications, recognition of achievement, support for learning, initial teacher education, continuing professional development, accountability within the system, and colleges and universities. The impact of the changes will reach far beyond the people who are part of the day-to-day workings of our education system. This is a programme of reform for the nation.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): The minister referred to teacher training and

professional development. How much work has been done to assess whether the current teacher training curriculum meets the needs identified in curriculum for excellence?

Fiona Hyslop: The member makes an important point. That is exactly the question that I am asking the deans of faculty in my discussions with them. They have given me confidence and an assurance that curriculum for excellence will be embedded in the work of the 20,000 teachers who we will train over the next five years. Indeed, the 17,000 teachers who have been trained in recent years are champions of curriculum for excellence in the many schools that I visit.

We have to address the major issues that face us. We have to provide overarching coherence for the whole system, and ensure that we build on the strong foundation of intellectual inquiry and excellence in Scotland.

We recognise that it is vital to encourage ownership of and interest in education throughout the community. That approach is backed up by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's report "Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland", which highlights the importance of having curriculum reform that comes from schools and teachers, rather than having people wait for central directions.

I do not pretend that any of that will be easy or without challenge. I would like to take a few moments to reflect upon the key challenges and consider how we can tackle and address them collectively to allow curriculum for excellence to progress.

Fundamental to our ability to achieve our aims is ensuring that we have assessment and qualifications that serve and support the curriculum. There is a perception that the situation is the other way round at the moment.

The role of inspection will be critical to the success of curriculum for excellence. Our new relationship with local government has significant implications for the nature of inspection. Significantly, the four capacities for all our young people are one of the 15 national outcomes. In addition to telling us how well our schools are performing, inspections act as a spur to improvement by identifying and spreading good practice and by supporting rigorous self-evaluation.

I have been discussing with Graham Donaldson, the senior chief inspector of schools, ways in which the powerful contributions that inspection can make can be fully realised in the context of the Crerar report and curriculum for excellence. Our removal of ring fencing, coupled with the removal of the need to report continually on top-down initiatives from national Government, should also lead to improvements.

In examining the shape of school education, I believe that the three-to-15 curriculum should deliver a broad education and a rich learning experience. Every child in Scotland is entitled to expect their general education to provide them with literacy and numeracy skills and skills for learning, life and work. They are entitled to education across a broad curriculum that covers science, language, mathematics, social studies—including, specifically, history—expressive arts, health and wellbeing, religious and moral education, and technologies. They should be given a variety of learning experiences, including interdisciplinary projects in, for example, Scottish and world history, creativity and innovation, enterprise, culture, environmental studies, citizenship and community.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I would like to develop further my thoughts about the shape of education.

Beyond that stage, from approximately age 15 onwards, the emphasis will shift from a broad, general education to greater personalisation and choice. Young people will begin working towards qualifications, and it is essential that those qualifications are flexible and offer pathways to the next stage, whether that is college, university, training or employment.

We have reflected on the current shape of qualifications and have found that, in general, our existing system works well for many young people. However, we need to examine how our qualifications system can best meet the needs of Scotland in the 21st century. To do that, we need a coherent curriculum and assessment system from three to 18. All qualifications will need to reflect the values, purposes and principles of curriculum for excellence.

Most young people take standard grade and intermediate exams between the ages of 15 and 18. Those are good qualifications, but the system is complex and needs to be simplified. The qualifications were originally intended for different year groups and they have different structures and purposes. The standard grade was introduced more than 20 years ago and is a two-year course designed for pupils aged 14 to 16. One of the main aims of the standard grade was to provide an exit qualification for those who intended to leave school at the end of secondary 4, at a time when many more people did so.

The more recently introduced intermediate 1 and intermediate 2 are one-year courses and were designed, in general, for pupils aged 17 and 18. I am currently considering what changes are needed to those qualifications, and I will announce further details of our plans in the next few weeks.

Higher qualifications will continue to be the gold standard of Scottish education, and we will look at how we can influence the system to ensure that the two-term dash is not the only route to highers for our young people. Flexibility will be key.

I am keen to encourage more young people to pursue science and language subjects at higher and advanced higher levels. We will introduce a Scottish science baccalaureate and a Scottish language baccalaureate, which will consist of a package of highers and advanced highers. Importantly, the baccalaureates will include an interdisciplinary project.

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): Does the minister share my concerns that the current advanced higher system is under considerable pressure in some areas? For example, in Renfrewshire Council, in my area, at least 50 to 60 teaching jobs are about to go and teachers are reporting to me that they will have to cut back on advanced highers. How can the minister expect baccalaureates to be introduced when education is being cut?

Fiona Hyslop: It is unfortunate that when we have an opportunity to address the future of higher education and of our education system in general, the Labour Party resorts to scaremongering. That does a disservice to the debate and to the work that many people have contributed to curriculum for excellence.

Margo MacDonald: I asked a question a couple of days ago about the advanced higher. I respectfully ask the minister to take on board the fact that Hugh Henry and I are concerned about its purpose. Will the minister examine the new Universities and Colleges Admissions Scheme form? It treats the advanced higher differently to how it used to be treated.

Fiona Hyslop: The purpose of our support for the advanced higher will be to ensure that it is strengthened, and that there is a proper place and a greater status for S6. It is important that the Scottish Qualifications Authority, which has responsibility for the advanced higher, ensures that the qualification is robust and that there are opportunities for all to study for it where they can. That is particularly important with regard to the Scottish baccalaureate and its links with higher education, further education and employers. I will announce details of those awards soon.

We have to ensure that curriculum for excellence puts learning in a practical context and makes connections with the world of work. Links between the classroom and the workplace will help young people to see the relevance of their learning and to increase their understanding of business and commerce. That is why I am engaging with commerce, from life sciences companies to sector skills councils.

Skills for work qualifications will also be important, and we will develop them. When I spoke last week to Professor Richard Teese, the author of the OECD report on Scottish education, he told me that the eyes of the education world internationally are watching with keen interest how Scotland reforms and improves its education system. Together, we can and must rise to the challenge of using education to help build a Scotland that is strong in community, society and economy.

The young people of Scotland look to us to shape a system that meets their needs in a world that is ever changing. The responsibility of all of us—teachers, headteachers, educational experts and politicians—to provide wise, effective and enthusiastic stewardship of education is heavy, but it can and will be shouldered by the community of Scotland, working together to transform education as a powerhouse for the country and young people and to build Scotland the learning nation.

14:47

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I was hugely encouraged when I came into the chamber by the level of interest in the curriculum for excellence, particularly among our press colleagues.

It is a timely moment for us to debate the curriculum for excellence, and I am grateful to the minister for allowing us the opportunity to do so. I am sure that she will be aware of the work that the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee has carried out in recent weeks in taking evidence on the new curriculum. She will also be aware not only of the broad areas of agreement that exist across the board, but of the concerns and anxieties that have been flagged up by various witnesses.

For a country that prides itself on having no formal set curriculum, we have a formidably formal and set curriculum. At secondary level, a pupil could walk into pretty much any high school in the country and immediately recognise the choices before them, the structure of the timetable and the content of the curriculum. That curriculum works well for some, but not for all.

I do not wish to go over old ground, but it is important to mention the broad agreement that has been reached on the way forward. The curriculum for excellence arose from the national debate on education—an exercise that revealed a broad consensus around the comprehensive model of education in Scotland and the areas that needed to be addressed. The four principles that emerged, on which the curriculum for excellence is

based, have attracted the support of teachers and other educationists.

It is also important to note that there has been broad political agreement on the aims and agenda of the curriculum for excellence—a move away from the dominance of exams and teaching to the test; a decluttering of the overcrowded curriculum; more room for teachers to teach and to exercise their professional judgment; and less focus on content and more focus on the importance of learning itself. Given that agreement among educationists and that political consensus, I have over the past few weeks been struck by the difficulties—which have lain submerged—that face us in implementing the new curriculum.

Our shared objectives have perhaps disguised some of the real obstacles that still need to be addressed. Primarily, the programme's implementation lacks clarity and direction. There is a crying need for decisive leadership from the new Scottish Government if we are to move ahead. I heard what the minister said about that.

Further questions arise over the timescale for implementation, and there is serious anxiety about the lack of resources to implement a series of radical reforms. Even more worrying is the fact that huge swathes of stakeholders—notably parents and pupils—have almost no idea of what is coming their way. Others, such as teachers, have differing and contradictory expectations. In the run-up to the debate, we have heard from people in the voluntary sector who feel excluded from the discussion.

I will be honest: I worry about the lack of focus and policy direction from the Government. I hesitate before striking a discordant note in what I believe will be a broadly consensual debate, but there is a danger of woolly-headed thinking about the curriculum for excellence. It is unfortunate that the Government's record does not bode well. The skills strategy contained no skills academies, no numbers for modern apprenticeships and no targets or drivers for change. Earlier this week, the Government launched an early years strategy that is practically devoid of any serious content other than good intentions. Of course, the Government has also abandoned proven and successful programmes, such as schools of ambition.

However, it is in the grasp of the minister and the Executive to address those problems. I would like them to start with the people for whom I am most worried—pupils and their parents. What are they to make of the curriculum for excellence? Some might have heard the mantra of successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. Those words might ring the bell of an education professional, or even a politician, but I am sure that we are aware that they wash over most parents' heads. Parents want

to know what subjects their children are studying, what exams they will sit, what qualifications they will have to show for their efforts and whether standard grade will even be around in a couple of years.

Even more fundamental than that, parents want to know not so much whether their child will be a confident individual or an effective contributor—important though that might be—as whether they can read and write. Whose job is it to ensure that each child is numerate and literate when they leave school? We should have the highest aspirations for all our children, but I thank Judith Gillespie from the Scottish Parent Teacher Council for reminding me at a recent event that we need to get the basics right. I ask the minister: if West Dunbartonshire can do it, why not all our schools?

Many members might agree on the need to push exams higher up the school, to the point when they matter—to the post-15 age group. It is broadly agreed that our system has too many exams. However, whether or not they are exam based, qualifications are important for those aged 15 and above, not least as a currency for school leavers to enter employment or go on to further or higher education.

It is worrying, to say the least, that although implementation of the curriculum for excellence is due to begin in the 2008-09 school year, we have done little to reform the examinable curriculum and the qualifications framework, let alone to inform parents and pupils what the map might look like.

Fiona Hyslop: I agree that we should move rapidly to address that. When I took office, I was concerned about the pace with which the examination system was being addressed. The session 2 Education Committee shared that feeling. In the next few weeks, I will announce our direction.

Ken Macintosh: I am delighted to hear that. I should have said that I noted that the minister said that she would make an announcement in the next couple of weeks. That is welcome, especially given the evidence that the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee recently heard from the SQA.

A lack of clarity also surrounds the new curriculum's structure, particularly for secondary school. I have looked at the draft experiences and outcomes for several subjects, which have been published, but I am none the wiser about what the new timetable will look like. Most parents are familiar with the idea that, when their child enters S3, he or she will choose from a range of seven or eight subjects, such as physics, English and geography. Will that still be the case in three years' time? The question is not unreasonable, yet no one seems able to answer it. A more open

approach to learning, akin to that which is practised in our primary school environment, has been talked about. If that approach is to be taken, the minister must say so.

Our recent debate on the importance of Scottish history in the curriculum revealed some rather muddled thinking. Will history remain a stand-alone subject that is taught by teachers who are trained in that discrete discipline? It is all very well to talk about teaching pupils the role and contribution of famous Scots chemists in the history of chemistry, but pupils want to know whether they are studying history or chemistry, and teachers want to know whether the pupils are to be taught by a history teacher or a chemistry teacher.

If there is a lack of clarity and knowledge among parents, teachers have conflicting expectations. Will there be room in the curriculum for subjects such as sustainable development? For many of us, allowing children to see their learning in context, rather than divorced from the world around them, will be one of the main benefits of the curricular developments. However, what will make room? Will there be less emphasis on physics, chemistry or maths?

Because of all the talk of pushing exams further up the school and reducing the burden of assessment, teachers have a further expectation that there will be considerably less focus on assessment. Many of us may wish to steer Scottish education away from a focus on incompatible and inaccurate league tables of attainment. Whatever teachers' views are in that regard, and whatever advances we have made through introducing the assessment is for learning programme, I am not sure that that view is yet shared by parents or that we have reached consensus on the role of assessment throughout school. Not only parents, but headteachers, directors of education, local authorities and even the Scottish ministers will want to know how schools are performing, whether pupils are achieving, and which policies are successful. It is clear that assessment of some sort will play a role in that.

I do not want to expand too much on my other concerns, which have been raised in the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee. I am concerned about, for example, the apparent slippage in the timetable for fully implementing the curriculum for excellence, and there is a worry about the lack of resources that are being provided to support what is widely acknowledged to be a major reform of our education and school system.

The minister is being confronted—possibly for the first time—by the difference between being in opposition and being in government. Does she

really believe that education policy can be allowed to drift for the next three years, as seems to be the case? We need the minister to show the leadership that she has described. There is a broad but loose consensus around the curriculum for excellence, but it could easily evaporate before our eyes if decisions are not taken. We need clarity, structure, decisions on the examinations and qualifications framework, and resources to support implementation of the curriculum for excellence. The minister needs to face up to all of those challenges.

14:57

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): I start the Scottish Conservatives' contribution to the debate with an unequivocal declaration of support for the curriculum for excellence. However, we firmly believe that its innovation affords us a much-needed opportunity to address several other pressing issues in Scottish education, especially the need to ensure that there is much greater articulation between schools and other educational institutions. It was good to hear that the cabinet secretary agrees that that is needed.

I heard what the cabinet secretary said about reform of the examination structure. Thank goodness for what she said. However, I give her a word of warning: we need a long overview of the whole structure. We need much greater rigour and the system to be decluttered. Hugh Henry and Margo MacDonald asked accurate questions. We need answers about what will come. If we are to add a Scottish science baccalaureate and a Scottish language baccalaureate, it sounds as though there will be two extra items in a muddled field. In two weeks' time, we will consider with considerable interest what the cabinet secretary announces.

I hope that the debate was designed to give us the opportunity to stand back and view the direction of Scottish education as a whole unit. In that context, I want to define the merits of the curriculum for excellence and the main challenges that we must embrace if we are to ensure that its benefits move well beyond people's years in formal school education.

Most people know when they meet somebody who is well educated. Their education shows in the way that they behave, their conversation, their range of interests and the skills that they bring to their occupation. A good education is about far more than passing exams; it is about the qualities that give a person good judgment, strong ethical values and a sense of responsibility as a citizen in a community. Good schools, colleges and universities, strong families and efficient workplaces have always provided mental and

physical wellbeing, a sharp focus on what really matters in life, and a sense of self-esteem, as they always will. They have always ensured that the individual is able to make a meaningful contribution to the economy. The curriculum for excellence marks a real watershed, from which we will achieve such things or yet more bureaucratic change that is built around spurious targets, with more measurable league tables and endless quantitative assessment that will almost certainly be rejected by a paper-weary profession.

I commend the architects of the curriculum for excellence for taking the bold step of encouraging teachers to think for themselves instead of being the recipients of Government diktats; for building a curriculum in which flexibility will better serve the individual; and for ensuring that the diversity of local communities and the outdoor environment can be fully utilised in the delivery of school activities. We believe that that message should be echoed by much greater devolution in school management, so that educational decision making is put back into the hands of the professionals who are best able to decide the needs of their individual pupils. Good schools have always done that, but far too often there has been a constraining hand of Government, with the result that there has been an obsession with quantitative measurement and testing.

