

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Wednesday 7 January 2009

Session 3

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7 January 2009



## Scottish Parliament

*Wednesday 7 January 2009*

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14.30*]

### Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** I take this opportunity to welcome you back and to wish you all a happy new year. I would like to say that it is good to be back. It is, it is.

The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection, for which our leader is the Rev Sam Torrens, of the Barclay Church of Scotland in Edinburgh.

**The Rev Sam Torrens (Barclay Church of Scotland):** In John 4:34, Jesus said:

“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”

David Tennant can look back on his time at “Doctor Who” and say with satisfaction, “Finished!” J K Rowling can leaf through the closing chapters of her Harry Potter series with a sense of completion. Sir Chris Hoy can stare with pride at his gold medals and can say, “Job done!”—at least, for now.

Alas, I must confess that I am more a job starter than a job finisher. From half-finished Airfix models, through half-read books, to half-baked ideas and half-prepared sermons, there are many tasks left incomplete. However, I am not in bad company. Mark Twain started “The Mysterious Stranger” three times, but never finished it. One reason that has been given to explain that is that he never fully mastered the plot, which involved the exploration of complex moral dilemmas. A job finisher requires insight into and understanding of the task. I pray that God gives you insight and understanding into the complex issues that face you and our nation with regard to education, the economy, health and so forth.

The Olympian temple of Zeus was started in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC but was left unfinished because the public believed it to be too grandiose and refused to support it—job finishers often need the support of others. I pray that God will give you plans, policies and ideas that will resonate with Parliament and the people of Scotland.

Truman Capote never finished his novel “Answered Prayers” because the prolonged saga of writing his most famous book, “In Cold Blood”, left him exhausted and empty of motivation. Job finishers need energy, enthusiasm and motivation, so I pray that God will give you that energy, and

that you can find enthusiasm for the work that you do day after day.

As a Christian, I am genuinely and sincerely glad that Jesus understood the complexity of the work that was given to him, and that he finished it. I am glad that, like a hungry man to his dinner, he went to the work that God had prepared for him, even though it meant the cross, and that he sacrificed himself for me and for all of us.

As a citizen, I am glad that there are people at every level of government who take to their work with focus, enthusiasm and self-sacrifice, knowing that through their completion of daily tasks they help to make our nation a better place in which to live.

So, at the start of this new year—this year of homecoming—let us bring home to completion the tasks that come our way, from the daily administrative duties to the great bills and projects, and not forgetting contact with individuals from day to day. May the immortal words of Scotland’s adopted son, Magnus Magnusson, ring in your ears—“I’ve started, so I’ll finish”—or you could listen to the words of one who is greater than he, greater than all of us:

“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work”.

May God bless you and all that you do throughout this year.

Amen.

## National Qualifications

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-3164, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on national qualifications. I remind members that as of today, the Presiding Officers will no longer give a one-minute warning before the end of each speech, so members are responsible for completing their speeches within the time available.

14:36

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop):** The start of a new year is an ideal time to think about the future, and one of the most important decisions in education this year is to decide how the next generation of national qualifications can best meet the needs of our young people and adult learners.

The curriculum for excellence is about delivering a modern education system for a modern Scotland. Building on the previous Administration's initial work, we will return professional autonomy to teachers and we will engender greater responsibility in them for raising the standard of learning and teaching in their classrooms. We will encourage breadth of experience throughout education and we will reduce overassessment in qualifications, which will provide more time for quality teaching and learning. We will also support teaching and learning that draws out the strengths of each pupil through more personalised learning.

We will improve standards, raise achievement, provide appropriate challenges for all and provide greater coherence and progression in education, supported by the qualifications system. We will ensure that literacy and numeracy are embedded at all stages: for the first time under devolution, all teachers of all subjects at all stages will be responsible for literacy and numeracy.

We will provide a progressive educational experience with greater focus on skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work, and we will ensure that parents are informed about the curriculum for excellence. Members should make no mistake: to give our young people the best possible chance to succeed in a changing world, our education system has to change to reflect that world and it needs to be supported by a coherent curriculum and a coherent assessment and qualifications system.

The consultation on the next generation of national qualifications was launched in June last year, along with "Building the curriculum 3: a framework for learning and teaching". The consultation ran until the end of October, and we received more than 1,800 replies from individuals and organisations. That is a remarkable response

rate, and I am grateful to all those who participated. I am particularly pleased that parents, young people and representatives of business responded to the consultation. All the individual responses were made publicly available in December.

Independent researcher Ipsos MORI is currently analysing the responses, in addition to a range of other evidence, and its report is due to be published next month. As well as considering the evidence from the Ipsos MORI report, I will take advice from the curriculum for excellence management board and the stakeholder group that I chair. Those groups involve the key players in education, including local authorities, the main teacher associations, colleges and universities. I want today to give Parliament an early opportunity to make its contribution to assessing and addressing the opportunities and challenges of introducing a qualifications system that supports the curriculum for excellence.

We deliberately set out an ambitious vision and a strong set of proposals in the consultation. I wanted to set a clear direction for the debate, while remaining open to ideas and suggestions around the details. We consulted on four main proposals: the retention of access, higher and advanced higher qualifications, with their content being reviewed to ensure consistency with the aims, vision and values of the curriculum for excellence; the introduction of new qualifications to replace standard grade at general and credit levels and intermediate 1 and 2; the introduction of new qualifications in literacy and numeracy; and increased flexibility in taking qualifications to allow young people more freedom to personalise their learning.

A substantial majority of respondents favoured the first proposal, which was the retention of access, higher and advanced higher qualifications with a review of their content to ensure that they are consistent with the curriculum for excellence. Those respondents supported our view that the next generation of national qualifications needs to reflect the learning of the revised curriculum with its emphasis on enabling young people to develop the four capacities.

Some concerns were expressed about practical issues, especially the timescale for introduction of the revised and new qualifications. I have addressed those concerns by introducing a further year of implementation for the new curriculum. Consequently, the start of the revised and new qualifications has been moved from 2012-13 to 2013-14, which will give teaching staff greater opportunities to undertake high-quality preparatory work.

I am pleased to announce that, in order to support that work and to acknowledge how

important successful implementation will be, we will provide in-service days in the current and the next two school years in addition to the existing in-service days and continuing professional development, which should increasingly focus on the curriculum for excellence. That will give an additional three in-service days to help teachers to, perhaps, address some of the concerns that are raised in Margaret Smith's amendment.

**Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** How much money does that involve, and is it ring-fenced?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The curriculum for excellence is not an additional initiative. It is about the bread and butter of what should already be happening—and increasingly is happening—in schools. I urge Ken Macintosh to engage with and encourage his local authority, East Renfrewshire Council, which is taking an active and progressive role in engaging in training and in development of the curriculum for excellence. I hope that he will welcome the point that I just made. The issue is certainly addressed by Margaret Smith in her amendment.

**Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab):** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Fiona Hyslop:** No, thank you.

The strength of our higher and advanced higher qualifications was re-emphasised recently when the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service decided to increase from 2010 onwards the tariff points that are awarded for them at grades A to C. UCAS's review clearly demonstrates the value of those qualifications and is good news for Scottish students who apply for university places in Scotland and elsewhere.

Most respondents welcomed the second proposal—the introduction of new qualifications to replace standard grade at general and credit levels and intermediate 1 and 2—and agreed that that will reduce the complexity of the qualifications system. A small number of respondents did not agree and suggested that standard grade be retained. There were different views on some issues. For instance, most respondents agreed that the new qualification should have a unit-based structure because that will provide motivation and help to ensure that our young people receive recognition for their achievements. However, some respondents were concerned that, as a result, courses might become overly driven by assessment. That is one of the main challenges that we have to address.

It is extremely important that we get right the assessment arrangements for the new qualifications. They need to promote high standards and to be fair, credible and reliable. Crucially, assessment must support good-quality learning rather than serve as a potential barrier to

it. I have therefore asked the curriculum for excellence management board to provide me with early advice on assessment issues.

The purpose of the senior phase is to build on the preceding broad general education by providing young people with a range of learning opportunities that include more practical or applied learning through the curriculum framework and the qualifications system. The number and range of qualifications that are undertaken in the senior phase will be a matter for schools, colleges, parents and young people to decide. I make it clear that the Government wants the senior phase to contain breadth of experience. The feedback that we have received states that further advice would be helpful, so we will take that work forward.

On 28 November 2008, we launched 16+ learning choices, which is our new model for supporting delivery of the senior phase of the curriculum for excellence and ensuring that more young people enter employment or training. It is Scotland's alternative to compulsory education to 18.

**Jack McConnell (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab):** On that second objective, the major reforms of the Scottish education system and examinations in the 1980s and the late 1990s were both affected by political decisions that were made early on, which politicians then found difficult to change because they did not have the strength to admit that they had perhaps made mistakes and should have listened more at an earlier stage.

I would welcome one assurance from the minister: if the evidence shows that there are examples throughout Scotland of individual schools or recent changes leading to improvements in pupil motivation and achievement, will she be willing to listen to that evidence and change her proposals, rather than stick to her initial proposals.

**The Presiding Officer:** Briefly, please.

**Jack McConnell:** Will she ensure that the changes are more sustainable because there is, throughout Scotland, real consensus that they can last more than just a year or two?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I thank the former First Minister—and, indeed, former education minister—for his intervention. I hope that my actions and responses have demonstrated to him that I am actively engaging in the process and will respond—after all, the culture in this country must be one of openness and responsiveness. We have to end the era of dictating everything from the top down, leaving no room for manoeuvre, even in the light of evidence to the contrary, so I give a commitment to creating such responsiveness at national and—increasingly—local level.

With regard to the introduction of new literacy and numeracy qualifications, respondents were generally in favour of option A—in other words, of assessing the new awards at the end of secondary 3. Again, there were differences in views about assessment and other practical matters, such as the implications for existing maths and English courses. I have asked the curriculum for excellence management board to consider those issues carefully. Making the awards at the end of S3 could help to alleviate misplaced concern about the narrowing of subject choices in S4.

Bearing in mind Elizabeth Smith's constructive amendment in this respect, I emphasise that these awards are only one of the actions that we are taking to improve literacy and numeracy from three to 18. Improved learning and teaching in primary school will be accompanied by effective assessment: for example, the new national assessment resource, which will be available from 2010 to help staff build confidence in assessment and to develop relevant responses, will ensure that steps can be taken to address problems at an early stage. Smaller class sizes in the formative years will also help to embed literacy and numeracy. Assessment for the new qualifications clearly serves a different purpose in providing formal recognition of young people's literacy and numeracy skills.

Our fourth proposal is to encourage greater flexibility in qualifications, in order to give young people more freedom to personalise their learning. A majority of respondents were in favour of allowing highers and advanced highers to be studied over two years as well as over, as they are at present, one year. However, there was less support for allowing them to be taken over 18 months because it is believed that such a move would require a winter exam diet.

A majority of respondents were also in favour of enabling the most able students to bypass qualifications at lower levels and to start studying for highers from S4 onwards. Some concerns were raised over timetabling and other administrative issues and over whether, in reality, parents would accept such a move or still demand the safety net of lower-level qualifications.

Concerns were also expressed about how universities' admission procedures, come 2015, would treat highers that were gained over more than one year. I know that, although they generally support greater flexibility, universities wish to consider for themselves any implications for their admissions policies.

I am keen for universities to consider carefully the implications, not just of qualifications, but of the curriculum for excellence as a whole, for their admissions procedures and for the transition between school and higher education more

generally. My letter of guidance makes it clear to the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council that universities will have a responsibility for taking forward the curriculum for excellence. After all, a major aim of the curriculum for excellence is to improve the quality of learning rather than simply to accelerate young people's progress through the qualifications system.

Although the Scottish science and language baccalaureates were not part of the consultation on the next generation of national qualifications, I am sure that some members will mention them during the debate. I announced the detailed structure of the baccalaureates at the end of November 2008—the first awards will be made in 2010. The Scottish Qualifications Authority is continuing to engage with schools, colleges, universities and employers over the awards, and I am particularly pleased that UCAS will this year tariff rate them for university entrance purposes. That, along with UCAS's uprating of higher and advanced higher qualifications which I mentioned earlier, will put Scottish pupils in a good position as we move forward.

Of course, we cannot and should not underestimate the challenges that lie ahead. The consultation has raised certain issues, particularly with regard to assessment. We are already looking ahead and considering new approaches to assessment, and we will want carefully to think through that issue and others to ensure that our qualifications system is improved and that any improvements are safely delivered. I intend to announce my decisions on the future shape of our qualifications system before the end of this academic year, in order to give the SQA the necessary time to develop the qualifications and to give schools, colleges and other providers a clear basis on which to plan.

This debate gives Parliament the opportunity to contribute its own views. I appreciate the constructive approach that many members have already taken and will listen very carefully to the views that will be expressed this afternoon. I believe that, in our stewarding of the Scottish education system, it is incumbent on us all not only to ensure that we provide clear direction and leadership but—as Jack McConnell made clear—to be unafraid of responding when issues arise or other evidence emerges.

In this debate, Parliament has the opportunity to shape the future of our qualifications system in the best interests of Scotland's young people and adult learners. I look forward to hearing what members have to say.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of developing the next generation of national qualifications in Scotland in line with the aims, vision and values of the Curriculum for Excellence, with its emphasis on equipping all young people to respond to the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century through developing their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors and acknowledges the challenges and opportunities in taking forward the findings of the national consultation exercise and the key role to be played by local authorities, schools, colleges, universities and others in ensuring that we develop a system that meets the expectations of society, in which robust and credible assessment supports good learning and teaching and all young people have the opportunity to acquire the skills, knowledge and experience that they require to take their places in a modern society and economy.

**The Presiding Officer:** As I should have done before, I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons, if they have not done so already.

14:50

**Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab):** Labour very much welcomes the debate and the opportunity to contribute to the discussion about the Government's proposed changes to national qualifications. We believe that change is necessary and that there is evidence for it.

How we treat our young people and the life chances and opportunities that we afford them tells us a lot about our society. We have always prided ourselves on our education system: it has many strengths and Scots play hugely valuable roles both in Scotland and all over the world as entrepreneurs and academics, and in their work in manufacturing or service industries.

Scotland's universities are truly world class, and the recent research assessment exercise recognised the quality and volume of world-class research in our universities. We are right to be proud that a large percentage of our school leavers go on to do degree-level courses. However, there is a lot of work still to do. Thousands of Scottish pupils leave school every year and fail to go into education, employment or training. Each one of those pupils represents a wasted opportunity—for them personally and for the whole country.

The consultation on national qualifications has straddled a seismic shift in the global economy and the corresponding challenges to the Scottish economy. That means that education and skills become even more important as we plan our recovery, which requires us to think hard about where we want Scotland to be as the economy changes again in the future. The context in which we have this debate about national qualifications is fundamentally different.

The fundamental changes to the Scottish education system through the curriculum for excellence, as initiated by the previous Government, will serve us well in educating our young people to be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. The fundamental purpose must be to increase attainment and achievement for all pupils. When we consider changes to national qualifications, we must always keep that at the forefront of our thinking. We also need to be fleet of foot and able to respond to the changing needs of our economy.

I offer Parliament a brief example: I urge the Government to give more thought to supply and demand issues in respect of science teachers. Given that many physics graduates have in the past gone into the financial sector, it might be that we should encourage such graduates to enter teaching rather than our just assuming that we need to continue to increase supply to solve the teacher shortage.

At a time of economic change, when jobs are scarcer, we have a responsibility to tackle the huge waste of young lives and the potential loss of skills that are caused by our education system's failure to bridge the achievement gap that opens in primary schools and continues to widen in the early years of secondary school. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's report stated that children from poorer communities and low socioeconomic group homes are more likely than others to underachieve, while the gap that is associated with poverty and deprivation in local government areas appears to be wide.

If we are going to tackle the achievement gap, we have to tackle the shocking levels of illiteracy that still exist in Scotland. Recent research indicated that although Scotland has—out of 40 countries in the progress in international reading literacy study—a significantly larger proportion of pupils at the highest levels of performance, we also have the third-largest gap between the lowest and highest attaining pupils. It is absolutely unacceptable that the Scottish survey of achievement shows that fewer than half of primary 7 pupils are well established in reading.

Although Labour welcomes the SNP's conversion to developing literacy and numeracy awards for secondary pupils, we believe that instituting that change is simply not enough. Our view, which we know is shared by parents and business in Scotland, is that pupils should acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills in primary school; it is not enough to assess them methodically in S3 and S4. The minister said that change is on the way in that regard. I look forward to seeing it, because in responses to

parliamentary questions that I have lodged, the Government has signally failed to come up with any meaningful definition of functional literacy.

My experience of working for many years with pupils who had failed to learn to read by secondary school is that, by that time, many youngsters have branded themselves as failures, have given up or have become alienated or disaffected. The OECD report states that the gap widens after primary 5. In my experience, by that stage many pupils are developing literacy skills that allow them to become successful learners and effective contributors, but a significant number of pupils are failing to develop those skills, so the education system remains a closed book for them.

For too many pupils, reading becomes a problem that requires to be tackled systematically in a whole-school approach to literacy, such as that which has been developed by West Dunbartonshire Council, whereby pupils are tested regularly against literacy levels and individualised literacy programmes are put in place to support them. Where is that in the minister's approach? There must be an absolutely clear expectation that children leave primary school functionally literate. *[Interruption.]* Bob Doris may laugh, but that is a very serious problem that pupils face, as many people in Scotland accept.

