

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 16 September 2009

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 16 September 2009

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good afternoon. As always, our first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Father Jim McGarry, of St Clare's church, Easterhouse, Glasgow.

Father Jim McGarry (St Clare's, Easterhouse): In 13 years of living and working in Easterhouse, I cannot remember a wetter summer, but we did not let the weather dampen our celebrations. St Clare's church and St Benedict's church are celebrating the golden jubilees of their foundation. The parishes have been in Easterhouse since the beginning of the scheme and they still make a big contribution to the life of the area. Not only that, I remind people that our parishes stand on the fields of the former Bishops of Glasgow of the 13th century. We stand on holy ground; we build on what has gone before us.

Another golden jubilee: a former parish priest came back to celebrate his golden jubilee of ordination—50 years of priestly commitment. There was then a celebration to end 21 years of ministry in Easterhouse by the Daughters of Charity. The sisters will be sorely missed on the streets of Easterhouse. Finally, to round off a summer of celebrations, we had a diamond wedding anniversary: John and Sadie, 60 years married, more than 50 of which were lived out in Easterhouse.

Celebrating such events is very important. They proclaim another version of the Easterhouse story—the one that you do not read about in the papers—and speak to us about dedication and love, fidelity and stability, service and courageous commitment in the community. Such qualities reveal the true dignity and immense possibilities within every human being. Such qualities cannot be bought in, or legislated for, but I firmly believe that they can be taught, affirmed, and treasured.

This summer, Pope Benedict issued a social encyclical to the church and world: “Caritas in Veritate”—“Love in Truth”. The Pope calls us to recognise God's gift of love as a rich source of energy and ideas. When love is enlightened by truth, says Pope Benedict, it rises above sentimentality and produces authentic development. What the world needs now, he says, is “integral human development”, where we pull

together all branches of knowledge for the common good. That is the challenge for you, our members of the Scottish Parliament, who have a grip on the bigger picture that is Scotland.

Pope Benedict asks three things: defend the truth, articulating it with conviction and bearing witness to it in life; affirm and value those who are living loving lives in the truth—do not marginalise them; and gather in all the elements, both positive and negative, that form our Scottish experience, using the reflections of different disciplines to produce an integral plan for the future of Scotland and its people. Such a plan would foster so much personal and community fulfilment and authentic fraternity and release so much energy and potential—a prize that is surely worth pursuing.

May God bless you in your endeavours.

Pathways into Sport and Physical Activity

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-4835, in the name of Christine Grahame, on pathways into sport and physical activity. We have little spare time in the debate, so I ask members to stick to the time allocations that are made to them.

14:36

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): First, I forewarn the chamber that I have 13 minutes—a rare privilege for me, as a back bencher. Secondly, I trust that I will not require those 13 long minutes. Finally, I am speaking in my capacity as convener of the Health and Sport Committee and am hence constrained—indeed, restrained—unaccustomed though I am to that position. I will, therefore, be somewhat subdued.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all our witnesses, including those whom we may have roughed up a bit. There is a lesson there for those whom I will call professional witnesses, if I may: when giving evidence to the Health and Sport Committee, words such as “teaching”, “granny” and “suck eggs” should be borne in mind. Members of the committee will understand what I am about to say, as it is a bit of an in-joke. We once heard one strategy too many, and I am quite serious about the word “scenario”, which is verboten.

Why did the committee undertake its inquiry? In 2007, sport moved into the ministerial health portfolio, from culture. That move is to be welcomed, because it removes sport from the exclusive, competitive, elite category in which it was, relates it to the wider population and underlines the crucial bond between an active life and a healthy life. Given that the days of playing footie or skipping in the fading light of winter, sometimes under the limited illumination of the streetlights, have gone, our children lead increasingly sedentary lives. They are driven to school more often than they cycle or walk—their digits do most of the walking on the ubiquitous keyboard. Their exercise is limited to raids on the fridge for convenience food while playing some virtual game. As a plus, they may well have a Wii exercise programme. Of course, that description is overegging the pudding, but it goes some way towards describing current lifestyles. Incidentally, we are all eating too many puddings.

The upshot is that childhood obesity is on the rise. That is bad in itself, with an increase in type 2 diabetes in children, which was almost unheard of two decades ago, when Fatty Arbuckle and Billy Bunter were confined to comic strips; I am

showing my age. However, a fat child can grow even bigger, into a fat adult, with increasing health problems. Being fat is not funny and it is not healthy for the individual or the public purse.

For the first time, a parliamentary committee decided to inquire into the provision of sport in the widest possible terms, beginning with the physical literacy—a term that was new to many members of the committee—of our youngest children. Physical literacy is all about co-ordination and balance—things like skipping, catching a ball and hopping. It is about the three Rs of physical skills. The committee also looked at physical education, as delivered through the commitment by the current and previous Governments to provide two hours of PE a week in all our schools.

The aim is to deliver not only a healthy physical future for individuals and society as a whole, but the mental wellbeing that accompanies an active lifestyle. We steered well away from the Commonwealth and Olympic games, with the specialised selection and training of the athletes involved, and focused on pre-school and primary education.

The committee heard from some of Scotland's sporting greats, such as Liz McColgan and Rhona Martin, and their message to the committee was that the most important issue to address was the crucial role that school plays in teaching children the importance of being active, fit and healthy. It is therefore appropriate that both the Minister for Schools and Skills and the Minister for Public Health are attending the debate. On an ancillary issue, despite those athletes winning their medals, activity and facilities in their sports subsequently declined. It was not a case of their winning gold medals and more people taking up those sports.

There are Government targets. Since 2003, when “Let's Make Scotland More Active: A strategy for physical activity” was published, there has been a target for 50 per cent of all adults and 80 per cent of all children to meet the minimum recommended levels of physical activity by 2022. Those minimum levels are that children should accumulate at least 60 minutes of physical activity of moderate intensity on a daily basis, and that adults should accumulate 30 minutes of physical activity of moderate intensity on most days of the week. Many of us here might recognise that we do not tick that box.

The most recent figures show that two thirds of Scottish adults and one third of Scottish children do not do enough physical activity to gain the benefits. Two thirds of teenage girls—they are in a particular group—are also reported to be physically inactive. According to Audit Scotland, the number of adults who participate in sport on a weekly basis fell from 49 per cent in 2001 to 42 per cent in 2006. Most sport nowadays takes

place with the crisps, sitting on the sofa, watching the league.

The ideal is for children to start on their pathway to physical literacy through structured play at nursery school, followed by learning the fundamentals. We were told by experts that, by the age of seven or eight, children should have the fundamentals of physical literacy in place. That should lead into “sport-specific education and participation” at upper primary and secondary levels. That is what is down on paper, although the reality is somewhat different.

The view from one secondary school teacher at a school that we visited, Dumbarton academy, was that the physical literacy of secondary 1 pupils—I am talking about catching a ball, hopping, skipping and jumping, not anything fancy—was at the lowest level that staff could remember for 20 or 30 years, and the situation was continuing to deteriorate.

What is the current position? The most up-to-date figures that the committee obtained, from 2008, suggested that, of 237 primary schools that had been inspected by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education—we roughed up HMIE a bit, as Mary Scanlon might relate—only

“around a third were providing young people with two hours PE at each stage.”

We were told by HMIE:

“in 2008, of the 50 secondary school inspections, two thirds of schools met the two hours physical education target at S1/S2 and a majority at S3/S4, although at S5 and S6 only one in seven schools met the target.”

The rate of meeting the target falls off, therefore.

The impression that we got from the educational establishment, in the form of HMIE and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, was that good progress was being made towards meeting the targets. “Progress” is a bit of a weasel word, which committee members might wish to pick up on.

There are several things that I wish to focus on.

“The Committee was disturbed”—

that is a moderate word for how we really felt—

“by HMIE’s approach to the inspection of PE,”

which was raised by my colleague Mary Scanlon. The committee piled in like a pack at that stage—it was great.

That line in the committee’s report continued:

“in particular, its view that, if no reference is made to the provision of PE in a school inspection report”—

this was sweet—

“it should be assumed that the provision of PE is satisfactory.”

Ross Finnie picked up on that point, and asked whether it also pertained to arithmetic, reading and writing. Of course it does not. We were very disappointed at HMIE. We further concluded:

“This type of approach might possibly be appropriate and proportionate if the position across Scotland for the teaching of PE was strong as a whole. But the reality is that lamentable progress has been made since the introduction of the specific government target in 2004 (which followed on from a similar target set by sportscotland’s predecessor body back in 1999).”

I do not put that at the door of the present ministers; it is at the door of everybody who has been here over 10 years.

We continued:

“That can be the only conclusion to be drawn since, to give one example, HMIE’s own unpublished records show that, of the schools that it inspected last year, only a third of primary schools were providing two hours of PE per week.”

That is not very good.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Did the committee investigate the reasons why such a small percentage of primary schools is delivering the PE that schools are meant to deliver?

Christine Grahame: Yes. There are a variety of reasons. Sometimes the issue is facilities, but the biggest issue is the determination of the headteacher or director of education to treat PE on a par with reading, writing and arithmetic. We found that PE was always being treated as a Cinderella or tag-on activity—something that could be done or not done. What happens depends on the school’s ethos. In East Renfrewshire Council, provision has been driven by the extremely impressive director of education, who freed up PE teachers to deliver the two-hour target, simply by aligning staffing arrangements.

Two hours of PE should be the absolute minimum. I am not talking about walking to school; I am talking about additional, high-quality PE, which is not simply about ticking a box. The Government said in its response to the committee’s report that if a school is delivering two 55-minute periods of PE we should not be nippy and say that the target is not being met, but we should remember that in a 55-minute period a child has to get to where the PE takes place, change into their gear, do their bit of exercise and then change and get back to class, so they certainly have not had an hour of physical activity, particularly if they had to commute to facilities. The committee looked at the nitty-gritty of PE, not just the box-ticking exercise, which no one wants.

There are great difficulties, but East Renfrewshire Council has been able to overcome them. It is important to say that the situation is not universally bad—far from it. We know about schools throughout the country that are providing

excellent physical education, but such provision is not uniform in Scotland. I had a recent encounter with the primary 5 class from Broughton Central primary school, who visited the Parliament's education centre last week. They impressed me with the diversity of activities in which they take part. They do everything—all the hands were up. Most of them walk or cycle to school and one girl had even ridden her horse to school—I am not saying that that should be mandatory, but it was interesting to hear. There was not one fatty in the class; they were all as bright as buttons and as fit as fleas—if that is not mixing my metaphors.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Fit as fleas?

Christine Grahame: Yes, indeed. Fleas will survive us all.

The committee made a number of suggestions about how to improve the national picture. I mentioned East Renfrewshire Council and I now mention Perth and Kinross Council and Clackmannanshire Council.

The fundamental issue is the status of PE. For whatever reason, most councils have not felt obliged to meet the 2004 target to deliver two hours of PE. The target is in the curriculum for excellence and ministers say that encouraging progress is being made towards meeting it, but the Health and Sport Committee wants us all to toughen up on the issue. That is why the committee mentioned single outcome agreements in its report. We want PE to be something that councils have to provide. The committee had a lovely discussion this morning about the difference between discretionary and mandatory approaches. In this context, I say to Dr Simpson that a mandatory and not a discretionary approach is appropriate.

The committee is very disappointed by the pace of change. We are not laying the blame at anyone's door in particular; we just want things to be achieved by the end of this parliamentary session. There are limitations in facilities and in staffing, but the biggest limitation is willpower. If a teacher is keen, PE happens; if a headteacher is keen, it happens; if a director of education is keen, that is even better, because it happens everywhere; and if the Government is keen, it will happen. We need more sticks than carrots from the Government.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Christine Grahame: I am sorry, I am in my final minute.

I am sure that other members of the committee will elaborate on issues that I have touched on. I was pleased to hear a broadcaster refer to the committee collectively as "senior, influential

MSPs"—the broadcaster meant senior in professional terms, not in age. It would be more satisfying to hear the Minister for Public Health and Sport or the Minister for Schools and Skills reassure us that there is commitment and political will at Government and other levels, so that we prove to be influential, if not senior.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Health and Sport Committee's 5th Report, 2009 (Session 3): *Pathways into Sport and Physical Activity* (SP Paper 260).

14:50

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): I am pleased to be able to respond to the Health and Sport Committee's report into pathways into sport and would always describe the committee as influential.

The debate provides Parliament with an important opportunity to come together to discuss the key issues that arise from the report—which the convener has laid out—and for me to outline the work to which the Government is committed as we work towards ensuring that young people of all abilities have the opportunity to experience physical activity and sport throughout their lifetime.

I welcome the report, as it supports the Government's ambitions for increasing participation in physical activity and sport and will be critical to the successful delivery of our legacy plan from the 2014 Commonwealth games, which was launched on 1 September 2009.

The report makes a number of recommendations, which we have considered. The Government has submitted a comprehensive response to the committee, but I am pleased to be able to highlight a number of key responses.

We agree that the provision of quality PE to every school pupil can make a significant contribution towards our young people developing a lifetime commitment to physical activity. As Christine Grahame mentioned, the curriculum for excellence experiences and outcomes for health and wellbeing include the clear expectation that schools will work towards the provision of at least two hours of good-quality physical education for every child every week. We acknowledge the efforts of every individual school to make progress towards the entitlement of two hours of PE, but continue to urge them to achieve that goal at the earliest opportunity.

Margo MacDonald: I hope that the minister will forgive me for asking her the same question as I asked at the conference that we both attended in Aviemore. How does she define quality PE?

Shona Robison: Quality PE is PE that is delivered by someone who is competent to deliver it. We have been making strides in ensuring that primary school classroom teachers have the ability and confidence—because, sometimes, it is a matter of confidence—to deliver PE. Within the secondary sector, we have specific PE teachers. Although they work within the secondary sector, they can also be an important support for the primary clusters that are allied to their schools.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Shona Robison: I want to make some progress but will give way in a minute.

My colleague the Minister for Schools and Skills met a number of local authorities during the summer months and received positive responses regarding their progress towards the target. In its meetings with local authorities, the Government has emphasised its commitment to two hours of good-quality PE and every local authority has made a commitment to adopt the curriculum for excellence through the 2009 single outcome agreement process.

We should remember that two hours of PE is the only component across the curriculum that has an input target. That reflects the Government's commitment to delivery. In turn, the target will be inspected by HMIE to monitor delivery. In his closing remarks, Keith Brown will say more about it and provide further background to his meetings and discussions with local authorities.

The committee made a specific recommendation that, at an appropriate age, a physical literacy assessment should be conducted for all pupils to ensure that, by the time children reach secondary school, they have the necessary skills to learn specific sports. It also recommended that pupil report cards should refer to a pupil's physical literacy skills.

The Government is committed to developing a greater understanding of physical literacy through specific experiences and outcomes in health and wellbeing and will provide a continuous and progressive focus on physical literacy as children and young people progress through the curriculum.

Teachers in both primary and secondary schools have responsibilities to conduct rigorous, robust assessment, to identify and report on issues at an early stage, and to address any problems that arise. The new assessment framework will be broader and more challenging than a single, narrow snapshot of evidence that is generated by testing.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): Why does the Government not wish to introduce a national physical literacy assessment?

Shona Robison: Presumably for the same reasons that Mr McAveety did not do so when he was the minister with responsibility for sport. I presume that his Government also recognised the limitations of a single snapshot and realised that we should require progress to be made on physical literacy throughout the school years. I am not convinced that a snapshot would be appropriate. When would be the best time to take it? There are various arguments around that, but I am not convinced that that is the right approach. We will continue to have the debate, but I believe that we can achieve the same outcome in a different way within what is a fairly comprehensive change to the way in which we deliver education through the curriculum for excellence. We should allow that to pay the dividends that I believe it will pay.

The active schools programme has been a huge success in providing a range of opportunities for children and young people to experience physical activity and sport in primary and secondary schools. Government has invested £12 million a year since 2004, at first under the previous Executive, to develop active schools throughout every local authority. The programme is making significant progress in delivering a wide range of new sport and physical activities in and around the school day and is having a considerable impact on participation rates. Of course, that activity is over and above the two hours of physical education that are undertaken as part of the curriculum for excellence.