At two sessions of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee, we heard evidence from various witnesses about the curriculum for excellence. It was noticeable that there was deep concern—even despair in one quarter—about the fact that teachers, especially in secondary schools, did not feel that they had been fully engaged in the process of developing the curriculum for excellence or in the careful thinking that is required to ensure that there is a fully coherent exam structure. Last week's edition of *The Times Educational Supplement* seemed to tell exactly the same story. As one witness put it, the curriculum for excellence is

“the biggest change in Scottish education for a generation”.—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 27 February 2008; c 650.]

However, it is the one for which we are least prepared.

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): Does the member accept that that is why the outcomes are currently in draft form, and why all teachers and other education professionals are being encouraged to—indeed, should—feed into the draft outcomes, to show where there are glitches and where improvements can be made, before the draft outcomes are finally published?

Elizabeth Smith: I am grateful to the minister for her intervention, but I do not entirely accept it. A lot of the debate is about the underlying

philosophy of the curriculum for excellence, which must be decided at the input stage, not the outcomes stage. We need a little bit more thinking about the delivery of the curriculum for excellence in order to carry the teaching profession along with us. As the minister knows, teachers are committed to the underlying principles, but they want to see how those underlying principles can be broadened out, especially beyond 15 to 18. There are big question marks about how the curriculum will articulate with the exam structure. We will have to wait two weeks to see the new proposed structure.

I will finish by identifying two crucial areas that must be addressed if we are not to waste our opportunity and deny too many of our children the best possible chance in life. First, we must take up the challenge that is laid down by the curriculum for excellence, which values all pupils, no matter whether their skills lie in vocational or academic subjects or a mix of the two. The curriculum for excellence is serious about that. It ensures greater focus and greater self-discipline—which a lot of our children are crying out for—but we must ensure that our educational structure properly caters for and respects those who opt for a more vocational balance.

Secondly, it is time to grasp the nettle of the clutter and complexity of qualifications. I cannot say it often enough—it is a clutter. Many employers and parents know that. We must do something about it. We particularly have to do something about the sixth form in Scottish schools. Far too many sixth formers around the country are twiddling their thumbs because, for one reason or another—sadly, in an increasing number of cases, because of budget cuts—they are unable to pursue the courses that they want to pursue. That is totally unacceptable.

It is also important to recognise the growing importance of our further education colleges alongside our universities, for which there is rising demand. It is time to examine properly what we expect from our universities and whether continually widening access at that level is the right answer. There are other options to be considered.

We have a huge opportunity to get this right, but we need to be far-sighted. We need a vision of Scottish education in its all-round capacity—not just a vision that suits the economy, but one that promotes a fair-minded and ethical society in which individuals are valued for who they are. We need an education system in which every individual is encouraged to reach for the stars—with schools of ambition, perhaps—and in which, every step of the way, we promote excellence rather than the lowest common denominator, which all too often has been the trademark of educational policy.

15:04

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): This is a welcome debate, and it is timeous given that a number of the experiences and outcomes are now available in draft form for people to have a look at.

Having had a look at the content of the curriculum for excellence, and having recognised its cross-subject and collaborative nature, I see that there are serious and major challenges for the professionals who are expected to deliver the changes within the timescale that has been set.

The document is not perfect, and some of the flaws have been highlighted, but it is fair to say that, thus far, no one in the chamber has been against the principles that are laid down in it, based on the four capacities, so I will confine my remarks to a couple of questions that arose during my recent visits to schools and to the comments in the OECD report on Scottish education.

To start with a broad sweep, I would be interested to know how the Government intends to address the eight recommendations in the OECD report and how progress on the curriculum for excellence relates to them. In particular, I would appreciate some input on the contribution that vocational studies will make to implementing the curriculum for excellence. The report said that

"vocational studies—if viewed broadly—are the most powerful vehicle for implementing a Curriculum for Excellence."

Good vocational education emphasises shared learning approaches, problem solving and applied learning. It would be a pity if applied courses had too narrow a focus on specific employability, because it could mean a return to the secondary modern approach to vocational skills instead of courses that are designed to reflect curriculum for excellence values.

Another issue is how vocational courses are delivered. I have spoken to a number of schools who are concerned about the prospect of such courses being farmed out to colleges. The danger is that students whose needs most require curriculum reform will be exported. Vocational subjects that are outsourced must be vehicles not only for employability but for broader cognitive and personal growth. Outsourcing can only be properly addressed if adequate continuing professional development is available for teachers, within the curriculum for excellence framework, as part of school development plans and with flexibility for head teachers.

Unlike in other areas of the curriculum, there is limited progression in vocational or—as I prefer to call them—applied studies. It seems that, in some areas, the SQA has been a little tardy in approving the courses being offered in schools. That runs the risk of incoherence, low prestige and diminished

impact, and it is not good for young people whose levels of achievement might exclude them from the academic route through school into work. Further, if the system diminishes the perceived value of applied courses, it will do nothing to improve the self-esteem and sense of achievement of pupils who choose to take them up, nor will it be compatible with a more strategic use of applied or vocational studies that are aimed at improving engagement and achievement. In that regard, there are still some serious gaps in the curriculum for excellence.

While the focus is on improving the experiences of and outcomes for pupils in mainstream education, there is a disappointing lack of consideration of the needs of those pupils who, for a variety of reasons, are being excluded or are on the point of being excluded from mainstream education. The curriculum for excellence marginalises the legitimate needs and expectations of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties who are substantially overlooked by the whole framework. If they are to be properly supported and educated, the curriculum for excellence must take meaningful account of them. They, and the teaching staff who support them, have a right to benefit from the objectives in a clear way that acknowledges the challenges that they face and the fact that attainment for those children cannot always be measured simply in terms of examination results or presentation for examinations.

Elizabeth Smith: The member makes an interesting point, but I should have thought that the opposite was the case—that in the curriculum for excellence there will be more focus on some children who have not been particularly engaged in the existing system. One of the underlying principles of the curriculum for excellence is that it focuses on individual needs—the whole process is built on that. That approach will bring greater self-discipline.

Hugh O'Donnell: I agree with the point that the member makes about the mainstream education system. My concern relates to children who have been excluded from mainstream education, as none of the current outcomes focuses entirely on them.

Members, including Elizabeth Smith, have raised assessment and attainment. Discrete assessment has always been a part of good educational practice and is to be welcomed, if progress is to be monitored. However, like other members, I have the sense that we have become too much inclined continually to measure the pig, rather than to feed it. We need to change our approach. To stay with that Yorkshire analogy, we do not take sufficient account of the fact that not all pigs are the same size or have the same

access to resources. We are not measuring like with like. We should measure progress from the point at which schools and individuals start, because all of them deal with a variety of social and extraneous circumstances. The current approach to assessment is unfair and produces distorted figures and tables that the media have great fun turning into league tables. I am pleased that we attempted to get rid of those.

There is no doubt that the new curriculum will have an impact on existing assessment structures. Since 2002, the assessment is for learning programme has supported professional practice in assessment, with better-quality assurance for teachers' judgments about pupils' learning and progress. When can we expect to know what steps the Scottish Government will take to ensure that the AIFL principles continue to be strengthened? When will assessment guidance and existing mechanisms of support be reviewed, without their becoming the dreaded league tables?

We need much better recognition of wider achievements beyond national qualifications, without creating additional formal assessment and workload pressures. I was pleased to hear about the proposed baccalaureates, but I agree with what Elizabeth Smith had to say about the amount of stuff that we are trying to cram into the day. The Government could do worse than look at North Lanarkshire's diploma, which school pupils achieve by contributing to a range of activities, many of which are non-academic and not directly related to the curriculum but give the children a strong sense of attainment.

There are still many outstanding issues, and the Government still has a long way to go before it convinces us that it will deliver the curriculum for excellence on time, with detailed guidelines on how it expects the professionals to deliver it.

15:13

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am delighted that we are debating the curriculum for excellence, to which the Government is fully committed. As a previous principal teacher of guidance, I have stated before that, with the curriculum for excellence, we may at last ensure that all teachers are involved in teaching children, rather than teaching subjects. That must be a step forward for Scottish education, because in the past the divide between primary and secondary education, in particular, has been obvious.

Because the purpose of the curriculum for excellence is to help prepare all young people in Scotland to take their place in a modern society and economy, we must assess whether its values and principles measure up to delivering that. I am delighted that there will be coherence in the

curriculum between three and 18 years, irrespective of the setting. However, achieving that is a major challenge, given that there are some large schools in cities and many small schools in other parts of the country, whose limited number of staff have to deliver as broad an education as possible. That is always a problem, especially in rural areas. The solution is not to give head teachers more power, but to cluster schools, if necessary, to share skills and to use modern technology to allow pupils to access the information that they need for particular courses.

To create the appropriate pace and challenge for every child, we must look carefully at how to develop the curriculum. If the intention is to have flexibility and change the traditional subject-based curriculum, work must now be undertaken to ensure that the qualities, ideas and principles of the new curriculum are embedded in the teaching profession first of all. The curriculum for excellence is a big change—it has been described as the most fundamental in Scottish education—and we are talking about a generational change. We should ensure that we audit carefully how far people at the chalk face are involved in developing the principles of the new curriculum.

When Alison Coull gave evidence to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee, she said:

"There has been debate on values and principles, but people have been used to receiving a detailed guidance pack quickly, whereas the programme is not of that sort. We thought that it was important that people should have the values and principles firmly embedded before we produced the draft outcomes and experiences, so that they were considered in the context of the values and principles."—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 27 February 2008; c 655.]

Those are wise words. The problem is that although that is a good theory, teachers' daily business is to ensure that they prepare students and pupils to achieve current requirements.

Hugh O'Donnell called for more CPD for teachers and that is important. However, so is the way in which it is focused—training must be more than just seminars from HMIE. There should be much more time in school for different departments to debate how they will handle the changes.

I offer a further quote to back up my concerns, this time from Brian Cooklin of the Headteachers Association of Scotland. When talking about whether teaching methods would have to change under the new curriculum, he said:

"There is a credibility gap between the talk about high-sounding principles and what happens on the ground. For us, the issue is bridging that gap."—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 5 March 2008; c 739.]

Cross-curricular and interdisciplinary work is a rich vein to explore and teachers are coming up with many extremely innovative ideas. They realise that their subject could contribute one aspect, another subject could contribute another and the various aspects could be integrated. That is a major challenge for teachers who are used to working within subjects and it will not be met satisfactorily in just a year or two.

The Government has inherited the task of developing the curriculum for excellence and making it practical. We all have to take a reality check and accept that we need to audit how schools on the ground are getting on with the values and principles before we change the exam system. We must be very careful about that.

Let us consider an issue that shows the obvious need for a cross-curricular approach. It has been announced that Scottish history will become a compulsory part of history exams at the top level. Ensuring that a broad sweep can be taught will require a lot of work. As was mentioned, we have debated the matter before, and that highlighted the problem of getting a wider grasp of a subject and enabling teachers, especially those who are not history teachers, to deliver that approach. I ask that we find ways to provide the material to allow the necessary debate to take place in schools soon.

I have talked to teachers in large and small schools in my region and it is clear that they want the security of knowing that the values and principles are in place before major changes in assessment come along.

15:19

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in this afternoon's debate, in which I am sure there will be a large degree of consensus. However, I hope that members will take the opportunity to raise their legitimate concerns about the implementation of the curriculum for excellence.

It has been broadly recognised that the curriculum in Scotland must become more child-centred and less focused on the structures, systems and bureaucracies that litter the educational landscape. The curriculum for excellence represents the type of decluttering that I am more than happy to support.

As members have already pointed out, over the past few weeks, the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee has been taking evidence on the curriculum for excellence, and we have found almost universal support for the underlying principles of this approach to reforming and developing the curriculum. I point out that my comments are not the committee's views, but my

own personal reflections on the evidence that we have taken.

Although it is true that concerns have been raised, some of which I will highlight later, the evidence that we have received suggests that there is a clear appetite and enthusiasm for a different approach to learning in Scotland. One of the driving forces in the development of the curriculum for excellence was the desire to ensure that education is more focused on the needs and aspirations of children and young people. David Cameron told the committee:

"teachers have been frustrated in recent years by the bureaucratic demands and burdens that have been placed on them"

and

"have spent more time ticking boxes than discussing how to establish concepts and understandings."

We will all agree that our teachers should spend more time teaching and less time assessing. However, that has led to concerns about maintaining standards in the curriculum for excellence. Indeed, one witness said that unless we are careful, the curriculum for excellence could become akin to the emperor's new clothes, with no one having the courage to ask for clarity about the real meaning of the term.

David Cameron nicely answered that very point when he said:

"This situation is like jazz: it can be freeform but there has to be a theme and people must have the capacity to improvise and be creative around that theme. However, the theme has to be the entitlement of children and young people in Scotland and it has to address the social needs of the nation."—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 5 March 2008; c 708, 715-16.]

At its best, the curriculum for excellence offers teachers, schools and educational authorities not only the scope for flexibility, responsiveness and creativity but a clear, unambiguous and agreed set of principles.

I am pleased that North Lanarkshire Council is leading the way in developing and implementing curriculum for excellence. The recent OECD report highlighted the good practice that is taking place in a number of our high schools in developing in-house vocational education.

Fiona Hyslop: I am sure that the member will be pleased to learn that I have visited Cardinal Newman high school. In response to her—and, to some extent, to Hugh O'Donnell's point about vocational experiences—I say that schools do not need to outsource vocational education. North Lanarkshire's approach well demonstrates the important lesson in the OECD report that vocational education must be available within schools to ensure that it is not exclusive but is experienced by everyone.

Karen Whitefield: I was delighted that the cabinet secretary visited North Lanarkshire; indeed, the same day, she visited St Margaret's high school in my constituency. Thanks to her intervention, I do not need to make the rest of my point about developing in-house vocational education.

North Lanarkshire Council has also been at the cutting edge of development of co-operative learning, which has been imported from the Durham region of Canada. Since its introduction 10 years ago, that approach—which focuses on active learning and children working in pairs and seeks to combine the benefits of team working with personal education achievement—has led to immense improvements in educational achievements. In Canada, it has also reduced behavioural problems in schools, and I am pleased to say that North Lanarkshire is already seeing its benefits. Indeed, it has invested heavily in training more than 4,500 teachers in co-operative learning and is now training staff from other parts of Scotland.

Although during our evidence taking individuals and agencies welcomed the values underpinning the curriculum for excellence, a number of them also raised concerns, mainly in relation to the national assessment framework. Although I note the minister's comments on that issue, I point out that, even where there was disagreement about how certain matters—for example, the future of standard grades—should be progressed, there was common concern about the clarity of the Government's position on assessment, particularly in secondary education.

I have some sympathy with those who feel that we should completely revise our assessment system between S1 and S3. Although the current system delivers for those with an academic bent, it fails those who might want to pursue a vocational path within our education system. However, it is also worth noting the evidence of Larry Flanagan of the Educational Institute of Scotland, who said:

"Teachers have a real difficulty: they are thinking that we are going to move away from that sort of agenda to a curriculum for excellence, which will bring flexibility, creativity and innovation, but the same people who are saying that they want them to do that are still measuring the performance of schools using basic attainment figures."—*[Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee, 5 March 2008; c 728.]*

The EIS favours the retention of standard grades whereas others wish to move away from them, but all the organisations that gave evidence to the committee seek greater clarity from the Government on the future of standard grades, highs and intermediate 1 and 2 qualifications.