Although the proposal to create national awards in literacy and numeracy is welcome, it cannot be considered in isolation. We need clear leadership from the minister on this. As members will be aware, the independent literacy commission—which is made up of practitioners, parents, business and academics—is examining this very issue and will, I believe, produce an important report in the coming months.

On the broader issue of the fundamental changes to national qualifications, I agree with the minister that implementation is too important to rush, so I welcome the decision to delay it by a year. It is vital to work on exemplars and to seek a shared understanding of how the changes will work in practice in schools.

Teachers are not averse to changes in education. Heaven knows that there have been plenty of changes over the past 20 years—I was involved in many of them in my time in education. However, teachers want to understand the changes and to be convinced that what is proposed is doable and will improve education for young people.

Continuing professional development is a vital component of any change. We know that there are widespread cuts in education budgets and that continuing professional development has often been the first casualty. I ask the minister to give us more information about the amount of funding that

is being put into continuing professional development to support the curriculum for excellence, and how much she will commit to funding CPD to support any new national qualifications. Will the money be ring-fenced? Can the minister give us a cast-iron guarantee that every teacher in Scotland will, for the reasons that I have outlined, have access to CPD? It is simply not good enough to say that it is up to local authorities. Teachers and parents are looking for leadership, not abdication on the issue.

A range of issues need to be addressed and I would be grateful for early responses on them from the minister, either in her wind-up speech, in correspondence or through discussions. There are too many issues to cover in detail at the moment, so I will mention just a few of them.

Can we be reassured that thought will go into the S1 to S3 programmes of learning? There is concern that there is a lack of clarity around their place in the overall secondary school experience. Do they stand alone? Do they provide a basis for future study? How can we ensure that the sequences of learning are developed and that there is commonality in the programmes of study in S1 to S3 in different local authority areas?

We also have concerns about subject choice being delayed until S3, given how important the process is in motivating pupils and giving them a sense of purpose. Although we recognise the argument against specialising too early, we seek reassurance that pupils will have motivating and stimulating courses that are targeted at the range of needs in S1 to S3, and that pupils will not be demotivated by subject choice being postponed for a year.

We think that there is a danger that restricting the number of courses that can be taken in S4 could narrow the choices that pupils have in deciding which higher to take in S5.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I want to see breadth of experience in S4. There are some misplaced concerns that there will be restrictions, but I do not think that there will be. I reassure Rhona Brankin that I will not accept a situation in which there are restrictions. Moving literacy and numeracy assessments to S3 provides an opportunity to ensure that that is not the case.

**Rhona Brankin:** Having seen the consultation responses, we agree overall. We welcome the proposal to move literacy and numeracy assessments to S3, which could create more space. However, parents want to be reassured that their children's subject choices are not being narrowed.

The proposal to allow more time for studying for higher is fine in theory, but how easy that will be for schools to manage is unclear. In a time of

education cuts, when some pupils' curriculum choices have been narrowed, organising courses that are timed differently will constitute a significant challenge in schools.

Recognition is widespread of the importance of highers and advanced highers, which are the gold standards. However, the Government's proposals still raise many issues. We hope that the cabinet secretary will continue dialogue with a range of organisations. It is important to reassure us that the voice of further education is being heard, given the number of people whom FE institutions put through accredited examinations.

I also hope that the cabinet secretary is in dialogue with organisations that represent pupils who have additional support needs. We urge her to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to stay on at school post 16—

**The Presiding Officer:** You must close now, please.

**Rhona Brankin:** We urge the cabinet secretary to ensure that pupils with learning disabilities are not, because appropriate courses are scarce, required to leave school at 16 and go to college. Similarly, all courses must be made available to all pupils, including those who are deaf or visually impaired.

**The Presiding Officer:** You must close now, please, Ms Brankin.

**Rhona Brankin:** We welcome the consultation on national qualifications and look forward to the cabinet secretary's response. We will engage constructively—

**The Presiding Officer:** I am sorry; I am afraid that I must move on. I warned members that their speeches had to be on time.

*Amendment S3M-3164.3 moved:*

"insert at end 'is therefore concerned at the continued lack of clarity over the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) within the new examinable framework; highlights the need for parents, teachers and other stakeholders to be involved to a far greater extent in developing the CfE and for teaching staff in particular to be given the time and investment needed to develop materials for it; believes that literacy and numeracy are central to the development of the CfE; believes that it is unacceptable that fewer than half of primary 7 pupils are well established in reading; calls on the Scottish Government to establish an assessment regime for basic literacy in primary schools, linked to individual programmes for pupils who have failed to attain adequate literacy skills, with the expectation that all pupils should leave primary school functionally literate, and calls for a greater show of leadership and direction from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning.'"—[Rhona Brankin.]

15:02

**Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)**

**(Con):** It is fitting that the first parliamentary debate of 2009 is about the future education of our young people. I would be the first to argue that a good education is about far more than examinations, but we cannot get away from the fact that they are a crucial part of the process, so we have an obligation to get the reform process right.

We face three challenges. First, we must retain the successful parts of the existing system—yes, it has some, despite what some people think—while removing or reforming the parts that are not working, so that the qualifications structure is fit for all pupils, whether they wish to have a predominantly academic focus or to be more vocationally focused.

Secondly, the reform must have the confidence of the teaching profession, of the further and higher education sectors and of employers. It is imperative to recognise that whatever reform takes place must articulate fully not only with changes in the school curriculum but with the tertiary sector. Our colleges and universities face demanding times ahead economically, financially and academically, as Duncan Rice eloquently laid out in his outstanding principal's report to the University of Aberdeen, which was published last month. Qualifications reform must be debated in that context and not in a vacuum.

Thirdly, we must not repeat the mistakes of 1992, when Professor Howie produced what was widely regarded as a top-class blueprint for reform, but political dogma—chiefly, the obsession with comprehensive education in late secondary school—got in the way and we ended up with a halfway house that did no one, least of all our pupils, any favours.

The Scottish Conservatives fully support the Government's desire for reform, and I will use the debate to outline three specific proposals. First, it is abundantly clear that far too many pupils in Scotland do not meet basic standards in literacy and numeracy. Too many pupils leave school without being able to read, write or count up properly. The Government has acknowledged that problem, and I am sure that it is why the cabinet secretary proposes stand-alone exams in literacy and numeracy in S4 or perhaps in S3. I have no problem with more rigorous testing of the three Rs in S4 or S3, but that should happen within whatever new exam succeeds the discredited standard grade and the intermediate level. That would be similar to the previous situation with parts of the old O grade, but S4 or S3 is too late.

If we examine the evidence that the schools, teaching unions and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of

Education prepare so carefully, we see that many primary school pupils have problems grasping the three Rs. Indeed, it is far too easy for pupils in Scotland to progress through successive years in primary school without ever gaining competence in reading, writing and arithmetic. Understandably, such pupils have difficulties when they enter secondary school; it is often why they lack confidence and can become disengaged.

My specific demand is for a set of nationally recognised tests against which a primary 7 pupil's ability to read, write and count up can be measured properly. That does not have to be done by way of formal exams or certification, but it must be done in a way that meets national criteria, perhaps as a key component of the new curriculum three-18 programme.

The second proposal concerns pupils who wish to pursue a more vocationally focused education. Frankly, at the moment, too many of them are given a raw deal. As a result, they often face the stigma of being lower-class citizens, which is a totally unacceptable state of affairs. I remind Parliament of what Professor Howie said in 1992, which was that the comprehensive system of education had failed pupils in the upper years of secondary school because of the insistence in its one-size-fits-all approach to course work that all pupils pursue some form of academic qualification.

Howie recommended a two-route system from S4 onwards, with clearly differentiated curriculum options for those who want to enter higher education as opposed to those who want more vocationally focused opportunities. This time round, 17 years on, we need to learn that lesson and provide many of the opportunities that our European competitor states offer.

Thirdly, the new structure must ensure that the system caters properly for our brightest pupils by stretching their academic potential and ensuring that they can access their courses of choice. I hear the argument for greater flexibility in allowing bright pupils to take S4 exams in S3, but my line on greater flexibility is to let those bright pupils bypass S4 exams altogether. Instead of the hated two-term dash for highers in S5, bright pupils would have two years in which to study for those exams. Such pupils get a good group of highers and advanced highers in any case; their S4 exam passes become irrelevant to universities and employers alike.

It goes without saying that the advanced higher is a first-class exam—in most subjects, it is superior to the A level. Indeed, it is now more widely recognised as such by a good cross-section of universities north and south of the border. That is as it should be. Is it not therefore sad that some of our brightest pupils cannot access advanced higher level courses because

their school has had to make budget cuts? Sadly, for reasons of political dogma, pupils are not allowed to take advantage of facilities in the private sector where subjects at that level are taught. Similarly, why cannot private sector school children go into the state sector? We must enter into a different ideology on the sharing of resources.

Too often, people have subscribed to the fallacy that bright pupils will achieve in any environment—that the system does not matter for them. I beg to differ, and if the Government really wants to create a much better alignment between education and developing Scotland's economic potential—Scotland's education system was once renowned across the world for that very feature—I suspect that it does, too.

We have a golden opportunity to improve our SQA examination structure so that it better reflects the needs of all our pupils. The current structure is far too complex and has lost much of its rigour. We need to ensure that all pupils grasp the basic skills and go on to develop their potential.

I move amendment S3M-3164.1, to insert at end:

"and, in particular, recognises the need to ensure that pupils in Scotland are properly schooled and tested in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy by the end of primary 7 and also to ensure that the qualifications structure better reflects the specific needs of all pupils, whether they wish to pursue courses that are more academically focused or more vocationally focused."

15:09

**Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** It is probably safe to say that none of us has read all 1,800 responses to the Government consultation. I have read enough to know that the majority welcome a fresh look at our national qualifications, albeit that many aspects of the proposals require greater clarity, a great deal more work to be done with key stakeholders and the resources that are necessary to deliver on time. That said, we welcome the revised timetable that has been set. If I were a teacher, I would be inclined to hand back this work to Fiona Hyslop and say, "This project is half finished. You have some good ideas, but more work needs to be done". However, she will have our support to be a "job finisher"—to pick up on what was said in time for reflection.

Qualifications are far too important for the job not to be done properly and for it not to be done in a way that commands support across the Parliament. We must deliver a qualifications system that encourages all our children to meet their potential.

Like the Government, the Liberal Democrats will take some time to consider the consultation

responses and the views of stakeholders before we take a final position, but there are some points that we can make at this stage. We all agree that a fresh look at national qualifications is required to set them in the context of the curriculum for excellence. We must deliver an education system that gives students the skills they need for learning and for work. That is even more necessary given the economic climate that we find ourselves in, and it is as necessary for those who wish to pursue a vocational route as it is for those who wish to enter higher or further education.

To some extent, there always appears to be an inherent paradox between some of the aims of curriculum for excellence—to deliver a broad education that values non-academic achievements—and the current system, which appears to be assessment driven, with pupils in secondary school in particular being taught to pass exams rather than to learn. The challenge is to deliver a robust and credible qualifications system that reflects the new, broader learning of the curriculum for excellence, where the focus is on learning leading assessment and not the other way round. As the cabinet secretary will acknowledge, assessment is critical. I will not spend a great deal of time discussing it today—assessment is complicated, and there are lessons to be learned about it from some of the consultation responses.

I had concerns about the suggestion that the number of subjects to be studied in S4 would be limited to five. The cabinet secretary has now clarified that matter. One of the strengths of the system is the broad approach that children have been able to take in the middle years of secondary school.

So far, the debate has—unfortunately, and despite our best efforts—failed to engage parents. The support and understanding of parents are crucial for qualifications reform. Speaking as a parent, I think that the present system of standard and intermediate qualifications is confusing and that most parents are unclear about the differences between them. It is crucial that parents understand the qualifications. We should never underestimate the important role that parents play in assisting their children with key decisions about subject choices or about whether they should take an exam over one or two years. That is why, important though it is to get the educationists to accept any new qualifications, it is at least as important to engage parents. They need to be much more involved than they have been so far.

That said, there will be real problems for the Government if it pushes ahead with changes that do not command the support of organisations such as the Educational Institute of Scotland, the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association and

other staff groups. The unions have concerns about workload issues, assessments and the consultation. It is fair to ask whether the consultation posed the right questions about the best way forward for Scottish credit and qualifications framework levels 4 and 5. There might have been different responses if that point had been put forward in a more open way.

It is crucial that we recognise the resource implications of introducing new qualifications. One response, from a teacher at my children's high school, pointed out that staff would have

“to accommodate the new exam, when our departmental budget doesn't even cover photocopying for the year.”

Our amendment simply acknowledges what we all know: the potential changes would have resource and training implications at a time when councils, colleges and schools across Scotland are having to make tough spending decisions. We welcome the cabinet secretary's comments about the importance of training and CPD, which were central to a number of the responses that have been received to date.

Given the long-term concern about the sense of drift in years S1 and S2, it is perhaps surprising that there has not been a little more focus on the issues in the early secondary years, particularly as a further year of general study might actually compound the situation for some pupils. We need more information about that.

We are concerned about the Government's plans for the baccalaureate, which perhaps could have been fitted into the debate. We would like a little more clarity about the proposals.

There are arguments on both sides about standard grades and intermediate qualifications, and we will return to that issue once we have had a chance to examine the responses in detail. We agree unanimously that we need to improve our record on literacy and numeracy, but that will not be addressed through an additional couple of exams at the end of third year. It must involve early intervention and continual assessment. We have concerns about setting a particular date for any external exam, whether it is at P7 or S3. Rather, there is an attraction to on-going national internal assessments as part of the curriculum three-18 programme—as Liz Smith suggested—with absolute buy-in from every school and all teachers. It should not just be left to English and maths teachers.

We could say much more, but I will conclude by saying that we must work together to deliver national qualifications with support from across the Parliament.

I move amendment S3M-3164.2, to insert after “contributors”:

“; further recognises the funding, resourcing and training implications of such a move,”

15:15

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):**

The Scottish Government's high ambitions for Scotland demonstrate our confidence in the talents and potential of Scotland's people.

Scotland's education system is widely regarded as one of the best in the world, as was confirmed by the OECD in its report on Scottish education, which was published in 2007. However, there is a certain amount of blurring and overlap at some qualification levels, which everyone, including the OECD, agrees needs to be addressed. We must ensure that our qualifications system helps to deliver the values, purposes and principles of the curriculum for excellence.

The qualifications for which young people aim should be flexible and should be designed to offer pathways to further or higher education, employment or training. The Government's consultation noted that in some schools there is an increasing trend towards offering intermediate qualifications instead of standard grades. In East Renfrewshire, as Kenneth Macintosh knows, standard grades were abolished some years ago. The approach stretched pupils and raised attainment levels.

The OECD report, which we debated last year, showed that Scotland is outperformed on literacy only by Finland, Korea and Canada and on numeracy only by Finland, Korea and the Netherlands. On scientific literacy, only Finland, Korea and Japan do better than Scotland does. Scotland does consistently well on the OECD's programme for international student assessment, on the quality of headteachers and on our impressive system of near-universal, high-quality pre-school education. Our approach to teacher induction is also regarded as world class. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. There is a wide achievement gap between pupils, which is strongly linked to socioeconomic status and inequalities in relation to participation in upper secondary school.

Highers and advanced highers continue to be held in high esteem and a substantial majority of respondents to the consultation supported the retention of those qualifications. Last month, UCAS announced that from 2010 it will increase its tariff scores for Scottish qualifications that are gained by university applicants, which demonstrates the improved standing of our qualifications in comparison with other United Kingdom qualifications.

The new generation of qualifications that will be created as part of the curriculum for excellence will

establish a coherent, flexible and enriched curriculum for everyone who is aged from three to 18. Standard and intermediate grades will be replaced by a single new qualification. In addition, baccalaureates in science and languages will be available for sixth-year pupils, so that pupils can receive a separate award for taking a cluster of subjects, which will encourage them to strive. Standard grade foundation level will be removed, because access 3 provides certification at level 3, and new awards in literacy and numeracy will be available. Increased flexibility will help to meet young people's needs and encourage pupils to bypass lower qualifications and sit highers from S4.

Respondents to the consultation expressed concern about the timescale for the introduction of new and revised qualifications. Their concerns have been addressed by the announcement that a further year will be allowed for implementation, which will give teachers more opportunity to undertake high-quality preparatory work.

Most respondents welcomed the proposals to reduce the complexity that currently exists at levels 4 and 5 and supported the suggestion that the new qualification should reflect the structure of intermediates and the inclusive approach to certification of standard grades. The new qualification will be unit based. Each unit will be assessed separately, and there will be an external examination. Short-term goals increase pupils' motivation by giving them more visible objectives and making learning more manageable.

Almost all respondents welcomed the increased focus on literacy and numeracy and were in favour of introducing literacy and numeracy awards at levels 3 to 5. A majority thought that young people should be assessed for the awards at the end of S3.

Universities Scotland welcomed the proposed updating of qualifications and said:

“We believe that the inclusion of the values outlined in ... the academic curriculum will produce a better rounded student in the future. We also believe that the flexibility being introduced will work to the benefit of many young persons who may develop academic strengths at different points in their school or college career. We recognize that the existing Advanced Highers are well regarded at present and already include the values which the review is intended to embed in the system.”