The importance of the active schools programme should not be underestimated. In 2007-08, it was operational in 2,493 state schools throughout Scotland's 32 local authorities and it delivered some 350,000 activity sessions that covered an extensive range of interests from the more traditional sports of rugby and hockey to activities such as Scottish dance and organised playground games. Activities are organised in response to interest that is expressed by the young people themselves and they take place in and around the school day, with over half taking place immediately after school and the rest at lunch time, break time, before and during the school day, in the evenings or at weekends.

The Government, along with sportscotland, is committed to the continuing development of the active schools programme to ensure its long-term sustainability. I know that the committee focused on that, and also that it recommended the hosting of a conference to agree how the programme will be taken forward to 2011. Sportscotland's partnership managers work closely with local

authorities to support and develop the active schools network. As part of the training and support programme, sportscotland delivers a biennial conference for members of staff who are involved in delivering the active schools programme. Sportscotland is reviewing the format of that and it is happy to look at the committee's recommendation.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): One problem that the committee came across is the fact that many active schools co-ordinators are on temporary contracts. Does the minister propose to address that?

Shona Robison: That is what I was referring to when I mentioned our commitment to ensuring that the programme is sustainable in the long term. It is an important programme and we want it to continue. I recognise the committee's concerns about the matter and we will endeavour to work through it with local authorities.

I turn to local sports development. The Government supports the development within each local authority area of sport and physical activity strategies that encompass the provision of opportunities for all communities to participate. Those strategies should also reflect the need for the provision of a facility network, provision of sports pitches and training areas, and the development of the volunteer and coaching workforce to support the development and the club infrastructure.

We recognise that local authorities have different paces when it comes to the provision of physical activity and sport. However, a unique opportunity exists to support the development of those strategies and the desired increase in participation through more effective communication across the sporting infrastructure, better evidence, and the sharing of the many examples of good practice that exist, some of which have been mentioned.

The Government will support sportscotland in the development of the increased opportunities to be set out in sports strategies within authorities. In doing so, we will ensure that the needs of children and young people with disabilities, who are often the most vulnerable and excluded members of our society, are fully considered and included in the development of such strategies at national and local level.

The opportunities in the 2014 Commonwealth games legacy plan should allow us to accelerate progress on the implementation of national and local strategies for physical activity and sport. Improving the nation's health is the overarching theme of the legacy plan. Central to that theme is the development of two key initiatives within the active Scotland component of the plan that are

aimed at increasing the availability and accessibility of physical activity and sport for individuals and communities. In turn, that will help to improve the health and fitness of our people.

One of those initiatives is the active nation programme, which aims to create a popular and high-profile movement to motivate people of all ages across Scotland to become more active. The other is the development of a network of community sports hubs. The vision is of a network whereby we can transform the belief in, demand for and delivery of a high-quality community sport system for Scottish people and communities. For school pupils who need a clear pathway into sport and for people who just want to take part, the hubs will provide a way of bringing people together as never before in a systematic manner across Scotland. That is being driven by the Scottish Government—

Christine Grahame: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

The Presiding Officer: No, the minister must wind up.

Shona Robison: The impact of the sports hubs cannot be underestimated. They will be backed up by the £25.5 million that has been earmarked for the legacy.

I am delighted to stand here to present the Government's response to the committee's report and to discuss further with Parliament the key issues and recommendations, many of which we are happy to take forward.

15:02

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The report was unusual for the Health and Sport Committee in that it was extremely consensual. It was also unusual that much of the written and oral evidence, and the impressions that we gained from our visits, was very consensual. Although, as the convener said, we gave some witnesses a slightly rough time, our evidence sessions were nevertheless a very useful exercise.

As the convener said, anyone who needs to know why sport and physical activity are important need only look at the figures on obesity. Many of the substantial health gains that have been made in the past 40 years will be jeopardised unless the obesity problem is tackled. Of course, one aspect of tackling that will be sport.

The committee started with the understanding given by documents such as "Let's Make Scotland More Active: A strategy for physical activity" and by committees such as the review group that was chaired by John Beattie, which indicated that participation levels had been dropping and sports

facilities disappearing. Sport in schools never really recovered from the massive damage that was inflicted by the attack on teachers' role in sport during the 1980s. We start from a rather depressing picture.

The Labour-led Government began to reverse that trend. In my former constituency—now that of the Minister for Schools and Skills—the active schools co-ordinators, for which Clackmannanshire had been a pilot area, resulted in a substantial increase in participation, particularly among girls. That was very welcome and demonstrated that active schools co-ordinators had great potential. As the Minister for Public Health and Sport said, that was followed through by expanding the scheme to include 2,500 schools, with 600 or 700 active schools co-ordinators.

The establishment of sportscotland and the Scottish Institute of Sport encouraged both elite and general participation. The results of that are evident. For example, the level of participation in rugby has risen in the past few years—in fact, it has doubled—so some good things are happening.

Our report makes clear—as the convener so eloquently outlined, with the velvet glove over the fist that she normally displays—that the resulting recommendations are not some radical and costly set of proposals. Rather, they are a clear call for leadership at every level to make physical activity, physical literacy and sport a much greater priority. That is simply not occurring.

Although the Government accepted some of our recommendations, its response was on the whole disappointing and, at times, even dismissive. It seemed as if the Government was not treating the issue as a real priority, although the report on the legacy of the 2014 Commonwealth games indicates to the contrary, as does much of the rhetoric that we have heard. Part of the problem might be that multiple ministers are in charge, although that is not necessarily a problem.

The response of the Government and HMIE on monitoring and inspection suggests a lack of determination. We are told that HMIE is considering a different approach, but there should be a clear approach. PE should be treated in the same way as other subjects in the curriculum.

Margo MacDonald: I could not agree more that it should be treated in the same way as any other classroom subject, but there has been a snobbery in Scottish schools about PE since Adam was a boy, and it exists among teachers.

Dr Simpson: I thank the member for that intervention.

I regret that, as far as I know—Mr Brown can tell me if I am wrong about this—the Government has refused to guarantee pupils and parents a report on the child's level of physical literacy and a personal development plan. I hope that that will be progressed in the curriculum for excellence, but I am not clear about the present position.

There is no great evidence of a commitment to the provision of two hours of quality PE a week. Indeed, the Government does not have the levers to allow it to say that that will occur, and that is regrettable. Despite the leadership that the Government is trying to show, there is no indication that the local authorities will definitely comply. We should remember that it is not just a year or two but six years since the target was first set out, yet the local authorities still cannot demonstrate that all their schools are meeting it.

We know that the target can be achieved—East Renfrewshire Council has demonstrated that. East Renfrewshire showed leadership at every level and it reorganised the entire curriculum to ensure the delivery of two hours of PE a week. Other councils, such as West Lothian, simply say that they cannot do it, or that they plan to do a bit of the work that is required by 2011. They are building failure into their proposals. We should recognise that the Scottish Consumer Council has said that parents want their children to have five hours a week of physical education or physical activity and sport. They are not getting that.

Margo MacDonald said that it was a question not just of how much PE children get but of the quality of the provision, and that is extremely important. However, the Scottish Government has declined our request that uptake of the teacher training that has been introduced—which is extremely worth while and important—should be matched to local authorities that are not providing two hours of PE a week. That training should not just be available for some teachers to apply for; it should be matched and monitored on the basis of the meeting of the two-hour target. I hope that the minister will respond on that.

The commitment in the Scottish National Party's manifesto to provide five hours of outdoor activity a week has not even been mentioned, and I would be interested to hear the Government's position on that.

As the convener mentioned, Stirling is one area where progress is being made. The council and the university have combined to create effective pathways into sport. I praise the Government for naming the University of Stirling as a centre of excellence. Even though the funding is rather inadequate, one result of that is that, with the creation of a sports village at Forthbank and the development of access by the university, elite and ordinary athletes are achieving a lot. The Scottish

Further and Higher Education Funding Council's recent funding of 100 talented young sportspeople through its national winning students scholarships will help enormously, too.

The convener also mentioned Perth and Kinross, where a huge number of additional PE teachers have been taken on, but teachers in primary school still do not have the confidence to provide PE in the way that we want them to.

I welcome the Government's decision to have a health improvement, efficiency, access and treatment target, but I am not clear that it will be able to deliver it, even through the community planning partnerships. I regret that the current legislation does not provide minimum standards. Local authorities' duty on entitlement to participate in sports is extremely unclear and woolly, and I urge the Government to ensure that clear guidance is provided. The SOAs do not allow local authorities to deliver and the concordat contains only fairly woolly, high-level targets. Specific guidance must be provided on the duty that local authorities have in this area.

The Presiding Officer: Wind up, please.

Dr Simpson: I commend the report and urge the Government to look again at some parts of its response, so that it is better able to deliver the objectives to which we all subscribe.

15:09

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I commend the feisty and politically incorrect convener of the Health and Sport Committee for steering and managing us through the inquiry. I also want to put on record the fact that excellent witnesses appeared before the committee. Liz McColgan, Shirley Robertson and John Beattie stood out for me, but everyone was first class.

The inquiry into pathways into sport for children and sport facilities was the first on such a topic in the Parliament since 2000, when the Education, Culture and Sport Committee conducted an inquiry into sport in schools. It is fair to say that we spread the net wider. Given the extensive groundwork for the report, I hope that the issue will be revisited at regular intervals in future to achieve a consistent approach to quality facilities throughout Scotland and opportunities for all children to participate in sport.

Committee inquiries are always interesting in informing MSPs on specific issues. We were told about the differences between physical literacy—I know that Elizabeth Smith has her own interpretation of that—physical activity and physical education. My understanding is that more emphasis on and investment in physical literacy in the early years, including the pre-school years,

would undoubtedly improve physical activity and physical education.

Evidence was given that cited particular schools as wonderful beacons of best practice in respect of access to sport. However, when I turned up at one such school in the Highlands to learn about that, the headmaster had no idea what I was talking about.

The debate is not just about the committee's report; it is also about the Government's response to that report. Unlike other responses from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, the response in this case is weak, defensive and fudged. The committee mentioned quite a few times that there had been "lamentable progress". The Government's response is lamentable.

The SNP has been in government for two years and five months. Its manifesto said:

"we will ensure that every pupil has 2 hours of quality PE each week delivered by specialist PE teachers."

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Mary Scanlon: Not at the moment.

That commitment has become:

"The Government expects schools to continue to work towards ... **two hours** of ... physical education".

That sounds a bit like the commitment on class sizes.

The manifesto said that all children in Scotland

"will be given free, year-round access to council swimming pools."

That is certainly not happening throughout Scotland.

The manifesto said:

"We will establish an innovative sport volunteer programme with schools and after school clubs".

We never heard about that.

The manifesto said:

"we will expand the number of centres of sporting excellence in Scotland, based on the model of the Bellahouston School of Sport in Glasgow."

I missed them too. Perhaps other members can tell us that those centres have sprung up in their constituencies. I could not find any evidence of them.

As Christine Grahame said, HMIE said that if PE is not mentioned in an inspection report, it can be assumed that everything is okay. The committee's report is clear. It says:

"this highlights a serious and unacceptable discrimination in the importance that HMIE has attached to physical education compared to other disciplines."

The Government has accepted that PE should appear in every school inspection report, but it says that it is looking only for

“comment on the school’s progress towards the target.”

That is hardly a commitment.

To say that local authorities that do not have a local sports strategy should produce a strategy is a step in the right direction. However, on the use of and access to outdoor pitches, the Government states that it will

“encourage Local Authorities to consider the importance of the availability of ... playing and training surfaces”.

The use of the words “encourage” and “consider” means that that is hardly a firm commitment.

The Government’s response to the committee’s recommendations on positive coaching is:

“Extensive discussions have taken place and are ongoing”.

Maybe, and maybe not.

As we have a historic concordat, I thought that all the commitment would be in the single outcome agreements. However, only six out of 32 councils even mentioned the matter.

I was also left somewhat confused about the role of active schools co-ordinators. I appreciate that they work well in some schools, but their role seems to be blurred, to say the least, with the role of PE teachers. The committee recommended that the Government host a conference involving all relevant parties on the way forward to reach agreement and understanding about the relationship between active schools co-ordinators, PE staff, headteachers and community sports clubs. The Government says that it is already doing that but, if so, why are there so many problems?

What I took from the inquiry—Christine Grahame and Richard Simpson have put it well—is that, where there is a will and a can-do attitude, children can be guaranteed two hours of PE a week. The test for physical literacy works in primary 6 and 7 in East Renfrewshire. If it works there, why does it not work elsewhere? Why is it instantly dismissed? As Richard Simpson said, some witnesses found many excuses not to make it happen. They blamed a crowded curriculum, lack of facilities and lack of transport. The committee received plenty of evidence of the need for new facilities. However, equally, we received plenty of evidence of expensive facilities that were very poorly maintained.

I hope that the report will not be allowed to gather dust but will be used for work to make considerable progress in the future, not lamentable progress.

15:17

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Apart from the minister, I am the first member to speak in the debate who was not involved in the preparation of the report. Therefore, I see it from outside the fold, as it were. I offer my thanks to the convener and the committee for preparing the report and I thank those who took part in the consultation exercise. The report offers the lay reader a well-informed view of the provision of physical education in schools throughout Scotland as well as a useful summary of progress that has been made and a framework for building on those improvements in the future.

As other members have hinted, the need for changes in Scotland’s attitudes to health has never been greater. The most recent health survey classified 22 per cent of men and 24 per cent of women as obese. Those figures are higher than in previous years. In addition, the committee’s report revealed that more than two thirds of adults do not meet recommended weekly exercise targets. It also makes clear the relationship between that poor adult health record and the habits of young people. Given that a higher proportion of women than men are now considered obese, it is surely significant that two thirds of teenage girls are physically inactive. When it comes to defusing Scotland’s ticking time bomb of obesity, early intervention must be the best policy.

Yet, although our country’s public health record is on the critical list, the opportunities to encourage sport have rarely been so readily available. The awarding of the 2014 Commonwealth games to Glasgow came on the back of the international success of Scottish athletes such as Chris Hoy and Andy Murray, both of whom are excellent role models for young people. The report therefore comes at the perfect time for planning how the Scottish Government can generate long-term enthusiasm for sport.

The report begins by examining physical education in schools in the context of the target that every school child should receive two hours of quality PE a week. It states that the current Government has made “lamentable progress” towards meeting that target. There is also considerable variation in PE provision between local authorities and across the education system. In 2008, a third of primary schools were providing the two-hour minimum, but only one in seven S4 to S6 pupils received similar provision.

Christine Grahame: In fairness to the Government, although paragraph 86 says that

“lamentable progress has been made since the introduction of the specific Government target in 2004”,

it goes on to say that that

"followed on from a similar target set ... back in 1999".

In fairness, we must accept that it has been a long haul since 1999.

Jamie Stone: I welcome that intervention.

The report identifies several barriers to the success of the policy. In primary schools, a key area for concern is a lack of adequate facilities, such as playing fields and sports halls. The report also notes the lack of PE training for primary school teachers.

Secondary schools lag behind primary schools in the amount of physical education that they provide. Again, the report identified numerous barriers to success in that regard. High on that list was a perceived devaluation of PE as a subject. That is reflected in the attitude of HMIE, which the report accused of failing to treat PE as equal to other curricular subjects. As a result, there was little incentive for headteachers to prioritise PE, or to make additional space for it in the school curriculum.

Many of the barriers that are identified by the report are local issues regarding staff attitudes or local facilities. It would seem easy, therefore, to treat them as problems that could be dealt with at a local level. Indeed, the report recommends that, if a school has failed to reach the projected two-hour target by August 2010, it should be the responsibility of the headteacher to write an explanatory report. However, by arguing in response to that recommendation that the

"Committee must recognise, as the Government does, that this target presents practical difficulties for some schools,"

the Government fails to portray a clear message that meeting that target must be a priority. Instead, the Government and local authorities must work with schools to overcome those difficulties. There are examples of good practice, and it is vital that they are shared and implemented across the country. It is not good enough for this Administration to impose what the report describes as a challenging two-hour target on local schools without assisting them in achieving it.

