

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 20 November 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

Thursday 20 November 2008

### Debates

Col.

<b>LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN</b> .....	12559
<i>Motion moved—[Adam Ingram].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Karen Whitefield].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Margaret Smith].</i>	
The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram) .....	12559
Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab) .....	12563
Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD) .....	12567
Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	12570
Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP) .....	12573
Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab) .....	12576
Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP) .....	12578
Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab) .....	12580
Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP) .....	12582
Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD) .....	12584
Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab) .....	12587
Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP) .....	12589
Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab) .....	12592
Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP) .....	12594
Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD) .....	12596
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	12598
Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab) .....	12601
Adam Ingram .....	12604
<b>QUESTION TIME</b> .....	12608
<b>FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME</b> .....	12616
<b>QUESTION TIME</b> .....	12628
<b>AQUACULTURE</b> .....	12645
<i>Motion moved—[Michael Russell].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Elaine Murray].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[John Scott].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Jim Hume].</i>	
The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell) .....	12645
Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab) .....	12649
John Scott (Ayr) (Con) .....	12653
Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD) .....	12655
Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP) .....	12658
Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab) .....	12660
Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP) .....	12664
Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab) .....	12666
Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP) .....	12669
Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab) .....	12672
Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD) .....	12674
Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con) .....	12677
Elaine Murray .....	12680
Michael Russell .....	12684
<b>EXPENSES SCHEME</b> .....	12690
<i>Motion moved—[Tom McCabe].</i>	
<b>DECISION TIME</b> .....	12691

<b>Gaelic Language Development .....</b>	<b>12694</b>
<i>Motion debated—[Alasdair Allan].</i>	
Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP).....	12694
Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab) .....	12699
Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	12700
John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD) .....	12702
Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP) .....	12705
Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab).....	12708
Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP) .....	12710
Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab).....	12711
Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab) .....	12713
The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani).....	12715

## Oral Answers

**Col.**

<b>QUESTION TIME</b>	
<b>SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE .....</b>	<b>12608</b>
<b>GENERAL QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>12608</b>
Construction Industry Skills Base.....	12609
End-of-life Choices (Guidelines).....	12611
Glenwood Health Centre .....	12612
HM Prison Peterhead Inspection Report.....	12614
Schools Estate.....	12608
South of Scotland TV Channel .....	12612
<b>FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME .....</b>	<b>12616</b>
Cabinet (Meetings) .....	12622
Children (Stigmatisation) .....	12624
Engagements.....	12616
Knife Culture .....	12624
Organ Donation .....	12626
Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings) .....	12619
<b>QUESTION TIME</b>	
<b>SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE .....</b>	<b>12628</b>
<b>FINANCE AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH .....</b>	<b>12628</b>
Business Support (North-east Scotland) .....	12643
Derelict and Disused Land .....	12637
Edinburgh Airport (Public Transport Access) .....	12634
Efficiency Savings .....	12631
Expo 2010 Funding .....	12642
Government Funding of Local Authorities .....	12629
Highland Council (Meetings) .....	12636
Infrastructure Investment Projects.....	12639
Local Government Efficiency Savings.....	12640
Local Income Tax (HM Revenue and Customs) .....	12628
New Schools.....	12634
Small and Medium-sized Businesses (Bank Support) .....	12637
Strategic Transport Projects Review .....	12640
Tourism (Fife) .....	12641
Union Terrace Gardens.....	12644

---

## Scottish Parliament

*Thursday 20 November 2008*

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

### Looked-after Children

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-2922, in the name of Adam Ingram, on supporting Scotland's looked-after children.

09:15

**The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram):** I am delighted to have the opportunity to discuss with colleagues in the Parliament the important issues that Scotland faces in addressing our commitment to improve outcomes for looked-after children and young people and care leavers. In that context, I am a little disappointed that Labour's amendment is so narrowly focused, but I will respond to it when I sum up.

As I have said publicly before—and I make no excuses for repeating my comments—the way in which we have treated children in public care is a national disgrace. If, as a nation, we are to be judged on our treatment of our most vulnerable citizens, that judgment must be damning. The previous Administration recognised that when it published "Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better".

I am sure that members will share my commitment that there should be no difference between the outcomes for young people who have experienced the care system and those for their peers who have not. That should not be too much to ask, but currently the differences are stark. Children in care are half as likely to leave school with any qualifications, they are more likely to be excluded from school and they are more likely to self-harm. Care leavers are less likely to be in employment and more likely to be in prison or homeless than their peers who have not been in care. I could go on, but I will not.

So what is different about those children? Their early experience will have been damaging and chaotic, and their experience of parenting will have been poor or non-existent. The protective factors that children gain from conventional families and which help them to grow up happily are likely to have been absent. It is not the children who are different, but their circumstances.

I hope that our commitment to getting it right in the early years, early intervention and prevention will, in the fullness of time, ensure that fewer children come into care. Families who need support will be identified early and supported to care for their children. However, we must ensure that those who do come into care get a better experience.

The term "corporate parent" can be controversial. I understand why people say that we need less of the corporate and more of the parenting, but we need to get both bits right. Agencies that care for looked-after children and care leavers must work together effectively and must have robust planning, monitoring and scrutiny mechanisms that drive up standards. They must recruit and develop the best staff and must be committed to improving services to children and their families. To achieve that, they must act corporately and have a corporate responsibility for those children and young people.

Good parenting is at the heart of a good childhood. Professionals and carers who take on that role for children in care face many challenges. I do not pretend that it is easy, but everyone involved must be able to answer positively the question, "Is this good enough for my child?"

That is the message set out in "These Are Our Bairns: A guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent", which covers all services—the corporate extended family, so to speak. It is unique in the United Kingdom in its multi-agency approach to looked-after children and young people and care leavers. That approach, which is underpinned by the getting it right for every child framework, is reflected in all the other associated materials that we have recently published.

To bring the document to life and illustrate what we can all do to make a difference, the guidance includes stories from people who are part of the corporate family and quotes from young people. I heard recently about some young people from Dumfries and Galloway, one of whom has left care to go to drama school in London and another who has set up her own business as a professional photographer. That would not have been possible without a supportive corporate family.

A range of people work with looked-after children and care leavers. They have a wealth of experience, which, together, we can bring to bear on improving outcomes. Social work and education are crucial, but they cannot do this alone. Others have a valuable contribution to make: housing; health; the voluntary sector; and the police, to name but a few.

**Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab):** Does the minister agree that the evaluation of the funding

and pilot projects that addressed the educational attainment of looked-after children was very positive? What is the Government doing to ensure that that good work carries on?

**Adam Ingram:** I thank Rhona Brankin for that helpful intervention. We have published a report on the evaluation of the local pilots to which she refers and have distributed the report, along with a range of other materials, to our local authorities. We want best practice to be adopted elsewhere. It is clear that different local authorities have different local circumstances and can pick and choose from the options available, but there are a range of successful interventions that people can take up and, I hope, implement in their area.

Those who run services—elected members and board members—must promote a culture of high expectation and ensure that systems do not present barriers to good childhood experiences.

Young people want to lead a normal, stable, secure life with people who care about them, and they want access to the same opportunities as their friends. Does the corporate family ensure that its children can play with friends and do sports? Does it ensure that young people are immunised, go to the dentist or optician and eat healthily? Do the young people grow up feeling supported, with the boundaries that they need to be responsible citizens?

When young people leave care, many of the differences come into sharp focus. Some members will have had the opportunity to see the National Theatre of Scotland's "365" production at this year's Edinburgh festival. It was a challenging production, which dramatised the turmoil that faces young people who are trying to set up home for the first time without the support that other young people access through their family. The good work that might have been done while they were in care can very quickly be undone because their vulnerability leaves them open to exploitation and failure through a lack of preparation for independence and the lack of having someone at the end of the phone with the time and resources to help them.

Members may recall that, in June, the Parliament debated the issues raised by Kathleen Marshall, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, in her report "Sweet 16? The Age of Leaving Care in Scotland". I was grateful to Karen Whitefield for raising the issue and for the positive words from colleagues throughout the chamber.

Many areas are developing innovative ways of tackling corporate parenting. Inverclyde's children's champion scheme has now been operating for a year. Each member of the council's corporate management team is a champion for

two looked-after children and must address barriers that become apparent in their areas of responsibility. The chief executive and directors have risen to the challenge and the council is now being approached by partner organisations, such as the local health board, who have asked whether they can participate. One of the children championed by the education director was excluded from school and, as a direct consequence, he rewrote the council's policy on exclusions. That is one example of the scheme in action.

A cross-community planning partnership approach is already being tried in Perth and Kinross, where the Tayside child health commissioner is a children's champion and the police actively support the scheme. The child health commissioner has told me that her involvement has opened her eyes to the barriers that systems, which make sense to organisations, can present to young people.

Other areas such as Fife and Renfrewshire have appointed lead councillors to champion the needs of all looked-after children. The councillors are already challenging their services to improve the experience of children in care. One issue that young people raise with them repeatedly is access to MSN and satellite television. Such issues may seem trivial to us adults, but for teenagers they are part of being normal.

I firmly believe that we can learn a lot from listening to young people. I am sure that all members share that belief and have heard from young constituents with strong views. How do we hear the voices of young people who are not so confident and need support to express themselves? Learning to express oneself confidently should be a normal part of growing up—effective advocacy can help vulnerable young people to do that. Who Cares? Scotland provides advocacy across Scotland. This year it is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary by undertaking a major piece of work to challenge stigma.

We in the Parliament also have the job of challenging stigma and ending discrimination. What can we do? We have a unique role in formulating policy and legislation. We are also community leaders and can challenge public perceptions of young people in the care system and challenge our local services to do better. We can contribute by promoting a culture that is aspirational for young people, their families and carers, communities and Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that it is unacceptable that outcomes for looked-after children and young people and care leavers across a range of indicators fall so far behind those of their peers and agrees to do everything possible to end discrimination and stigmatisation of those who have

experienced the care system and to challenge all services to offer the best possible childhoods to the children and young people in their care to ensure that looked-after children and young people and care leavers are able to grow up into successful, responsible and happy adults.

09:26

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this morning's debate. I hope that once I have finished speaking the minister will see that the Labour Party's focus is not narrow, but broad. However, we recognise that it would be wrong for us not to mention in today's debate the report on child protection services in Aberdeen.

For far too long, young people who are looked after have been faced with levels of care that fall far short of anything resembling a stable family environment, despite the best efforts of social care staff. I am pleased that a number of Scottish councils are taking steps to address the problem, to try to provide young people with a level and standard of care that is more akin to that provided by a family. Today I will mention some of the excellent work that my local authority, North Lanarkshire Council, is doing in relation to some key issues.

Central to the efforts of North Lanarkshire Council is the quest to provide children in its care with a level of support that nears that provided by the family. That approach is the basic thrust of all recent policy statements on corporate parenting.

The council has spent a great deal on campaigns to recruit prospective foster carers, because it recognises that, without doubt, foster care is the environment closest to a child being with his or her parents. Most, if not all, workers in the child care profession agree that foster care is preferable to residential care in a home. The North Lanarkshire why you campaign, which aims to recruit 36 additional fostering resources over a three-year period, has proved very successful. After two and a half years, the campaign has recruited an additional 29 fostering resources and an additional 38 adoptive parents. It is true that the exercise is not cheap, but I believe that it is worth the cost. I urge the Scottish Government to look at that example and to consider funding similar high-profile campaigns throughout the rest of Scotland.

It is vital that, having recruited foster carers and adoptive parents, we retain them as a resource. That is why we need to ensure that they have access to proper training and support mechanisms. For corporate parenting to mean anything, it is vital that all key players and agencies should train properly staff and volunteers who are responsible for the elements of a child's care.

The importance of training is illustrated by an issue that is raised in the Government's policy document "These Are Our Bairns": the importance of ensuring that young people in care homes are given the opportunity to engage with their community. The document recognises that often young people who are looked after miss out on some of the normal family activities that other children take for granted. They may find it difficult to access clubs or other activities, through lack of money, lack of transport or even lack of encouragement and support from a carer. That may seem a trivial point, but comments from young people in care clearly demonstrate that they want to be seen as playing a normal part in the community and not as being different. It is a training issue, because it is easy to see how hard-pressed care home staff may see such activities as less of a priority than effective management of the home. Only through training and emphasis on the importance of extra-curricular activities as a matter of policy will staff realise that such activities must be a priority and not an add-on to their normal practice.

Another step that North Lanarkshire Council is taking to improve the lives of children in its care is the rebuilding of all its children's homes. The council has invested approximately £2 million per home in rebuilding new, smaller-scale residential homes. The homes have been designed to cater for no more than six young people at a time; efforts have been made to make the design more akin to a family home than a cobbled-together institution. It is important to note that North Lanarkshire Council consulted young people on the design of the new homes.

Improving child staff ratios has required the council to employ more care home staff. That is an important point, as proper, good-quality corporate parenting cannot be done on the cheap. It is not easy to sustain when council budgets begin to tighten, and it requires a real commitment from both local and central Government to ensure that it does not move down the list of priorities for public spending.

There is acceptance that we must do better in relation to the education of children who are looked after; the minister touched on that issue. The fact that a child has been taken into care usually means that they have serious problems in their family home. That alone will have an impact on educational attainment, but living in temporary foster care or a children's unit creates added difficulties. It is easy to see why attainment rates for looked-after children are significantly lower than those for other children. A recent report by Dr Graham Connelly of the University of Strathclyde pointed out that the exclusion rate for looked-after pupils is 368 per 1,000, compared with a rate of 60 per 1,000 for non-looked-after pupils. The uphill

struggle that children and young people who are looked after face when seeking to obtain qualifications is clear even from those figures.

I was somewhat disappointed by the minister's response to the intervention by my colleague Rhona Brankin. Although disseminating good practice is important, we also need money to allow good practice to continue. The projects that the previous Government piloted were resourced; I hope that the present Administration will consider doing the same.

I believe in the development of children's champions, an initiative that started in the London borough of Barnet and has now moved to Moray Council and Inverclyde Council. The project aims to ensure that the barriers to achievement that children and young people who are looked after face do not continue to compromise the ultimate success of their care plans. It also seeks to raise awareness of the corporate parenting function and to combat effectively the stigma and exclusion that children and young people who are looked after by councils face.

Champions will be recruited from staff at senior officer level in councils and, as in the Barnet model, will not meet the young person whom they champion. The rationale behind that is not to expand the number of professionals who are involved in a young person's life. Champions will be responsible for assessing information on a young person's progress to date and asking the right questions about their potential and the opportunities that can be made available, just as any good parent would. They will also be responsible for considering what additional resources or provisions would ensure the best outcome for a young person.

That could be a worthwhile approach. Not only will it broaden our knowledge of the issues that affect young people who are looked after, but it will also provide some of the most disadvantaged and powerless young people with strong support from some of the most powerful people in their community.

The Labour Party's amendment calls on the Scottish Government to make a statement to the Parliament on the recently published report on the joint inspection of services to protect children and young people in Aberdeen. Anyone who has read the inspection report will have been shocked by its contents and will be concerned that some of our most vulnerable children and young people are not being protected.

The inspectors highlighted their lack of confidence that children who are at risk of harm, abuse or neglect were receiving the help and support that they needed. Inspectors were concerned that too many children were being left

to live with drug-abusing parents and were being given insufficient support or protection. It appears that, in many cases, early intervention happens too infrequently and action is taken only when a crisis point is reached. Worryingly, staff have not always been aware of the correct policies and procedures to use, and there has not been a clear framework in which to operate.

The inspection report makes for difficult reading, but it is the shattered lives that it leaves in its wake to which we must attend. The report concluded that four aspects of the service were unsatisfactory, including recognising and assessing risk and planning to meet needs. It described 10 aspects of care as weak.

Sadly, this is not the first time that a council's child protection service has been criticised. In 2007, Midlothian Council's deputy leader and social work director both resigned following the publication of an inspection report that showed serious weaknesses in the council's service. In opposition at the time, Fiona Hyslop said that social services in Scotland were being "stretched beyond acceptable limits" because of a funding shortfall.

Given that, on the night before publication of the report for its area, Aberdeen City Council announced that it would have to make £8.5 million of cuts, can the minister give the Parliament an assurance that social services in Aberdeen will not face funding cuts and that support will be there to improve child protection services? I accept that this is an extremely difficult time for Aberdeen City Council. Given that, and given the seriousness of the situation, the Labour Party believes that it is important for the Government to act. Has the minister met representatives of Aberdeen City Council? How does he intend to work with the council to ensure that the recommendations of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education are enacted? A statement to the Parliament would be helpful.

I accept the Government's belief that legislative solutions to problems are not always appropriate. However, the previous Administration consulted on the draft children's services (Scotland) bill, which we believed had the potential to improve and protect services for children. We hope that the Government will re-examine that proposed legislation and consider whether there might be merit in proceeding with all or part of the draft bill.

I welcome the steps that have been taken by both the previous Executive and the current Government to develop a more serious approach to corporate parenting. There is little serious division on the policy, but I call on the Government to ensure that all local authorities in Scotland have sufficient funding to carry out their role as a corporate parent properly.



I move amendment S3M-2922.1, to insert at end:

“; in that spirit recognises that looked-after children are among those considered as most vulnerable and therefore believes that integral to their success is for the Scottish Government to ensure that local authority funding for the care and safety of children more generally is properly protected, particularly in light of the recent worrying HM Inspectorate of Education report into child protection services in Aberdeen, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to make a statement on that report and to revisit the Children's Services Bill consulted on in the previous parliamentary session.”

09:39

**Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** The minister's motion focuses on the important general issue of looked-after children. It is only right, given last week's publication of the worrying HMiE report on its inspection of services to protect children and young people in Aberdeen, that we also discuss that report.

We have returned to the question of looked-after children many times in the chamber over the past nine years. Throughout that time, we have worked together on the issue, and I hope that we can continue to do so today. I say that not out of a sense of complacency—far from it—but out of a sense of shared ownership of the matter and, no doubt, a shared concern that, despite the advances that we have made in this area across the United Kingdom, we are still confronted with events such as those in Haringey, Manchester and Aberdeen, which have dominated our thoughts in recent days.

All of us who are fortunate enough to be parents surely agree that we want the very best for our children. It is never an easy job, and it is not an easy job to be a corporate parent any more than it is an easy job to be any other form of parent. However, as a society and as corporate parents, we should want no less than the best future for the children in our care—for Scotland's 14,000 looked-after children. I welcome the recently published “These Are Our Bairns” report on corporate parenting, which makes very clear what the responsibilities towards such children are across a broad range of stakeholders. As ever, the challenge is to ensure that the aspirations go from the pages of such documents to the front line and develop into actions by the various stakeholders and a greater respect and care for the individual child. It is crucial that the individual child's voice and needs are heard.

The minister caught the essence of that when he highlighted the importance of computer access to Bebo, Facebook and other such sites for teenagers. We must remember that what we think of as being important is not necessarily what they think is so important. We must provide the

wraparound care of the best family, to allow children to grow and to access opportunities in their community.

Statistics from a variety of areas show that we are failing looked-after children: 60 per cent will leave care with no qualifications beyond standard grade foundation level; 36 per cent will have been in contact with a children's panel; and almost half of 16 and 17-year-olds in Scottish young offenders institutions were formerly looked-after children. Looked-after children are more likely to be excluded from school, more likely to become homeless in later life, more likely to suffer from mental health problems and more likely to be out of work. It is always worth remembering that children continue to be twice as likely to be referred to children's hearings for their own care and protection as they are because of offending behaviour on their part. Children are products of their families. In too many cases, those families are chaotic and dysfunctional.

There are a number of ways in which looked-after children are cared for. Almost 60 per cent of them are looked after at home by parents or family members, and 40 per cent are in foster care or residential or secure settings. Each child has their own history, and they need services and support around them to reflect their particular needs.

For every time that social workers, health professionals, the police or politicians have got it wrong, there are a number of occasions when they have got it right—when what they have done has improved a child's life. They might even have saved a child's life. We should never forget that Baby P was killed not by the care professionals, but by his family. The best system in the world and the most caring professionals in the world might still fail in the face of terrible evil. We owe a debt to those professionals who are working in this very difficult and important field. I put that on the record.

Nevertheless, we need to learn lessons, and we need effective, responsive and accessible services that minimise the chances of failure. It is crucial that, at all times, the interests of children and young people, especially those at risk, are placed at the heart of future policy developments, services and decision making. However, too often, an adult's parental rights or the inability of professionals to take ownership of a situation seems to take precedence.

We believe strongly in early intervention. It is the right thing to do and it is a spend-to-save strategy. One of the concerns that comes out of the recent Aberdeen inspection report is that

“In many cases effective action was not taken until crisis point had been reached.”

Unfortunately, I am sure that Aberdeen is not alone in that regard. We know of too many situations in the past—in Midlothian, Edinburgh and elsewhere—to believe otherwise. It is vital that services for the care and safety of children are properly resourced and staffed, and that problems are not left to get out of control.

Having had a chance to look at the conclusions of HMIE's Aberdeen report, I hope that the minister will agree to the request for a statement on the report and that he will accept our amendment's point about the need for early intervention and an immediate and on-going review of child protection practices across Scotland's local authority areas.

The HMIE report makes worrying, sobering and disturbing reading, but time and again it returns to key themes: that services were not provided quickly enough or for long enough; that children at significant risk were not seen regularly enough; that all partners were not kept informed; that councils and voluntary sector partners suffered from a lack of resources and because of staffing issues; that even when models of practice and communication had been put together, they were often ignored; and that crucial meetings were often not well attended. The report found:

"When there were high levels of risk to children social work staff relied too heavily on the parent's agreement to work voluntarily with them."

It continued:

"Risk assessments placed too much emphasis on how well parents cooperated with staff."

The fundamental point is not how parents co-operate with staff, but what parents do in caring for their children. Children were not protected from harm. They were left at home because no alternatives were available, and many who were on the child protection register were not even allocated a social worker. No wonder, then, that most children did not have their protection plans reviewed, even when their circumstances changed.

I hope that the council, the Government and the other key partners will respond effectively to the HMIE report, so that when inspectors revisit the area next year, they will be able to see that real progress has been made on the protection of children in the area.

We know from Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People and from others that real issues arise when young people leave care. Eight times as many of them leave care at 16 or 17 as leave at 18. Given the childhoods that they have had, who can blame them for wanting to leave? We have to take the care that they have been given and continue it beyond the time when

they leave. We need effective throughcare and other support.

The numbers in residential care have reduced since 1990, and the use of alternative support such as fostering, adoptive placements and community-based alternatives has contributed positively to that reduction. Foster parents, kinship carers and others are playing a crucial part, but they need support as well—financially and in other ways.

I put on record my personal disappointment and my party's disappointment that the Government has decided to delay the repeal of regulations that would allow same-sex couples to apply to become foster carers—even though the Fostering Network estimates that 450 new foster carers are needed each year to meet demand. That flies in the face of what Parliament decided in the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007. We should be ensuring that children have access to as many loving homes as possible. People who come forward to offer that love and care will all be vetted vigorously. Repeated delays do nothing to help the delivery of the kind of caring homes that children so desperately need.

The Government has laudably taken on the getting it right for every child proposals from the previous Administration. The Labour amendment calls on the Government to revisit another piece of work that was undertaken by the previous Executive—work on a children's services bill. We are happy to support that but we would not wish to prejudice the outcome of a fresh look at the bill. We do not believe that legislation is the only way to improve corporate parenting or communication between professionals. Reflection will be required.

In our amendment, we call on the Government to work with councils and other partner agencies to ensure that child protection practices are kept under immediate and continuous review. The events of recent weeks have shown us again that we must be vigilant when it comes to child protection and looked-after children. As corporate parents, we must do all that we can to improve the care given to the thousands of children and young people who rely on us.

I move amendment S3M-2922.1.1, to insert at end:

"and to work with local authorities and other partner agencies to ensure that appropriate early intervention and support is available across Scotland and that child protection practices are kept under immediate and continuous review."

09:48

**Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)**  
(Con): It would be a very dispassionate human being who could remain untouched by recent

events related to child care and looked-after children, so let me say unequivocally that we support the Government and the other political parties when it comes to taking this matter very seriously indeed, and especially when it comes to finding a more joined-up approach between the professionals and carers who are involved in the lives of Scotland's looked-after children. Last week's television images were a stark reminder of just how vulnerable some children are, and of the difficulties that we face in adopting policies that can deal successfully with cases in which the child's voice is never heard.

Members will be aware of the vast array of reports on the subject. I thank people from the huge array of public bodies who regularly provide members with informative briefings. The Centre for Social Justice estimates that family breakdown now costs the United Kingdom about £22 billion a year, not including costs to the care system. That speaks volumes about the scale of the task that is in front of us. The centre makes it clear that our current care system is overloaded, that too much is demanded of our social work services, and that morale can, at times, be very low. Naturally, none of that is helped when serious mismanagement occurs, as was revealed last week both north and south of the border. Members will also be mindful of the fact that the number of children and young people who come under the "looked-after" heading has been increasing year on year for the past two decades, as has the number of child protection referrals.

I have no doubt whatever about the Government's commitment—or, indeed, the commitment of the other political parties—to addressing the matter, including the very difficult and sensitive issue of child protection legislation. Such commitment was evident in the cabinet secretary's swift and honest response to the publication of the damning report on the state of children's services in Aberdeen City Council, to which Karen Whitefield referred.

In addressing all such matters effectively, I hope that the Government will be mindful of the following important principles. First, it would be totally unacceptable if the large number of financial commitments that are being placed on councils at present—a time of economic downturn—were to mean that there will be a squeeze put on the funds that are available to support children's services. It is to be hoped that councils and the Government will, via the regular concordat discussions, recognise just how important this area of support is. We need to be sure that councils are able to provide a structure that is both secure and transparent, and which represents best value for money.

In that context, it will be important to make the most effective utilisation of the services that are offered by the voluntary sector, which in so many cases is able to provide vital support and expertise to local authorities in providing quality care. Just last week, I was told by a charitable trust that because of tax changes in the past few years—principally, the fact that advanced corporation tax was replaced with taxes on income revenue—the trust is more than £500,000 less able to support good causes each year. That area of policy needs urgent attention.

There is also the question of educational provision for looked-after children. The recent publication of the HMIE report on improving education provision for our looked-after children makes clear what was already known—that, overall, looked-after children face a bleak outlook when it comes to educational opportunities, particularly in the tertiary education sector. The report recommends that a number of improvements be implemented, including a clear vision for councils on the specific educational needs of looked-after children; increased support for children leaving care who are beyond the school-leaving age; and better methods for assessing the needs of looked-after children, especially in regard to access to the wider curriculum. That is why the Scottish Conservatives also believe that better educational support must be offered to children who are excluded from school, so that they can be provided with a more focused and disciplined approach that allows them to gain more confidence and self-esteem.

We have a wealth of expertise in many voluntary sector bodies—whether in groups such as the Prince's Trust, Fairbridge or eTEN, or in private sector groups such as Spark of Genius—and we need to ensure that they are fully supported and known about by the communities that wish to make use of their excellent support. It is simply not acceptable that some of our children are excluded and have nothing to do or any means of feeling they have something worthwhile to contribute.

We welcome the pilot schemes that have been conducted across 18 council areas in Scotland, and have examined a variety of techniques to provide direct support to help youngsters become the major stakeholders in planning their educational and employment futures. The outcome of those pilots saw improvements in attendance, advancement in assessment levels, faster and more effective educational progress, and indirect improvements in the level of support for parents and carers. As Karen Whitefield and Margaret Smith said, those areas require considerable attention.

However, as the minister said in his opening remarks, perhaps the most important issues to

tackle in the longer term are the problems with parenting. I hope that we in Parliament can agree that the problem is among the most acute social difficulties that face this country. In far too many cases we are now witnessing a third generation of parents who lack basic parenting skills—parents who no longer know how to pass on the skills because they themselves were children of parents who did not possess those skills. Although the Government can help—as it is doing in improving kinship and foster care, in reforming the children's hearings system, and in developing legislation that is presently under consideration—it cannot be expected to bear the entire burden of the problem. As Margaret Smith said, parents are the most effective means of bringing up children, so we need to ensure that we have social policies that address that issue, and that we have tax policies that create much greater incentives for families to stay together and which help a parent to stay at home in the earliest years of a child's life. Care at that early stage is vital.

We will work with the Government and, more important, we will work on a cross-party basis to improve the outcomes for our looked-after children and for all those who are such vital links in the human chain. However, we also believe that we have to do more in other policy areas in order, we hope, to reduce the numbers of children who are placed in care in the first place.

09:55

**Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):**

When we offer a decent future to children, we offer a secure future for our nation. I am pleased that yesterday we took a small step towards achieving the ambition—as expressed in the instrument that was debated—of ending discrimination against, and stigmatisation of, some children, through the decision to pass the statutory instrument enabling the provision of free school meals to every child in primary 1, 2 and 3. I presume that those who opposed that measure will take time to consider the evidence of the benefits of it over the next few years and will ensure that the additional benefits to society of the provision of that nutrition are examined properly.

As always, however, we must move on to another challenge. The inadequacies of provision for looked-after children are well documented, but that does not reflect the dedication and professionalism of the people who are involved in the provision of that care. Their efforts should be acknowledged by everyone, as they have been in the chamber. I assume that every member of Parliament will agree that their work should be applauded. Neither is it the case that we have had politicians ruling our country who would wish harm, neglect or failure to thrive on any child.

Much as the SNP Government is clearly superior, I cannot believe that any Scottish politician would want anything less than the best outcomes for all children in Scotland. The devil, therefore, is in the delivery.

I will focus on a couple of areas rather than try to cover the whole spectrum. I was pleased to learn recently that the Equality and Human Rights Commission's legal committee has agreed to inquire into the rights of looked-after children in accessing additional support for learning in Scotland. The additional support needs tribunal can hear appeals against local authority decisions about ASL provision, but children cannot bring appeals to the tribunal—only parents can do that, or those who have left childhood. On the other hand, sheriff courts can hear claims of disability discrimination in schools and children can bring claims in their own names. That seems to be an issue that we should address, especially for looked-after children.

No matter how dedicated the staff are, it is a lot harder for a person who is not the parent—natural parent, foster parent or adoptive parent—to ensure that they do not miss important points. The right of the child to speak for herself must also be clear. Unfortunately, that is not the only issue that we will have to address.

In 2005, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education identified problems for looked-after children in respect of implementation of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. In particular, the report identified concerns about access to service provision and advocacy services for looked-after children and young people. It also identified other problems in respect of communication with them.

I was therefore heartened by the commitment that was made in the chamber a few weeks ago to consider ways in which to incorporate into Scots law the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. That has been welcomed by everyone in the chamber and by all the children's organisations that have contacted me in the past few weeks. The report recommended action by Government and children's services—we have a duty to ensure that we can deliver on that now. I am aware that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, in her Opposition days, raised concerns about some of the measures in the 2004 act when it was going through Parliament. I am therefore confident that she will be determined to improve the legislation. I am also aware, however, that the bill progressed through Parliament on a consensual cross-party basis, and that no party can claim the moral high ground above any other. The whole Parliament—all the parties, some of which are no longer in Parliament—can take the credit for the legislation.

I look forward to the same consensual way of working throughout the passage of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill. I understand that organisations that will respond to the stage 1 consultation will raise concerns about the additional support needs of looked-after children. I look forward to that engagement and to a multilateral attempt to address those concerns. I note that little—if any—research has been conducted into ASL needs and looked-after children. I hope that the ministers will take that into account in planning the next round of Government research and will seek to provide us with appropriate research findings in due course.

**Rhona Brankin:** Some research that has been done by way of freedom of information requests has found that, in the whole of Edinburgh, only four looked-after children currently have co-ordinated support plans. Given that the SNP, in conjunction with others, runs the City of Edinburgh Council, what would the member like to say about that?

**Christina McKelvie:** The Liberal Democrat/SNP-run City of Edinburgh Council will obviously look at that. [*Laughter.*] I hope that the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill will address such issues, as well. However, I remind Rhona Brankin that Glasgow faces the same issues, and Glasgow City Council is not a Liberal Democrat/SNP-run council.

**Margaret Smith:** Yet.

**Christina McKelvie:** Let us get serious. I will move on.

There are specific concerns that I hope that we can examine. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that children who are looked after by their local authority are in the strange situation of their parent also being the body that makes decisions about their additional support for learning needs—surely, a conflict of interests. We could address that, too.

There are also concerns—which I understand will be raised in evidence—about access to education for looked-after children, and about protection of the human rights of those children. We will address those issues during our scrutiny of the bill. I trust that the cabinet secretary and her ministers will provide us with their views throughout.

One of the key issues regarding looked-after children is their low level of educational attainment. The standard among them is considerably worse than among other children. Members from throughout the chamber will speak about that this morning, as some already have.

This nation is proud of its ability to rebuild and refashion itself, and we have come a long way in the past few years. I trust that we will continue to

make good progress when opportunities to do so present themselves in the future. I support the motion.

10:01

**Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife)**

**(Lab):** I declare an interest in that, until August 2008, I was involved in the development of an electronic single shared assessment, which includes elements of child protection and child care. Also, my wife is a consultant in interagency training in child protection, and I have a son who is a medical specialist in addictions. I will talk about addictions today.

The number of looked-after children in Scotland has risen from about 11,500 in the first Parliament to 14,000 now. To some extent, that reflects the fact that we now recognise the fact that families in which there are problems with drugs and alcohol are often significantly damaged.

On the medical aspects of looked-after children—the other aspect that I will address—we have the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, but we still await the regulations and guidance for that act, although I understand that they will be forthcoming shortly and are being consulted on. I would be grateful if, in summing up, the minister could give us a timetable for that. It is vital that there is no slippage on it, that there is effective training in relation to the 2007 act and that we achieve an implementation date of June 2009.

An area that interests me, and on which I have questioned the minister previously, is provision of medical information to adoptive and foster parents. Under section 74 of the 2007 act, medical information must be supplied to adoptive parents. However, that addresses only adoption, not permanency, which is a significant problem that is of concern to me. In 1989, I wrote to the General Medical Council in my capacity as, at that time, the chair of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering Scotland's medical group, because I was concerned that medical practitioners were not providing information on the family histories of children who were being placed for adoption and fostering because the families refused to allow that information to be transmitted. I think that section 74 of the 2007 act will deal with that, but I would like the minister to say whether he has had discussions with the General Medical Council about the need for instructions to be given to doctors to ensure that that medical information is passed on.

I also suggest to the minister that, if it is possible, any children's bill should incorporate a change that extends the measure to include permanency and not just adoption. We are no

longer dealing with the clear-cut situations that I found when I started work as an adviser in adoption and fostering in 1974-75. At that time, there was adoption and there was fostering. There was a very clear gap between the two. Once a child was adopted—I was adopted myself—the family was left on its own, with no support, and that was the end of it.

Now, however, there is adoption with support, although provision is patchy; adoption with or without contact; and permanent and temporary fostering. In addition, a process of concurrent planning is being trialled in London. It has been highly successful, particularly in relation to families with drug problems, who must be given a chance to change. When I was lead clinician in addictions in West Lothian, I found no drug-addicted parents who did not want to love and care for their children, but there were many who were unable to do so because their addictions got in the way. It is necessary to give those parents chances, but those chances must not be at the expense of the ability of that child to attach. If the basic trust of the child is damaged badly in the early years, we end up with an older person who will need the services that others have described—40 per cent of the children about whom we are talking require child and adolescent mental health services.

The services have to have clear guidance about how they should tackle the issues of addiction and the management of children, but I do not believe that they have that at this time.

When I was chair of the BAAF's medical group in the 1980s, I was engaged in the development of a medical passport for every looked-after child, which would be held by the adoptive parent, foster parent or local authority until the child reached the age of capacity. When used in conjunction with the child's family book, which gives the child's family record, the medical passport should give a clear medical history of the child. I suggest that the proposal is still an important one.

I used to lecture in social work—Scott Barrie and David Stewart make me feel old by reminding me that they were students of mine. At that time, the health issues that we were concerned with in that context were continuity of care and smoking among foster parents, which are still issues for looked-after children. When children are moved around and placed with different foster parents, continuity of care is often broken. The minister should consider that issue.

Around 100,000 children live in families with drug and alcohol problems. We need to provide support not only in the early years but in the antenatal period. In Edinburgh, there is a specialist team that provides such support, and research into the issue is going on in Glasgow, but we need such specialist teams in every area. The current

guidance is that there should be a case conference at 20 weeks. However, we need to manage and support those families from a very early stage of the pregnancy—as soon as it is confirmed. It is not sufficient for that to be done only by the midwife. There must be social work, health visitor and drug specialist involvement from that early stage.