The Association of Directors of Education in Scotland said that moves to simplify the assessment framework at S4 would be welcome. Skills Development Scotland said of the proposal to extend the period of study for highers and advanced highers:

“the greater the flexibility the greater the reach to engage learners. It also allows some time for reflection on learning ability and styles which can be critical in future learning and career decisions. This is in keeping with the spirit of

Curriculum for Excellence and having a degree of personalisation which works at the pace of the learner."

The Alliance of Sector Skills Councils believes that the proposals would offer "valuable flexibility", help to "stretch" pupils and provide an

"opportunity for individual learners to progress and achieve at the pace that suits them."

ADES has a "clear and consistent position" on the proposals and welcomes

"the flexibility and the possibilities for personalisation"

in planning that they offer. However, its view is that there would be

"practical difficulties in implementing these proposals in the short term."

The cabinet secretary has taken that view on board.

The Federation of Small Business supports

"greater flexibility in the examination process"

and says that

"There could also be benefits for employers in terms of hiring new employees ... through the academic year."

Scotland's colleges support learners moving forward at their own pace and are

"comfortable with the proposal for Highers to be taught over 12 or 18 or 24 months".

*The Times Educational Supplement Scotland* of Friday 2 January quotes Ronnie Smith, the general secretary of the EIS:

"Mr Smith praised Education Secretary Fiona Hyslop for her 'commitment and leadership' in pushing ahead with the new curriculum, and also for reacting quickly to concerns and delaying implementation for a year.

'I think the level of engagement with stakeholders is very good,' he said. 'I think she's shown herself to be quite sensitive to some of the messages coming through.'"

On the baccalaureate, David Cameron, the director of children's services at Stirling Council and chairman of ADES, said:

"ADES is delighted that the Scottish Government is taking such a positive approach to ensure high level provision in, and hopefully, take-up for Sciences and Languages. We would be very interested in working with SQA and the Scottish Government to consider these proposals particularly as part of the wider discussions around Curriculum for Excellence."

Professor Emeritus Richard Johnstone OBE from the University of Stirling said:

"The Baccalaureates will be a great boost primarily for students in the upper secondary school but there is a good chance that students at earlier stages in their secondary education will also find the prospect attractive. The proposal gives students a great opportunity not just to enhance their learning of particular languages but also to integrate their language-learning with the learning of other things which they have chosen to study."

Dr Tom Shepherd, the chairman of the Scottish life sciences alliance, said:

"The new Baccalaureate in Science is an exciting development that will raise the profile of science in schools, reflecting the key role of science in the future economic development of Scotland. This initiative will motivate and recognise the achievements of science students; it will foster the connections between different scientific disciplines, a key factor of modern applied science; and will ease the transition of students to the international opportunities that a science career can provide."

I urge members to support the motion.

15:22

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** It has long been recognised that Scotland's curriculum for three to 18-year-olds is due for review. That process was started in the first session of the Parliament with the national debate on the curriculum, the conclusions of which were developed into the curriculum for excellence proposals.

I welcomed the Government's decision to consult on the curriculum for excellence. However, given that we still await the final conclusions from the consultation responses, today seems a strange time for a debate.

**Fiona Hyslop:** It might be helpful if I explain that the consultation is on national qualifications, not the curriculum for excellence.

**Claire Baker:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that intervention. I am sorry if my comments were not clear. I understand that the Ipsos MORI report is due out at the end of February. If the debate had taken place following its publication, we might have had more substantial material to discuss. I understand why the cabinet secretary may not wish to debate other pressing education issues—particularly on the first day back after the recess—such as university funding, student hardship, the situation with probationary teachers or the failure to deliver on promises on class sizes. However, a debate on proposals that have yet to complete the consultation process seems a bit mistimed. Nonetheless, I welcome any chance to debate how we can ensure that everyone in Scotland learns to their full potential.

Scotland's curriculum has many obvious strengths and is renowned internationally, but there is no doubt that its various segmented parts have developed separately. A more integrated and fluid approach across the whole age spectrum could ensure that we get the best out of everyone in Scotland's schools, colleges and other learning environments and could mean that schoolchildren—and adults in non-school provision—can rise to their full potential without the curriculum or qualification structures blocking their development.

Therefore, I welcome a number of the proposals in the Government's consultation. The increased flexibility that was offered in last year's proposals is a welcome step, as it will encourage pupils to work at their own pace. However, Rhona Brankin has rightly expressed reservations about how schools will manage the change in practice.

Equally, retaining higher and advanced higher provides welcome stability for pupils, teachers and schools alike. However, in terms of content, I believe that a greater focus on functional literacy and numeracy is required. I welcome the cabinet secretary's opening comments on that area. It is crucial that children leave primary school with a foundation in the skills that they need to reach their full potential as adults. We recognise that the transition from primary to secondary can be a challenge for all children and it is unacceptable to expect them to undertake that without the necessary skills. We need more consistent and regular testing of primary schoolchildren's literacy and numeracy levels, and much more rigorous collection of statistics by the Scottish Government, which could go a long way towards identifying those pupils who are being left behind and ensuring that they catch up by the time that they go on to secondary school.

A number of the cabinet secretary's proposals are sound. I believe that the ambition is there to improve Scotland's curriculum, but there are concerns over the reality of implementation. I have genuine fears that the cabinet secretary could fumble this once-in-a-generation opportunity and the years of hard work by not ensuring that sufficient resources are in place. While many councils across Scotland are struggling just to tread water, it is simply unrealistic to believe that councils and their school staff will be able to implement the significant changes that we need without sufficient resources. We have heard many education groups highlight their concerns over funding for the curriculum, including the EIS, the Scottish Parent Teacher Council and School Leaders Scotland, through its general secretary. Moreover, we have heard concerns regarding funding for teachers' continuing professional development. Due to the tight funding settlement provided to local authorities, training for teachers has been squeezed, although funding in that area will be a crucial element in delivering the curriculum for excellence.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Claire Baker:** I will just finish my point.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's announcement of an extra in-service day, but there needs to be more secure funding for continuing professional development.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I want to address the point about funding. The funding settlement from Westminster was tight, but local government got a fair settlement from the Scottish Government. More important, local government got a record level of funding. The majority of the funding for local government—40 per cent or more—is for education. There is therefore a record level of funding for education, but we expect it to be applied to education and CPD, as it has been previously.

**Claire Baker:** I will challenge what the cabinet secretary has just said.

Councils are struggling to afford new teachers, keep class sizes down, deliver free school meals and build the new schools that pupils need, and it is hard to see where they will find money to implement those changes. For example, recent statistics reveal that spending per pupil in Fife Council, in my region, was among the lowest in the country. It spent under £4,000 per primary pupil and had the lowest spend per secondary pupil in Scotland. That situation has developed over the past two budgets from a situation in which Fife's spend per pupil was similar to the average Scottish spend to one in which its spend is now the worst in Scotland. Primary schools in Fife have seen a 4.1 per cent real-terms cut and secondary schools have seen a 6.9 per cent real-terms cut because of two years of Scottish National Party council leadership. In Fife, as in other councils across the country, there is no extra room in the budget to deliver the Government's proposals.

Let us not forget that it is not just schools that will deliver the new curriculum. We must also look at the experience of colleges and voluntary sector providers and ensure that the curriculum suits children, young people and adults. Equally, universities must be included to ensure that their own curriculum dovetails with the curriculum up to SCQF level 7. However, we see again a severe shortage of funding to deliver the changes that we need. Wishful thinking will not deliver the curriculum for excellence. To deliver the ambitious overhaul of Scotland's curriculum that we want, the Scottish Government must come forward with the resources to back up the good work that has been carried out on the curriculum for excellence.

Again, I welcome the words in the cabinet secretary's proposals, which build on a number of years of work by the previous Administration and stakeholders throughout the sector. However, without sufficient money, the SNP is risking the legacy that was left to it. I hope that the cabinet secretary can show the leadership that is required on this issue and deliver the resources for the curriculum that Scotland requires in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

15:29

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

I am delighted to be back—happy new year to everyone. I most pleased to see, Presiding Officer, that you have lost none of your wit, charm or grace over the festive period. Those qualities cannot be taught, even by the best teachers in the best schools. As for the rest of the population, we will just have to make do with a review of the national qualifications system, which is welcome. Fortunately, we are well down that road.

Scotland has a decent education system that we take to be one of the best in the world—an assertion that has found some support from the OECD. The gradual improvement in the perceived standard of our education system is also reflected in UCAS's recent decision to uprate the tariffs that it awards for Scottish qualifications, as Kenneth Gibson said. Merit for that belongs to the teachers and pupils in our schools, and we can all be proud of it. However, we should not be complacent and think that our system cannot be improved. I am fairly confident that members generally agree with that assertion. Each party and its members will agree that we should be looking to improve our education system for the benefit of those pupils who are currently in the system and those who will be making their way through it in the future, and for the general benefit of the country and the rest of us.

The Howie report, which was published 16 years ago, in 1992, suggested improvements to Scottish education. It was a far-sighted publication and might be updated to reflect the changes that have taken place since it was published. In a recent article in *The Herald*, John Howie said:

"Standard Grades are certainly useful diagnostically: are you likely to pass a Higher next year, or the year after, or not at all? But both the Howie Report and the minister believe that the diagnosis should take place in the third rather than the fourth year, and both see this assessment as focusing on core skills."

Assessment in S3 is the way forward for our young people.

As well as a review of national qualifications, the Howie report recommended the introduction of the baccalaureate, which we have heard a bit about today. The baccalaureate would be an academically demanding qualification that would allow the most able pupils to demonstrate their ability. I am more than pleased to note that the introduction of that qualification by the Scottish Government received John Howie's support in the article that I mentioned.

John Howie's approval was echoed by Professor Jack Jackson, visiting professor of curricular studies at the University of Strathclyde, who said:

"The interdisciplinary project which will form part of the Science Baccalaureate should give S6 pupils an

opportunity to further develop independent learning skills and to take greater responsibility for aspects of their work."

He also said that he hoped that

"higher education will recognise the added value of the interdisciplinary project and the more rounded qualification provided by the Baccalaureate."

That interdisciplinary project, showing that the pupil has the ability to think, study and work on their own initiative, is the jewel at the centre of the qualification. Employers look for those values in potential employees, and universities seek them from potential students.

I note that there are some concerns about the introduction of a baccalaureate. In particular, in Elizabeth Smith's response to the consultation, she asked why no equivalent qualification is being proposed for social science or the arts. I hope that the cabinet secretary will reassure her and the rest of us that the SQA will be able to propose extending the baccalaureate qualification into other areas when it makes its proposals for reviewing qualifications.

In addition, Labour's 2007 election manifesto called for

"radical reforms to ensure that young Scots have much greater opportunities to learn and excel in globally useful skills, and in particular languages and science."

The baccalaureate would do exactly that—I am pleased to see that we agree.

The stretching of pupils' talents would be matched by proposals to allow greater flexibility for individual pupils to tailor their examination schedules. We have heard a lot today about exams taking place when pupils are ready for them, and we should strive for that so that pupils can get what they are looking for when they need it. Provided that there is a fallback position to give confidence to those who bypass exams to reach for the next level, such flexibility in the system should encourage many more young Scots to ask how far they can go, rather than how safe it is to take the next step. I learned that lesson when my son sat his standard grades last year and was thinking about what he would do next. A flexible system would have been more helpful to him, rather than his obsessing over whether he should stay on to do higher.

Inspiring confidence in pupils, encouraging them to take control of their own learning and providing a framework within which they can seek excellence will help to provide young Scots with the tools that they will need to build a successful career, and educationists with the evidence base that they need to determine the next steps in improving the Scottish education system.

A renewal of our national qualifications is due and represents an opportunity for us to set out a

fresh feast for advancement, to delineate the dishes that are on offer and to make them healthy options—I think that I have had too much Christmas pudding. We can set Scottish education on a route that ensures that our education system remains among the best in the world, learning from the past but not thirled to it, celebrating success but not blinded by it, and acknowledging improvement but never being subdued by it.

The chamber contains plenty of the enthusiasm that we need to make the improvements that Scottish education needs, and I look forward to working with my colleagues across the party divides to help deliver a better education system for current and future generations of Scotland's school pupils.

I support the motion in Fiona Hyslop's name.

15:34

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):**

There can be few subjects that are as important to the Parliament as the education of our children and young people. As has been said a number of times, Scotland has a proud educational tradition. That is undoubtedly true but, as the cabinet secretary rightly said, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. We must ensure that our education system remains vibrant and relevant to the times in which we live. That is why the previous, Labour-led Executive invested so much in the physical infrastructure of our education system; sadly, that investment has not been replicated by the current Government. It is also why the previous Executive initiated the review of the curriculum, which led to the development of the curriculum for excellence—that vision, too, appears to have lost clarity under the current Administration—and why it began the task of reviewing our qualifications system.

I welcome today's debate, even if it could have waited until Ipsos MORI published its report next month. It is important that we in the Parliament have an opportunity to debate the Executive's initial views on the responses to the consultation on national qualifications.

The cabinet secretary was right to announce that the Government will delay the implementation of the national qualifications proposals. It is right to listen to the concerns that many of the respondents to the consultation expressed. We have a valuable opportunity to reshape our curriculum and how we measure success. That is why it is vital that we take the time to get it right and, importantly, to ensure that sufficient resources are in place.

I listened carefully to the cabinet secretary and despite her protestations that the historic concordat has delivered record levels of funding to

Scottish councils, the reality is that EIS members who work in our classrooms every day continue to express concerns that local authorities have insufficient resources properly to implement the curriculum for excellence. The Government cannot continue to ignore those concerns, which I share. I also share the concerns about the lack of clarity surrounding the implementation of the curriculum for excellence, which is particularly worrying when we are considering the restructuring of our qualifications system.

A number of respondents to the consultation made that point. They often said that the proposed new examinations appeared to be at odds with the very principles of the curriculum for excellence. In its response, the EIS stated:

"The current proposals in many ways run counter to the whole philosophy of the programme and if implemented might serve to undermine support for CfE throughout the system."

With that in mind, I urge the minister to provide much more clarity on the future of the curriculum for excellence and to ensure that there is a synergy between it and the proposed new qualifications system.

I will say a few words about the impact of the new proposals on further education. A number of respondents, including Glasgow City Council, expressed concerns that training providers for young people who undertake vocational qualifications might not offer the proposed literacy and numeracy qualification and that that would disenfranchise those young people. It is vital that we take the opportunity to ensure that there is a much smoother, pupil-centred journey between the state educational sector and further and higher education providers.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I make it clear that national qualifications are not just school qualifications. One of the strengths of our system is the credit and qualifications framework. I agree that if we are to tackle the illiteracy and innumeracy problems that exist in the adult population, it is essential that national qualifications serve adults as well as pupils and that they are not just school-based qualifications.

**Karen Whitefield:** That was exactly the point that I was making. I am concerned that the Government's consultation was completely silent on the pupil journey, whether it involved an adult pupil or a young pupil moving from school education into further education. The cabinet secretary needs to provide greater clarity on that issue in particular.

I turn to the Government's proposals on literacy and numeracy assessment, whether that happens in S3 or S4. I accept that employers need a clear understanding of the potential of their future

employees with regard to literacy and numeracy. However, the Government's proposals are wrong in relation to testing in S3 and S4. That is far too late. Numeracy and literacy should be embedded in the curriculum at primary school and at secondary school. They should take the form of assessment throughout a pupil's school life—the assessment should not come when they are getting ready to leave school, when it is often far too late for us to do anything to address the fundamental problems that they may have encountered in improving their literacy and numeracy. Most people agree that, to facilitate learning, we should try to lessen the burden of examination and continuous assessment. It is strange, then, that the Government wants to introduce yet another layer of examination—a layer that could prove to be pointless and meaningless.

An aspect that is missing from the consultation but which was mentioned by respondents, including Glasgow City Council, and which is of particular concern to my local authority, North Lanarkshire, is local authorities' ability to allow students to sit their standard grades a year early—the so-called age-and-stage relaxation, which was introduced by the previous Executive. As the cabinet secretary may know, pupils in Dalziel high school in North Lanarkshire have benefited from the ability to sit their standard grades in S3 and then spend two years on their higher examinations. Pupils, parents and teachers are pleased with the results of those who have taken that route. I ask the minister to consider ensuring that that flexibility remains, no matter what changes the Government introduces.

15:42

**David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con):** We have had a number of debates on education over the past few months, which have focused principally on the historic concordat and the obligations foolishly undertaken by the leaders of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to exonerate the Scottish National Party Government from delivery of its manifesto commitments on lower class sizes, free school meals and matching school building programmes brick for brick.

However, the debate is about the future structure of our qualifications. On the face of it, that has nothing to do with the concordat but, rather, is about equipping young people with the appropriate skills and qualifications for life after school. Employers and young people need a qualifications structure that is rigorous, straightforward and far simpler than at present and which will stretch and determine young people's abilities and prepare them for work, training or higher education. I agree that it is essential that

we retain the higher examination—a constant that spans the generations since its introduction more than 50 years ago—as the gold standard of the Scottish education system.