The report also tackles the active schools initiative, which aims to create a bridge between community sports clubs and local schools, arranging extra coaching and practice in sporting activities. The main area for concern that is noted in the report in that regard is that, although active schools co-ordinators have been successful in introducing children to new sports, provisions have not been made for pupils to continue those new activities outwith the school environment. More coaches and volunteers are needed to run extra-curricular clubs and, in rural areas, access to proper sporting facilities is a problem.

The Liberal Democrats have long campaigned for better provision of local sports facilities. As a representative of an overwhelmingly rural constituency with an historical underprovision of sports facilities, I am well aware of the difficulties that are involved in transporting young athletes to faraway competitions and training.

It seems to me that easy access to proper facilities would encourage children to take up sport in the first place. I therefore suggest that, if the Scottish Government is committed to encouraging long-term involvement in sport outwith school, ensuring access to adequate local facilities is crucial. It is a fundamental right of anyone living in Scotland that they should not be disadvantaged because of geography.

The overall message of the report is that, although many important steps have been taken, a huge amount remains to be done if Scotland is to change its reputation as the sick man of Europe and tackle its obesity time bomb. The huge personal costs of obesity are well recognised, and Liberal Democrats have this week revealed the hidden costs of obesity to the national health service in Scotland. The responsibility for bringing about social change lies partly with local authorities, which must be responsible for implementing a curriculum that provides school pupils—from nursery age—with a basic grounding in physical literacy that will be the foundation for physical activity in later life. Once that is done, it will be up to schools and community clubs to build on those skills by providing extra-curricular coaching and activities.

However, local authorities cannot make those changes without clear and focused direction from Government. Headteachers must be willing to accommodate two hours of physical education in the weekly timetable, but the Government must work with inspectors to ensure that such efforts are duly recognised in inspection reports.

Similarly, the report recognises that schools and community groups must work together to "unlock the potential" of their local facilities. However, Government must work with those groups to ensure that those facilities are available.

The Scottish Government must make clear that the two-hour target is not a recommendation but an urgent priority.

The Presiding Officer: We come to open speeches. I have a little bit of flexibility, but members should keep their speeches to around six minutes.

15:24

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate.

As others who are not members of the Health and Sport Committee have done, I commend the committee for its report and committee members for the amount of work that they have put into it.

The report is a comprehensive and important contribution to the debate on sport and health. We have heard a number of important contributions this afternoon from committee members of all parties that demonstrate not only their knowledge and experience but the sound advice that they are able to give to Government ministers.

The importance of this debate is highlighted by the statistics, which are outlined in paragraph 9 of the report, on those who are overweight and those who are obese. The proportion of overweight men rose from 56 per cent in 1995 to 64 per cent in 2003, while the proportion of overweight females rose from 47 to 57 per cent during the same period. Obesity rates also rose during that time, from 16 to 22 per cent for males and from 17 to 24 per cent for females. That shows the scale of the challenge that we face.

The issue is not only the fact that Scotland now has more people who are overweight or obese but the knock-on effect that that has on the country's health. It means that more people in Scotland are suffering from heart disease, high blood pressure and high cholesterol, which undermines their quality of life and affects their life expectancy. Given that we will, crucially, consider the budget tomorrow, we should acknowledge that those problems put a lot of pressure on the NHS budget, which has a knock-on effect on the economy. If people are not fit and able to do skilled jobs in Scotland, we will not be able to participate in economic competition with other countries.

The sporting events that will take place here in coming years offer opportunities to increase participation levels. The children's games are taking place in Lanarkshire in 2011; the Commonwealth games are taking place in 2014; and many people are looking forward to the Ryder cup coming back to Scotland, the home of golf. It is hoped that, in the run-up to those events, many youngsters will take part in sport to a greater extent, not only because they see the chance to represent their country but because the events give sport a higher profile. We are already beginning to see the benefits of that in the improvements in infrastructure around the country. In Toryglen, in my constituency, the football development centre has recently opened. I have been there a number of times for events; it is a fantastic facility, which is already being used by a lot of youngsters. I can only hope that it will provide an inspiration for the national football team to be a bit more successful in the next competition that it enters.

As the minister outlined in her speech, it is important that we consider the legacy from the Commonwealth games. That brings us to the question of what we seek and what we want to achieve with regard to sport in our country. We are looking for more participation, particularly among younger people, which would improve fitness and health. We would also like to see more success at a sporting level. It was good that the committee took evidence from elite athletes such as Liz McColgan who have had a degree of sporting success. Those elite athletes spoke in particular about the importance of PE and participation in sport at a younger age, and about their participation when they were at school.

Members have already commented on the fact that the two-hour PE target has not been met. In order to meet those objectives, we need to look not only at the targets but at our infrastructure. I was interested to read in the report that it would take £540 million to upgrade the 338 swimming pools in Scotland so that they are fit-for-purpose facilities. I was disappointed to read that Meadowbank, the scene of great Commonwealth games in 1970 and 1986, has fallen into a state of disrepair. We must look at our facilities.

The SNP must take more responsibility for the PE target and for improving the infrastructure. Many wise contributions have been made by members on all sides of the chamber, but it has been noticeable that those on the Government benches have been quiet—I hope that ministers have been taking note of what has been said and that they will take on board the advice.

15:30

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): First, I thank the committee clerk and his team for the good-natured and efficient way in which they helped in the production of the report. They were, and are, fun to work with, which makes all the difference in committee work. I would also like to mention my committee colleagues in that regard. Some might say that a Health and Sport Committee, 75 per cent of whose membership is entitled to concessionary travel, is unsuited to commenting on sport and physical activity, but the opposite is the case. The fact that we are undertaking such rigorous work while others of our age are basking in retirement is a tribute to our health, and one has only to look in on a committee meeting to see that sport is uppermost in our minds. As long as the convener manages to produce a steady supply of nutritious snacks—so far, that supply has not been in doubt—we will happily continue with our endeavours to make Scotland a happier and healthier place.

Our listening to the evidence that underpins the report and visiting several schools and sporting

establishments shattered some illusions. We began by calling our investigation “Pathways into Sport”, but it soon became apparent that physical activity is the more important goal. Sport is one way of achieving physical activity, but it is not for all; many people are more suited to other forms of activity, ranging from hill walking to line dancing, and all those activities should be encouraged and enabled.

Then, there is the role of elite sport. I assumed that if a country’s sportspeople succeeded at international level, others would be attracted to their sports, but that is not the case. Evidence that we received suggests the possibility of a negative correlation, although I also doubt whether that is the case. Therefore, one important justification for hosting major sporting events in Scotland is shown to be less valid.

My long-held prejudice—at the risk of further offending Mr McAveety—that elite sport is often a very unhealthy experience was, if anything, reinforced by evidence. For example, I asked former rugby international John Beattie about his rugby-related limp and whether it is permanent. He replied:

“The limp is permanent, but I had a whale of a time getting it.”—[*Official Report, Health and Sport Committee*, 14 January 2009; c 1401.]

Several mentions have been made of Liz McColgan and the good evidence that she gave to our committee. When she gave evidence last year, she said:

“In 1996, I won the London marathon. In 1997, I was diagnosed with arthritis in my feet but still finished second in that year’s London marathon. That was the last race that I ran—I retired as a result of arthritis in my feet.”—[*Official Report, Health and Sport Committee*, 26 March 2008; c 698.]

That was when she was in her early 30s, having already had major knee surgery, which was required after a running injury when she was still in her 20s. I can add to that my experiences in general practice of prematurely crippled ex-professional footballers, and gymnasts who needed joint replacements when they were still young.

At least Liz McColgan and John Beattie had the consolation of sporting success, but for every winner there are many more losers whose health is also at risk. Elite sportspeople remind me of the gladiators of old, fighting to uphold the honour of their masters—in this case their country—but risking sacrificing their health in the process.

Where does the future lie? How do we help people into the regular physical activity that will help to protect them from premature ill-health? The answer that came from the evidence is to start when people are young, but youngsters do not just

need physical activity. As we have heard, they need to be taught to be physically literate so that they can make the most of the opportunities that present themselves later.

It is certainly a matter of concern that the target of two hours of quality PE a week was set as long as 10 years ago, and it is certainly a bit rich for some people to say that the SNP Government should get a hold of the issue when others who were in power for many more years failed lamentably to get anywhere near the target. Many schools are still nowhere near meeting that modest aim. There are excuses aplenty: I have heard about curriculum overload and poor facilities, and one headteacher even told me that the school could not afford a PE teacher because the money had already been spent on art. However, East Renfrewshire Council showed that, with the will, the target can be met. Indeed, it must be met if Scotland is to become a fitter and healthier nation.

Finally, I want to consider certain problems that are faced by pupils in secondary education. At Wester Hailes education centre in my region, which the committee visited, all pupils receive two hours of quality PE in secondary 1, rising to five hours in S4. Even in S5 and S6, when PE becomes optional, 64 per cent of pupils continue with classes. That is a magnificent achievement on which the school must be congratulated.

However, it is impossible to use the sporting facilities at some schools in the evenings and at weekends because of the high fees that are charged by greedy private finance initiative owning companies and, as sporting clubs tend to be found more in leafy suburbs than on deprived housing estates, they are also sometimes difficult to access. If the physical activity habit that is so successfully encouraged at schools such as Wester Hailes is to continue, we must find better ways of linking them with senior clubs and societies.

The committee’s report has something useful to contribute to the health of Scotland. I commend it to the minister.

15:36

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

In the Health and Sport Committee’s work, sport is not often given the prominence that it deserves. Health is a huge area; there is always pressure on our time to discuss more medical-related issues and legislation. It seems from the Government’s response to the committee’s report that it faces some of the same challenges.

The committee is very aware of the need to change the balance of health care from acute to primary care—prevention rather than cure, which

is why the sport element of the committee's remit is so vital. However, like the primary care element of health care, which is also vastly important, the issue lacks immediacy so it can become difficult to shift the focus on to it. After all, a person who is ill needs to be treated right away if their life is to be saved and, with that kind of focus, it is easy to give less priority to the advice and assistance that prevent people from becoming ill in the first place. The same is true of sport in the committee, which is why it decided to use its very limited time to conduct an inquiry into access to sport and sporting facilities for everyone.

I found the evidence to be very interesting. Many people who had reached the pinnacle of their sport in their careers had done so almost by accident, either by being in the right place at the right time or by having a chance meeting with someone who became a mentor. It became clear that, in most sports, people need money and parental support if they want to reach competition standard. Of course, there were exceptions to that rule, but they had a pretty tough time of it and needed a huge amount of determination.

Given the well-proven health benefits of recreational sport, the committee was also keen to consider the availability of sport to everyone who wants to take part, regardless of their talent. We heard about the lack of facilities in many areas. That lack is something that I can, as a member for the Highlands and Islands, vouch for. There are, of course, exceptions such as the Shetland Islands, where the authorities have emphasised provision of sporting facilities. However, in most parts of my region, such resources are few and far between, and what facilities are available are old and do not have the critical mass of people using them to make them financially viable. It is clear that those amenities need public support and funding.

However, I can also point to examples of best practice in the Highlands and Islands. For many years now, leisure centres in Moray have been working with local general practitioners either to promote health through exercise or to provide rehabilitation for people who have suffered heart attacks or experienced other health crises in which increased exercise is vital to recovery.

I recently visited Atlantis Leisure in Oban, which is another example of best practice. The leisure centre, which is run by a social enterprise, gets young people through the doors by providing a variety of activities such as modern dance for young women, who are notoriously difficult to involve in physical activity. Atlantis provides facilities that young people want, which means that they feel valued and welcome in the centre. Membership numbers are high and the community stands to reap the health rewards of that activity. However, Atlantis faces funding challenges

because of crippling water rates. I have raised the problem with the relevant minister, but I have yet to find a solution. The SNP Government promised free swimming for young people, so I urge it to start to consider innovative ways of delivering that. A reduction in water rates for leisure centres that have swimming facilities might be a good starting point.

Swimming is hugely important, not only for health reasons, but because it can save lives. I have been urged by young people and their parents to help them to secure a 50m pool in Inverness, to allow them to prepare locally for competitions. Currently, young people who want to compete have to travel to the central belt to practise in a 50m pool and to take part in events. The costs and time commitment that are involved in that journey prevent many young people from pursuing the sport. The ability to host competitions would also boost the Highland economy.

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Will Rhoda Grant congratulate the Scottish Government on managing to get a 50m pool in Aberdeen, which the Labour Party did not achieve?

Rhoda Grant: I was coming to that point. I perhaps do not greet that development with the same enthusiasm as Aileen Campbell. I will explain why. Scottish Swimming has pointed out to me that it has two priority areas for a 50m pool—Aberdeen and Dundee. Those developments will not make any difference at all in the Highlands because young people will have the same travel time to access either facility. Those two priority areas are so close together that either city could benefit from a pool in the other. I ask the minister to consider rebalancing the priorities. That is especially important because we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to develop a competition-size pool in Inverness. The UHI Millennium Institute and Inverness College are considering developing a new campus. Access to a 50m pool would be a huge incentive for students coming to study in the Highlands. Such a pool would also provide competition facilities for the wider area. Swimmers from as far afield as Caithness would have their journey time shortened considerably.

We ignore the health benefits of sport at our peril. Good-quality local facilities are essential for most types of sport. I have focused on swimming as an example, and have covered the competitive and recreational aspects. A reduction in water rates for facilities is one way in which the Government could show a commitment to its promise on free swimming. I urge the minister to support, and to provide input into, the development of a 50m pool at the new UHI campus. Let us not miss the opportunity. If we do, there will not be another for a generation.

15:43

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): I am pleased to speak in the debate. As other members have done, I commend the members of the Health and Sport Committee, the committee clerks and their support staff for producing a comprehensive and positive report that sets out practical options for the way forward. We all recognise the scale of the challenge that we face in getting more of our citizens of all ages involved in sport and, crucially, in keeping them involved. We face a particular problem with getting teenage girls active.

Obesity is a ticking time bomb for our population and is one of the major issues in public health. However, the Commonwealth games in Glasgow in 2014 offer us an unprecedented opportunity that we must make every effort to grasp. Opportunities arise from the new sports infrastructure that is being developed and from the inspiration that such a mega-event can provide for people of all ages and backgrounds. The debate in Parliament in April on the 2014 legacy was constructive and important and has been followed up by the Scottish Government's detailed legacy plan. I hope that the plan will help to prevent a repeat of previous missed opportunities from world games. For example, after the Olympics in Sydney in 2000, many children in Australia who wanted to try new sports found clubs to be ill-equipped to handle the influx, and there simply were not enough coaches. Investment in coaching is of huge importance.

The health benefits of participation in sport are well known and have been referred to by many members in the debate. I am especially pleased that some members have also referred to the tangible benefits of sport to individuals' mental health, as well as to their physical health.

I agree with the point that was made by the committee—and by others in their submissions, including Scottish Rugby and the Scottish Sports Association—about the need for school sports facilities to be accessible, especially after school hours and at weekends. Scottish Rugby believes that the single greatest barrier to universal access to sport is the fact that sports clubs are not part and parcel of what schools do. Sport should be seen as a vehicle through which to educate pupils and, in many cases, to engage with the disengaged. I have a lot of sympathy with that.

Ian McKee: Does Jamie McGrigor agree that often among the biggest impediments to people using school facilities out of hours are the PFI contracts under which those schools were built, which make the playing fields very expensive to hire?

Jamie McGrigor: Sometimes those playing fields are excellent and sometimes they are not.

The issue of school facilities has been raised with me repeatedly in my role as a Highlands and Islands MSP. Excellent new facilities are constructed, but parents, youngsters and sports clubs are frustrated that those facilities are closed outwith school hours. The brand new Lochgilphead high school was built without a running track—the nearest running track is in Glasgow, which is 100 miles away.

We need the closest possible links and co-ordination. I commend the many thousands of volunteers throughout Scotland who give their time to support our youngsters in sports clubs. We need to build on and expand that volunteerism. I welcome the committee's recommendation that local authority sports strategies should identify capacity building in local sports clubs. Although local facilities and, specifically, access to them are a huge part of the debate, I was pleased that the committee report noted that Scotland has a number of world-class facilities, including mountain bike tracks in my region, although those tracks make me feel quite sick when I look at them.