**The Presiding Officer:** You have one minute left.

**Dr Simpson:** I could go on for many more minutes, but I will curtail my speech.

I understand the Government's desire not to legislate in this area but, with regard to the sharing of information, I must say that I spent my time after I left Parliament in 2003 trying to implement policies around information sharing in respect of drugs and alcohol, which I had been trying to promote as a minister. The electronic single shared assessment on which I have been working has been on the blocks since 2003 and is still not operational. That reflects not only my experience but the experience of everyone who has been active in this area in the more than 35 years since the Maria Colwell inquiry. Information sharing is absolutely fundamental to the development of effective shared care.

I hope that there will be full information for all, not just adopted children; that preplanned support for their medical needs will be provided in a way that ensures continuity; that there will be prior and guaranteed access to child and adolescent mental health services, which is an issue to which the Health and Sport Committee will return in its inquiry; that there will be specialist drug and alcohol teams that will intervene in the antenatal period and at least the first year after birth and will also work with addicted children and those suffering from foetal alcohol syndrome; that there will be an end to voluntary information sharing and that it will instead be made statutory; and that there will be effective guidance on managing children in families with drug addiction problems.

10:10

**Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** I declare a special interest in this subject, as my sister has been a foster carer for many years.

I agree entirely with what Richard Simpson said about continuity of care for looked-after children. Government guidelines say that the care services need to think like a parent and to constantly challenge what is happening around the child by asking, "Is this good enough for my child?" That question must be at the forefront of the minds of everybody in the services that serve those children.

The tragic case of Baby P has been raised by previous speakers. Such a case must never happen again. Protection of the rights of children must be paramount in any legislation and those rights must come before the rights of parents.

I want to concentrate on what we are doing in this Parliament to protect the people who I consider to be the most vulnerable in our society. Children do not ask to be born, but they are born. Further, they do not ask to be born into a certain lifestyle, but that happens as well. Their parents might lead chaotic lifestyles, be drug dependent or simply be unable to cope. That is why we, as a caring society, have put in place certain measures to protect such children. However, as has been said, sometimes those measures do not work. We must all ask whether we are doing enough or could do more. I hope that the debate will raise some questions and supply some answers.

Rhona Brankin's amendment calls on the Government to ensure that

"local authority funding for the care and safety of children more generally is properly protected".

In that regard, I am quite concerned by the news—which I received last night—that the City of Glasgow Council has decided to remove direct and care services from council control, which could lead to the loss of 600 jobs. That decision will have a direct effect on the very vulnerable children we are talking about today. I ask the minister to instigate a meeting with Councillor Steven Purcell, the leader of Glasgow City Council, on that matter so that we can ensure that vulnerable children are not further disadvantaged. It is important to do something about that right now.

I agree whole-heartedly with what Margaret Smith said about early intervention and continued support. That is where the child protection committees come to the fore. They have oversight of protection measures at local level and work in partnership with the police, social work, health agencies and others to ensure that support is put in place. However, it must be put in place as early as possible. If it is not, the child's life could be in danger. It is good that the child protection committees work at grass-roots level, and I believe that they are working well. However, nothing is perfect, and we must continue to monitor the committees to ensure that they continue to intervene at an early stage.

Foster parents do a terrific job, as Karen Whitefield said. However, their views are not always taken into consideration. I have spoken to foster carers—not just my sister—who say that they are not always listened to. One issue that arises frequently in my discussions with them is the length of time that children are kept in the care

system. The sad fact is that, by the time children get to the age of four or five, many people do not particularly want to adopt them. However—as was alluded to by Richard Simpson and Margaret Smith—the reason why they are kept in care for that length of time is that, time and again, they are sent back to their parents, who are trying to co-operate with the services, only to be returned to the care system when things do not work out. That must damage those children. Richard Simpson spoke about trust: imagine being a child who is learning to trust someone, but is taken back to parents, and then again back to carers. What long-term damage must that do? That is why we have such problems in the care system for older people. I would like the minister to consider that issue.

Another issue that I and others, including those who come to see me, constantly raise is children being given access to parents. Children are told that they are going to see their parents, but the parents often do not turn up to meet them. What damage does that do to a young child who had looked forward to contact with their parent? It does not always happen, but it happens time and again. Children turn up and wait, but the parent does not turn up and there is total damage. Obviously, such children are left in pieces—we perhaps pick up those pieces later. I promised the foster carers who I spoke to that I would raise such issues, and I would like the minister to consider them.

If possible, I would like the minister to organise or instigate a meeting, a conference or something else in which foster carers can express their concerns to the relevant departments and be listened to. Foster carers are at the coalface and must be heard for the sake of the children I see daily and other children who will come into the system. We cannot fail those children. The costs are being paid, but not by us—those children's lives are the cost.

10:16

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I remember as a young—or perhaps younger—researcher in the early months of the Parliament preparing a paper on looked-after children for Labour MSPs. The inequalities that face that group of young people have never left me. I prepared the paper at the time of the first big debate on the issue, which took place when Sam Galbraith was the responsible minister. The genuine importance that has been placed on the issue is clear from previous Executive ministers' speeches and their actions in government. However, reform and the increased resources that have accompanied reform have not led to the progress that we all wanted and still want to see.

The statistics make for depressing reading. The numbers of children in care have steadily

increased over the past few years. Some 26 per cent more children are now looked after than were looked after in 1999. Many life chances are taken away from children in care. We know that such children are more vulnerable to teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment and severe health inequalities, which Richard Simpson discussed.

Change has not happened anywhere near as fast, and has not gone as far, as we wanted it to. That has not been because of lack of effort, lack of support in Parliament or even lack of consultation outside it. Many of the indicators on which the wellbeing of looked-after children is based will take a while to improve, but children and young people are being let down daily. Looked-after children do not need to see such reductions in their life chances. Other countries do much better in this area. We must improve parenting and corporate parenting in this country so that we do not continue to waste the talents of Scotland's looked-after children.

Education has been focused on and has received resources—Rhona Brankin highlighted that. Last year, 48 per cent of looked-after children over school age left care without any qualifications. That figure is an improvement on the near 60 per cent who left care without any qualifications in 2002-03, but it is still unacceptably high.

It is depressing that the figures for my region—Fife—do not compare well with the poor national figures. The educational attainment of looked-after children in Fife is lower than that of looked-after children in other parts of the country. They have lower attainment in many qualifications, and lower attainment in English and maths. Furthermore, there has been a large drop in attainment from last year to this year. Fife Council was one of 18 authorities that took part in pilots that were aimed at increasing educational attainment among looked-after children, but the process revealed as much about what needs to be improved as it did about the ability to deliver results. However, it is important that there is a legacy from the pilot so that the necessary change that was identified can be achieved.

In recent discussions that I have had with teachers and other professionals who work with looked-after children in Fife and throughout Scotland, concerns have been expressed about the serious lack of foster care places and the lack of training for foster carers so that they can cope with challenging behaviour. Despite fostering being most beneficial to the most disruptive children, many are placed in bought placements in which they find themselves in mixed age groups. That leads to frequent disruption, which can obviously impact on children's attendance and

attainment at school. Only 27 per cent of care leavers who are entitled to after care are still in touch with Fife social work services, and only a third of care leavers in Fife had pathway plans. Those figures are well below the national averages.

There are also concerns about weaknesses in some local authorities' single outcome agreements on looked-after children, and about stretched social work budgets, which must ensure that children on the margins of needing care will always have that option open to them.

However, some positive actions have been taken in Fife. There are people in Fife who are very committed to looking after looked-after children. I am pleased to be an ambassador for Barnardo's Fife children's rights service, which provides independent advocacy for children throughout Fife. Many of the service users are children who have been, or will be, taken into care. The service is entirely independent of other interests within child care services. Children feel that they can trust it, and it can speak freely and fully in support of the child's rights. I would like to see such a service available to looked-after children throughout Scotland.

If we are to improve corporate parenting for looked-after children in Scotland, and improve parenting in Scotland so that we rely less on corporate parenting services, we need properly protected investment by the Scottish Government and local authorities throughout Scotland. I know that we are working in a changed financial relationship with local authorities, but it is clear that progress is slow on local delivery and translating words into actions, and that the Parliament's intentions often struggle to be realised.

10:22

**Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP):** We all agree that the 14,060 children who needed to be looked after by local authorities as at March 2007 are 14,060 children too many, but, unfortunately, for many children a form of corporate parenting is the only sensible option that is in their interests.

One thing is certain: looked-after children are vulnerable. They have a much higher incidence of mental ill health. Their attendance rates at school are significantly below average compared with their peers' attendance rates, and it is not surprising that a very high proportion of them—especially those who are looked after at home—leave school with minimal or no qualifications.

Improving the care of looked-after children is vital to ensure that they have productive futures. The minister said that action is being taken in pilot projects to accomplish that aim and that the



results have been encouraging. Such measures are valuable, but I am particularly concerned about the needs of looked-after children who still reside at home. I said that such children attain far less educationally than do children in residential care, which perhaps is not surprising. Despite the bad publicity that residential homes have had in recent years, there is no doubt that most of them are run by caring staff who provide some sort of stable base on which to develop the circumstances in which children can prepare for adulthood. A child who is at home must cope with the circumstances that led to referral and being categorised in the first place. Unless it is absolutely necessary, we do not wish to break irretrievably the bonds that bind families together, but living in such circumstances can place a burden on children that is greater than they can easily bear.

Richard Simpson was right to draw attention to the predominant needs of the child, but we must not assume that parents in certain situations wish ill for their children. They may not be able to express their love, perhaps because of ignorance, the adverse effects of alcohol or drugs, or simply because they had an emotionally deprived upbringing and do not know how to care or show love properly. Members should not forget that in a few years' time, the children whom we are worrying about today will be parents, and that a few years ago, many of their parents were looked-after children. The figures show that there is a much higher incidence of the children of looked-after children being taken into care.

What is needed is not just educational input for looked-after children who stay at home but input for the whole family unit. There is an interesting initiative at the moment at the National Gallery in London, in which looked-after children and their parents are encouraged to produce works of art in the educational section of the gallery and then exhibit them in the gallery itself. That not only allows the calming effect of artistic endeavour to work its magic but, by virtue of exhibiting work in a prominent gallery, enhances the self-esteem of people who for years have been accustomed to being at the bottom of the pile and of no significance to anyone, including themselves.

**Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab):** I agree profoundly with Ian McKee on the need to support not just children but their families, but does he agree that some of the budget cuts that we are seeing in local councils across the country affect the ability of professionals to do exactly that?

**Ian McKee:** I do not want to get into a dogfight about budget cuts. We have been talking a lot about funding and physical resources, but I want to draw attention to a more profound problem that we face in our society: the lack of support that we give to our social workers.

With the benefit and wisdom of hindsight, we are all tremendous at determining what should have been done in certain circumstances. About 10 days ago, I was motoring to Lochgilphead as part of my duties on the Health and Sport Committee, so I had a chance to listen to the radio. There was a long interview with a young mother who had rushed off to Ireland when she was 32 weeks pregnant to avoid her child being taken into care by social workers. She got a most sympathetic hearing, as did her mother, and the interviewer obviously agreed that the social workers were wrong. It was only at the end of the interview that a statement was given by the social work department that there had been no intention of taking the child into care. Throughout the interview, it was accepted by the interviewer on behalf of society that social workers were wicked people who took children away from young mothers.

On one occasion during my medical practice, I referred a child to hospital because I was worried about some bruising. I am glad to say that it turned out that the cause of the bruising was innocent, but my relationship with that family was ruined permanently because I had shown that worry and asked for confirmation from the hospital. I was inhibited from taking further steps with other children because of the damage that it would do to my relationships with people.

We must get away from the idea that social workers are wicked if they take children away from people and wicked if they leave children with people. We must respect them as people who do a very difficult job and one that needs society behind them. If society is not behind them, we will continue to see mistakes like those that have happened recently.

It is salutary to think of the hundreds of young children who are killed on the roads every year. I do not want to denigrate what has happened to children in care, but if we paid a lot more attention to the general safety of children in our society, a lot more children would benefit and we would have a better society as a result.

Let us work with the children and their families, but above all let us support and not denigrate the social workers, who have an awful job in society.

10:29

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** I begin by agreeing with Ian McKee's comments, which echoed earlier contributions by Margaret Smith and others, on the importance of the social work facility and the different roles that it can play. Social workers get the blame in lots of situations, but Margaret Smith was right when she said that we should remember that, ultimately, it is not

social workers but some parents who, sadly, harm children.

Over the years, we have had a lot of debates on looked-after children, which is to the Parliament's credit. The minister made an excellent opening speech, but I had the slight sense that it was a speech more for the opening of a conference than for a debate in Parliament. I make that point seriously, against the background of the Government's accountability. No major initiative or progress was announced, and the debate was not set in any context. It would help if, when the minister summates, he indicates how the points that have been made today will be taken forward and will fit into Government policy and, given the great interest in the subject, how he will report to Parliament on progress in the weeks and months to come.

For me, the Social Work Inspection Agency's 2006 report "Extraordinary Lives" was both a wake-up call and an indication of what was possible. I cannot remember if it was that report or another that was published about the same time that said there is nothing inevitable about poor educational outcomes for looked-after children. Before then, I had met a lot of young people who had been or were looked after, I had talked to groups such as the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum, and I had spoken to foster carers, adopters and children who had been adopted. I knew that some young people had developed extraordinary resilience and made tremendous achievements, despite horrendous starts in life, but somehow I did not really believe that it was possible to change things in a substantial way. The message that came from the reports was that change was possible.

As we have heard, about 14,000 young people are looked after by local authorities—more than half at home, nearly 30 per cent with foster parents and the remaining number in a residential setting. All those situations are important components of our facilities for young people. The numbers are not impossible either to visualise or to target effectively. It is true that we have to consider the context of the 40,000 to 60,000 young people who live with drug-abusing parents, and the 80,000 to 100,000 young people who are affected by parental alcohol abuse. Many more children than the central core are at risk, but, even then, the numbers are manageable and change is possible.

We know what makes a difference: the SWIA report spelled it out in detail, and Sandra White was right to mention the disappointment that arises when those things do not happen. It is long-term stability, suitable home backgrounds and links with birth families. It is regular attendance at school, strong and satisfying friendships and

networks, and the provision of nurturing experiences into adulthood. It is listening to young people and acting on that listening, and it is strong relationships with key individuals in their lives. It is effective transition planning and building resilience.

I will touch on three aspects of the challenge. The first is the need for effective and speedy assessment at the right stage—many members have touched on the implications of that. I was told by the Scottish institute for residential child care that some countries have more children in care than does Scotland. I do not know whether that is true, but it is an interesting sideline if it is. There may be lessons to draw from them.

We know that too many children and young people go through failed placements and can be in too many foster homes, with all the disadvantages that go with that. We heard from Elizabeth Smith that parents are the best people to bring up children—but, sadly, not all parents. We must keep that fact in mind. We know, too, that fostering organisations have identified a shortfall of 10,000 foster carers throughout the UK. The pressure on foster carers brings its own problems of inadequate or unsuitable placements. Those problems should not be understated. The number of potential foster parents can cause issues in getting the right placement for children.

**Dr Simpson:** Does the member agree that there is concern that foster parents in Scotland foster more children than do foster parents in England? In England, there is a limit. I am not suggesting that we should have a limit, but we could phase one in when there are complex needs. Overplacing children with foster parents places an undue burden and expectation on those foster parents.

**Robert Brown:** I accept that point, the background to which is the inadequate number of foster parents in the first place. We need more foster carers, and given that foster care across the board results in the best outcomes for looked-after children, it is a major priority. It is worth stating that again: outcomes with foster parents are the best. Outcomes in residential homes are the second best and, sadly, outcomes for children who stay at home are often the worst. That may seem contraindicative, but it is an important aspect.

The second aspect of the challenge is the transition to adulthood. Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People was spot-on in identifying that as a major weakness. The Scottish tradition is for forisfiliation at 16—the right and ability for young people to leave home and fend for themselves at the age of 16. For looked-after children, that is a bad tradition. It means that there is pressure to get immature and vulnerable youngsters out at 16. It means feeding the sad

cycle of loneliness, homelessness, criminality and ill health that is so often the fate of many young people in those circumstances, and it can mean that they cut links with the significant adults in their lives. For those who are in residential schools, there can be disconnects in funding when it is needed most. We need to heed the call of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which regards 18 and not 16 as the age of adulthood, although even 18 should be a liberating age and not a cut-off-and-throw-away age.

Karen Whitefield talked about the exclusion rate of young people who are in care. In the UK, almost a third of ex-looked-after children are not in education, employment or training at the age of 19, and an extraordinary 45 per cent of 16 and 17-year-olds in young offenders institutions have been looked after.

The third aspect is staff. I would like to see a massive recruitment campaign for foster parents, perhaps along the lines of the one for children's panel members. We also need better trained and qualified staff in children's residential establishments, which still have a long way to go. The fact that many local authorities do not have a proper recruitment strategy is not a minor problem, given that there are 4,500 workers in the sector.

It is a worthy objective that the state should act as corporate parent to looked-after children, but that objective needs to be given substance and spirit, with champions at all levels who listen and relate to children. That is not a bureaucratic requirement but a flexible and living one. We have had an excellent debate. Let us take forward the messages and ensure that they are actually implemented on the ground for all the children whom we are concerned about.

10:36

**Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab):** I join Robert Brown and others in praising the work that social workers do, often in difficult circumstances. Ian McKee is right to talk about the complexities of their work and the difficult decisions that they make. Often, we do not dwell on the good, correct decisions that are made, because we take them for granted, but tragically we have to confront the wrong and bad decisions that are made, and that is often done only with the benefit of hindsight.

Having been friendly with many social workers for many years, I know how difficult decisions can be, and I know the dilemmas that they face and the pressures under which they work. No one should underestimate the work that social workers do or the complexity of the decisions that they make.

We can agree about much of what has been said in the debate. I agree with Adam Ingram

when he says that what we have is a national disgrace. He is right—the judgment is damning, and not just for the current Administration. The same applies to previous Administrations, including the one of which I was a part. Collectively, we have failed looked-after children over many years, and local authorities, collectively and individually, have also done so.

Sometimes, we get into the trivia of wanting instant responses to everything, but we cannot make simple judgments about many children, given their complex lifestyles. As has been said, we want to avoid taking some children into care. Instead, we should do whatever we can to keep them with their family. However, as recent reports have shown, some children need to be removed from their family for their own sake and their own protection. Richard Simpson is right to point out the complexities that drugs and alcohol bring to the equation.

As the Minister for Children and Early Years said, we can undoubtedly point to some successes. Some children have gone on to lead hugely productive and rewarding lives, but I wonder how much of that we can put down to the system and how much of it is to do with the individual and what they have achieved despite everything that they have had to confront. In passing, however, like Richard Simpson, I note that the families with which they are placed make an enormous and beneficial contribution to their development. We should thank those families for that.

On the one hand, the debate is encouraging, because of the consensus and shared values that we have, but on the other it is profoundly depressing. I suggest that we all—including me—have a degree of complacency on the issue. I address the following words in particular to the minister. I worry that complacency can turn to negligence if we are not careful. In effect, we are neglecting looked-after children. Offering warm words, as we have all done this morning, is complacent. We need much more than warm words.

Ian McKee said that we do not want to get into a squabble about budgets, but if social workers are not properly resourced at the local level, they are unable to make the decisions that children need. As politicians, we cannot turn away from that. We are guilty if we simply exhort social workers to take on better practice and say, "It doesn't matter about the budgets. We're not going to squabble about that." We need to confront that.

We need to take action. Whether ministers and the Scottish Parliament should take action through legislation or just through policy development is a matter for debate, but action is needed. I ask the minister to consider the results of previous work

and reports. If he cannot do so in today's debate, I ask him to respond to me in writing.

One reason why I am depressed about the situation is because, when I look back to the words that Peter Peacock and I said as ministers, and compare them with what Adam Ingram is saying, I find that we are not moving forward. In 2007, I said:

"Too many of our most vulnerable young people are not fulfilling their potential ... This is a problem that needs care and attention from everyone ... We must increase the possibilities".

We can go on with the warm words, but what has happened—

**The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Hugh Henry:** Can I just finish, minister? There is a specific point that I want to make.

What happened to the commitment, which was made publicly on behalf of us all, that the Scottish Cabinet would get regular reports? How many times since 2007 has the Cabinet been given a report on how looked-after children perform at school? What has the national champion that was suggested been doing, if indeed they have been doing anything? What have we done specifically to remind councils of their role and responsibilities as corporate parents? What have we done to improve training for teachers and other professionals, as we committed to do? Can the minister give me details of the guidance that key workers have been given on their role in supporting young people?

It is all very well to say that we want councils such as Inverclyde Council to be emulated—every council should have a champion—but we need not an exhortation but an insistence that that happens. Indeed, we should set an example by having a Cabinet of champions. Not just the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning—who, unfortunately, is not here—but every member of the Cabinet should be responsible for making sure that a certain number of authorities do their job. If we do not give a lead, how can we expect others to follow?

As Adam Ingram said, the issue is a national disgrace. It has gone on too long, and we are all part of it. We need to finish with the warm words and commit ourselves to effective action.

10:44

**Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP):** As usual, I am batting well down the order, so I will not rehearse things that have already been said. In passing, however, I commend Robert Brown's point that children do not suddenly change at the age of 16. Those of us who are parents know fine

well that change goes on for a considerable time thereafter, and it seems to get more expensive. The point is that our relationship with our children continues to develop. The idea that a looked-after child can suddenly be shown the door at 16 and all will be fine is obviously nonsense.

I will address several issues briefly. First, I remind members of a few statistics on prisoners. Of our prisoners, 80 per cent have the writing skills of an 11-year-old; 50 per cent have the reading skills of an 11-year-old; 65 per cent have the numeracy skills of an 11-year-old; and 70 per cent used drugs before they entered prison. That is relevant to the debate because, compared with the general population, prisoners are 13 times more likely to have been in care as a child. We can do the maths any way we like, but that is a significant issue. The figures show that there is a cycle. We know that children of prisoners are more likely to come into corporate parenting; that children of teenagers are more likely to come into corporate parenting; and that those teenagers are more likely to become prisoners and so on. We must accept, as the Government has in principle accepted, that we have to break that cycle.

My second point is about Aberdeen. As a citizen of Aberdeen who lives within walking distance of the city centre, I recently tried to find out what is going on there. To be absolutely clear, I am not here to defend the indefensible. However, the measures that I will mention were in hand before the HMIE report that members have mentioned was published. Aberdeen City Council is spending an additional £170,000 this year on six qualified social workers for the children's social work fieldwork team. As I said, the decision on that was taken long before the HMIE report came out. The city is spending capital moneys on bringing looked-after children back into the city, which will significantly improve cash flow for the service. The city's adoption and fostering service has recently been inspected and received a very high rating, so it is not all doom and gloom. The council is trying and is doing its best, although that is not to pre-empt what the minister might say.

My third point is about the children's hearings system. Members may be aware that a consultation is being carried out on the future of the system, which is a significant part of the looked-after children process. I quote from the consultation document to make a point about the reason for the consultation:

"When local government was reorganised in 1996, the structure of the Children's Hearings system was partially reformed. The Children's Reporters were taken out of local control and placed within a Non-Departmental Public Body—the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration. The children's and Safeguarder panels however moved from a regional basis"—

under which there were 12 of each—

"to 32 Children's Panels, 30 CPACs and 32 Panels of Safeguarders.

This caused a considerable increase in bureaucracy as each children's panel required a chairman and at least one deputy".

Members will understand that there was reduced flexibility all round. I am not in the business of blaming people for the changes in 1996, but that explains why the Government is anxious to clarify the system and reduce the bureaucracy.

The three overarching principles governing the operation of the children's hearings system are that the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration, the child's views must be taken into account when major decisions are made about his or her future, and no supervision requirement should be made unless doing so would be better for the child than making no supervision requirement. In all those processes, an element of legal advice is involved. One issue in the consultation document is that the same lawyer may advise a panel—which is proper—and one of the parties, which may be the council social work department. It is entirely clear that that is not good legal practice. It is a basic legal principle that those who advise a tribunal should be independent of those who take either side in the argument. However, as the consultation document points out, that is not always what happens. Although the issue is peripheral to the debate, it is important that we get the system right, because it is important that youngsters are represented properly.

I will extend the argument by pointing members to a recent article in the online *Journal of the Law Society of Scotland* that was put together by cl@n—the Community Law Advice Network. "Jack's story" takes us through an education appeal committee process in which exactly what I described happened. In the case, which was anonymised, the appeal committee was advised by the council's lawyer on matters of law, but the same lawyer took the council's side. Had the child not been represented independently by the group that wrote the article, it is obvious that he would not have been well represented and the result would probably have been different, for reasons that members will understand.

That adds a little more to the argument. I encourage the minister to examine the way in which appeal systems operate and to try to encourage people to ensure that we follow the correct legal procedures. In part, that is because we do not want challenges in European courts, which are a complete waste of everybody's effort, but it is also because it is important that children are represented properly. They have a view and are entitled to have it taken into account in such processes. By definition, when someone gets to

an appeals tribunal, they have reached an important stage.

10:50

**Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** All members who have spoken have acknowledged the importance of this debate on looked-after children. I join them and agree that young people who live in residential services are among the most vulnerable in Scotland. In many ways, our society has the right priorities, with high ideals and the aims of providing the best possible help and support for the most vulnerable around us. As members have said, that includes looked-after children. We are fortunate that, over the decades, people who care have focused much effort on setting acceptable standards and regulations. We are thankful for those who have devoted their lives' work to such an important mission. Parliamentarians owe a huge debt of gratitude to those who have given their best to make a difference on a vital matter.

Inspections by the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care have found that several services use good practice in protecting children and planning for care. However, the commission has found that more than 50 per cent of services need to improve aspects of their practice in one or more areas. It is also interesting to note that the commission has taken formal legal enforcement action in two residential special schools because of concern about the safety and wellbeing of the young people who were living in them.

Hugh Henry was right on many issues. As other colleagues have done, he made a point about the pressure on social workers and other key professionals. Case load has been cited in newspapers in the past couple of weeks as a contributing factor to instances in which serious problems have emerged. We must keep a close eye on resources for social workers and other key professionals. The points that members, particularly Hugh Henry, have made on that are really about resourcing. We must watch where the money is going in local authorities now that ring fencing no longer applies; Labour members, rightly, hold strong views on that issue.

I welcome the news of further intervention by another crucial organisation. Only yesterday, I received an e-mail from the Equality and Human Rights Commission regarding the important issue of support for learning. The e-mail advises that the Equality and Human Rights Commission's legal committee has agreed to conduct an inquiry into the rights of looked-after children in accessing additional support for learning. The commission points out that the Additional Support Needs Tribunal for Scotland has jurisdiction to hear appeals against local authority decisions on ASL

provision, but that children cannot bring appeals to the ASNTS, as the legislation allows only young people and parents to do so. Currently, the sheriff court has jurisdiction to hear claims of disability discrimination in schools, and children can bring claims in their name.

In 2006, there were 12,966 looked-after children and young people in Scotland, 44 per cent of whom were looked after and accommodated in foster care, residential care or secure settings. In 2005, an HMIE inspection report identified problems with the implementation of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 in relation to looked-after children and young people. In particular, the report identified concerns about access to service provision; advocacy services; and communication with looked-after children and young people. The report recommended action by Government and children's services.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission, in partnership with many of Scotland's leading children's and disability organisations, is raising concern about the ASL needs of looked-after children in a joint submission at stage 1 of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill, which is before the Parliament. Despite there being consensus on the specific concerns about the legal rights of looked-after children and young people to challenge decisions about their ASL needs and service provision, no research has been done to provide robust evidence on the impact on looked-after children and appropriate service provision.

In Scotland, the commission's initial concerns focus on children whose parent is a local authority; often, such children have no independent person to bring an appeal on their behalf because the corporate parent is also the body that decides on the extent of the child's special educational needs. The commission is also concerned about looked-after children's access to education; in particular, it is concerned about those with ASL needs, because disabled and black children are overrepresented in that group. Further, the commission is concerned that there is a failure to provide looked-after children with their basic human rights.

I am aware that the commission will meet Scottish Government officials in the next few weeks to discuss its initial concerns, the possible scope of an inquiry and appropriate terms of reference for Scotland. I very much hope that real and meaningful efforts will be made to extend commitment to such an important issue.

I would like us to reflect for a moment on our situation in Scotland, where there is a great deal wrong but much more to aspire to and put right. Members might have seen, or heard about, the

sometimes harrowing and grim TV programmes about what is happening to children in eastern European care homes. I watched one such programme about a year ago and received numerous e-mails about it from constituents and others. I raised their concerns with my colleague and friend Catherine Stihler, who is a member of the European Parliament, and the Romanian home that featured in that programme was closed as a consequence of concerns expressed throughout Europe. I mention that because we need to embrace the idea of sharing the knowledge and experience of our many experts here in Scotland with people who work in care homes and other professionals in eastern Europe. To that end, grant funding programmes are available throughout Europe.

I hope that civil servants, the Government and my colleagues in this Parliament will join me in trying to ensure that such children are cared for. I remember hosting a meeting in the Parliament at which Cardinal Keith O'Brien was a key speaker. He said to me that the very worst examples of care were in Romania and that, as parliamentarians, if we did just one thing to remember Ceauşescu's legacy, we should work to help such children. That is why I was pleased when I saw Jack McConnell's motion this week in which he applauds J K Rowling and others for their contribution to helping more than 25,000 children in eastern Europe. I hope that we will each do our little bit, too.

10:58

**Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP):** In our deliberations about Scotland's looked-after children this morning and our expressed desire to improve, promote and protect children's welfare, it is paramount that we reflect on the suffering of Baby P, which is a haunting example of what can happen when we get it so very wrong, by acts of either commission or omission.

Baby P was visited 60 times by health and social work professionals—the equivalent of twice a week. He was seen by 19 health professionals and had been in hospital three times. He had more than 50 injuries. Three days before he died, he was seen by a paediatrician who failed to diagnose his broken back and ribs, injuries that would have left him paralysed. Instead, he was described as cranky and miserable.

As a former social worker, I am incredulous about the single and collective failings of each agency towards Baby P and, as a mother, I can barely bear to think about it. However, as a parliamentarian and a citizen, I think that I must and we must. Closer to home are the death of baby Caleb Ness and the HMIE reports about

Aberdeen and Midlothian, which are chilling reminders of the tragedies that could have been.

Following Victoria Climbié's death, the Laming report, among other things, focused on corporate parenting. Corporate parenting is defined as

"formal and local partnerships needed between all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children".

Forgive me, but that is rather staid, managerial, civil service, policy-maker language. The important thing is to consider who corporate parents are. Local councillors need to take on leadership and ownership and they need to be at the vanguard of their local child protection system and services.

What then is the role for parliamentarians? We should be the corporate interfering granny, looking over the parents' shoulders to ensure that they are doing it right. We should be the nosy neighbour, always watching and asking searching and probing questions about outcomes for Scotland's children. We have reams of well-meaning legislation and policy statements. As we know, professionals have a duty of care and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 rams home the point that children's welfare is paramount and that their needs and rights take precedence over those of everybody else.

To its credit, the previous Scottish Executive produced "It's everyone's job to make sure I'm alright." The Scottish Government has produced, "These Are Our Bairns: a guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent." Government has to be blunt and concrete in saying that it is entirely unacceptable for any professional—not just social workers, but nurses, doctors, health visitors, housing officers or anybody who is paid from the public purse or who works in a service that is funded by the public purse—not to share information or not to work in children's best interests. That must be the case irrespective of whether people work in a service that works directly with children or one that provides only indirect support to children, or, indeed, whether their client is an adult as opposed to a child.

Often, in the wake of the death of a child, we hear commentators, particularly in the press, say that in the years following all the horrific revelations of institutional abuse of children in our child care system, the pendulum has swung the wrong way and we have gone to the opposite extreme. Apparently, social workers are now too reluctant and reticent to take children into care and the current presumption is that a bad family is better than no family. However, the clear message from Government and Parliament is that there must be no room for fashion or fads when it comes to protecting Scotland's children. Protecting

children is a straight-down-the-line decision, which should be evidence based and made with vigour and rigour about what is best for each child. That decision should be made without fear or favour. The quid pro quo from parliamentarians and Government to workers and other professionals is that when they make those decisions without fear or favour, we will stand by them.

According to some studies, 60 to 80 per cent of a social worker's time is spent staring at a computer screen, wrapped up in bureaucracy or doing paperwork. Of course, as Hugh Henry said, resources are always central to any discussion about protecting children's services. I am glad that we have expressed our support for the difficult job that our social workers do and that we recognise the successes that often go unreported. We also recognise that work with children and families is complex and takes time, and that there needs to be dialogue and sharing of information.

I am proud of Scotland's children's hearings system. However, there is never any room for complacency. Approximately 50 children throughout the UK die every year at the hands of their parents or carers. As we know and as we have heard today, there are many forms of abuse. We have to stand by our children. The challenge for policy makers and politicians is to feel for the children who do not have parents or people to put their interests first. As Sandra White said, we must want for those children what we would want for our own children.

Like most parents, I would rather lose a limb than see any harm come to my son. As parliamentarians and legislators, that is the desire and ethos that we need for all Scotland's children.

11:05

**Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD):** This has been a useful and valuable debate. As Robert Brown said, we should feel no shame in continuing to have such debates.

If we are honest, everyone in this chamber knows that, notwithstanding its good intentions, the state in all its guises is often the worst of all parental options for vulnerable children. All the available data, to which members who are more knowledgeable than me have alluded during the debate, tell us that.

In summing up for the Liberal Democrats, I will raise a couple of issues relating to excluded children and training. We need to find a mechanism within the joint working that goes on that takes account of the fact that the priorities of our education services are often at odds with the expectations that we have about supporting vulnerable children. Our obsession with standard grades and highers and so on means that we do

not recognise that many children who come from chaotic backgrounds and who might be looked after are making a success of their lives when they get to school on time and do not punch a fellow pupil or verbally abuse a teacher. Our system of education means that children who bring a lot of baggage with them into the classroom are immediately excluded when they vent their feelings in the only forum that they have to do so. That places them at considerable disadvantage. We have to train our teachers to recognise that wee Mary or Johnnie is not necessarily just a bad kid but has a huge number of issues. Exclusion will not necessarily help those children unless we have back-up systems in place to provide the help that is needed.

Karen Whitefield was right to mention the work that North Lanarkshire Council is doing. It provides a good range of support services for young people who are at the point of being accommodated. That involves joint working between education services, social services and health services. We have to consider all the things that we have referred to and the statistics that we have bandied about, such as those that we have received from a variety of voluntary sector organisations. However, we also need to take practical steps to address those issues.

I want to put on record a concern of mine, which is reflected to some extent in the findings of the Barnardo's report that was published at the beginning of the week. All too often there is an assumption in the wider sphere that children who are in care, however we define that—whether they are under formal supervision orders or are being looked after—are there as offenders. We all know, and the statistics show, that most of the young people who are part of our care system are there for their own protection. It grieves me when the local reaction to the refurbishment or siting of residential facilities for children in an area is that bad kids are being brought into the area. We need to change the way in which the media engage with those issues; otherwise, we will have a nimby attitude to the most vulnerable children in our society. That is a particular hobby-horse of mine.

Two weeks ago, I was fortunate enough to visit the pathfinder project in Falkirk, which I understand that the minister is going to see on Friday. That is a classic example of how things can be done—there is sharing of information, to which a number of members have referred, and the getting it right for every child model is followed. That requires people to have an understanding of where each of the contributing agencies is coming from in relation to its philosophy and training. I am not convinced that we have got that right and I still believe that we need some form of cross-discipline training for social work, education and police services. Various local authorities are trying to pull

those things together, but that is not done universally. We need the Government to take a lead on that.

Where there is a need for secure accommodation, it should not be about just incarceration; it has to be focused on delivering the best outcomes for these children. It is critical that we build these children's self-reliance and resilience, because they are vulnerable and do not react well to changes in circumstances. Other members—Richard Simpson in particular—said that small changes in circumstances, which most of us can absorb and deal with readily, often cause negative reactions in and negative outcomes for such children. We need to build up their resilience, so that they can deal much more sensibly with what we would regard as the normal trials and tribulations of life.

I commend the GIRFEC model and the work that is being done in Falkirk and Polmont in that regard.

As other members have said, we need to provide much more support for adoption and fostering, because the provision is patchy across the country. We also need to take account of the role that kinship care can play and to ensure that the recognition of and funding for it are equitable.

As Hugh Henry said, we must take all the necessary steps to ensure that these children and young people get the best possible start. There is no great contention in the Parliament about how to do that. These children and young people should be the focus of the attention and they deserve our maximum support.

11:12

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I welcome not just the debate but the terms of the motion in the name of Adam Ingram, which are quite clear. The motion states:

"That the Parliament agrees that it is unacceptable that outcomes for looked-after children and young people and care leavers across a range of indicators fall so far behind those of their peers".