I welcome the retention of the advanced higher, which has become highly regarded and rated against the English A level and which has replaced in recent years the certificate of sixth-year studies, which never fully lived up to its promise, even when I sat it in 1970.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Did the member pass?

**David McLetchie:** I passed it.

However, if we delve more deeply, the qualifications structure has a great deal to do with the historic concordat. It is abundantly clear that the financial and other pressures that are being placed on local authorities by the Government to deliver on the concordat commitments will have serious and detrimental effects on other aspects of education, including the availability of key courses. That is especially true regarding the provision of advanced higher courses, which my colleague Elizabeth Smith referred to in her speech. In councils such as Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire, Borders and Highland, a number of cases came to light last year that exemplified the problem.

**Fiona Hyslop:** It is important to make it clear that the choice for advanced highers has not changed. Mr McLetchie cites the case of Renfrewshire. Although accusations to the contrary have been made by some parties, the same choices for advanced higher are available this year as were available last year.

**David McLetchie:** Teachers in Renfrewshire certainly raised concerns about the width of courses available. We received evidence that in Peebles an S6 pupil had to move to a private school to study advanced highers in modern studies and history, and *The Times* highlighted a case in Biggar high school in which another S6 pupil was unable to sit advanced highers in geography, art and history, which he required for entry to the University of Manchester. There were continuing fears that the cuts in secondary school staffing levels in Highland Council would mean that advanced highers would be offered in only a handful of the region's 29 secondary schools. The cabinet secretary cannot ignore those facts.

Let us be clear that advanced higher courses often involve small numbers of students and require specialist teaching, so it is unreasonable to expect every secondary school to offer every subject at advanced higher level. However, that makes it all the more important that facilities are shared—and not only between neighbouring state schools. For example, there is no reason why state schools and independent schools cannot

work together to share teaching resources. That would be one important way in which some of our independent schools could demonstrably satisfy the public benefit test to retain their charitable status. Councils should be encouraged to consider such partnerships and not to turn their face against them on ideological grounds.

The Government has made great play of the fact that qualifications reform will provide a better structure for all pupils across the range of ability. It wants to introduce a Scottish baccalaureate award in both science and modern languages to—I think that I quote the Government—“stretch our brightest pupils”. However, those awards are group awards, of which advanced highers are an integral part. How ridiculous would it be if the academic qualifications of some of our brightest pupils were compromised because they attend a school that does not offer advanced highers, or does not offer advanced highers in the subjects that they need for a baccalaureate award?

In addition, is it not about time that the Government explained the logic of why a baccalaureate is appropriate only in science and languages? What has happened to the interests of our brightest and best pupils in arts and social sciences? How will that affect their qualifications and admission to university?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am delighted to say that when I announced the detail, including the distinctions and other aspects of the baccalaureate, I was overwhelmed by the interest that was expressed. I announced at the end of November that we would look at other subjects.

**David McLetchie:** I encourage the cabinet secretary to do so, because Scotland can currently boast that four of its universities are in the top 200 in the world, which is a significant achievement, but we will sustain that position in the future only if they can attract Scotland's brightest and best young people as well as students from the rest of the United Kingdom and overseas. How ironic it would be if the new qualifications structure, which is designed to do just that, was compromised because too many of our ablest young people were unable to sit the appropriate exams in our schools. Will the cabinet secretary address that matter? Or will we yet again hear the refrain that it is all up to councils and nothing to do with the Government?

Policy priorities and spending priorities are intertwined. The Conservatives make no apologies for saying that we regard the provision of free school meals to all pupils in P1 to P3 as the wrong priority. We should be in no doubt that such provision may be at the expense of the courses and qualifications that are available to some of our most able young people in Scotland. That is a

choice that the SNP Government has made; it is not a choice with which we agree.

15:48

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I agree with Margaret Smith's comment that we should try, as far as possible, to put aside party differences in relation to education and try to reach agreement on the best way forward. It is a matter of regret that the Labour Party has taken a destructive approach in its contribution to the education debate in recent months. I find it ironic that Labour's amendment states that

“it is unacceptable that fewer than half of primary 7 pupils are well established in reading”.

Who is to blame for that? Labour education ministers were in office for 10 years, so if there is still a problem in primary 7, the blame for that lies fairly and squarely with Labour. Perhaps Labour members should learn lessons from their failed past.

**Rhona Brankin:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Neil:** I will do so later.

I will concentrate on a number of key issues. We do not know what Labour's position is, but I think that there is broad consensus among the other parties, albeit that there are some differences on the detail, on the way forward. I do not intend to go over that, as I would like instead to add a bit of value to the debate that has taken place.

On the reforms that we are discussing, we have to learn the lessons of the early 1990s, because—as Liz Smith rightly said—aspects of the introduction of the reforms at that time could have been handled better. The evaluations that were undertaken in 1999 and 2003 on behalf of the Scottish Executive into the implementation of the higher still reforms clearly indicated that there was a major failure on the part of previous Administrations adequately to consult employers, in particular. One of the problems that resulted from that is that many employers have not fully understood the importance of some of the reforms, which has tended to force them down the road of relying on standard grades rather than other qualifications.

The time has come for us to replace standard grades and intermediate qualifications with a new qualification. However, I ask the cabinet secretary to ensure that, when that change is implemented, employers and other stakeholders are properly consulted. If the system is to work, we must ensure not only that employers are consulted but that they fully understand the reforms that are being implemented.

**Fiona Hyslop:** That is an important point. It is because of such concerns that we have ensured

that representatives of business organisations are members of the curriculum for excellence stakeholder group. We want them to be involved in that way partly so that they can inform our decision making, but also because we want to ensure that employers and businesses are fully aware of the new qualifications system.

**Alex Neil:** That was a helpful intervention.

We are all agreed that there is a need for better assessment with regard to literacy and numeracy and that those areas must be treated as high priorities. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the key demand from employers and others is for enhanced learning in relation to literacy and numeracy. The issue is not only about assessment and accreditation; it is about the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy. I am sure that the cabinet secretary is looking at ways of enhancing literacy and numeracy.

Professor Gordon Hayward and others have suggested that engineering be included in the curriculum for excellence. That is an excellent idea that is worthy of serious consideration. Engineering is fundamental to our ability to build the kind of economy that we want to have, and people will need to have qualifications in it. I know that the cabinet secretary is sympathetic towards that view.

I agree with David McLetchie that we need to expand the baccalaureate beyond modern languages and science, and I note that the cabinet secretary has said that she will do that. However, we should not think of the baccalaureate as being simply the end part of a school education. One of the benefits of the baccalaureate, apart from the fact that it is an internationally recognised qualification, is that, because of the level at which the subjects are taught, it helps to make the transition from school to higher and further education much smoother. As we all know, most of the problems in education arise during periods of transition, so anything that makes the transition easier at such a crucial stage in a young person's education is to be welcomed.

My final point relates to resources. Of course we need more resources for education—but this Government has put in a record amount of resources. Karen Whitefield, who represents the Labour majority in North Lanarkshire Council, should consider the way in which that council misused its resources and maladministered its education budget.

**Rhona Brankin:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alex Neil:** No, I will not.

The problem is not a lack of resources—in that case, it was maladministration by the Labour-controlled North Lanarkshire Council.

15:56

**Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab):** I always welcome the opportunity to debate our education system, but I wondered about the timing of today's debate. However, since the cabinet secretary seems to be quite defensive about that, I will just say that I wonder whether we will have the opportunity to discuss Ipsos MORI's report when it is complete.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I wanted Parliament to have the opportunity to express its views on the proposals that were put forward in June. I await constructive ideas and suggestions—as I have heard from a number of members on my side of the chamber—from Labour members, and to hear where the Labour Party stands on qualifications. That would help me in my decision making.

**Mary Mulligan:** The cabinet secretary has heard a number of suggestions this afternoon, and I hope that she will take them on board.

I reiterate my support for a review of national qualifications. The Labour-led Scottish Executive began revitalising the curriculum during the first session of the new Scottish Parliament. There was much consensus that developing a curriculum for excellence was the correct way to proceed, but it was clear that the changes to the curriculum would necessitate changes to national qualifications.

In her statement to Parliament, the cabinet secretary said that she wanted

"the new system to have a sharper focus on literacy, numeracy and other life and work skills"—[*Official Report*, 24 April 2008; c 7864.]

so I will start by addressing—as many other members have done today—the literacy and numeracy issue. Although I acknowledge that there is a proposal to test for literacy and numeracy at S3, I agree with my colleague Rhona Brankin and other members that that is too late. It is unacceptable that pupils can leave primary school without literacy and numeracy skills. Those skills need to be assessed prior to any transition, and a programme—as intensive as necessary—should be put in place to address any problems. Any testing should take place to show the success of those interventions.

I agree with many of the consultation respondents, who were wary of an S3 literacy and numeracy test but felt that there should be flexibility to test when the pupil is ready, whether that is at S1, S2 or S3. Following the cabinet secretary's statement last April, I asked specifically about the curriculum for sixth-year

students. I have seen at first hand the experience of sixth year and its worth—or otherwise. For some, sixth year is an opportunity to build on good higher results, sometimes by taking advanced highers. We have heard from members on the question of advanced highers; rather than repeat those comments, I will say that there are concerns that the availability of advanced highers across Scotland is inconsistent. Advanced higher courses move in and out of schools from one year to the next, depending on whether staff are available, and that is not the way that it should be.

For some, sixth year is an opportunity to catch up, to redo failed highers, or to improve grades, but for many—too many—it is viewed as a wasted year, especially if pupils are receiving, as some currently are, unconditional offers from universities. The changes through a curriculum for excellence and the proposals for changes to national qualifications will address concerns that have been raised about S1 and S2, which have often been viewed as years of treading water for too many students. However, I am not confident that the same can be said of the changes to S6.

When the OECD report commented on the availability of vocational courses, there was general agreement that that area of Scottish education needed to be improved. However, any suggestion that we should divide pupils at whatever stage into those who do vocational courses and those who do academic courses should be resisted. I thought that Elizabeth Smith was perhaps making that suggestion today.

We need to increase the value that is given to vocational courses, but that will happen only if we allow all pupils the opportunity to study such courses. If we allow pupils to access vocational courses in a way that fits within the overall picture of national qualifications, that will encourage more pupils to take those courses. That will be to everybody's advantage, including individual pupils, and to the advantage of the wider economy. However, I am not sure that the proposals will deliver the required equality of esteem, so the matter needs further discussion.

In conclusion, I will promote the interests of parents in the matter, as Margaret Smith did. I do not apologise for repeating some of the things that she said. For many parents, the exam system has become confusing, with standard grades, highers, intermediates, advanced highers, national certificates, higher national certificates and diplomas. There is misunderstanding about where they all fit, when they should be taken and what their advantages and disadvantages are.

I am equally concerned that parents do not yet really understand the proposals for the curriculum for excellence. Parents might welcome a review of the national qualifications, but they might not

appreciate why it is happening or why it is happening now.

Margaret Smith was right when she said that parents are an essential part of supporting our children and young people through their education. Parental support is a critical factor that helps young people to succeed throughout their education. I ask the cabinet secretary to ensure that the many issues that are debated in the review of national qualifications are properly communicated to all interested parties. In particular, I ask her to ensure that parents and pupils are fully involved in the discussions and that they understand where we seek to go with the proposals.

16:02

**Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** It is important that we get our new national qualifications framework right, so I welcome the Scottish Government's extensive consultation on the matter. The new framework is a testament to the way in which the previous Scottish Executive passed on to the new Scottish Government progress in relation to curriculum development and the qualifications framework. The previous Scottish Executive commissioned the OECD report, which many people regard as a springboard for the Scottish Government's proposed reforms that we are debating today. There is, therefore, continuity within the debate.

In general, I support the proposed reforms and commend the Scottish Government for its approach. I will raise a few matters that particularly interest me. First, I will comment on the proposed reform of standard grade qualifications. For many, the two-year standard grade courses are too long. Courses that could be short, snappy and exciting can become a two-year drag, so many teachers will welcome the idea of a one-year course that is split into a number of internally assessed units followed by external certification. Motivating students can be a challenge at the best of times, and it can be difficult for teachers to sustain a two-year focus. I therefore welcome the recognition that the current mainstay of S4 assessment at levels 3 to 5 should change and the fact that the reform will lead to focused one-year courses. The merger with intermediate qualifications will achieve a most desirable outcome for education by decluttering the landscape—that is a most overused term, but it will be achieved in this case.

Many people frown upon the foundation examination at standard grade. Some say that it is external certification just for the sake of it and that, by using course work and internal assessment from the two years, teachers can ably assess whether a student has achieved the required standard. Teachers can ably assess students at

standard grade as being of a sufficient standard to merit accreditation at level 3 or, in this case, foundation. In many ways, that makes access 3 a better option for many students and easier for teachers.

However, although I believe that access 3 has far more benefits, the foundation exam has certain other benefits that I hope will not be lost. The fact, for example, that it is external can be a strength. Access 3 does not have such an external exam. For some—though not all—students at level 3, that kind of exam is an important rite of passage in their educational journey and for many teachers the external exam affirms what they already know about the ability of their students.

Because many schools operate multilevel teaching, there is a very real prospect of having classrooms in which students at level 3 are studying themes similar to those being studied by students taking the new level 4 and 5 qualifications. However, the fact that there is no external exam at the end of the year could lead to problems in motivating students at level 3 and in how they view the validity and status of their own certification. The prospect of exams is the only way in which many teachers can motivate some students, and taking that away might lead to apathy and, in some cases, challenging behaviour.

I am not saying that students should have to sit an external examination to achieve level 3; however, offering the option of an external examination would give added value to the access 3 qualification and prepare students who wished to move into S5. It would certainly be a new target for students who did not sit—or, indeed, did not pass—the external examination. Students who passed the external exam could progress to the new level 4 qualification, if that were deemed appropriate.

Meaningful progression is important for all learners in education. Although many students will quite rightly want to pursue so-called less academic courses after S4, others will want to persevere with the learning that they enjoy. Offering the option of an external examination for level 3 would provide that kind of progression and I believe that learners at that level deserve such an opportunity.

I welcome the proposals to introduce science and language baccalaureates at S6 and note that the cluster award approach mirrors that which is taken in the higher still qualifications framework. I am pleased that the baccalaureates will give students an added incentive to push themselves in these areas and that, in particular, they will help to motivate S6 students into viewing the year not as a slack year before university but as a chance to push themselves the extra mile.

However, the introduction of the baccalaureate might have an unintended consequence. As David McLetchie has pointed out, for a number of years now the social sciences have been squeezed in secondary schools. Many students skip social sciences in S5, preferring to take them in S6, while other students who did not take history or modern studies in S4 try to crash their higher in S6. Without a social science baccalaureate in S6, the hand of subjects such as history and modern studies might be weakened further when students come to choose their subjects, and I welcome the cabinet secretary's assurance that she will seriously consider extending the baccalaureate system. However, any such move must be examined and monitored closely.

I welcome the provision of an extra year to bring in our new qualifications framework. Financial resources are an important issue, of course, and I believe that they will be provided. Politicians will always argue over money, figures and so on, but the biggest resource—

**Rhona Brankin:** Will the member give way?

**Bob Doris:** I am trying to make a very important point; the member should sit down and let me do so.

As the biggest resource in any school is the teacher, it is vital that local authorities provide good-quality continuous professional development and in-service training, additional in-service days and so on. I am very glad that the cabinet secretary has given assurances in that respect.

Teachers want courses as much as they want resources. Good teachers need core materials that they can develop into themes for their lessons, and the cabinet secretary should consider that in the build-up to the launch of the new curriculum framework.

As for the proposal to extend the study time for highers to 18 months, the fact is that many youngsters who fail their highers in S5 get the shake-up that they need to pull up their socks and pass the exam in S6. One unintended consequence of running highers for 18 months from S5 into S6 is that such second chances might not arise.

Most members have taken a positive approach to the debate, and I broadly support the Government's approach.

16:10

**Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab):** Today's debate has proved just how intertwined the new Scottish national qualifications framework and the curriculum for excellence are in delivering on our aspirations for all learners in this and following generations. In government, Labour

began revitalising the curriculum in light of the conclusions of the important national debate on education in 2002. There was consensus that developing a curriculum for excellence is the right direction of travel. If the curriculum for excellence is to be a success, the SNP Government must show the leadership that many sectors have called for, ensure sufficient and appropriate consultation, provide clarity of purpose, supply a detailed programme for implementation and—crucially, as several colleagues have mentioned—make available sufficient resources and development time to support the wide-ranging programme of curricular change.

At this stage, I should declare my membership of the EIS. Before being elected to the Scottish Parliament in 1999, I worked in further and higher education for 18 years, which I concluded as head of the business school at Adam Smith College.

I will focus first on consultation, on which I want to raise concerns with the cabinet secretary. The EIS, which has been one of the most committed supporters of the curriculum for excellence, has been very disappointed by the narrow focus of the consultation. I ask the cabinet secretary to treat that point seriously in her concluding comments. In addition, in an article on 10 October in *TESS*, the SNP Government was accused of failing to consult Scotland's colleges on its plans to scrap intermediate qualifications along with standard grades. Langside College in Glasgow called for proper representation on bodies that manage and implement the curriculum and qualification changes.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Will the member give way?