Members will know that angling is one of the biggest participation sports in the UK. It is a sport that I try to enjoy when I get the time. Angling can teach young people many transferable skills that are of real value, and I commend the Scottish Countryside Alliance for its work in getting young people involved in the sport. I also pay tribute to the work of Angling for Youth Development, which has managed to get a new angling course accredited by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, and I commend the Scottish country sports tourism group for highlighting the importance of shooting and deer stalking as recreational sports that draw down considerable income for rural Scotland and promote healthy lifestyles. Scotland is world famous for country sports, so we should advertise them rather than try to hide them. Where better to walk hills than the Scottish Highlands?

Jamie Stone: I would be interested to know, as I am sure other members would, how angling makes one fit.

Jamie McGrigor: Angling makes one fit through casting those huge weights.

We have wonderful outdoor recreations in Scotland. On that subject, I am delighted that the Scottish Conservatives have advocated a clear policy that all children from primary 7 to secondary 3 should be entitled to a one-week residential course in outdoor education. What a fantastic idea that is. My colleague Liz Smith has very ably suggested that policy in recent months. I believe that it would make a real difference to many young

people by giving them a taste of something new, exciting and different outwith the normal school environment.

Today's debate is important not just because of the opportunity that it gives us to discuss the committee's useful report, but because it gives us a chance to hear the Scottish Government's response. I hope that ministers will be able to take on board many of the committee's recommendations. I look forward to delivery of those recommendations, so that every young person in Scotland has a genuine opportunity to participate in the sport of their choice, whether for leisure, for health or even for competition.

15:49

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Sport is never far from the minds of many people in Scotland. It is often said that only in Scotland do people start reading their newspapers from the back. However, as other members have recognised in this debate, there is a gap between the amount of sport—particularly football—that is watched in Scotland and the amount of sport in which people actually participate.

The committee is to be congratulated on producing a thorough report that provides a useful analysis of the challenges in increasing the number of young people who take part in sport and physical activity. Although we may debate some specifics in the report's recommendations, I am sure that we all agree with the broad themes and overall aim of getting young people active. As the report notes, regular physical exercise is hugely important not only for the physical wellbeing but for the mental wellbeing of youngsters and, by extension, for society as a whole. Jamie McGrigor mentioned that.

The report acknowledges some of the challenges in inspiring young people, particularly girls, to take part in sport. As a woman, I find it alarming—yet not entirely surprising—that two thirds of teenage girls are reported to be physically inactive. There are high drop-out rates among girls once PE becomes optional in the school curriculum, with peer pressure, low self-esteem and physical changes no doubt taking some of the blame.

Why is that the case? Why does PE become so unattractive? The traditional games and activities that are taught in PE lessons may have something to do with it. I note that the report highlights successes where schools have branched out into offering gym-style equipment and dance classes—no doubt the dance classes benefit from television programmes such as "Strictly Come Dancing", which raise the profile of dance and encourage people to take up the activity. PE teaching needs

to be fleet of foot in order to evolve in ways that keep it relevant to youngsters.

Margo MacDonald: As someone who was once fleet of foot in a gymnasium, I say to Aileen Campbell that it has always been the case that teenage girls have not been all that keen on PE. The problem has nothing to do with the sport or the PE activity and everything to do with the fact that it messes up girls' hair and makes them sweaty. Getting girls involved in PE depends on what surrounds the production of PE. That is what matters.

Aileen Campbell: There are initiatives to encourage young girls to get involved in PE. For me, it was more a question about what was on offer, and less—as is probably evidenced by my hairstyles of late—about not wanting to get my hair out of place.

I recently spent some time in Iceland, where I saw many prominent adverts backing the country's women's football team, which had qualified for the UEFA women's championships. In Scotland, it is rare to see women's fitba mentioned on the back pages of the papers that we all are so keen to read. We have to do more to promote role models and success stories to make sport more attractive to girls.

It is important that we get this right. Even if every school meets the two-hour target—which we all want—the impact will be small if children continue to participate reluctantly in classes or feel that they are being forced into something they do not want to do. We can also take a positive outlook. Progress has been made towards the target of two hours of good-quality physical education every week and we should welcome the fact that the target is included within the curriculum for excellence. Indeed, a number of local authorities have chosen to include it in their single outcome agreements with the Government. For example, North Ayrshire Council, in the South of Scotland region, aims to have 80 per cent of primary schools and 82 per cent of secondary schools providing two hours of PE per week by 2012, with an eventual target of 100 per cent. Under the terms of the historic concordat, it is right that each authority should decide how it wants work towards the target.

We should also remember that the target was inherited by the present Scottish Government and that the previous Administration accepted that it would take time to achieve. Important though the target is, Government policies will not, by themselves, bring about the culture shift that is needed to get Scotland active. If children are to learn at school how to get active, PE lessons will need to be easy and attractive; children should want to put into practice outside of school the skills that they learn in school.

At the weekend, I spent time at the Biggar Rugby Football Club's annual mini-tournament, where teams from primary schools across Scotland came to compete against each other over the course of a day. What makes the tournament such a success is the crucial role that parents and guardians play in supporting the teams and helping the event to run smoothly. Such parental involvement is essential. Engagement of the whole family and activation of parental responsibility are very important in getting kids active. Jamie McGrigor may be interested to know that Biggar RFC has a successful programme in which it reaches out to the primary schools that feed the area's secondaries, including Biggar high school and Lanark grammar school. The programme helps to raise the profile of the game and to create teams of youngsters, some of whom may eventually go on into the first XV. I am pleased to say that Biggar RFC received funding from the Scottish Government's cashback for communities programme—funding that helped it to establish midnight rugby leagues for young people in some of the more deprived areas of the county. The investment of well-targeted cashback for communities funding shows what can be achieved with relatively modest amounts of money.

Burnbraes park in Biggar has been transformed in recent years thanks to the work of Janet Moxley and other community activists, who have won grants from a range of sources to maintain the park and to install new play equipment that is suitable for, and attractive to, different age groups. Other areas could learn from their work. I have passed on information about it to Lanark play parks action group. In a recent survey by the group, 60 per cent of respondents rated the condition of the town's play parks as "very poor".

Even the nicest play park can seem miserable on a cold, dark winter's evening, so we must ensure that Scotland has the facilities to enable people to take part in sport all year round. When preparing for this debate, I was reminded of a report that was published by my colleague Kenny MacAskill back in 2005, which showed the massive success of Norway in investing in all-weather pitches throughout the country. In recent months, we in Scotland have learned only too well the effects of Norway's investment in sport. Of course, the fundamental difference between Norway—which has a surplus of \$70 billion and is not facing £500 million-worth of cuts—and Scotland will not be lost on my SNP colleagues.

I was interested to see that the committee report mentions the lack of ice rinks. From my work in Cunninghame South, I know that parents are concerned about the closure of the Magnum leisure centre in Irvine.

Ultimately, if we want Scotland to do well in sport at international level, we must get it right for youngsters at the earliest opportunity. For as long as I can remember, we have been scratching our heads about how to improve Scotland's international footballing performance, although I remember that years ago the question was why we had not made into the later rounds of the tournament, not why we had not got there in the first place.

The committee's report is useful as we move forward, outlines many of the challenges that we face and suggests a range of solutions. I am glad that we have had the opportunity to discuss those today.

15:56

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I thank the convener of and clerks to the Health and Sport Committee and members of the Scottish Parliament information centre health team. We are grateful to them for guiding us through a long but important inquiry.

The committee was acutely aware of the fact that it was undertaking its inquiry at a significant time, with the Olympic and Commonwealth games ahead of us. Its report examines celebrities and their engagement with the world of sport, and how schoolchildren participate—or, as we found out, do not participate. We also reflected on how to create a legacy for Scotland from the Commonwealth games.

When I read the Government's response, I thought that it had missed a huge opportunity. It had an opportunity to be contrite, to admit that it was not giving the issue the priority that it needs or that the people of Scotland expect, and to capture the huge reserve of good will that exists for sport among people and politicians across Scotland. Instead, it fell back on being defensive and, as Richard Simpson said, dismissive of the committee's recommendations. In my opinion, that was a huge mistake.

As the weeks and months pass, I do not get the feeling that the SNP Government attaches any urgency or importance to the various challenges that are ahead of us. How frequently is the issue on the agenda at Cabinet meetings? Are highly visible initiatives under way? Are there initiatives that we are just not hearing about? Amidst all of that, we should not forget the challenge of the need for activity for all of us or the fact that we have the second highest levels of obesity in the world. The committee held a long and in-depth inquiry. Its work, report and conclusions have

revealed some of the SNP Government's most significant broken promises.

Just who is the champion of sport in the SNP Government? The strategy and tactics at the heart of the Government are focused almost exclusively on passing the buck to local authority outcome agreements. In case any doubts exist about that, I refer members to a recent letter that I received from the Minister for Public Health and Sport, Shona Robison, in which she said that the SNP's manifesto commitment was

"entirely a matter for local authorities".

She went on to say:

"As you will know, local authorities account for 90% of spending on sport in Scotland. A number of local authorities already have schemes offering free or discounted access to targeted groups and I would hope that others will recognise the benefits that free access to swimming pools can bring to achieving local outcomes. However, that is entirely a matter for individual local authorities taking into account local needs and priorities."

I am certain that the Scottish public did not think that that was the contract into which they were entering when they voted the SNP into government. Was the SNP simply being economic with the truth with folks across Scotland?

The manifesto of which I speak was clearly a manifesto for a Scottish Government. When did the present Government last convene a major conference of all stakeholders on how we can create a sense of urgency in building towards two globally significant sporting events? We have learned from the reports that have been leaked that the Government would rather use its and its civil servants' time to pick fights with Westminster about whether to choose independence or opt for a version of the Calman recommendations. We need only read Angus Macleod in *The Times* yesterday to get a flavour of the discussion.

Perhaps the committee's core conclusion was that nobody has taken responsibility for delivering on the policy. The target of two hours of PE per week, once adopted, was not given priority status, which led to a failure to adopt any co-ordinated approach to its implementation.

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Keith Brown): Will the member take an intervention?

Helen Eadie: When I have finished my point.

Is that surprising? If something is delegated to 15 local authorities, they all think that someone is undertaking a co-ordination role. As we now know, however, no one—not even the relevant minister—is undertaking that co-ordination. That is some priority for what was a manifesto commitment—and probably one of the commitments that meant most for the everyday lives of the public who, by and large, love and

enjoy sport. For some people, sport is their entire life—in spite of, not because of, the present Government. The evidence of the huge input of the voluntary sector is testament to that, as the committee heard.

The Government constantly defends itself by saying that the policy is included in the local authority outcome agreements. I typed the word "sport" into the search facility of the first local authority outcome agreement that I looked at. The search highlighted "sport", but—guess what?—only as part of the word "transport". The next reference to sport in the same search, under "Intermediate Outcomes", said "includes walking 2+ miles" per week. Other references included those in the authority's efficiency savings section—the council was looking for efficiency savings of just under £500,000, and the website highlighted a reduction in overtime for sports centres. So much for outcome agreements on sport. The Government really needs to get a grip.

We then read that the education spokesperson of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities insisted, on behalf of the umbrella group, that:

"We are moving away from the narrow targets such as two hours of PE."

The First Minister, Alex Salmond, said that investment in that area would go up by £40 million over three years. Has that happened? We shall find out tomorrow when John Swinney makes his budget statement.

The committee was outraged—I will not be as polite as the committee convener or Richard Simpson—by the approach of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education to PE, which was

"if no reference is made to the provision of PE in a school inspection report, it should be assumed that the provision of PE is satisfactory".

The committee's report says:

"The Committee considers that HMIE's attitude towards the inspection and reporting of PE is symptomatic of the lowly status that PE has enjoyed over a number of years ... The Committee considers that it is imperative that PE is inspected to the same level as all other curricular subjects."

In its response, the Government talks about expecting good-quality physical education. I believe that a Government needs to do more than simply expect.

Page 41 of the SNP manifesto of 2007 stated:

"We will work towards a guarantee of 5 days outdoor education for every school pupil. To start this process, we will provide an additional £250,000 each year to support the expansion of 5 days subsidised outdoor education targeted at children from our most deprived communities."

Labour freedom of information requests reveal that only seven local authorities have said that they hold information regarding outdoor education

centrally, and none of those provided it for all pupils. They included Aberdeen City, Highland, the City of Edinburgh, Inverclyde and Midlothian. Angus and Moray even state that there is no Scottish Government policy on outdoor education.

16:04

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I, too, congratulate the Health and Sport Committee on what I believe is a good report. However, running through it, I detected some slight confusion on the matter that Ian McKee raised: the differences between physical education and physical activity, and between physical activity and sport.

Try as we might, no matter how good the coaching and facilities are, not everyone likes sport. The convener of the Health and Sport Committee does not like sport, but she likes physical activity. [*Laughter.*]

Christine Grahame: I caution the member about referring to an item of apparel that I once confessed to wearing. She has referred to it enough in the past.

Margo MacDonald: I had no intention of referring to the member's big blue knickers.

The report endorses everything that I and other members have been saying in the Parliament for 10 years. Karen Gillon, who is not here, could attest to that. She did a huge amount of work to try to make PE serious and worthy of the respect that other classroom subjects get.

I am happy that the committee did not pull its punches in its report. There was mention of lukewarm headteachers. The best lessons in that regard can be learned from East Renfrewshire Council, which must have worked out how to timetable PE along with all the examinable subjects and still produce good academic results.

There are lukewarm councils. Members have said that no one takes responsibility for the delivery of the programme. Long ago, when dinosaurs still gambolled about the earth, we had PE organisers in councils who delivered the programme for the council and the Government. Perhaps that idea could be revisited.

There are lukewarm inspectors, too. HMIE betrayed the snobbery about the status of PE in the school curriculum that I described. The status of PE is improving, but we still have a long way to go and HMIE might be the last to get on that train as it pulls out of the station.

Christine Grahame said that if people are keen PE will happen. I am glad that many members said that being keen is not enough. Many teachers are as keen as mustard but cannot teach for toffee. We need good, well-trained teachers.

The report emphasised the importance of getting them young. Physical literacy was mentioned in the context of pre-school education—that is the context in which I understand the concept. I have 10 grandchildren, all of whom were subjected to time with their grandma out in the garage in the middle of winter, learning how to throw, catch, pass a ball and so on, with cut-down clubs, bats, rackets and all the rest of it. That is what physical literacy is about. However, some children are more literate than others, which is why I have difficulty working out how we could have a system of examination of physical literacy and PE attainment that would equate to our approach to examining other subjects.

The report also mentions the legacy from the Olympic games in London and the Commonwealth games in Scotland. If “legacy” means physical structures or the motivation to take part in sport or physical activity that we pass on to the people who come after us, it is already in place. The legacy should include kick-starting the active schools programme and links between what happens in schools and community sport and clubs. The committee's recommendation that there should be a conference to consider the matter is a good one, but the end result of the conference must be agreed in advance. We do not want another conference at which everyone starts by saying who they are and where they are from—there are far too many conferences like that. We know what we want to do; we need to work out how to deliver it.

There is less mention in the report than I would have wanted there to be of the type of PE that is provided in PE teacher-training programmes. I have a query about the courses that are currently taught. The report welcomes the one-year course, but there are one-year courses and one-year courses. I caution members that people who go into the one-year course after having done an academic degree are often good at one particular sport—they are specialists—and inspirational in it, but they are not necessarily qualified to teach physical education.

I would like the Government to assess the various courses that are on offer and to consider whether they are becoming far too academic. Is the PE certificate in schools also far too academic? Among PE teachers, there are too many stories of students coming out who cannot deliver any shots in netball and do not know about football and rugby because all that they did was class work.

I will finish on the reality of sport in the community and quote the experience of Hutchison Vale Football Club, which is a marvellous organisation. It has been going for 70 years and coaches hundreds of kids every week. Some of its

graduates are Allan McGregor and Steven Whittaker of Rangers Football Club, Gary Caldwell of Celtic Football Club, Ian Murray of Hibernian Football Club, Gary Naysmith, Andy Driver, Darren Fletcher, Kevin Thomson, John Collins, Kenny Miller and Derek Riordan, who is very good.