Adam Ingram went further than that in his opening remarks when he said that the treatment of looked-after children was "a disgrace". We have heard that that view is shared throughout the chamber by members in all parties. The Conservatives are happy to support the motion.

I will deal briefly with the amendments. We have no difficulty with the Liberal Democrat amendment, which amends the Labour amendment and refers to the need for keeping under continuous review child protection practices, which is relevant at present.



There is an awful lot in the Labour amendment with which we would agree. It is right to refer, as Karen Whitefield and others did, to the worrying HMIE report on Aberdeen City Council and some of the questions that that raises. There are serious concerns about effective action not being taken until the crisis point is reached. That is not acceptable and the Parliament is right to be concerned about it. Such is the seriousness of the matter that we are happy to support calls for a statement to be made to the Parliament about it, because ministers have to take a serious interest in it.

We are happy to look again at the question of a children's services bill, which, as Karen Whitefield, said, was consulted on in the previous parliamentary session. We are happy to engage with that.

My concern about the Labour amendment is the wording about funding. I appreciate that there is an issue about funding; I will talk more about that later if I have time. However, I am not clear what the Labour amendment means when it talks about ensuring that

"local authority funding for the care and safety of children more generally is properly protected".

That sounds like a proposal to reintroduce ring fencing. Perhaps Rhona Brankin will clarify that in her closing remarks. If that part of the amendment is not intended to mean that ring fencing should be reintroduced, I am not clear what it is intended to mean. It would be helpful if that could be clarified. If the intention is to reintroduce ring fencing, that is not something that we could support.

I move on to the wider issues. Elizabeth Smith talked about the cost of family breakdown, which is at the core of many of the problems that we have discussed. The Centre for Social Justice estimates that family breakdown costs the UK £22 billion per year. All levels of government must consider policies to support families.

One issue is helping to develop parenting skills. We all acknowledge the problem of parents—some are the second or third generation—who do not have the basic skills to bring up youngsters. We do not want a huge new initiative of Government programmes to deal with that. Tremendous voluntary groups throughout Scotland—Barnardo's springs immediately to mind—are already helping to deliver parenting programmes. The Government should support those groups in their work to ensure that they reach into the areas in which parents have difficulty, to support parents and deal with the cyclical problem of generation after generation bringing up youngsters without the skills that they need to get on in later life.

We must acknowledge that families break down. No matter what Governments do, that will always happen. We will end up with looked-after children in institutional care or foster care and we need better help for those youngsters. Adam Ingram was right to say that corporate families are the substitute of last resort for natural families. Corporate families must perform better, whether on education or on access to friends, sports and other extra-curricular activities. Corporate families could and should do much more to become more like natural families and improve the outcomes for looked-after youngsters.

Foster care was discussed, but one issue that was not mentioned—except by Richard Simpson in passing—is whether smokers should be allowed to foster children. Some local councils are debating that controversial subject. I am not a smoker, but I think that it is difficult to argue for artificially restricting the number of people who can foster children. I would find it difficult to say to well-qualified people who otherwise had the necessary skills, "No, you cannot foster, simply because you smoke," provided that they did not smoke where the children were in the home. We must consider that carefully.

Hugh Henry made excellent points about the pressure on council budgets. The last thing that we want at this time is cuts in children's services. As in Aberdeen and down south, when local authorities face pressure and look for cuts to make, the danger is that they will decide to cut the children's services budget. That can have serious consequences.

I have no wish to bring a discordant note into the debate, which has been largely consensual, so I say as gently as I can to Christina McKelvie that spending £30 million of the education budget on free school meals for children of parents such as me, who can well afford to pay for those meals, is not a priority when budgets for children's services are under pressure. If I had the choice between funding free school meals and funding social work, I know which I would choose. We must rethink those priorities.

Angela Constance and many others referred to the Baby P case. No one in the country could not have been shocked by the details of that horrific case. Margaret Smith was absolutely right when she said that the blame for what happened to Baby P must rest with the evil people who tortured and murdered him and not with the authorities. However, that does not absolve of responsibility the social work authorities in Haringey, which had a duty of care towards the small child and which failed him.

I agree with Ian McKee and many others that social workers are hugely undervalued professionals. They do a vital and difficult job—I

would never want to or be qualified to do it—that is pressured, stressful and sometimes dangerous. They face tortuous decisions daily, in which they try to balance the rights of parents with the protection of children. At what point is the decision made to take children away from their parents and put them in a looked-after situation? The judgment of Solomon is required week by week and day by day. That judgment is immensely difficult to make.

However, that does not mean that we should not recognise that very serious failures occurred in the Baby P case. The authorities must be accountable for what went wrong. We must move away from the closed-ranks mentality that is all too prevalent in the public sector. Resignations should have occurred as a result of the Haringey case. That is not because of rage or revenge, but because, unless we have accountability and a resignation, we will not properly learn the lessons of that dreadful case.

11:20

**Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** Like many members, I will start on a positive note. Before the minister starts to worry, that does not mean that I will become unremittingly negative later. I want him to accept my speech in the tone in which it is given—as constructive criticism—and in the context of our general acceptance of the direction of travel, as my colleagues have made clear. It is worth mentioning the broad support from all parties in the Parliament for the approach to looked-after children and for the principles that underpin the getting it right for every child agenda. It is clear that members share a concern not only to protect Scotland's most vulnerable children from harm, but to do what we can to improve the life chances of those who are in care.

I welcome the minister's opening remarks about the importance of corporate parenting. Many members, including Liz Smith, supported what he said about the importance of good parenting in general. He gave encouraging examples of young people who have prospered following their experience of care, and he listed positive examples from the many agencies that are involved in looked-after children's lives and which can and do make a difference.

Much as I agree with the minister that we in Parliament have a role in challenging attitudes and promoting a positive and supportive culture, I was disappointed not to hear more about the concrete action and specific steps that he and his ministerial colleagues are taking. Hugh Henry and Robert Brown made that point well, and it was a theme in the debate.

I will give just a few examples of practical steps that were mentioned. My colleague Karen

Whitefield talked about the importance of training for staff in residential and other surroundings and about investing in decent buildings and homes. I add to that the need to offer decent pay rates for jobs that are often undervalued and remain unfilled as a result.

Liz Smith, Claire Baker and several other members talked about the importance of improving educational attainment among looked-after children. The minister's response on what has happened to the pilot projects to address that concern simply highlighted the fact that little action has been taken and no resources have been put in place.

As Helen Eadie did, I highlight the Equality and Human Rights Commission's forthcoming inquiry into the rights of looked-after children to access additional support for learning. I hope that that inquiry's findings will inform the minister's approach to the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill. Given that Christina McKelvie also referred to that inquiry, I should be congratulated on finding something positive in her speech, too.

I assure Murdo Fraser that we deliberately did not refer to ring fencing in our amendment. However, we wanted to emphasise the central importance of funding. Liz Smith made the point well that we should use the concordat as a device to prioritise resources and action, rather than a cloak to hide behind, which it is used as too often.

I support and sympathise with the sentiment behind the motion. The debate, if not the motion, has been full of practical suggestions for policies and initiatives that could make a difference to looked-after children's lives. We can improve how we operate, but I worry that the motion carries the implicit assumption that the care system lets children down and that that system is somehow responsible for poor outcomes for many young people. It is difficult for looked-after children to break out of the cycle of low self-esteem, low expectations and low attainment, but much of the damage to their lives is done long before they enter the care system. We can do better but, in foster families and residential placements, the care system is full of committed, sympathetic and professional people who overwhelmingly try to provide a safe, secure and stable environment for young people who might never have experienced such a home.

Although it is right that we work to improve the service, children who are at risk but not yet in the care system face the biggest problem. We know that early intervention would make a difference in nearly every case, but too many children become looked after almost as a form of crisis management rather than a structured intervention. For example, very few of the horrific abuse cases

that Angela Constance recounted took place in a foster family or care home; they nearly all involved children who were identified as being at risk but who were not taken into care.

I am only too aware that, as others have said, the debate takes place against the backdrop of the Baby P case in London and, closer to home, the report into social work and children's services in Aberdeen, which, as my colleague Karen Whitefield highlighted, was one of the most critical inspection reports that we have ever seen. As Margaret Smith and Ian McKee argued, social workers do not harm babies; unfortunately, some parents and families do. However, given what we know about Baby P, Caleb Ness, Victoria Climbié and the frightening, depressing list of abuse cases that grab our headlines, we have an obligation to address the identified shortcomings. In Aberdeen City Council's case, that means a ministerial statement on the steps that are being taken to turn round a failing service. At a national level, it means a clear statement of intent on a children's services bill.

Time and again, the point has been made that, if only information had been shared, tragedy might have been averted. Richard Simpson gave some forceful illustrations of what that means in practice. The children's services bill that was drafted in 2007 would introduce a statutory duty on people to share information, rather than relying on a voluntary system. The minister knows that he would enjoy my party's support if he were to enact such a measure.

I imagine that most of us are familiar with the phrase "needs not deeds", which is often used to describe the focus of the children's hearings system. To turn the phrase on its head in describing the Scottish Government's approach, we need to spend less time describing what needs to be done and more on our deeds because, unfortunately, there is a gap between the minister's good intentions and the practical actions that are being taken.

**Hugh Henry:** Will Ken Macintosh refer to the point that Murdo Fraser made about funding? I understand that the Labour amendment does not call for ring fencing but, notwithstanding what Murdo Fraser said about that and in light of Ken Macintosh's point about deeds, it is surely incumbent on the Parliament and on ministers to get local authorities to specify the resources that are intended for child protection and to guarantee that they will be spent on ensuring that children are protected.

**Ken Macintosh:** I agree with Mr Henry about that. I hope that I can reassure Murdo Fraser that we do not have to ring fence, because other mechanisms exist. The Government has put in place a supposedly historic concordat of which it is

proud. Surely that historic concordat and the single outcome agreements can be used to deliver for Scotland's children and ensure that money is spent on the priorities that we have identified in the Parliament.

By way of illustration, I will give a few examples in which that approach is not being taken. What has happened to the support that should be in place for vulnerable two-year-olds and the £34 million that was earmarked at Westminster for the families of disabled children? Why are we witnessing cuts in pupil support and additional support for learning? Where is the much talked-of financial support for kinship carers?

Sandra White talked of a threat to 600 jobs at Glasgow City Council, but—to use a favourite Scottish National Party expression accurately for once—that is simply misleading scaremongering. It is perhaps more worrying that SNP back benchers and ministers are unwilling to follow through the logic of their rhetoric on the financial settlement for local authorities. It is not enough to have a consensus on the will to look after children better if we are not prepared to will the means to do so.

I do not underestimate the challenges that face those who care for our young people or the difficult decisions that ministers face when they set priorities and allocate funding. However, we need to accept our responsibilities. Given the overwhelming support that the Parliament has expressed for ensuring that we get it right for every child, I hope that the minister will tell us less about what needs to be done and more about what is being done to make a difference for our looked-after and vulnerable children.

11:30

**Adam Ingram:** I will deal first with the Labour amendment. Aberdeen City Council, like all local authorities, has an existing statutory duty to protect children. Statutory obligations have first call on a council's resources. The deficiency in Aberdeen was related not to the financial resources that were at the council's disposal, but to its failure to deploy and manage them efficiently and effectively for the purpose of child protection. Margaret Smith highlighted those deficiencies accurately and well in her speech.

Social work and child protection services at Aberdeen City Council are being reorganised and restructured to ensure that the deficiencies are rectified. The various inspectorates that are involved will conduct follow-up inspections to ensure that their recommendations and the remedial action plan have been successfully implemented. I have already made public statements on the HMIE report and intend to issue

further information to MSPs in a fact sheet, but I will respond to members if they want more information.

**Rhona Brankin:** Does the minister accept that one of the key findings of the HMIE report on services in Aberdeen was that there was a failure to share information adequately? Will he refer to that in his speech?

**Adam Ingram:** I am about to come to information sharing, which was not at the heart of the problem in Aberdeen.

Labour calls on us to revisit the draft children's services bill, but the First Minister has made it clear to Iain Gray that the key issues with which we have to deal relate to hard, practical policy implementation. We are taking that forward through the getting it right for every child programme.

Local authorities are not short of statutory obligations and guidance. Thresholds for taking a child into care should not be determined nationally by a tick-box policy formula but must be determined by the individual needs of, and risks to, the child. Every case is different, and professionals need to be empowered to take confident, competent and timely decisions for the child. We can achieve that through the getting it right for every child practice model, which we are testing out in pathfinders in the Highlands and elsewhere—including Falkirk, as Hugh O'Donnell said.

Because professionals sometimes disagree about which course of action is best for the child, the GIRFEC approach proposes that agencies agree on a lead professional to co-ordinate multi-agency discussion. As Hugh O'Donnell pointed out, joint training is another important aspect, as that will enable professionals to understand one another's language so that the cultures of the organisations involved do not impinge on decision making.

**Ken Macintosh:** We accept that there is not just one way to address the problem, but will there come a time when the minister will revisit his approach if it does not work and reach a new view on the statutory sharing of information?

**Adam Ingram:** Yes. I am pointing out what we believe should be the way forward. People protect children, so building relationships at a local level—allowing appropriate information to be shared and action to be taken—is the key to improvement in child protection. Legislation is not a magic bullet. However, if it becomes apparent that a change in the law would help, we will introduce legislation, for which we would obviously welcome the Opposition parties' support. However, there is no such imperative at this time.

The tone and substance of the amendment in the name of Margaret Smith strike the right balance. The Scottish Government will introduce proposals to shift culture and practice towards prevention and early intervention and away from an approach in which people wait for risk to materialise, as happens, unfortunately, all too often under current systems.

I will respond to other issues that were raised during the debate. I am indeed encouraged by North Lanarkshire Council's example of investment in fostering and residential care. I agree that, throughout the country, more foster carers are required, along with better training and support.

Members asked what I am doing. I have tasked the fostering and kinship care reference group with making recommendations, and I shall receive the group's report shortly. A national residential care review is on-going, and it will report soon, too. I confirm to Sandra White that I would be happy to meet the foster carer groups that she mentioned to address the many issues that I know are live at the moment.

I can confirm to Richard Simpson that, in implementing the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, we are currently consulting on the looked-after children regulations. The consultation ends in January and the regulations will be laid before Parliament shortly thereafter. Discussions with the GMC are on-going—I take on board the thrust of Dr Simpson's arguments. I think that we need to make more use of the medical expertise of professionals such as Dr Simpson to ensure that all professionals understand the importance of stability, early intervention—including prenatal care—and continuity of care. I would be more than happy to sit down and work with Dr Simpson on the issues that he raised. Clearly, Ian McKee has an important contribution to make, too.

I agree with Hugh Henry that there is no point in mere exhortation to do better. We need to drive improvements. Our single outcome agreements with local authorities provide the vehicle for so doing. I agree with him that ministers must take responsibility—I like to think that I am doing so—for driving those improvements.

I thank members for engaging so positively in the debate. It is good to hear that colleagues from all parties are committed to improving outcomes for looked-after children, young people and care leavers. Sometimes we in Scotland have a tendency to focus on the negatives and, as we have heard, it is all too easy to do that with the care system. However, there are many success stories and there can be many more. The contribution that we all make to the lives of looked-after children and young people can have a

positive impact on their lives. We can give them a positive future. I believe that Scotland has the potential to be a successful country that values all its citizens and empowers them to be all they can be. The Parliament has a central role in making that happen. Why should our looked-after children, young people and care leavers do less well than their peers? Why should our expectations and aspirations for them not be as high as for young people who are not looked after?

Across the country and across sectors, we are seeing a growing enthusiasm, understanding and desire for real change. I believe that the materials that we have recently launched in the context of our commitments in “Early Years and Early Intervention”, “Getting it right for every child”, “A Curriculum for Excellence” and “More Choices, More Chances” will support the care system in providing a positive experience so that looked-after young people grow up to be effective, responsible citizens and, above all, happy.

Let us not forget—Robert Brown made this very point—that around half our looked-after children live at home with their birth parents under a supervision order from a children’s hearing. Those children currently fare worst of all. Over the coming months, I am making it a priority to examine what we can do to make a real difference for such children.

In partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, we have just completed four regional events at which I have engaged with more than 400 stakeholders from all sectors. From that engagement, we are building a picture of not only the good practice that already exists but the ideas that people have that could make a real difference in the future.

**The Presiding Officer:** Minister, you should come to a close, please.

**Adam Ingram:** That engagement is a three-way process: local services will inform national policy; national policy will influence local delivery; and local services will learn from one another. To build on that further, recognising the key role that local councillors have as corporate parents, we and COSLA will organise a session in the spring at which elected members will be offered the opportunity to share learning, so that they feel better equipped for that challenging task.

I see that the Presiding Officer wants me to close—

**The Presiding Officer:** Quite soon, please, minister.

**Adam Ingram:** As a minister, I am a member of that corporate family, and I will ensure that the Scottish Government plays its part. I look forward to members’ support in enabling us to do that.

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### General Questions

11:41

#### Schools Estate

**1. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to renew and regenerate the schools estate. (S3O-4906)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop):** Some 100,000 pupils will be lifted out of poor-quality school buildings and classrooms by 2011 as a result of a school building programme that continues apace, with 250 schools to be delivered during the lifetime of this Parliament. Around £1 billion-worth of construction work is under way on major schools projects for which Government sign-off and the initial construction commenced within the last 18 months. Over the next three to five years, authorities will invest more than another £1 billion in schools, which will be supported by the funds made available in the local government settlement. In total, the Government is supporting in excess of £2 billion-worth of school building work.

**Karen Whitefield:** Let us turn to the council areas where there has been no sign-off for new school buildings. Is the minister aware of the difficulties that North Lanarkshire Council faces? Having built 28 new schools in partnership with the previous Administration, the council had hoped to build more. However, the lack of a funding stream from the Government forced the council to rely on prudential borrowing, revenue savings and capital receipts totalling £250 million. With the collapse of land sales, the council now finds itself £86 million short—

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Come to a question, please.

**Karen Whitefield:** Will the Scottish Government match its rhetoric on school building with action? Will it provide Scotland’s councils with the money to build new schools, or will the minister tell the pupils and teachers of North Lanarkshire which of their nine primary schools will not be replaced?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The additional £115 million of extra capital in the local government settlement each year is providing opportunities for prudential borrowing, which provides value for money for the public purse. Perhaps North Lanarkshire Council might want to look at South Lanarkshire, where

only this week I opened Calderside academy, which is part of a £230 million school project that is funded and supported by the Scottish Government.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Does the minister share my concerns over Midlothian Council's plans to use playing fields at Cuiken primary school for development, which is completely contrary to Scottish planning policy 11? Does she agree that the proposal is another example of Labour councillors seeking to reduce facilities for schoolchildren even though doing that will have an adverse impact on health and wellbeing?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I appreciate the member's concern about the use of playing fields. The decision on Cuiken primary school was developed prior to May 2007. I understand that the school's capacity is extensive compared to the number of those who attend it. The key issue, I suppose, is the school premises regulations, which identify the size of playing fields relative to the school population. The member raises some separate planning issues that can be addressed by the council, but it is in all our interests to ensure that the facilities for school playing fields are part and parcel of the community interest in the building of any new schools.

**Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** It will come as no surprise to the minister or any member in the chamber that I take this opportunity to mention Wick high school. Does the minister agree that it is in appalling condition, that the council does not have the funds to do it up, and that it would be a worthy and deserving candidate for support from the Scottish Futures Trust or whatever other form of funding ministers decide to put in place in due course?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am aware that Highland Council has recently announced an £88 million regeneration and school support programme for school buildings. I understand that that includes significant improvement to Lochaber, Thurso and Wick high schools. Perhaps the questions about immediate developments would be best addressed to Highland Council. We would be very interested in Highland Council's offer to work constructively with the futures trust on Wick high school.

### **Construction Industry Skills Base**

**2. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to support the construction industry to retain its skills base during the economic downturn. (S30-4888)

**The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt):** Although parts of the construction sector,

such as house building, are clearly being affected by the economic downturn, it is important to recognise that employment in the sector remains at the same level as this time last year, which gives the industry a good base upon which to retain and redeploy skills.

The sector, led by the Scottish construction forum, has identified the need for a well-trained and skilled workforce to ensure future success. The industry-led development of a new suite of modern apprenticeship frameworks at levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 demonstrates that commitment.

The Scottish Government supports the industry's efforts through a range of initiatives. We are accelerating our investment in affordable housing and looking to bring forward capital investment plans. An additional 1,000 modern apprenticeship opportunities have been created in the construction and engineering sectors. Those measures will provide stability in the sector during the economic downturn.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** The construction industry has been particularly hard hit and, in all probability, it will lose 20,000 jobs before Christmas. The industry is concerned that if the situation is not addressed urgently, its ability to respond to any upturn will be impossible because of the flight of skills across the board in the construction industry. I accept that the oil and gas industry is doing well, but the downturn has affected all other sectors.

**The Presiding Officer:** Could you come to your question please?

**Marilyn Livingstone:** The construction industry is concerned that it will be unable to retain the skilled staff necessary to train the workforce of the future. Minister, urgent action is required and the industry is asking the Scottish Government and local authorities to—

**The Presiding Officer:** Please come to your question, Ms Livingstone.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** The industry wants the Scottish Government and local authorities to propose large and small infrastructure projects to ensure the sustainability of this vital industry.

**Maureen Watt:** As the member is convener of the cross-party group on construction, I understand her interest in the matter. However, £1 billion-worth of construction work is under way on major projects, including school projects that have started during the past 18 months. As I have already said, we are investing £100 million in affordable housing and are working closely with the construction industry on the skills issue to make sure that we minimise the effects of the economic downturn.

### End-of-life Choices (Guidelines)

**3. Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether the guidelines issued to national health service boards regarding end-of-life choices are sufficiently clear. (S3O-4852)

**The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison):** Decisions regarding choices for patients, carers and families are a fundamental element of the planning and provision of palliative and end-of-life care services, regardless of diagnosis or location. By publishing the national action plan, "Living and Dying Well", the Scottish Government has provided a clear framework for NHS boards to ensure, for the first time, a consistent and comprehensive approach across Scotland which promotes choice about the nature of care at the end of life.

**Margo MacDonald:** Although I congratulate the Government on clarifying some aspects of end-of-life choices, I wonder whether the minister could outline the thinking behind accepting a patient's right not to be resuscitated, but denying a patient the right to take positive action to end a life that has become intolerable to them.

**Shona Robison:** The clinical diagnosis made by the health professionals who are treating the individual concerned is important, as is the care that the patient receives, and how it ensures that a patient's wishes are respected as far as is practicable. Any care or treatment has to be provided in line with professional obligations and within the law. "Living and Dying Well", the care that people receive, particularly the identification of their needs by general practitioners and 24-hour community nursing, and the health boards' delivery plans, will ensure that care is improved across Scotland, and I hope that Margo MacDonald will welcome that.

**Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP):** The minister will be aware of my strong and long-standing interest in palliative care, now evidenced by my member's bill proposal, which has just been published. Does she agree that real end-of-life choices can be exercised only if we have ensured that good-quality palliative care is available to all who need it, thereby ensuring that Scotland leads the world in assisted living as opposed to assisted dying?

**Shona Robison:** I am aware of the bill and, as ever, we will consider the details of the proposal and respond accordingly.

Roseanna Cunningham makes some good points, which is why "Living and Dying Well" is so important. It will ensure that, no matter where people live in Scotland, they will have their needs identified by GPs and 24-hour community nursing, and that the electronic palliative care summaries

for patient medical records will ensure that the right information is given to any health care provider, including out-of-hours services where we know there have been some issues around critical times. All that will be brought together and underpinned by education, training and workforce development, and the appointment of national and local clinical leads. I am sure that Roseanna Cunningham and other members will be interested enough to look at the delivery plans that health boards have to have in place by March 2009.

### Glenwood Health Centre

**4. Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans there are to upgrade the Glenwood health centre in Glenrothes. (S3O-4939)

**The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison):** Fife NHS Board acknowledges that further upgrading of Glenwood health centre will not be sufficient to provide an environment that will continue to be fit for modern health and care services. Plans are therefore under development that should see the replacement of the existing health centre with a purpose-built, modernised health facility.

**Tricia Marwick:** Is the minister aware that the Glenwood health centre serves thousands of people in the west of Glenrothes and that the building's condition was deemed to be inadequate and substandard as far back as 2000? Of course, the previous, Labour Government did nothing about it, despite the concerns that were raised at the time by patients, doctors and other professionals. The minister will be aware of my concern that the people of west Glenrothes should get a health centre that is fit for purpose. Will she set out a timetable for the replacement of the Glenwood health centre?

**Shona Robison:** Tricia Marwick makes some important points. The development has moved on to the work required to review the scope and to ensure that the capital investment is manageable within the board's capital allocation plan. It is estimated that the outline business plan will be submitted for consideration by the capital investment group in February or March of next year. I am sure that Tricia Marwick will welcome that.

### South of Scotland TV Channel

**5. Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has held with Dumfries and Galloway Council and Scottish Borders Council on the possibility of a dedicated television channel for the south of Scotland. (S3O-4854)

**The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani):** The Scottish Government has not had any direct discussions with Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders Councils about the possibility of a dedicated TV channel for the south of Scotland. However, on 17 November, officials met representatives of the local television sector, including a member of the south of Scotland TV working group.

**Alasdair Morgan:** To maximise coverage for the south of Scotland, any local channel would need to use the Sandale transmitter in Cumbria, where spectrum will become available after the digital switchover. Will the minister look favourably on any local business case that might be proposed in favour of using that transmitter with a view to adding her support to that case?

**Linda Fabiani:** The Scottish Government's priority is to take forward the Scottish Broadcasting Commission's recommendation to establish a Scottish network to which local television initiatives could be linked. I am aware that there are strong concerns in the south of Scotland that the proposals set out in the Office of Communications public service broadcasting review will reduce the provision of local services in the area and that local TV could replace those services. The local TV group should work with Ofcom to ensure that it can gain maximum coverage in the area. I would expect Ofcom to recognise the benefits of supporting that aim and to consider seriously business case proposals from the south of Scotland TV working group.

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** The minister will be aware that the second stage of the switchover to digital services in the Borders is happening as we speak. Is she aware that any digital services—whether a new Scottish digital channel or a digital channel based elsewhere—are seen by fewer than half of the viewers in the Borders? More than half of the viewers in the Borders receive only half of the digital channels because they get their TV signals through relay transmitters. Will the Scottish Government do everything in its power to ensure that those viewers are not disfranchised?

**Linda Fabiani:** I am very aware of the issue, especially following the members' business debate on 5 November. It is a serious issue, particularly in the Scottish Borders, where half of the population will get fewer channels. As was agreed at the members' business debate on 5 November, we will do everything that we can to raise the issue with the United Kingdom Government. Following that debate, I wrote to the appropriate minister to highlight the concern.

## HM Prison Peterhead Inspection Report

### 6. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):

To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to address the concerns raised in Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons report on HM Prison Peterhead, published in October 2008. (S3O-4914)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** HMP Peterhead has developed, in line with normal Scottish Prison Service practice, an action plan to address the recommendations in the recent HM prisons inspectorate for Scotland report. The Scottish Government announced in August 2007 that a new, publicly operated, fit-for-purpose prison, HMP Grampian, would be built in the Peterhead area to replace the existing prisons at Peterhead and Aberdeen. In the meantime, a maintenance programme for HMP Peterhead will continue.

I was pleased to note that Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons also reported that

"the good things referred to in recent reports are still part of the life and culture of Peterhead."

That reflects the hard work and dedication of the staff and managers at Peterhead.

**Alison McInnes:** The report was particularly critical of the lack of maintenance in the workshop and the shortcomings in the provision of purposeful work opportunities. I appreciate that a new prison is planned but, although the announcement was made in August 2007, a planning application has not yet been lodged. Can the minister give an assurance that the existing facilities will not be allowed to deteriorate in the interim? Will he ensure that meaningful work opportunities are made available to prisoners now?

**Kenny MacAskill:** Absolutely. This Government has set out with a will to ensure that we deliver that necessary prison for the north-east. We did so having inherited a crumbling prison estate. Thankfully, one new prison will open next month, two new prisons will follow shortly and HMP Inverclyde and HMP Highland are also being sourced.

### Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):

Can the cabinet secretary tell us what further measures will be taken to ensure that those who are currently on the waiting list for treatment at Peterhead can participate in the sex offenders treatment programme—that was identified as a problem—and that such offenders will in future be able to receive that treatment, which benefited from so much investment by the previous Executive, wherever they are located in the prison estate?



**Kenny MacAskill:** We have a world-renowned treatment centre at Peterhead. Such facilities also exist in other institutions within the SPS. There are also difficulties when prisoners do not seek treatment. The problem is that treatment cannot be foisted upon them; the old adage is that although we can take a horse to water, we cannot make it drink. We are dealing with difficult and sometimes dangerous people. The expertise that we have at Peterhead and elsewhere in the SPS serves us well. We should seek to support the SPS in dealing with those difficult people and we must ensure that once they are released—because most of those prisoners are on a determinate sentence—we have in place the appropriate multi-agency public protection arrangements to secure our communities.

**The Presiding Officer:** Before we move to First Minister's question time, I am delighted to say that Senōr Alberto Perdomo MP, Speaker of the chamber of representatives of the General Assembly of Uruguay, and His Excellency Ricardo Varela, the Uruguayan ambassador to the United Kingdom, have joined us in the Presiding Officer's gallery for First Minister's question time. Mr Speaker, Your Excellency, on behalf of the Scottish Parliament, I give you a warm welcome. *[Applause.]*

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Today, questions to the First Minister will be taken by the Deputy First Minister.

### Engagements

**1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Deputy First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-1190)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon):** As members may be aware, the First Minister is unwell today; I am sure that we all wish him a speedy recovery. Later today, among other things, I will appear on the BBC's "Question Time" with Tavish Scott, the leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, and Jim Murphy, the leader of the Scottish Labour Party. *[Laughter.]*

**Iain Gray:** Perhaps this is a game that we can play another day—I want to ask questions about *Clostridium difficile*. The outbreak of *C difficile* at the Vale of Leven hospital was the worst ever in the United Kingdom—18 people lost their lives. Yesterday, world-renowned epidemiologist Hugh Pennington warned that the real number of deaths may have been substantially higher, because *C diff* is not always recorded on death certificates. In September, the Parliament voted for a public inquiry into the *C difficile* outbreak, to ensure that all of Scotland learns lessons from the Vale of Leven. Last night, the Deputy First Minister did not rule out a public inquiry. Will she confirm today whether a public inquiry will be forthcoming—yes or no?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I thank Iain Gray for raising an issue of the utmost seriousness—I am sure that every member of the Parliament will treat it with the seriousness that it undoubtedly deserves. I repeat what I said on television last night and have said in the chamber previously: I have not ruled out a public inquiry. When the scale of events at the Vale of Leven hospital came to light earlier this year, I took the decision to order a rapid independent investigation, so that we could identify the significant failings at the hospital and take quick action to put them right. I stand by that judgment absolutely. The report that I ordered and the accompanying Health Protection Scotland report led to 40 recommendations, each of which is in the process of being implemented.

As Iain Gray knows, when the reports were published, I decided to pass them to the Lord Advocate. As a result of that decision, a police investigation into events at the Vale of Leven hospital is under way. In the interests of due

process for all concerned, it is appropriate for me to allow that investigation to continue before making any further pronouncement. I repeat: on an issue of such seriousness, a public inquiry has not and should not be ruled out.

**Iain Gray:** The Deputy First Minister is hiding behind due process. Any lawyer will tell her that there is nothing to stop her holding a public inquiry now. The due process to which she refers is based on a report with which she says she is satisfied, but the report has been condemned by the families of those affected and criticised by the experts; it has now been disowned by its author. Britain's leading patient safety specialist has called the report the worst that he has ever seen,

"not fit for purpose under any circumstances"

and "appalling". Even the report's author said that it

"didn't get to the bottom of every aspect".

Of the 30 people who were interviewed, only six were front-line staff, and not one ward nurse was spoken to. Is the Deputy First Minister seriously saying that she is satisfied with the report?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I will make a couple of points for the sake of accuracy and for the record. If Iain Gray cares to check the record for the comments that I have made in the chamber previously, he will find that I have never said that I am unable at this stage to order a public inquiry. I have said that it is appropriate to focus first on the actions that will rectify the significant failings at the Vale of Leven hospital and to observe due process by allowing the on-going police investigation to take place.

It is possible in theory—although it is not for me to say—for the Lord Advocate to order a fatal accident inquiry, a public inquiry or indeed a criminal prosecution. Perhaps unlike Iain Gray, I believe that due process is important.

Anybody who watched the BBC programme on the matter last night, as I did, would take issue with Iain Gray's claim that the author of the report disowned it. He said that he was commissioned to carry out a rapid investigation to identify quickly the significant failings at the Vale of Leven. That is the exercise that he carried out, and I think that he carried it out well.

As a result of the report, 40 recommendations are being pursued, which allows us to make real improvements to infection control procedures at the Vale of Leven and to the surveillance systems there, which failed significantly earlier this year. There is also a continuing programme of investment in the maintenance and the fabric of the hospital. That is entirely the right way to proceed.

As I have said previously, tackling infection in our hospitals is the top priority for me as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, and for the Government. That is why one of the first decisions that I took in office was to more than triple the budget for fighting infections in hospitals. I will continue to take my responsibility to reduce the incidence of infections very seriously.

**Iain Gray:** The problem is that due process cannot be based on a report that is so fundamentally flawed. Michelle Stewart's mother-in-law died in the C diff outbreak, and here is why she thinks that a public inquiry is so important:

"We're just skimming the surface ... We've not learned enough about what happened during the outbreak for them to learn every lesson ... We don't want any other family across the whole of Scotland to have to go through what we went through and think their family died needlessly."

The families of those who died want a public inquiry now. Britain's leading epidemiologist wants a public inquiry now. This Parliament voted for a public inquiry in September. Ms Sturgeon has admitted today that there is no reason why that cannot happen. She herself is the only obstacle. How many people need to tell her that she is wrong before she calls a public inquiry?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** As I have said, a public inquiry is not being, and will not be, ruled out at this stage. This is a matter of the utmost seriousness, and I have nothing but respect for the families involved in the Vale of Leven outbreak. I have met the families on two occasions. I know how difficult and dreadful the situation has been for them. Some years ago, I watched my grandmother battle C difficile, so I know how horribly distressing it is. It is important not only that we allow due process to take its course in this case but that I, as health secretary, ensure that the failings that have been identified at the Vale of Leven are put right, so that the sort of reduction that took place in C difficile rates in Scotland in the last quarter can continue. At this stage, I would not claim that reduction as a trend, but it is an encouraging development.

Anybody who suggests that the report that was carried out by Professor Cairns Smith was not important does not, I believe, have the interests of patients at heart. That report has allowed us to focus on improving infection control and the fabric of the Vale of Leven hospital, and on ensuring that we have robust surveillance systems in place, so that no outbreak can go unnoticed again. I would have thought that all those actions would be welcomed by everybody in the chamber.

**Iain Gray:** Of course the issue is of the utmost seriousness, but it is of the utmost urgency, too. It is not just at the Vale of Leven—there have been C difficile outbreaks at Hairmyres, at the Queen Margaret hospital in Dunfermline, at the Royal

Alexandra, at Stobhill, at the Victoria infirmary and at Woodend hospital in Aberdeen. Under the health secretary's watch, the number of C diff cases in Scotland has increased by more than 9 per cent. Under her watch, the key budgets for hospital cleaning and maintenance are being cut in real terms in most hospitals. The relatives of C diff patients are still taking laundry home—although the health secretary seemed not to know that last night. This is not getting better; it is getting worse.

When she was in opposition, the health secretary called for public inquiries with monotonous regularity but, now that she is in government, she resists doggedly. What is she afraid of? What is she trying to cover up? She is the only obstacle to the inquiry that we need. In the interests of the families, will she change her mind now?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** The budgets for cleaning in our hospitals are not being cut. If Iain Gray studies the information that was provided to the BBC by NHS boards, as I have done, he will see that the presentation of the information significantly distorts reality. I encourage him to study the information.

On the subject of statistics, I readily acknowledge that C difficile is a growing concern. It is not a new concern; death rates from C difficile in Scotland have been rising steadily throughout this entire decade. The issue is a problem, which we are determined to tackle.