Although I accept that the minister is committed to progressing the curriculum for excellence, I

hope that she will take into account the concerns of people who have given evidence to committee and that she will provide the clarity of purpose and the support structures and resources that they so desperately crave.

15:25

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): Scotland has a long and proud history in education. Its Education Act 1696 heralded the first national system of education in the world and is a fine example of what an independent nation can do and of how an independent Scotland can lead the world in education.

However, we must be honest and admit that our education system has suffered a bit over the years. Sometimes it has raced ahead, whereas at other times it has been dragged back. Since May 2007, it has, of course, raced ahead, gathering an incredible spirit of adventure.

Wendy Alexander might believe that she has done well in her first year in opposition, but it is certain that the SNP Government has done well in power. There has been some good movement in Scottish education this past year. After all, we recently repealed the graduate endowment learning tax, thereby opening up opportunities for pupils who are finishing their schooling. I know that the Government has been working to deliver on its election promises in education, and I am sure that the whole Parliament will welcome the excellent advances that Scotland's Government has made.

Last year's change of Government and the spirit of optimism that has reinvigorated Scotland have offered us an opportunity. We have an opportunity to refresh and renew Scottish education, and to examine the basics of education to ensure that they are the appropriate elemental building blocks that will serve well individual students and society as a whole.

The building blocks that are enshrined in the curriculum for excellence must create solid foundations in the pre-school years, followed by the layering of primary school, the reaching of secondary education, the dreaming spires of tertiary education and—dare I say it—the penthouse suite of learning for the sake of learning all the way through life. That is the task that this Parliament faces—we have four years to create the best education system in the world.

I know that George Foulkes will say that we are doing this deliberately and that making Scotland a better place is a dastardly, underhand nationalist trick. I will let members into a secret: we are doing it deliberately. We are building a better country, so we will build a better education system to make that country a better-educated country.

Members might have noticed that a consultation on an early years strategy was launched yesterday. I had feared that the First Minister might head for a shot on the swings, but he successfully kept his swings for the opinion polls, as the weekend papers showed.

The early years strategy has been a long time coming. Shockingly, Michael Forsyth was the most recent minister to deliver an early years strategy, even though Labour ministers kept promising one for 10 years. That was typical of Labour leaders, who are all talk and no action.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): The member is extremely confident about her party's early years strategy, but does she not think that it is regrettable that in Edinburgh and Aberdeen nurseries are being closed by councils in which her colleagues are in power?

Christina McKelvie: That is another example of talk without action and scaremongering. Labour members need to open their ears and listen.

The early years strategy will help us to develop the framework that will give young children the skills that they will need to learn and grow. I am talking about proper skills that are needed and valued in Scotland's economy. I am bemused by those who say that we must force Scotland's businesses to take on apprentices. We do not live in a command economy. If a business does not have a place for an apprentice, it does not have a place, and no apprenticeships bill will ever change that.

We will serve Scotland's people better if we tailor the education system to their needs and to the needs of Scotland. Every school in the country should be a school of ambition and every pupil in the country should have the opportunity to progress. The curriculum for excellence will allow that to happen.

Every school should deliver an excellent curriculum and every teacher deserves the support of the curriculum for excellence. That is why—unsurprisingly—I support the actions of this Government.

The future of Scottish education lies in delivering on SNP promises. We will take the padding out of the system and give teachers, pupils and parents the room to improve the educational experience. We will simplify and streamline the qualifications system, introduce the baccalaureate, bring about parity of esteem between academic and vocational subjects and remove ring fencing, so that councils no longer need to tick boxes but can do what is needed. We need to give Scotland's teachers the time and space to teach and Scotland's pupils the time and space to learn. We will set an agenda that politicians cannot control. That is right for Scotland. We will bring Scottish history and culture

into the mix. It is ridiculous that we are the only country in Europe that does not teach its own history. We should let our young people have the confidence that comes from knowing that they are as good as everybody else.

The curriculum for excellence needs a Government that believes in excellence; one that believes in the ability of teachers to deliver education and that of pupils to soak it up. Thank goodness we have such a Government now. We have a Government that is listening, moving ahead and acting in Scotland's best interests. When we come to 2011 and look back on a successful referendum—aye, it's coming yet—we will see the abolition of prescriptions, the abolition of the graduate endowment, the saving of hospitals, the abolition of council tax, and so on. I want to see an excellent education system among those achievements and I believe that we will.

15:31

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): First, I apologise for missing some of the opening speeches. I was in the Parliament's education unit talking to pupils from Lenzie academy, who are now sitting behind me in the public gallery. By happy accident, I am making my speech while they are with us. I hope that it does not put them off.

I am delighted to be taking part in the debate on the curriculum for excellence. When I spoke to the pupils earlier, they asked me what the main difference between Labour and the SNP is. They have just heard what the SNP is like; I hope that I will educate them on what Labour is like.

Continuing and increasing funding for the education of Scotland's children is vital if Scotland is to address the future skills that it needs and if we are to grow our economy in the way that we all wish it to grow. It is well known that additional investment in education will result in benefits not only for the children of Scotland but for Scotland as a whole. As is said often, a good education is a road out of poverty. By enlarging the skills base and increasing job creation, such investment will have a knock-on effect on the health of the nation and its economy. It will also have an effect on crime and disorder.

Since the creation of the Scottish Parliament, education has been considered in great detail. We have looked at how to improve, declutter—that terrible word—and introduce flexibility into the curriculum. Labour launched a national debate on education in the first session of the Scottish Parliament, from which came the curriculum for excellence and the schools of ambition initiative. At that time, we on this side of the chamber showed leadership in seeking to examine

education in greater depth to find out what was working and what was not, and in seeking to design an education system that would equip our young people for the demands that living in the 21st century places upon them.

The thrust of the initiative was not only to prepare children and young people for life at school and college or university, but to prepare them for life. We wanted Scotland's youngsters to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to their economy and country. I am afraid to say that the SNP has shown precious little leadership on the issue. The SNP owes it to the children of Scotland to ensure that it provides the funding that will ensure the implementation of the curriculum for excellence as it was set out originally and within the timescales that were planned.

Without proper funding for education, how will the SNP achieve the goals that Labour set for the curriculum for excellence? In announcing its plans, the SNP Administration leaves more questions unanswered than ever before. As I said, the curriculum for excellence was developed to release the full potential of children and young people and not only to prepare them for exams.

Perhaps the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning could try this little test. What will the future shape of the secondary curriculum look like? What role will testing play?

Fiona Hyslop: I, too, welcome the pupils of Lenzie academy. I am unsure whether David Whitton was in the chamber for my opening speech. If he had been here, he would have heard me say that, in the next couple of weeks, I will make an announcement on the qualifications system. It is important that qualifications follow the curriculum; they should not lead it. I acknowledge the previous Government's emphasis on that.

David Whitton: I am sorry—I heard part of the cabinet secretary's speech, but not all of it. I will read it in the *Official Report*.

I have a couple of other questions. What is the Government doing to involve parents and inform them about what is going on? What role do parents think basic skills should play in the curriculum? If the cabinet secretary is telling me that she will give me answers to those questions, I will listen with interest. However, it is unbelievable that the SNP plans to implement a new education curriculum that has no mention of basic functional literacy. We in the Labour Party believe that basic functional literacy cannot be ignored and should be included in any change to the curriculum. Members must be aware of cases in which children have left primary school unable to read and write. The schools of ambition programme and the curriculum for excellence were developed

to include basic functional literacy at their core. I feel strongly that the SNP is letting down many children by ignoring that.

Fiona Hyslop: I encourage the member to read the draft outcomes in literacy. Under the curriculum for excellence, literacy and numeracy will for the first time be embedded throughout the curriculum in all subjects. Does the member welcome that and does he have any views on the draft outcomes in literacy, which have been published?

David Whitton: Of course I welcome the fact that basic numeracy and literacy will be developed in the way that the cabinet secretary says they will. Anybody would.

I turn to the schools of ambition programme, although I know that we will debate it further later this week. In 2005, St Ninian's high school in Kirkintilloch, which is in my constituency of Strathkelvin and Bearsden, was awarded an extra £100,000 a year through the initiative. The school invested the money in extending its expertise in modern languages through the use of information technology. That additional investment is now coming to an end, although its benefits can already be seen—St Ninian's recently received one of the best reports from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education for a secondary school: three "excellent", 10 "very good" and three "good" gradings. The teachers and pupils of the school should all be congratulated for that. Christina McKelvie said that every school should be a school of ambition, which I support, but I do not understand how we will achieve that by closing down the ones that are schools of ambition and taking away their support.

Scotland was once famed the world over for the education system that it provided for its young people, but I am not sure that we could make the same boast today, while so many of our youngsters still leave school unable to read or write properly. I welcome the cabinet secretary's comments about urgent action to address that problem. Vocational education must be made cool again for today's teenagers. Plumbers should be the new pop stars—they can certainly make the same kind of money as pop stars do. A trade apprenticeship should once again become a valued goal and something that parents encourage their children to consider.

A great deal was done in the first two sessions of Parliament to assist schools to educate and children to learn, but the work is not yet complete. If the curriculum for excellence is to be a success, it needs to be implemented with sufficient funding and within the originally planned timescales. The time for action and investment is now.

15:38

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): When I was first faced with the curriculum for excellence, I felt genuine excitement about the possibilities. I still do, but there is a long way to go. Some of my concerns stem from the fact that we do not yet have an up-front commitment to the expressive arts or a recognition of what they can do for education.

At present, 30 per cent of the curriculum is to be left open for exploitation in any way that schools like. However, if the shape of the recommended hours in the curriculum is anything to go by, there is a lack of commitment to the creative and the aesthetic, and even to physical education. The latest information that I have, which is from the Scottish Parliament information centre, is that the suggestion is that of the 1,200 committed hours for a year, there should be just 80 hours for creative and aesthetic activities and just 80 hours for physical education. That message from the overall shape of the curriculum suggests that we still have not made an up-front commitment to those activities.

Christina McKelvie talked about revolutionising education in the next four years. I do not want to sound too depressing, but I can remember the EIS coming up with a summary of 80 so-called fundamental changes that had been inflicted on Scottish teachers and the educational system during a 10-year period. Many of those changes have still not fully kicked in. Education goes through long processes of gradual change. Many changes can be achieved only through full training of teachers and changes in the curriculum in the colleges of education. That takes time.

I come back now to a favourite subject—outdoor education, to which I have been dedicated for a long time. As I have said to Parliament and to successive Executives, outdoor education in the state education sector has declined from a great high during the 1970s and 1980s almost to an all-time low. That has happened because of a variety of circumstances, including the development of a risk-averse society, a lack of funding and training for teachers, and the loss of a core group of experienced teachers who made great progress during the 1970s and 1980s.

Responsible citizens, effective contributors, successful learners, and confident individuals—outdoor education contributes to all four of those categories, but the arts, too, can contribute to all four. I would be impressed if, during a debate on education, we had the minister responsible for the arts sitting in the chamber with us.

In a document called “Arts Education—a Lifelong Learning Strategy 2004-09”, the Scottish Arts Council stated:

“The Scottish Arts Council believes that arts and creativity have the power to bring joy, change lives, provoke thought and action and give a confident voice and means of expression to everyone, and therefore should be open and available to all. We also believe that arts and creativity are, or should be, inextricably bound up with the same principles and practice which drive education in its widest sense.”

That is a core paragraph from the document.

This new Government has already withdrawn funding for cultural co-ordinators, but I hope that it will continue funding creative links officers. When the minister sums up, I would like to know what the Government’s commitment is to making progress on work that has already been done and on the impetus that was provided by cultural co-ordinators.

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

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

Robin Harper: Yes, I will.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, Mr Purvis.

Jeremy Purvis: Does Robin Harper share my concern that a joint policy statement from the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities does not mention outdoor education or a strategy on play? That is not the best start, and it will not lead us in the direction that he and I both want for an early years strategy.

Robin Harper: I share Jeremy Purvis’s concern. I am extremely concerned about the lack of any mention of play or outdoor education.

Maureen Watt: Will the member take an intervention?

Robin Harper: I am in my last minute and have already eaten into it by taking the previous intervention. I am sure that the minister will be able to comment when she sums up.

Before I finish, I want to mention the Chicago experience. For seven years, the Scottish Arts Council has been following the progress of an innovative arts and education project in schools in Chicago. The project originally set out to reduce truancy by bringing artists into schools to work with inner-city school pupils, who suffer markedly high levels of economic and social deprivation. The early success of the project led to an investigative study of the outcomes of embedding the arts more radically into learning and teaching. The collaboration of teachers and artists from all disciplines in the planning and delivery of learning across the curriculum is now well established in

several Chicago schools. I invite the cabinet secretary or the minister to respond to that.

15:44

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): No one so far has suggested that we can underestimate the importance of getting right the curriculum in our education system from age three to age 18. Getting it right is essential because the impact of the curriculum for excellence will be generational—it will have an impact for many years to come. I very much welcome the fact that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning is willing to have an open debate, in which all stakeholders will have an opportunity to contribute to the curriculum for excellence. I agree with her that our education system had become far too focused on providing children with the skills to pass exams, rather than on equipping them with the skills that they need for life. The curriculum for excellence should be about not only preparing children and equipping them with the skills for passing exams but about ensuring that they have the knowledge and skills for life and work in the future.

The cabinet secretary will know that setting out the framework for the curriculum for excellence will, in itself, not deliver the types of outcomes that she would like children to achieve through our education system. The key to ensuring that the curriculum for excellence delivers what it is intended to deliver is to ensure that we have clear focused outcomes against which we can measure the process. Some members have criticised the fact that the outcomes are currently only in draft form, but I hope that they will take the opportunity to say what they would like to be added to the outcomes. Now is the time for those who are interested in outcomes to make known their views rather than criticise the fact that the outcomes are merely in draft form at the moment.

Hugh O'Donnell: One criticism I have in relation to the outcomes is that if people other than professionals are to make a contribution, the language that is used might be clearer. I hesitate to do this, and I thank the member for his time, but I will quote from the outcomes, which state:

"Having investigated the practical impact of inaccuracy and error, I can use my knowledge of tolerance when choosing the required degree of accuracy to make real life calculations."

That presents a difficulty with engagement for large numbers of us, not least me.

Michael Matheson: Mr O'Donnell assumed that I was giving him more time than I had intended. I recognise that, at present, some of the draft outcomes would not achieve a crystal mark. I have no doubt that the minister is waiting for the

member's submission on the outcomes, and to hear his views on that issue.

Elizabeth Smith made a thoughtful contribution to the debate. I agree with her that the curriculum should value all pupils, irrespective of their academic ability. The curriculum for excellence is a major step forward in ensuring that we have a system that allows that to happen. However, I also agree that we should ensure that there is sufficient flexibility within the educational structures to ensure that they can deliver for pupils of different levels of achievement.

On flexibility, unlike Rob Gibson, with his professional background, I am not an educationist, but I am conscious that the different approaches that different schools will be able to undertake, and which even different classes at the same school will be able to undertake, will present a major challenge for many people in the profession. We need to provide the right type of support, guidance and professional development to the teaching profession in order to ensure that that is effective. I have some concerns that schools that are doing well will be in close proximity to schools that are not doing well. We must ensure that that does not happen or that it does not become more marked with increasing flexibility. It is therefore important that we can measure or audit how schools are performing, and that we share experience, in order to encourage good practice throughout the sector.