Hutchie Vale knows what it is like, in difficult areas, to take children on board, take them through and make them enthusiasts. In 1993, it introduced the measured steps system for six to 11-year-olds. In 1998, the programme had 130 kids, 45 per cent of whom had addresses in Broomhouse—not the most salubrious of areas—and the club charged them 50p a week. In 2001, it had to move to a new public-private partnership school and charge the kids £3 a week; only 7 per cent of them had addresses in Broomhouse. That is the reality for far too many clubs when they have to deal with new facilities.

Paragraph 277 of the report says it all:

“On the basis of the evidence, the conclusion that the Committee draws is that nobody has taken responsibility for delivering on the policy.”

If we have helped to clear that up this afternoon and inspire someone to take that responsibility, we will have done a good job.

16:12

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I thank Margo for an excellent speech. She touched on a number of areas on which I will touch.

I am not a member of the Health and Sport Committee, but I hope that its members will take my comments in the constructive way in which they are meant.

I thank Margo for her explanation of physical literacy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Use full names, please.

Sandra White: I am sorry. I thank Margo MacDonald for her explanation. When I phoned people in my constituency, none of them knew what physical literacy was, so I asked the committee convener. I was told that it is running, jumping, catching and throwing. Perhaps we should have a wee bit more plain speech, not only in the committee but throughout the Parliament.

Much of the debate—and the report—has focused specifically on the provision of physical education in schools, how best to achieve delivery of a two-hour PE target and where responsibility for the implementation of the policy lies. I congratulate the committee on being so robust on that and thank it for its recommendations. However, I have concerns about one issue, which

Margo MacDonald raised: the recommendation that

“pupil report cards should refer to a pupil’s physical literacy skills.”

My sister will probably kill me for this. She graduated as a psychologist but, throughout her life, she has been—and still is—unable to play skipping games or use a skipping rope. Would she have had a yellow, red or green card on her report card? Some people simply cannot take part in sports, so I have a real problem with that recommendation. I am concerned about it.

Christine Grahame: With respect to my colleague, we were not talking about taking part in sports but about basic skills of balance and catch. I am told that report cards are now so politically correct that teachers dare not put anything critical on them, but the point is to assist parents and children for whom something is lacking that should be there at the given stage of life, as we would with other skills.

Sandra White: I appreciate the explanation, but I still have concerns. I think that some parents would have concerns too, as would some pupils, such as, perhaps, my sister when she was younger. As I said, the report is robust on the issue and I thank the committee for that. However, as I said, I am not a member of the committee so I am taking an overview of the matter. I think that I should be able to give my impressions of it, and I hope that my views will be taken in the constructive way in which they are meant.

Further focus has been given to the active schools programme and the need for integrated local sports provision. Although I agree that those areas are important, I am concerned that the committee’s considerations focused on a remit that, to my mind, put too much emphasis on the provision and development of formal sporting activities to the detriment of physical activity in general. That is despite the fact that, during phase 1 of the inquiry, when the committee took evidence from athletes, it noted that one reason for the falling off in participation levels was to do with social changes whereby, as Christine Grahame said, young children are less likely to play outside. That should have been looked at more carefully and in more depth.

Furthermore, the section of the report on the remit and evidence at phase 2 of the inquiry explicitly states at paragraph 24 on page 5:

“The goal for the inquiry was to encourage physical activity in general”.

Physical activity in general was to be encouraged, but that was not looked at deeply enough. I agree with the minister that the provision of sport hubs that cater for all is one of the ways forward.

The report goes on to define physical activity as “movement of the body that uses energy”.

It states that this includes, among other activities, play, gardening and dance.

Margo MacDonald mentioned girls. I say to her—I am sure that she will take my comment in the spirit in which it is intended—that the fit for girls programme was introduced by the Government to encourage girls to be more active. Jamie McGrigor and I were involved in discussing that when we were on the Equal Opportunities Committee. The programme has been welcomed and it has had positive outcomes for young girls.

Unfortunately, however, it seems that the physical activity aspect of the inquiry was overlooked in favour of more structured sporting activities, particularly those for young people, even though Scotland's national organisation for health information, ISD Scotland, has reported that two thirds of Scottish adults do not do enough physical activity. Once again, that should have been looked at much more closely. I am not criticising the committee, but we should be looking at these things in much more detail. The inquiry focused too narrowly on PE provision and younger people in general rather than considering the large percentage of the population who could benefit from an inquiry into how to encourage and make provision for increased physical activity, which, as the report states, could include housework and gardening. In my experience of my kids and others, those activities are not best enjoyed by youngsters.

We all agree, and the committee's report states, that the 2014 Commonwealth games give us a great opportunity to create a lasting legacy for the whole of Scotland and to raise the profile of sport and healthy living in general. Since the announcement on the games, I have received a great deal of correspondence from constituents who are keen to learn what the lasting legacy will be for their communities. I know that a lot of work is being done on that. Surprisingly, however, a lot of that correspondence has come from adults who are concerned about the lack of local places for youngsters and adults to take part in physical activity.

I am not using my speech to publicise it, by any means, but as a result of that concern, I and my colleague Bill Kidd launched a consultation—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must wind up.

Sandra White:—to determine how we can respond to those concerns, by asking local residents what they would like to see. One model is the outdoor gym at Barlanark in the east end of

Glasgow. That is something that we should be looking at—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, the member really must wind up.

Sandra White: To wind up, and in conclusion, Presiding Officer, I believe that we can build a consensus. There were promises in the Labour Party's manifesto, the Lib Dems' manifesto—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think we get the message. I call Ken Macintosh.

16:19

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): When I got home last night, I drove down to the Scotstoun sports centre in Glasgow to pick up two of my kids who were playing tennis there. The courts were full, the pitches outside were all being used, and the swimming pool and gym were packed. The joint was jumping. I mention that not just because it made a terrific impression on me but because I want to start not by highlighting what is wrong but by highlighting what some local authorities, such as Glasgow City Council, are doing right.

For years, Glasgow City Council has invested in excellent facilities such as those at Scotstoun, Bellahouston and the Gorbals sports centre, which have been made available to all. Free swimming—the minister might like to take note of that Labour-delivered initiative—and programmes aimed at involving young people from all social backgrounds, not just those who can afford to attend private clubs, have been provided in Glasgow. The Parliament and the Government should be doing what they can to support such initiatives.

I add a small footnote for the attention of the Minister for Schools and Skills on what can be done to support cities such as Glasgow. The Gaelic school in Glasgow is currently struggling with inadequate sports facilities. In what is a national success story—a school with a growing roll—parents still want a full and well-rounded education for their children in addition to immersion in the Gaelic language. As my colleague Pauline McNeill highlighted in a letter to the minister, the school needs additional investment from the centre—from the Government—if it is to improve the facilities that are on offer to pupils. I hope that the minister will look at what can be done to support parents, the local authority and the local community in addressing that problem.

Before I go any further, I add my congratulations to the members of the Health and Sport Committee on their report. Of course, the same path has been trodden previously by, for example, my colleague Karen Gillon in the Parliament's first

session, and John Beattie, who chaired the physical activity task force back in 2002. However, as the committee's report highlights, the health of our country and rising obesity levels demand further action. The tantalising incentive of the 2014 Commonwealth games and—dare I say it—the absence of our national squad from the 2010 world cup in South Africa provide the imperative to act now.

The committee's report does not overly dwell on this point, but the need for adequate funding—in decent modern sports facilities in particular—underpins, or is implicit in, all the committee's observations. As committee members have mentioned, the looming crisis facing Scotland's curlers, skaters and ice hockey players is just one illustration of that need for funding.

Sandra White: Will the member give way?

Ken Macintosh: I will make progress, if I may.

However, what struck me when I read the report was the need not just for funding but for leadership, which is a theme that my colleague Richard Simpson and several others have pursued. In the committee's report, East Renfrewshire Council—I hope that members will forgive me for mentioning my own, Labour-led, local authority—is singled out for praise. As the committee report and members today have highlighted, the local authority has provided leadership not just on the delivery of PE but on the active schools programme and links with local sports clubs. Across the board, EastRen has shown what can be achieved when there is clear commitment and leadership. Unfortunately, the contrast with the lack of leadership from the centre could not be greater.

I will give one stark example of that. As might be expected, the Health and Sport Committee's report looks at the so-called commitment to two hours of PE a week in every school. The committee's conclusions—which mention the "lamentable failure" to achieve the target—are among the most strongly worded of any committee report that I can recall. I was particularly intrigued by the Scottish Government's defence in its response, which states:

"We have ensured that the target is embedded within Curriculum for Excellence".

I wonder whether members are aware of the full background to that embedding.

Shona Robison: What is different between that and the eight years in which the Labour Administration failed to deliver two hours of PE, which was a commitment from 1999? In our two years in power, what does the member believe that we could have done that his party failed to do in eight years? Does not that reflect—if the

member is being fair—what a challenge the target is?

Ken Macintosh: The minister is the fifth or sixth SNP member who has stood up to give the same lame excuse. SNP members are so used to blaming others that they cannot take responsibility. The commitment was an SNP manifesto promise, the SNP has been in government for two and a half years and she is the minister in charge. We expect leadership, commitment and responsibility.

As members might be aware, the key document for the embedding of that target was the curriculum for excellence document on health and wellbeing experience and outcomes. Between December 2007 and 17 April 2008, the document went through nine drafts without any reference to the two hours of PE. Then the First Minister faced a question on the subject, which had been in the papers that week, from my colleague Wendy Alexander. He responded:

"Wendy Alexander should not believe everything that she reads in the papers. Reports that we intend to scrap that target are completely unfounded".—[*Official Report*, 17 April 2008; c 7684.]

What happened next? Well—believe it or not—following the First Minister's response, the two hours commitment magically appeared in the 10th and final draft of the document, which was published on 1 May.

Members are only too familiar with the First Minister's lack of accuracy in answering parliamentary questions—

Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): That is disgraceful.

Ken Macintosh: Most members are fully aware of that.

However, what I am particularly concerned about in the context of today's debate is what that says about the priority that this Administration attaches to what is supposed to be a flagship commitment. It is only in the curriculum for excellence because the First Minister was embarrassed at question time—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must wind up, I am afraid.

Ken Macintosh: That shows that the target is hardly embedded in the curriculum for excellence, and it is hardly an example of leadership.

I conclude on the note on which I started. On Saturday morning, thousands of parents will be down at my local pitches when I drop off my oldest boy to play football. Parents who willingly give up their time do not need lectures on the benefits of sport or on how much fun it can be—what they need is commitment and leadership.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member's time is up; we need to move on to the wind-up speeches, for which members have six minutes. There is no spare time in this curriculum.

16:25

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): As with Jamie Stone, it is as a dispassionate observer that I congratulate the Health and Sport Committee on its report, "Pathways into sport and physical activity". However, the publication of the report does not justify the shock tactics that the committee's deputy convener deployed earlier this week on "Good Morning Scotland", when he drew attention to the committee's recommendations by threatening to take to the Bournemouth beachfront in Lycra shorts and a string vest.

The report highlights some fairly fundamental shortcomings in the way that children in Scotland are encouraged to develop the habit of taking physical exercise. Against the backdrop of an alarming rise in obesity, not least among our children and young people, it is clear that those failures come at a social and economic cost that we can ill afford to ignore.

Although it is not the sole answer, the committee is right to draw attention to the Government's lack of progress towards providing every schoolchild with two hours of quality PE every week. That is considered to be the absolute minimum to ensure that a child grows up with the basic skills of athleticism, balance and co-ordination. Like others, I am not a fan of the expression "physical literacy", but it captures the fundamental skills that every child should have the chance to develop as far as possible. Possession of those skills brings with it the added benefits of self-confidence and improved physical and mental health. That makes ministers' willingness to finesse their commitment to achieving two hours of high-quality PE all the more regrettable, as is the low priority that HMIE affords the issue, which drew criticism from the committee and did so much to disturb Christine Grahame.

Although schools are vital in creating the pathways into sport that are so critical, the responsibility goes much wider. The committee recognises that and urges councils to develop local sports strategies that incorporate measures to maintain and upgrade local authority facilities and to improve access. However, as Jamie McGrigor noted, if such strategies are to be successful, it is necessary for capacity to be built in local sports clubs across the country.

It is perhaps a little late in my remarks to confess that I did not follow the Health and Sport Committee's evidence taking as assiduously as I might have done, but I did attend an excellent

briefing session with the Scottish Rugby Union, which it is clear from the final report had an influence on the committee members who were present. The event sticks in my memory partly because of a photo that I have of me sandwiched between Scottish international Ally Hogg and Margo MacDonald—that is the back row for the Holyrood fantasy first XV right there.

I was also struck by a discussion that the three of us had that evening about the importance of sport in schools and of the network of sports clubs around Scotland. I expressed real excitement about the appointment of Orkney's first rugby development officer, who took up his post earlier this month. As Richard Simpson made clear, the sport has enjoyed an explosion of interest and participation, and nowhere has that been more evident than in Orkney, where it has been witnessed across age groups and abilities over the past few decades. Bruce Ruthven's appointment will help to take the game in Orkney to the next level, by helping local primary and secondary schools to deliver high-quality rugby programmes, improving the recruitment and training of volunteers, increasing the number of evening sessions, to which Aileen Campbell referred, and creating opportunities for competition across the age and ability range.

I am encouraged that that is a nationwide phenomenon. More than 65 development officers are now in place, each of whom encourages close collaboration among the SRU, local rugby clubs and local councils. Orkney Rugby Football Club's Kevin Sutherland and Rodney Spence deserve special mention for co-ordinating fundraising efforts and putting in place a comprehensive strategy for making best use of the development officer role. The initiative will pay real dividends for the rugby club in bringing on current and future generations of players.

I believe that the benefits will also be felt more widely and that the approach that has been adopted will help to increase participation rates in sport generally throughout the islands. Time will tell, of course, but I think that that example demonstrates that a joined-up approach among councils, schools, sports clubs and national sporting bodies can address some of the fundamental issues that are highlighted in the committee's report.

There are similar examples in other sports, but I have been impressed by what the rugby authorities and the wider rugby community are trying to do.

Dr Simpson: Will the member give way?

Liam McArthur: I cannot, I am afraid.

I am conscious that those efforts are being made against a background of concerns about the

safety of sport in general and rugby in particular. I certainly echo some of Ian McKee's comments and understand the concerns, but I hope that they can be kept in perspective, not least in the context of this afternoon's debate.

I declare an interest as a director of the Hearts and Balls charity, which was set up a decade or so ago to provide support and advice to people affected by serious rugby injuries. My rugby career was cut short many years ago by a cruel, debilitating and ultimately terminal lack of talent, but the same does not apply to my younger brother, Dugald, who played on into his late 20s. His career was ended by a horrendous accident 13 years ago, which left him quadriplegic. Not a day goes by in which I do not wish that he had never taken up the sport, but it would be a greater tragedy if that attitude became pervasive. Indeed, I already have doubts about whether our relationship with risk is entirely healthy.

Rugby is a sport from which many thousands of people, including Dugald, derive enormous pleasure, whether through playing or watching it or reliving their glory days—real or illusory. It offers everything from regular physical exertion to lifelong camaraderie. That is not to say that changes cannot and should not be made in it, as in other sports. As the former internationalist and current BBC presenter John Beattie recently observed:

"We have to have a game that combines physicality with a sense that it is trying to be as safe as possible, particularly in the teenage years."

That is why I was delighted that the SRU published its are you ready to play rugby? initiative back in May. The proposed changes, which build on input from players, coaches, academics and medical practitioners, are progressive and can help to improve safety while safeguarding enjoyment. In New Zealand, where a similar scheme has been in operation for some years now, the reduction in spinal injuries has been encouraging. The initiative can make a difference in Scotland through reducing the potential for mismatches at age-group level and introducing better training and preparation of players, coaches and referees and required standards of pitch-side care.

The initiative cannot, of course, entirely remove the risk of serious injury. Such injuries are—thankfully—rare, but they occur and will continue to occur not just in rugby but in a range of sports. However, I would argue that a greater risk arises from our not taking seriously enough the need to increase participation in sport and develop in our young people a habit of taking physical exercise.

16:31

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): I am grateful to Christine Grahame and the Health and Sport Committee for their extensive work on one of the most important issues that the country faces in improving health.