I will tell Iain Gray what the Government is doing to tackle infections in our hospitals, and I ask him to listen carefully. The Government has tripled funding to tackle infections; we have set a target for the reduction of C difficile; we have provided extra funding for antimicrobial prescribing policies, which are a key factor in tackling C difficile; we have raised hand hygiene performance requirements; we are toughening up cleaning standards; we are empowering senior charge nurses; we are establishing an independent inspectorate that can carry out random inspections of our hospitals; we have banned, for the future, the privatisation of cleaning contracts that Labour was so keen on; and we have decided that, in future, all new hospitals will be 100 per cent single rooms. Those are real actions to tackle infections, and I would have thought that Labour could welcome them.

### **Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)**

**2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** I, too, am sorry to hear of the First Minister's indisposition. I wish him a speedy recovery.

To ask the Deputy First Minister when the First Minister will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-1191)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon):** I am not sure when the First Minister will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland but, as I indicated earlier, I will see him in Glasgow this evening.

**Annabel Goldie:** I have listened to the exchanges between the Deputy First Minister and Mr Gray, but there are some basic, inescapable and chilling facts. First, Scotland has the highest rate of hospital-acquired infection in the United Kingdom. None of us can be proud of that, and all hospital patients will be deeply disturbed by it. Secondly, and sadly, the Vale of Leven hospital is not unique among our hospitals in having an unacceptably serious level of infection risk. According to the BBC, there are alarming levels of C difficile cases throughout Scotland.

Last night on television, the health secretary claimed that what has happened at the Vale of Leven is

"not reflective of general practice across the NHS in Scotland."

The facts do not support that assertion. Clearly, the health secretary does not know what is going on in our hospitals in Scotland. Does she now accept that the problem is much more serious and much more widespread than she indicated?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I will not—for party-political or any other purposes—try to diminish the issue of infection in our hospitals. It is one of the most serious issues that I, as health secretary, face. That is not just because of the impact that it has on the people affected and their families but because it undermines confidence in our health service. That is why tackling the issue is my top priority.

We can bandy about statistics, but we have to take care. I accept that the rate of C difficile has been increasing—not just since this Government took office but for some time. However, let us consider the death rate from C difficile—and let me start by saying that every death from C difficile is a death too many. The death rate from C difficile in England, proportionately, is double the rate in Scotland. I say that simply because we have to take care with statistics.

To answer Annabel Goldie's question, no, the rate of infection in our hospitals is not greater than I thought. I am well aware of the rate of infection in our hospitals; I commissioned the Health Protection Scotland study that accompanied the Vale of Leven independent review that told us the extent of the problem with C difficile over the same six-month period. We can talk about the scale of the problem or we can focus on the actions that the Government is taking to tackle the problem. I prefer the latter approach. The Government is

determined through its actions to reduce the rate of all infections in our hospitals. I hope that all members welcome the reduction in the number of cases of MRSA, which I hope will continue as we roll out MRSA screening. I am determined to see such a reduction in the number of cases of C difficile as well.

**Annabel Goldie:** The Deputy First Minister needs to take a reality check, in her own words, "to tackle the problem". To tackle the problem, we need to know what is happening, where it is happening, why it is happening and when it is happening. We need robust, real-time data to be provided not on a health-board-by-health-board basis but, at the very least, on a hospital-by-hospital basis—preferably on a ward-by-ward or even bed-by-bed basis. When hospital-acquired infections threaten, we must move from being reactive to being proactive, anticipating what is happening and being able to deal with that, not looking at what has happened and having to analyse why. We are behind the game.

The Deputy First Minister said, five years ago:

"It is up to the Health Minister to ensure that superbugs are kept to a minimum and that patients enter Scotland's hospitals to be treated not infected".

She was right—I could not agree with her more. She is now the health minister, so when is she going to live up to her own fine words and turn the rhetoric into reality?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** In case there is any doubt in the mind of anybody in the chamber, let me repeat what I said in opposition. It is the responsibility of the health secretary to tackle infection in our hospitals. That is a responsibility that I understand probably better than anybody else in the chamber, and it is a responsibility that I will never shirk.

Annabel Goldie is correct on two points. First, she says that we are behind the game. Since I took office, we have been playing something of a catch-up game with England in relation to C difficile. The reason for that is that the previous Administration introduced mandatory surveillance of C difficile three years after it was introduced in England. There has been an element of catching up.

Secondly, we need better real-time information, which is why we are improving the surveillance systems that are in place in our hospitals. It is also why we are introducing new reporting requirements for hospitals, so that health boards have real-time information that is broken down not just by hospital but by specialty. That will enable them to know exactly what the situation is and target their efforts to ensure that they bring down the infection rates.

It is too early—as I heard somebody say from a sedentary position—to read too much into the

figures from the last quarter. However, any reduction in the number of cases is surely welcome. I believe that, if we continue to take the right action, particularly around antibiotic prescribing, we will see a reduction in the number of cases of C difficile. I hope that every member will welcome that when it comes.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**3. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** To ask the Deputy First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-1192)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon):** The next meeting of the Cabinet will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

**Tavish Scott:** An e-mail from an electronics company in Galashiels, which has 40 employees, says this:

"Our banking facility has been ... at base +1.5% for years ... Last Friday we had a meeting with our bank manager ... and were stunned to be advised that they would require base +4%."

The Government has a Financial Services Advisory Board. Does the Deputy First Minister expect it to help Scottish business during the recession?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I very much share the concerns that Tavish Scott has just articulated. We all appreciate that small businesses are suffering in the current financial climate and that the lending conditions that many of them now face are an aspect of the difficulties that they are encountering. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, John Swinney, has written to the banks, asking them to change their lending practices to ensure that they do not penalise small businesses.

Of course, the key player in all of this is the United Kingdom Government, which has made the decision to put significant amounts of taxpayers' money into our banks. I would have thought that we should all be demanding that the condition of that support—which was that the banks return to 2007 lending conditions—should now be insisted on by the UK Government in the interests of everyone in Scotland.

**Tavish Scott:** For years, we have all supported the financial services industry in Scotland. Now, we need its help in return. Small business is being hit by banks. The collapse in competition will make that worse, and now the banking industry has been shamefully let down by the UK Government over HBOS. The Government has ripped up the level playing field, broken its promises and thrown 20,000 jobs to the wind. At the dawn of a recession, Scottish business has found itself

raided by the banks and abandoned by Labour at the Treasury. *[Applause.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Tavish Scott:** Will the Government call in what is left of Scottish banking this week and get it to drop the punishment charges for small business? Further, will the Government establish a banking jobs task force to tackle the crisis that the UK Government has created?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I assure Tavish Scott that John Swinney and the rest of the Government will persist with that dialogue with banks to ensure that we get fair treatment for our small businesses.

On the issue of the task force, Tavish Scott will be aware that the Financial Services Advisory Board is already in place. It is an important body.

I hope that all members appreciate the Government's commitment to our small business sector, which is evidenced by our small business bonus, which is providing help to small businesses in difficult circumstances. It is important that we all, with a united voice, call on the UK Government to take action as well to ensure fairness for our small business sector.

I have to say that I have sympathy with Tavish Scott's more general points about the financial sector. On several occasions, the First Minister has made clear that he will work for the best deal for Scottish jobs and Scottish decision making and, of course, in the interests of competition. We have also said that our preference has been for HBOS to remain as an independent bank. Members might like to know that the First Minister wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 19 November—yesterday—to express his great concern at the statement that the chancellor issued on Tuesday, which gave the lie, at long last, to any pretence that the UK Government has to being committed to the maintenance of a level playing field.

I agree that the UK Government has not treated our financial sector with the fairness that we should have expected.

**The Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, but I simply do not have time to take any constituency questions. I will wish to discuss—

**George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab):** You let her go on too long.

**The Presiding Officer:** Lord Foulkes, if you would be quiet, please, I might say something.

I will wish to discuss with business managers over the next week how we can speed up these opening exchanges.

## Children (Stigmatisation)

**4. Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister, in light of the recent report by Barnardo's regarding the increased stigmatisation of children, what action the Scottish Government can take to help reverse this trend. (S3F-1200)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon):** I believe that the vast majority of Scotland's children and young people are making a meaningful and positive impact in their communities. The report raises the issue of the gap that exists between reality and perception. The reality is that 99 per cent of headteachers believe that all or almost all pupils are generally well behaved in class; that more than 185,000 young people are actively engaged with voluntary youth organisations across Scotland; and that fewer than 1.5 per cent of young people commit crime.

To show his personal commitment to this issue, the First Minister recently hosted a dinner with opinion formers in the public and private sectors. The aim of that was to move forward an ambitious agenda for our young people through the Young Scot active initiative, an element of which will specifically target unfair and negative reporting on young people.

**Nigel Don:** I share the Deputy First Minister's belief that the vast majority of children are not involved in the activities that they are often presumed to be involved in.

This morning, we had an interesting debate about looked-after children. What steps is the Government taking to ensure that the necessary services are in place to deliver early interventions where they are required by that group of children?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** The early years framework, which is being produced in partnership with our local authority partners, will be produced shortly. It will be an important contribution to this debate. In addition, the Scottish Government works closely with partners in the youth sector to ensure that young people are supported to make a positive impact in their communities and nationally, and that that impact is recognised and rewarded. We are ensuring that that work is supported with significant resources. I am sure that, with all of us working together on this important agenda, we can give young people in our society the recognition that the vast majority of them thoroughly deserve.

## Knife Culture

**5. Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what action is being taken to address violent knife culture. (S3F-1214)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon):**

The Government is fully committed to getting knives off our streets, and we are working with the national violence reduction unit and a number of other partners to tackle the issue head on. Co-ordinated and sustained enforcement, targeted education, and earlier, more effective intervention are key elements of our approach. The medics against violence initiative, which I launched on Tuesday with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, is just one example of the innovative work that we are now undertaking in Scotland.

**Duncan McNeil:** I, too, look forward to seeing the medics against violence initiative at work in my constituency. I am confident that sharing real-life experiences from the front line will have a positive effect over time.

However, the toll is growing here and now. Every year, around 1,000 patients attend Glasgow dental hospital alone as a result of knife-related facial injuries. The most common way of committing murder in Scotland is with a sharp instrument or knife—indeed, such crimes are up 59 per cent since 2006, and the use of such a method of killing is three times greater than the use of any other method of killing. Therefore, it is clear that measures to tackle knife crime have not had the desired effect. Will the Deputy First Minister assure us that she supports the campaign to ensure that violent criminals who are found in possession of a knife face an automatic jail sentence?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I certainly assure the member that the Government will do everything possible to reduce knife crime on our streets and in our communities. As he knows, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice is considering the issue that he raises.

From a political perspective, probably no other member knows more than I do about the toll that violence takes on our national health service. Duncan McNeil is right to point out that toll, but he is not right to say that we are not taking strong action. For example, effective, co-ordinated police action has taken 2,000 knives off the streets in this year alone. Tougher prosecution guidelines are already in place, which means that more knife carriers are in custody with tougher sentences, and we continue to support the violence reduction unit, of course, through direct Government investment of more than £900,000. As with other issues that we have discussed during this question time, I hope that there will be cross-party support for tackling the scourge of knife crime in our communities to ensure that we deal effectively with the problem.

**Organ Donation**

**6. Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government accepts the findings of the United Kingdom organ donation task force's report on presumed consent for organ donation. (S3F-1197)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon):** I have made it clear that I am personally sympathetic to opting out as the basis of organ donation, but I have also said that the Government and I will be guided by expert opinion.

The organ donation task force concludes that moving to an opt-out system now could deliver real benefits but that such a move carries a significant risk of making the current situation worse. Therefore, it recommends working within the current system to boost the number of donors and having a further review of opting out in five years' time.

We want donor numbers in Scotland to double. To make that happen, we will provide increased resources to raise awareness of the organ shortage and build on the impact of our television campaign. We will also continue to work with NHS Scotland on making the necessary improvements to ensure that we achieve such an increase in the donor rate.

**Mike Rumbles:** Does the Deputy First Minister agree that our national health service is founded on the principle of informed consent and that so-called presumed consent is a complete misnomer, as presumed consent is not consent at all? Does she agree that, in addition to promoting donations, the key to obtaining more transplants is having specialists in every major hospital, as there are in Spain, for instance?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I have some sympathy with those comments. I think that Mike Rumbles and I are on opposite sides of the debate, but I do not think that there is a great divide between us.

I agree that presumed consent is a misnomer. Consent must underpin both an opt-out system and an opt-in system. It is important to stress that our objective is to increase the number of donated organs; how we do that is a secondary issue.

Mike Rumbles is right to point to Spain. It is thought that practical measures rather than a change in the law have increased the donor rate there. If we can do the same in Scotland, I for one will be happy. If we cannot, it would be right to review the opt-out situation, which is why we have not closed the door on the issue.

**Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Does the Deputy First Minister agree that,

in the short term, we should seriously consider introducing an opt-out register, so that people who definitely want to opt out can do so? Will she also join me in welcoming the fact that, in my area of Clackmannanshire, the *Alloa and Hillfoots Advertiser* has been running a campaign to increase the number of people in the donation system? Should we not encourage all local newspapers to engage in similar campaigns? That will at least help the situation in the short term.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I congratulate the *Alloa and Hillfoots Advertiser* and encourage other local papers that have not already done so to follow suit. I also take the opportunity to encourage everyone in the chamber and outwith who is not on the organ donor register to take the step of signing up.

On Richard Simpson's first point, the register is set up to record positive wishes that people express, but the task force heard suggestions that the register could also be used to allow people to record their objection to donating organs after their death. I am happy to ask the programme delivery board that has been set up to implement other recommendations to consider that point.

12:31

*Meeting suspended until 14:15.*

14:15

*On resuming—*

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Finance and Sustainable Growth

##### Local Income Tax (HM Revenue and Customs)

**1. Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it can confirm that HM Revenue and Customs has not been involved in the preparation of proposals by the Scottish Government on collection of the local income tax. (S3O-4890)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** The United Kingdom Government has made it clear that the main channel of communication on our local income tax proposals should be with HM Treasury. I can confirm that information from HM Revenue and Customs has been used as part of that process.

**Mr McAveety:** I am somewhat surprised by the response from the minister, given that only last month HMRC stated categorically that it

"has not been involved in the preparation of any proposals by the devolved administration."

Will the minister tell us whom we should believe: Scotland's Mr Jolly—Alex Salmond—or the taxman?

**John Swinney:** Mr McAveety is obviously feeling injured because he was not invited to give a sterling performance on the "Children in Need" programme such as the First Minister gave on Friday evening. We on the Government benches are still laughing about it; I am sure Mr McAveety is, too.

I have little to add to my answer. The Treasury has made it clear that it wants to be the channel of communication for discussing the Government's local income tax proposals. That is the approach that we are taking, but HM Revenue and Customs has provided information as part of that process.

**Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):** Last week, the First Minister confirmed that the rosy forecast of tax revenue in the local income tax plans will not be met. Last night, the cabinet secretary heard first-hand from the Scottish Chambers of Commerce that business does not want a local income tax. Today, the National Audit Office reports that the amount of tax that is due but will never be paid has doubled in a year. Given the increasing problems for the discredited local income tax, will the cabinet secretary pay heed to

those respected institutions, and the First Minister, and ditch the local income tax?

**John Swinney:** The Government continues to promote the proposal for a local income tax. We will shortly set out further details on the consultation exercise, which I know will please Mr Brownlee enormously. The information will be in the public domain, and the Government will set out in due course the steps that it is taking to implement our manifesto commitment to a local income tax.

I remind Mr Brownlee—if I need to, as he was present and heard the speech as well as I did—that the chairman of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce was also critical of the council tax and referred to the lack of public support for it. Before Mr Brownlee crows too much, perhaps he should think about a more credible alternative to the despised council tax.

**David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab):** I can quote to the cabinet secretary what Mr Quirk said. He just said that the council tax was not popular, but people do not like paying taxes anyway.

The cabinet secretary, Mr Brownlee and I were all at the Scottish Chambers of Commerce dinner last night, and we heard the chairman, Norman Quirk, describe the Scottish National Party's proposals to introduce local income tax in the current economic climate as "positively spine-chilling". Will the cabinet secretary meet the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and others—such as the Confederation of British Industry, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, which are all opposed to local income tax and believe that it will be a disaster for the Scottish economy—so that they can discuss their concerns? He could then perhaps take their advice and ditch the policy.

**John Swinney:** I keep having to warn Mr Whitton about the fruity language that he uses in parliamentary exchanges. I had to warn him about that at the Finance Committee meeting on Tuesday, and I caution him gently again today.

As always, I remain happy to discuss issues with the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the CBI and other relevant business organisations. Mr Whitton will not be surprised to hear that I regularly see representatives of those organisations. I will, of course, discuss the local income tax with them.

### **Government Funding of Local Authorities**

**2. Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive when it expects to receive proposals from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities for amendments to the formula for

distributing government funding to local authorities. (S3O-4913)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** Work on the review of the distribution formula is under way jointly with COSLA. I expect the results of the review to be agreed in time to inform the next local government finance settlement, covering the period 2011 to 2013.

**Liam McArthur:** The cabinet secretary will recall his meeting with Orkney Islands Council and me on 28 February, at which we highlighted the serious discrepancy between the relative funding settlements for each of the main island areas. Does he agree that Orkney is underfunded in relation to its needs? Does he accept that, although a full-scale review may take a little more time, there are anomalies in the current funding arrangements that can and should be addressed in the short term?

**John Swinney:** I agree with Mr McArthur that Orkney Islands Council does not receive as much as other island authorities in resources per capita. It is important that we go through a considered process when addressing the distribution formula for local authorities, because the issue does not affect only Orkney Islands Council. Mr McArthur will recall that at the meeting to which he referred—or perhaps slightly before that—we had constructive discussions about the financial arrangements for Orkney Islands Council. The council expressed considerable satisfaction with the resulting distribution arrangements and the financial settlement that it received for 2008-09. The Government will have further discussions on the distribution formula with Orkney Islands Council and other local authorities.

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** Can the cabinet secretary tell me at this stage whether local authorities such as Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council, which are poorly funded per capita and have been for an exceptionally long time, are likely to benefit from any review of funding? In answer to a previous question on the likely outcome in respect of the local income tax, he said to a member in the chamber that local authorities such as Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council would be allowed to retain the money that would be raised through a future local income tax. Will he confirm that central Government funding of local authorities would be adjusted as a consequence of that action and that any future formula will apply regardless of how money is raised locally?

**John Swinney:** On the first point, Mr Johnstone will appreciate that if I gave the type of commitment that he seeks in relation to two local authorities—Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council—I would be prejudging the



discussions on the distribution formula that are taking place between the Scottish Government and COSLA. I understand the views of both councils on the existing formula. Such issues will be considered as part of the review.

On the second point, I have already made it clear to Parliament that local authorities will be able to retain the local income tax that is generated in their areas. There will, of course, be a parallel channel of funding, as there is today—I refer to revenue support grant—to support funding of local authorities. The distribution formula will inform the Government's decisions on the allocations that should be made to individual local authorities.

**Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that per capita funding is a blunt measurement of need in any community and that much more needs to be thought through in determining distribution of resources from the centre? Does he share my concern about the fact that, in the past 30 or so reviews of the distribution formula, less than 1 per cent of resources have been redistributed? Do the matrix and the information that are available to him at the moment suggest that, in this review, there will be a more radical redistribution of resources than occurred on the more than 30 previous occasions on which the formula was examined?

**John Swinney:** Mr Kerr makes a fair point. From his experience as a former finance minister, he will understand the intricacies of the local government finance formula. That may be an exaggeration, because I am not sure that anyone understands the intricacies of the formula, although Mr Kerr will understand them more than most. The calculation is not made simply on a per capita basis. A variety of indicators, including deprivation and sparsity of population, comprise the distribution formula. Any amendment of those factors would have to be considered very carefully to ensure that it did not create unintended consequences.

I assure Mr Kerr that that will be very much the thinking for the distribution formula. As to whether or not it leads to more radical change, that will be a product of the distribution review itself. I would be prejudging that process if I were to make any further comments on the matter, but I assure Mr Kerr that ministers will be happy to discuss those issues with Parliament and with other parties in trying to arrive at a financial settlement and distribution formula that must carry comprehensive support across the chamber.

### Efficiency Savings

**3. James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it has

made in achieving efficiency savings targets. (S3O-4885)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** We are only six months into the first year of the 2008 to 2011 efficiency programme, so it is too early to report on progress made in the first year. We will publish the outturn report for this year in autumn 2009.

**James Kelly:** Does the cabinet secretary share my concerns that Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board will have to make £42 million of budget cuts? Does he agree with me that front-line services should not be cut to meet efficiency savings targets?

**John Swinney:** There is a clear definition of what constitutes an efficiency saving. It is included in the Government's efficiency programme. What might be described as crude cuts in services can in no way pass the test for efficiency savings. Efficiency savings are driven by improvements in arrangements for delivery of services, by circumstances that allow us to encourage more cases to be handled and by improvements in the operational processes of public services.

Had I followed the advice of the Labour Party when I was setting the Government's efficiency programme, I would have had a 3 per cent efficiency savings target. The type of financial challenge that Mr Kelly is discussing in relation to Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board would have been much greater if I had followed the advice of the Labour Party. It is a good job that I did not do that.

**Keith Brown (Ochil) (SNP):** Has there been any examination of what the impact would have been—or is the cabinet secretary able to give his own assessment—had the 3 per cent cuts that were proposed by new Labour been agreed to? Does the cabinet secretary agree with me that it would have been “spine-chilling”—to use David Whitton's word—if the people who provide the services or who rely on them had to deal with a 50 per cent increase in the efficiency savings that had to be made?

**John Swinney:** As Mr Brown will be aware, I produced an efficient government programme that I felt contained a reasonable level of achievement for all aspects of public services. If I had gone for a 3 per cent efficiency target, it would have increased the scale of the programme by 50 per cent and would have made the challenge ever greater. That would have come on top of the fact that the health service—which is getting a greater financial settlement under this Government than it would have the Labour Party been returned to office—would, like every service apart from education, have had its budget increased only by

the rate of inflation under Labour's proposals at the last election. This Government has delivered a settlement for the health service that goes higher than that.

**Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab):** Two myths have been propagated by the minister in the one response. What he said was factually inaccurate both with regard to what Wendy Alexander proposed and to cash-releasing and time-releasing savings. The proposals were radically different, considering the 2 per cent cash-releasing savings that the Government is proposing. It is also a myth that the national health service would not have found and got the funds that it required.

That said, I come to my question. Will the cabinet secretary guarantee and assure Parliament that when any organisation—NHS, local authority or quango—submits its proposals for efficiency savings, it will set out in detail its response to the Government's criteria thereby providing a full explanation as to the so-called efficiency savings that it is making, so that the Parliament and the public may rest assured that the efficiencies are not in fact cuts? I seek a simple assurance. Does the cabinet secretary expect every public body to respond according to the criteria that were set out by the Government?

**John Swinney:** I am fascinated by Mr Kerr's correction of my alleged "two myths". I remember the 3 per cent efficiency savings speech very well. It was the hungry caterpillar speech, and I will never forget that day. My recollection of that entire period is imbued with it. It was clearly said in that speech that the target would be 3 per cent efficiency savings. Allow me to put that on the record.

I am sorry to go over old ground, Presiding Officer, but Mr Kerr knows as well as I do that the former First Minister made it clear that, under the Labour Party's spending plans before the election, the only service that would get an above-inflation increase in funding was education. Everyone else would have "to cut their cloth"—I think that that was the phrase. I put that, too, on the record.

I turn to the other points that Mr Kerr raised. He asked me to make it clear that organisations must adhere to the criteria that have been set. The criteria have been published, so they can be scrutinised by MSPs and by the public. We have also published efficiency plans in relation to the efficiency proposals that are coming forward from different elements and organisations of Government. As I said in my answer to Mr Kelly, members will be able to scrutinise the outturn report when it is published in the autumn of 2009.

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** I remind members of our new-found, very amicable agreement. I would be grateful if members could

keep questions as short as possible—they should not ask multiple questions. Of course, we expect ministers to follow suit in their answers.

#### **Edinburgh Airport (Public Transport Access)**

**4. Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on improving public transport access to Edinburgh airport since 2007. (S3O-4921)

**The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson):** The Scottish Government has committed £500 million to the Edinburgh tram project, which will connect Edinburgh city and the airport. In addition, a new railway station will be constructed in the Gogar area that will integrate with the tram network for onward connections to Edinburgh airport. Together, those initiatives will provide a high-quality public transport link to the airport.

**Margaret Smith:** It is now 14 months since the transport minister called a halt to the direct rail link to Edinburgh airport and promised instead a tram-rail interchange in the Gogar area. When will the location of the interchange be announced? What discussions have taken place with stakeholders in west Edinburgh about public transport access? Can he confirm that the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland is involved in those discussions, given the impact of the recent changes in relation to the airport?

I welcome the continuing commitment to the tram.

**Stewart Stevenson:** Decisions on the location of the Gogar station are at an advanced stage. We have talked with a range of stakeholders and are working closely with TIE Ltd on the project.

I have had discussions with the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland on a range of issues, although I am not sure that there is a relationship with the issue that the member raises—the society has not raised it with me. However, if the society has concerns, I will be happy to hear them and to put people's minds at rest.

#### **New Schools**

**5. Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive how many schools it envisages will be built under the Scottish Futures Trust in this parliamentary session. (S3O-4866)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** I told Parliament last month that I expect that the Scottish Futures Trust will first be used in the commissioning of a new school building project during 2009. It is already discussing with the

school estate strategy working group how the trust can best support the delivery of our and local authorities' joint aspirations to improve the school estate.

**Elizabeth Smith:** Can we now assume, then, that the cabinet secretary expects each local authority in Scotland to bring forward proposals for new schools? Will he encourage councils such as Fife Council, in my region, to bring forward a new school at Taybridgehead, which the Liberal Democrats promised but never delivered?

**John Swinney:** Many local authorities throughout Scotland are already bringing forward proposals for school buildings. Some projects were initiated under the previous Administration and the Government is taking them forward. Other school building projects are within local authorities' capital programmes and have been provided with the resources that the Scottish Government has made available. In the current financial year, local authorities received a 13 per cent increase in their capital budgets.

There is plenty of initiative on the part of local authorities and they want to be involved in school building. I am working closely with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to ensure that the school estate strategy working group and the Scottish Futures Trust are closely aligned in delivering improvements to the school estate.

**Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP):** Will the schools that will be built under the Scottish Futures Trust have automatic freedom of access to school lets? If so, that would be a massive improvement for communities that at the moment find themselves locked out of schools that have been built under the private finance initiative and public-private partnerships.

**John Swinney:** One of the purposes behind any new school estate development would be to encourage greater community use of, and involvement in, the facilities. The Government very much favours that approach and I will certainly ensure that Mr Paterson's aspirations are fully considered in our work to develop the school estate.

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** Are councils still able to bring forward PPP proposals and to request level-playing-field support for school programmes?

**John Swinney:** A number of school projects are being taken forward just now; indeed, the other day, we signed off a project in Inverclyde that has level-playing-field support. That approach to school building remains intact and will be taken by the Government in the projects that remain outstanding under the commitments made by the previous Administration.

**Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):** Is the cabinet secretary aware that work on five of the new primary schools that are being built in Aberdeen has stopped? As he knows, the development is being progressed under the non-profit-distributing model. Will ministers offer Aberdeen City Council the additional bridging finance that its private sector partners will need to resume the work without further delay?

**John Swinney:** Mr Macdonald will be familiar with the structure of the Aberdeen City Council contract. It is the responsibility of the special purpose vehicle that has been set up to attract finance and manage the project to secure any financial arrangements and ensure the project's continuity following the financial problems experienced by Landsbanki.

The council has been in touch with me on the matter. Indeed, this week, its leader set out for me in correspondence the interim proposals that the council is taking forward. I think that it is acting responsibly and effectively on this matter and, as with all issues related to the council, I am willing to assist where I practically can. However, I reiterate that the solution to this issue and the responsibility for creating financial continuity lie with the council's special purpose vehicle. We should be looking first of all to it to put in place the finance to continue the project. I know that that work is under way in the council.

#### Highland Council (Meetings)

**6. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met Highland Council and what issues were discussed. (S3O-4905)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government is in regular contact with Highland Council on a range of issues.

**David Stewart:** As the cabinet secretary is well aware, Highland Council has an excellent network of first-class healthy living centres, including the groundbreaking janny's hoose project, which was recently praised by the First Minister. However, the centre is due to close next month as a result of funding problems. Will the cabinet secretary speak urgently to all the public agencies involved in order to provide a lifeline to that project, which is an example of best practice in regeneration and health inequality work?

**John Swinney:** I am not familiar with all the details of the case that Mr Stewart has highlighted, but I will of course have it fully investigated and ensure that the issues are considered. That said, I am pretty certain that the centre is one of a set of projects whose financial support was extended by the Deputy First Minister after this Administration

came to power. Centres of this type, which fulfil our responsibility to encourage our fellow citizens to lead healthier lives, play an important role across the range of our public services.

As I said, I will investigate the points that Mr Stewart has raised, and I am sure that if any appropriate action can be taken, ministers will take it.

#### **Small and Medium-sized Businesses (Bank Support)**

**7. Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive how it will promote the urgent need for banks to give additional flexible support to small and medium-sized businesses. (S3O-4930)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather):** The Scottish Government is committed to doing everything within its power to encourage investment in and development of the Scottish economy and to help the business and banking communities. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth wrote earlier this month to all the main clearing banks urging them to do more to assist our small and medium-sized businesses in the provision of affordable finance by utilising all available resources, including the United Kingdom-wide small firms loan guarantee scheme, the option of invoice discounting and support that is accessible through the European Investment Bank.

**Angela Constance:** Does the minister share my concerns that good local businesses, such as Vantana, which makes blinds in my constituency, are being additionally penalised in these difficult times by the withdrawal of credit facilities, a reduction in overdrafts and increasing interest rates on loan repayments, which is all the more harsh, given that local businesses are requesting only flexibility, not a free lunch?

**Jim Mather:** I recognise that situation. We are looking for an early return to reasonable and competitive rates and terms and conditions, and to establish a situation in which the banks and companies across Scotland recognise their mutual interest in delivering long-term, viable businesses with more people in work. We are working assiduously to achieve that end, and are in dialogue with the Financial Services Advisory Board and Scottish Financial Enterprise.

#### **Derelict and Disused Land**

**8. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to encourage local authorities to bring derelict and disused land back into productive use. (S3O-4908)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather):** The Scottish Government

has allocated £36.6 million for this year and the next two years through the vacant and derelict land fund to the five local authorities with the greatest concentrations of such land in close proximity to some of our most deprived communities—that is, Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Dundee and Highland. National planning policy also encourages the reuse of previously developed land in preference to greenfield land.

**Patrick Harvie:** I am not sure whether the minister has had time to see the landshare campaign that is being run on television by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, who is encouraging institutions that hold disused or underused land to make it available for local communities to produce their own food, which reduces the environmental impact of food production, reduces costs to householders and communities, and reconnects communities with an understanding of where their food comes from. Will the minister encourage local authorities and the rest of the public sector to join that campaign and to recognise that land that is held by the public sector can be put to good, productive use by communities?

**Jim Mather:** I rarely watch television, but I spotted Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall doing pioneering work by putting an old British Gas site to productive use. I view the initiative in the same light as I view the Norwegian Government's corporate social responsibility bill, which is currently going through the Norwegian Parliament and seeks to make corporate social responsibility an integral part of the way in which businesses operate.

I am happy to further augment and support the initiative that Patrick Harvie mentions, and I make a commitment to him that we will raise the issue in our discussions with businesses and communities, in line with George Kerevan's wonderful article in today's *Scotsman*.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** I appreciate the support that can be given through the vacant and derelict land fund, but I find it difficult to understand why it is confined to the five local authorities that the minister mentioned. In West Dunbartonshire, which I represent, and in Inverclyde, which Duncan McNeil represents, there are substantial amounts of vacant and derelict land from the industrial past that could be reclaimed and which are identical to the areas of land in Glasgow and North Lanarkshire that the minister talked about. I ask the minister to re-examine which authorities come under the scheme. As a matter of fairness, the situation should be reviewed.

**Jim Mather:** Our approach is designed to have the biggest possible impact. The five areas that I mentioned contain 80 per cent of all the vacant

and derelict land that is located in Scotland's 15 per cent most deprived data zones. I suggest to the member that success in those areas could breed further success, and that we should see where our approach takes us.

### **Infrastructure Investment Projects**

**9. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government how many Scottish Government infrastructure investment projects are being accelerated for early delivery. (S3O-4918)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** A very significant capital investment programme, amounting to £35 billion over the next 10 years, is set out in our 2008 infrastructure investment plan. Despite the economic circumstances, we are progressing that programme and accelerating activity in a number of ways. For example, we have already announced the fast tracking of our affordable housing investment programme, which will bring forward £100 million of spending this year and next year.

Earlier this week, the First Minister announced that the key design contracts for the Edinburgh to Glasgow rail improvements programme were being tendered earlier than anticipated. That will bring forward the next stage of the programme, which is worth up to £1 billion, and increase the rail capacity between Glasgow and Edinburgh. Similarly, the hub initiative, which will deliver a range of local projects, including general practitioner surgeries, is now being prioritised by the Scottish Futures Trust for early delivery.

Last week, we announced funding for two pathfinder projects in the south-east and north of Scotland. We were also able to confirm that the Scottish Futures Trust will be involved in commissioning its first schools project next year. That compares favourably with the more than two years that it took for the first schools project to be commissioned by the previous Administration using a private finance initiative/public-private partnership scheme.

**Jeremy Purvis:** The cabinet secretary cited the example of a railway project in Scotland being accelerated. The financial close for the Borders railway procurement project is scheduled for December 2010. Will he please bring that forward by a year?

**John Swinney:** The Government has made clear its commitment to the Borders railway. We have set out the timescale within which we will bring it forward, and if there is an opportunity to accelerate things, we will do so.

Mr Purvis has made another demand for me to change my financial programme and increase

commitments earlier in the session than I can justify. At the same time, he wants me to make £800 million of spending cuts every single year. I simply ask him to get the story straight when he presses the Government to take action.

### **Strategic Transport Projects Review**

**10. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in respect of the strategic transport projects review. (S3O-4873)

**The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson):** The strategic transport projects review is currently in the process of concluding, and ministers are considering the emerging findings. It is expected that there will be an announcement on the outcome of the review later this year.

**Bill Butler:** The minister is aware of the cross-party support in the chamber for the Glasgow crossrail project and the strong backing for that project from local authorities and business. He also knows that completing the short link between Scotland's historically separated rail networks would deliver a more efficient and competitive railway, which would in turn promote a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits throughout Scotland. In light of the overwhelming financial advantage of a project that a recent range of assessments judged would result in a benefit cost ratio of well over 2.0, will the minister and his Government support the authorisation of that key rail link in its strategic transport projects review?

**Stewart Stevenson:** The member will know about the substantial support that we are giving to railways in Glasgow. The Glasgow crossrail proposals were worked up by Strathclyde Passenger Transport, which responded to previous feedback by breaking it down into bite-sized chunks, which I welcome. I am sure that the member will, like everyone else, listen with great interest when we make our strategic transport projects review announcement later this year.

### **Local Government Efficiency Savings**

**11. Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it intends to review the 2 per cent efficiency savings target set for local government. (S3O-4895)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** The Government does not intend to change the 2 per cent efficiency target. We are only six months into the 2008 to 2011 efficiency programme, which is a key part of public service delivery for the 2007 spending review period.

**Duncan McNeil:** During a committee evidence-taking session, the cabinet secretary informed me that he expected the number of people who are employed in the public sector to be reduced over the funding period. At a time of rising unemployment, his Government's stated policy is to do all that it can to maximise jobs in the Scottish economy. What action has he taken to ensure that job losses are prevented in the public sector?

**John Swinney:** It is clear that individual public authorities must make judgments about the number of staff they require to deliver the public services that the public expect within the financial resources that the Government makes available to them. In coming to that judgment, authorities must consider the delivery of the efficiency programme, which I mentioned in my answer to Mr Kelly. A significant number of specific criteria have to be addressed before any savings can be defined as efficiency savings. Ensuring that public sector employment is at an appropriate level will rest with all public authorities, including the Scottish Government.

I point out to Mr McNeil that Scotland enjoys a significant amount of public sector employment. I look to all public servants to contribute to encouraging and supporting the development of the Scottish economy at this difficult time. Many authorities are responding positively to that challenge.

#### **Tourism (Fife)**

**12. Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what support it is giving to tourism in Fife. (S3O-4923)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather):** Fife is marketed by VisitScotland using the fantastic assets that Fife can offer its visitors, which include golf, touring, walking and other outdoor pursuits, food and drink, nature, local events, festivals, history and heritage—the list goes on and on. Those great assets are promoted across the United Kingdom and overseas by VisitScotland in a number of ways, such as through websites, in print, by direct mail and in public relations activity. Some of those measures focus entirely on Fife—for example, the kingdom of Fife visitor guide and the dedicated VisitFife website—while others feature Fife as part of the wider promotion of Scotland.