On an issue that Robin Harper raised, I am passionate about the role that sport and outdoor education can play in our education system. I am aware that a working group chaired by Maureen Watt is examining the greater role that outdoor education can play. If teachers are to have the flexibility and skills to shape and deliver courses to include all pupils, sport and outdoor education can play an important part, if they are used in the right way. There is a culture that is not currently in favour of outdoor education within the system. I would like more to be done on that issue, so that teachers can have the confidence to use outdoor education in delivering the curriculum for excellence.

I will finish on an issue that is of personal interest to me—early years education. If parents are to understand the continuum of education from three to 18, parents of children at the early years stage need to be better informed of what the outcomes from early years education should be.

15:51

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): There are four values that underpin the curriculum for excellence: justice, compassion, integrity and, last but not least, wisdom. It is a pity that Christina

McKelvie will not benefit from the curriculum for excellence. David Whitton should not despair about literacy, however—she read the speech that had been prepared for her very well.

I will refer to the comments that the minister made. I intervened because of a specific issue concerning the curriculum for excellence. The minister spoke about developing the baccalaureate, and she referred to the advanced higher. The minister should be aware of the growing concerns in Scottish education about the impact that the cuts are having on delivery. The minister is ill informed, and she was being unfair when she said that such concerns are Labour scaremongering. In my council area, the Scottish National Party-led administration of Renfrewshire Council is making extreme cuts to education.

Ms Hyslop does not need to listen to the Labour Party. Last night's annual general meeting of Renfrewshire EIS unanimously passed a resolution saying that the meeting

"condemns Renfrewshire Council's budget for 2008 as a threat to education, and to teaching jobs and instructs the secretary to inform the Director of Education and Leisure of the meeting's view of the budget".

Teachers are worried about what is happening with education on the ground. That is profoundly worrying at a time when we are introducing what I believe is a visionary and aspirational measure. In some respects, it does require a major pedagogical, pedagogical, pedagogical shift for some teachers. At least I try hard words. Teachers will have to make a fundamental shift in their thinking. The curriculum will mean having more personalisation and choice, and it requires more depth. That needs resources. Resources are fundamental to the process, but resources are being cut. The curriculum for excellence will not work without adequate resources in schools, not least information and communications technology resources, which many schools do not have.

Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): Given the member's concern about resources, will he condemn North Ayrshire Council, which is making the largest education cut in Scotland, at £118 million, or 3 per cent of the education budget? Will he also commend Perth and Kinross Council, which has the highest increase for education, at £140 million, or 16.8 per cent of its education budget?

Hugh Henry: Keith Brown touches on a point that is relevant across Scotland. There might be one or two exceptions, but hidden behind the council tax freeze are real worries about cuts in services and diminution of quality. Teachers and parents are now beginning to feel the practical impact of that. We need to put in the resources to make the curriculum work.

Member after member today has rightly pointed to current weaknesses. Teachers are committed to the curriculum for excellence—they say that it is in many respects what they have always tried to do. However, they are also saying that, at the moment, the situation is woolly and open to interpretation. How do we measure success? There is an issue about measurement and testing. Teachers are worried that while they are bringing in the curriculum for excellence, they must still cope with the five-to-14 curriculum. The curriculum for excellence is starting to permeate. It is also addressing the four capacities and it is encouraging teachers to think more, but there are worries about the outcomes and the practical implications, not because teachers are opposed to the curriculum for excellence or because they want to undermine it, but because they care genuinely about the quality of education and about their pupils. They cannot provide quality education if the Government withdraws funding, fails to ring fence properly and fails to protect teaching jobs throughout Scotland. I suspect that what we are seeing in Renfrewshire is but the thin end of the wedge, which we will see develop as the years progress.

We have a visionary and aspirational process, but the vision will not be realised and the aspirations will be thwarted if we do not support and fund the process fully. Ken Macintosh and others were right to say that the current Administration and minister need to face up to their individual and collective responsibilities.

15:56

Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP): I am not a member of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee, or a former teacher or an education expert. However, I sat on an education authority for 11 years and, for that reason, I am delighted that we are having this subject debate and that the chamber is being used more as a deliberating chamber than a debating chamber. As a new member of the Parliament, I have found that we tend to have fairly genuine openness and thoughtfulness in subject debates such as this one; perhaps they also reflect what the general public have in mind when they think about what parliamentary debates should be.

Regardless of the party to which we belong, we are all proud of our schools and our Scottish education in general, as well as being proud of the schools that we attended. I am particularly grateful to Tynecastle high school, which overlooks Tynecastle park, for turning me into a Hibernian supporter. The distinctive philosophy of our education system and long heritage of valuing learning as a nation are important to us all. Over the past 500 years, that commitment has been

second to none. I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for giving us the opportunity to discuss this issue.

This debate on the Scottish education system should, as far as possible, be open and based on free thought. Liz Smith's point that teaching needs to be decluttered has been echoed among all the different parties. That is at the heart of the Scottish Government's direction in education.

The greater emphasis on supporting vocational training, which many of us have supported for some time, is long overdue. The curriculum for excellence recognises that its four key priorities must be included and embedded in all the strands of teaching, not float in independently as a set of targets that are disembodied from what is being done on the ground.

The discussion on resources that we have just had is important. I came from local government, as did Hugh Henry, and I think that councils must have the discretion to take decisions themselves. There has been an increase of more than 16 per cent in Perth and Kinross Council's education budget, but there is a huge cut in North Ayrshire Council's education budget. We might condemn that. Perhaps Hugh Henry would have more credibility if he had condemned North Ayrshire Council and commended Perth and Kinross Council when he was going on about Renfrewshire Council. However, councils must have the discretion to take decisions themselves. That is what those councils have done. North Ayrshire Council must have a rationale—although I cannot think what it would be—for cutting its education budget more than anybody else has. The fact that it has the right to do so is a hallmark of the Scottish Government's approach to local government.

I do not think that the call to reimpose ring fencing will be echoed by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—it will certainly not be echoed by the people there whom I know.

Jeremy Purvis: I want to ask the member a question that I asked the Minister for Schools and Skills last week about reductions in investment in the area that I represent. Is the member saying that, given the local government settlement, no council has any excuse to reduce investment in education?

Keith Brown: I was trying to say that every council has every right to set its own education budget and that, perhaps, the defining difference between the Scottish Government and the previous Administration is that we recognise that local government has a distinctive part to play and has a right to do so. We might condemn or commend the decisions that councils make, but they have the right to make those decisions.

Ken Macintosh commended West Dunbartonshire Council. I always wonder why we never hear any mention of Clackmannanshire Council, which pioneered exactly the same scheme many years before West Dunbartonshire Council did. However, that was an SNP-controlled council, which might explain why it is never mentioned. During my time on Clackmannanshire Council, we introduced a new learning, leisure and education committee, which included pupils from each of the schools as well as parents, trade unionists and support staff. Again, that innovation did not last long under the Labour Party, which was unfortunate.

In talking about cross-cutting in teaching, I am reminded of a conversation that I had with a professor of English, who told me that far more original thought happened in the university cafe than at the individual study desks in the library. Subjects have never lived in separate cubicles, even if it can be convenient to divide them up in that way. Teaching flourishes most when ideas from one area can be drawn into another. Any schoolteacher can tell stories of being happily surprised by pupils who do that spontaneously.

Most of the lessons that we remember from our school days are the ones that were the result of an inspirational teacher—in those cases, it was not so much that we learned from the curriculum but that we drew inspiration and support from a particular teacher. Very good teachers are invaluable in the system.

I am glad that the Scottish Government acknowledges that Scotland's education must have a place for Scotland. This country has never been on the sidelines of the world except, perhaps, constitutionally, and it has led in fields from engineering and science to art and literature. However, especially in the teaching of history and culture, we are guilty of placing ourselves on the sidelines. During the recent debate on the teaching of Scottish history, I was astonished at the various ways in which the Opposition parties tried to justify not teaching Scottish history in our schools. No other country in the world would understand that debate.

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): What?

Keith Brown: I was there, and I was on the radio with Ken Macintosh later that night and heard him make the same arguments. I do not understand why people have this absolutely appalling cringe.

Ken Macintosh: Will the member give way?

Keith Brown: I am sorry, but I am in my last minute.

A pupil in Ireland covers the world greats, such as Shakespeare—the teaching of whom no one

would dispute, anywhere in the world—but, at the appropriate level, they focus on Yeats, Joyce or George Bernard Shaw. However, in Scotland, there has been an attitude of seeing Scottish—if it is seen at all—as meaning Scots and of not recognising our wider contribution. Robert Louis Stevenson's "Kidnapped" and "The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" are known by even many young children, but how many know of their Scottish origin? It could even be argued that Scotland gave the world Harry Potter, although, perhaps, one or two people might question the antecedents in that regard.

In history, too, it is easy to teach children about the Vikings at Lindisfarne but not Iona, or to teach lines of kings and wars with France, when Scotland's role was distinct and separate. When the Scottish Government made its announcement that history teaching in Scotland was to take the groundbreaking step of including the history of Scotland, the more hysterical critics were quick to reach for the "Braveheart" example. However, I want my children to know not only just how inaccurate "Braveheart" is, but what actually happened. I want them to be taught that, in 1745, Scots fought on both sides at Culloden, along with the English or even the French. I want them to learn that Scots fought under Joan of Arc; that our links with Poland go back for five centuries, not five years; and that, in 1919, troops were deployed in the streets to stop Scotland following Russia into communism. Above all, I want them to know that they live in a genuine country with 1,200 years of history that is as rich as any other and longer than most.

Reversing that kind of trend, along with the other changes in the curriculum for excellence, will need an attitudinal shift. I, for one, have no doubt that our teachers have the ability and our children have the potential.

16:03

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab):

Under the previous Executive, for the first time, a curriculum for excellence brought together a single curriculum for three to 18-year-olds. It clearly stated why we educate our children and how we intend to educate them. It was designed to ensure that young people develop literacy and numeracy skills and other essential skills and knowledge that they will need for work and life.

The Scottish Executive at the time set out a programme for development with a view to beginning the implementation in 2009-10. I reiterate that date—2009-10—because we are already in 2008.

I welcome what the cabinet secretary said about the drive for basic skills and I welcome the

commission for literacy that Labour has proposed, which will ensure that no child is left behind. As a Dundee-based MSP, however, I see the welcome cultural diversity in the city and therefore my additional concern is that children who speak English as their second language have not only literacy needs, but language needs. That issue needs to be addressed in the curriculum, in relation to not just Dundee, but Scotland as a whole.

There is growing concern about the direction in which the Government is taking education. The latest EIS briefing raises concerns about the

"lack of engagement with the profession as a whole and an increasingly top-down nature of the whole development programme".

That contradicts directly what the cabinet secretary said. The vision of the curriculum for excellence seems to be under threat and underresourced.

I await the coming announcements, as does everyone in the education establishment, and I hope that there will be improvements. However, it is undisputed by the teaching profession that the Government's pledge to reduce class sizes in P1 to P3 is not possible within the given budget. Only in areas in which there are falling school rolls will that be possible in anything like the near future. It goes against the trend in some areas in which the school rolls are rising.

I share the concern that lack of progress by the current Administration on education will mean that the implementation date for the curriculum for excellence will not be met. There is a need for leadership from the Government to ensure that meaningful progress is made—frankly, a change in rhetoric is not enough. As we have heard, pupils learn best in groups, and when the subjects are meaningful and link with other subjects. Although many pupils might have an interest in Scottish history, there are many other subjects, and it can be unhealthy to put such an emphasis on one subject. I speak as a former teacher of English who thoroughly enjoyed teaching Scottish literature in schools, even when I taught in Liverpool.

A curriculum for excellence offers the opportunity to develop resources and learning situations that cover more than one subject area. I commend Learning and Teaching Scotland for the materials and guidance that it has provided, but the EIS is asking for more leadership on how best all that can be facilitated. Teachers must be given the time and the opportunity to engage, and the developments need to be resourced.

Innovations such as glow and other technology give teachers opportunities to take ownership of the curriculum for excellence, and can give them

more freedom to teach in creative ways. Primary schools in Dundee are taking part in a pilot using hand-held Nintendo DS consoles to support interactive learning. Like all pilots, the scheme will need additional funding to mainstream the already encouraging results. The Government will neglect the children of Dundee and beyond if additional funding is not made available as part of the curriculum for excellence.

The recent OECD report outlined the need to build on the programme, and it cited the need for innovation in plans to deal with skills and attainment. However, that should not lead to excessive attainment measuring by local authorities and HMIE. This morning, I had the wonderful opportunity of visiting the newly opened and purpose-built Donaldson's college with Bill Kidd, a fellow member of the Equal Opportunities Committee. The school is examining, as are many others, how a curriculum for excellence can help to direct its learning and teaching, while incorporating the many examples of good practice that are already in evidence.

The advert for the television documentary that will be shown on Monday evening describes Donaldson's college as specialising in preparing young people for life in a hearing world. That sums up what the curriculum for excellence is about: preparing our young people for work and life beyond school. I urge members—to continue the advert—to watch the programme on BBC2 on Monday night, even if they cannot visit Donaldson's in person.

Decisions on the future of the curriculum for excellence are essential, and they need to be made as soon as possible. The shape of the secondary curriculum is still unclear, and until the questions that members have raised today are answered, it will be difficult to determine how levels of attainment are being raised. It will also be difficult to demonstrate how pupils will be supported to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. Teachers, parents and pupils in Scotland are waiting for leadership on that.

16:09

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Members often say in closing that a debate has been wide ranging. We have heard this afternoon about prescription charges, the referendum on independence and Vikings on Holy Island, so the debate has indeed been wide ranging. I noted Christina McKelvie using lots of little words and Hugh Henry trying to say a very long word lots of times.

I am pleased that the important process that the previous Government started is being continued

by the current Government. The cabinet secretary called for a campaign for the curriculum for excellence. I thank her for taking a cross-party approach that acknowledges that not all that was done in the previous eight years was bad. However, in taking evidence recently, the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee has heard nothing from a teacher representative, council or agency to suggest that a campaign for the principle of the curriculum for excellence is required. Rather, practical tools and resources need to be in place to ensure that the benefits are realised for pupils.

A new Government wants to repackage, rebadge and shape a policy in its own mould and with its own language. However, after the evidence that the committee heard from Alison Coull, who is the deputy director of the curriculum division of the Scottish Government's schools directorate, I was struck by the comments of Gordon Smith of the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland. He said:

"I agreed with 95 per cent of what I heard from the earlier witnesses, but I heard it in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007, and—from listening to Alison Coull—I will probably hear it in 2011."—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 5 March 2008; c 732.]

It is right to discuss the practicalities, as we need not rehearse the principle of the curriculum for excellence.

Ken Macintosh and Elizabeth Smith were right to ask the questions that teachers and some parents and pupils are asking. I refer only to some parents and pupils, because urgent improvement is needed in the practical matter of communication. On Friday, I met a member of a parent council. When I discussed with her the curriculum for excellence, it became apparent that although she was active in the school's running and had heard of the curriculum for excellence, she was not fully involved in the process. We have the newly constituted parent councils, which can be fully involved in the process. That would be a practical step forward. Local authorities could get in touch with each parent council to allow a full debate.

Fiona Hyslop: The member makes an important point. That is why I am pressing local authorities and headteachers to engage and show leadership as much with parents as with pupils. The member is right that parent councils provide an ideal opportunity for that and I will certainly take that message to directors of education.