It is ironic that, in an age in which the diversity of sports on offer and the media coverage of them have never been greater, there are fewer active participants in sport and fewer physically fit youngsters per head of the population. For all the allure of sport on the big stage, there are deeply worrying signs at the grass-roots level about the lack of activities that are undertaken because of pleasure rather than because of competition, especially in schools. Gone are the days of compelling virtually all schoolgirls to play hockey and all schoolboys to play football or rugby. I was never one to worry about unfashionable kit or freezing cold winters spoiling my hockey, but I do not want us to return to those days. That said, they carry a strong message, as do the lifestyles of a generation that was in general much fitter and leaner than the current generation.

I read the Health and Sport Committee's report with great interest. As Ken Macintosh rightly pointed out, many good things are happening, but it is abundantly clear that pupils are not getting two hours of PE in far too many schools. Indeed, as Mary Scanlon pointed out, even the intention of providing that does not exist in far too many schools.

It is clear that, in their varying degrees, certain issues are seen to be having a detrimental effect on PE in schools. Those issues are: the lack of an integrated strategy for sport and PE; concern about the availability of and access to sports facilities; the lack of specialist PE teachers in primary schools; a lack of focus when it comes to HMIE PE inspections; concerns about the health and safety bureaucracy and the accompanying litigious society; curriculum pressures; budget pressures; the aggressive and ugly behaviour of some key sportsmen and some sections of supporters; and the changing nature of teaching jobs. The story is not very happy, but what can we do about it? I want to pick up on some of the key themes.

What struck me most about the Health and Sport Committee's report was its comments about the lack of an integrated structure. One of the biggest difficulties has been confusion about definitions, although perhaps that is not a valid excuse. I share Sandra White's and Margo MacDonald's concern about the term "physical literacy", which is pretty meaningless, but it is important to come up with meaningful and accurate definitions of the terms "physical education", "physical activity" and "sport" because,

as Margo MacDonald and Ian McKee said, those terms are far too readily confused. That was clearly shown when the Scottish Government got itself into deep water about whether walking to school was PE. We are talking about two hours of good-quality physical education, which I am sure should mean two hours of PE instruction in normal curriculum time by a professional teacher with the relevant skills.

East Renfrewshire Council and Clackmannanshire Council have been praised for their pathways into sport programmes. One reason for their success is the fact that they have had an understanding of the overall strategy, which has involved not just schools but clubs and bodies such as SwimScotland that have done a huge amount to push forward innovative programmes and youngsters. I also mention Cricket Scotland. That might upset Sandra White, as it is not a body that appeals to her, but it too has done a huge amount and extremely well to get far more people involved in a short time.

Those local authorities have not taken a piecemeal approach that lacks clarity and vision, but the committee notes that such an approach is far too prevalent throughout Scotland. To me, what is essential is a willingness to make structural changes to the school timetable. Although I fully acknowledge that that is not easy, particularly in this day and age when so much presses on the curriculum, it can be done with willpower, as Richard Simpson and Mary Scanlon have said.

There is also the issue of facilities. It is important that up-to-date facilities are available, and I hope that the new school build programme is on the way to helping that. However, it is a question not just of the availability of the facilities but of their accessibility and cleanliness. In my view, local authorities and local communities could do a lot more to improve those aspects.

I also believe that an important lesson to be learned from East Renfrewshire is the importance of getting commitment at teacher-training level and harnessing volunteers. Those are, sadly, among the most difficult tasks that we face. It used to be the case that the majority of teachers in Scottish schools—of whatever type—would willingly take on extra-curricular activities. They do not do so now, as the job demands so much paperwork and more teachers feel heavily under pressure about health and safety issues. It used to be easy for volunteers to gain elementary coaching certificates from schemes such as those that were run way back in the 1970s by Green Shield stamps and the Prudential—coaching schemes that were designed specifically to ensure maximum grass-roots participation rather than to develop sporting

superstars. We have largely lost those schemes, and we are failing a generation because of it.

The Health and Sport Committee's report is extremely important, but what is even more important is how we react to it. To put it mildly, the current Government is sleepwalking on the issue and needs to wake up to the reality of the stark message that the committee has sent out.

16:37

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston)

(Lab): I had better get my tackle in first, if we are talking about sport. I was a sports minister and bear some responsibility for some of the concerns that have been raised by the committee. I recognise and do not envy the difficulties that the minister has to address in trying to get the monolith of education to deliver on the clear commitment of both previous Administrations and the present Administration to two hours of quality PE a week. To prevent an intervention by Margo MacDonald, I define two hours of quality PE as any pupil's experience when she was a PE teacher. I hope that flattery will get me everywhere.

The committee's report is a brave one in that the SNP convener has been willing to raise critical questions about the process that the Government faces in delivering pathways into sport, but the Government's response has been timid and disappointing. I hope that, in summing up, the minister will give us a wee bit more confidence and aspiration—we obviously need those in Scottish sport, given recent developments. How must the coaches have felt after Andy Murray did not succeed as he hoped to? How must the national football coach—who received much opprobrium, to which, I concede, I contributed over the months—have felt when the players on the pitch did not deliver what was expected? The challenge that the Government faces is to deliver the laudable objectives that were contained in the SNP's manifesto commitments.

Margo MacDonald: The member mentions Andy Murray. He is the only tennis player who has, through his inspiring performances, increased the number of people who take part in tennis. That is something that we need to address. What has he got, and what has he done that others cannot?

Mr McAveety: I welcome that intervention because one suggestion is for the Judy Murray tennis academy to be located 250yd from my front door. I would be delighted if that development took place.

Margo MacDonald touches on an important message, which is how we can use the big sporting events to create more activity, enjoyment and a general sense of wellbeing.

There is a lack of clarity in areas in which the committee has raised concerns in its report and I have raised concerns in recent months. We welcome the broad commitment in the Government's response to endeavour through the outcome agreements to deliver its manifesto commitments to two hours of PE a week.

Mary Scanlon: I remind the member of something that I clearly remember, which is that the SNP manifesto stated:

"we will ensure that every pupil has 2 hours of quality PE each week".

Today, that pledge has become an undertaking to try to make some progress towards that.

Mr McAveety: The member has saved me half a paragraph. That is exactly the point that I want the minister to respond to, because I think that it is a genuine concern across the chamber.

I want to talk about the swimming pledge because, when I was leader of Glasgow City Council, we improved access to swimming not only for young people under the age of 18 but for people over the age of 60. We made a commitment to do so because we saw the benefit of that policy. The Government's commitment is good, but the question is: how can we bring it about?

On the local sports strategies, a few phrases leap out of the Government's response to the committee's report. One is:

"within the constraints of the Concordat agreements Local Authorities will place differing priorities on the provision of sport and physical activity."

With regard to a number of other areas, concern is raised about the fact that some local authorities are not even aware of any endeavour at a national level to try to deliver on outdoor education. Will the minister explain how the Government is trying to make progress in that regard?

I note that Ian McKee is back in the chamber, so I say that, like everyone else, I am keen to ensure that we have the best quality top sportspeople in Scotland. However, in case there is any doubt, I should say that I am also keen to ensure that people have opportunities to participate in sport at whatever level.

I am a veteran of what I call the wonderful facilities that were the red blaes pitches in Glasgow. Back in the 1980s and 1990s, I used to take school football teams out, even on unforgiving winter mornings when we had to chap on the doors of some of the young members of the teams to get them out of their beds so they would turn up for the match.

The point is that we need to try to make facilities better. That is a big challenge. I have held the

position that the minister currently holds, and I am aware of the obstacles that can appear when people try to do such things. However, I would like to hear from the minister how he intends to overcome those obstacles.

In sport, we have heroes. One of my great heroes, Muhammad Ali, was in Britain a few weeks ago. It was rather sad to see his condition, which is probably the result of the sport that he was involved in, but he once said:

"Champions aren't made in gyms, champions are made from something they have deep inside them—a desire, a dream, a vision."

It would be overstating the case to claim that the committee's report represents a desire, a dream or a vision, but it represents a reasonable aspiration, and I hope that the Government can respond to a reasonable report that raises concerns that we all have, and make some progress. Even I would welcome progress being made on key SNP manifesto commitments, if they make a difference to the people whom I represent.

16:43

The Minister for Schools and Skills (Keith Brown): It is clear from today's debate that there is cross-party agreement on—if nothing else—the health benefits that are to be gained from encouraging children, young people and adults to be more active. However, as several members have mentioned, there are worrying signs that Scots are becoming less and less physically active, despite the public understanding the benefits.

I would not risk trying to speak for the Health and Sport Committee in any way—especially as its members are so serious and influential—but the central message that I took from its report was that this issue needs to be taken seriously and responsibility must be taken for it. I hope to address that, as well as some of the points that have been raised.

We all agree on the importance of the message being underpinned by concrete action across the public sector and beyond. Nurseries, playgroups, schools, higher and further education establishments, parents, the medical profession, youth workers, sports governing bodies, local sports clubs and local authorities have a vital role in ensuring that appropriate physical activity is incorporated into their services for young people. It is vital that physical activity forms part of all young people's lives and that there are appropriate opportunities to stimulate and develop the interest and commitment that will provide a foundation for sustained physical activity.

On 1 September, we published a games legacy plan for Scotland that sets out our aspirations for

the periods before, during and after the 2014 Commonwealth games. The plan includes a new physical activity programme to encourage people of all ages and abilities to become more physically active in the run-up to 2014 and beyond. That relates to the point that was made that we should not concentrate too much on the competitive and elite elements of sport, but instead should ensure that we use the example that some people provide to produce a legacy that benefits the entire population.

The legacy plan also seeks to improve the use of and access to the facilities that are available for physical activity and competitive sport through the development of the community sports hubs that we have heard about today.

The new school estate strategy, which we expect to publish later this month, will reaffirm the joint commitment of the Government and local authorities to improve access to school facilities, which members have mentioned a number of times.

Jamie McGrigor: The Scottish Sports Association suggests that upskilling primary teachers is one way to get young people involved in sport. What is the Government doing on that?

Keith Brown: I will move on to teacher training shortly. Our original commitment of £1.8 million for teacher training will continue right through the process. That is, of course, set against a background of tight public expenditure, which should give members an idea of our commitment. The Minister for Public Health and Sport yesterday met the body that Mr McGrigor mentioned, and the Government is engaging in continuous joint working with it to achieve the desired outcome.

The health and wellbeing aspect of the curriculum for excellence, which we have heard about today, sets out the sport, physical activity and physical education experiences and outcomes for all young people during their school days. An important element of that is the requirement for all schools to work towards delivering two hours of physical education a week. The commitment to deliver the new curriculum—and therefore the two-hour physical education commitment—has been secured through the concordat and endorsed by every local authority during the 2009 single outcome agreement process.

Elizabeth Smith: Will the member take an intervention?

Keith Brown: I want to make some more progress.

The Government is committed to driving home the need for schools to make good progress in delivering at least two hours of physical education each week. We have emphasised that in our

meetings with local authorities. Adam Ingram, Fiona Hyslop and I have, between us, now met every single local authority in Scotland.

To return to Jamie McGrigor's point, we have developed in conjunction with Glasgow and Edinburgh universities a postgraduate certificate course for existing primary teachers to enhance their physical education skills. Around 600 primary teachers have already participated in the course, and the total funding of £1.8 million that I mentioned has been agreed with the universities for the period 2008 to 2011.

Margo MacDonald: I apologise for not having the exact figures to hand—perhaps the minister can help me. What savings are made by upskilling primary teachers who are non-specialists while keeping unemployed the young physical education graduates who cannot get jobs?

Keith Brown: Decisions on the employment of teachers and the training of teachers in physical education are matters for local authorities. However, we can ensure that additional funding is provided so that the training is available to them.

To return to the central point about taking the issue seriously, when I appeared before the Health and Sport Committee Ross Finnie spoke about his visit to East Renfrewshire to find out what had been done there, which obviously had impressed committee members. I visited East Renfrewshire shortly after, and I was similarly impressed by what had been achieved, not least what had been done with the timetable, which has been mentioned. I say to Liz Smith that a number of local authorities throughout Scotland have now copied that: they like what has happened in East Renfrewshire and they are pursuing it. However, it is for local authorities to decide whether they do that or not.

Elizabeth Smith: How much progress does the minister expect to be made by the 29 councils that are not delivering on the targets?

Keith Brown: I do not think that 29 councils are not delivering on the targets. If I had time, I could list the progress that each council has made. For example, Helen Eadie, who would not let me intervene in response to her comments, might be surprised to learn that in Fife in 2005, not a single primary school was offering two hours of physical education, and now 23 are. Many secondary schools are also doing that when they did not do so before. That contrasts with the points that some members have made about a lack of progress.

I met representatives of ADES at the Health and Sport Committee's suggestion, and put forward as a template what has been done in East Renfrewshire. Members will realise that in education in Scotland there is some resistance to the regular presentation of East Renfrewshire

models, not only because of the excellence of that local authority but because its socioeconomic make-up is not entirely typical of every authority in Scotland.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has—as I said when I appeared before the committee—asked HMIE to comment on progress towards the target of two hours of PE a week for each pupil in every single report that it produces. As a result, the inspectorate has rewritten the procedures that it applies in relation to the target.

I said that we have met every council in Scotland. I should mention that progressing the target through the curriculum for excellence was not only this Government's idea; it was Peter Peacock's idea. That is how he said it should be delivered. Of course, the curriculum for excellence has taken some time to come to fruition—not least because of the request to delay it for a year, but also because of earlier delays.

The single outcome agreements all mention the curriculum for excellence. Apart from the six agreements that have been mentioned, they do not mention the target of two hours of PE a week because they do not go into that kind of detail. The method for delivering the target is through the curriculum for excellence. In contrast to the point that Ken Macintosh made, the target was in "Building the curriculum 3", which was published in 2008, so it was not a late addition, as has been suggested.

The school estate strategy will start to address some of the concerns that have been raised about the lack of facilities, which I understand and accept. Many schools have said that the available facilities are a reason why they find it difficult to address the problem, although other schools have been happy to move beyond the school gates and use surrounding areas, as happened when I was at school. A lack of appropriate facilities is not an excuse for not meeting the target, but we understand that it is a constraint.

Through the work that we have done with HMIE, ADES, East Renfrewshire Council and others to promote what East Renfrewshire Council is doing, huge progress has been made, although we cannot tell other councils to do it. I am convinced that there will be massive progress in the course of the next year when curriculum for excellence has been implemented.

Mary Scanlon: Will the minister give way?

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): No, he will not; he does not have time.

Keith Brown: We are heartened that the committee's report broadly supports the Government's approach, and we have found many

of its recommendations helpful in considering how we may step up our efforts.

I am also heartened by the feedback that I have received from councils about their commitment to delivering two hours of PE a week for all pupils and about the steps that they are taking to meet the target. I appreciate the challenge that the target presents to some schools, but let me be clear that the improvements that are being made to the school estate, the number of teachers who are receiving additional support in teaching PE and the increased flexibility through curriculum for excellence will help us to increase both the number of those who are using the pathway and the number of signposts that are in place for others to follow.

Ken Macintosh: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am sure that the minister would not wish inadvertently to mislead the chamber. I point out that the document to which he referred, "Building the curriculum 3", was published in June 2008—after the final draft of the document that I mentioned.

The Presiding Officer: The point is now on the record.

I ask Ross Finnie to wind up on behalf of the committee. Mr Finnie you have a very tight eight minutes.

16:52

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will not get into a debate about what a tight and what a wide eight minutes are, as that might waste more time.

The debate has generally been consensual. I will start from the beginning of the whole process. The committee was concerned about lower levels of participation in sport, therefore we took evidence from sporting organisations to get a better feel for why that was the case. I hope that Sandra White did not confuse the early evidence sessions with the substantive work that the committee subsequently undertook. Having found that there was considerable unanimity across the sporting organisations that their deep concern about the lower levels of participation had much to do with the physical abilities of pupils who presented to them, the committee extended the remit of its inquiry from being an inquiry into pathways into sport to being an inquiry into pathways into physical activity. I have much sympathy with Margo MacDonald, Elizabeth Smith and many other members in respect of the difficulty that we had with definitions.

We wanted to keep PE as part of what is required. We tried to set physical literacy as the minimum standard that we expect our school

pupils to attain, although we obviously have not succeeded. If pupils attained physical literacy, sporting organisations would be able to attract and make use of a better cohort of people.