**Jim Tolson:** Does the minister agree that, as Scotland's ancient capital, as the final resting place of 11 kings and queens, including King Robert the Bruce, as Andrew Carnegie's birthplace, and for a whole host of other reasons, Dunfermline does not get its fair share of support to highlight its importance to the national and international tourism market? Will he join me to help right that wrong?

**Jim Mather:** Given the passion that the member brought to his question and the provenance of Dunfermline, I suggest that Dunfermline and Fife will do exceedingly well. The year of homecoming will point many people—not only those called Bruce—towards a visit to Dunfermline.

#### **Expo 2010 Funding**

**13. Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive, in light of the current economic climate, whether it will reinstate funding in order to give Scotland a higher profile at expo 2010 in Shanghai. (S3O-4891)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** I agree with Mr McCabe that the Shanghai expo will be an exciting opportunity for Scotland to showcase the scope of our creative talent to the world, and I firmly intend that Scotland will be well represented. The Scottish Government's decision not to pledge £500,000 to the United Kingdom Government for the expo is based on an important principle: it is part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's role to represent Scotland at the expo, along with the other countries of the UK, and not only when the Scottish Government provides earmarked funds. However, we have offered to discuss with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office the possibility of providing funding for specific further opportunities to showcase Scotland within the Shanghai expo programme.

**Tom McCabe:** I am glad that the cabinet secretary agrees with me on the importance of the exhibition, which could be pivotal in Scotland's engagement with one of the most important economies in the entire world. However, I hope that there will be no unnecessary picking of fights with the Westminster Government. We are all aware of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's responsibilities, but I am asking this Scottish Government to put Scotland first, put fights with Westminster aside and invest in giving us a higher profile during the exhibition in Shanghai, which is taking place at an extremely important time.

**John Swinney:** I know, from Mr McCabe's period in government, that he has a long-standing interest in developing business connections with China. I applaud him for that. He knows the respect that I have for his work in that area.

We have to consider the issue, but not within the context of fights with Westminster, which are not what the Government is about in this respect. The important point is to recognise the financial responsibilities of respective organisations within the UK Government. If it is appropriate for ministers in the UK Government to have responsibility for foreign and Commonwealth activities, they should also have responsibility for the promotion of every component part of the UK.

That principle underpins, for example, the duty of VisitBritain to promote every single part of the UK. In a venture of the type that Mr McCabe mentions, it is the responsibility of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to act in a similar fashion. However, I assure Mr McCabe that the Government will interact constructively with the UK Government on this question, as we do on many other questions.

#### **Business Support (North-east Scotland)**

**14. Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action ministers are taking to support businesses in the north-east, given the current financial climate. (S3O-4931)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather):** As indicated in my previous response, the Scottish Government is committed to doing everything within its power to encourage investment in and development of the Scottish economy, and to help businesses across Scotland, including those in the north-east. The Scottish Government's economic recovery plan is fully in line with our economic strategy and our continuing commitment to achieving our purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth. Firms across Scotland can already access advice on cash flow and business efficiency from the business gateway website and, where appropriate, direct from Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. We fully appreciate the heightened importance of ensuring that the right advice is readily available to firms during these difficult times.

**Nigel Don:** Tomorrow, I shall be at the annual general meeting of the north-east branch of the Federation of Small Businesses. Can the minister give me guidance on what the Government is doing specifically for small businesses in that area?

**Jim Mather:** The full delivery of the small business bonus scheme will come into play this year and in 2009, delivering an extra £50 million to the small business community, which very much welcomed the bonus last year. This year, 120,000 small businesses will be totally taken out of the business rates net, and 30,000 small businesses with a rateable value of up to £15,000 will benefit to the tune of a 25 or 50 per cent reduction. On top of that, we now have public contracts Scotland, which is a very much improved procurement portal that I advise all FSB members to look at. It will ensure that small businesses have a level playing field and an even chance of bidding for public sector business. That applies to the north-east as well as to every other part of Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** We have a little time in hand, so I will take a final question, which is from Richard Baker.

#### **Union Terrace Gardens**

**15. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has held with Scottish Enterprise Grampian on proposals for a feasibility study into the potential redevelopment of the Union Terrace gardens in Aberdeen. (S3O-4869)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather):** There have been no discussions between the Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise over proposals for a feasibility study into the potential redevelopment of the Union Terrace gardens in Aberdeen.

**Richard Baker:** Can the minister pursue the issue of the timescale for such a study with Scottish Enterprise Grampian, given the impact that significant delay could have on the Peacock visual arts centre project, which has already received support and pledges of funding? What information will the minister seek on the options in the consultations on the proposals for this vital development for Aberdeen?

**Jim Mather:** I anticipate that the review and update of previous studies will, in fact, address all those points. I look forward to a situation where a collegiate approach can be taken between those who seek to develop Union Terrace gardens and the Peacock visual arts centre project, which I expect to be a by-product of the exercise.

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** Can the minister give guidance on how the rest of the finance that would be required for such a grand project might be made available and whether Sir Ian Wood has given any indication that he has received further private sector support for the project?

**Jim Mather:** I anticipate that the significant contribution from Sir Ian Wood will spur the civic pride of other Aberdonian corporates and the Aberdeen diaspora. I look forward to that developing over time.

## Aquaculture

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-2921, in the name of Michael Russell, on a fresh start for Scottish aquaculture.

14:59

**The Minister for Environment (Michael Russell):** I am very pleased to introduce the debate. I will start with some facts, if members will bear with me while I recite them—this is a bit of a litany, but they are worth remembering. In Scotland in 2007, we produced 130,000 tonnes of farmed salmon, and the figure is estimated to rise to about 136,000 tonnes this year. Farmed salmon is worth around £380 million, which is more than the value of our catching sector. We also produce about 7,500 tonnes of farmed rainbow trout, brown trout and sea trout, worth about £10 million, and smaller amounts of cod, halibut and Arctic char.

We have a highly successful shellfish sector in Scotland; we grow more than 5,000 tonnes, worth more than £5 million. Production is dominated by mussels and Pacific oysters, with small quantities of native oysters and queen and king scallops.

We are the largest producer of farmed salmon in the European Union and the third-largest producer in the world, behind Norway and Chile. In 2006, the value of all fish exports from Scotland, including aquaculture produce, was £425 million, which accounts for 61 per cent of all food exports.

Farmed salmon supports 1,195 direct jobs in salmon production and 3,733 full-time, part-time and seasonal jobs in salmon processing—a significant number. Even with today's dispiriting news from Inverness, the sector continues to operate well and the projections are good.

Production of trout and other fin fish supports an additional 247 jobs, with another 292 in processing, and shellfish production supports about 400 jobs. There are about 6,000 aquaculture jobs in total, most of which are in remote and coastal areas in the Highlands and Islands.

Scotland has a tremendously important aquaculture industry. The industry also makes a worldwide contribution. In 1980, only 9 per cent of the fish consumed throughout the world came from aquaculture; today, the figure is 43 per cent. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization reports that aquaculture is now seen as the only way to meet the increasing demand for seafood.

The quality of what we produce in Scotland is high. Scottish salmon has held the French Government's top quality award, the label rouge,

since 1992, and was the first non-French food to receive that accolade. Scottish farmed salmon enjoys protected geographical indication status alongside Arbroath smokies, Parma ham and Scotch beef.

**Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** And black pudding.

**Michael Russell:** Black pudding is soon to come, as Mr Peacock shouts from a sedentary position—perhaps he has had too much.

Aquaculture is a good-news story and we must build on our success. However, in the past year there have been difficulties that we have needed to overcome, and there are more difficulties ahead. I point particularly to the loss of the minimum intervention price, which we fought hard to maintain, but which was not maintained. People in the industry are working together, however, and there is every indication that that difficulty has been overcome. We have taken advantage of the change to re-establish a good relationship with Norway in particular. In my meeting with the Norwegian minister, Helga Pedersen, earlier this year, I agreed to develop a memorandum of understanding between the Scottish Government and the Norwegian Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs, to share expertise and experience in areas of common interest in aquaculture.

We are moving ahead in a way that is underpinned by our ambitious vision for aquaculture in Scotland. We want a sustainable, ambitious, thriving, growing, diverse and profitable Scottish industry. We believe that Scotland's coastal waters provide excellent conditions for further growth in the fin-fish and shellfish farming industries.

When I opened the Scottish shellfish farming conference in Oban just a month ago, I discussed with delegates the potential for growth and expansion. The Scottish Government is committed to forward planning for the industry. Next spring, we will launch a new five-year framework for continued success and growth in the industry. The process of putting together the framework, branded a fresh start for Scottish aquaculture, has been inclusive, consultative and collaborative.

The Government is not the creator of the industry, but we recognise the important role that we can play in facilitating growth and development driven by the industry in co-operation with communities in rural Scotland.

Our fresh start proposals incorporate the industry's own seven-point plan for growth, which looks at a range of issues, including environmental ones. The consultation is now closed and although the responses are still being analysed, the early impression is that stakeholders broadly support the key themes that we have included in the



framework: health; planning consents and sites; containment; markets, marketing and image; and finance. Our policy will be based around those themes.

Of course, we are also mindful of present challenges. I was struck by the questions that were asked during the previous item of business and the question that Tavish Scott asked the Deputy First Minister this morning about some of the threats to growth and small businesses. Aquaculture is a sector in which there have been financial threats aplenty in the past. The support of the banks is vital to the industry. Some of the stories that I have been hearing in recent weeks of unilateral changes in terms and conditions are very worrying indeed. The industry is vital for Scotland, so we have to ensure that it is helped forward in difficult times—and in good times, too. The support of the banks is important, and I am making that point to them. Provided that they give that support, we can have a profitable aquaculture sector in Scotland. We have included the sector in our economic recovery plan.

I am happy to say that the European fisheries fund opened to bids on 15 September. We face a challenge, which I am bringing forward today. By the end of the year, we will have money available for projects that are of the most strategic importance and which will have the biggest and most immediate impact on the industry's needs. Today, we published a new map of Scotland that shows for the first time the location of all the fin-fish and shellfish farms. We have a fantastic coastline but there is a need for strategic investment, and the European fisheries fund could help in that regard.

We are also helping by bringing forward further legislation. The marine bill will enhance planning and sustainability in Scottish aquaculture.

If we have a strategically sited industry—the new map shows that we have that, but we could do better—we can also develop what we need: an environmentally sensitive and socially responsive industry, which is extremely important.

The industry has been criticised as a bad neighbour that does not respect those among whom it lives. That needs not to be true if the industry is to go forward. The industry, the wild fish sector and the community must live in harmony. To date, I have been very pleased with the work of the tripartite working group, but I acknowledge that the wild fish sector continues to have concerns about the operation of the aquaculture sector. I am sure that we will hear about those concerns during the debate.

Of course, fish farming has some impact on wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout stocks. We know that along the west coast of Scotland a decline in

wild stocks began before fish farming arrived and that stock recovery to date has been patchy. Some stocks, particularly of sea trout, are severely depleted. The reasons for that are complex and multifactorial. Fish farming might be one of the contributing factors, but it is not the only factor. Even so, the tripartite working group structure is designed to assist in those circumstances. I have pushed strongly and positively the working group's priorities.

This month, we launched a new inspection regime under the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2007, which will help to enforce the good practice that exists, supported by the industry itself.

We have worked very hard on—and, as many members know, I have put my support behind—achieving a dramatic reduction in escapes. In 2006, 204,749 fish were lost, and in 2007, 210,643 fish were lost. Those figures are absolutely unacceptable. I am glad to say that, in the year to date, the figure is 66,471. However, that is still too many and we will continue to drive the figure down, just as we will continue to ensure that problems of health and lice infestation are tackled effectively.

We have new regulation in place to encourage and ensure best practice. We have published the fish farm sites map. We are challenging the industry to optimise existing sites. We have developed a siting and database management tool. We are bringing forward funding under the EFF, having accelerated the opening of that programme to ensure that people take part. We have driven down the number of escapes and we have got through a difficult period in which the loss of the minimum import price at least rattled the industry. More than that, we have shown that we are behind the industry and the work that it wishes to do. We are also behind its economic impact, which is vital to Scotland, and to rural Scotland in particular.

For all those reasons, our aquaculture industry can do well and go on doing well. Even with the challenges on consumption in the domestic market, I am glad that the industry believes that production has not yet been affected and that opportunities lie ahead. The favourable dollar to pound exchange rate and the gaps in supply in the USA because of a drop in production in Chile, for example, provide opportunities at a time when some might think that threats were appearing. Indeed, the number of salmon servings that are consumed in the UK increased by 22 per cent from 179 million two years ago to 219 million this year.

For all those reasons, the debate is about a positive: the Government is taking positive action. It would be appropriate if that action were the

subject of consensual debate and the Parliament's unanimous support.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the recent consultation, *Scottish Aquaculture: A Fresh Start*; supports the continued development of an ambitious, sustainable, thriving and growing Scottish aquaculture industry; recognises the economic importance of the industry to Scotland as a whole and many coastal communities in particular; supports efforts to advance the enviable international reputation of quality Scottish aquaculture products, built on high environmental standards and excellent health status when compared to competitor nations, and welcomes the engagement of the shellfish and finfish industries and other stakeholders in the development of the new Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture, to be published in spring 2009.

**The Presiding Officer:** Quite a period of time is available in the debate. If any member feels particularly loquacious, they may find that we are relaxed about their taking up some time. I do not propose to set a time limit for speeches, unless any member threatens to take up all the available time.

I call Dr Elaine Murray. In theory, she has nine minutes, but we will be flexible with the time.

15:11

**Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** I was a bit puzzled by the timing of the debate, which takes place only two short weeks after the consultation closed. Consultation responses are to be made available in the Scottish Government's library within 20 days of the closing date, which was 5 November, and they will be published on the consultation web page next month. The timing makes it a bit difficult for non-Government members to have an overview of the responses, but I trust the minister's assertion that most stakeholders supported the new strategy's five principal objectives. I have managed to obtain some responses, but not the majority, unfortunately. That is a disadvantage, because I have been unable to form an impression as to whether or not there is consensus on the various minor issues that the Government's paper raises.

That said, the debate provides a useful opportunity to discuss an industry that contributes significantly and increasingly to the Scottish economy. As the minister said, Scotland is the second-largest producer of farmed Atlantic salmon in Europe and the third-largest salmon producer in the world—its global market share is about 10 per cent. Farmed salmon is estimated to be worth about £380 million a year—I would not repeat the figures unless we had a lot of time for the debate. Brown trout and sea trout are worth about £10 million a year, and shellfish are worth about £5 million a year.

As the minister said, aquaculture is particularly important to many remote rural and island communities, where it is the mainstay of employment opportunities for as much as a third of the workforce. In turn, that employment supports a range of local services and facilities.

Of course, aquaculture supports employment directly. Dumfries and Galloway has several active freshwater fish and shellfish farms. Some produce fish only for food, whereas others, such as Barony College's Carse of Ae fish farm, produce fish principally to restock local lochs and rivers. That supports the local angling economy and produces some fish for consumption. Barony College also provides qualifications in fish farming, which offer students good employment opportunities and enhance the industry's attractiveness as a career.

Aquaculture also supports employment indirectly through fish processing, to which the minister referred. Pinneys of Scotland in Annan, which is part of the multinational Uniq, is the largest salmon processor in Scotland. It employs 700 people, of whom 80 are temporary Christmas staff. Pinneys of Scotland is the largest single-site private sector employer in Dumfries and Galloway. I am pleased to report that I have been assured that it uses 100 per cent Scottish salmon. Incidentally, it holds the royal warrant to supply smoked salmon to Her Majesty the Queen and, unsurprisingly, it has an extensive export business. It produces a range of seafood-based products, including fish ready meals—a Marks and Spencer fish ready meal is likely to have come from Pinneys of Annan.

However, the aquaculture industry has attracted criticism and concern, mainly on environmental issues. That is why a ministerial working group for aquaculture was set up during the first session of the Scottish Parliament. The working group consulted a wide group of stakeholders and issued proposals that were subject to consultation between December 2002 and February 2003. "A Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture" was published in March 2003, and all the 36 objectives in it have now been achieved.

After five years, and following the achievement of those objectives, it is timely that we are examining the issues that are pertinent now and building on the lessons that have been learned. However, having examined the previous strategic framework and the proposed renewed framework, I am of the opinion that the new one is more of a refreshed start than a fresh start—although I appreciate that fresh is always a desirable word to use in conjunction with fish.

The Labour Party will support the Government's motion. Our amendment is intended to be a positive addition that addresses some of the concerns that were expressed in consultation responses. One concern is that the various EU

directives that have been, or are in the process of being, transposed into Scottish legislation should become part of an integrated and holistic framework for the aquaculture industry. The water framework directive was transposed through the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003. It, the forthcoming marine bill, the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill, the proposed climate change bill and the aquaculture strategy are all part of an environmental jigsaw whose pieces need to fit together coherently. *[Interruption.]* There is a lot of muttering going on. I might have said something amusing that I have not picked up, but I can hear a lot of muttering in the background.

There is no doubt that decades of ignorance and carelessness have resulted in damage to the environment from human activity. Therefore, the objective must be not simply to prevent further damage to the environment but to enable the environment to recover. That will require difficult but unavoidable decisions about policy direction. Of course, a healthy marine ecosystem is also essential for the aquaculture industry.

The former Executive's sustainable development strategy, which was published in 2005, identified five guiding principles of sustainable development. Those included living within environmental limits and achieving a sustainable economy. As far as I am aware, the current Government has accepted that strategy, and I seek ministers' assurances that the renewed strategy for growing the aquaculture industry will accord with those principles. Furthermore, ministers must consider how the renewed strategy will integrate with the marine bill and developments in marine management. The foreword to the strategic framework of 2003 stated:

"aquaculture must grow sustainably if it is to continue to build on its success. That means it must develop in ways which can be accommodated within the overall capacity of the environment to sustain it."

That objective must lie at the heart of the renewed strategy.

The Government's motion refers to "high environmental standards". Scotland will not and should not compete at the cheap and cheerful end of any market. We must aspire to the highest quality, and nowhere more so than in relation to environmental standards. The aquaculture industry's interests do not necessarily have to be in conflict with environmental concerns. Like animal welfare, good environmental practice can be a positive sales attribute and can contribute to marketing and to the industry's image and attractiveness as a career.

The Conservative amendment rightly identifies potential conflict between the interests of the aquaculture industry and those of the angling

industry, as well as the potential problems with interaction between farmed and wild fish stocks. The danger that *Gyrodactylus salaris* poses cannot be denied. Tackling it was a key part of the previous strategy, and measures that reduce the threat of the parasite's introduction to Scotland clearly need to be given serious consideration. However, if the amendment is a rehash of the arguments that were made during the stage 3 debate on the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Bill—and Jamie McGrigor's intervention during the non-native species debate makes me suspicious that it might be—I remind members that the then Minister for Environment and Rural Development rejected a statutory obligation to declare fishing and water sports equipment at customs points because expert assessment was that the risk of *Gyrodactylus salaris* entering the United Kingdom via such equipment was extremely low.

The Liberal Democrat amendment, which identifies training and retention issues in the aquaculture industry, also has value. Its references to the "current rapid expansion" of the industry and to streamlining the regulatory burden might imply a tipping of the balance in favour of the aquaculture industry, overriding the potential effects on wild fish or the environment. As RSPB Scotland states in its briefing:

"the Renewed Strategic Framework should not have the objective of securing unabated economic growth, but instead should aim for sustainable development".

We agree that there is considerable potential for expansion—Rhoda Grant will elaborate on that in her speech—but it must be within environmental capacity. We will listen very carefully to the arguments that are made in favour of the Liberal Democrat amendment.

The consultation document is structured around five themes. The first is health, including the vital issues of sea lice control, water quality and—although it is not mentioned specifically—*Gyrodactylus salaris*. The second is planning and identification of sites, and the number of registered sites, including inactive Crown Estate leases. The third is containment and the prevention of escapes. I was trying to work out how the minister had personally prevented escapes from happening, but perhaps he has been swimming around with a net, trying to persuade the fish to go back. I am pleased to hear that he is doing his bit. The fourth is markets and careers and training in aquaculture. The fifth and final theme is financial investment in the industry. I look forward to further discussion of those issues during the debate.

Before I move the amendment in my name, I should say that whatever is buzzing under my desk is not mine; I will try and find out what it is.

I move amendment S3M-2921.2, to insert at end:

“and believes that the renewed strategy for Scottish aquaculture must be consistent with the provisions of the forthcoming Marine Bill and the EU Water Framework Directive.”

15:21

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** Perhaps flying fish were buzzing over there.

The Scottish Conservatives are strong supporters of the aquaculture industry, which, with 454 active fin-fish sites and 332 active shellfish sites, is hugely important to the Scottish economy. It is worth almost £400 million to our economy and supports almost 6,000 jobs in our most remote and fragile areas. Aquaculture is a Scottish success story that deserves widespread credit for creating jobs, and I welcome the minister's positive comments on developing the industry.

It is true that the industry has, at times, struggled to overcome negative public perceptions. To that end, I wish to highlight its voluntary code of conduct, which contains more than 300 specific compliance points covering all aspects of fish health and welfare, environmental management and consumer assurance. The code is adhered to widely—more than 95 per cent of Scottish salmon is produced by farms that have signed up to it, which is encouraging. The Government's motion highlights many of the sector's merits and I have no hesitation in supporting it.

The Government's consultation document “A Fresh Start” addresses sensibly most of the major issues that affect the industry. Ultimately, however, a consultation document, although welcome, is no substitute for action, and I therefore encourage the Government to ensure that the forthcoming strategic framework proposes robust solutions to the issues identified by the consultation.

That brings me to the Conservatives' amendment, which deals with two of the most pressing issues in the sector, as envisaged by Elaine Murray. I hope that all parties will feel able to support the amendment at decision time. The first issue is the serious one of escaped farmed fish, and I was pleased that that problem was acknowledged in the consultation document. Escaped fish are a problem for fish farms, which obviously suffer lost revenue, and for anglers, who are gravely concerned about the damage that farmed fish can inflict on wild stock, such as disease and the dilution of the gene pool.

Recreational angling, particularly salmon angling, is worth a huge amount of money to the Scottish economy, and it would be nothing short of a tragedy if our reputation for excellence in that

field was to be damaged by question marks arising over the integrity of our wild fish. I therefore ask the minister to ensure both that efforts are redoubled to reduce the risk of escapes and that, as my amendment says, traceability mechanisms are improved to deal with escapes that occur. Those steps must be at the heart of the updated strategic framework.

The second issue that our amendment deals with is the threat posed by the salmon parasite *Gyrodactylus salaris*. The parasite, which has devastated salmon stocks in Norway, could cause incalculable damage to our fish farms and wild stocks. As the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment recently warned, an outbreak of GS could result in the collapse of what he called our “iconic ... salmon angling heritage”. Similarly, experts have suggested that a GS outbreak would cost the Scottish economy hundreds of millions of pounds.

As members will recall, the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2007 deals with the GS threat, but it remains the view of the Scottish Conservatives that the act does not go far enough. It provides ministers with the power to treat infected waters with the chemical rotenone, which is effective in tackling the parasite but has the unfortunate side-effect of wiping out every living thing in the river system. Obviously, that is not a scenario that any of us wishes to contemplate, which is why we must do everything in our power to prevent GS from arriving in the first place.

I remind the minister that, during the passage of the 2007 act, my colleague Ted Brocklebank moved an amendment that would have required people to declare any fishing gear that they brought into Scotland from a country that was potentially affected by GS. That amendment would also have obliged ministers to ensure that appropriate decontamination facilities were in place at points of entry. Such a plan was proposed in the previous Executive's document on GS, which was produced by experts at the University of Stirling's institute of aquaculture and Glasgow Caledonian University's business school.

The proposal was enthusiastically endorsed by the Environment and Rural Development Committee when Sarah Boyack—who I regret is absent today—was the committee's convener. Therefore, it was a great pity that, in her subsequent role as Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development, Ms Boyack marshalled her troops from the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties to vote down Mr Brocklebank's amendment. Thankfully, the amendment was supported by Scottish National Party members, including the now Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead. I trust that the minister will give a firm commitment

to reopen the 2007 act in order to insert into it Mr Brocklebank's amendment, given that the dangers from importing GS are now much greater than they were in 2007.

I also draw the minister's attention to concerns about the possibility of well boats bringing directly from Norway fish that might be contaminated by GS or other diseases. I know that at least three major fish farming companies have made a commitment not to support live smolts from Norway, but I would appreciate further clarity from the minister on what is being done to ensure that the dangers of importing contaminated fish are eliminated. I ask him to keep a close eye on the situation.

On a more positive note, we need to consider the development of the industry and how we can help the growth of the halibut and turbot sector—a subject that I know is close to the minister's heart. To facilitate such growth, we need to make it easier for young fish to be brought in from outside the European Union. We need a border inspection post in Scotland. Having spoken this morning to the chief executive of Prestwick airport, Mark Rodwell, I believe that the airport would be more than happy to consider creating such a facility to allow young fish to be flown into Scotland—perhaps that is a new way of looking at flying fish—to help develop the aquaculture industry.

I welcome the approach that is outlined in the consultation document but reiterate that more concrete action is required if we are serious about combating the concerns that are outlined in my amendment. I have pleasure in moving the amendment in my name and am happy to intimate that we will support all the other amendments.

I move amendment S3M-2921.1, to insert after "competitor nations":

"further supports efforts to advance the enviable international reputation of Scotland's wild salmon stocks and, in light of the potential damage to the health and integrity of wild stocks caused by escaped farmed fish, believes that a robust commitment to reducing escapes and improved traceability must be a central element of the new Strategic Framework; recognises the continued threat posed by *Gyrodactylus salaris* to farmed and wild salmon stocks alike and, in light of the economic and ecological damage that an outbreak could cause, considers that further serious consideration must be given to measures aimed at reducing the likelihood of the parasite entering Scotland".

15:28

**Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD):** Researching this topic reminded me of the economic value of aquaculture to Scotland as well as of its prospects. As Mike Russell mentioned, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization reported in 2006 that aquaculture, which supplied only 9 per cent of the fish consumed by people in

1980, now provides 43 per cent of the market—a share that is growing. Of course, seafood consumption is expected to increase by 50 per cent between now and 2030. To keep pace with demand, global production of shellfish will need to double by 2030.

Scotland can deliver a chunk of that supply, but we need to ensure that that growth potential is seized upon. Sustainable development of this food sector should be the main focus for policy makers. Atlantic salmon dominates in terms of value, with production at around 130,000 tonnes in 2007, as Mike Russell mentioned. Mussel production dominates shellfish culture in Scotland, but trout is also important in fresh waters. No one would deny that scope exists to increase fin fish and shellfish production. Globally, aquaculture has to make up the gap between the demand for marine protein and what is available from depleting wild fish stocks. It is an industry that has carved a place for itself in the international marketplace and still has a place to go. As Mike Russell mentioned, the industry is worth roughly £400 million each year. To put that in context, the fish-catching sector is worth £370 million, beef £467 million, sheep £151 million and pigs £57 million. Aquaculture already plays a significant economic role in Scotland, although there is obviously room for growth.

The Solway coast has huge potential for development and is considered a growth area by Scottish Enterprise, particularly for niche markets. Members will all have heard of a fish called Wanda, but how many have heard of a fish called tilapia? In the US, it is now ranked as the fifth most consumed seafood and researchers believe that tilapia is destined to be one of the most important farmed seafood products of the century. It is a good substitute for white fish, with the potential to help the recovery of cod; the University of Stirling and Scottish Enterprise have done interesting work on that already.

A report on aquaculture in the Solway indicated potential yields for shellfish production to be in the region of 13,000 tonnes of oysters or 19,000 tonnes of mussels. As with aquaculture elsewhere in Scotland, realising potential will depend on the degree to which the industry can exist in harmony with other marine use, regulations and environmental designations. Will the minister confirm what work is on-going on the Solway? I hope that that conversation will continue between us long after today's debate.

In developing the sector and our potential for increased wealth, we need to ensure that there is a properly-trained, skilled workforce. I know that Liam McArthur will focus on that in more detail later. Elaine Murray mentioned the good work of Barony College where, coincidentally, my sons

and my father were educated—albeit in sheep and cattle culture rather than fish culture.

There are some concerns about the environmental consequences of a growing aquaculture industry. Elaine Murray seemed to be concerned that the Liberal Democrat amendment would just bring full-scale industrialisation, but that must happen with the environment in mind. It is therefore key that the Government offers assurances that the development of the sector will not come at the expense of the environment. We know about the problems with cod recovery in the North Sea and the measures to deal with discards. To mirror those efforts, let us ensure that the aquaculture industry is delivered in a way that does not damage existing wild fish or the sea bed. The same goes for freshwater farms and their escapees, which Mike Russell and John Scott rightly have concerns about. The wild fish and invertebrates that live in our waters are an important part of our economy for both tourism and our environment.

Access to support will kick-start any business venture, so I was pleased to read in the strategy that applications to the Scottish fisheries fund from small businesses will be prioritised. It is important that small and medium-sized enterprises are given as much support as possible, whether they are existing businesses or those diversifying for the first time.

Coexistence in the marine environment requires communication between all stakeholders. Planning must be flexible if we in Scotland want to remain competitive and it must be based on what we can do rather than what we cannot. Scotland needs a competitive advantage.

The minister's motion refers to the excellent health of our industry, although Iceland and Norway have advantages over us because of their cooler waters, so we cannot be complacent. The arc of aquaculture also invests heavily in research and development, and we need to learn from those countries. I am pleased to hear that the minister is working with Norway on that.

Red tape remains a barrier. I know of a one-man business in my region that, until recently, paid £600 per year to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency for water testing. That charge is now £2,000 per year, which is unsustainable. I look to the minister to address such charges, rather than build up SEPA with more employees—an extra £16 million and 40 more staff are, I believe, being committed to SEPA to address flooding.

**Michael Russell:** Will the member give way?

**Jim Hume:** I am sorry—I am in my last minute.

**Michael Russell:** It is to correct an inaccuracy.

**Jim Hume:** I am in my last minute.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan):** The member may give way if he wishes to do so.

**Jim Hume:** The original framework can boast such achievements as the industry code of good practice and the inception of the Scottish Aquaculture Research Forum. I hope that Mr Russell will not flounder on aquaculture delivery or carp on about other Administrations—that would be very shellfish of him. We have a chance to build on the work of the previous Administration to deliver a successful, sustainable aquaculture industry. I am happy to move my amendment on behalf of the Liberal Democrats.

I move amendment S3M-2921.3, to insert at end:

“believes that Scotland can learn valuable lessons from its competitor nations with thriving aquaculture industries; further believes that Scottish aquaculture can maximise the opportunities presented by the current rapid expansion of the international industry to achieve genuinely sustainable growth, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to take decisive action to streamline the regulatory burden, introduce a fair inspection regime, improve community and industry liaison, and encourage the development and retention of a skilled and qualified workforce in the aquaculture industry.”

15:35

**Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** As a member of the previous Environment and Rural Development committee, I was involved in consideration of the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Bill in 2007, so this debate is like déjà vu all over again, as they say.

The renewed strategic framework for aquaculture is to be welcomed, because each Government must have a different name for the same thing as it develops. However, the industry is developing and, despite the times in which we live, we have been successful in maintaining jobs in fin fish and shellfish in some of our most remote areas. I will speak about the perpetuation of those jobs in a minute, but I want first to look at one or two of the themes in the consultation on the renewed strategic framework, especially the “planning, consents and sites” theme.

It would be useful if the minister could provide an update on the use of sites, because, although fish farm sites can be good neighbours, some people see them as bad neighbours. When we debated these issues in March 2007, we found that 121 out of 252 salmon leases established by the Crown Estate had reported nil production in 2004. In 2005, the figure was 125; in 2006, it was 140. Sixty-seven leases reported nil production in the total period 2004 to 2006. There are good reasons, such as fallowing, for keeping certain

sites empty, but often it is done for anti-competitive reasons—to stop smaller companies coming into the market. That must be examined. When we considered the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Bill, we were concerned that the Crown Estate did not have an effective way of dealing with the matter.

I hope that changes to our planning processes will enable us to limit the time for which leases are held. If they are not used within five years, planning permission should be withdrawn; there should be a means of regulating that. I hope that the minister will be able to expand on the issue, because local communities are concerned about large companies such as Panfish, which have sites and have applied for more. Those include the site at South Corriegills in Arran, which has been the subject of a public inquiry. Why is the company applying to take up new sites, against the interests of local communities, when many of its sites are unused?

**Michael Russell:** The member raises an important issue, but it was not possible to address the matter in a comprehensive way until we knew where all the sites were. Incredibly, the work that has been done on sites over the past year has enabled us for the first time to map them and to compare them with designated sites in Scotland. That will allow informed decision making for the first time.

**Rob Gibson:** I welcome the publication of the map, which shows the progress that is being made in these matters; I referred to that earlier. However, it will also be necessary to tighten up regulations.

The “markets, marketing and image” theme is important. Reference has been made to the image of salmon farming, which is improving considerably. However, we know that the market conditions for shellfish are very difficult at present. Given the fantastic resource of clean waters that we have, it is a great pity that the people who produce shellfish see prices going down. In this period—the run-up to Christmas—there is a lot of evidence of difficulty. Prices are slow. French and Spanish dealers who would normally have struck deals for lobsters and other shellfish by this stage have not done so—they say that the Christmas season has not yet arrived. The credit crunch is affecting our European neighbours, as it is us. Orkney fishermen say that they are having difficulty selling cooked partans. We need to find the means to float companies in weeks 49, 50 and 51 of the year. If the price rises are not achieved then, many shellfish merchants will be in serious difficulty. We therefore hope for evidence of a change in the process for marketing shellfish. There is a period of low demand in January, and if

people have to keep over their stocks until then, they will not make money out of them.

Perhaps this is the time to stimulate the home market. Perhaps we should not, with all due respect, be eating turkeys at Christmas, but lobsters or shellfish—as people do in countries such as Portugal. That might be a good thing, because there are large stocks of them needing sold. We hope that there will be help with marketing through the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society, which claims to work with aquaculture and which should be given a chance to do more in that direction.

We have questions about the environment, which I am particularly interested in from the point of view of the proposed climate change bill. If, as RSPB Scotland suggests, the growing aquaculture industry is to be consistent with the Scottish Government’s sustainable development strategy, we should perhaps ask the minister whether we could have some means of doing a carbon count of the effect of the aquaculture industry, as we do for other industries. Aquaculture is a good industry to choose for ascertaining whether or not it is environmentally sustainable. That fits well with how the forthcoming marine bill will take into account marine spatial planning and the best use of our extremely clean waters.

I hope that the debate focuses on some of the major factors that will help the aquaculture industry to develop. As we have heard, we now have a greater uptake of salmon. Perhaps that is because of the difficulties of getting other fresh stocks, which have been run down through overfishing in some parts of the world. More processed salmon is being eaten. Nevertheless, that is good for the Scottish industry at the top end.

I doubt that we have had enough global warming to develop the necessary climate for flying fish to reach this part of the world, as the Tories suggested, but who knows, they might be farmed in future. In the meantime, in the serious world, this is an excellent debate on an excellent industry that we must support.

15:42

**Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Like others, I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in the debate. I was reflecting earlier on what I might say about the 30-plus years that I have now spent living in the Highlands and Islands. I have watched the industry develop and play a very significant role in the economy of the region—from Shetland, in the far north, through Orkney, where I lived in the 1970s, to the Western Isles and right down through most of the sea lochs in the west Highlands into the southern parts of

Argyll. The industry has become a significant part of the life of the communities of the coastline of the Highlands and Islands. The salmon and shellfish farming industry has become a significant employer, as the minister indicated, with more than 6,000 people enjoying work from the industry.

As a result of the success of the industry over the years, communities in the Highlands and Islands have remained viable and public services that might otherwise have been lost have been maintained. I can think of schools on the west coast of the Highlands that would probably have closed because of declining population, but have effectively been saved by the industry. If the industry is kept going, it can help to sustain the whole community.

The salmon farming industry has had its highs and lows over the years. I suspect that it will continue to have ups and downs in the economic cycles that we experience. The industry is particularly susceptible to price fluctuations, currency changes and international competition and production levels. It still exists, however, and it employs thousands of people in some of our most remote communities. It is still making progress in the marketplace.

Shellfish farming has particularly huge potential to expand in the Highlands and Islands. We have some of the finest conditions in the world for growing shellfish. We have a long coastline, mostly with high quality clean water. Most of the coastline is undeveloped in terms of shellfish production, so there is capacity for significant expansion in the sector. That expansion would be in harmony with the environment. Indeed, it would have to be, as good shellfish require good clean water to grow. The Association of Scottish Shellfish Growers estimates that we would be capable of supporting about 100,000 tonnes of production per annum, compared with the current levels, which are only a fraction of that, between 5,000 and 7,000 tonnes. The industry can also play a significant part in developing the growing consumer interest in local food. A significant part of the tourist experience of visiting the Highlands and Islands ought to be eating local salmon and shellfish of real quality.