**Marilyn Livingstone:** I will give way after I have developed this point.

Langside College's concern, which I am sure is reflected throughout the sector, is that the same staff and curriculum development opportunities should be available to colleges as are available to schools. There is deep disappointment at the fact that national certificates and progression at intermediate levels 1 and 2 are being ignored.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I point out that, in the summer, we appointed a representative from the college sector to the curriculum for excellence management board precisely to ensure that colleges are represented. Clearly, the national qualifications system is not just a schools system, so I reiterate that we need to ensure that the qualifications are fit for a lifelong learning agenda. On that issue, I agree with the member.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** The cabinet secretary will be aware why I raised the issue. The point needs to be recognised across the board.

The Association of Scotland's Colleges points out that more adults—as many as 100,000—study for intermediate awards in colleges than do pupils in Scotland's schools. Curriculum for excellence is about preparing our children and young people for life after school as well as about improving their attainment while they are at school. The four capacities are about developing potential across the board; they are not just about exam preparation. The capacities aim to develop successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors in both the school and college sectors. I agree with the cabinet secretary that colleges have a major role to play.

The article in *TESS* stated:

"After giving evidence to the parliamentary education committee, Howard McKenzie, acting chief executive of the ASC, told *The TESS* ...the first time colleges were involved in the development of the new curriculum ... was around seven weeks ago ... when they began sitting on the revamped management board of A Curriculum for Excellence. The college, whose principal was the only FE representative on the review group which produced ACfE and who now sits on the management board, has also entered a plea for the colleges' voice to be heard."

That plea is not about having one person on a board but about a much wider issue. The message is clear. As the cabinet secretary said, Scotland's colleges have an important role to play, so their voice needs to be heard. The cabinet secretary must address the sector's concerns.

In the time remaining to me, I want to discuss resource and development time allocation, which clearly are critical to the success of the curriculum for excellence, as many members have said. As someone with hands-on experience of developing and delivering curriculum change, I support strongly the EIS, which said:

"we cannot ignore the fact that teachers in Scotland's schools are being asked to implement a radical programme of curricular change with an acute absence of support, resources and development time."

On the basis of my experience, I can tell the minister that that will not work. I agree with Alex Neil that this issue is not a political football—it is far too important for that. We must implement an education system that gives our school pupils and adult learners the skills that they need to respond to the ever-changing demands of this new century. If change is to be successful, it must command the support of all stakeholders.

The day-to-day reality of the historic concordat on the ground is the loss of dedicated funding for curriculum for excellence development. I will not raise the Fife issues that Claire Baker raised, but given, as a result of the concordat, the budget-cutting agenda of many local authorities, many teachers believe that money that would have been available for development is being moved

elsewhere, which will have major implications for the success of this crucial programme.

Ronnie Smith, general secretary of the EIS, made the crucial point that

"The message to the Scottish Government and local authorities from teachers is clear. They support the ethos"—

as we all do—

"of the Curriculum for Excellence, and are eager to work on delivering an enhanced curricular framework to benefit Scottish pupils. But they are currently struggling with a lack of ... resources to support this massive programme of change. Without a step change in resourcing and support the Curriculum for Excellence is at risk and a great opportunity to improve the learning experience for generations of Scottish pupils will be lost."

We must heed that warning.

I know that I am not the only one who is bringing such concerns to the cabinet secretary. Without an appropriate resource allocation, the SNP Government is putting at risk the ambitious, wide-ranging programme of curricular change. We must not fail this and future generations. I hope that the cabinet secretary will take on board the concerns that the Parliament and major stakeholders have raised.

16:17

**Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** In recent days, the last lines of a writer who was much concerned with education throughout his life have come to mind:

This is the midnight, let no star  
Delude us. Dawn is very far.  
This is the tempest long foretold,  
Slow to make head, but long to hold.

Those lines came from Rudyard Kipling in 1936, in the aftermath of an economic crash, which we now realise was lesser than the crash that has befallen the western world today, which forces a stock-take, not least of our education resources.

In many respects, what we see in the programme for international student assessment and elsewhere is a credit to Scotland. That is reflected in the performance of our universities and the research breakthroughs that they have made in biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and energy, but there is a disturbing gap between such inventive achievement and its application to serial production. That is where the training of, and by, technical manpower—the wee man in overalls with a micrometer in one pocket and a file in another, who, given time, could build an engine—is crucial, and I thank Alex Neil for reminding us about that. Such men provided an education in the yards and shops of Glasgow, Dundee, Aberdeen and the Clyde. They say that there was a gang in one of the yards containing Alex Ferguson—the other

one—Billy Connolly, Bobby Campbell, Gus Macdonald and Jimmy Reid. As one worker observed, such line-ups had not been seen much since ancient Greece.

In 1989, a young Scottish politician—Gordon Brown—said memorably, and absolutely accurately:

"We must manufacture or die."

In 1995, about 16 per cent of Scots worked in manufacturing. That percentage is now down to 9 per cent. That fact affects the sort of practical and adaptive education—of the type I mentioned—that people get.

The baccalaureate is a key option. As someone who has taught the products of the baccalaureate tradition in Europe, I recognise the pedagogical logic that makes connections between disciplines and I know how rapidly it can form a usable synergic world view. We should therefore open ourselves to co-ordinated educational co-operation, as well as technical co-operation, with the countries and regions in the European Community that we need to finance and construct our renewable power plants and infrastructure.

I speak from 42 years' experience at the chalkface—or do I? In 1969, I was thrown in at the multimedia deep end when I had to organise the final industrialisation and culture module of the Open University's foundation course in the humanities. That was a professor's task on a junior lecturer's salary—Walter Perry knew his economics. I had learned by going through a bac of sorts—the bunching of subjects under the old 1960s highers system and the co-ordination with the first year at university—and it worked overall. Bunching history, philosophy, mathematics and languages had a powerful social logic. My academic results were not good at that stage—in fact, they were dodgy. Forming a profile from those demanding subjects is extremely difficult. I scraped into university, although I received a good second chance with the old bursary competition and some superb university teaching. That left me with the question whether testing in disparate subjects in which the candidate is supposed to be good is a real measure of potential. Is it not better to tackle something difficult and to make a landing on new territory?

We need rigour and a system. Yes, we even need learning by rote—Kipling's "The Gods of the Copybook Headings"—because in maths and languages, much information and technique simply must be hard-wired into our system so that we do not even have to think about it. Think languages. Think computer languages. No kid would thank anyone for advice to learn about software systems through empathy. Such information must be memorised deep in the brain.

However, there must then be imagination and experiment. The Germans call that Spielraum, and they got the idea from Scotland's Adam Ferguson. It is the educational tradition of Robert Owen, A S Neill and Kirkcaldy's own R F Mackenzie, who was a great educator. In its updated and digitised version—a plug follows—it is what Scotland's Pat Kane, who is a rock singer, savant and my master in all such matters, calls his play ethic.

There are two other requirements. One is getting out of school—not to take a gap year, but to see how society works. I recommend something that is comparable to the German social year—soziales Jahr—in which students do social work with old people, retarded kids and the like, which gives them academic credits, cash and a broader social awareness.

**Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD):** Will the member give way?

**Christopher Harvie:** The second requirement is civic education. If members were out on the streets of north Edinburgh yesterday, they would have seen a hearse with a cardboard coffin that was led by a jazz band and followed by various flamboyantly dressed citizens. We were taking leave of Bernard Crick, who was a socialist, political scientist, biographer of Orwell and candid friend—God help us—to more than one party in the chamber. He believed in political education, not to indoctrinate but to liberate. In his memory and in the Scottish tradition, what Thomas Chalmers called the whole civic and social economy of our nation must have a central place in any baccalaureate and any rounded education.

16:23

**Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD):** Professor Harvie did not accept my intervention, so will he take the opportunity to reconsider his use of the word “retarded”? I would be grateful if he did so, so that it is a matter of record.

**Christopher Harvie:** Yes.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** Thank you.

In many ways, the debate has been informative. It has given all speakers and parties the opportunity to air their concerns about the proposed changes to our examinations and assessment process. Members have made various observations. I sympathise with Labour's comment that we are holding the debate in the middle of the process rather than at the end, but I look forward to seeing something solid at the end of the academic year that we can consider more fully.

The Government's motion contains little to object to. Members have made relevant points—I highlight Liz Smith's speech—but I want to

mention a couple of issues. I turn to the proposed assessment of literacy and numeracy. Having been an FE teacher for a while, I know how difficult it can be trying to improve the literacy and numeracy of pupils who come to FE straight from school while at the same time teaching them a subject. There are many former secondary school teachers in the chamber. I guess that it is equally difficult for secondary teachers to address pupils' literacy and numeracy deficiencies while teaching their subject and preparing children for exams or to make subject choices. As a consequence, I have a great deal of sympathy for Liz Smith's position on when assessment should be made.

As we all appreciate, by and large, primary schoolchildren are assessed—including for literacy and numeracy—discretely, which is entirely appropriate. However, by the time that kids are making the transition from P7 to S1, it is too late and too resource intensive to make up for the literacy and numeracy time that has been lost. We need to think about when literacy and numeracy can be addressed. I appreciate what the cabinet secretary said about exams in S3/S4, but classroom teachers will be aware of pupils' literacy and numeracy shortcomings long before they get to exams. That is the challenge.

**Fiona Hyslop:** The point is an important one in building consensus. We are not talking about an either/or situation, in which pupils gain a qualification in secondary school or have an assessment in primary school. We have to have assessment if we are to improve teaching and learning. We also have to give pupils the opportunity, time and space for literacy and numeracy early in primary school. Until the age of eight, children learn to read; from the age of eight onwards, they read to learn. Let us get the basics right at the outset. I think that there is a consensus throughout the Parliament on taking that forward.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** I am glad to have that reassurance.

I turn to the extent to which our teaching institutions are involved in the process, including in the development of the curriculum for excellence, and how that links into the examination reforms. I am concerned that there seems to be some fog around what they are expected to teach our prospective teachers. I seek clarity on that.

As Rhona Brankin said, there are issues around additional support needs and support for children who have social, emotional and behavioural needs. We need to be clear that such young people require different targets, exam structures and achievements from those that are accepted for mainstream schooling. For example, for many of those young people, working in a group, let alone sitting an externally assessed examination, is a challenge. For them, turning up clean and on

time, not punching a fellow pupil and not verbally abusing or punching a teacher is an achievement. We need to find a mechanism that allows them to find value in their achievements. I understand and accept the need for a formal examination process, but there will always be young people in our society who do not fit into the mainstream boxes. Over the past 16 months, I have met many such young people. We need to find a mechanism to address those issues.

Liz Smith rightly touched on vocational opportunities. In going round vocational institutions and schools in central Scotland, I found that young people are often regarded as being either academic or vocational. Sometimes the issue is timetabling, and sometimes it is attitude. There is a tendency to say, "You're academic, therefore you can't do the vocational courses." That needs to be addressed. I spoke to sixth-year pupils who were happy to do their highers but who also wanted the opportunity to do the college courses that were offered as an alternative. We need to address that.

I will ask the Minister for Schools and Skills, who will be responding to the debate, a final question. Can we have an indication as to what will be taught in relation to the proposed literacy and numeracy testing? How will they be tested? In what way are those subjects not covered already? Who will do the teaching and the assessment?

16:30

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

This debate is important and timely. The manner in which it was introduced by the cabinet secretary reflects the constructive and consensual approach with which she has addressed what is a very important issue. We can all agree that we need reform of a cluttered qualifications structure, but across and outwith the chamber, different opinions on the way forward are legitimately and genuinely held. The Scottish Conservatives generally support the Government's approach, although Elizabeth Smith and David McLetchie have outlined some of the qualifications that are placed on that support, some of which I will elaborate on.

I will start by addressing the very important issue of literacy and numeracy, which features in our amendment and to which Elizabeth Smith referred in her speech. There are widespread concerns about the matter. The issue was also raised by Rhona Brankin, and it features in the Labour amendment, which says

"that it is unacceptable that fewer than half of primary 7 pupils are well established in reading".

The statistics for writing and numeracy are little better. I gently remind Rhona Brankin—Alex Neil did so in his usual fashion, somewhat less gently

than me—that the problem did not appear overnight in May 2007; it predates then, and we must all be conscious of our responsibility for it.

We can agree that there is a concern that needs to be addressed. We agree that the statistics are poor and need to be improved. Employers have informed us that they are often not satisfied with the standard of school leavers who come to them. Youngsters' basic reading, writing and numeracy skills simply do not equip them for the workplace—or, for that matter, for going on to further or higher education. We can agree about all of that, although there is still some disagreement about when we should test for those basic skills. The cabinet secretary takes the position that it should be done at the end of S3, but, like other members, I believe that that is simply too late. Towards the end of S3, many youngsters are within a year of leaving the school system altogether, and possibly education as a whole. It is far too late in the course of their school career to test them on the vital skills of literacy and numeracy. A number of members have explained why such testing needs to be done much earlier.

In our amendment, we say that such testing should be done in primary 7. It is essential to identify before the transition from primary to secondary whether youngsters have those vital skills. If primary school is about anything, it is about ensuring that, before children go on to the next stage, they have the basic skills that they will need. When the wide range of subjects that are available at secondary school becomes open to them, they should have the basic knowledge and qualifications that they require. The tests must be undertaken at primary 7, so that we can identify the problem areas and so that secondary schools know the level of ability of youngsters coming into S1. I will not get hung up on the question whether there should be a national test or whether it should be carried out externally. The important thing is to test against national criteria in primary 7. I hope that the cabinet secretary agrees with that point.

**Fiona Hyslop** *indicated agreement.*

**Murdo Fraser:** I see her nodding.

I will move on to standard grades. I am old enough, unfortunately, to predate standard grades as far as my school career is concerned. I sat O grades, which were straightforward: a pupil who got A, B or C passed; if they got a D or E they failed; if they were particularly poor in a subject they might even get a no award. Those exams were simple, straightforward and easy to understand, and they had external credibility. I regret that the standard grade, which—albeit with very good intentions—was introduced to replace the O grade, is now discredited as a qualification. It is not taken seriously by employers. I have heard anecdotal reports from many employers that

when youngsters turn up with a clutch of standard grades at foundation, general or credit level, the employers simply do not understand what the qualifications mean.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I agree that it is important to have a simple system that employers can understand, but will the member reflect on the fact that the new exams will not be introduced until 2013-14 and many youngsters will sit standard grades before then? The standard grade has worth, and when we debate the issue it is important that we do not demotivate youngsters who are studying for the qualification or will do so in the years to come.

**Murdo Fraser:** I agree that all qualifications have worth, but among people who are not directly involved in the education system there is huge confusion about what the various levels of the standard grade qualification mean. If the test was to produce a qualification that satisfied the desire to give everyone a prize, the standard grade passed the test—other than that, I am sorry to say that it is not fit for purpose. I am pleased that the standard grade will go and I hope that whatever replaces it will be much more simple, straightforward and understandable, so that it can enjoy the external credibility that the standard grade lacks.

If the standard grade is discredited, the opposite is true of the higher. Although concerns about grade inflation will always be expressed from time to time, highers remain the gold standard of Scottish education, as David McLetchie said, and we should be reluctant to tamper with their structure. There are issues to do with the proposal to allow pupils to study for highers over two years, which I think should be a matter of local choice. Schools should have the flexibility to decide whether pupils will study for highers over one year, 18 months or two years. I understand the issue to do with university admissions, which needs careful consideration. We must try to preserve the higher as best we can, because it is one of the successes of Scottish education and has stood the test of time.

The advanced higher is also a great success story. It has grown in stature since its introduction and is highly regarded, not least by university admissions officers. We should strengthen the advanced higher. There are concerns about its availability throughout Scotland and there are issues to do with funding and restriction of pupil choice. More flexibility is needed. Schools should be prepared to work together, not just in the state sector. Where there is a strong independent sector, for example in Edinburgh, state school pupils should be able to attend independent schools to study for advanced highers and independent school pupils should be able to

attend state schools to do the same. Such an approach would very much benefit our youngsters.

We mention vocational courses in our amendment. We must not lose sight of the need for good vocational as well as good academic qualifications. We should not regard vocational qualifications as second best and somehow not as good as the academic route; we must ensure that they are an integral part of the structure.

We will support the Government motion, and we hope that the Government will support the amendment in Elizabeth Smith's name. The general direction of travel is welcome. If we can sort out problems to do with literacy and numeracy testing and qualifications for young people who choose a vocational route, we will be on the right track.

16:38

**Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** I wish the Presiding Officer and all members a happy new year. I hope that everyone is feeling refreshed, reinvigorated and perhaps even inspired. Of course, I extend my greetings to the Government front bench, although it appears that whatever inspiration is in the air did not reach the drafters of the motion. All members welcome the opportunity to debate education, but the blandness of the motion took the spring out of my step. I read the motion twice before I realised that it does not say anything. As is too often the case, it is the three Opposition amendments that get to the point and flag up issues of substance.

In having another debate on curriculum for excellence and the new examinations framework when the cabinet secretary has little of substance to say and has made little progress since we last debated the issues, the Government runs the risk of doing more harm than good. I said that the cabinet secretary has made little progress, but I think that we have gone backwards since our most recent debate on the examinable curriculum, given that she has announced a year's delay in the implementation of curriculum for excellence.

**Margaret Smith:** Does Ken Macintosh accept that the important thing is not whether the Government has U-turned and set the timetable back a year but whether we get it right, even if that takes an extra year or an extra year after that?