Of course, those were the broad aims of the committee. We were not in a position to solve the problems, but we entered into a very extensive inquiry—one of the longest that the committee has conducted—which produced substantive evidence to support the report.

Of course, the report presents a challenge to everyone in society. As Aileen Campbell pointed out, parents have a responsibility in this matter, and the report challenges them to address the physical state of their children. It challenges educationists to tell us what they intend to do about the question of physical education. It challenges health providers, local authorities, sports clubs and, inevitably, the Government and the Parliament.

We must be careful in spelling out to ministers that, by producing a report of this substance, the committee is seeking a positive response to its recommendations. I should perhaps illustrate what I mean with reference to a couple of recommendations. For example, in its response to the report, the Scottish Government said:

“Curriculum for Excellence includes within the experiences and outcomes for health and wellbeing, the expectation that schools will continue to work towards the provision of at least 2 hours of good quality physical education for every child every week.”

The committee did not say that previous Governments succeeded in meeting that expectation; indeed, even Frank McAveety was gracious enough to accept that they had not succeeded. However, the evidence showed that the policy had simply not managed to get out of the Government documents in which it was embedded. Our point was that we should not rely on a policy being successful simply because it is embedded in a policy document.

The committee finds it disappointing that, in relation to its recommendation that

“the PE target”

should not be

“confused with other physical activity targets”,

the Government responded:

“There is no question of the two hours of taught PE being confused with other aspects of ... Health and Wellbeing”.

I am sorry, but I have to tell ministers that that is not the evidence that the committee received.

With regard to the remarks by the Minister for Schools and Skills on HMIE in his closing speech, we accept that ministers wrote to us to say that they were asking the inspectorate to change its

approach. However, in its response, the Government said:

“The quality of children and young people’s learning in physical education is evaluated and reported on in every school inspection.”

I do not doubt that ministers are seeking to make changes with the inspectorate, but, again, I am sorry to say that that clear statement does not reflect the evidence that we received. There might be a grammatical point about the tense that was used, but we should not get into that now.

We are not trying to pin blame on anyone; we simply point out that a substantial report has been produced during the life of this Government and we hope that it will engage with us in trying to do something about the issues that have been raised. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. I apologise, Mr Finnie, but I must ask members who are entering the chamber to respect the fact that we are winding up a debate and that other members would like to listen to the speeches.

Ross Finnie: Notwithstanding the minister’s caveat, I am encouraged—as, I am sure, is the rest of the committee—by the minister’s statement that the experience of East Renfrewshire Council is to be commended. However, in its official response, the Government said that the kind of restructuring of the timetable that East Renfrewshire undertook to achieve the two-hour target would have an impact on classrooms and teachers. There was no note of encouragement in that response, although the Minister for Schools and Skills went further in his comments this afternoon. In any case, the committee has suggested that the timetable needs to be restructured—otherwise there will be no time in it for two hours of PE.

So, Madam Presiding Officer—*[Laughter.]* We will not refer to your sporting apparel, Presiding Officer. Many constructive comments have been made in the debate, and there has been unanimity on the committee’s basic proposition that it is imperative to separate out physical activity and physical education—Margo MacDonald made that point very clear—and to ensure that our youngsters, whatever their socioeconomic background, can engage in physical activity and acquire a degree of physical expertise. As I said, by taking that approach we will ensure that there is a larger cohort of the population to whom sports clubs can make their pitch. In that respect, we acknowledge that the integration that sportscotland’s sports advisers can achieve in schools and in making the crucial link between schools and sports clubs is critical to increasing participation.

The report has much to commend it. I hope that, even at this late stage, the Government will reflect on its immediate responses to the committee. From today's remarks by the Minister for Public Health and Sport and the Minister for Schools and Skills, I do not think that the Government's responses to the report accurately reflect what ministers intended. Some of the responses were overly dismissive. I hope that, just as the committee wants the recommendations to be taken forward, the Government will see its way to taking them forward, as that is crucial for educational attainment and the improvement of sport in Scotland. I commend the report and I hope that the Parliament will work to implement its recommendations.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-4853, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for Thursday 17 September, which is tomorrow.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 17 September 2009—

delete

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate:
Scottish Road Safety Framework

and insert

2.55 pm Ministerial Statement: Budget

followed by Scottish Government Debate:
Scottish Road Safety Framework—
[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-4854, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 23 September 2009

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Ministerial Statement: Broadcasting

followed by Public Petitions Committee Debate:
Inquiry into the Public Petitions
Process

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 24 September 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Health and Wellbeing

2.55 pm Stage 1 Debate: Tobacco and
Primary Medical Services (Scotland)
Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Tobacco and Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 30 September 2009

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by SPCB Question Time

2.50 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 1 October 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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 Scottish Government Business

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-4855, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 2 timetable for the Arbitration (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Arbitration (Scotland) Bill at Stage 2 be completed by 9 October 2009.—[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motion S3M-4856, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S3M-4857, on substitution on committees.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Act 2008 (Consequential Modifications) Order 2009 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Gavin Brown be appointed to replace Murdo Fraser as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Finance Committee;

Murdo Fraser be appointed to replace Gavin Brown as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee.—[Bruce Crawford.]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S3M-4835, in the name of Christine Grahame, on the Health and Sport Committee's report on pathways into sport and physical activity, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Health and Sport Committee's 5th Report, 2009 (Session 3): *Pathways into Sport and Physical Activity* (SP Paper 260).

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S3M-4856, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Act 2008 (Consequential Modifications) Order 2009 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-4857, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on substitution on committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Gavin Brown be appointed to replace Murdo Fraser as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Finance Committee;

Murdo Fraser be appointed to replace Gavin Brown as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee.

Whithorn

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I should probably declare an interest in the next item of business, given that it is centred on Whithorn, which is a royal burgh in the very heart of my constituency.

I am pleased to introduce the final item of business, which is a members' business debate on motion S3M-4580, in the name of Alasdair Morgan, on Whithorn as cradle of Christianity and place of modern pilgrimage.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that Whithorn is the earliest known centre of Christianity in Scotland and that Whithorn has already produced archaeological artefacts of immense historical significance; notes that, while in ancient times Ninian was Scotland's premier saint and remains commemorated in many sites throughout the nation, the historical significance of Whithorn and Ninian's story is largely forgotten by a modern generation; recognises that the recognition of Whithorn as Scotland's cradle of Christianity will bring economic benefit to a depressed area, and supports the efforts of the Whithorn Trust to publicise Whithorn's unique contribution to Scottish history more widely, not least for the benefit of its present-day inhabitants.

17:04

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am glad, on St Ninian's day, to be speaking in the debate and to have the opportunity to put on record, in Parliament, the royal burgh of Whithorn's place as Scotland's earliest-known centre of Christianity. I thank the members of all parties who have signed my motion to that effect, and those members of the public who have made the long journey from the south-west to hear this debate in their Parliament.

Although the history of Scotland during what was to be the final century of the Roman empire in the west is neither well nor definitively documented, St Ninian—or Bishop Ninian—was in Whithorn in the decades spanning AD 400 or, some say, AD 500, and is reputed to have rebuilt the existing church there in a style of building unknown to the Britons of the time, hence its name of candida casa. The significance of that is not just that it pre-dates the settlements on Iona and Lindisfarne but that its importance to Christians remained throughout the centuries to come. Contrary to our geographical view of the centre of Scotland, Whithorn, in days gone by, was a significant centre.

Being the shrine of Ninian, Whithorn has been a significant place of pilgrimage throughout the centuries. Scottish royalty was a regular visitor, and recorded pilgrims include Robert the Bruce; David II; James I, II, III, IV and V—I do not know

why the sixth did not get there; Queen Margaret of Denmark, the wife of James III; Mary Queen of Scots; and indeed our current monarch.

The legacy of Ninian is well known throughout Scotland and the wider world. That is attested to by the use of the name in many churches, schools, streets and so on. Indeed, on the great bronze doors of St Andrew's house—the seat of the Scottish Government here in Edinburgh—Walter Gilbert sculpted four Scottish saints, with his representation of Ninian taking pride of place before the other great saints, Kentigern, Magnus and Columba.

While we are right to celebrate our past for its own sake and because of how much it has contributed to what we are today as a nation, it is entirely appropriate that the present inhabitants of Whithorn and the Machars of Wigtownshire should remember their heritage and the historical significance of their locality in such a way that tangible benefits are conveyed to the community as a whole.

Revenue from pilgrimage is nothing new and was very much a feature of the middle ages: pilgrims bought and wore badges that represented their intended place of pilgrimage. One such lead badge was found during the Whithorn excavations. The badges were obtained for a fee, in this case from the Prior of Whithorn. In 1504 and the year after, James IV is recorded as having spent the then princely sums of, respectively, four shillings and nine shillings on pilgrimage badges.

Although Whithorn's geographical position may have made it a fairly obvious first foothold in Scotland for Ninian, by contrast that position does not do the town any favours in terms of how our modern economy is structured. Whithorn is a considerable distance from the larger centres of Scottish population and far from any other country, with the exception of Ireland. To get to Whithorn takes more than a slight diversion from any of the through routes that visitors to Scotland might normally take, so one cannot simply sit back and wait for the casual visitor to drop in.

To be fair, transport has always been an issue in the south-west. As far back as 1441, Margaret, Countess of Douglas, applied to the Pope to be granted an indulgence in return for contributing financially to the building of a bridge over the River Bladnoch, where pilgrims to St Ninian were in the habit of assembling. Given that the Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution has no responsibility for transport, he will be relieved to know that I will make no such demands tonight.

Moreover, although somewhat similar in terms of accessibility, in terms of public recognition Whithorn and Ninian suffer by comparison with Iona and Columba, despite Ninian preceding

Columba by some time. However, I am not trying to stimulate bitter rivalry between the two sites, although the press coverage might be useful. Instead, I am trying simply to enhance the degree of recognition that Ninian gets, without necessarily diminishing Columba in any way. That said, it is worth noting that close to Iona, on Mull, there is the small village of Kilninian, whose name means "the church of Ninian". Perhaps that is an early example of saintly rivalry.

For some time, the people of Whithorn have been working hard to develop ways of interpreting and publicising the significance of Whithorn as a cradle of Christianity in Scotland and a place of modern pilgrimage. I am talking about pilgrimage for not only its own sake but the economic benefit that it can deliver for everyone in the area. The hard work to which I referred has been done in particular by the Whithorn Trust. Some years ago, I was delighted—as was the Presiding Officer—to be asked to become a trustee.

The trust has a solid foundation on which to build. Anyone who visited Whithorn this summer—particularly if they were lucky enough to do so on a dry, sunny day—could not fail to be struck by the attractive and pleasing aspect of the broad main street, much of which was recently refurbished. Indeed, Whithorn is one of only three or four towns in Scotland that still bears witness to its original medieval layout. The town also has a visitor and exhibition centre with a fine collection of early Christian stones, including the Latinus stone, the earliest Christian monument in Scotland. Visitors can also explore the significant evidence of human activity from the earliest time that is to be found all over the southern Machars of Galloway.

It is therefore with some justification that the Whithorn Trust has unveiled ambitious plans to move forward a project. The purpose of a members' business debate is not only to air a topic publicly but to attract the undivided attention of the respective minister, albeit for a short time. Tonight, the Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution—a minister with a deep interest in Scotland's culture and its ecclesiastical history—is in the chamber. Given his interest, I have a chance of extracting a small price from him—it is only a small price. All that I ask him to do is agree to meet a small delegation of trustees in the not-too-distant future to talk about their plans and consider how the reinvigoration of Whithorn can better fit into the Government's broader cultural and tourism strategy for Scotland.

17:12

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Alasdair Morgan on securing the debate.

Aged 25 and newly married, I set out to teach at Whithorn school, a secondary school that was situated across a playground from Whithorn primary school. As Michael Caine might have said, "Not a lot of people know that." I came to the school direct from urban—if not urbane—Dunfermline, where I had taught in a comprehensive with a school roll in excess of 1,000. I moved to a school—at the time it was called Whithorn junior secondary school—that had a roll of under 100. Of course, on taking up residence in the school house, I became a resident of Whithorn. I well recognise the broad main street that Alasdair Morgan described.

Whithorn was a disadvantaged town at that time, and it remains disadvantaged. It is located pretty well at the end of one of the Galloway peninsulas. Back in those days, Newton Stewart was a busy market town, but it is suffering a bit nowadays. As you and I know, Presiding Officer, the Isle of Whithorn is not an island but a town on an attractive harbour. People tend to pass through Whithorn en route to the Isle of Whithorn; they have to make a point of visiting. Indeed, once they have visited the area, their only choice is to turn round and head back up the peninsula to Newton Stewart. In many ways, the area is disconnected from central Scotland. It used to take me four hours to drive from Whithorn to Edinburgh; Concorde crossed the Atlantic faster than that.

I found that many people did not know where Galloway was. They tended to be vague, asking, "Is it in Ayrshire?" "No," I used to say, "It is not." People had not a clue about the part of Galloway in which Whithorn is located, never mind a knowledge of the town. I am therefore pleased that the debate is taking place.

I made my first contact with St Ninian's cave while teaching at the school. One lovely spring day, I took the class out of the school to visit the cave. We strolled through the beautiful Physgill glen, which leads down to the cave. The children, rightly, took for granted everything about the glen—they were used to being surrounded by such countryside—but, coming from an urban part of Scotland, I was astonished at its beauty. It was burgeoning with bluebells, wild irises, crocuses and primroses—I will get poetic—as the April sun streamed through a delicate canopy of birch leaves. I am sure members can picture it. I was enthralled. When one comes to the end of the glen, it opens up to reveal a seascape and one crosses a rough pebbled shore to reach the cave. For any monk to take up a place there must have meant a real hermit's life.

The experience was extraordinary and magical, but few people knew about St Ninian's cave. Until the debate, I imagine that few people were aware of the role of St Ninian in bringing Christianity to

Scotland. I am sure that many associate that with St Columba and Iona. I say to Alasdair Morgan that there should be a bit of a scrap; it would raise the profile of St Ninian.

I look to an initiative down in Galloway that succeeded and that provides a model for Whithorn. Ten or 15 years ago, Wigtown, which had been an important place and the heart of Wigtownshire, had fallen into desuetude; it looked a bit like tumbleweed town and had lost many of its industries and markets. It then became a book town. I thought that the initiative was just a slick public relations job that would never work, but it has: Wigtown has put itself on the map as a book town. The buildings that were crumbling and falling apart have been restored. The town is fresh, invigorated and busy and has an important local economy; I know that you are aware of that, Presiding Officer.

I hope that, through this motion and by hooking on to the history and some of the legacy of St Ninian, Whithorn will have the kind of regeneration and renaissance that happened in Wigtown. I congratulate both you, Presiding Officer, who have unfortunately been silenced in the debate by your role, and Alasdair Morgan.

17:16

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Alasdair Morgan on securing this debate.

As we know, Whithorn is to be recognised as the earliest-known centre of Christianity in Scotland. Whether for pilgrimage, healing or culture, Whithorn has an ancient legacy as an important historical and religious site, both nationally and internationally. The Whithorn Trust is dedicated to promoting the profile of that legacy worldwide; it is important that the Parliament, too, should recognise it.

Whithorn has produced for Scotland archaeological artefacts of immense historical significance, dating as far back as the fifth century. Most famous is the Latinus stone, the earliest British Christian monument, which was carved around AD 450 with an inscription beginning

"We praise you, the Lord."

The story of Whithorn cannot be recounted without reference to its most famous protagonist, St Ninian. Celebrated as Scotland's first saint, he began his holy mission to the southern Picts of Scotland in the fourth century, long before St Columba's journey to the western isles two centuries later. St Ninian's influence was alluded to by an eighth-century historian, Bede, who described him as

"a most reverend bishop and holy man of the nation of Britons."

However, as others have said, the legacy of St Ninian's influence on the growth of Christianity in Scotland has often been undermined by the popular fame of Iona.

Following St Ninian's death, thousands embarked on the arduous pilgrimage to Whithorn, bringing a wave of prosperity for the small community in its wake. In the 16th century, the reformation brought disillusionment about Whithorn's significance. As anti-Catholic iconoclasm grew, so did the culture of disregard for religious artwork and church buildings; pilgrimages were also prohibited.