Increasing shellfish production can also play a part in addressing the food security issues that John Scott often raises. We have the capacity to grow more of our own food in Scotland. Further, getting greater access to salmon for our own population will have significant health benefits because it is one of those fish with the right kind of fatty acids. It is good that the number of people who eat salmon is increasing and that the market is therefore growing.

Over the years, as other members mentioned, there has been a lot of controversy in the salmon

sector about environmental matters, including overstocking in the early days, the effect on sea lice numbers, the effect of that on natural stocks, and the impact of escapees from fish farms on the genetics of natural stocks and their ability to survive. That is a critical issue because of the economic importance of those stocks. There has also been controversy about the use of chemicals and feedstuffs in and around salmon farms.

It would be foolish to pretend that those controversies are over, but it would be wrong not to acknowledge that huge strides have been taken over the years in acting on those concerns. The minister mentioned the recent reduction in the number of escapes and, like him, I hope that that continues. The move to industry quality standards has played a strong part in the progress that has been made, as has the move to organic production, which improves environmental sustainability.

Quality is the key to success in the marketplace, and there has been an impressive focus on quality over the years. Scottish produce from the sector rightly enjoys an excellent reputation throughout the world, and because people regard the Highlands and Islands as having a clean environment, its reputation for quality in general has also been enhanced. Sound and improving environmental practices are a prerequisite for aquaculture's continuing success.

There have been major changes in ownership patterns in the salmon industry over the years. The industry started with pioneer independent producers, but there were moves first to larger companies and then to multinational companies. The fact that Norway now dominates in the pattern of ownership has implications for Scottish jobs, because the market might compensate for any overproduction in Norway with reduced production here.

**Michael Russell:** It is important to note the difficulty that was experienced in Scotland with overproduction and dumping on the market. We need to remain vigilant about that. I am sure that the member will acknowledge that we have said publicly that, should it recur, we will immediately seek renewed action at a European level.

**Peter Peacock:** The minister anticipated the point that I am coming to. One of the continuing challenges in the industry is to consider those issues.

The independent salmon producers, in particular, regret the loss of the minimum import price regulations and find it worrying for the future. They would rather that the EU had not ended the provisions that the estimable Allan Wilson fought for and helped to secure, in tandem with his UK colleagues, when he was Deputy Minister for



Environment and Rural Development. He had to fight hard with the sceptical European Commission about that. However, in removing the minimum import price, the EU agreed to monitor closely the Norwegians' practices and any attempt to dump cheaply priced salmon on the EU market. It is important that the monitoring is robust and thorough because it might form the basis of a case that is made to Europe in future. I am glad that the minister acknowledged that.

The independent salmon producers have a particular need to secure working capital if they are to survive. Their plans for an aquaculture finance company have been difficult to advance since the loss of the minimum import price, and the difficulties have no doubt been exacerbated by the banking crisis. The Government might be able to help in that area, and I encourage the minister to say something about that when he sums up.

Shellfish growers are concerned about the availability of sites and leases. They suggest that there should be a presumption in favour of shellfish leases for sites that are freed up under the location and relocation programme. As Rob Gibson and others mentioned, they also want inactive leases to be freed up. There is a role for the Crown Estate in that, but there is also a monitoring role for the Government. Again, I would be interested to hear the minister's views on that.

It would also be interesting to hear the minister's views on planning fees. Shellfish growers believe that they are charged disproportionately high fees because they are assessed on the same basis as much larger salmon enterprises, yet their profits and impacts are significantly different. That must be an impediment to growth and it appears to conflict with previous Government advice on the matter.

As I said, shellfish growing requires clean water and in that respect Scottish Water has a role in ensuring that sewage discharges meet the highest possible standards. Shellfish growers have also highlighted real difficulties with the way in which the measurement of E coli in shellfish is used to assess water quality. That can lead to perverse results; for example, the clean waters of Applecross are regarded as less healthy than the river Clyde, which is hard to imagine. Spikes in E coli levels in shellfish caused by natural stock and not linked to human pathogen presence can result in area closures, and I urge the Government not to compromise on the health question, but to work with the industry on finding alternative measures.

Of course, that will require research and, just as it can help the industry to acquire and develop the skills that are needed, Government can also help aquaculture in that very important area. Indeed, the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation is looking at this very important area for future

support. Salmon producers have also highlighted planning issues, marketing, fish health and containment as key concerns.

Whatever emerges from the consultation, I hope that the strategy's next iteration will not only have more substance than the consultation but be consistent with the forthcoming marine bill and address the issues that I have raised this afternoon and that many others have raised in responses to the consultation.

15:51

**Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** In many ways, aquaculture might have become one of Scotland's forgotten industries. Since its boom years in the 1980s and early 1990s, the industry has faced serious challenges from catastrophic disease to relentless consolidation as major companies have steadily built global concerns.

The industry's difficulties during the latter 1990s and early years of this century are well known, particularly in the communities that have been most affected. Out in the wider population, many people could be forgiven for having formed the view that, as a result of such travails, it is no longer a significant player in the Scottish economy.

As the figures show, nothing could be further from the truth. As has been said more than once this afternoon, Scotland is the largest producer of farmed salmon in the EU and the third largest producer in the world, behind only Norway and Chile. It is worth repeating and constantly reminding ourselves of those facts.

We are responsible for 80 per cent of the UK's entire aquaculture production. According to the latest figures this year from the Fisheries Research Services, there are more than 450 registered active fin-fish sites and more than 330 registered active shellfish sites in Scotland. Although employment levels in the industry tend to fluctuate, the latest figures suggest that more than 6,300 jobs are dependent on salmon farming alone. The vast majority of those jobs and others in the shellfish area of the industry are in the Highlands and Islands, and a great many are based in some of our most fragile coastal and rural communities, both on the mainland and on our islands.

Since its inception in the Highlands and Islands in the 1960s, the aquaculture industry has brought important socioeconomic benefits to these areas. However, the communities that serve it have also experienced something of a socioeconomic rollercoaster ride as the industry has matured to its current form.

A sector profile published by Highlands and Islands Enterprise last year makes for interesting reading. Focusing on cultivation rather than the processing of fish and shellfish, it shows that while the industry is still dominated by salmon, other species of fish grown include rainbow trout; moreover, as we have heard, the output of cod and halibut is rising. Shellfish cultivation, the main products of which are mussels and oysters, is also expanding steadily.

The report highlights some of the key factors affecting the overall expanding global market, including environmental and food safety regulations, technological advances and rising consumer demand for farmed fish. It also underlines the on-going trend of consolidation of the major salmon companies and the continuing potential for job rationalisation that that entails.

The report states that, at the time of writing, 1,325 jobs or 1,215 full-time equivalent posts, including 1,105 full-time and 220 part-time jobs, were involved in the production of salmon, salmon smolts and trout in the Highlands and Islands. As the report says, these figures exclude

“the very significant indirect employment impact throughout businesses in the supply chain to the aquaculture sector”.

Indeed, it is estimated that indirect employment could account for as many as 2,100 more jobs in Scotland, the majority of which are in the Highlands and Islands. The report also states that shellfish production supports 401 jobs in Scotland, around 90 per cent of which are located in the Highlands and Islands.

Just this month there was some very welcome news from the aquaculture industry. One of Scotland's principal salmon farming firms, Loch Duart, which is based in north-west Sutherland, embarked on an ambitious £3.7 million development plan, starting with a major upgrade of its hatchery. The company is expanding to keep pace with demand for its high quality fish from caterers and retailers, at home and abroad. The development programme, which includes the acquisition and infrastructure for three sea loch sites in the Uists, has been supported with £740,000 funding from Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Loch Duart, which currently has nine farm sites near Scourie and operates to high environmental standards, intends to increase production by 50 per cent and create 19 new jobs over the next three years.

It is heartening, particularly in the current extremely challenging economic climate, to see a company such as Loch Duart expanding and offering fresh opportunities in fragile communities where alternative employment opportunities are scarce. I sincerely hope that there will be more of this to come from the aquaculture industry.

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that our aquaculture sector is highly successful as an industry, while remaining sensitive to the needs of the environment. This is where the issue of escapees comes in. My first experience of wild salmon was watching them being netted, legally, on the beach at Lossie, and being illegally ripped out of deep pools in the river Lossie. I have also seen wild salmon being netted illegally on the west side of Lewis, and have witnessed the burning of confiscated nets at the back of my office in the old prison cells in the courthouse in Stornoway. In those days, wild salmon were plentiful, and it was almost a civic duty to get one for the pot or the freezer. Times have probably changed, however.

**John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** No, no.

**Dave Thompson:** John Farquhar Munro does not agree.

Escapees threaten the future of our wild salmon, and we must do all that we can to ensure that escapes are minimised. I am, therefore, glad that we seem to be getting on top of the issue, so that our legal salmon fishing can prosper.

The consultation on a renewed strategic framework for Scottish aquaculture is an important starting point on a matter that is vital to the industry. The Government and all stakeholders must work together to ensure the future success of the industry.

The Government's long-term goal is to introduce a plan that builds upon an existing aquaculture industry that is ambitious, thriving, growing, diverse and profitable. That development has to be sustainable—environmentally, economically, and socially. There is little to disagree with in those aims.

15:57

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** As Elaine Murray said, this is a strange time to have a debate on the issue. The Government's consultation has closed and the responses have not been published. Indeed, we do not know what the Government's thoughts are on those responses. The Parliament will have to scrutinise the Government's proposals when they are published, and that will be done either in the chamber or in a committee.

Aquaculture is an important industry, because it provides jobs in remote rural areas where there are often few employment opportunities and where the jobs that are on offer tend to be part time or seasonal. The industry brings important economic benefits to all our coastal communities. That is why I was surprised that the consultation

document said simply that we need to ensure that there is a good career structure. Nobody could disagree with that sentiment, but it gave us nothing to work with. What is the Government's ambition in that area? What is there to comment on?

I was, therefore, pleased that the industry appears to be progressing the issue by carrying out a study to identify the skills that it requires. Lantra, the sector skills council, is supporting that initiative, which will consider the need to draw up a framework for development and career progression for the workforce. I hope that the initiative will consider how training can reach people who live and work in remote communities. It is not always possible for people to leave home to participate in training, which means that ways of pursuing training remotely must be pursued. The Government can support that by ensuring access to information technology in our remotest areas, which will help to break down geographical barriers. Ensuring that those communities can access high-quality broadband at reasonable cost would help, and I hope that the Government will support the initiative.

I also hope that the Government will consider ways of maximising jobs in the industry through farming and by adding as much value as possible locally.

It is strange that the Government seems to be increasing the bureaucracy surrounding fish farming. Holding the review now means that changes will take place if it is not simply to be a paper exercise. The review will be followed shortly by the marine bill; again, it is inconceivable that that bill will have no impact on fish farming. It seems to me that the already cumbersome bureaucracy that surrounds fish farming will increase. The industry is complaining about the legislative framework.

**Michael Russell:** I know that the member regards me as being capable of achieving much, but I am not capable of implementing a massive and unwieldy bureaucracy in 18 months. If such a thing exists, it was created by her Government; if it does not exist—I do not think that it does and we are, of course, always lessening the burden of bureaucracy—what she has said is wrong and unfair. One way or another, she is wrong.

**Rhoda Grant:** Needless to say, I do not agree with the minister. What he said in opposition and what I am saying is that the industry is complaining about a bureaucratic legislative framework. In his short time in office, he is already carrying out a review; on top of that, a marine bill will create more bureaucracy. I ask the minister to sweep up measures in the marine bill and streamline the bureaucracy that surrounds the fish farming industry. Perhaps we would get

somewhere if he stopped muttering and started listening.

We need to ensure that wherever we create bureaucracy, we protect our aquaculture industry's high standards. It is the best in the world, and we must make it as easy as possible for it to operate, especially in the current economic climate.

We would benefit from further scrutiny of a number of issues that the industry is concerned about. It is concerned that a number of licences have been undeveloped, and it would like them to be freed up for future expansion. Several members have spoken about that. A great deal of anecdotal evidence seems to show that there are a number of reasons why that has happened. Rob Gibson mentioned anti-competitive reasons. Others allude to speculation, and some talk about creating disease barriers. The Government must take a better look at what is happening. We need jobs and investment in aquaculture; in that context, misuse of sites and speculation are criminal, although the aims of protecting the industry from disease and raising quality cannot be argued with.

There is potential for expanding the industry, but we must properly consider disease control before we do so. Having only anecdotal evidence about licensing is not good enough. If evidence shows that we should have protection zones, they should become part of the planning and licensing process. Is the Government working on that with industry and scientists? Our products are recognised globally as high-quality products. We must consider developing jobs in the rural economy, but we must also protect our reputation for quality. The minister must get to grips with that, and leases need to be released if they are not required for disease protection.

There are concerns about cost variations, which Peter Peacock mentioned. In Shetland, a planning application can be got for £3,000; it costs £11,000 in Dumfries and Galloway. There is a huge range of costs, which cannot be linked to reality. The range of costs also creates a disincentive for small projects that lend themselves to shellfish farming. We can expand the industry in that area in a way that does not impact on the environment.

Our shellfish farming output falls way short of that of other countries. It has been said that we could up our output from 7,000 tonnes a year to 100,000 tonnes a year. Spain's output is 250,000 tonnes, and France produces a similar amount. Greece beats us by producing 35,000 tonnes of mussels a year. Shellfish farming lends itself to small operations, which we need to encourage. In some parts of the country, the cost of planning means that very few would be able to pursue such an option financially. What support is available to

individuals who want to start a small shellfish farming business?

Water quality is of the utmost importance to fish farming. I assume that the marine bill will address that issue. SEPA and Scottish Water have a role in protecting the quality of our water. The Government must ensure that its agencies are working with the industry to improve water quality.

This might not have been the right time to have the debate, but those issues have to be addressed by Government. We have a unique opportunity to grow our economy and provide jobs in areas that need them. The minister needs to stand back and think about how the Government can make a difference at this stage, by reducing bureaucracy and providing support where it is needed.

The areas that I have touched on are some of the areas that have been highlighted by the people who have responded to the consultation. We need to streamline measures with the forthcoming marine bill; we need to make the planning process more relevant and consistent; and we need to get to grips with licensing problems. We need to find clear and practical ways to move forward and make aquaculture an attractive career for people who live in the areas concerned. We must provide training and personal development.

We must protect our reputation for having a product of excellence. The minister needs to take away such issues and then bring back his ideas, either to the Parliament or to the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee.

16:05

**Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I apologise for missing the opening minutes of the debate.

The Scottish Government has, as one of its principal aims, the promotion of “sustainable development”. It is the sustainable part that I want to focus on with regard to Scottish aquaculture.

The salmon aquaculture dialogue, initiated by the WWF, held its 12<sup>th</sup> meeting in Edinburgh only last week. According to Dr John Webster of the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation, the international environmental community received—and I quote him exactly—“a real shock”. Why were those people reportedly so surprised? They were surprised, Dr Webster says, because those visitors to Scotland had not been aware of the sustained and world-leading efforts of the Scottish salmon industry to develop along sustainable lines over the past quarter of a century. I shall expand on those efforts in the rest of my speech.

A quarter of a century ago, virtually all the feed that was fed to farmed salmon came from marine sources. Today, less than 50 per cent of the

protein in the so-called on-growing diet that is fed to Scottish farmed salmon is of marine origin. Much of the diet is sustainably produced from terrestrial crops. That shift has been driven by both environmental and economic factors. The price of fish meal and fish oil is volatile, yes, but it is also better for the environment to reduce the proportion of marine-origin ingredients.

That significant change in the composition of salmon diets has been made possible only by Scottish scientific expertise. The work that is done by the nutrition group at the institute of aquaculture in Stirling, headed by Professor Gordon Bell, is world leading. Professor Bell and his team have found that they can make salmon use protein much more efficiently—for growth rather than for energy—by substituting plant oils for some of the marine-origin protein in salmon feed. According to Dr Webster of the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation, the research is almost instantly applied: the composition of salmon feed changes as soon as science shows that it is possible. The UK is often criticised for failing to translate the discoveries of its scientists into commercial products and applications, but the Scottish salmon industry can quite reasonably claim to be showing the way.

Despite the surprise that was expressed at the salmon aquaculture dialogue last week, the Scottish salmon industry’s efforts over the years have not gone entirely unnoticed. As long ago as 1992, the prestigious Label Rouge designation was awarded to Scottish salmon. That was the first time that the French Government’s premier-quality certification was awarded to a non-French product, and the first time that it was given to a fish product. The award is conferred only on products meeting stringent criteria with regard to the quality and sourcing of inputs, and, of course, with regard to the quality of the product itself. No one doubts that the product of Scottish salmon farming is of high quality.

Of course, salmon are piscivorous—their natural diet is other fish—so it is not possible to eliminate marine-origin products from their diets altogether. Indeed, the health-giving omega 3 oils that are found in salmon’s flesh—EPA and DHA, though if I tried to pronounce the full names I would get hopelessly confused—depend on their diets containing some marine ingredients. In this area, too, the Scottish salmon industry—and I include the feed-producing companies—is striving to improve the sustainability of its practice. Dr Webster tells me:

“If you talk to any of the Scottish fish-feed manufacturers, they will tell you that the sustainable sourcing of raw materials is a high priority.”

Sustainability, he clarifies, is a balance between economic, social and environmental factors—but all are important.

The pressure from consumers, and therefore also from retailers, is inevitably and quite correctly pushing things in that direction. It is good to note here that the southern hemisphere countries are protective of the long-term viability of their fishing waters, so ingredients for salmon feed from that part of the world are increasingly likely to be sustainably sourced.

What of the use of drugs and pesticides in the Scottish salmon industry? As we know, concerns have been reported in the past. For the past four years of analysis of samples of fresh and farmed salmon in Scotland, I ask members to guess how many samples were found to contain pesticides or antimicrobial residues—my request is entirely rhetorical, so members should not feel any need to shout out their guess. Is the answer a few hundred? Indeed it is not. Is it 27? Nope. The answer is two. There have been only two positives in four years.

I believe that the Veterinary Residues Committee's view is that the use of veterinary medicines by the Scottish salmon industry is very well regulated. Key to that, according to Dr Webster, is the inherent discipline in the industry. It is fair to say, then, that Scotland leads the world with regard to the proper and responsible use of veterinary medicines in salmon.

I could talk about the code of good practice for Scottish fin-fish aquaculture and all that that embraces, or about the on-going efforts to prevent escapes of captive salmon—such action is clearly essential to protect Scotland's wild stock. However, time does not permit that—it might, but I think that members would have gone to sleep by the time that I had finished. I think that I have made the point, however, that the Scottish salmon industry and how it has evolved is a good example of the principles of sustainable development.

In that spirit, the industry is interested in exploring the new area of integrated aquaculture. The Scottish Association for Marine Science states:

"The process of farming fish in open water cages releases nutrients into the surrounding environment."

That, of course, we all know. It continues:

"Much of these nutrients ... should be readily taken up by macroalgae. SAMS is developing integrated aquaculture systems, growing seaweeds alongside fish farms to investigate their effectiveness at sequestering dissolved nutrients produced by the fish farms. The seaweeds produced will be commercially saleable in their own right and SAMS is testing whether"

the algae might flourish on the by-products of the salmon industry and whether those in turn might feed shellfish.

With its record of cutting-edge science and immediate commercial implementation, Scottish aquaculture, as exemplified by the salmon industry, has a lot to be proud of. However, I agree with the RSPB that there is more to be done in Scotland with regard to marine conservation generally. With that in mind, I am confident that, with sustainability at its core and not simply economic growth, Scottish aquaculture will continue to lead the world. I congratulate the industry and commend the motion.

16:11

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie)**

**(Lab):** I start with a bit of a disadvantage in contributing to the debate because, unlike most of the previous speakers, I do not represent a constituency with a significant coastal area. Most of the fish farming that takes place in Clydebank probably takes place in fish tanks, which are primarily there for visual effect rather than a true economic purpose. I am also at a disadvantage in speaking late in the debate, when many of the valid and key points have been made. I noted that the first three speakers all recited essentially the same statistics to underline the aquaculture industry's importance to Scotland in economic and employment terms, and in providing diversity in Scottish agricultural production. All those points are particularly well made and, I hope, will be better understood as a result of the debate.

It is fair to say that debating aquaculture is not new to the Parliament. The issues, as Peter Peacock said, have moved on considerably over the past 10 years. However, in important respects, the persistent issues remain. I want to highlight three of them.

First, there is the balance between fish farming and other areas of activity in the coastal communities where fish farming is concentrated. In some areas of Scotland, that is not a problem because fish farms can happily co-exist alongside other forms of marine and agricultural activity. There is only a relatively small number of fish farms in such areas, so there is no problem of concentration. However, as the map at the front of the consultation document makes clear, a number of other areas have significant concentrations of fish farms. Issues arise from that in terms of the assimilative capacity of the waters to deal with the inevitable concentration of nutrients and therapeutants that are used to make the fish farms operate on a commercial basis and to ensure that the fish remain healthy.

As far back as 2002, when the Transport and the Environment Committee conducted an inquiry into fish farming in Scotland, we recognised that some fish farms were inappropriately located. Either they were in areas where there was insufficient change of water because of tidal movements, or there were issues arising from the concentrations that had built up—a product not necessarily of the water, but of the scale of use. There are significant issues regarding the licensing system and the location of fish farms in terms of planning consents and so on, which have not been altogether successfully addressed.

I know that significant movement has taken place over the period, with the new planning regime and so on, but I do not think that we have really heard from the minister a summary of where we are with the problems of inappropriately located fish farms and how we can rationalise the industry in a sympathetic way to ensure that fish farms are properly located in ways that minimise any risk to the excellent health status to which the minister referred. I would like to know how the regulatory powers of the planning authorities are being employed. Are they entirely effective? Is the inspection regime sufficient? Is there a need for further measures to assist particular fish farms that have a problem simply because of their location or the history of the use of nutrients and therapeutics? How can we help such fish farms to move to places that might provide better circumstances?

The document that has been consulted on is important. The other important document is “Sustainable Seas for All”. How will the operation of the aquaculture industry—fish farms—be integrated with other developments such as offshore wind power and tidal power developments, especially those that affect the sea bottom? It is important that we do not consider the aquaculture industry without looking over the edge at what other uses of the sea there might be and what issues they might raise.

That is particularly important given that the nascent companies in the tidal power and offshore wind power sector may not have the legal resources to compete with the fish farming industry and other industries. The Government has a role in ensuring that an appropriate balance is struck in the use of the sea and that the situation is properly managed.

**Michael Russell:** The member raises an important point. The marine spatial planning powers in the marine bill will be extremely important not just because of cost considerations, but because all users of the marine environment need to be considered as legitimate users. The map that we have produced is of vital importance because it shows us, for the first time, where fish

farms and shellfish farms are so that we can ensure that they fit into the matrix.

**Des McNulty:** I appreciate that comment from the minister.

My final point is on food security, which was an important issue for discussion at the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee. Unfortunately, I left that committee before its inquiry could be completed. There are significant issues affecting the aquaculture industry, alongside the agriculture industry, regarding the balance of power between the supermarkets and the producers, and many people feel that the supermarkets now have too much power. I appreciate that there are limitations on the role that the Government can perform in interfering with commercial markets. Nevertheless, we need to think about how the Government, alongside providing support to Scottish agriculture and Scottish fishing, can properly support Scottish aquaculture by ensuring that the imposition of the commercial power of the supermarkets does not unfairly affect Scottish aquaculture producers.

16:19

**Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD):** This has been a constructive debate. On the encouragement of the Presiding Officer, there have been many loquacious contributions. It would be invidious to name names, although I did particularly enjoy what appeared to be the Open University lecture from Bill Wilson. This afternoon has offered further proof, if it were needed, that it is not always about quantity; in this debate, the focus has been very much on quality.

I share Elaine Murray’s and Rhoda Grant’s curiosity about the timing of today’s debate, but I certainly welcome the minister’s commitment to the development of a renewed—indeed, a refreshed—strategic framework for Scottish aquaculture. As someone who participated in the meetings of the advisory group that was established to help prepare the previous framework strategy, I can certainly reassure the minister that I do not take the move on his part as a slight; indeed, I take modest pride in his reference to being able to build on strong foundations. I also feel some of what Rob Gibson referred to as

“déjà vu all over again”.

I am bound to say that successfully balancing the various interests involved is not, as Mr Russell conceded, always easy. I remember—not that fondly—that the previous ministerial advisory group spent the best part of three meetings trying to thrash out a mission statement that was acceptable to all. I was reminded of that when I read RSPB Scotland’s briefing note for the debate. Despite what Dave Thompson said, the RSPB

does take issue with the foreword to Mr Russell's latest text, which states:

"Scottish ministers want an aquaculture industry that is ambitious, thriving, growing, diverse and profitable."

I am bound to say that that bears a striking resemblance to the previous wording, but there is a tension between continued economic growth and expansion on the one hand, and carrying capacity and sustainability on the other. That can be resolved, but it will require sensible compromises to be made along the way, some of which will be difficult. That is very much encapsulated in the RSPB briefing, and in other briefings, and it is reflected in the Labour amendment, which we will certainly support.

As Des McNulty observed, most members have followed the minister's lead by highlighting the enormous importance of both the fin fish and shellfish industries for many of our remotest communities. My constituency is a case in point, although I know that there is a feeling that Orkney is still not fulfilling its full potential in aquaculture.

Overall, however, the state of the aquaculture industry in Scotland seems to be more encouraging than was the case a few years ago, notwithstanding the news from Inverness this week. The previous strategy was a reflection of the times in which it was developed, so the time is right for a refresh that will reflect new circumstances, opportunities and challenges.

There are plenty of challenges. The battle that was fought to persuade the European Commission to instate a minimum import price in response to what were seen as anti-competitive practices by other farmed-salmon-producing countries should not be underestimated. My colleague Ross Finnie, and Allan Wilson, to whom Peter Peacock referred, should be congratulated on their roles. The fact that the MIP was removed earlier this year will have been greeted with relief by parts of the Scottish industry, although I know that other parts of the industry are feeling extremely anxious—a point that Peter Peacock made well.

The Commission might believe that there is

"little risk of recurrence of dumping",

but as *The Herald* reported back in August,

"there have been predictions of significant job losses in some of Scotland's most fragile communities as a result of the EU's decision".

The introduction in 2006 of the minimum import price complicated relations with the Norwegians in particular. It is perhaps somewhat ironic that, as the minimum import price was being lifted earlier this year, ministers found alternative ways of displeasing their Norwegian counterparts by making repeated and partisan comparisons between the two countries. However, I am

delighted to hear about the memo of understanding that has been agreed.

**Michael Russell:** It is surprising to hear that an offence was created, given that the Norwegian foreign minister and the Norwegian ambassador were at pains to say publicly that no offence had been created, and to apologise for any other impression. I would not want the member to mislead Parliament about matters Norwegian, nor about any other matter.

**Liam McArthur:** Goodwill is breaking out everywhere.

Part of our amendment attempts to assist the Government by laying healing hands on what Jim Hume referred to as "the arc of aquaculture". Most members have referred to the twin challenges of disease and escapes. I welcome the figures that the minister announced earlier and the fact that the efforts of the minister with his big net are clearly paying dividends, although he is right to point out that the figures are still too high.

John Scott's amendment and much of what he said in his speech are valid, but we need to be careful. The reputation of our aquaculture sector is good, but it is also vulnerable. Some people have been, and continue periodically to be, only too happy to use specific cases to generalise about the industry as a whole, which is unhelpful. That underscores the importance of effective marketing by individual companies and by the industry as a whole. It would help if the minister were to outline the role that he sees the Government playing in supporting those efforts. For the avoidance of doubt, that also reminds us of the need to continue to focus ruthlessly on quality and on addressing disease, as well as escapes and site location. High environmental standards and an excellent health status lie at the heart of a profitable and competitive industry, as Jim Hume made clear.

Points were made about having an effective and streamlined regulatory environment. I reassure Elaine Murray that that is not about being a soft touch or having a light touch, but about a risk-based approach that is rigorous but not needlessly burdensome, and which does not place unnecessary costs on private businesses and public agencies.

One other key factor in achieving the objectives and ambitions that we all have for the industry is skills, which Elaine Murray mentioned briefly. The minister acknowledges the need to retain and attract skilled workers, not least given the standards to which we want the industry to aspire. I hope that he accepts the need to help our SMEs to create genuine career opportunities and structures, and that he recognises the role that qualifications have to play in achieving that. The minister should therefore be aware of concerns

that have been expressed to me about the relatively low profile of skills in the consultation document “A Fresh Start”, which I hope will be rectified in the strategy. He might wish to reflect on whether withdrawing funding from over-20s who seek qualifications will help. As the workforce in the Highlands and Islands tends to be older than that elsewhere in the country, it is easy to understand why concerns are being expressed. I encourage the minister to respond to them constructively.

In loquacious conclusion, the debate has been positive and constructive. I hope that the minister has found it helpful in developing his thinking. The Liberal Democrats are happy to support the motion and the amendments, although we were slightly concerned by some of Mr Scott’s interpretation of his amendment. I look forward to the development of the strategy and to further debate on its detail.

16:27

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):**

As my colleague John Scott said, we warmly welcome the Government’s review of the strategic framework for Scottish aquaculture. We have had a useful discussion about the issues that face the industry and about what we wish to see in the new framework when it is published next spring. We look forward to seeing the consultation responses and the Government’s reaction to them once they have been collated and studied in detail.

As other members have done, I will quote the consultation paper, which says:

“Scotland should have sustainable, growing, diverse, market-led and profitable farmed fish and shellfish industries, which promote best practice and provide significant economic and social benefits for its people, while respecting the environment.”

The new strategic framework must reflect that ambition and must enable the fish farming sector to achieve it.

The minister said that Scotland is the largest farmed Atlantic salmon producer in Europe; I thought that it was the second largest.

**Michael Russell:** I understand that priority goes to Norway and Chile and that we are the third-largest producer in the world, but Norway is not a member of the European Union, of course.

**Nanette Milne:** I thank the minister for that clarification. Scotland also produces large quantities of farmed rainbow, brown and sea trout, as well as halibut, char and cod.

The health benefits of eating fish are increasingly recognised, global consumption of fish is growing and the aquaculture industry’s importance is growing apace—43 per cent of fish

that are eaten are produced on fish farms. Despite that, aquaculture in the EU and Scotland has not yet expanded in line with global market development.

As Peter Peacock said, expansion of the aquaculture industry could contribute significantly to our food security by delivering more home-grown, healthy and nutritious products. Therefore, the approach in the Government’s consultation document to promoting and enhancing the industry is welcome. However, as my colleague John Scott said, actions speak louder than words. I hope that the new strategic framework will identify robust solutions to the important problems that are identified in “A Fresh Start”. The new locational map that was announced and other significant statements by the minister this afternoon represent a good start. We look forward to more supportive action in the future.

We have heard from many members that Scottish farmed salmon is extremely important to the economy, with the Highlands and Islands in particular depending on the industry for economic growth. It accounts for nearly 40 per cent of all Scottish food exports, and its high quality is internationally recognised. According to the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation’s briefing document, farmed salmon generates close to £200 million for Scotland every year and sustains many businesses that have grown to support the salmon farming sector, such as haulage firms, ice suppliers, equipment manufacturers and, of course, the veterinary services that look after the health of the fish stocks. There is also a significant spin-off for other small local businesses, such as hotels, that feed off the increasing success of the aquaculture industry.

A sustainable future for the industry is clearly of major importance to Scotland, particularly for some of its more remote and fragile populations. If the industry is to compete successfully in a growing global market, its commitment to good practice, environmental responsibility and sound commercial judgment will be increasingly important. Several members have rightly stressed the importance of environmental responsibility. The voluntary code of good practice that the sector has pioneered has been a major success, and more than 95 per cent of Scottish farmed salmon is now produced by companies that adhere to the code. Therefore, we welcome the involvement of the shellfish and fin-fish industries—as well as other groups—in development of the new strategic framework, which must be in harmony with the code that is already in place.

As our amendment suggests and as John Scott explained, we have two major concerns: the problem of escaped farmed fish and the need to



keep the *Gyrodactylus salaris* parasite out of Scotland. Tougher action is still needed on both. Our wild salmon angling sector is internationally renowned for the salmon's quality and purity, so contamination of wild salmon stocks from escaped farm fish could have a catastrophic effect on that reputation. Therefore, the interests of the wild salmon sector must be a key and integral part of the renewed framework, and robust measures should be put in place to limit escapes further and to improve traceability when they occur. Parliament knows our serious concern about the on-going threat to farmed and wild salmon stocks from potential infestation by the *G. salaris* parasite, which has already devastated salmon stocks in Norway. It is vital that action be taken to keep it out of Scotland and, as we said in the recent debate on non-native invasive species, we are of the firm opinion that the Government should consider amending the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2007 to include Ted Brocklebank's stage 3 amendment that would require declaration of potentially contaminated fishing gear, and the decontamination of such gear, at ports of entry. The cabinet secretary is well aware of the dangers of allowing the parasite into Scotland—indeed, he supported the amendment in Ted Brocklebank's name during the stage 3 debate last year—and I hope that the Government will accept our amendment to the motion as an indication that it will give serious consideration to our proposals.

John Scott also made some practical suggestions concerning the development of fish farming, particularly about facilitating the growth of the halibut and turbot sectors. I hope the Government will consider those suggestions.

The RSPB briefing raises some serious issues about the health of Scotland's seas. Repeated breeding failures and significant population decline of some species of coastal birds are worrying and make it crucial that we enshrine environmental sustainability in the renewed strategic framework and the forthcoming marine bill. It is important that the new framework be consistent with the bill and the EU water framework directive, therefore we are happy to support the Labour amendment.

We will also support the Liberal Democrat amendment because a streamlined regulatory system, a fair inspection regime, a skilled and qualified workforce and good liaison between communities and the industry are all desirable and ought to be achievable.

The Scottish Conservatives recognise the enormous importance of the fish farming industry to Scotland. We are generally supportive of the Government's proposals to promote and enhance it and we look forward to the publication of the new strategic framework next spring, which we hope

will reflect the areas of concern that have been raised and discussed in the debate.

16:34

**Elaine Murray:** This has been a useful debate and I appreciate members' attempts to be as loquacious as possible and to extend their contributions beyond six minutes to seven, eight or nine minutes to assist us poor individuals who have to sum up at the end and fill the remaining time. I do not know whether the minister and I can rise to the challenge of filling the 25 minutes that I see are left to us.

The debate has been useful, despite some concerns about its early timing. I hope that we will get the opportunity in the committee or in the chamber to scrutinise the consultation results. It is the shape of the final document that will be most important.

A number of contributors to the debate have linked the development of the aquaculture industry to other priorities of the Scottish economy, such as tourism. Food security is also becoming increasingly important. Another link is with the health benefits to be gained from consuming fish and, indeed, from consuming good, fresh, local produce whether it be fish, meat or vegetables—I think that we would all like that to be developed in a local food strategy. Fish products can also play a role in Scotland's reputation for high quality foodstuffs.

Much as I enjoyed Dave Thompson's description of observing illegal salmon fishing—he seems to have had a career in that—I do not agree that aquaculture is a forgotten issue. The Transport and the Environment Committee in the first session of Parliament conducted an investigation into fish farming, and a strategy was published in March 2003. Now, five years on, the Scottish Government is considering the issue again and proposing a refreshed strategy. Therefore, since the start of the Scottish Parliament, awareness of the industry's importance to the Scottish economy has increased, as has the desire to address and solve the various problems that surround the industry so that it can be promoted.

Various members have commented on the need to limit escapes and to monitor and trace escapes that occur. That is a difficult issue and I would be glad to hear more from the minister about how he has achieved the reductions of the past 18 months, although it has been happening for the past three years. Obviously, there will be lessons to learn from that.

Members have also referred to the interaction between wild and farmed fish. Of course, the consultation document identifies the key theme of sea lice, which was also a key theme of the 2003

strategy because it is important to the health and welfare of farmed fish as well as wild fish. Unfortunately, there now appears to be evidence of sea lice resistance to some of the available treatments, so authorisation is being sought for new treatments.

Exciting possibilities are being developed for non-chemical treatments, which would avoid some of the complications of chemical treatments, such as the release of chemicals into the natural environment and the build-up of resistance to treatments, which seems to be happening. One of those natural methods of control is done by cleaner fish, which are fish such as wrasse that remove sea lice from the host fish rather than fish that have superior personal hygiene habits.

Tackling the problem of sea lice is important to the aquaculture industry, but it is also important to wild salmonid stocks. It is worrying that the 2007 wild sea trout catch was the lowest ever, at 27,115, which was down 0.6 per cent on 2006, which was also a poor year. The Association of Salmon Fishery Boards and Rivers and Fisheries Trusts Scotland estimate that sea lice cost their industry £30 million per annum. Although a single treatment is unlikely to be applicable in all cases, the use of non-chemical, natural treatments and the management of sites to reduce infection, as well as possible chemical treatments, need to be high on the agenda.

Several members, including Rhoda Grant and Rob Gibson, mentioned planning issues. The consultation document refers to the perception that there is a lack of sites for the expansion of aquaculture in Scotland and to the fact that, historically, development was permitted on sites that would now be considered unsuitable.

The Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation is concerned that the introduction of the new planning system and the provisions of the new marine bill may complicate the optimisation of sites and new site identification. However, as Rob Gibson said, there are a considerable number of unproductive sites. We need to know where those are and sanctions perhaps need to be imposed on people who continue to sit on sites year after year without using them. Unfortunately, a number of those inactive sites have Crown Estate leases. We hear that there are various reasons for that, including companies keeping leases as an asset for the future, but that all conflicts with the perception that there is a lack of sites. I appreciate that the matter is the subject of an expert group investigation; the group can perhaps consider the possibility of sanctions, should those turn out to be necessary.

Scottish Environment LINK argues that it is too soon to introduce permanent site consents. It identifies concerns over the possibility of mass

escapes or increases in disease outbreak should there be a move to larger sites and larger cage diameters.

The Association of Salmon Fishery Boards and Rivers and Fisheries Trusts Scotland also have serious reservations about permanent planning consent, because of the dynamic nature of the issue and the difficulty in predicting how the industry will develop in future decades. Obviously, the marine bill provides the opportunity for a new and, I hope, clearer planning system for the marine environment. Will the minister consider at least delaying making any decisions on permanent planning permission until after the bill has been passed and we have the framework for marine planning in place?

The submission from the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards and Rivers and Fisheries Trusts Scotland disputes the statement in the consultation document about the success of the tripartite working group—that is at odds with the minister's opinion. The group was set up to promote dialogue between the wild fish and fin-fish farm sectors and the 18 area management associations. Their submission observes that, although some AMAs are working well together, others have so far failed to progress beyond problem identification to solution identification, which is more important.

As always, Bill Wilson was very interesting and educational owing to his knowledge of fish. I have benefited from his knowledge of the breeding cycles of fish, which the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee found helpful in its recent discussions. I was interested to hear about Professor Bell's research at the University of Stirling into reducing the need for fish products in feedstuffs, because the issue of feed sustainability has been a concern. The issue has been raised with regard to feed ingredients that have been derived from wild fish captures; I was told in a recent conversation that it can take 5kg of wild fish to create 1kg of farmed fish. If there is another way of producing quality farmed fish that is not as dependent on wild fish stocks to feed the farmed fish, that is an important development and I am grateful to Dr Wilson for advising the chamber about it.

I was also interested to hear more about the use of microalgae to reduce the release of nutrients from fish farming cages, because that has been one of the environmental concerns about fish farming. It is helpful to hear of natural ways of controlling the problem and I look forward to hearing more about that in the future.

I was happy to accept Mr McArthur's reassurances that the Liberal Democrat amendment is not intended in any way to suggest a light-touch approach. Scotland is, of course,

obliged to meet international commitments under the OSPAR convention, the world summit on sustainable development, the EU marine strategy framework directive, the EU water framework directive and the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003. The new strategic framework needs to be developed in the context of meeting all those international obligations.

Des McNulty referred to problems where there is a heavy concentration of sites and mentioned the map that shows how close many of those sites are to each other. The 2003 strategy included the principle of operating within the

“biological, assimilative and visual carrying capacity of the environment”.

The current consultation document refers only to the

“carrying capacity of the environment”.

Scottish Environment LINK suggests that, in the final document, the term “carrying capacity” needs to be more fully defined and that means of monitoring carrying capacity need to be further developed.

Rob Gibson referred to the possibility of a carbon count in discussing the environmental issues of fish farms. The concern is not so much the carbon footprint but the effect on biodiversity.

Liam McArthur and Rhoda Grant mentioned training. For any industry to be viable, its workforce must be appropriately trained. In my opening speech, I referred to courses that are offered by the Barony College in Dumfriesshire. They include a higher national certificate in fish farm and production management, work-based level 2 Scottish vocational qualifications in aquaculture and fisheries, and short courses in fish disease diagnosis and treatment and in something called electro-fishing—I am not quite sure what that is.

Rhoda Grant made an important point about the difficulties of accessing training for people who live in remote and rural communities. The obvious answer to that is distance learning, but that is not easy if people do not have access to good broadband. The problems of broadband access in some of our remote and rural communities compound the problems for people trying to access training through distance learning.

Peter Peacock and Liam McArthur also referred to unfair competition, particularly from Norway, and the unwelcome loss of the European Commission's minimum import price. I know that the minister said that the Government also regrets that.

**John Scott:** With particular reference to Norway and regrets, does the member, on behalf of the

previous Labour Government, regret not taking more precautionary measures to ward off the risk of *Gyrodactylus salaris* being imported into this country?

**Elaine Murray:** I am not sure that that is a correct interpretation of events. As I said in my opening speech, the amendment that John Scott refers to was rejected on the advice of an expert group, which said that the chances of GS coming into the country through the mechanism in question were very low.

On the minimum import price, it is important that the Government continues to monitor what is happening. If Norwegian producers face economic problems at home, the easy answer for them is to make production cuts in Scotland. If that happens, can the Scottish Government take action to protect Scottish jobs and will it work with the Scotland Office and counterparts in the UK Government? Action will need to be taken if we are to protect the jobs both of people working directly in the aquaculture industry and of those, such as my 700 constituents who work at Pinneys of Scotland in Annan, whose employment is dependent on the industry.

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** You should wind up now, Dr Murray.

**Elaine Murray:** I will do so, Presiding Officer.

I am happy to accept both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat amendments, and I am pleased to hear that others intend to accept our amendment. I am also very pleased, on behalf of the Labour Party, to say that we will support the Government motion at decision time.

16:48

**Michael Russell:** I express my gratitude to Dr Elaine Murray, who has filled more than half the time that was available, which means that my summing up will be shorter than hers. I congratulate her, as I have been able to throw away a great deal of material that I would otherwise have commented on.

I shall make two points at the outset. First, I was slightly surprised that several members talked about the strange timing of the debate. I cannot imagine that anybody would be suspicious of my motivations, but I will make it clear that it has been sensible to hear MSPs' views before the revised framework is finalised. Of course we intend to discuss it in Parliament following its publication, and of course it will have to interface closely with the provisions in the marine bill. That is entirely accepted. Today's debate has been a good opportunity to hear from members a variety of views that we will integrate into the Government's

thinking. I am grateful to all members who have contributed.

Secondly, I say to Rhoda Grant, who raised this issue, that I am passionately committed to reducing bureaucracy. It is a little rich to be criticised for not being so committed when I am trying to deconstruct a system of bureaucracy that was created by her party in government. Nevertheless, I believe that the debate overall has been positive, and I will go through a range of speeches.

Many members focused on planning and sites. Members seem to accept that a lack of information has been a difficulty, so we have taken a big step forward today by publishing the map of sites. We now need to do several other things.

We know that fin-fish production takes place in 263 sites out of the 458 sites that have been consented. There is a gap between the number of consents and the number of sites that are being operated. That gives us an opportunity. We want to develop a siting tool that will allow us to examine all environmental and other considerations—along the lines of the spatial planning to which Mr McNulty referred. Development of the tool will allow informed decisions to be made about exact siting—where opportunities are great and where there are potential difficulties, including with interactions.

It is important to note that the SEPA consenting process involves close consideration of the carrying capacity of the environment. No site that would degrade the environment at any stage is consented. In addition, the good practice of rotating cages allows environmental recovery from the small amount of damage that is done. In the summer, I was at a fish farm in Skye that operates the system on three sites: one site is fallow and two are occupied. We are concerned about environmental issues, which our policy on consenting sites allows us to consider.

We and the industry are concerned about inconsistencies in the approach to planning. I am glad to say that planning fees are being normalised. The expert working group on sites has gathered information on all sites, and inactivity will be a factor in the system for deciding future priorities. There is much work to be done, but we recognise that a modern approach to sites is needed.

We must also remember that the cost of production is often dependent on the site, its carrying capacity and the size of the installation. If the industry is to remain competitive in Scotland, it will have to recognise the drive towards larger and more efficient sites that is taking place in Norway, for example, but it will have to do so with full recognition of the environmental difficulties that

such an approach may cause. I am sympathetic to the environmental points that the RSPB makes but, as ever, we must ensure that we strike a balance between environmental issues and commercial imperatives in a sensitive and forward-looking way.

**John Scott:** Does the minister accept that there is still a huge opportunity for development of the fin-fish industry and the shellfish industry through co-operation? There are already models of such co-operation. Does he agree that there is room for expansion?

**Michael Russell:** I entirely endorse the member's view. Working in partnership and co-operation is a huge issue for the industry.

Other important issues have been raised. For example, Mr Peacock mentioned the protection of shellfish waters. There are some inconsistencies, which we are trying to drive out, but it is important to recognise that 112 waters in Scotland—the number was previously 105—are now protected under the shellfish waters directive. Seven waters—Loch Ailort, Sandsound Voe, Baltasound Voe, East of Burki Taing, Muckle Roe, South Wick and Loch Fyne coastal strip—were designated this month. In 2007, shellfish growing waters achieved 100 per cent compliance with standards. We are always aware that the quality of the environment and of the water is what makes the industry successful, because it makes for a first-class product. Environmental and commercial issues must be kept in balance, and we will endeavour to do that.

As new species are introduced, we will have to recognise what they need in terms of clean water and nutrients. I say to Mr Hume that although tilapia is an interesting possibility it flourishes best in the warm waters of the Nile. So far, despite global warming, we do not have the warm waters of the Nile, even in the Solway.

The Government intends to support the amendments, but I want to make our position clear on the policy positions that the other parties have helpfully put forward. I will deal first with the amendment in the name of Dr Elaine Murray. The renewed strategy will sit within the marine management provisions of the proposed Scottish marine bill and the marine management organisation. We are entirely aware that we will have to ensure that this set of policy proposals is sensitive to those provisions and that the timing is correct. Aquaculture policy will develop alongside and dovetail with wider EU, UK and Scottish initiatives, including the water framework directive. Dr Murray recited well just some of the conventions and directives that apply in the area and of which we are extremely aware. We are happy to accept in full the two points that she makes.

With regard to the amendment in the name of John Scott, we have a robust commitment to reduce the number of escapes. That is clear under our existing policy and in the renewed framework. Dr Murray asked how that had been achieved. Despite what Mr McArthur claimed, I do not have a net and some very large waders that I am using to block the escape of the 66,000 fish I talked about.

**Liam McArthur:** What a pity.

**Michael Russell:** I am sure it is a pity, but they just do not exist.

The combination of a number of factors has allowed progress to be made. One is zero tolerance. The Government has zero tolerance of escapes. Escapes should not take place on the scale that they have been, and the figure of 200,000 plus was a nonsense. Good practice means running a fish farm in a way that stops escapes. A further factor is continued investment—ensuring that investment is up to date and that equipment does not fail. There is also new technology. All those things have come together.

The biggest factor is determination that escapes should not happen. The figure for escapes in Norway is substantially lower than the figure here. It simply should not be happening, and we are continuing to press the matter. I entirely respect the view of the angling community, which thinks that escapes are a big downside to fish farming in Scotland. Good neighbourliness will develop for a variety of reasons, one of which will be if escapes stop happening.

Sea lice infection is of great concern to us. Inspections for sea lice and containment under the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2007 will commence next week. We will continue to work with others, including other countries—we are working with Norway on the matter—to ensure that we have the right regime for sea lice. Reduced escapes and sea lice issues are key themes of our approach under the “Fresh Start” document. The traceability of escaped fish is a further issue. If escapes take place, we want to know where and why they happened. There is of course a legal requirement to report them. The industry knows that we mean business on that.

John Scott spoke about *Gyrodactylus salaris*. I appreciate the points that he made, and he is absolutely right that we should eliminate any threat from well boats—but we already do that. Legislation bans imports from GS-diseased areas. That will continue. We have guarantees that there will not be such imports. We are able to regulate imports from all diseased areas, and we are doing so. We have a *Gyrodactylus salaris* contingency plan in place and we have a concordat with the Norwegian Government on the provision of

assistance and expertise should we have an outbreak—which we absolutely intend not to have. *[Interruption.]* Finally—

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. There is too much noise in the chamber during the winding up of a very interesting debate.

**Michael Russell:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am very glad that you have found the subject interesting. I do, and many members do. Had some other members been here during the afternoon, they would have learned a great deal. In the few minutes still available to me, I shall give them some information. For example, the regular public awareness campaigns on the dangers of introducing the parasite go on. Most recently, the BBC went on a G salaris fact-finding mission to Norway. The Scottish Government was there too, and we now have a new video on YouTube, which helps. We will continue to push the matter. Dr Murray looks surprised. We continually place on YouTube videos that give interesting information. Finally—*[Interruption.]* There is even one about beavers, which I made myself. I do not want to self-advertise at this late stage in the day, though.

Finally, I turn to Mr Hume’s amendment. As I have mentioned, we are developing a concordat—a memorandum of understanding—for mutual benefit between Scotland and Norway. Regulation is a key issue, but everything I have said today is about reducing the burden of regulation, and all the organisations involved know that the guiding principle from the Government is that regulations should encourage good practice and not just stamp out bad practice. That is what is happening in the aquaculture industry, as in every other. Significant advances have been made in streamlining the aquaculture regulatory burden. A new framework will be made to facilitate a further lightening of the load—rather than to increase it. A lot of things are imposed on us; our job is to ensure that we do not impose on others. The renewed framework will highlight skills issues. I take issue with Mr McArthur—the skills issue is included, and the framework highlights the importance of the industry in rural and other parts of Scotland.

This has been a good and productive debate in which many other points that I do not have time to cover have been made. I was startled at one stage to hear Rob Gibson call for us to serve lobster as Christmas dinner. I cannot imagine lobster with bread sauce, but no doubt somebody has done and is already making it. That point aside, the aquaculture industries in Scotland are good industries with huge potential and they are doing well. Our job as a Government is not to get in their way; our job is to encourage their development. The debate has provided us with a lot of information about how to do that. I am grateful to

all members who participated. I hope that, like me, they will support not just the motion but all the amendments.

## Expenses Scheme

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S3M-2912, in the name of Tom McCabe, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, on the expenses scheme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament recognises that Members' staff salaries were last uprated in the financial year 2007-08 and in relation to the Resolution of the Parliament dated 12 June 2008 on the Expenses Scheme ("the Resolution")—

(i) amends the Schedule of Rates annexed as Annex 2 to the Resolution with immediate effect by deleting "£54,620" where it appears in line 2 and by inserting "£56,650" and

(ii) determines that all references to the Schedule of Rates and to the limit on entitlement to reimbursement of staff salary costs in paragraph (a) of the Resolution shall be read as references to the Schedule of Rates and limit on entitlement to reimbursement of staff salary costs as so amended.—[Tom McCabe.]

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

## Decision Time

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-2922.1.1, in the name of Margaret Smith, which seeks to amend amendment S3M-2922.1, in the name of Rhona Brankin, on supporting Scotland's looked-after children, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S3M-2922.1, in the name of Rhona Brankin, as amended, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2922, in the name of Adam Ingram, on supporting Scotland's looked-after children, be agreed to.

*Amendment, as amended, agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S3M-2922, in the name of Adam Ingram, on supporting Scotland's looked-after children, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the Parliament agrees that it is unacceptable that outcomes for looked-after children and young people and care leavers across a range of indicators fall so far behind those of their peers and agrees to do everything possible to end discrimination and stigmatisation of those who have experienced the care system and to challenge all services to offer the best possible childhoods to the children and young people in their care to ensure that looked-after children and young people and care leavers are able to grow up into successful, responsible and happy adults; in that spirit recognises that looked-after children are among those considered as most vulnerable and therefore believes that integral to their success is for the Scottish Government to ensure that local authority funding for the care and safety of children more generally is properly protected, particularly in light of the recent worrying HM Inspectorate of Education report into child protection services in Aberdeen, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to make a statement on that report and to revisit the Children's Services Bill consulted on in the previous parliamentary session and to work with local authorities and other partner agencies to ensure that appropriate early intervention and support is available across Scotland and that child protection practices are kept under immediate and continuous review.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question, is that amendment S3M-2921.2, in the name of Elaine Murray, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2921, in the name of Michael Russell, on a fresh start for Scottish aquaculture, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S3M-2921.1, in the name of John

Scott, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2921, in the name of Michael Russell, on a fresh start for Scottish aquaculture, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S3M-2921.3, in the name of Jim Hume, which seeks to amend motion S3M-2921, in the name of Michael Russell, on a fresh start for Scottish aquaculture, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S3M-2921, in the name of Michael Russell, on a fresh start for Scottish aquaculture, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the Parliament notes the recent consultation, Scottish Aquaculture: A Fresh Start; supports the continued development of an ambitious, sustainable, thriving and growing Scottish aquaculture industry; recognises the economic importance of the industry to Scotland as a whole and many coastal communities in particular; supports efforts to advance the enviable international reputation of quality Scottish aquaculture products, built on high environmental standards and excellent health status when compared to competitor nations; further supports efforts to advance the enviable international reputation of Scotland's wild salmon stocks and, in light of the potential damage to the health and integrity of wild stocks caused by escaped farmed fish, believes that a robust commitment to reducing escapes and improved traceability must be a central element of the new Strategic Framework; recognises the continued threat posed by *Gyrodactylus salaris* to farmed and wild salmon stocks alike and, in light of the economic and ecological damage that an outbreak could cause, considers that further serious consideration must be given to measures aimed at reducing the likelihood of the parasite entering Scotland; welcomes the engagement of the shellfish and finfish industries and other stakeholders in the development of the new Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture, to be published in spring 2009; believes that the renewed strategy for Scottish aquaculture must be consistent with the provisions of the forthcoming Marine Bill and the EU Water Framework Directive; believes that Scotland can learn valuable lessons from its competitor nations with thriving aquaculture industries; further believes that Scottish aquaculture can maximise the opportunities presented by the current rapid expansion of the international industry to achieve genuinely sustainable growth, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to take decisive action to streamline the regulatory burden, introduce a fair inspection regime, improve community and industry liaison, and encourage the development and retention of a skilled and qualified workforce in the aquaculture industry.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S3M-2912, in the name of Tom McCabe, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, on the expenses scheme, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament recognises that Members' staff salaries were last uprated in the financial year 2007-08 and in relation to the Resolution of the Parliament dated 12 June 2008 on the Expenses Scheme ("the Resolution")—

(i) amends the Schedule of Rates annexed as Annex 2 to the Resolution with immediate effect by deleting "£54,620" where it appears in line 2 and by inserting "£56,650" and

(ii) determines that all references to the Schedule of Rates and to the limit on entitlement to reimbursement of staff salary costs in paragraph (a) of the Resolution shall be read as references to the Schedule of Rates and limit on entitlement to reimbursement of staff salary costs as so amended.

## Gaelic Language Development

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan):** The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S3M-2374, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on Gaelic language development. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

I have agreed to requests by a number of members, under rule 7.1.1, to speak in Scots Gaelic. Members should note that headphones for simultaneous interpretation are being handed out and are also available at the back of the chamber. Members should turn to channel 1 to receive an English translation.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament commends Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, along with other local authorities and public bodies, for the recent publication of their Gaelic language plans; likewise commends the Gaelic plan of the Scottish Parliament and the soon to be published Gaelic language plan of the Scottish Government; notes the important work done by the community and by many agencies and bodies in Scotland to maintain and develop the Gaelic language; recognises that in the coming few years it will become clear whether or not Gaelic is to survive as a community language, and therefore recognises that a sense of urgency in this area of policy is essential, particularly in respect of the expansion of Gaelic medium education, if we are to ensure that the number of speakers has, by the 2021 census, been stabilised at 2001 levels as the prerequisite for long term growth.

*The member has provided the following translation:*

Gu bheil a' Phàrlamaid a' moladh Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, cho math ri ùghdarrasan ionadail agus buidheannan phoblach eile, airson na planaichean Gàidhlig aca fhoillseachadh o chionn ghoirid; gu bheil i cuideachd a' moladh nam planaichean Gàidhlig aig Pàrlamaid na h-Alba agus a' phlana a tha Riaghaltas na h-Alba gu bhith a' foillseachadh a dh'aithghearr; gu bheil i a' toirt fa-near an obair chudromach a tha a' choimhearsnachd agus tòrr bhuidheannan ann an Alba air dèanamh airson Gàidhlig a leasachadh agus a ghlèidheadh; gu bheil i ag aithneachadh gum fàs e soilleir anns na beagan bhliadhnaichean a tha romhainn am mair a' Ghàidhlig mar chànan coimhearsnachd agus mar sin gu bheil i ag aithnacadh gu bheil cùis-èiginn anns an roinn phoileasaidh seo, gu h-àraidh a thaobh leudachadh foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig ma tha sinn a' dol a dhèanamh cinnteach gu bheil àireamhan an luchd-labhairt aig àm cunntas-sluaigh 2021, air an glèidheadh aig ìrean 2001 mar riatanas airson fàs san fhad-ùine.

17:03

**Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP):** Tapadh leibhse, Oifigeir-riaghlaidh.

Tha mi glè thaingeil don a h-uile duine a tha a' gabhail pàirt anns an deasbad seo, an fheadhainn aig a bheil Gàidhlig agus, dìreach cho cudromach, an fheadhainn a tha ga h-ionnsachadh fhathast—mi fhìn nam measg. Tha mi taingeil cuideachd do



na buidhnean Gàidhlig a bha a' gabhail pàirt an-diugh ann an latha Gàidhlig na Pàrlamaid.

Carson, ge-tà, a tha sinn a' bruidhinn mun Ghàidhlig a-rithist? Carson a tha Alasdair MacAilein gur bodraigeadh leis a' chuspair seo turas eile, agus nas miosa, a' bruidhinn sa Ghàidhlig fhèin.

Chuala mi cuideigin gun ainm anns a Phàrlamaid a' gearan o chionn goirid mun phuing seo. Thuirt e, "Bidh deasbad againn an t-seachdain seo a' tighinn mu dheidhinn seòladh. Am bu chòir dhuinn uile a bhith a' bruidhinn mar pirates?" Uill, chan eil mi duilich idir gu bheil mi a' bruidhinn sa Ghàidhlig.

Air an làimh eile, tha mi a' tuigsinn a' chunnairt a tha ann, anns an t-suidheachadh seo, agus is sin cunnart "tokenism" mar a chanas iad. Is ann air sgàth sin a bhios mi a' faighneachd cheistean sa Ghàidhlig anns a' Phàrlamaid, bho àm gu h-àm, air cuspairean eadar-dhealaichte. Tha mi a' dèanamh sin dìreach a bhith a' cumail nam chuimhne gu bheil Gàidhlig comasach air barrachd na cuspair na Gàidhlig fhèin. Ma tha an inbhe a tha aig a' Ghàidhlig a-nis a' ciallachadh dad, tha i a' ciallachadh gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig cho math airson còmhraidh mu Bhaghdad 's a tha i airson còmhraidh mun mhòine.

Ma tha sibh ag èisteachd ri seo air na clogaidean-èisteachd, tha mi duilich nach robh an alliteration ag obair anns a' Bheurla cho math 's a tha i anns a' Ghàidhlig. Cuimhnichibh air an eisimpleir sin an ath thuras a bhios sibh a' cluinntinn na h-argamaid gu bheil bàrdachd Gàidhlig dìreach cho math anns a' Bheurla 's a tha i anns a' prìomh chànan.

Co-dhiù, chan eil mi a' smaoinichadh gu bheil an deasbad seo cudromach dìreach aig ìre ìomhaigheil. Tha tòrr a' tachairt ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig an-dràsta a tha a' dèanamh an deasbaid seo freagarrach agus feumail.

Bha deasbad den t-seòrsa seo againn airson a' chiad uair ann an 2000—a' chiad deasbad a bha air a chumail tro mheadhan na Ghàidhlig bhon bhliadhna 1307. An uair sin, bha sinn a' suidhe ann an Àird Chatain ann an Earra-Ghàidheal, agus cò bha anns a' chathair, Oifigear-riaghlaidh, ach Raibeart Brùs?

Dè tha air tachairt don Ghàidhlig eadar 2000 agus an-diugh? Uill, airson aon rud, tha taic nas làidire ann don Ghàidhlig aig a h-uile pàrtaidh. Bhiodh e doirbh a chreidsinn 10 bhliadhna air ais, mar eisimpleir, gum biodh sianal telebhisein aig a' chànan, le prògraman matha, luchd-èisteachd a' fàs, ùidh ga brosnachadh anns a' chànan agus misneachd ga toirt gu gnìomhachas craolaidh ann an Alba air fad. Agus ged a tha cnap-starra ann—ged nach eil an sianal air Freeview fhathast—tha

sinn uile aig an aon ràmh a' strì gus sin a chur ceart.

Tha plana Gàidhlig aig a' Phàrlamaid a-nis a tha a' cur ris na seirbheisean Gàidhlig a tha rim faotainn aig a' Phàrlamaid an-dràsta ann an caochladh dhòighean. Chaidh na planaichean Gàidhlig aig Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, mar eisimpleir, agus Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd fhoillseachadh o chionn ghoirid cuideachd. Canaidh am ministear, tha mi cinnteach, rudeigin mu phlanaichean a tha aig an Riaghaltas cuideachd, agus na targaidean neartmhor a tha aca airson adhartas nas làidire fhathast. Mar eisimpleir, a' dèanamh cinnteach gu bheil àireamhan nan Gàidheal aig a' chunntas-sluaigh ann an 2021 aig an aon ìre 's a bha e ann an 2001. Airson a' chiad uair, tha mi an dòchas gu bheil sinn ag obrachadh gus crìonadh na Gàidhlig a thionndadh air ais.

Carson a tha sinn a' bruidhinn mu dheidhinn leasachadh a' chànan, ge-tà? Uill, a chionn 's gu bheil rathad fada romhainn eadar an seo agus slàinte airson na Gàidhlig. Tha mòran adhbharan ann airson "meal-an-naidheachd" a chantainn rinn fhèin. Ach feumaidh sinn, aig an aon àm, ar casan a chumail air an làr.

Tha mi eòlach air cuideigin ann an Leòdhas a tha a' tuigsinn na Gàidhlig, ach cha bhi e ga cleachdadh idir. Bha mi a' faighneachd dheth carson, agus thuirt e nach robh ach a' Ghàidhlig aige nuair a thòisich e anns an sgoil. Thuirt an tidsear ris—anns a' Bheurla, ged a bha Gàidhlig gu leòr aice—gum faigheadh e an strap a h-uile turas a bhiodh e a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig. Fhuair e an strap a h-uile latha anns a' chiad agus san darna bliadhna aige anns an sgoil gus an do dh'ionnsaich e a' Bheurla. Agus tha sinn a' faighneachd fhathast carson a tha "hang-ups" aig tòrr dhaoine anns na h-eileanan mu bhith a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig agus carson nach eil ach cairteal de na pàrantan a' taghadh fòghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig airson na cloinne aca ged a tha a' chomhairle a' dèanamh deagh obair air a' chuspair siud.

Chaidh a' Ghàidhlig sìos mu 3,800 duine dìreach anns na h-Eileanan an Iar eadar 1991 agus 2001. Anns an 100 bhliadhna eadar 1901 agus 2001, chaidh àireamh nan Gàidheal ann an Alba air fad sìos bho faisg air cairteal a' mhillein gu dìreach 58,000. Cha mhair a' Ghàidhlig le àireamhan mar sin. Is e fàs no bàs an roghainn a tha againn.

Ged a tha an rabhadh sin romhainn ge-tà, tha sinn ag aithneachadh an adhartais a tha ann. Tha 2,200 cloinne a' dol tro fhoghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig aig ìre na bun-sgoile air feadh na h-Alba. Bha dìreach 24 ann ann an 1985. Feumaidh an àireamh seo a dhol suas gun dàil sam bith.

Tha e fìor chudromach gu bheil am poileasaidh againn ag aithneachadh gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig airson na coimhearsnachd, agus chan ann dìreach airson na sgoile. Mar a thuirt aon nighean bheag riumsa ann an Leòdhas, "Carson a tha a h-uile mac màthair anns a' bhaile agam a' bruidhinn riumsa anns a' Bheurla? Nach eil iad a' creidsinn gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig agam?" Mar sin, feumaidh sinn an t-àite a tha aig a' Ghàidhlig anns a' choimhearsnachd a neartachadh, ma tha sin a' ciallachadh cùrsaichean ulpan no ge-brith dè.

Tha a' Ghàidhlig mar phàirt de ar n-eachdraidh, ar cultar, pàirt de ar nàdar fhèin. Ma bhios sinn ga call, bidh sinn a' call rudeigin prìseil da-rìribh. Tha an cànan ann an staid chunnartach, ach tha e ann an staid dòchasach cuideachd. Sin an t-adhbhar gu bheil e cho cudromach gu bheil Gàidhlig ga cluinntinn anns an t-seòmar seo. Sin an t-adhbhar gu bheil mi a' togail a' chuspair seo turas eile agus is ann air sgàth sin gu bheil mi, gun nàire sam bith, a' bruidhinn mun Ghàidhlig a-rithist.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I thank everyone who is taking part in the debate—those with Gaelic and, just as important, those, like me, who are still learning. I am also thankful to all the Gaelic organisations that have taken part in the Scottish Parliament's Gaelic day.

Why, though, are we talking about Gaelic again? Why is Alasdair Allan bothering Parliament once more with this subject and, indeed, worse than that, why is he speaking in Gaelic itself? Recently, I heard someone in Parliament who shall remain anonymous making that very point. They said, "There's a debate next week on sailing. Should we all speak like pirates?" Well, I am not at all sorry to be speaking in Gaelic.

On the other hand, I understand the danger of tokenism in this situation. That is why, now and again, I will ask questions in Gaelic in Parliament on many different subjects; I need to remind myself that Gaelic is useful for more than simply talking about Gaelic. Gaelic's current status means that it is just as good for talking about Baghdad as it is for talking about peat. I should apologise to anyone who is listening on headphones, because the alliteration in my previous sentence does not work as well in English as it does in Gaelic. Members should remember that example the next time someone argues that Gaelic poetry is just as good in English. Anyway, this debate is important not only at a symbolic level. Just now, there is a lot happening in the Gaelic world that makes this debate appropriate and useful.

The Parliament first had a debate of this kind in 2000; in fact, it was the first such debate in Gaelic to take place since the year 1307. At that time, the

Parliament met in Ardchattan in Argyll, and who was in the chair, Presiding Officer, but Robert the Bruce? What has happened with Gaelic between 2000 and today? For one thing, there is stronger support for it from every party. Ten years ago, for example, it would have been difficult to believe that the language would have its own television channel. The channel has good programmes, its audiences are growing, interest in the language is being encouraged and confidence is growing in the broadcasting industry in the whole of Scotland. However, there is an obstacle: the channel is not available on Freeview, although we are working together to put that right.

Parliament now has its own Gaelic plan, which adds to its many services in a number of ways. Western Isles Council and the Highland Council recently published their Gaelic plans. I am sure that the minister will say something about the Government's plans and its strong targets for promoting Gaelic, which include ensuring that the 2021 census shows that the number of Gaelic speakers has remained at the level that it was when the 2001 census was carried out. I hope that, for the first time, we are all working to turn back the decline of Gaelic.

If that is the case, why is my motion on the development of the language? Well, the road between where we are now and a healthy Gaelic language is a long one. There are many reasons for congratulating ourselves, but we must keep our feet firmly on the ground. For example, I know someone on Lewis who understands Gaelic but does not use it at all. When I asked him why, he said that when he started school he only had Gaelic. The teacher told him—in English, even although she had plenty of Gaelic—that he would get the strap every time he used Gaelic, and he got it every day in primary 1 and P2 until he learned English. That story shows why many people in the islands still have hang-ups about using Gaelic and why, for example, only a quarter of parents in the Western Isles choose Gaelic-medium education for their children.

Between 1991 and 2001, the number of Gaelic speakers declined by 3,800 in the Western Isles alone and, in the 100 years between 1901 and 2001, the number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland decreased from a quarter of a million to 58,000. Gaelic will not survive with numbers like that; the choice is growth or death. Bearing that warning in mind, however, we should also acknowledge the progress that has been made. At the moment, 2,200 children throughout Scotland are in Gaelic-medium primary education, whereas in 1985, there were just 24, although I have no doubt that the number must increase without delay.

It is very important that our policy recognises that Gaelic is for the whole community, not just for

school. As one little girl said to me, “Why does every single person in my village talk to me in English? Do they not believe that I have Gaelic?” We must strengthen the place that Gaelic has in the community, whether that means using ulpan Gaelic immersion courses, or anything else. Gaelic is a part of our history, our culture and our nature. If we lose it, we will lose something that is priceless. The language is in a dangerous state, but it is also in a hopeful state. That is the reason why it is important that Gaelic is heard in this chamber, that is the reason why I am raising this subject again and it is the reason why I am once more speaking—without apology—about Gaelic.

17:10

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):**

Ciamar a tha thu was the only Gaelic that I knew until this afternoon, when I learned how to say, “Good afternoon, friends”: feasgar math, a chàirdean. I apologise to Alasdair Allan for my poor pronunciation—I hope to learn a bit more in the coming months.

I congratulate Alasdair Allan on securing this debate. I want to talk about Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu, which is the Gaelic-medium school in my constituency. I know that we are all proud of that school, but I am particularly proud of it. Glasgow has 10 per cent of Scotland’s Gaelic speakers, which is the largest number outside the Western Isles. I often claim that Partick has more Gaels than the Western Isles, which I know is not true, but it sounds plausible. That is why I want to make a short contribution to tonight’s debate.

The first stand-alone Gaelic-medium primary school in Glasgow was established in 1999, with a roll of 105 pupils. The new Gaelic school has 287 primary pupils, 104 secondary pupils and 60 nursery children. It is virtually full and has proved to be a great success. I must pay tribute to the City of Glasgow Council and to the minister who was responsible for education at the time, Peter Peacock. I know that the council and the minister had to fight hard to establish the school, which is now a permanent feature of education in Glasgow.

Not only does the school represent progress for Gaelic-medium education in my constituency, it resides in the Anderston area, which lost its school some years ago. The new Glasgow Gaelic school lives in the building that was formerly Woodside secondary school. But for the Gaelic school, that site would have become another housing estate, so we are pleased that we have retained a good school in our locality.

There are now more than 400 pupils and children in the school. Crucially, 80 per cent of the families who send their children to the school speak English as their first language. The school

is, therefore, important to parents who might have missed out on learning Gaelic and are keen that their children should learn the language. There are early indications that the school is performing extremely well. I know that Maureen Watt will be watching developments closely: I see that she is nodding, which means that she agrees that the early indications are that the school is doing well. Its school roll grows every year—we now have three primary 1 classes, which is another indication of the popularity of the school.

From my work with the school and with local people, I know that children from English-speaking families who learn Gaelic are much more open to learning other languages. I have done a lot to encourage people to send their children to the school for that reason.

As members can imagine, being a Gaelic school, the school promotes a lot of work in the expressive arts. For example, pupils can learn the bagpipes, the fiddle and the harp. However, it is important to emphasise that the school focuses just as much on other issues. For example, it is an eco-school and a fairtrade school, and it places a great emphasis on enterprise.

More work needs to be done to ensure that we have enough Gaelic-medium education teachers to support Gaelic education, and I know that that will be a big issue for the Government. I support progress in that regard.

The primary 7 class of Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu were the first children to sit on the steps in the Parliament’s garden lobby and draw what they saw. They used those drawings to design jewellery, which is displayed in the school. I am proud of how the school has developed and that people from it have been here many times.

We have made significant progress in protecting and promoting the Gaelic language. That has been one of devolution’s big successes: without devolution, we would not have been able to protect the language and promote it as we have.

17:15

**Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)**

**(Con):** Bu toigh leam meal-an-naidheachd a thoirt gu Alasdair MacAilein airson a bhith a’ cur deasbad an fheasgair seo air dòigh. Tha mi glè thoilichte a bhith a’ bruidhinn air Gàidhlig san àm-ri-teachd agus cuiridh mi fàilte air a’ Phlana Gàidhlig a tha Pàrlamaid na h-Alba air bogadh andiugh an co-bhoinn ri Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

I congratulate Alasdair Allan on securing tonight’s debate. I am very happy to be talking about the future of the Gaelic tongue and I welcome today’s Gaelic plan put forward by the

Scottish Parliament in conjunction with Bord na Gaidhlig.