**Ken Macintosh:** I could not agree more with Margaret Smith. As she knows, we welcomed the year's delay; it is absolutely necessary. I apologise to the cabinet secretary because I am calling it a delay but, from reading this week's papers, I gather that we are supposed to call it a programme of extended implementation, not a delay.

The point is that we have to get it right. However, as Hugh O'Donnell pointed out, we are having another debate in the middle of the process after very little progress and are in danger of not taking everybody with us. There was consensus about the curriculum for excellence but, if the cabinet secretary and the SNP Government do not expound a clearer vision, there will be a danger of people losing confidence in where we are going.

Whether we call it a delay or an extended implementation programme, we have at least had a decision from the cabinet secretary. It is clear from the responses to the consultation—if it was not clear before that—that many difficult questions and decisions require her immediate attention. I will put a question that I have asked her before: can she describe to me in simple language how the secondary school curriculum will look under her plans? How many subjects will pupils choose at what stage? Will physics—or any of the sciences—be stand-alone subjects? What about history or geography? Will literacy and numeracy be part of English and maths or stand-alone subjects?

How can we have reached this stage in the programme of implementation without knowing the answers to some of those questions? Rhona Brankin, Murdo Fraser and Hugh O'Donnell all commented on the centrality of literacy and numeracy, but the minister's proposals on them are particularly vague. As I understand it, she has responded to criticism of her plans to introduce literacy and numeracy exams at the end of fourth year, when it would be too late to do anything about the weaknesses that they might reveal. However, by just moving the exams, she has missed the point. The concern is not so much how we assess literacy, but what we are doing to improve it. The Conservative and Labour amendments both flag up the work that needs to be done far earlier in the curriculum and in a pupil's school career—at primary school, in fact—if we are truly to make progress on what must be the cornerstone of any education system.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Does Ken Macintosh understand the difference between assessment for qualification for later life and lifelong learning and assessment for learning, the purpose of which is to improve the teaching and learning in primary school? Everybody is agreed that we need assessment to improve teaching and learning in the early years. Indeed, smaller class sizes in P1 to P3 will provide more teaching time for literacy and numeracy. Let us hear the ideas that he has for qualifications in secondary school.

**Ken Macintosh:** The cabinet secretary seems to be inhabiting a different planet from the one that I do. The Government has made no announcements of a programme for improving

literacy and numeracy. Instead, we have a focus on exactly the wrong thing: rather than tests being removed, as everybody has commented is necessary, we are getting new tests without any purpose behind them. The Scottish Government's consultation seems to suggest that, at secondary school, literacy and numeracy will not be taught as stand-alone subjects but will be examined as though they were. The minister can correct me if I am wrong, but there seems to be an assumption that all teachers will be responsible for literacy and numeracy and, therefore, that pupils will just pick them up as they go along. That is not exactly the treatment that I would expect of a priority subject and I assure the minister that parents will not be happy with that treatment either. They are unlikely to accept their children being assessed—and will certainly not accept their children being graded—in subjects that they have not been specifically taught.

Hearing the minister, I wonder whether she has listened to parents. That is a point that Margaret Smith made well earlier. I suspect that, despite the warnings that the Parliament gave her on that point last year, few parents or pupils have an inkling of what to expect from the curriculum for excellence. In fact, in her opening remarks, the cabinet secretary proudly described the members of the board of management of the curriculum for excellence as the main players in education, but it struck me that that list does not include parents. That is a rather disappointing and blinkered omission.

Several respondents to the consultation and many speakers in the debate mentioned flexibility within the curriculum and, perhaps more importantly, the limits of that flexibility. As an aside, I thought that Elizabeth Smith made a good point about the contrast between, on the one hand, talk of flexibility and, on the other hand, removing access to advanced higher.

We want teachers to be given more freedom to teach, but where does the minister draw the line? If a pupil moves from one school to another in second, third or fourth year, will they be able to continue their course of learning? Will the geography studied in Glenrothes be the same or even roughly the same as the geography studied in Greenock? Those key questions are not just for families whose children move schools; they directly impact on any externally assessed and moderated exam. We wish to see a move away from teaching to the test, but the cabinet secretary should be fully aware of the crucial importance that pupils and parents give to the qualifications that the pupils study for. To give a personal example, my eldest son is in primary 5. Under the current extended implementation programme, he will be in the second cohort experiencing the new curriculum for excellence when he enters high

school. I know that I am not alone in viewing what might lie ahead for my son with worry, rather than confidence or even certainty.

Marilyn Livingstone and others reminded us of the need to fund properly any programme of reform. The EIS in particular has warned of the dangers of trying to introduce fundamental and thoroughgoing change without providing teachers with the time and resources to do it. The cabinet secretary's announcement on that issue in her opening remarks has left me even more confused. Perhaps the minister can clarify in her closing remarks what mechanism is being used to deliver the new continuous professional development. There does not seem to be any additional money and I do not believe that she has renegotiated the concordat or single outcome agreements. Perhaps the minister has secured the agreement of her local government colleagues. I look forward to hearing exactly how the additional CPD will be guaranteed.

When the cabinet secretary announced the proposals on national qualifications, she talked about achieving transformational change in Scottish education. There appears to be no shortage of grandiose language when it comes to the new curriculum, but when we need leadership—deeds rather than words—there is none. There are practical answers to what are undoubtedly tricky questions. I urge members to support the amendments to the motion.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan):** I call on Maureen Watt to wind up the debate. You have until 4.59, minister, if you feel capable.

16:47

**The Minister for Schools and Skills (Maureen Watt):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I thank all the members who have taken part in this interesting debate. I have appreciated the contributions of members from all parties.

As the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning stressed, the key aim of curriculum for excellence is to provide a more progressive educational experience, with a greater focus on skills for learning, life and work. That will improve standards, raise achievement and provide appropriate challenge and stretch for each and every individual; and it will be enhanced by the 16+ learning choices, our new model for supporting the delivery of the senior phase of the curriculum for excellence and improving other learning pathways. Those policies will better prepare our young people for the positive and sustained post-school destinations in further and higher education and employment that we all want them to achieve.

The consultation on the next generation of national qualifications gives us a strong platform for taking those policies forward. We held this debate to give the Parliament the chance to contribute to addressing the opportunities and challenges involved in introducing a qualifications system that supports curriculum for excellence—I believe that members have done that. Mary Mulligan, Claire Baker and Ken Macintosh should realise that that was the purpose of the debate. It is insulting to the 1,800 people who responded to the consultation to say that we are not involving people. Many hundreds of people have given us their ideas. We want to ensure that we do not just present the qualifications to Parliament and that all members are involved in the process of formulating them. I thank those members who have taken on that positive role.

**Mary Mulligan:** My point was that, as Margaret Smith said earlier, probably none of us has read all 1,800 submissions. My point was really about the timing of the debate.

**Maureen Watt:** As I said, this is a process. The Ipsos MORI report is collating all the responses for the management board so that it does not have to go through all 1,800 responses. Clearly, however, Margaret Smith and others have gone through a number of the responses in order to inform themselves and take part in this debate.

There was general agreement about effective assessment, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy. The debate focused on assessment for qualifications, but members' contributions reinforced our joint aspiration to have effective teaching and assessment of those key skills for pupils between the ages of three and 18.

I wish that Karen Whitefield and Rhona Brankin had listened to the cabinet secretary when she said that we will

"ensure that literacy and numeracy are embedded at all stages. For the first time under devolution, all teachers of all subjects at all stages will be responsible for literacy and numeracy."

**Karen Whitefield:** Will the minister give way?

**Maureen Watt:** I will finish my point. Hugh O'Donnell made an important point about how teachers are involved in literacy and numeracy and, in a number of schools that I have visited that have been implementing the curriculum for excellence, the English and maths teachers are engaging with teachers in other subject areas to make sure that they are all involved in the same process.

**Elizabeth Smith:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Maureen Watt:** I want to make progress.

We are ensuring that literacy and numeracy are embedded at all stages.

**Karen Whitefield:** Will the minister explain exactly how literacy and numeracy will be embedded in the curriculum?

**Maureen Watt:** Educationists are best placed to take that forward. As politicians, we are not going to say how that will be done.

**Rhona Brankin:** As a politician, will the minister take an intervention?

**Maureen Watt:** I want to make progress. I was also an educationist.

**Elizabeth Smith:** It is true that any teacher has always been involved in teaching literacy and numeracy; there is nothing new about that. We are arguing that there should be some criteria for testing literacy and numeracy. That is the crucial point.

**Maureen Watt:** We agree with that. The outcomes and experiences in literacy and numeracy provide the framework for testing, and any assessment will have to ensure that literacy and numeracy are embedded throughout the curriculum.

I particularly liked what Margaret Smith said about learning leading assessment rather than the other way around. Coupled with assessment for learning, which we have already, that is very much the way forward. Christina McKelvie made an important point when she said that pupils and young people must be able to see not just how safe it will be to sit particular exams, but how far they can go, so that each individual is stretched.

I hope that today's debate has made it clear that the perceived narrowing of the curriculum is not happening. The general education period of S1 to S3 will allow students to broaden and deepen their learning and, as they progress through S3, they will have opportunities for greater specialisation to enable a smooth transition to qualifications. Making subject decisions at the end of S3 will give pupils a much firmer grasp of and greater commitment to the subjects that they want to study instead of making choices when they are more immature in S2. The senior phase of education will then have to enable our young people to take more qualifications during that period.

**Ken Macintosh:** Will the minister give way?

**Maureen Watt:** No; I want to make progress.

David McLetchie does not make the situation clear when he says that there is poor availability of advanced highers. In fact, record numbers of advanced highers were taken in 2008. The figure was up 5.8 per cent on the 2007 figure. The curriculum for excellence should increase collaboration among schools and partnerships with

colleges. As Elizabeth Smith said, we must ensure that there are more partnerships between schools and colleges so that pupils get the opportunity to study the subjects that they want. There are already magnificent examples of partnership working through videoconferencing and the glow programme will greatly enhance those opportunities for young people.

There was general agreement on the need to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to develop skills through practical learning. We want to continue to develop skills for work. In our skills strategy, we emphasised the importance of parity of esteem for vocational qualifications and of ensuring that such qualifications are available not just to the less able—which immediately pigeonholes people—but to academic pupils as well, so that they can broaden their range of work. As Christopher Harvie said, work experience is extremely important, too.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** On the matter of standards, what discussions have taken place and what agreement has been reached with the people who teach the teachers? If we are to have a literate school workforce, student teachers must learn grammar again when they learn to teach.

**Maureen Watt:** Ms MacDonald's point is well made, even though she has just come into the chamber. We are engaging fully with the teacher training establishments in that regard.

Marilyn Livingstone made an important point about the involvement of colleges in the qualifications debate. The colleges have been fully involved in the process; indeed, two people have been seconded to ensure that they are fully engaged. As the cabinet secretary said, it is about learning from three to 18.

The curriculum for excellence management board includes a great number of people, but we recognise that schools are the bodies that are best placed to communicate the curriculum for excellence agenda to parents. I have attended a number of Saturday workshops for parent council members that have sought to ensure that the curriculum for excellence proposals can be communicated to parents. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Could we have a little less background noise, please, so that we can hear the minister?

**Maureen Watt:** The debate has shown that we are keen to ensure that ownership of the curriculum for excellence lies primarily with the education community and wider society, not just with Government. It is crucial that Parliament and the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee continue to participate in the debate.

The importance of education to Scotland's future demands no less.

The debate has highlighted where the main challenges and opportunities lie. With the introduction of the curriculum for excellence, Scottish education is at a crossroads. We are at a point at which the curriculum for excellence can take off and make a significant difference to the attainment of all pupils. We must raise the bar as regards the expectations of all our young people so that they are well equipped to deal with not just the challenges of the current economic climate, but whatever life throws at them.

**Ken Macintosh:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Maureen Watt:** No, thanks.

That will require a higher degree of enthusiasm, drive and professionalism from all of us who are involved in education than ever before. Earlier this afternoon, the Rev Sam Torrens wished us all energy and enthusiasm. Together with our partners in education and the wider community, we as a Government are ready to meet all those challenges. Given the importance of qualifications to the nation's future, we will continue to involve Parliament as we firm up our decisions.

## Business Motions

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-3177, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for tomorrow. The motion appears in the revised section A of today's *Business Bulletin*, copies of which are available at the back of the chamber.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 8 January 2009—

after

Thursday 8 January 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

delete

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Protecting Scotland's Communities – the Scottish Government's Offender Management Plan

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time  
Europe, External Affairs and Culture;  
Education and Lifelong Learning

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: Homecoming and its Potential to Support Sustainable Economic Growth

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

and insert

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Homecoming and its Potential to Support Sustainable Economic Growth

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: The Humanitarian Disaster in Gaza

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time  
Europe, External Affairs and Culture;  
Education and Lifelong Learning

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: Protecting Scotland's Communities – the Scottish Government's Offender Management Plan

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business—[Bruce Crawford.]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** Tomorrow's business will be altered accordingly. As previously stated, copies of the revised business programme are available at the back of the chamber.

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-3169, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 14 January 2009

2.30 pm Time for Reflection  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Budget (Scotland) (No.2) Bill  
*followed by* Business Motion  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 15 January 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Health Boards (Membership and Elections) (Scotland) Bill  
*followed by* Financial Resolution: Health Boards (Membership and Elections) (Scotland) Bill  
 11.40 am General Question Time  
 12 noon First Minister's Question Time  
 2.15 pm Themed Question Time  
 Health and Wellbeing  
 2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: Forth Crossing  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 21 January 2009

2.30 pm Time for Reflection  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motion  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 22 January 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Scottish Parliamentary Pensions Bill  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business

11.40 am General Question Time  
 12 noon First Minister's Question Time  
 2.15 pm Themed Question Time  
 Rural Affairs and the Environment;  
 Justice and Law Officers  
 2.55 pm Stage 1 Debate: Flood Risk  
 Management (Scotland) Bill  
*followed by* Financial Resolution: Flood Risk  
 Management (Scotland) Bill  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business—[Bruce  
 Crawford.]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-3170, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for stage 1 of the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be extended to 13 February 2009.—[Bruce Crawford.]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Decision Time

17:01

### The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S3M-3164.3, in the name of Rhona Brankin, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3164, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on national qualifications, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

### AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)  
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)

Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

### ABSTENTIONS

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)  
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)

Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 42, Against 63, Abstentions 16.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that amendment S3M-3164.1, in the name of Elizabeth Smith, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3164, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on national qualifications, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that amendment S3M-3164.2, in the name of Margaret Smith, which seeks to amend motion S3M-3164, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on national qualifications, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S3M-3164, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on national qualifications, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the Parliament recognises the importance of developing the next generation of national qualifications in Scotland in line with the aims, vision and values of the Curriculum for Excellence, with its emphasis on equipping all young people to respond to the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century through developing their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors; further recognises the funding, resourcing and training implications of such a move; acknowledges the challenges and opportunities in taking forward the findings of the national consultation exercise and the key role to be played by local authorities, schools, colleges, universities and others in ensuring that we develop a system that meets the expectations of society, in which robust and credible assessment supports good learning and teaching and all young people have the opportunity to acquire the skills, knowledge and experience that they require to take their places in a modern society and economy, and, in particular, recognises the need to ensure that pupils in Scotland are properly schooled and tested in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy by the end of primary 7 and also to ensure that the qualifications structure better reflects the specific needs of all pupils, whether they wish to pursue courses that are more academically focused or more vocationally focused.

## Newsquest (Herald and Times) Ltd (Job Cuts)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S3M-3038, in the name of Sandra White, on devastating cuts at *The Herald* and the *Evening Times*. The debate will be concluded without any questions being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament condemns the announcement that all staff at The Herald and Evening Times in Glasgow will be made redundant and have to re-apply for their jobs under new terms and conditions, which it believes will inevitably leave them worse off, and further believes that this reorganisation will have a damaging effect on editorial independence among the titles and should be re-evaluated.

17:04

**Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** Since its inception in 1783 as the *Glasgow Advertiser*, *The Herald* has always been held in high regard for the quality of its journalism and its proud editorial independence. It is one of the oldest newspapers in the world and has come a long way from its humble beginnings. In 1876, it was joined by its sister paper, the *Evening Times*; more recently, it was joined by the *Sunday Herald*, which was launched in 1999.

Despite fears over the continuation of those proud traditions, the titles were sold off after the Competition Commission received assurances from Gannett. The commission stated:

"Gannett said that it was committed to maintaining the autonomy of local editors, and planned to manage the titles locally in Scotland ... In our view, commercial considerations were also likely to deter any attempt to adopt a different approach for the titles ... As a final safeguard, we also believed that Gannett would not wish to risk its reputation (especially among competition authorities) with regard to any future inquiries into newspaper acquisitions by Gannett. We did not therefore expect the transfer adversely to affect the editorial freedom, editorial stance, content or quality of the SMG titles, accurate presentation of news, or freedom of expression."

In my view, the takeover of the newspapers has affected all of the aforementioned and put in jeopardy the hard-earned reputation of the titles for fairness, justice and freedom of expression. Indeed, I believe that when those issues were raised with John Hutton MP, he agreed that that was the case.