Different ways of practising Christian faith should not stop us recognising and celebrating today the heritage that Whithorn gives us. The Whithorn Trust hopes that reinstating the town's position as the birthplace of Christianity in Scotland will renew its link to its pilgrim past and bring prosperity to its current inhabitants, through growing interest and visits to the town. The trust has undertaken an impressive effort to catalogue the evolution of the community of Whithorn, through the preservation of historical literature and artefacts, to return to it due recognition as the cradle of Scottish Christianity.

Honouring this old monastic town with such a prestigious title will bring essential tourism and vital economic input to an area that has suffered relative rural deprivation, but the lasting legacy of this small south-western Scottish town is not to be underestimated, as the spread of Christianity laid the foundations for much of Scotland's, the United Kingdom's and Europe's political, artistic and cultural landscape.

As we celebrate the 150th year since David Livingstone first travelled to Malawi as a Scottish missionary, Scotland is again reminded of the Christian roots of its international influence. Olympic gold medal winner Eric Liddell, who was later to become a missionary in China, joins a legacy of Scottish Christians whose impact has had global reach. Whithorn's Ninian, Blantyre's Livingstone and Edinburgh's Liddell have shaped global institutions and movements, building on the Christian principles that they preached and lived by.

On this St Ninian's day, the Scottish Parliament is pleased to have the opportunity to support the efforts of the Whithorn Trust in bringing to the attention of Scotland and the wider global community the influential significance of this unique and ancient Scottish site.

17:20

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I, too, congratulate Alasdair Morgan on securing this debate on St Ninian's day, recognising Whithorn's place in Scottish history. It can only help to promote the royal burgh of Whithorn and its remarkable heritage.

Among Whithorn's many claims to fame, the principal one is undoubtedly the location of the first Christian church in Scotland, located at the end of the Physgill glen. Although it is overshadowed in popular imagination by Columba and his church at Iona, Whithorn's claim to be the first church in Scotland was substantiated as early as AD 731 by the Venerable Bede.

The story of St Ninian brought pilgrims and prosperity to Whithorn for 1,000 years but, after the banning of pilgrimages at the time of the reformation, the town and the area went into decline.

In modern times, Whithorn's ancient status as the original site of Christian influence in northern Britain has been forgotten by many; the memory of its greatness has been eclipsed by the popular fame of Iona. However, the date AD 397 is generally celebrated as the beginning of Ninian's mission, although no written references to St Ninian from the period when he was alive have been found. We can refer only to works that were written many years after his death. Nevertheless, Whithorn's history as an early Christian centre cannot be doubted. Archaeologists have uncovered clues from the earliest settlement in the fifth century. The Latinus stone, which other members have spoken about, is the earliest Christian monument in Scotland and shows that the community was Christian.

We know that, believing in his power to cure illness and perform miracles, people have been making pilgrimages to visit the shrine of St Ninian in Whithorn since the seventh century. The town became a cult centre. Kings and commoners made the journey over many centuries, and the fame of Ninian and Whithorn spread.

In present-day Whithorn, it is possible to visit many different sites of historical, archaeological and religious interest. St Ninian's cave, on the Solway shore south of Whithorn, is said to have been St Ninian's retreat. The Catholic diocese of Galloway holds a pilgrimage to St Ninian's cave on the last Sunday in August each year. There are also youth pilgrimages and a Christian Aid walk to the cave.

St Ninian's shrine was reputed as a place of powerful healing, where the sick and injured could be miraculously cured of their ailments. Stories associated with St Ninian include the miraculous growth of leeks, the marvellous umbrella that

saved his book from the rain, cures for the blind, the leprous and the malformed and, after Ninian's death, the subsequent cures associated with a visit to his grave.

Is this too much for the minister?

The Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution (Michael Russell): No—I am absorbing every word. Miraculously.

John Scott: Indeed.

Evidence of medicinal herbs and what might be a surgeon's knife were found in remains of the seventh-century monastery during excavations in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Numerous royal visitors came to Whithorn. According to the records, Robert the Bruce's son, David II, was miraculously cured at Whithorn. At the battle of Neville's Cross in 1346, David II is said to have received an arrow wound that never fully healed but, after visiting Ninian's tomb, the injury was cured.

Whithorn's historical and archaeological treasures demonstrate its significance in Scottish history. I congratulate Alasdair Morgan again on securing the debate and giving the Parliament the opportunity to raise awareness of a fascinating place.

17:24

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): The historical and religious significance of Whithorn is immense, and I congratulate Alasdair Morgan on bringing the debate to the chamber on St Ninian's day.

The south of Scotland is laced with historically important and significant sites, which are all too often overlooked for other, well-marketed attractions. The debate highlights the importance of the south of Scotland and Whithorn in particular. The Isle of Whithorn and much of the Solway coast provide a real haven. There is much to see on the costa del Solway: we have the Wickerman festival, the book town of Wigtown, the artist town of Kirkcudbright, Logan botanic garden, Threave gardens, Port William—scene of most of my childhood holidays—and, of course, the many rural shows that I enjoy attending in summer. At one such show last year, we probably had the most southerly hustings for the Liberal Democrat party, when Tavish Scott, Mr Finnie and the rest of them came to Wigtown.

I hope that the debate will highlight the excellent work of the Whithorn Trust to keep alive the ancient memory of the fifth-century settlers who are believed to have been Scotland's first Christian community, and the work of St Ninian, the apostle of the southern Picts. As the motion

makes clear, the site is important in theological history. The most significant of the early Scottish saints was undoubtedly Ninian, a bishop who was born in about AD 350. During the years of the Roman empire's terminal decline, he was sent to Rome for religious instruction, his parents having adopted the faith through the influence of Roman soldiers. He returned to Whithorn to build his candida casa—the original white house—in AD 397.

As John Scott said, the story of Bishop Ninian does not appear in the historical record until 300 years later, in AD 731, in the writings of the Northumbrian monk Bede, which is perhaps why St Ninian is not as well known as St Columba. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Whithorn area was important for trade for a long time, perhaps even as far back as when the ice melted on its northern track. As most scholars know, little was written in the post-Roman period before the Venerable Bede's writings—the period is therefore called the dark ages—so the fact that little was written of Ninian is irrelevant to the saint's story, which is backed up by archaeological evidence.

Some people wonder why there was so much early activity in a remote part of south-west Scotland, but that is an attitude of people who are used to land transport in modern times. The sea was the ancient motorway and places such as Whithorn and Orkney were vital junctions on the network.

There is evidence of the importance of Whithorn from Ninian's time until the reformation, after which the pilgrimage to Whithorn and the area's importance went into decline. The economy and population declined and names that had been synonymous with the area moved to the new world of America, Canada and Australia. I hope that, in the year of homecoming, the motion and debate go some way to encourage people who have historical links with or an interest in Whithorn and the surrounding area—and Scotland as a whole—to make the pilgrimage back to the Isle of Whithorn.

17:28

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Alasdair Morgan on securing the debate and on his eloquent speech, which was about not just an important phase in Scotland's past but a legacy of resources that we have to hand in tackling many of the problems of today's divided and increasingly bewildered world.

Bewilderment tends to go along with the history of the early saints, too. They are a pretty intangible lot. In the 1840s, no less a person than John Henry Newman, who was editing a series of

volumes entitled “Lives of the English Saints” for the Anglo-Catholic clerics of the Oxford movement, approached the historian James Anthony Froude to write the life of St Neot, a contemporary of Ninian. Froude, who was en route to writing a life of another of Alasdair Morgan’s constituents, Thomas Carlyle—a somewhat different character—worked diligently through the medieval hagiographies and stories about saints who lit fires with icicles, turned bandits into wolves and floated across the Irish channel on altar stones, before concluding:

“This is all, and indeed rather more than all, that is known to men of the blessed St Neot”.

There are problems with the historical Ninian. He seems to be almost a clerical contemporary of Arthur. There is a certain logic in that, because Ninian is the semi-mythical embodiment of the activities of Romano-British clerics in congregations that were probably active continuously but subject to someone like an inspector, who would come round and ensure that their churches were in order. That seems to be what modern historians conclude of the Ninian figure. There was another person with the name of Uinnean who seems to have done rather similar work at the same time and I imagine that the ability to conflate the two was considerable.

We can gather from inscriptions, place names and cemeteries that, by the sixth or seventh century, there was a dispersed Christian presence that probably went as far north as the Aberdeen area—the Mounth. Christianity in the aftermath of Roman withdrawal consisted of isolated congregations that were in touch with one another through the travelling priests that I mentioned and strung together—as Jim Hume reminded us—by the sea. Archaeology from a grave in Northern Ireland has provided us with a golden model of a 14-oared skin galley, which gives us some idea of how sophisticated the connections between the various countries were at the time. Such a galley would have been the craft of Ninian, St Patrick—who was roughly a contemporary—and Columba, the young chieftain of the Uí Néill who became the great political figure in the Scotland of his time.

From those times come ideas and practices that are still relevant today—the ideas of peaceful travel and pilgrimage—and of which we desperately need to make use. Those vessels crept round the English coasts and eventually tackled the Channel and the Rhine delta. The boats went as far up the great rivers as they could—to Reichenau on Lake Constance, St Gallen and Würzburg. In the middle ages, Ninian enjoyed even greater popularity than Columba. There were altars dedicated to him by emigrant Scots at Bruges and Bergen-op-Zoom in the low

countries, as well as at Hamlet’s Elsinore and Copenhagen in Denmark.

We can work on those historical connections to encourage not only tourism connections but a new form of pilgrimage, deriving other, more subtle benefits from those ancient traditions. Members should recall that, in the seventh century, Columba’s biographer, Adamnan, stressed in his book “The Holy Places” in connection with pilgrimage that attention should be paid to the rights of civilians in time of warfare. That is one of the first examples of international law.

The Whithorn tradition shows us aspects of cultural preservation: the rescue of Latin, illuminated manuscript probably at its greatest and traditions of asceticism, meditation and closeness to the natural world. Those are more necessary in a modern world that is dominated by materialism and globally divided. Therefore, I wish the Whithorn Trust and all those who are associated with it success in reviving the community’s history and, with it, the life chances of us all.

17:33

The Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution (Michael Russell): I congratulate Alasdair Morgan on securing the debate, which has been fascinating and full of extraordinary information. Before I sum up, I welcome back to Parliament Karen Gillon, who is restored to what one would have to call her rude good health. It is good to see her back. Her many friends—I count myself in that number—have been worried about her.

It has been a debate of great interest. Alasdair Morgan struck me immediately with the most novel way I have yet heard of funding the new Forth crossing: by selling indulgences. I shall draw this to the attention of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth. It may well prove a winner in terms of what we are trying to achieve.

I was similarly struck by the miraculous interventions that John Scott listed, particularly on David II’s arrow wound. Professor Harvie’s introduction of hagiographies such as Adamnan’s was an interesting element. Hagiographies are meant to talk about the miracles and achievements of saints. The achievement with David II was remarkable, but I was not aware that a modern hagiography of Ninian included the selection of Tavish Scott as Liberal Democrat leader. That certainly may have been miraculous and, in time, people will probably worship at the throne of Ninian because of that achievement.

Those of us who were brought up in the Scottish Episcopal Church were often brought up in churches that were dedicated to St Ninian. I am

one of those—St Ninian's in Troon was the place in which I originally worshipped.

There was a living link with *candida casa* and Whithorn because there was a knowledge throughout those churches of the special place that Ninian held as, essentially, the founder of Christianity in that part of Scotland. There was also a belief that the foundations that are devoted to Ninian throughout Scotland were in some sense historically connected with the tours of Ninian. Professor Harvie alluded to that and commented on the role that Ninian and other similar figures might have had as sort of religious inspectors.

There is some dubiety about the connections that those foundations have; in the case of 19th century foundations such as St Ninian's in Troon, I think there is no connection whatever, but we should certainly remember the role of early Christian figures in perambulating around Scotland and spreading Christianity, or reinforcing Christianity at a time when it was not strong within Scotland. Whithorn stands in a very special place within that.

Whithorn is unique because it is the only place in Scotland where actual evidence can be found of every phase of the development of Christianity from the earliest times—from the fifth century AD—to the reformation and beyond. Whithorn is a sort of visual aid to our understanding of Christianity in Scotland and has a special place in every faith and denomination in Scotland. It certainly has a special place in Scottish church history, which I had the honour to study at university.

The remains of the crosses at Whithorn, the ruined priory and the other things that have accumulated there—both the physical relics and those places that are named, one or two of which John Scott mentioned—contribute to that distinctive nature. Every year, the small but significant community welcomes a small but significant number of visitors who are in search of contact with that history—with the age of saints and the history of Scottish Christianity.

The Government, through Historic Scotland, has been working closely with the Whithorn Trust to achieve sustainable growth in what we might call the market for religious visitation in Scotland, because it is part of the general economic development of the community. However, it is much more. It would be quite wrong to reduce this to a matter of mere economics, because it is about something within the soul and history of Scotland, which we want many people to celebrate, and not just Scots.

Of course, we have been doing that for a considerable time. The first ancient monuments act was passed in 1882 and the ruined remains of

the priory were taken into care shortly thereafter. The medieval stone crosses came in first—they were taken in as part of the first group of monuments. The priory came into care in 1908, so it has been in care for more than 100 years. Even at that time, the schoolhouse was leased and converted to display crosses and other carved stones, so Whithorn was in the heritage market early and has continued to be so.

In the 1950s, the excavations at Whithorn built upon that experience, particularly with the discovery of the famous Whithorn crosier, which was buried with a 13th century bishop. That is one of the treasures at the Museum of Scotland, although I am pleased that it is displayed in Whithorn each year.

How do we take this forward? A lot of work has been undertaken in modern times. Historic Scotland's education unit supports education visits. There is a downloadable PDF site guide for teachers on investigating Whithorn priory and museum, so there is access to information. Historic Scotland pioneered the use of microsites to provide access to Scottish information and the Whithorn microsite was one of the first. I have to say that it is also one of the best used.

The Government also recognises the importance of developing cultural roots. Again, Professor Harvie mentioned that. We are looking at the possibility of pilgrim ways in Scotland; my colleague Roseanna Cunningham has been prominent in promoting those. We will, in 2010, advertise the route that links Whithorn and Paisley abbey, which will give people at both ends of that route and those who want to travel it an opportunity to learn something of the south-west of Scotland and ensure that they understand its history.

Ninian's monastery was a place of pilgrimage and is therefore a place to which we should encourage modern individuals to go in pilgrimage. It was a light that shone brightly in the dark ages and it is a light that can shine brightly now. I am glad that Historic Scotland and the Whithorn Trust have worked together to establish a partnership that will enable that. Historic Scotland is also considering the opportunities for marketing and promoting other early Christian sites that are in state care.

There is interest not only in pilgrimage, but in early Christian art. Along with Whithorn, that has to include St Andrews cathedral, Dunkeld cathedral, Iona abbey, Meigle in Perthshire, St Vigean's in Angus, the Dupplin cross at St Serf's church in Dunning, Jedburgh abbey, which Karen Gillon will know well, and a variety of other places. Some physical remains still exist, such as the impressive collections of carved stones at Kilmodan in Argyll. Sometimes where there is

physical evidence of buildings, and certainly where there is documentation and excavation that illustrates a site's importance, we will wish to promote those and to ensure that they are meaningful.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that Whithorn is the jewel in that crown. Whithorn gives us a more complete understanding of Christianity in Scotland than any other site.

Alasdair Morgan: Will the minister just clarify whether he will accede to the request for a meeting with the trustees?

The Presiding Officer: I was hoping that someone would ask that.

Michael Russell: I ask Alasdair Morgan not to ruin my peroration. These things do not happen by accident. They are carefully planned.

Whithorn is the jewel in the crown in our understanding of Christianity in Scotland. In that place, we have seen a good partnership between Historic Scotland and the Whithorn Trust, but much more can be done and there is potential. Therefore, Presiding Officer, I am more than happy to agree to a meeting with the trust. I suggest that we might meet at Whithorn, and I know that Historic Scotland is happy to facilitate such a meeting. I hope that Alasdair Morgan is happy with that—and with the way in which I have included it at the very end of my remarks.

Meeting closed at 17:41.

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