*The member continued in English.*

I hope that that roughly approximated to the following. I congratulate Alasdair Allan on securing tonight's debate. I am very happy to be talking about the future of the Gaelic tongue and I welcome today's Gaelic plan put forward by the Scottish Parliament in conjunction with Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

The Scottish Conservatives are justifiably proud of our record on supporting Gaelic. The Conservative Government introduced state funding for the language in 1979-80, and the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 placed a duty on local authorities to provide the teaching of Gaelic throughout the Gaidhealtachd. The Gaelic broadcasting fund was established by the then Secretary of State for Scotland, Malcolm Rifkind, in 1989, initially for around £8 million, which was a huge sum at the time. It was consolidated in law under the Broadcasting Act 1990 and the Broadcasting Act 1996.

I was involved in some of those decisions in my role as head of news and current affairs at Grampian Television. We broadcast the first-ever Gaelic weekly news service—"Seachd Làithean"—and we were one of the first companies to be commissioned by the Comataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig to produce Gaelic programmes. I am delighted that the fund has now grown into the Scottish Government's contribution to the annual budget of Scotland's dedicated Gaelic channel, MG Alba, which is, of course, co-funded with the BBC. The new channel's involvement with the work of the excellent Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on Skye, which I revisited during the summer recess after a long absence; cultural organisations; and events such as the annual Gaelic Mod, which I had the pleasure of attending in October—it was in Falkirk; I was not lucky enough to hear Alasdair Allan singing with the Back Gaelic choir—show that the language and culture are still as wonderfully organic as they are dynamic.

It is right and proper that the Parliament and the Government continue to play a full supportive role in promoting Scotland's original tongue, but we recognise the sense of urgency that Alasdair Allan refers to in his motion and the continuing concerns about Gaelic's sustainability. In addition to the Parliament's plan, we look forward to the Scottish Government's plan in the near future.

On Gaelic-medium education, we believe that parents throughout Scotland should have the right to have their children educated in the language of their choice, with English being taught at the same time. However, I have long held the view that we will not save Gaelic simply by giving local

authorities in parts of Scotland that have little interest in the language the funds and choice to learn it.

It seems to me that only two things will save Gaelic. One is broadcasting, which I have already dealt with; the other is immersion education. If we are to bring the language back from its deathbed, we must use the same methods that have been successfully implemented by educationists in Ireland, Wales, the Basque country, Catalunya and elsewhere. I continue to hold the view that all subjects should be taught in Gaelic in the remaining Gaelic heartlands of Skye, Lewis, Harris and the Uists. Spreading the same policy to, say, the inner isles and sympathetic mainland council areas in the west should be considered only when a degree of linguistic stability has been achieved.

Until 1971, Welsh speakers in Wales were in decline. Following the national immersion education strategy there, nearly a quarter of the population of Wales now speaks Welsh. In the same period in which Wales has gained 80,000 Welsh speakers, Scotland has lost 50,000 Gaelic speakers. The figures for Ireland, following its immersion strategy, are even more dramatic. In 1926, only half a million spoke Irish Gaelic; the figure is now 1.5 million. A policy of immersion education for a period of, say, four to six years has, of course, long been advocated by Sir Iain Noble, who founded Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, and others who have studied minority languages that are at risk. I commend such a strategy to members.

As I said when the previous Executive introduced the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill, a previous generation muzzled the Gaelic language. Màiri mhòr nan òran—big Mary of the Songs—got it wrong when she blamed the Sassunach. What happened had nothing to do with the English; it had everything to do with Scottish educationists. I appeal to the minister. With the forthcoming publication of this Government's plan for Gaelic, let us hope that we will not deliver a strategy that—however well meaning—sees a new generation of Scots presiding over the last rites of this great language.

17:20

**John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** Tha mise, mar a tha a h-uile duine eile, gu math toilichte agus pròiseil a bhith a' gabhail pàirt anns an deasbad a-nochd. Tha mi airson taing a thoirt do mo charaid Alasdair MacAilein airson an deasbad a thoirt air beulaibh na Pàrlamaid.

Anns a' chiad àite, tha mi airson taing a thoirt dha na coimhearsnachdan sgìreil agus na buidhnean poblach a tha ag obair anns na h-

àiteachan sin, bhon a rinn iadsan adhartas mòr airson a' chànan is a' chultar. Feumaidh sinn a bhith taingeil gun do thachair sin. Tha mi airson taing cuideachd a thoirt gu Pàrlamaid na h-Alba— a' Phàrlamaid againn fhìn—a stèidhich Achd na Gàidhlig (Alba) 2005 air creig chruaidh. Tha mi a' dèanamh dheth gun do rinn an achd sin tòrr feum airson inbhe na Gàidhlig agus gum bi sin againn airson iomadach bliadhna. Tha mi toilichte gu bheil sinn, mar a thuirt Alasdair MacAilein, leis na casan againn air talamh gu math làidir.

Tha mòran de na comhairlean agus na buidhnean poblach a chuir an ainm ris an achd anis ag obair gu math cruaidh agus gu math dripeil airson an cànan a bhrosnachadh anns na sgìrean aca fhèin. Gu dearbh, tha mòran dhiubh an dèidh na planaichean aca airson Gàidhlig a chur air beulaibh na Pàrlamaid agus air beulaibh na buidhne ùire, Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Tha sin a' toirt inbhe ùr dhan Ghàidhlig agus brosnachadh is cuideachadh nach robh ann bho chionn iomadach bliadhna.

Chunnaic sinn an-diugh mar a tha Pàrlamaid na h-Alba, an seo ann an Dùn Èideann, prìomh bhaile na h-Alba, ag obair airson brosnachadh is cuideachadh a thoirt dhan Ghàidhlig. Chaidh plana ùr còig bliadhna a thoirt a-staigh le buidheann chorporra na Pàrlamaid. Chaidh sin a chur air beulaibh an t-sluaigh an-diugh agus thàinig mòran a-staigh airson sin a chur air bhog. Rud a thug toileachas mòr dhomh, b' e a bhith a' faicinn Rody Gorman, bàrd ainmeil à Èirinn, is e a' toirt an t-eadar-theangachadh a rinn e air pios bàrdachd aig Edwin Morgan "Open the doors!", a sgrìobh e airson fosgladh na Pàrlamaid o chionn naoi no 10 bliadhna air ais. Mar a thuirt sinn an-diugh, bha sinn toilichte gun do thachair sin agus gun deach na dorsan fhosgladh aig an àm sin airson an cultar is an cànan a thoirt a-staigh agus a sgaoileadh a-mach tro Alba air fad. Bha sinn gu math pròiseil an seo anns a' Phàrlamaid an-diugh.

Dh'fhaireich sinn gu bheil Bòrd na Gàidhlig a' dèanamh obair mhòr. Tha sianal ùr Gàidhlig againn air telebhisean, a-nis an dèidh iomadach bliadhna de strì agus stramash mu dheidhinn. Tha sin againn an-diugh ach tha duilgheadas againn nach eil sin a' ruigeil a-mach dhan a h-uile pàirt den Ghàidhealtachd, ach thig sin ge-tà. Dh'fhaireich sinn mu dheidhinn an inneil Freeview gum bu chòir gur ann, cho fada 's a tha sin aig daoine, gum faigh iad na prògraman Gàidhlig a tha a' dol a-mach.

A-nochd, tha fios againn gu bheil deasbad gu bhith eadar na sgoiltean às a' Ghàidhealtachd a thàinig sìos gu Dùn Èideann an-dè. Leis an deasbad sin a' tachairt anns a' Phàrlamaid a-nochd, bidh Gàidhlig a-rithist air beulaibh an t-sluaigh. Tha sin a' dèanamh mòran airson

Gàidhlig a bhrosnachadh is a chuideachadh is a sgaoileadh a-mach air feadh Alba air fad.

Tha mi làn chinnteach nuair a thig an cunntas-sluaigh air ais ann am beagan bhliadhnan gum bi, mar a bha Alasdair MacAilein ag iarraidh, àireamhan luchd-bruidhinn na Gàidhlig—agus àireamhan nan daoine a tha a' cumail a' chultair is a' chànan beò—a' sìor-dhol suas. Tha mi an dòchas gum bi sin a' tachairt, agus tha mi làn chinnteach gum bi. Mòran taing.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

I am, like everyone else, pleased and proud to be taking part in this debate tonight. I thank my friend Alasdair Allan for securing the debate. I also thank communities and public bodies for their work in helping to promote the language and culture. We must be thankful that that has happened.

I thank our own Scottish Parliament for establishing the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 on a very hard rock. I gather that it has done a lot of good for the status of Gaelic and that it will be a benefit for many years. I am happy that we find ourselves, as Alasdair Allan said, with our feet firmly on the ground.

Many of the councillors and the people from other public bodies who put their names to the original bill have been working very hard to promote Gaelic in their own communities. Many of those people have presented their own plans to the Parliament and to the new group, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which will give a lot of status to the language, providing help that has not been there for many years.

We have seen today how the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland, has been working to encourage the language. The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body has launched a new five-year plan and many people came for the launch. What really impressed me was seeing Rody Gorman, a noted poet from Ireland, who has translated the poem "Open the Doors!", written in English by Edwin Morgan to mark the opening of the Parliament 10 years ago. We are happy that the doors have opened for Gaelic language and culture so that they could be promoted and strengthened. We feel very proud, here in the Parliament today.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig is doing a lot of work. We have a new Gaelic channel on television that we did not have before. Many a struggle there was to get it going, but now we have it. It is not broadcast in all parts of the Highlands, but that will come. As long as people have Freeview, they will get the Gaelic programmes.

Later tonight, schools from the Highlands will debate Gaelic—people came down to Edinburgh

yesterday. Opening Gaelic out to people does a lot to encourage them and increase their confidence.

I am sure that the number of people who speak Gaelic, and who are keeping the culture alive, has increased since the previous census, as Alasdair Allan wishes. I am sure that that will have happened.

17:25

**Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Tapadh leibhse, Oifigeir-riaghlaidh.

Tha mi gu math toilichte pàirt a ghabhail anns an deasbad seo air leasachadh na Gàidhlig agus meal-a-naidheachd a thoirt gu Alasdair MacAilein a thug an deasbad seo don Phàrlamaid.

Tha tòrr Gàidhlig agam, ach chan eil mi fhathast fileanta no misneachail. Is e an t-àite far a bheil mi a' tuiteam nach eil mòran cothrom agam Gàidhlig a chleachdadh agus, mar sin, tha mi ga call. Ged a tha mi a' gluasad air adhart agus air ais a-rithist, tha mi fhathast fada nas fheàrr na bha mi o chionn 35 bliadhna nuair a thòisich mi ag ionnsachadh.

Tha mi a' creidsinn gu bheil an rud a tha a' cur stad air an neach-ionnsachaidh aig nach eil mòran ùine an dearbh dìth ùine sin agus dìth chothroman an cànan a chleachdadh ann an coimhearsnachd nàdarra.

Rugadh mi ann an Inbhir Losaidh, ann an teaghlach aig nach robh Gàidhlig, ged a thuit m' athair gun do bhruidhinn a sheanmhair Gàidhlig ann an Inbhir Losaidh mun bhliadhna 1900. Cha robh cuimhne aige air mòran ach abairt a chleachdadh i a bha caran coltach ri "Càite a bheil mo phìob clay?"

Mar sin, tha e a' coimhead gun robh an t-sinn-seanmhair agam a bhiodh a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig agus a' smocadh pìob dìreach trì ginealaichean air falbh bhuamsa. Leis an sin, tha Gàidhlig, tha mi cinnteach, nam fhuil, anns an aon dòigh 's a tha i anns an fhuil aig mòran daoine eile gun fhios dhaibh.

Ghluais mi gu Steòrnabhagh ann an 1973 agus bha mi an dùil Gàidhlig ionnsachadh. Mar sin, chaidh mi don leabharlann airson leabhar fhaighinn air iasad leis an ainm "Teach Yourself Gàidhlig". Bha droch ghàire aig neach-cuideachaidh an leabharlann a thuit "Seo fear eile", agus cha robh i misneachail idir. Gus an fhirinn innse, bha droch bhlas agam agus mi a' feuchainn ri Gàidhlig ionnsachadh ann an Steòrnabhagh anns na 1970an. Bha tòrr anns a' bhaile gun Gàidhlig agus cha robh an fheadhainn aig an robh Gàidhlig ag iarraidh a bhith a' bruidhinn a' chàin. B' e cànan na "Maus", no muinntir na dùthcha, a bha innte agus cha b' urrainn dhut a bruidhinn nan robh thu ag iarraidh àrdachadh sam bith. Neo 's e sin am beachd a

bha ann co-dhiù. Bha iad buailteach a bhith a' magadh orm ged a bhiodh duine no dhà sònraichte nach do rinn sin. Tha mi toilichte a ràdh gu bheil beachdan tòrr nas fheàrr ann a-nis a thaobh na Gàidhlig, ged a tha mòran fhathast an aghaidh rud sam bith Gàidhealach.

Dh' fhàg mi Leòdhas ann an 1983 le cuid mhath de Ghàidhlig, ach fhathast fada bho fhileantachd. Air ais air an tìr-mòr, ann an Inbhir Nis, lean mi air adhart leis na clasaichean oidhche agus seachdain an-siud is an-seo aig Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, gus an d' fhuair mi àrd ìre Gàidhlig ann an 1994, ach cha do rinn mi mòran airson 10 bliadhna às dèidh sin.

Cha robh e gus an deach a' bhan-ogha agam, Yasmin, don chròileagan, agus an uair sin don aonad Gàidhlig aig Bun-sgoil a' Mheadhain ann an Inbhir Nis, a thòisich mi a-rithist leis a' chursa comais làn-thìde aig Colaiste Inbhir Nis nuair a leig mi às mo dhreuchd ann an 2002.

Bha sin fìor mhath a chionn 's gum b' e sin a' chiad uair a bha an tìde agam airson cùrsa-bogaidh làn-thìde a dhèanamh. Agus is e seo, tha mi cinnteach, an dòigh gus adhartas mòr a dhèanamh. A-nis tha mi air feuchainn ris na cùrsaichean "Gàidhlig san dachaigh" agus "Ulpan" a dhèanamh agus tha an dìthis dhiubh glè mhath agus tòrr nas fheàrr na an dòigh traidiseanta.

Rinn mo nighean an cùrsa comais cuideachd gus a bhith a' cuideachadh Yasmin leis an obair dhachaigh aice agus tha i a-nis ag obrachadh mar neach-cuideachaidh san sgoil ùr Gàidhlig ann an Inbhir Nis.

Tha mi cuideachd toilichte gum biodh clann na nighinne eile agam, Ella agus Jude, a' dol tro fhoghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig agus gu bheil sinne a' dèanamh pàirt beag airson Gàidhlig san àm ri teachd, agus tha mi an dòchas gum biodh an granaidh à Inbhir Losaidh a bhiodh a' smocadh na pìoba toilichte leis a sin.

Ma tha sinn airson Gàidhlig a shàbhaladh, feumaidh sinn fhathast foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig a leudachadh, agus tha mi gu math toilichte gu bheil Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd dìreach air aontachadh sgoiltean Gàidhlig eile a thogail ann am Port Rìgh agus sa Ghearasdan.

Feumaidh sinn na cùrsaichean "Gàidhlig san dachaigh" agus "Ulpan" a leasachadh mar dhòighean ionnsachaidh, còmhla ri bogadh làn-thìde, airson luchd-ionnsachaidh gus am bi iad ag ionnsachadh ann an ùine tòrr nas giorra na na 35 bliadhnaichean a bha agamsa.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am happy to take part in this debate about the development of Gaelic. I congratulate Alasdair Allan on bringing the debate to the Parliament. I have a lot of

Gaelic, but I am not yet fluent or confident in it. Where I fall short is that I do not have much opportunity to use Gaelic and therefore I lose it. Although my Gaelic goes forward, then back again, I am still much better at it than I was 35 years ago when I started learning it. I believe that what stops the learner from continuing with Gaelic is lack of time and lack of opportunity to use the language in a natural environment.

I was born into a family in Lossiemouth that had no Gaelic, although my father said that his grandmother spoke Gaelic in Lossiemouth around 1900. He did not remember many of the Gaelic sayings that she would use other than something like, "Where is my clay pipe?" It looks like my great-grandmother was speaking Gaelic and smoking a clay pipe just three generations away from me. I am sure that Gaelic is in my blood in the same way that it is in the blood of many other people who do not know Gaelic.

When I moved to Stornoway in 1973, I wanted and expected to learn Gaelic. I went to the library to borrow the book "Teach Yourself Gaelic". There was a smirk on the assistant's face when she said, "Here's another one." She was not at all confident in me. To tell the truth, I did not have a very good accent when I was trying to learn Gaelic in Stornoway in the 1970s. Many people in the town were without Gaelic, and those who had Gaelic did not want to speak the language. They called it the language of the "Maws", or the country people. People could not speak Gaelic if they wanted to be promoted—or that was the opinion at the time. People were liable to make fun of us for speaking Gaelic, although one or two special people were not like that. I am glad to say that opinions of Gaelic are much better now, although many are still against anything that is Highland.

I left Lewis in 1983 with quite a bit of Gaelic, but I was still far from being fluent. Back on the mainland in Inverness, I carried on with the night classes and a week here and there at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig until I got higher Gaelic in 1994. However, I did not do much for 10 years after that. It was not until my granddaughter Yasmin went to the play group and then the Gaelic unit in Central primary school in Inverness that I started again. I did the cùrsa comais full-time in Inverness College when I retired in 2002. That was really good because it was the first time that I had had the time to do a full-time immersion course. I am sure that that is the only way to progress to a great extent. I now try to do the Gaelic in the home and ulpan courses. They are both very good and much better than the old traditional ways.

My daughter also took the cùrsa comais in order to help Yasmin with her homework. She is now working as an assistant in the new Gaelic school in Inverness. I am also happy that Ella and Jude,

the children of my other daughter, are going through Gaelic-medium education and that we are playing a little part in the future of Gaelic. I hope that the granny from Lossiemouth who smoked a pipe would be happy with that.

If we want to save Gaelic, we must expand Gaelic-medium education. I am very happy that Highland Council has just agreed to build other Gaelic schools in Portree and Fort William. We must develop the Gaelic in the home and ulpan courses as ways of learning, along with full-time immersion courses for learners, so that they will learn in a much shorter time than the 35 years that it took me.

17:31

**Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):** Mòran taing. I congratulate Alasdair Allan on securing the debate this evening, and I congratulate the learners of Gaelic who have spoken so well. The debate offers an opportunity to celebrate the progress that has been made in strengthening the place of Gaelic in Scottish life since—and, indeed, before—the establishment of the Scottish Parliament nine years ago, as well as a chance to consider what more needs to be done.

The Gaelic language is important to me as a native of the Isle of Lewis and as a representative of the city of Aberdeen. On the island side, my family have lived in Harris, Uist and neighbouring islands for as long as anyone can remember, and many of them are still active in some of the communities that Alasdair Allan represents. My father, the Rev Roddy Macdonald, was both a translator into Gaelic and a Gaelic bard in his own right. He translated all the works of Burns from Scots and English into Gaelic, and he collaborated with others in writing a book of trilingual poetry that celebrates the diverse languages and cultures that are native to Scotland. He was the latest in a long line of people in my family who were fluent in the Gaelic language, which stretched back to the bard Peter Morrison in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

That is my Gaelic inheritance. Equally important to me, however, is our investment in the future of Gaelic. That future lies not only in the Highlands and Islands, but in cities such as Aberdeen and in communities in countries overseas for which Gaelic remains important.

Like Pauline McNeill, I have the privilege to have a Gaelic-medium school in my constituency. Gilcomstoun primary school is host to both the nursery and the primary school units for Gaelic-medium education in Aberdeen. This year, we celebrate 25 years of Gaelic pre-school education in the city, and we look forward to building on those successes going forward.

My daughter Iona has enjoyed Gaelic-medium education from the age of two and is now in primary 6. She is looking forward to taking her bilingual skills into secondary school. Her experience of Gaelic-medium education has been immensely enjoyable and productive, not least because of its success in passing on the culture as well as the language of the Gàidhealtachd in the heart of an east coast city. The experience has also been immensely productive for an inner-city school, where Gaelic has been a vehicle for making a distinctively Scottish contribution to a multicultural environment.

It is important that all those advances are not lost. Gaelic must not be seen as inward looking or it will fail. It must be a part of what makes Scotland an inclusive and multicultural society, and it must be as open to those who arrive in Scotland as it is to those whose families have lived here for many generations.

Gaelic-medium education is also affected by wider policies in education. In the area that I represent, a number of cuts in education funding are being considered. It is important to recognise that Gaelic-medium education cannot succeed in isolation, but can do so only in the context of a successful schools system. I am concerned by the proposal that is being considered in Aberdeen to end French immersion teaching at Walker Road school. That successful initiative, which is in another member's constituency, has been praised by ministers in this Government and in previous ones. Ending the initiative would send the wrong signal not only to members of Comann nam Pàrant who already sent their children to Gilcomstoun and Hazlehead schools, but to other parents who may be considering doing the same.

Proposals to end schooling on a Friday afternoon or to reduce school transport have serious implications for all children at all Aberdeen schools but particularly for those at a Gaelic-medium school that serves the entire city. I hope that councillors in another place will take those implications into account.

I welcome the debate. I hope that the minister will take the opportunity to reinforce the position of Gaelic-medium education in our cities as well as elsewhere. It matters for our young people, our Gaelic heritage and our multicultural communities and it reinforces the message that a bilingual education is an asset for all those who enjoy the opportunities that it offers.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** At this point, I would be prepared to accept a motion to extend the debate by up to 20 minutes in order to finish the debate.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended until 5.56 pm.—[*Alasdair Allan.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

17:35

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** I am pleased to speak in the debate and congratulate my colleague Alasdair Allan on securing it.

I will make a brief speech, not as a speaker of Gaelic but as a supporter. There are supporters of the language in some perhaps unlikely places.

Gaelic plays an important part in the history, culture and life of Scotland, as we have just heard. Too often, debates around the language centre on whether this or that area was part of the Gàidhealtachd, as if Gaelic used to occupy some well-enclosed space and was heard nowhere else. Of course, that is not true. Whether or not Gaelic was the dominant language in an area, it was part of the common experience of people all over Scotland, as Gaels and other Scots conducted trade and commerce.

My home county of Ayrshire is identified, quite rightly, as Robert Burns country. We are proud of that, but it is not our only inheritance. Just 20 miles from Burns's birthplace in Alloway is the village of Barr, which has been identified as possibly the last Gaelic-speaking community in the Lowlands. Even today, Ayrshire is home to Gaels, with Anne Lorne Gillies, who will be known to most members, prominent among them.

In recognising that twin inheritance, I am pleased to highlight the work that East Ayrshire Council is doing to re-establish Gaelic as part of the common experience throughout Scotland. The council provides Gaelic-medium education for pre-school and primary pupils at Onthank primary school in my beloved Kilmarnock. Given that the area has no recent tradition of Gaelic, that is remarkable. It is even more remarkable when we consider that it is an area of long-standing multiple deprivation. East Ayrshire Council should be congratulated on that remarkable achievement.

The Gaelic language is also offered to pupils in six other primary schools in the authority's area. Gaelic-medium education is available at the Grange academy, which also hosts a Gaelic-medium youth club.

The growth in Gaelic-medium education at pre-school and primary levels is a real building block for the future. Those years of education are an exciting challenge for children as they learn to read, write and count. An important part of their formative years is that children in Gaelic-medium



classes experience those challenges while using Gaelic.

If Gaelic is to be a truly community language, it must be experienced outside the classroom and the theatre. It needs to be a language in which we can conduct business and everyday conversation.

The Gaelic plans that are being produced by the Parliament and the Government, which are to be rolled out across public agencies, are important signposts for the future. They must not only demonstrate a commitment to the language but spell out how agencies will reinforce the use of the language on a daily basis.

**The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt):** I thank the member for promoting what is being done in East Ayrshire and I hope that he will join me in congratulating Aberdeenshire Council on having a Gaelic teacher in the schools in upper Deeside, where the crofters used to speak the Gaelic not that many decades ago. Does he agree that it is incumbent on us all to highlight the number of job opportunities that there are for people who speak Gaelic fluently, not just in the media industry but in teaching? Pauline McNeill highlighted the fact that we need Gaelic teachers not just in primary schools but increasingly in secondary schools, where they teach their subject specialism in the Gaelic. There are also opportunities for translators and people who work for public agencies. The opportunities are immense.

**Willie Coffey:** I certainly agree. Development in that area in recent years has been a revelation to me.

If Gaelic is to develop, it must be allowed to come in from the cold and the sidelines of Scottish society. In some pockets of the country, an unhealthy attitude is still taken to the language and its importance. That can be overcome by raising awareness of the language, which must be not only heard but seen. It is crucial that people see the language in its written form, particularly in communities that do not speak Gaelic. I hope that that will be emphasised as Gaelic language plans develop. I look forward to hearing the minister's speech, which will add to earlier comments. I am delighted to support Alasdair Allan's motion. Mòran taing.

17:40

**Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I join Alasdair Allan in welcoming the Gaelic language plans from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the Parliament, which I congratulate. I will stop short of congratulating the Scottish Government, because I have not seen its plan, but Alasdair Allan may well have seen it. If he has confidence in it, I hope that it will make the big

contribution that we all hope it will make to developing Gaelic.

The bald statistics on the demographics of Gaelic still suggest that it is in a parlous condition. The sad fact is still that more people who speak Gaelic die each year than there are people learning the language. Like Alasdair Allan, I look forward to the day when those figures cross over and when the number of learner speakers exceeds the number of speakers who die. That will give us hope for the future.

Despite those demographic trends, I have never been more optimistic that Gaelic has a strong and secure future than I am now. In my years of involvement in public life in the Highlands and Islands, I have seen enormous change. I am well aware of the days to which Alasdair Allan referred, although they were before my time, when kids were thrashed in schools throughout the Highlands and Islands for uttering a single word of Gaelic. Today, we take pride in educating huge numbers of pupils through the medium of Gaelic. That was unimaginable a few years ago.

As John Farquhar Munro spoke, I thought about the early pioneers in my time on Highland Regional Council at the start of the Gaelic-medium education movement. They were people such as the Reverend Jack MacArthur from Sutherland—he also spent periods in the Western Isles and in Skye; Duncan Grant from Glen Shiel and then from Skye; Jim Henderson from Lochaber; Neil McKechnie from Dingwall; and John Farquhar Munro himself. Years ago, they all advocated the importance of Gaelic-medium education in a modest way, but they saw that movement begin to take off in the Highlands and Islands.

I am sad to say that Jack MacArthur, Jim Henderson and Duncan Grant are no longer with us. They would be astonished if they saw the progress that had been made from the very small beginnings about which they used to argue. The Sleat peninsula in Skye provides an example. From the modest beginnings of a Gaelic-medium unit in an English-speaking primary school there, 20 years later, huge controversy and debate now occur over whether English should be used in that school at all. We now have a Gaelic school with an English-medium unit. That is a massive transformation. In Barra, Portree and Fort William, people demand Gaelic-medium schools. They have the ambition for that and the confidence that it is possible.

As Pauline McNeill said, Glasgow has an all-through Gaelic-medium school and the first full Gaelic-medium secondary school in Scotland. That is possible because of the concentration of Gaelic speakers there. That provides enormous hope for the future in that community and more widely by showing that secondary education

through the medium of Gaelic is possible and achievable. Such developments were unimaginable only 10 or 15 years ago, but they are now real. That means that we can develop further initiatives.

One great joy of visiting Gaelic-medium schools is not just hearing young people speaking the language, but hearing music and poetry and seeing art everywhere. One great aspect of visiting such schools is that their pupils always sing or play a musical instrument, such as the clarsach. That gives a clue to our future policy needs. We are talking not just about language and words, but about the expression of the language through music, poetry and recitals. We need to embrace all that.

Gaelic-medium education will be critical to the future of the language, but it must develop in other ways, as I have said. I have been amazed by the development and high quality of the fèisean music movement in the Highlands and Islands, which contributes to culture and understanding by making them relevant and contemporary for young people.

Major increases are beginning to happen in people's ability to use Gaelic in everyday ways, which Dave Thompson mentioned. That allows people to practise speaking Gaelic. One function of Gaelic language plans is to have a role in such developments, but they are only a vehicle to allow those developments to progress. If Gaelic language plans sit on a shelf once they have been written, they will be of no value. We must monitor implementation and encourage progress from modest beginnings.

It was my great privilege to be able to take the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 through the Parliament. It is fascinating to see acts of the Parliament result in actions on the ground. That is why I welcome the Gaelic language plans but, in themselves, they will not save Gaelic. Ultimately, the language will survive because of the generation that is coming through the schools now and is involved in the fèisean movement; because of those who are involved in the new Gaelic television channel, those who watch it and those who take an interest in the language; and because of those who are involved in many other activities. The involvement of people in Gaelic-medium education and other forms of expression gives me the optimism that I have not had for many years.

17:45

**Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** Tha mi an dòchas gu bheil deasbad an latha an-diugh na cheum eile air adhart ann an aiseirigh na Gàidhlig.

I tried to say that I hope that the debate marks another step forward in the revival of the Gaelic language.

I congratulate Alasdair Allan on securing the debate, which marks a significant milestone in the publication of Gaelic language plans. I will concentrate my remarks on Gaelic-medium education. I hope that many members agree that it is the key to the language's survival. We have certainly come a long way since the establishment of the first Gaelic-medium units, which have been highly successful—I hope—in stopping the language's decline and sparking its revival.

Not only Gaels but any linguist would confirm that immersion in an all-Gaelic environment makes a huge difference in building pupils' confidence and to the learning environment. That is particularly the case in the English-dominated culture that we have in this country. There is growing parental and community support for all-Gaelic schools. The decisive step that we need to make now is from Gaelic units to all-Gaelic schools. Proposals exist for such schools in Portree, Barra, Fort William and Edinburgh among other places. In Glasgow, there is a proposal for a second such primary school.

The evidence that we have shows that all-Gaelic schools are particularly good not only for the Gaelic language but educationally. Where they exist, they are popular with parents and can encourage more families to opt for Gaelic-medium education. Therefore, they are an important tool if we are to achieve the ambitious targets that have been set in the national plan. Schools that have more children than their predecessor units are also more efficient, with fewer composite classes and higher output per teacher.

I welcome the £2.7 million funding that the Scottish Government has announced for new buildings. I hoped that it would be more, but it is a good start. I am particularly pleased that the Government has accepted the principle that some form of central funding is necessary. It is essential that there be supplementary support for local authorities to fulfil the targets that are in the national plan. The number of local authority areas in which we need to intervene to expand Gaelic-medium education is small but it would make a big difference, so we should not spread those limited resources round every council.

Moreover, using the normal rules for allocating money for new buildings would not necessarily achieve our objectives. I give Portree primary school—where I first started my education—as an example. It currently has a roll of around 250 pupils, 150 of whom are in English-medium education and 100 in Gaelic-medium education. The existing school is a decent building and in fine order but, if we are to expand Gaelic-medium

education there, we need to build a brand new school with additional capacity. That is clearly a difficult decision to take in a tight financial climate, but part-fund arrangements are the solution. The previous Executive showed the way in Glasgow by providing funding to the council, which in turn provided the building. That is the model that we should use. However, I certainly welcome the initial funding from the Government and hope that it will be renewed after the two years.

I was going to mention the importance of getting BBC Alba on Freeview, but John Farquhar Munro has done that so I will conclude with a brief mention of the Gaelic college on Skye. The growth and success of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig has been at the heart of the revival of Gaelic and symbolic of its success. One of the key figures in building Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and the person who should take most credit for the college's achievements is its director, Norman Gillies. As some members know, Norman is coming up to retirement and will soon step down from his post. I hope that the Presiding Officer does not mind my taking this opportunity to extend my best wishes and the Parliament's thanks for the immense contribution that Norman Gillies has made to the Gaelic language and the college, and to wish him well for his retirement.

17:50

**The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani):** Tapadh leibh, Oifigear-riaghlaidh. Gaelic is unique to Scotland, and everyone here has recognised that, I am delighted to say. Everyone has also recognised that we must take necessary and urgent steps to secure Gaelic for the future. For that reason, I thank Alasdair Allan for lodging the motion for debate, and everyone else who has contributed. I am delighted that we had to extend the time for the debate; it is a mark of the respect of everyone in Parliament.

The Scottish Government has made its position clear. We came to Government with a strong programme of ambitious Gaelic commitments, on which we are making good and steady progress. I hope that those commitments and initiatives, and the increased funding that we are putting in place, will improve the status and appeal of the language. I hope that it will also lead to an increase in the use of Gaelic in the home, school, community, workplace, the arts and in public life generally.

I commend the Scottish public authorities that have prepared Gaelic language plans—Highland Council, Argyll and Bute Council, and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar—and are moving forward with their implementation. On this day, I also congratulate the Scottish Parliament on the launch of its Gaelic language plan. The Parliament has

taken vigorous steps to promote the language, including the language planning forum that is being held here tomorrow.

I am confident that the Gaelic language plans have already led to an increase in the use of Gaelic. More progress must be made as plans are prepared and finalised. However, I take on board what Peter Peacock said: the plans cannot be left on a shelf—they must be constantly monitored, refreshed and renewed where necessary.

The Scottish Government was one of the initial bodies to receive a notice to produce a Gaelic language plan from Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Our plan will set out the measures that are to be taken on the use of Gaelic in Government, and how the Scottish Government will use and enable the use of Gaelic in the delivery of its services. It will include commitments on our corporate identity, communications, publications and staffing, and it will outline measures that we have taken to support the promotion of Gaelic throughout Scotland. It will describe measures that are aimed at raising the status of Gaelic, promoting its use and encouraging its learning.

When put together with the plans that are being rolled out by all the other public bodies, that could increase the status of Gaelic and the level of its use in Scotland. For that reason, I am pleased to be able to inform members that the Cabinet has considered and approved the Government's draft Gaelic plan, which will be prepared for a period of consultation in January 2009.

The text of tonight's motion refers to the need for an expansion in Gaelic-medium education. I agree; it is vital to support the growth in the number of Gaelic speakers. The Highland Council Gaelic language plan contains a commitment to open two more dedicated Gaelic schools and, last week, the Highland Council moved forward on that in Portree and Fort William.

Discussions are going on about the possibility of a dedicated Gaelic school in Edinburgh, the nation's capital city, and we are all aware of the success of the Glasgow Gaelic school and the increasing reputation of the Inverness Gaelic school.

We have increased our support for Gaelic-medium education throughout Scotland. As Ken Macintosh said, we have made capital support available to authorities that would like to make progress with Gaelic-medium schools. We have also supported Gaelic teacher recruitment for reviewing Gaelic early years education. We have increased provision for a range of education projects that Bòrd na Gàidhlig will implement.

The Government's funding for resources to support teachers and pupils in Gaelic education is at an unprecedented level. There is no question

about the Government's and the Parliament's commitment to Gaelic-medium education in Scotland.

The motion that we are debating refers to the importance of the survival of Gaelic as a community language. The presence of Gaelic in our lives and culture enriches every one of us. However, it is essential that we have a living language community to support that and that we give thought to how we strengthen and grow the community. That issue was discussed at a recent conference in Lewis that focused on growing Gaelic in communities. It was a good day: new initiatives were put in place and new funding was made available. It is vital that we maintain momentum in this very important area. It is important, too, that Bòrd na Gàidhlig gives further thought to how matters can be taken forward. I have written to it in that regard.

Gaelic is in a fragile condition. We cannot be complacent, but like others I believe that we are at a critical point. I am very encouraged by the desire to support Gaelic that I find in Scottish public life, and I am encouraged by the commitment and vitality that I have found with Gaelic speakers, learners and supporters. Even this week, there have been encouraging signs of vitality. The Scottish Parliament's Gaelic plan has been launched, while a book of Gaelic poetry was launched last night. A new Gaelic novel was published today in Glasgow, and later this evening we have the final of the Gaelic high schools debating competition.

Those developments, and many more, are reasons for optimism and confidence, and our duty is to maintain progress, use the initiatives that have been put in place and work to ensure a secure future for Gaelic so that the language will continue to play a significant role in Scottish society and cultural life. I totally support the motion, and I am confident that all members will be able to support the necessary steps that will ensure the survival of Gaelic as a community language in Scotland. Tapadh leibh.

*Meeting closed at 17:56.*

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:

**Thursday 27 November 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