Jeremy Purvis: I thank the cabinet secretary for her response. I hope that, when people see the *Official Report* and hear her remarks, parent councils will have much better involvement in the process.

Hugh O'Donnell: Will the member take a brief intervention?

Jeremy Purvis: I will take an intervention if it is constructive and helpful, but I am always wary of giving way to my party colleagues.

Hugh O'Donnell: I thank the member for accepting an intervention. Does he agree that one way forward in communicating with parents would be to make progress on developing the national forum that the Government promised?

Jeremy Purvis: I am happy to support that. I was slightly concerned about giving way, because I know that Hugh O'Donnell used to work for Donald Gorrie.

I was encouraged that Learning and Teaching Scotland had undertaken qualitative consultation with learners, but that was more to do with the process of changing qualifications and with the SQA consultation. We need to do more with learners. My colleague Hugh O'Donnell raised the critical issue of the perception of learning among young people and particularly among those for whom the formal school setting is not the best to encourage them and capture their imagination. Among those young people and others, types of learning are perceived as inferior or superior, so Liberal Democrats—and, I hope, others—will no longer describe vocational courses as purely vocational. All vocational courses are academic and all academic courses and qualifications allow people to develop vocations. It is about having applied academic learning opportunities in the curriculum for excellence. I hope that we will start to break down the previous prejudices about vocational and purely academic courses.

I have spoken about the curriculum for excellence to pupils in schools in my constituency. In 2005, I had a meeting with pupils from Peebles high school, after the initial public consultation on the curriculum for excellence had been completed, during which we talked about the curriculum for excellence and the qualifications changes. The skills for work courses to gain applied academic qualifications are among the exciting things that have been developing in schools. I was pleased but not surprised to read the positive evaluation report on the skills for work courses. A message from pupils is that courses should be made exciting. It does not matter whether it is a purely academic course or an applied academic course—we must have the right courses, led by the right teachers.

Questions arise about funding. Karen Whitefield and other members raised genuine concerns about the continuation of funding not only to secure skills for work courses, but to ensure that those courses, which are more expensive to deliver, will be available as part of the curriculum and actually delivered in schools.

The cabinet secretary appealed for a consensual approach in the debate. Christina McKelvie smashed that consensus. She sought to take credit for the Education Act 1696, which was passed by the old Scots Parliament. Of course, she did not point out that the school-in-every-parish approach that was taken by that Parliament involved charging fees for learning. However, we should not worry. There will be another education debate tomorrow, in which I am sure the SNP will say that the 1696 Scottish Government was a Labour Government.

David Whitton and other members are looking for a balanced approach. Witnesses who have given evidence to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee have highlighted a potentially unbalanced approach. We must be careful that there is not a fragmented approach to policy.

We still have no definition of what access means in the Government's policy of providing access to a nursery teacher for every child in Scotland; we still have no clear direction for promises that have been made about class sizes in primary schools; and heads of primary schools simply cannot plan properly as a result of the uncertainty that exists over that policy. There is still uncertainty about how pupils' transition from primary school to secondary school will be made and managed in the curriculum for excellence, and we need clarity on the Government's qualifications policy.

I hope that the minister will provide clarity on highers in the baccalaureates. Christine Carlin of the Scottish Government schools directorate said in evidence:

"We are still considering how the science and languages baccalaureates might be brought together. It could be that we take a different approach to the highers and advanced highers that young people already have and recognise them as a baccalaureate rather than adding something in, but we are still considering the detail of that."—[*Official Report, Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee*, 27 February 2008; c 684.]

The cabinet secretary seemed to give the impression that the baccalaureates will cluster and will not be new.

Balance, clarity and resources are all required so that we see the benefits of the curriculum for excellence that we all want to see.

16:18

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

It is always a pleasure to follow Jeremy Purvis, even if it seems that he has been taking lessons in fashion from Christopher Harvie. However, we will forgive him for that.

Jeremy Purvis: The Conservative vote in Peebles will be slashed if Murdo Fraser is insulting my rather dashing Robert Noble tweed suit.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Perhaps we can return to the subject of the debate.

Murdo Fraser: Certainly, Presiding Officer.

I agree with Mr Purvis that the debate has been generally consensual—

Hugh O'Donnell: Until Murdo Fraser spoke.

Murdo Fraser: Indeed. The debate has also been wide ranging. I am sorry that Christina McKelvie, who is no longer in the chamber, decided to break the consensus with a rather partisan speech. I can only imagine that she was making a pitch for early promotion to ministerial office at the next reshuffle. If I were sitting on the SNP front bench, I would be getting worried; I would watch my back.

As my colleague Elizabeth Smith said, the Conservatives warmly welcome the development of the curriculum for excellence. I have always believed that our current school system does well for the majority of our pupils. Of course, there are still problem areas in education, but we should not be afraid to celebrate the success that has been achieved. However, two groups are being let down by the current system. First, the top-performing 10 per cent or so of students are simply not being stretched enough. Elizabeth Smith made the point that, for many pupils, sixth form is not being properly utilised. Secondly, and more worrying, the bottom 20 per cent or so of achievers are too often being left behind. Earlier this week, we saw statistics that show that one in 10 Scottish school leavers goes straight into unemployment. Those youngsters are simply being failed by the current school system and that is perhaps the most serious problem in Scottish education.

The curriculum for excellence is an opportunity to address some of those problems. We welcome the recognition that education is about more than simply passing exams, and that the system needs greater flexibility, needs to produce well-rounded individuals and needs to involve the wider community.

The need for greater flexibility was recognised in the OECD report to which the cabinet secretary and various members have referred. We have a tremendous resource in our teaching profession and Government needs to trust our teachers and head teachers more than it has in the past. The Scottish Conservatives want to see greater local decision making. I heard from one director of education on Friday about his ambition for top-performing students to start certified courses at least a year early. It is essential that schools have the flexibility to permit that.

We also need to expand vocational education—an issue that the Scottish Conservatives have

raised regularly for many years. That will require greater flexibility than we have at present. The director of education to whom I referred also raised concerns about the provision of core subjects, especially in S3 and S4, not allowing sufficient time in the school week for a proper focus on other areas such as vocational education. To develop a curriculum that is truly based around the individuality of the child will require much greater local flexibility and decision making than before.

The OECD report seeks to encourage vocational education. It says:

“International experience suggests that Scotland would gain from a bolder, but also broader approach to vocational studies in schools than it has so far demonstrated.”

I hope that the cabinet secretary takes that message on board.

Science teaching in schools was raised with me last week by members of the BioIndustry Association, which met members from various parties. Many of our successful industries in Scotland—not least bioscience—require a constant stream of quality science graduates and PhD students. Sadly, too few youngsters in our schools are being encouraged to take science subjects. In some schools, timetabling problems and a lack of resources mean that pupils cannot choose to take three science subjects to higher level. Other schools have difficulty in recruiting science teachers. If we are serious about developing Scotland's economy, the question of science in our schools—indeed, in higher education in Scotland—must be addressed.

Hugh Henry: Murdo Fraser makes an important point about not only the teaching of science, but the need for science teachers. Will he join me in expressing concern that many teachers who complete their probation fail to get jobs and that there seems to be a lack of urgency in the Administration about getting those teachers into jobs?

Murdo Fraser: Yes. Hugh Henry is right to raise that issue, which is one that I have raised on previous occasions. Newly qualified teachers sometimes have great difficulty in finding employment. The danger is that they will find employment in other sectors and will not return to teaching, despite the huge investment that the state has made in them by providing training and the huge investment that they have made themselves. It is a serious issue.

We must also reconsider our current exam structure—Elizabeth Smith and other members referred to that. The introduction of the new curriculum provides an opportunity to assess the qualifications that are currently on offer and wonder whether they are still fit for purpose. We

especially need to look at what is happening in sixth form. In many schools there is concern about the lack of availability of advanced highers in certain subjects because of a lack of resources. Hugh Henry raised that issue earlier in an intervention on the cabinet secretary, who was too hasty in seeking to brush it aside.

I welcome what the cabinet secretary said about a review of exams and I look forward to her announcement about how the Government intends to proceed. I agree with what she said about ending the two-term dash for highers and about encouraging youngsters to start studying for the higher qualifications earlier, where appropriate. I will be interested to see what the Government proposes about the baccalaureates, although I wonder why it would be right to have baccalaureates in science and languages but not in other subjects.

Fiona Hyslop: The member has made the case himself for encouraging more people to take science. It is about incentivising the study of more science subjects for the reasons that he mentioned in his speech.

Murdo Fraser: I hear what the cabinet secretary says, but that does not prevent baccalaureates from being introduced in other subjects, such as social science, geography, history or whatever. I hope that the cabinet secretary's mind is not closed on that point.

The curriculum for excellence offers a real opportunity to improve Scotland's education system. Encouraging greater flexibility in local decision making should ensure that our education system is more tailored to the needs of Scotland's young people. In particular, we should not lose this opportunity to ensure that Scotland's education is improved for those who are currently being failed by the system.

16: 26

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to debate the curriculum for excellence. This is one of those rare occasions where change is being supported across political parties, professional groups and the range of interested parties. There has been consensus in the chamber this afternoon, with one notable exception.

Following the conclusion of the national debate on education, the curriculum for excellence was developed with consensus. It sought to address a number of aims, central to which was the decluttering of the curriculum. Many felt that there was no depth or substance to what was being taught and that everything was focused on a mass of exams that were not always well understood.

The curriculum for excellence is also about refocusing education on preparing children and young people for life after school, as well as improving attainment while they are at school. A further important theme will be that of re-engaging and remotivating young people. Young people should be able to value education, not just put up with it until they are able to leave school. If they value education, young people are more likely to follow the path of lifelong learning that is necessary for their personal development and their economic prospects; there is likely to be more need to retrain or upskill for work.

So why is a small cloud hanging over today's debate? My colleague Ken Macintosh and others have identified the concern that the curriculum for excellence's progress might be stalling. It is absolutely right that such a fundamental change should not be rushed, but people must believe that there is momentum and that progress is being made.

The Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee has taken evidence from several witnesses from a range of interests to update us on progress. Although those who are at the centre of the change—Scottish Government officials, HMIE and Learning and Teaching Scotland—were very clear about what progress had been made and where we are heading, it was noticeable that other witnesses were not quite so clear. I was concerned that some pivotal players, such as teachers, were clearly at different stages. It was acknowledged that, while primary teachers are relatively well involved, the situation is far less clear for the majority of secondary school teachers. Obviously, that reflects the role that those teachers play already, because primary school teachers already provide a more general curriculum, whereas secondary school teachers are bound by their subjects. So a question arises about training and professional development. I would appreciate it if the minister could expand on how initial teacher training is being addressed in the context of the curriculum for excellence.

The teachers agreement introduced a major improvement in the organisation of on-going professional development for teachers. In her closing speech, will the minister expand on how that will be developed further? For example, will additional time for such development be identified?

I return to the issue of how involved stakeholders feel in the development of the curriculum for excellence. In a briefing that members received for this afternoon's debate, a number of bodies raised concerns. Oxfam said that it

"had concerns about the process of engaging with stakeholders including opportunities for teachers and NGOs to engage meaningfully with the curriculum review."

The sustainable development education policy network, which represents a host of organisations, says that there are concerns about

“many relevant stakeholders, including the NGO sector, becoming increasingly marginalised.”

We need to keep those comments in perspective, but we cannot ignore them, given that the organisations in question felt obliged to express such concerns.

The central players in a child's education, apart from teachers, are, obviously, their parents. I cannot say that any of the answers to questions at the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee from my colleague Ken Macintosh, which were subsequently referred to in *The Times Educational Supplement*, reassured members that parents are fully involved in the development of the curriculum for excellence. A straw poll that I have taken of parents to whom I have spoken at various schools indicates that their knowledge of the curriculum varies widely. Those who are active, were previously school board members or are now school council members have a good grasp and some knowledge of the issues. However, among a sizeable number of others there is little understanding and some confusion. I am glad that the cabinet secretary responded to Jeremy Purvis on that point, which is important and needs to be addressed.

I want to press the minister on how we are using the experience of young people to develop the curriculum for excellence. In a curriculum for excellence newsletter that the cabinet secretary circulated in the summer, reference was made to seminars involving S5 pupils from Fife, Clackmannanshire, Stirling, Falkirk and North Lanarkshire. I commend that process, as I am sure that it was useful. The themes that arose from it, which included—to name but three—supporting the needs of all learners, having an exam structure that offers flexibility and having a broad reward system that recognises achievement in its widest sense, will be beneficial in taking the curriculum for excellence forward. How will such involvement be expanded? Importantly, will the cabinet secretary or the minister ensure that all young people's voices are heard? I have mentioned that one of the aims of the curriculum for excellence was to re-engage and remotivate young people. Clearly, at the moment there are young people in our schools who are disenchanted with the education system and do not turn up on a regular basis. How can we ensure that we hear their views on how education can be improved and take on board the important points that they could make that would make a real difference to our education system?

There is much support for the curriculum for excellence, both here in the chamber and in the

wider community, among those people who are aware of it. However, there are a number of questions that still need to be asked. I hope that the cabinet secretary will accept that we are asking them because we are supportive and want to be positive on these issues. A number of members—Hugh Henry, Margo MacDonald and Liz Smith—asked about the purpose and role in the exam system of advanced higher. The cabinet secretary has said that an announcement on the future of the exam system will be made shortly. I hope that that announcement will answer the question about the purpose of advanced higher. How can young people have more choice if teachers are not available and subjects are not offered because of cuts in local budgets? Indeed, some subjects were not being offered even before savings had to be made, because teachers were being pulled between teaching advanced higher and teaching a wider range of subjects lower down the school. That has been an issue for some time and it needs to be resolved.

Elizabeth Smith and other members asked how the imbalance between vocational and academic learning can be addressed. We heard a good example of how North Lanarkshire Council tried to tackle the issue, which we might want to develop.

Hugh Henry made the critical point that the curriculum for excellence must be fully resourced. There are grave concerns about budgets, perhaps because there is uncertainty and a lack of clarity. If the curriculum for excellence is not fully resourced we will not secure the changes in the education system that our young people deserve.

I listened to the speeches in the debate, which is probably one of the most important debates that we will have in the Parliament, because it is about the future education of all our children. It is clear that it is time for the Government to start providing answers, details and direction. As other members said, the Government must show political leadership on the curriculum for excellence.

16:36

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt): The debate has been interesting. We appreciated the speeches of members from all parties. I have pleasure in summing up on behalf of the Scottish Government.

Fiona Hyslop said that the curriculum for excellence is about far more than just schools or teaching, or young people and teachers; it is about equipping our people with the skills and knowledge that will enable them to maximise their talents, ingenuity and creativity. That is how we will succeed in the 21st century, when the mark of a successful country is not just the productivity of

its labour but the capacity of its people to use and build on their skills for learning, life and work.

As members said, we debated matters that are close to the heart of the curriculum for excellence in the Parliament when we discussed the OECD review of Scottish education and the teaching of history. The purpose of today's debate was not to repeat what was said in other debates or to rehearse the detail that was provided during discussions in the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee; it was to consider and discuss some of the challenges that are associated with bringing an aspirational programme of reform to fruition. I thank the members who highlighted some of those challenges. We reflected on our ambitions for Scottish education and for Scotland as a learning nation that is confident, productive and visibly successful. I am grateful to all members for their constructive contributions to the debate.