The draconian antics of management, which have resulted in journalists on all three titles being made redundant and invited to reapply for jobs in the new structure, call into question the assurances that were given to the Competition Commission and raise some serious points.

First, I ask the minister to consider making representations to the Competition Commission on the matter. Secondly, I ask Gannett's management to pay close attention to the commission's final safeguard, which was that

"Gannett would not wish to risk its reputation (especially among competition authorities) with regard to any future inquiries into newspaper acquisitions by Gannett."

Although it seems that Gannett has paid little or no attention to the workforce or politicians on the matter, I hope that, as a successful business, it will pause, consider its future business prospects and re-evaluate the whole process. Let us be clear that the process will undoubtedly result in worse pay and conditions for staff, which is clearly unacceptable given that Newsquest made a profit of more than £23 million in 2007, bringing its total profit since 2004 close to £100 million.

The conditions under which staff find themselves working will also undoubtedly deteriorate under the new structure that is being proposed. That is particularly worrying given that a recent survey that was undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive revealed that, even before the current plans were announced, alarming levels of stress among production staff were being recorded in all areas, including demands, control, manager support, roles and the threat of change—not surprisingly, that was seen to be producing the most stress. Indeed, the survey indicated that, for six of the seven markers, urgent action was required to reduce stress levels.

It is wholly unacceptable that management are pressing ahead with changes that have not been thought through and which will lead to more stress among the staff. I therefore ask that the minister also consider asking the HSE to look into these deeply worrying proposals, which are clearly having a detrimental effect on staff health. We cannot expect staff not to be suffering under these terrible conditions—they were doing so even before they were told that they would have to reapply for their jobs, which they do not even know whether they will get.

The problem has been compounded by the lack of information given to staff. We learn that Donald Martin has set deadlines for staff to reapply for jobs without even giving them information about the jobs for which they are applying. Frankly, that beggars belief.

How staff have been and are being treated is unacceptable and, as has been noted, possibly illegal. I would be interested to know whether the issue of the legality of the group's approach to staff was raised at the minister's recent meeting with Tim Blott and Donald Martin, and, if so, exactly what was said. If the issue was not raised, I would ask the minister to raise it.

Let us be in no doubt that the titles and coverage will be affected. It seems that there are already plans to scrap the third edition of the *Evening Times*, which means that there will be only one edition available to the public to buy on the streets—the early morning edition; the second edition is for home delivery only. I understand that an edition of *The Herald* has also been scrapped. These are worrying times, not only for staff but for the readership.

It might seem strange to hear politicians standing up for the press, as we do not always agree with it. However, all of us truly value a vibrant and diverse press, even if it does not always write what we would like it to. There must be a completely democratic and independent press.

It struck me as strange that coverage of this important event has been somewhat muted. I urge all members of the media to stand together to highlight the owners' unacceptable approach and, by supporting the workers at the titles, ensure that other journalists and broadcasters do not suffer the same fate.

The process must be halted until the Competition Commission and the HSE are given an opportunity to deliberate on the matter and meaningful consultation is entered into with all parties, including the workforce of the titles and the National Union of Journalists.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There will be four-minute speeches, and there will be no one-minute warning.

17:11

**David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab):** I should declare an interest, as I have been a member of the NUJ for more than 30 years and am a former official of the union.

I am astounded by what is happening at *The Herald* and the *Evening Times*. It reminds me of an experience that I had when I was employed by the *Daily Record* almost 20 years ago, when the late Robert Maxwell tried to introduce changes there. He did not mess about; he just sent a letter to people's houses telling them that they were sacked. The man who delivered that letter to my house was chased down the driveway by a very irate Mrs Whitton.

Even so, I am astounded. Many of my constituents work on the papers. One of them happens to be someone whom I worked with many years ago. A few days ago, I wrote to him to ask what was happening. He sent me back an e-mail to tell me that the original deadline for applications had been put back from January 5 to January 12. He went on to say:

"many people are worried about their chances of retaining their jobs, and some - graphic artists and imaging, for example - feel there is no role for them: ie, their jobs are actually redundant but they are not being excused the charade of an interview and just being allowed to go with NewsQuest redundancy terms (two weeks for each year's service, capped at 20 years)."

I should point out that many of the staff at *The Herald* have 30 or even 40 years of service.

My constituent continued:

"Salary-wise, if you land the job that is closest to what you have been doing you will retain your current salary. If you are offered a lesser job, you retain your salary but it will be frozen until the rest catch up.

There has been a slight cut in holidays ... but the biggest downside is the new working conditions: production comes into line with content provision and loses the nine-day fortnight; there will be seven-day working and an arduous rotating shift pattern".

That shift pattern will involve shifts starting at 10 in the morning and 2 in the afternoon and also a late shift.

My constituent continued:

"Everyone will work for all three titles, the web and edit videos. In effect, all three papers cease to exist as separate entities and ... the quality will plummet to the lowest common denominator ... the daily arts page in *The Herald* will cease and ... the ABC section will be taken from *The Herald* to boost the *Sunday Herald* ... staff on the business section were cut long ago on the understanding that they could top-up with casuals. Now the desk has been told: no more casuals."

That is happening at a time when, as Sandra White mentioned, stress levels among the workforce are disgracefully high. The fact that there will be no more casuals will probably mean that the stress levels will go through the roof.

My constituent continued:

"the editor is on record as saying that we were all being made redundant because we were obstructing change."

That language has been changed, and the people are now "at risk of redundancy". However, there is a caveat, as my constituent explains:

"If you leave now, you are deemed to have quit and will receive nothing. If you are 'lucky' enough to be offered a job but want to leave, they say you will not qualify for redundancy."

I wrote to Mr Martin, the new group editor, to complain about the bully-boy tactics, and he wrote back to me a few days ago. He said:

"I can assure you there are no bully-boy tactics. We are in close, at times daily, discussion with the NUJ Scottish Organiser from whom we are happy to take feedback and constructive input."

I spoke to the NUJ organiser, Paul Holleran, today, and he told me that he has not met Donald Martin personally for six months. However, if Mr Martin is looking for some constructive input, I suggest that he sit down and negotiate properly

with the NUJ and announce a decent redundancy package from the £23 million profit that the group made last year. That way, he might just get a decent workforce and maintain a paper that has a proud and long record in Scotland.

17:15

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP):** I thank Sandra White for bringing the debate to the chamber. As has been said, it is really a debate on workers' rights and the relationships between owners and management, and employees.

Happily, it is fairly rare these days for a company to ride roughshod over a loyal workforce to the extent that Gannett and Newsquest are doing in this dispute. It is obvious that they do things differently in America. The legality of making workers apply for their own jobs is dubious, but the morality is simply contemptible. The *Evening Times*, *Herald* and *Sunday Herald* stable is profitable to the tune of £23.4 million per annum, and awards have been won by all three newspapers and by their journalistic and editorial staff. There is, therefore, no business basis for the undermining of editorial staff morale.

The staff are dedicated professionals who produce a high-quality product, but it is clear that they are undervalued by owners for whom squeezing out the last penny of profit is more important than the quality of their newspapers or, indeed, the quality of life of their employees. The suggestion that editorial staff at these three nationally important newspapers should float between titles, with a lesser status than they have at present and with correspondingly poorer wages and conditions, will inevitably result in a lessening of the quality of the newspapers. It is a bean-counter mentality of cutting margins and knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing.

As has been said, the suggestion breaches the commitment that the group made to the Competition Commission in 2003 when it acquired the titles to develop and properly invest in the newspapers. The staff at the *Evening Times*, *The Herald* and the *Sunday Herald* were employed at levels of wages and conditions of service for which they had applied and which suited their levels of qualification, expertise and lifestyles. It is entirely false to suggest, as management have, that those jobs at those levels have in reality been made redundant, so Newsquest is on the shakiest of ground in issuing redundancy notices. It must speak to the unions seriously and address the concerns that its actions have raised among its staff.

I for one am willing to call for a boycott of all Newsquest titles and products—one is already in progress among growing numbers of Scotland's

discerning newspaper-buying public—should the obduracy and intransigence of the owners and management continue. That appears to be the only form of action that they will understand.

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** I understand the point that the member makes, but surely a boycott would be counterproductive.

**Bill Kidd:** I have spoken to the unions about it, and they believe that the public are already carrying out a boycott. A boycott would only be counterproductive if it continued over a long period. It seems that the company wants only to make as much money as it can in as short a time as possible.

17:18

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** I thank Sandra White for lodging the motion and for signing my own motion on the same issue.

Such is the outrage at the actions of the new editor in chief of Newsquest (Herald and Times), Donald Martin, that about 60 MSPs signed one or more of the three motions that were lodged when it was announced that *Sunday Herald*, *Herald* and *Evening Times* staff would be made redundant. As we have heard, the deadline for people to apply for their own jobs is Monday 12 January. They have not done so, because there is still no information, which is appalling. Some senior journalists would lose up to £15,000 to £20,000 a year. This is no way to treat the press in Scotland.

Newsquest does not seem to care about the widespread opposition and concern. The group is refusing to negotiate and seems determined to impose a settlement. It does not seem to care about industrial relations and the agreements that it made with the unions, and it does not seem to care about the quality and diversity of the Scottish media, having shown little regard for the assurances that it gave the Competition Commission. What it does seem to care about is money. The group is not in financial difficulty. It makes massive profits, but it clearly feels that it does not make enough. It is difficult not to conclude that the cuts are the result of greed and not need.

If the group goes ahead with its plan to merge the titles, it is likely that 30 to 40 jobs will be lost. Those who remain are likely to be on reduced pay and conditions, including lower holiday entitlement and new, enforced shift patterns. Added to the existing concerns about stress and other health and safety issues, that cannot be good for the staff or the quality of the newspapers.

On the adoption of new production technology, the NUJ notes:

“every other media employer in Scotland is working with the union to try to handle these changes in a civilised manner.”

I believe that the group's actions are unwarranted and unacceptable. Its plans represent a significant threat to the health of the newspaper industry in Scotland, and we in the Scottish Parliament must oppose them. The plans might increase the group's short-term profitability, but downgrading the quality of its product is not a recipe for sustainability. For the sake of Scotland and its media, the *Herald* group should take a step back, rethink its strategy, and work with the NUJ to achieve sustainable, long-term success.

17:21

**Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP):** I congratulate Sandra White on securing this important debate, and all the MSPs who signed the motion.

I am not surprised by the support for the Newsquest staff. For a democracy to flourish, it needs a few key components, one of which is a vibrant media. At present, Scotland has a vibrant media—albeit that there are signs of contraction—but the threat against the three Newsquest titles will surely send shock waves through all media organisations in Scotland. *The Herald* and the *Evening Times* are institutions in Scotland, and the *Sunday Herald* has proved in the past decade to be a quality addition to the newspaper stands. The more quality publications we have, the better, as far as I am concerned.

There is another vital issue, which I suggest is probably the most important thing to be considered—the staff. Other members have already touched on that. The threat to the workers in the Newsquest organisation is appalling. They will be wondering what will happen to them in the coming weeks and months—they have already had a few weeks of uncertainty. Some will be lucky enough to get their jobs back, albeit on worse conditions, but what will be their fate in the medium term, never mind the long term?

From what I have been led to believe, communication from management to the staff has been practically non-existent, which has created even more uncertainty and apprehension among the staff. I have been informed that those who are taken back will work for all three titles. As the publications have different sets of working hours, will that mean that the staff will work from 6 am to 12 midnight in order to cover shifts? David Whitton said that the shift will probably start at 10 am, but I have been informed that it will start at 6 am, which just emphasises the lack of information and communication from management to staff. Also, will the staff work six or seven days a week to ensure that the publications are covered? Those

questions might seem ridiculous, but I assure members that they are legitimate concerns that have been put to me by staff who do not have a clue about what the future holds for them at Newsquest. It could be said that those questions are not exclusive to Newsquest and the three titles—I accept that—but as this evening's debate is about the future of the titles and the staff, it is legitimate to highlight the questions.

As things stand, it might seem to the naked eye that the management's actions are the actions of a drive to cut costs and increase profits. I do not know whether that is the case, and I am not suggesting that it is, but it could be suggested that such a strategy is under way. I hope that a profit maximisation strategy is not under way. The Newsquest products are quality products that target different markets and have the right to an equal place in the competitive media.

In various sectors of the industry, competition can occasionally be positive, stimulating improvements and leading to better products. Scotland's written media is one such sector; the greater the range of available written publications, the better served Scotland will be. Indeed, the more that interest in on-line versions of newspapers increases, the wider the range of publications that will be available throughout the world.

Newsquest has three different quality products that provide huge benefits to Scotland and ensure competition in the industry. The threat to the future of the titles and the staff is worrying and will concern everyone involved in the Scottish media. I urge Newsquest management to think again about its proposals, to communicate with its staff, to provide genuine assurances about the future of the publications and to invest in the publications. Increased investment will reap greater moral and financial rewards, while short-term cuts will simply devastate morale, the quality of the product, their readership, advertising and—ultimately—the publications themselves.

17:25

**Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)**  
**(Con):** I congratulate Sandra White on securing the debate. However, although her motion refers specifically to the *Herald* group, I point out that the whole Scottish newspaper sector faces a bleak new year.

I happen to know a bit about Scottish daily newspapers. My first job on leaving school was with the *Dundee Courier and Advertiser* group, and the girl I married was a newspaper journalist who worked for a number of Scottish dailies, including *The Herald*. One of our sons is a writer for a Scottish national daily and—until she saw

which way the wind was blowing—his wife held a senior editorial position with the *Evening Times*.

There is a 1960s pop song that tells us that “Even the Bad Times Are Good”. In the half century or so that I have known the Scottish newspaper industry, even the good times have, all too often, been bad. Periods of relatively healthy profits failed to silence the constant calls for belt-tightening and rumours of job cuts. When the old hot-metal days gave way to a bewildering array of cheaper and faster printing methods, typesetters and compositors were the first victims. We journalists kidded ourselves that wordsmiths would always be needed, but not quite believing our own bluster, some of us moved into broadcasting, while others even went into politics. Now journos who once pontificated about so-called luddite print unions are seeing an army of unpaid bloggers threatening their livelihoods.

The *Herald* group has been caught up in a tsunami that is sweeping through the world-wide newspaper industry. This is not just a Scottish or United Kingdom phenomenon; the American owners of *The Herald* are applying cost-cutting methods to their titles all over the US. It is no secret that every Scottish newspaper publisher is seeking to cut costs. Sadly, that is going to mean job losses and, eventually, the probable loss of Scottish newspaper titles. The credit crunch is just the latest blow to hit newspapers, which have seen circulation and advertising collapse as electronic publishing comes of age.

Was the Gannett group, which owns *The Herald*, right to fire its staff and require them to reapply for fewer jobs with less favourable conditions of employment? By normal UK labour relations standards, it was absolutely not right. Gannett will discover that, when newspapers dispense with those who gather news, they are sowing the seeds of their own demise. Either newspapers are about breaking news or they are about nothing.

However, checking the share price of any Scottish newspaper group is like a glimpse at Armageddon. Newspapers survive not on circulation, but on advertising. Circulation is important only in as much as it justifies the price that the newspaper charges to carry ads. With circulation and advertising both in free-fall, we are witnessing the newspaper version of the perfect storm.

That is not the end of the bad news. Until now, national and local newspapers have been able to rely on councils and the Government advertising recruitment opportunities, and publishing public and statutory notices. However, local authorities and the Government are turning to the electronic media. Today, I have asked written questions about the amount that is spent by the Scottish Government on local and national press

advertising per annum, and I have requested similar figures from the councils. Clearly, government at all levels must seek to save costs. As the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism will no doubt confirm, the Scottish Government is in five different areas of Scotland trialling the publication of public and statutory notices on the web. If the trials are successful, it could mean a massive loss of advertising revenue for the Scottish press, and newspapers going to the wall.

We can sit here deploring Gannett's heavy-handed labour relations—which, I add, I do not condone—but the fact is that Scotland's newspaper industry is in deep crisis. Although we should be grateful to Sandra White for lodging her motion, the issues go beyond the fates of individual *Herald* journalists, important though they are. I believe that Parliament is in the very near future bound to return to the wider debate about newspapers.

17:30

**John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I also congratulate Sandra White on securing this evening's debate on an important issue. I know that her motion and other motions have received a lot of support.

I declare an interest as a former National Union of Journalists member and a former union official. Some people might not know that many people who work for trade unions, as well as people who work in the media, opt for the NUJ as their union of choice. I should also mention my background as someone who has been on the well-trodden path of having worked on the other side—the management side—of industrial relations. In my time there, I felt that good management of industrial relations is at the centre of any successful business. Having a good relationship with trade unions makes a real difference in workplaces.

Of course we must recognise that the industry is changing and faces other pressures, but lessons can be learned from looking at other industries. The approach that has been taken by the management of *The Herald* and the *Evening Times* is not what is needed when an industry is changing. Management needs to engage positively with the workforce and with its trade union representatives. The manufacturing sector provides recent examples of how to face global pressures. That sector has managed to come through those pressures and to sustain its workers through positive industrial relations and positive engagement. People in the media industries that are now facing pressures should look to that as an example.

If we reach the stage where people on *The Herald* and the *Evening Times* end up being forced out the door, we will be offering an open invitation to other titles to conclude that, if those newspapers can get away with it, other employers can, too.

**David Whitton:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**John Park:** Sorry—I must make progress.

We need to send a clear message from Parliament that that is not the case.

Sandra White asked questions about the legality of recent moves by the group's senior management. If those moves are not illegal, they are certainly immoral. Again, we need to send a clear message that, in 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland, it is not acceptable to do business in that way. Changes cannot be simply imposed in a modern workplace.

There is an old saying that, if a management approaches things in a certain way, it will get the unions that it deserves. However, to be honest, I do not know who deserves the sort of management approach that we have seen. My understanding of how the NUJ has done its business in the challenging times of recent years and on this issue is that it has dealt with matters sensibly by engaging with and representing its members properly. It has also engaged with management to try to make a difference and to find a solution. At the end of the day, people want the same solution. The union might have ideas that are different from management's about how to get there, but negotiation and discussion are needed to find that common ground and to move forward.

I hope that the minister will join Parliament in sending a clear message that the approach that has been taken by the group's management is completely unacceptable—it is out of kilter with Scotland's approach to doing business in 2009. That important message should also be given by the Scottish Government alongside Parliament.

We also need to keep in mind that we are talking about individual workers who will have been worried over Christmas and who will be worrying now. At a difficult economic time, when everyone is facing many different concerns, worry about one's job, which is such a big part of a person's life, makes a real difference to family life and, to my mind, adds unnecessary stress. In thinking about those people, I hope that we can send a clear message tonight that we are fully behind the workers at *The Herald* and the *Evening Times*.

17:34

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I add my thanks to Sandra White for lodging the motion.

Sandra White and other members have mentioned the sometimes love-hate relationship that exists between politicians and the media. The mutual respect between the two is not always entirely evident on every page of every newspaper or in every political diary, but that mutual respect exists. For a properly functioning democracy, a free and high-quality press is vital. Its importance is far greater than that of, for example, the blogosphere, although I would certainly defend the freedom of both.

High-quality journalism is necessary for high-quality press. High-quality journalism is not the same as reporting and it is not just copy or text. It depends not only on journalists themselves, but on the many other professionals who make the end product possible. Decent treatment of employees is essential not only for justice but for a high-quality, professional product.

Ted Brocklebank urges us to recognise the reality that the industry faces. I agreed with many of his comments, but I disagreed with some of them. Newspapers around the world are recognising that people have more choices of where to go for their news these days—where to go for their immediate coverage. However, journalism is something different. It is not just coverage or reporting. The thing that will make me carry on buying a high-quality newspaper, as well as going to the blogs, the BBC website and so on, is high-quality journalism—the kind of thing that we know we will get when we buy the paper.

What should Newsquest/Gannett or any other owner of a newspaper do to ensure that they can carry on safeguarding the product for the future? It should certainly not do what it is doing at the moment. How would we feel about MSPs who decided to treat their staff in a similar way by announcing sudden cuts just before Christmas, with mass redundancy and rerecruitment? How would we feel if we learned that one of our colleagues was scrapping an agreement that had been reached through collective negotiation through the unions; reducing working conditions in relation to sick pay, hours and shift patterns; cutting key posts and redefining hours; and causing increased stress among the remaining employees and a feeling that those who remained were working for a less-valued organisation, which was being not nurtured but neglected by its management? We would be ashamed of colleagues who treated their employees like that. If they were doing it at a time when our allowances for paying staff were being increased, we would be rightly outraged.

That scenario is analogous to what Newsquest/Gannett is doing. The resources that it has available and its profits are increasing and yet that is how it is treating its staff. That kind of behaviour will lead to a denuded and diminished product, not to a product that will have a future in the new reality, which Ted Brocklebank described accurately, in which people have many more choices of where to go for coverage.

If a public sector agency of the Scottish Government was treating its staff in this way in similar circumstances, we would not be debating it at 5 o'clock in a members' business debate; it would be the subject of anger and outrage every Thursday afternoon at 12 o'clock until it stopped. That is what should happen in the case of Newsquest/Gannett. Its behaviour should stop. That should be the clear message from the Parliament tonight.

17:38

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I declare an interest as a loyal, long-standing reader—notwithstanding my geographical location—of *The Herald* and the *Sunday Herald*, both of which I value.

Other members have dealt with employment rights. I, too, attended the NUJ briefing. I am absolutely astonished at what appears to be a rather large coach and horses being driven straight through employment legislation—in effect, people are being sacked. A coach and horses is also being driven through equality legislation, given the proposed changes in work shift patterns.

I say to Patrick Harvie that if any of us did something similar in the Parliament, we would be before an industrial tribunal—and all over the newspapers—without our feet touching the ground. There are some laws for the newspaper proprietors and others for politicians. As John Park said, if the newspaper proprietors are not breaking the letter of the law—which I dispute—they are certainly breaking the spirit of the law.

At a human level, we have to consider the abysmal treatment of employees, especially, but not exclusively, those who are long serving and who have probably worked beyond the call of duty. Like others, I would call a halt while unions and management discuss the position that lies before them.

I appreciate what Ted Brocklebank said. We all know that these are hard times for newspapers—although they are not so hard for *The Herald* stable, given the money that it is making—but their owners should not be acting in this bludgeoning way. I say to David Whitton that if Mr Martin says that such behaviour is not bullying, I do not want to meet him on a darkened stairhead at night.

A broader issue is the loss of diversity in journalism, to which Patrick Harvie referred. Scotland has four broadsheets, which are geographically based: *The Press and Journal*, *The Courier*—I am obliged to Ted Brocklebank for reminding me of that—*The Scotsman* and *The Herald*. All have served and some currently serve their readerships in a good old-fashioned fashion and some of them are surviving. They reflect the Scottish geographical loyalty to newspapers and I do not want that to end.

I mention in passing the absolute uselessness—at least previously—of the Competition Commission. I understand that the rules have now changed, so it can reopen and review the decision that was made in 2003, when Newsquest and Gannett gave undertakings from which they have walked away. There is no point in having a Competition Commission whose rules do not have to be paid attention to.

Where is the management behaviour leading? The individual journalists experience injustice. The protection of employment rights is disregarded. Broadsheet news coverage in Scotland is eroded. There is further erosion of quality journalism—on which I agree with Patrick Harvie—such as specialist and informed reporting and investigative journalism, which sometimes takes time but can dig out nuggets of information. Democracy is diminished by the enfeebling of what is called—rightly—the fourth estate. That is the broader picture.

It is said that the relationship between the politician and the journalist is like that between the dog and the lamp post—I forget which is which. I have far more regard for the political journalists whom we in the chamber know. They do not just do our bidding; they put us to the test.

We need quality journalism to shine a keen light on the actions not only of the Parliament, but of Westminster and of the wider world. We need it to expose those who buy power and influence; to expose charlatans, whether large or small; and to bring to our comfortable breakfast table—reading a paper is different from surfing the internet—the harshest reports and comments on our man-made disasters, whether they are in Iraq or Gaza.

The effect of the proposed demise of the staff and the papers in the stable goes beyond the readership, so I support Ted Brocklebank's proposal for a wider review of the service that newspapers do Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Given the number of members who are still waiting to speak, I am minded to accept a motion under rule 8.14.3 of standing orders to extend the debate to allow the remaining two back-bench speakers four minutes each, before the minister speaks.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended until 5.57 pm.—[Sandra White.]

*Motion agreed to.*

17:42

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** I am pleased that Sandra White secured the debate: the action of Newsquest's management in the past few months should be exposed because of how it has attempted to achieve modernisation. As John Park said, if Newsquest gets away with it, I am afraid that some employers will think that that is how to do business.

The issue is not change itself—everyone understands that modernisation of the newspaper industry is inevitable; the question is how the industry chooses to change. When change occurs, people must be carried with it and be allowed to embrace it.

By all accounts, the management's view even of how it will run the three newspapers is misguided. As Christine Grahame said, each has a different character, but the management intends to roll up the new contract of employment for journalists so that they write articles not for specific papers, but for a general pot. That denies the fundamental and important relationship that has always existed between journalists and their sources. That is certainly the school of thought from which I come.

A serious discussion is needed with the trade union—the workforce knows as much as the management about how the industry works. Only by sitting down together can a constructive way forward be found.

The debate is helpful, because it gives the Parliament another opportunity to express the view that such behaviour is not expected from Scotland-based companies. Sacking the workforce to create an atmosphere of change by fear is wrong and we should say so, as we are doing tonight.

*The Herald* was one of the newspapers that lobbied the Parliament to stop the BBC spending £68 million to free up the way for online development. If I had known then that *The Herald* would go down the route that its owners have taken, I would not have lobbied the BBC on the point.

When I raised this issue with the First Minister at First Minister's question time on 4 December, he rightly said that it is one that *The Herald* would have featured in an editorial. I hope that the debate is reported. I believe that the Press Association is covering it. I hope that it gets the attention it deserves in the newspapers that should cover it.

As the *Herald* group is based in my constituency, I have taken a special interest in this issue as an MSP but also as a Labour spokesperson, trade unionist and human being. The way in which the company sacked its staff and revised job descriptions to introduce lesser terms and conditions is fundamentally wrong. I cannot agree more with Patrick Harvie on the need to maintain standards, including in contracts of employment. That is the only way in which to retain the best people for our industry. Poorer terms and conditions make for unhappy workforces, and unhappy workforces are never a part of high-quality industries.

The situation has exposed flaws in employment law when it comes to redundancy. That is a matter for Westminster to decide upon, but anyone with even some knowledge of the law would surely believe that what has happened is fundamentally illegal given that it has weakened the position of the workforce. It seems that management can override redundancy law. The sanctions against such employers appear not to be strong enough. The law on redundancy should be clearer cut. I have for many years considered that revision of our redundancy laws is needed. I hope that Westminster will look into the matter.

It is right for the Parliament to speak out on the subject. All members agree on that. We all know that change is inevitable—times are hard and the industry faces serious challenges in the years ahead—but we must keep up the pressure on the company, as what it has done will affect standards. The people we represent want high-quality news. They will not get it if this situation is allowed to continue.

17:47

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** I will try to be brief in picking up where Pauline McNeill left off.

Sandra White has done the workers in the *Herald* group a service by securing the debate, but in doing so she has also opened a can of worms. There is a great deal that we in this Parliament cannot do. Ted Brocklebank was the first to analyse properly the fact that we are talking not about a little Scottish problem, but about a national one. Although each of us can feel heart sorry for all the Scottish families that are represented in the workforce across the three titles, they form part of a much wider movement.

As Pauline McNeill and other members correctly said, the important issue in the debate is the way in which the situation was handled. The textbook case in front of us, which David Whitton will recollect, as do I, is that once Rupert Murdoch had gone to Wapping and done it—as the headlines

said, it was *The Sun* what done it—the way was open for Robert Maxwell to copy him. I remember the razor wire that was put up around the perimeter of *The Record* offices. People questioned why it had been done, but the tsunami had started and was carrying all before it. Given the current economic climate, I doubt very much whether this or any other Government will take on any employer who behaves as Newsquest is behaving.

I think that there is a piece of legislation before Westminster that will place wider civic and public-spirited duties on shareholders. We could investigate that. Perhaps we could also encourage Scottish shareholders of the *Herald* group to exercise more care over their stewardship as shareholders—it is possible.

This Parliament cannot sort the situation out, but we could agree to host a seminar to examine the future of mass-media communication along the lines of those that we have held in the past, such as the event in which Bill Gates was involved. It is essential for a democracy to have mass-media communication. If anyone thinks that the blogosphere will take the place of the responsible journalism of the past that helped to build democracy, civil liberties and natural justice in this country, they are out of their minds and ignoring the patently obvious. There is a role that we can play: we cannot sort out industrial relations, but we can take the side of the workers. In this situation, they are in the right.

Circulation is falling, as Newsquest knows. It also knows that advertising is vanishing like snow off a dyke and that the situation will get even worse over the next year—but it also has responsibilities as management. I am not on its side, but I am willing to help it behave better, just as I am willing, as part of the Parliament, to help with the bigger picture. We might be able to bring people together to establish how to manage mass communications of information. If we do not, people who are less well intentioned might well do so.

17:50

**The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather):** I congratulate Sandra White on securing the debate and voicing her concerns for the staff, legacy and editorial independence of the *Herald* titles. I acknowledge the strong and unanimous views that have been expressed. This is probably the best members' business debate that I have attended. The quality has been terrific, and I can assure Sandra White that we will keep all representation options open.

Members will know that I cannot intervene directly in an industrial dispute, but this case is

significant on several levels, which is why I have made a point of meeting representatives of the unions and Newsquest over the past few weeks. I have urged both sides in the dispute to come together for the benefit of all involved. We stand willing to take part in any follow-up meetings if it is deemed helpful. We want to help the titles endure and grow and protect Scottish values and cohesion in the workplace.

Polarisation and drastic action are always a matter of regret, as they always result in suboptimal outcomes. As John Park mentioned, better positive engagement is being achieved elsewhere. I understand that there is an example in Wales of Newsquest and the NUJ doing something similar to what JCB has done recently—showing that the two sides can work together. I have always favoured a better way. It is clear to me from conversations that I have had that such an option still exists in this case and that both sides want the titles to endure and grow in the long term. It is a matter of regret that we are where we are; I am determined that we should learn and propagate a lesson from what is happening.

**David Whitton:** Will the minister give way?

**Jim Mather:** I am keen to get as constructive a statement as possible on the record and to send a clear message in relation to what John Park said. If I have time at the end, I will gladly take Mr Whitton's intervention.

Unfortunately, the approach that is currently being taken is legal, although it sits very uncomfortably with Scottish values and Scottish standards and aspirations for industrial cohesion in what are challenging times. I am sure that, in their heart of hearts, the local management of Newsquest know that such drastic actions play badly in Scotland. I sense both their embarrassment and a desire to find a better way.

Meanwhile, there are some real questions that must be answered by those who are responsible for framing employment law in Scotland. The point needs to be reinforced that, as long as the UK Government retains responsibility for that, it must place the needs, concerns and values of the Scottish people at the heart of what it does. That has been shown tonight in members' speeches. Scots do not want the approach that has been adopted at *The Herald* and the *Evening Times* to be taken elsewhere in the newspaper industry or in other sectors.

Like Ted Brocklebank and Margo MacDonald, we recognise the challenge that the sector faces as new players with lower overheads and lower marginal costs move into the field. Competition is tough. Not only that, but people are accessing news media differently and are becoming more

reluctant to pay for it. News and commentary are no longer static products. Consumers expect a more immediate and interactive service, so the business and business models are rapidly changing.

Undoubtedly, however, there are opportunities for established players such as *The Herald* and the *Evening Times*. Consumer trust is a critical element in the sector, especially in this electronic age, and those titles have that. *The Herald* has been building trust with the people of Scotland for more than 200 years, and that is a huge asset. Large monolithic websites do not necessarily attract customer loyalty and love, so there is space to develop something innovative and challenging in Scotland. This country has a tradition of large, voracious newspaper readerships. There is every reason to believe that modern, younger Scots will respond positively to modern services that are produced here in Scotland. That is a legacy that we have an obligation to honour and develop.

Any Scotland-based service that is to be successful must have the interests and concerns of Scots at the heart of its activity, or Scots will not use it. That point is registering with the staff and unions in question.

There is a business case for a better way forward. The experience of the 21<sup>st</sup> century tells us that most successful businesses increasingly operate in partnership with their employees. In all truly successful and long-living companies, success is based on a worthy, unifying purpose that is to do with developing mutual respect and building in customer dependence. That is the only way of guaranteeing the future that everyone wants and delivering sustainable growth that is meaningful at corporate level to employees, managers and shareholders.

Most management teams think that people resist change, but my experience tells me that people resist change when it is imposed on them—if change is not imposed, it is not resisted.

**David Whitton:** I am sure that the minister knows that The Scotsman Publications Ltd is engaged in negotiations with staff. I use the word "negotiations" in its proper sense, because management has sat down with the unions to discuss the proper way forward. I am sure that the minister welcomes that approach as opposed to the approach of Newsquest management, which has been to impose change on staff.

**Jim Mather:** I do indeed.

Staff at the Newsquest titles are committed to helping to grow the titles over the long term. The shareholders need such growth, without which there is no longer any shareholder value. We know that if a business is to endure and grow it must adapt, innovate and continue to do better,

which requires cohesion and win-win deals for everyone who is involved.

**Christine Grahame:** Will the minister give way?

**Jim Mather:** I want to make key points in my final minute.

The company has survived over the years, and previous generations of staff have shown great flexibility—there is no reason to believe that that cannot happen again. The company must win hearts and minds, as its predecessors must have done, and I urge it to make a final attempt to do so. I understand that the company is between a rock and a hard place, but what it is doing is no way to win hearts and minds.

**Sandra White:** Will the minister give way?

**Jim Mather:** I want to get a key point on the record.

Margo MacDonald suggested that a seminar be held. I have persuaded Tim Blott, in his role as president of the Scottish Daily Newspaper Society, to bring together a wide range of people who have a stake in the sector's future success in Scotland. Tim Blott and Paul Holleran have both confirmed that they will come together for that. The approach matches what we have done with 46 other sectoral groups in Scotland and can help us to find a better way forward. By bringing the right people together in a single room we can begin to unleash the potential for collaboration and achieve the outcome to which I think Margo MacDonald was alluding.

*Meeting closed at 17:57.*



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