I agree with Ken Macintosh that the pace of implementation of the curriculum for excellence was slower in the run-up to the election. I assure him that Fiona Hyslop and I have picked up the baton and are running with it. We have a campaigning role in engaging as many stakeholders as possible in the curriculum for excellence. Teachers are best placed to engage pupils and parents and have an important role in that regard. As the cabinet secretary said, by involving stakeholders, politicians of all parties can have a campaigning role.

We will take on board Mary Mulligan's point about NGOs perhaps not feeling included in the process. However, the voluntary sector has been involved through the pupil inclusion network Scotland, so it has had a stake in the development of the framework for the curriculum for excellence.

It is a shame that David Whitton was not in the chamber for the whole debate. If he had been, he would have noted that we have certainly upped the pace in implementing the curriculum for excellence. Yesterday, I was at a conference at which Professor Katherine Weare said that it is important that change is not implemented too quickly because we must keep all the stakeholders on board—especially parents, who are perhaps not as up to speed as the rest of us.

I thank Elizabeth Smith for her positive speech. I assure her that the baccalaureate is not an extra exam but a batch of advanced highers. I was pleased to see a recent SQA report that shows an increased number of entries for advanced highers this year.

Elizabeth Smith: I ask the minister for clarification. She said that, yesterday, she heard a professor of education say that we should not fast track too much change without considering the

detail. Why, then, will a statement be made in two weeks' time in which, it has been suggested, changes to the examinations structure will be fast tracked? There are questions about how the two approaches articulate with each other.

Maureen Watt: That is the precisely the tension that we face. On the one hand, people want the pace of change and implementation to be stepped up, but on the other hand, they are aware that we have to take everybody with us.

I return to my point about advanced highers and the baccalaureate. By the time pupils reach S5 and S6, they are at the stage in their learning when they must be more aware of the need for personalised study and learning. With tools such as the glow project, videoconferencing and more innovative ways of studying, pupils should be able to access the range of subjects that they require for further education.

Hugh O'Donnell and others mentioned parity of esteem. Last Friday, I launched the evaluation of the skills for work programme. It is clear from that evaluation that we cannot have a one-size-fits-all approach. Skills for work should be delivered in a range of places and ways and not just in schools and colleges.

I agree with the concerns about assessment that were expressed by Karen Whitefield—who was speaking in a personal capacity—and others. We must get that right, which is why we all await with interest the announcement on assessment that the cabinet secretary will make in the next few weeks.

Robin Harper might have been a bit more gracious when he talked about outdoor education. I have kept him informed of the fact that, as Michael Matheson said, I am chairing a committee on reversing somewhat the decimation of outdoor education by respective Governments in the 1970s and 1980s. I have said that I will meet Robin Harper, Elizabeth Smith and Jeremy Purvis to update them on progress.

I note that Hugh Henry is no longer in the chamber. It is unfortunate that he, as a former minister, did not take the opportunity to say where he saw the curriculum for excellence going and where he thinks that we have gone wrong. I note that he berated local authorities for taking decisions at a local level with regard to their education provision.

I assure Marlyn Glen that the cabinet secretary and I meet the unions regularly. Indeed, Larry Flanagan of the EIS was supportive of the curriculum for excellence in his evidence to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee.

I take Jeremy Purvis's point about the challenges of implementation. I have the general

impression that all members in the chamber are prepared to be advocates for the curriculum for excellence, and I welcome that.

Murdo Fraser was right to highlight sixth year and the bottom 20 per cent of achievers as areas of concern. I hope that I have addressed his concerns about sixth year.

The OECD report said that it was not the school that someone attends, but who they are that presents the challenges that we face as we drive forward education in Scotland. That is why our early intervention strategy and the more choices, more chances agenda, which we have made key planks of the Government's policy, are so important.

Ken Macintosh: I have listened carefully to the minister's responses to a number of questions. Will she specifically address the structure of the school timetable at secondary level? Will an announcement be made on that matter in the next few weeks or subsequently?

Maureen Watt: Timetabling trials are being carried out in a number of schools, as are trials on the curriculum for excellence as a whole. Just last week, at a school in Moray where trialling is being carried out in a physics class, the S1 pupils were given draft outcomes and tasked with researching what they already knew and what more they needed to learn. That is precisely what the trialling throughout the country seeks to establish.

The curriculum for excellence is a way of getting away from the culture of prescription. Robin Harper mentioned hours of study. Input is required in the current education system, but we are much more interested in measuring outcomes and that is what the curriculum for excellence is about.

We need every young person to develop to their full potential. If we are to achieve that, we need to extend the partnership approach that has underpinned the development of the curriculum for excellence in the wider community. Our programme of improvement and reform must be owned and advanced not just by central and local government, but by children and young people and every professional. That is why this Government is wholly committed to ambitious curriculum reform and why we welcome today's debate as an opportunity to reflect on and discuss some of the significant challenges that it brings.

Housing and Regeneration Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-1582, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the Housing and Regeneration Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation.

16:47

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): I welcome the Local Government and Communities Committee's unanimous support for the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions in the Housing and Regeneration Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 15 November 2007, relating to the executive competence of Scottish Ministers to enter into agreements for the provision of services with the Housing Corporation and/or Welsh Ministers, on such terms and for such payment which they consider appropriate, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

16:48

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to raise some issues on this legislative consent motion, which Labour members—who consider LCMs on the basis of the practical measures to which they relate and who judge each LCM on its merits—have decided to support. We think that it is important that we take the opportunity to illuminate some significant issues for the Parliament—members know that my every instinct is philanthropic.

Members of the Local Government and Communities Committee felt that it was important for all members to receive an explanation from the Scottish National Party of why it is no longer opposed, in principle, to LCMs. On numerous occasions in the past, SNP members voted against entirely rational and logical LCMs on the basis that it was a point of principle for them to do so. Of course, that was then and this is now. We can only surmise that the memory banks of SNP back benchers have been entirely wiped and that that point of principle has been forgotten.

The principle on which we operated was that, whenever possible, we would seek an opportunity for the Scottish Parliament to legislate and that we would use the LCM process only if the prospect of new Scottish legislation was not imminent. The problem for the SNP, of course, is that it appears that the prospect of legislation on anything at all is not imminent. That makes it even more bizarre that the minister claimed to the committee that use of the LCM process was

"a proportionate and efficient use of parliamentary time."—*[Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee, 5 March 2008; c 724.]*

He might wish to talk to his business manager about that.

Of course, the broader question is why no suitable legislative vehicle is available. A big decision has been made to abolish Communities Scotland and yet the bill before us relates to regulation in England. There is no coherence on the issue of savings for Communities Scotland or how housing and regeneration fit into the community planning framework. What will happen now that individual housing association grant decisions will be micromanaged from the centre? How will the regulator fit into all of that? We have had no discussion of those issues. Given that we are going in an entirely opposite direction to that taken in England, it would have been nice for the Scottish Parliament to have been given an opportunity—whether in relation to legislation or otherwise—to have had that discussion. We could have dealt with the issues raised in the LCM in that way.

In order to be helpful, I direct the minister to his own words. In July last year, I asked him whether abolishing Communities Scotland "would require legislation". His reply was:

"Ministers are currently considering the most effective organisational structures for the future delivery of Communities Scotland's functions. That process will involve consideration of any legislation that might be necessary to support the transfer of Communities Scotland's functions, although legislation would not of itself be required to abolish Communities Scotland."—*[Official Report, Written Answers, 19 July 2007; S3W-1797.]*

Given that we do not need legislation to abolish Communities Scotland, it would have been helpful if the Government had looked for legislative opportunities that would have allowed the Parliament to debate what will now happen to Communities Scotland's functions.

The LCM is an indicator that the SNP has abandoned the principles that it used to apply. It has not even applied the test that we used to apply. The Government is unable to explain why it has not brought to the chamber a debate on the future of Communities Scotland. Perhaps the minister will tell the chamber what other legislation might be necessary and what Communities Scotland's future is. I welcome his interesting response.

16:51

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): The provision in Westminster's Housing and Regeneration Bill to which we are being asked to grant consent this evening will end the statutory powers of Scottish ministers to enter into

agreements for services that relate to housing regulation. No doubt, the minister will argue that the power is superfluous and redundant. Indeed, it is true that neither the present Government nor its predecessor—nor, indeed, the Conservative Government of happy memory before then—exercised that power.

Even if one accepts the argument—as the Conservatives accept it—that the power should be excised from the statute book, it would not be appropriate for the Conservatives to allow the occasion to pass unnoticed and unmarked in the chamber. However minor the matter, SNP members will vote this evening to permit our mother Parliament in Westminster to end a statutory power that is presently exercisable by Scottish ministers by virtue of the division of responsibility that is set out in the Scotland Act 1998. Accordingly, today is a red-letter day. The motion is a mark of co-operation between the SNP Government, the Parliament in Scotland and the Government in Scotland's other Parliament at Westminster.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

David McLetchie: No thank you.

Would that this red-letter day signalled a new maturity in the relationship between our two Parliaments and a retreat from the tactical position of trying to promote and ferment conflict and division at every turn that has been the hallmark of the SNP Administration to date.

Let us hope that this legislative consent motion heralds a new era of co-operation. Let it mark a willingness on the SNP's part to recognise that some powers are indeed redundant and that Westminster can spring-clean the statute book just as effectively as the Scottish Parliament can—and, indeed, that Westminster may be the appropriate legislature to do that. Furthermore, let us resolve to scrutinise the statute book more closely in order to repeal even more of the powers and regulations that are clogging it up—powers that contribute nothing to our society save bureaucracy, delay and expense.

I remain highly sceptical of Mr Maxwell's willingness to do that, given that he is the minister who is forcing the home report on to our property market just as it is starting to decline. I also remain sceptical of the Government in general. No sooner had Mr Mather slipped into the back of his ministerial limousine than he did a U-turn on better regulation policy. The SNP has failed on those measures, but it is right in this one, small instance. Accordingly, I trust that SNP members will vote for the motion with the same degree of enthusiasm

and delight as members on the Conservative and Labour benches.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Stewart Maxwell to wind up the debate.

16:54

Stewart Maxwell: I will do my best, Presiding Officer.

Johann Lamont mentioned several things that it would have been nice if the Government had done. Well, it would have been nice if Johann Lamont had actually discussed the LCM that is before us. In the three minutes of her speech, she failed to mention it at all, but instead spent her time railing against a range of issues. However, we have come to expect the scattergun approach, not only from Johann Lamont, but from other members on the Labour benches.

Section 33A of the Housing Associations Act 1985 is a minor power that reflects pre-devolution ideas about the operation of housing regulation throughout the United Kingdom, which, as it turns out, have never been realised. The intention is to repeal section 33A in England and Wales, as it will be wholly redundant once the Housing Corporation ceases to exist. The Scottish Parliament could repeal the provision, but no suitable legislative vehicle is currently available to do so.

I will try to address the several concerns that have been expressed previously and during this short debate.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member take an intervention?

Stewart Maxwell: It is suggested that the LCM impacts on the Scottish Parliament's legislative competence or is tantamount to our handing back powers to Westminster. Let me be clear: only through changes to the reservations in the Scotland Act 1998 can powers be handed back to Westminster or the legislative competence of our Parliament altered. Individual motions, such as the one that we are discussing, represent no more than a one-off agreement by the Scottish Parliament for Westminster to legislate on our behalf on a specific aspect of a devolved matter.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Stewart Maxwell: Comments about powers being taken back by Westminster are out of touch with the mood of Scotland, the national conversation and the clear demand from all sides for the Scottish Parliament's powers to be extended. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order. Excuse me, minister, but there is so much

background noise that I am not sure whether you can hear the requests for interventions.

Stewart Maxwell: For your information, Presiding Officer—

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member give way?

Stewart Maxwell: I can hear them all clearly, Presiding Officer.

It has been suggested that the motion will mean that ministers cannot enter into contracts for regulation services in the future. That is not true. Whether or not the power is in place, the Scottish ministers can enter into legally enforceable agreements with other bodies. It has been suggested that a non-statutory memorandum of understanding, rather than a legally binding contract for services, is not a suitable basis for housing regulators to work together. I do not agree. A memorandum of understanding is a sensible and proportionate approach to the management of cross-border regulation issues. Housing regulators north and south of the border have never made use of the statutory power, which is evidence that it is not relevant to effective regulation.

Johann Lamont stated in her opening remarks that the SNP has always opposed LCMs or Sewel motions. I will give her a short list of cases in which that was not true, although it does not cover them all—the motions on the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Bill, the Police and Justice Bill, the Housing Corporation (Delegation) etc Bill, the Compensation Bill and the Serious Crime Bill. The SNP takes a pragmatic approach and works closely with the UK Government for the benefit of the people of Scotland. It is therefore very sad indeed to see the Tory party focusing on narrow constitutional wrangling.

I welcome the unanimous support for the LCM from the members of the Local Government and Communities Committee, including Johann Lamont and David McLetchie, and I ask Parliament to support the motion this evening.

Business Motion

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-1600, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I ask any member who wishes to speak against the motion to press their request-to-speak button now.

16:58

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): Before I move the motion, I say that it is my intention next week to ask the Parliamentary Bureau to schedule as part of next week's business a short statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice on the Scottish Prison Service's report on the Robert Foye incident.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 26 March 2008

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Debate:
Healthcare Associated Infection
Taskforce Action Plan

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 27 March 2008

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Debate on the Home Detention Curfew
Licence (Prescribed Standard
Conditions) (Scotland) (No.2) Order
2008 (SSI 2008/125)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: The Local
Government Finance (Scotland)
Amendment Order 2008

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

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

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: Fatal
Accident Inquiries

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 16 April 2008

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Justice Committee Debate: 4th Report
2008 - Report on Inquiry into the
Effective Use of Police Resources

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 17 April 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 Stage 1 Debate: Public Health etc.
(Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

The Presiding Officer: The name of the member who requested to speak has been removed from my screen, so no member wants to speak against the motion.

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There is one question to be put as a result of today's business. The question is, that motion S3M-1582, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the Housing and Regeneration Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions in the Housing and Regeneration Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 15 November 2007, relating to the executive competence of Scottish Ministers to enter into agreements for the provision of services with the Housing Corporation and/or Welsh Ministers, on such terms and for such payment which they consider appropriate, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

Fairtrade Fortnight

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S3M-1174, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on celebrating Fairtrade fortnight. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the ongoing efforts of individuals and organisations working to promote and raise awareness of fair trade in Scotland, welcomes the steady increase in the number of schools, colleges, church groups, towns and cities across Scotland who now have Fairtrade status; acknowledges the important contribution made by the Scottish Fair Trade Forum in the work to help Scotland achieve Fairtrade nation status, notes that Fairtrade fortnight will take place from 24 February to 9 March 2008, and looks forward to marking this at an event in the Parliament on the evening of Thursday 28 February.

17:01

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): I should begin by stating the obvious, which is that Fairtrade fortnight has come and gone. However, that is not a reason for not debating it this evening. We have the opportunity both to reflect on the success of those two weeks of celebration and to look to the future.

There was a time, not so long ago, when Fairtrade conjured up the thought of not very good tea and not very good coffee, but nowadays more than 200 different Fairtrade products are available to us, and the quality is excellent. Across the country, towns and villages are following the example of Aberfeldy and Fairlie, which proudly proclaim their Fairtrade status. Cities are now getting in on the act too, with Glasgow achieving the accolade last year. East Renfrewshire became a Fairtrade local authority at the same time. Many schools have been so honoured too. Entire school communities have embraced the concept, including Hillhead high school in my colleague Pauline McNeill's constituency, and its feeder primaries Oakgrove primary school and Willowbank primary school in my constituency.

There is no doubt in my mind that the announcement by Jack McConnell in March 2005 that the then Scottish Executive would take a lead on this issue and would work to support the idea of Scotland becoming one of the world's first Fairtrade nations has helped to support the commitment that many already had. Funding of the Scottish fair trade forum, and the appointment of its co-ordinator, Betsy Reed, have allowed it to go from strength to strength. I have no doubt that the dedication and leadership of John McAllion as the forum's first chair will also assist our country in achieving its ambition. It was good to celebrate Fairtrade fortnight with them and with others, but

achieving Fairtrade town, village or nation status is only a means to an end. It is an opportunity for us to demonstrate our commitment to the ideals of fair trade and to encourage others to understand them and embrace them. Of course, we do not just do that for the sake of it; we get involved in the fair trade movement because of the effect that it has on the producers.

We know that this is an ill-divided world. If those of us who in relative terms have so much can pay a few more pence for goods here, the effect that we have can be disproportionate, especially on those who work so hard and so long to produce the goods that we enjoy. The Fairtrade premium that we pay helps to ensure that farmers and producers in other countries can have clean drinking water, health care and education for their children. However, it can go further than that. It also often allows farmers to have access to irrigation and seeds and fertilisers for the next season.

If we, as wealthy citizens of a wealthy country, can afford to pay a little more for Fairtrade items, how much more could the countries of the developed world do? Rich countries set the rules governing trade—rules that mean poor countries lose out. They dump subsidised goods on developing nations, control and limit poor countries' share of the world markets by slapping high taxes on imported goods, and control patents in ways that mean that poor people cannot afford vital medicines.

Over the past few years, the European countries and the African, Caribbean and Pacific—or ACP—countries have been negotiating trade agreements. Europe has insisted that those countries negotiate a far-reaching free trade agreement. However, by September of last year, it was obvious that it would not be possible to conclude a deal because the outstanding disagreements were so far reaching. Europe agreed to postpone talks until 2008, but only on some of the issues. It also insisted that most of the deal had to be done by December 2007 and that, if it was not, tariffs would be raised on exports, which would in effect close markets, put companies out of business and destroy jobs. It is no surprise to any of us that, under pressure, some countries involved felt that they had to deal. It is fair to say that they did so with a sense of anger.

The 76 ACP countries have been put under immense pressure to conclude a deal. In December 2007, 35 of them concluded deals and 41 refused to do so. The ACP countries have asked political leaders around Europe to support the renegotiation of the worst part of the deal. So far, Europe has not responded. Indeed, we suspect that, during 2008, the European

Commission wants to get all ACP countries to sign those agreements, and to expand the contents of the deal, making them even more favourable to Europe and even less favourable to the poorer countries. We all have a vital role to play in promoting trade justice and fair labour practice in countries throughout the world. For us as individuals, it is about Fairtrade products, and making a point of taking the Fairtrade option where it exists. It is about encouraging Governments to play fair on trade.

In the expectation that a large number of members might wish to speak this evening, I am deliberately keeping my remarks short. I recognise—as I am sure we all do—the contribution of everyone who works so hard all year round to support Fairtrade. We should also send greetings to those who work so hard to produce the Fairtrade goods that we enjoy. However, we must also renew our pressure on the European Union to agree fair deals with the developing world.

Scotland's celebration of fair trade lasts for two weeks, but our campaign continues until real trade justice is achieved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the debate. A considerable number of back benchers wish to speak, so members have a tight four minutes.

17:07

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Fair trade is a major success story of our time. The concept goes to the heart of the vision shared by many of us—from all parties—of a world of economic and social justice. People in Scotland can be proud of the role that they have played in taking the idea of fair trade into the mainstream of society. I congratulate Patricia Ferguson on securing the debate and on her recent election as the convener of the cross-party on international development, of which I am the vice-convener. The group is the largest established in the Parliament, which in itself is a sign of Scotland's international outlook and commitment to global solidarity with those most in need.

The basic principle behind the fair trade concept of paying producers in the developing world a social premium, to protect them from the vagaries of the market and to provide a secure and sufficient income, goes back to the formal establishment of the Fairtrade Foundation in 1992 and the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International network. However, it is the hard work of the foundation and the range of charities and non-governmental organisations that support its work that has led to the wide array of Fairtrade

goods now available and the increasing level of awareness among the public.

In 2007, sales of Fairtrade goods reached almost £0.5 billion in the United Kingdom. Since 2005, the number of African producer organisations selling to the UK market has almost doubled, going from 81 to 152. More than half of the UK population—about 57 per cent—recognise and understand the Fairtrade mark. That awareness is hugely important because, for many people, contact with the Fairtrade mark and fairly traded goods is the first step on a journey towards greater understanding of the social and economic injustices that leave so many producers and communities in the developing world in poverty. The work of schools, parishes such as St John's in Carlisle and towns up and down the country—many in the south of Scotland—to achieve Fairtrade status is testament to the desire of many people to turn their commitment to global justice into action.

To achieve Fairtrade status, communities must be dedicated to change over the long term and willing to change what it means to be consumers in a globalised world. I pay tribute to the work of Scotland's international development sector, in particular Oxfam, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund and Christian Aid, in supporting schools, churches and communities in their efforts to achieve Fairtrade status.

I am aware of the progress that is being made towards Scotland achieving Fairtrade nation status. It is right that we do not rush into that, and I commend the work that has already been done to guide the process. The wider implications for public life and society are immense—every aspect of procurement, consumer and sourcing practices will have to be carefully monitored. Despite all the hard work and achievements of the Fairtrade movement, we are only at the beginning of a journey towards a world where trade justice becomes a reality.

Running the Fairtrade organisations remains the work of committed individuals, backed by civil society and the wider public. They are building and promoting an alternative model of economic development. People in Scotland and throughout the rich world who buy Fairtrade goods make a conscious decision to do so and, by that decision, they recognise that many of the alternative goods that they purchase are unfairly traded.

Multinational companies and rich countries' Governments continue to manipulate the global markets in their interests. Oxfam has summed that up in its report "Rigged Rules and Double Standards". Through economic partnership agreements and the World Trade Organization, the rich world denies developing nations the very protections and producer support that allowed

countries such as ours to become rich in the first place—all in the name of the free market.

Many of the organisations that I mentioned earlier, and hundreds more across Scotland, are backers not only of the Fairtrade Foundation but of the trade justice movement, and they were the forces behind the make poverty history campaign in 2005.

I am happy to join my colleagues throughout the chamber in stressing our commitment to the Fairtrade movement.

17:12

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): I am happy to speak in the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives, and I add my congratulations to Patricia Ferguson on securing it.

Fairtrade fortnight has become an important event in the campaign by the Fairtrade movement. I understand that my home town of St Andrews became a Fairtrade town on St Andrew's day 2005. It is perhaps the 12th or 13th town in Scotland to achieve that status. This year's Fairtrade fortnight was bigger and better, with more events than in previous years. The expansion of the availability of Fairtrade products means that Scots now have the option and, increasingly, the inclination, to purchase about 3,000 certified Fairtrade goods. Charities such as Oxfam are now selling scores of Fairtrade food items, as well as craftwork and jewellery, in their Scottish shops. Big stores such as Tesco, Marks and Spencer, Sainsbury and Debenhams are all developing their Fairtrade cotton businesses. Tate & Lyle, a company with a strong Scottish base, has converted all its sugar to Fairtrade.

As some of us heard at the meeting of the European and External Relations Committee yesterday, although fair trade helps millions of people in the developing world, a wider understanding of trade justice would help millions more. If Africa, east Asia, south Asia and Latin America were each to increase their share of world exports by 1 per cent, that could lift nearly 130 million people out of poverty.

Here in Scotland, we have little knowledge of procurement in our own country, far less an understanding of the supply chain around the world. There has so far been little analysis of how procurement affects the environment and climate change, and how those factors are likely to impact on the world's poor as a result of the way in which rich nations access goods and markets. As we have heard, Scotland is working towards achieving the full status of a Fairtrade nation, with ethical policies on procurement. Although there are European Union rules on non-discrimination that

appear to legislate against fair trade procurement in contracts, many people believe that the Scottish Government has interpreted the EU rules too conservatively. The Department for International Development, among others, has advised:

“There are no legal reasons why public authorities should not include fair and ethical trade criteria into their procurement practices.”

It is interesting to note that the National Assembly for Wales has committed itself to providing Fairtrade bananas in all primary schools in Wales. Here in Scotland, the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth games could provide an excellent opportunity to ensure that procurement is on a fair and ethical basis.

Particularly important in assessing free trade is the plight of sub-Saharan African countries, which are among the poorest in the world. Tariff barriers and the dumping of subsidised goods on the global markets by the EU, the United States of America and, increasingly, China, Japan and Korea have prevented developing countries from competing on fair terms.

There is certainly much to criticise in the EU's approach, particularly the stance of trade commissioner Peter Mandelson, who seems to argue that only when poor countries open up their economies fully to foreign investment and expertise will they become integrated fully into the world economy. That sounds a bit like an attempted 21st century colonisation of the third world by Brussels. We in Scotland must use whatever influence we have to help convince Mr Mandelson's bureaucrats that economic theory does not always produce just solutions, especially at this stage in the development of the so-called ACP countries—the 76 former European colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific with which the EU has failed to finalise a free trade agreement after seven years of wrangling.

Much closer to home, we must ensure that our Parliament's responsible purchasing strategy has positive fair trade objectives in procurement to increase the range of fairly traded products that the Parliament uses. Of course, there is so much to do and so little time. However, the cause is just and as Scotland moves towards Fairtrade nation status, we must certainly keep up the momentum.

17:16

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I welcome this debate on Fairtrade and wider trade justice issues and congratulate Patricia Ferguson on securing it.

As we have seen in this and previous years, Fairtrade fortnight is a fantastic opportunity to raise further public awareness about fair trade issues in Scotland and around the world. It is a

chance to celebrate the power of the individual to shape how our supermarkets, food outlets and high street stores do business and the good will and determination of the people of Scotland and the UK in working towards combating issues of poverty and global injustice. Those efforts continue far beyond the allotted two weeks of Fairtrade fortnight.

I want to widen the debate, as other members have done, because Fairtrade fortnight is also a good way to provoke debate about what more needs to be done and how we can do more to tackle the root causes of poverty, not least those that prevent or hinder developing countries from competing in the world market on an equal footing with their richer neighbours.

Although Fairtrade fortnight celebrates the power of the individual consumer, it is important to recognise the need for Government and the Scottish Parliament to take a lead in addressing these issues both at home and on the world stage.

At home, we must ensure that the essential principles of fair trade, development and justice are major factors throughout all areas of Scottish policy. We need to confront the sticky issue of public procurement to ensure that ethical and sustainable procurement is at the heart of all public service delivery, wherever possible.

Although there has been some uncertainty about the extent to which the Scottish Government is able to include ethical trading requirements in its tendering policies within the prescriptions of EU law, mounting evidence, not least from the House of Commons International Development Select Committee's report last year, suggests that there might be more scope than it first appeared to include social and environmental criteria in future public service procurement contracts.

Moreover, we need greater accountability to ensure that service providers adhere to the international standards that are currently in place. In its bid for the 2012 Olympic games, Madrid put forward tendering proposals for the supply of Fairtrade T-shirts. Perhaps Scotland could develop that idea further to include fair and ethical criteria in its procurement contracts for the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth games. That is just one way in which Scotland can do more not only to support the ideals of Fairtrade but to promote more ethical codes of practice in business in Scotland and abroad.

That might be one small step towards addressing some of the larger issues of trade justice on the world stage—the structural and apparently insurmountable inequalities that are embedded in current international trade regulations and procedures.

The continuing controversy surrounding negotiations between the EU and African,

Caribbean and Pacific countries over economic partnership agreements is a critical example of the ways in which international development aims are so frequently sacrificed to a pro-western mercantile agenda. However, international pressure to liberalise markets to such a degree—and so quickly—might have catastrophic effects on those countries, which could result in unfair and overwhelming competition from technologically advanced, subsidy-maintained European economies and cause further economic insecurity and disempowerment in developing countries.

For example, a study by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa indicated that Zambia could lose up to \$15 million in revenues as a result of being forced to lower import tariffs—that is roughly equivalent to its total annual spending on HIV and AIDS. According to the Kenyan Ministry of Trade and Industry, Kenya could lose up to 65 per cent of industry and 12 per cent of Government revenues, which would threaten the livelihoods of millions, especially those in rural areas. The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, of which Malawi is a member, could lose up to \$0.25 billion dollars in regional trade as a result of the current EPA deals.

If trade is ever to be really fair, Scotland, in partnership with the UK, must put pressure on the European Union and the World Trade Organization to redress those and the many other trade injustices that serve to keep developing countries in crippling poverty.

17:20

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I congratulate Patricia Ferguson on securing this important debate.

Ted Brocklebank quite rightly made reference to the supermarket companies that are doing a great deal on the fair trade front. I wave this Co-op card aloft quite deliberately because it was the Co-op that led the way in this field, to a great extent, and I want to put on record my praise for all that it has done and continues to do. Indeed, as Patricia Ferguson said, the days of coffee and tea being the only Fairtrade products that are available are long gone. The Fairtrade products that are now available are of an extremely good quality. I admit shyly to the chamber that I am particularly keen on the chocolate, which is some of the very best.

All of us have a role to play, but Ted Brocklebank, Karen Gillon, Roseanna Cunningham and I have a particular role to play through our involvement in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Together, we guard the position of the CPA jealously and protect what we see as this Parliament's right to speak on an equal level with other Commonwealth members. That is

why we have said what we have said to the Parliamentary Bureau and others in order to ensure that Scotland is represented at the various get-togethers. Via the CPA, we can further the cause of fair trade.

As Malcolm Chisholm said, through fair trade, we can get rid of some of the inequalities that exist. However, it is fair to say that there are great tracts of land in sub-Saharan Africa that could be tilled but are not because it is simply not worth while for countries to do so because the returns are not good enough. In addressing the inequalities and making it worth while for our brothers and sisters in Africa to supply food to the world, on a fair basis, we can increase the amount of ground that is under cultivation, which will increase the production of food and, in turn, help to tackle the terrible issues such as starvation and poor food that are faced.

I pay tribute to the organisers in my constituency who constantly help on the fair trade front. In the past, the movement has been led by dedicated individuals. In turn, they have rolled the movement out to the younger generation—younger than me.

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): That is not hard.

Jamie Stone: The minister says that it is not hard to be younger than me, and I accept her comment.

Often, it is the youngsters in our schools who are aware of the fair trade issue. I take great comfort and draw great hope from that fact.

All of us in Parliament can further roll out what we are saying and the message that we are putting over to the schools. It is a good message, but it can be made stronger still.

There is a good and a bad side to us all. What we are doing on fair trade, not only in Scotland but all over the world, is an example of some of the higher and better motives of human beings.

17:23

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I thank Patricia Ferguson for giving us this opportunity to mark Fairtrade fortnight with this debate. It is appropriate that we do so, as Scotland has a proud record in the fair trade movement and played a more important role in its origins than is often remembered.

My involvement with Fairtrade fortnight goes back to 1986, when I joined Oxfam as a campaigns organiser. As several members have said, at that time there was really only one product, which was campaign coffee. A few enthusiasts would buy a share in a container of coffee from Tanzania or, latterly, Nicaragua—often

in partnership with the Max Havelaar Foundation in Holland—and, incredibly, that coffee would be shipped to a flat in, if I remember correctly, Stockbridge in Edinburgh, where volunteers would pack it by hand before hawking it around any outlet that would take it.

Promoting fairly traded coffee was a centrepiece of Fairtrade fortnight at the time, and I spent many evenings persuading Oxfam campaign groups to ask their local supermarkets to stock it, even if it was only for that fortnight—breaking out into the main stream in such a way was our holy grail. That was a truly thankless task. I well remember the jubilation when our group in Alloa succeeded in talking the local Co-op into taking a small supply. It was trumpeted as a national success—so much so that, a year later, we sent them back to repeat it, only for them to be told not to worry because last year's coffee was still on the shelves.

To have got from that position to today, when Fairtrade sales have reached nearly half a billion pounds in the UK, and one in every four bananas sold in Britain is fairly traded, is astonishing. The key was to commercialise the quality and the presentation of Fairtrade products without compromising the ethical principles behind the idea. Edinburgh-based Equal Exchange was a leader in that field, and it still is.

Cafédirect—the coffee that finally laid to rest the idea that drinking fairly traded coffee was only for those with a strong stomach—led its assault on the coffee trade from Edinburgh. I pay tribute to Lorna Young, Cafédirect's first sales director—her life was cut tragically short in 1996, but her work lives on, and Cafédirect is now the sixth-largest coffee brand of any type in the UK. The Fairtrade mark that she, Equal Exchange, Oxfam and Christian Aid helped to create now endorses more than 3,000 different products.

Aileen Campbell was right to say that Fairtrade still depends on volunteers and their commitment. In my constituency, I pay tribute to the work of the Fairtrade shop in Prestonpans. During Fairtrade fortnight, I went to a very well-attended screening of the documentary "Black Gold", about the global coffee trade, which was organised by Earth Matters, a local Fairtrade shop in North Berwick. As a result, a steering group is now working towards making North Berwick a Fairtrade town.

Patricia Ferguson was right to say that the most important thing in all of this is the benefit that Fairtrade brings to producers. In the case of Cafédirect alone, that means that more than 1.5 million farmers and their families benefit from a fair price and from investment in their communities.

Fairtrade is of course the lever and the example that drives wider trade justice, but I celebrate the fact that a handful of enthusiasts in a basement

flat in Stockbridge can take on the market in the world's second most-traded commodity, and bend it to their will. That is the lesson and the promise of the fair trade movement: that there is no supply chain so long that it cannot be bridged; no cartel so closed that it cannot be broken; and no trade that cannot be made fairer by people of good will in the determined pursuit of justice.

17:27

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): I thank Patricia Ferguson for lodging the motion and for securing the debate. Much has changed since the first Fairtrade products started to arrive on our shelves a few decades ago. As Aileen Campbell mentioned, retail sales are now reaching almost half a billion pounds per year, and are growing strongly. Most important, that is making a direct difference to people's lives—to probably around 7 million people in Africa, Asia and Latin America alone.

There have been a number of positive commercial developments from large supermarkets, retail outlets and food producers, and those are all welcome. However, there is still much room for improvement, and there are still some supermarkets and retail outlets that are perhaps more tokenistic about fair trade than others. The Co-op is a good example of an organisation that has a genuine interest and commitment in the area.

I will focus on some of the local initiatives that have taken place in the Lothians. Change comes not just from big commercial organisations, but from local initiatives that promote fair trade and change habits within our communities.

Edinburgh has been a Fairtrade city since 2004, and politicians from all parties, along with the civic communities, have worked hard to make that a success. I pay tribute in particular to the winners of the Edinburgh lord provost's Fairtrade awards for 2008, who offer some fantastic examples of the work that local people are doing on the ground. Ben Miller of the University of Edinburgh won the best youth/education award for his voluntary work to ensure that the university promotes the sale and use of Fairtrade products in its student union and in its shops.

YWCA Lochend won the best Fairtrade community award for a cafe that it launched in 2007. The cafe has quickly become a local hub that is well used by the community and which not only promotes the Fairtrade message and fair trade practices, but gives local residents affordable nutritious meals and refreshments, as well as providing local cooking classes. It is a good example of an initiative that combines a lot of good work.

I pay particular tribute to last year's winner of the lord provost's award—Queensferry fair trade group. A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of meeting the group and presenting it with a certificate to mark South Queensferry's success in becoming Scotland's first Fairtrade royal burgh. As has been said, that success was down to the hard work of a core group of dedicated individuals who have worked tirelessly in their own time to promote fair trade and trade justice to communities and local businesses in South Queensferry. Seeing how quickly that work has developed has inspired them. I hope that the recognition of the group through the award and the certificate has inspired it to continue its work and inspired others to take on similar initiatives in other towns and villages throughout Scotland, to prove what can be done.

There have been fantastic examples of schools becoming involved in fair trade work—Jamie Stone referred to that. Roseburn primary school has a link with a cocoa-growing area in Ghana. Its primary 4 pupils study fair trade and focus on chocolate from that area. Currie community high school has links with Kenya and has promoted Fairtrade products from a women's co-operative there. Its students are learning about the direct benefits of that for people on the ground.

The fair trade movement is an inspiration to us all. It proves that collective power from individuals making small changes in their habits can make big differences in the world. The Parliament should definitely encourage the movement.

17:31

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, which gives me particular pleasure as a Labour and Co-operative Party MSP. I reiterate Jamie Stone's comments about the Co-op, which has been at the forefront of fair trade initiatives for many years. I congratulate Patricia Ferguson on securing the debate. As she said, the debate is at the end of Fairtrade fortnight, but in many ways that is useful because it allows us to celebrate the fortnight's success. Several members have mentioned initiatives in their communities—I will touch on some such initiatives later.

Fair trade is crucial when we consider that 30,000 children under five die every day from preventable diseases. The task that we face is still immense, but fair trade allows us to tackle poverty and to bridge the inequality gap. The importance of working together is summarised in a quotation from Martin Luther King:

"Before you finish eating your breakfast this morning, you've depended on half the world. This is the way our universe is structured ... We aren't going to have peace on earth until we recognize this basic fact."

The theme of that quotation is that we must work together. Fair trade achieves that across international boundaries—it involves £1.2 billion and 7 million people, as Shirley-Anne Somerville said.

Much work has been done in Scotland and the UK on fair trade. Iain Gray's speech on some of the history of fair trade was interesting and useful. As other members—including Aileen Campbell—said, the UK market for fair trade products is worth nearly £500 million and one in four bananas is fairly traded.

I will give the local perspective from Rutherglen and Cambuslang in my constituency. Ted Brocklebank mentioned that St Andrews had achieved Fairtrade town status. Camglen Fairtrade forum is campaigning in Rutherglen and Cambuslang to achieve Fairtrade status for both towns. A successful campaign has been launched, which has involved several good events in Fairtrade fortnight, including the screening in Rutherglen town hall of the documentary "Black Gold". Stonelaw high school also ran a successful stall in Rutherglen's Main Street on successive Saturdays.

Jamie Stone said that fair trade has been great because it has encouraged many young people to campaign for honourable values. A positive feature of the campaign group in my constituency is its mix of people. Young people, old people, schools, churches, community groups and elected representatives are involved, and people think that a real community spirit exists in a time when it is sometimes felt that the community ideal has been undermined. It is great to be involved in practical action to tackle poverty and injustice.

The objectives of fair trade have been summed up by Nelson Mandela, who said that

"overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."

Politics is about making a difference. Members recognise that the ideals of fair trade allow us to participate and see real practical differences.

I commend Patricia Ferguson for lodging the motion and I commend the work of the groups in my constituency. The cause endures and the battle continues. We will keep that battle going until we eradicate poverty throughout the world.

17:36

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Patricia Ferguson on securing the debate. I do not want to embarrass her, but having heard her speak at the reception in Parliament and having listened to her thoughtful and knowledgeable comments, nobody can doubt her

commitment to fair trade. I also associate myself with various comments that other members—Malcolm Chisholm among them—have made about fair trade being the catalyst for several developments that need to take place in the commercial world.

However, I want to concentrate on two events in which I have been involved during Fairtrade fortnight. The first was a visit to a primary school in my constituency—Linlithgow bridge primary school—which held a coffee morning to highlight Fairtrade fortnight. The children there spoke eloquently about their commitment, why they think fair trade is important and why they want to be involved in it. I agree with Jamie Stone that it is important for our young people to recognise why fair trade is important. The children produced a recipe book of dishes that can be made from various fair trade products, many of which—I say to Mr Gray—were banana based.

This afternoon, we had a debate on development of the curriculum for excellence. It is apt that our young people are using their learning to recognise problems for other people around the world. I was struck by the serious way in which the young people at the coffee morning dealt with fair trade, although that seriousness is not unusual given that they come from Linlithgow, which has for many years had one of the most active fair trade branches and the most active Oxfam branch.

The second event was also a coffee morning, in St Joseph's parish hall in Whitburn. Whitburn has become the most recent Fairtrade town in West Lothian. However, it is one of many, as West Lothian is trying to be the first Fairtrade county in Scotland. There are many others in that competition. At that coffee morning, I was struck by the fact that the fair trade project is led by a host of people from churches and community groups. I think James Kelly mentioned that. Perhaps we see fair trade benefiting people outwith our country, but there is also a benefit to our communities, as it develops community spirit.

The gloom-mongers among us—the Adam Smith Institute is, unfortunately, among them—have said that fair trade is not really making the difference we all expect, but I do not think that is true. We have heard that the fair trade movement has been very successful, but we will have been successful only when we do not need the fair trade banner. In the meantime, we must encourage those who provide goods and services to make them fair trade goods and services and we must encourage customers to buy them.

At today's time for reflection, Tony Benn said that we have the knowledge and skills to provide fairly for everyone in the world. That is true. Fair trade is one way to address the injustices in our world until we use that knowledge and those skills to bring justice to everybody in the world.

17:40

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): I, too, thank Patricia Ferguson for securing this debate on a very important subject. She spoke about the bad perception of fair trade products. Iain Gray gave us more detail of that from his long memory—or perhaps it is his long life. In the first debate that we had in the Parliament on fair trade, which was probably in 2000, members talked about the products being perceived as not that good. It is a mark of how far we have come in such a short time that fair trade products are now regarded as mainstream. Someone—I cannot remember who—mentioned that Tate & Lyle is starting to use fair trade sugar. That, too, is a mark of how far we have come.

Since the first debate in the Parliament, we have seen the growth of Fairtrade towns, Fairtrade villages, Fairtrade universities and Fairtrade schools. I am sorry that George Foulkes is not in the chamber, as this is a subject that is close to his heart. When he was one of the international development ministers at Westminster, he helped me greatly in the move to make Strathaven one of Scotland's first Fairtrade towns, and I thank him for that. Since then, we have had the Fairtrade school movement. I get a buzz every time I think of Sandford school being the first Fairtrade school in the United Kingdom. We now have many Fairtrade schools. Young people are very important in taking the movement forward.

Members have mentioned too many schools for me to address them all in seven minutes, but I will mention three that I was fortunate enough to visit during Fairtrade fortnight. At Whitelees primary school in Cumbernauld, pupils made their own CD from start to finish—they wrote and performed the song, and they are now distributing it. Marvellous stuff. St Elizabeth's primary school in Hamilton managed an amazing fusion of Scottish Highland dancing and Caribbean music, which was a joy to behold.

I also thank Lianne, from Thornlie primary school in Wishaw. It takes an 11-year-old to go on the Lesley Riddoch show and give short shrift to the man from the Adam Smith Institute, which Mary Mulligan mentioned, when he was trying to say that fair trade is not a particularly valuable thing. Of course it is. The fact that trade is fair does not mean that it is not free—the two are not mutually exclusive. Surely anyone with a social conscience or who cares about the world—as, I believe, the vast majority of people do—can help fair trade to move forward.

Although Fairtrade fortnight has passed, now is an apt time for members to discuss what events we attended. As Shirley-Anne Somerville, among others, said, there are people who keep the

movement going throughout the year. It is no longer the case that we have to convince stores to stock Fairtrade products just for Fairtrade fortnight; people keep it going all year round. Indeed, even before it became popular, there were people plugging away in the churches, especially through Traidcraft, for many years. It is those folk who have kept the movement going and who have enabled Fairtrade fortnight now to be the focus for moving on for the next year.

As Iain Gray said, the Fairtrade mark can now be found on 3,000-plus products. We have also heard about the Fairtrade Foundation and the fact that the fair trade market in the UK is now worth £500 million. Indeed, it is estimated that 90 per cent of people now recognise the Fairtrade mark on products. Since 2005, the number of African producer organisations that sell to the UK market has almost doubled, to 152. Each of those organisations represents thousands of farmers and workers.

Aileen Campbell mentioned the social premium. Fair trade is not just about the producers; it is also about the schools that are built and the co-ops that are formed in other countries to give a fair deal to workers. Of course, there is still a lot of work to be done.

The Scottish Government is absolutely committed to making Scotland one of the world's Fairtrade nations. To drive forward the campaign that the previous Administration started, the Scottish fair trade forum receives from the international development fund core funding of £60,000 per year for three years. In October last year, at the formal launch of the forum, I was delighted to announce further funding of up to £40,000 for this financial year to assist it with more awareness-raising activities, a lot of which took place during Fairtrade fortnight. Real progress has been made since the forum elected its interim board—I hope to have the opportunity to meet its members soon—and I look forward to increased collaboration with the forum and its chair, John McAllion, with a view to building capacity.

I acknowledge that the Fairtrade nation criteria are ambitious, but Fairtrade nation status has to be meaningful. Becoming a Fairtrade nation cannot happen overnight. It is not about being first, or even one of the first; it is about taking on trade justice issues, looking at how procurement can be fairer within government and challenging preconceptions by looking at overseas examples. We are currently considering the findings of the select committee that Malcolm Chisholm mentioned.

I will conclude, although we could all say much more. We have achieved quite a lot, but the fight goes on. As James Kelly said, the battle continues, because this is a wide issue. I know

that members of this Parliament and people all over Scotland will continue to support and promote fair trade, as they have done for many years, in Parliament, in the Government, in all our institutions and right across the country, to the benefit of people here and people overseas. Fair trade is all about ending the unfair poverty that producers in developing countries face.

Meeting closed at 17:47.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the archive edition should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Wednesday 26 March 2008

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

OFFICIAL REPORT daily editions

Single copies: £5.00

Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00

The archive edition of the *Official Report* of meetings of the Parliament, written answers and public meetings of committees will be published on CD-ROM.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

Single copies: £3.75

Annual subscriptions: £150.00

Standing orders will be accepted at Document Supply.

Published in Edinburgh by RR Donnelley and available from:

Blackwell's Bookshop

**53 South Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1YS
0131 622 8222**

Blackwell's Bookshops:
243-244 High Holborn
London WC1 7DZ
Tel 020 7831 9501

All trade orders for Scottish Parliament documents should be placed through Blackwell's Edinburgh.

Blackwell's Scottish Parliament Documentation
Helpline may be able to assist with additional information on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament, their availability and cost:

Telephone orders and inquiries
0131 622 8283 or
0131 622 8258

Fax orders
0131 557 8149

E-mail orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Subscriptions & Standing Orders
business.edinburgh@blackwell.co.uk

Scottish Parliament

RNID Typetalk calls welcome on
18001 0131 348 5000
Textphone 0845 270 0152

sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Accredited Agents
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers