



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 17 June 2010

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 17 June 2010

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

Schools

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good morning. The first item of business today is a debate on motion S3M-6580, in the name of Des McNulty, on schools. I advise the chamber that we have a little time in hand, but it is not excessive. If members could speak roughly to the guidelines that they have been given, we will finish on time. I call Ken Macintosh to speak to and move the motion. You have about 13 minutes, Mr Macintosh.

09:15

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): More nats, fewer teachers.

Members: Oh.

Ken Macintosh: It seems to work as a slogan. Who would have thought that that would be the epitaph of the Scottish National Party Administration as it nears the end of its four-year term? Who would have thought that a party that was elected on the basis of such a comprehensive list of promises to improve Scottish education could fail to deliver on nearly every one? It is not just a case of more nats, fewer teachers; the SNP has failed on class sizes of 18, on free school meals for primary 1 to P3, on physical education, on school nurses, on school buildings, on student debt and on nursery education. Now, it is failing us on the curriculum for excellence, too. We need to look at why the SNP is falling down so badly on education. Given the fact that it is only a matter of weeks until the curriculum for excellence is introduced in our secondary schools, we must take a particular look at the new curriculum and what needs to be done to restore confidence in it among teachers and parents.

It is not simply a matter of the SNP failing to live up to its pre-election promises. I believe that, despite the SNP's claims to be a social democratic party of the left, its lack of a clear, coherent, progressive ideology means that it has been unable to provide clear leadership and set a sense of direction and that it is failing to manage Scottish education effectively. Over the past three years, at a time of rising Government budgets in Scotland, the SNP has overseen the loss of 2,500 teaching posts. A similarly large number of classroom assistants have gone, and there have been cuts to school budgets throughout the country. When it

had the funds, the Scottish Government failed to invest in the new curriculum, and now, as we enter a period of austerity, it is little wonder that parents and teachers are alarmed at the prospects for their children and pupils.

I do not believe that the SNP is a progressive party, despite its protestations to the contrary. Yes, the SNP spent much of its first eight years in the Scottish Parliament trying to shed its old tartan Tory image and reinvent itself as a party of the democratic centre. However, in practice, the policy choices that have been made by the SNP in government have given the game away. This afternoon, for example, there will be a debate on tackling poverty in Scotland, but none of the headline measures that have been introduced by the SNP Government is designed to tackle poverty—in fact, quite the reverse. Extending the provision of free school meals to the children of well-off parents is hardly the most progressive measure, and the same can be said of the SNP's policy of extending the provision of free prescriptions. It has clearly been more important to the Scottish Government to freeze council tax and reduce business rates than to maintain teacher numbers. Populist, rather than progressive, is an appropriate term for most of those policies.

I do not doubt the left-wing credentials of many SNP back-benchers, but quite a few ministers—including, crucially, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning—and others seem to be more comfortable on the right. I do not believe that even Mr Russell would describe "Grasping the Thistle" as a socialist tract. I apologise to members on the Conservative front bench for repeating a joke that is doing the rounds. Who are the best-known Tories in Scotland? Fergus Ewing and Mike Russell. There is a contrast between the progressive claims of the SNP and the reality. For example, the Scottish Government supposedly refused to countenance the use of public-private partnerships to build new schools, but it is happy to spend millions to support merchant bankers in developing a similar private finance model through the Scottish Futures Trust.

At the most recent election, the SNP rebranded many Labour and Lib Dem policies as its own in what was effectively a populist outbidding process rather than a radical rethink. For example, over the previous 10 years, the Labour-Lib Dem Executive had driven down class sizes year on year. The SNP simply outbid us and produced the arbitrary figure of 18, which it has singularly failed to come close to achieving. As I have mentioned before, on school buildings, the SNP did not even bother to invent or develop its own position; it simply defined its policy in terms of Labour's promise by pledging to match us brick for brick. On other policies, such as getting it right for every child and, supposedly,

the curriculum for excellence, the SNP was happy to adopt our policies and follow them through. The difficulty, however, is that without any clear leadership or sense of purpose, the SNP appears to be dressed in ill-fitting clothes. Some of its policies have lost their way. Without any sense of ownership, drive or direction, it is little wonder that education policy, in particular, has got lost along the way and teachers have been left floundering.

The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning, Mr Brown, revealed at the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee recently that the long-awaited SNP school building programme will still leave 100,000 children occupying poor or inadequate schools. Not one school has been commissioned and built over the lifetime of the current Parliament; we have had merely a promise to rehouse 35,000 pupils at some point in the future, leaving 100,000 pupils to be educated in a second-class environment.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Not true.

Ken Macintosh: I would be happy to take an intervention from the minister.

The list of excuses that have been provided by the Scottish Government for its inadequacies is growing almost as long as its list of unkept promises. The initial—and still, I believe, a favourite—hiding place for ministers was behind the concordat, with the finger of blame pointed firmly at local authorities for failing to deliver. The fact that many councils are SNP run seemed to be conveniently ignored. More recently, there have been attempts to pretend that the Scottish budget has been declining although it has, in fact, been increasing. The favourite excuse now is the harsh new spending environment, despite the fact that the Government is still working within the old spending review and despite the announcement that any cuts will be postponed until next year. The Scottish Government wants it both ways, as usual.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): At the beginning of his speech, the member said that he thought that the SNP had failed to deliver on nearly every one of its education promises. I wonder whether he can enlighten me. I have tried to find the one that has been delivered on. Can he tell the Parliament what that is?

Ken Macintosh: I thank Mr Rumbles for that intervention. I did the same thing, but I added the word “nearly” as a caveat. I wanted to let the minister off the hook in case he could find something for his speech this morning.

Michael Russell: Do not worry, I will. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Ken Macintosh: One of the SNP's specific policy commitments was to maintain the number of teacher posts. At the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee yesterday, the cabinet secretary tried to present an intriguing new excuse. Mr Russell suggested that the previous Labour-Lib Dem Executive had artificially and unsustainably inflated the number of teachers who were employed in Scotland, although he did not present any evidence to back up that theory. The SNP claims that although it may have lost 2,500 teaching posts that it promised to keep, in retrospect, they were not needed anyway. Even more confusing was the cabinet secretary's explanation of how he apparently managed—in the middle of losing thousands of teaching jobs—to guarantee the employment of 100 additional teachers to implement the curriculum for excellence after agreeing with local authorities that extra money would be used for that special purpose. Without a hint of irony, Mr Russell insisted that that could not be called ring fencing in any way.

The excuses and the reasoning are becoming increasingly far fetched but, unfortunately for the cabinet secretary and his colleagues, few involved in Scottish education do not know where the responsibility lies. The parents from Renfrewshire who will visit the Parliament later this morning know who is responsible for cutting their school buses. When it comes to the curriculum for excellence, the minister's own survey of teachers provides evidence of how badly the Scottish Government has got it wrong. Of the 15,000 teachers who responded to the survey, 72 per cent of secondary teachers were not at all confident about delivering a broad general education to S1 to S3 pupils. Furthermore, 70 per cent of secondary teachers were not at all confident that they would have sufficient information to implement certain elements of the curriculum for excellence, and 72 per cent of secondary teachers—including two out of every three secondary headteachers—were not at all confident that they had sufficient information to implement the new literacy and numeracy qualifications. A similar percentage of secondary teachers felt not at all confident that they had enough information to support and deliver the national 4 and 5 qualifications. That is damning material collected by the minister's own officials. What on earth has the Scottish Government been doing all this time? The SNP has been in power for three and a half years and it is less than three weeks before the end of term, yet three quarters of our teachers are not prepared for the new curriculum.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Mr Macintosh has given us nine minutes of analysis of what Labour does not like about what the

Government is doing. When will he give us Labour's alternative programme?

Ken Macintosh: What perfect timing. That is exactly what I am coming on to. If the SNP Government cannot deliver, I assure the SNP that it can step back and make way for a party that can deliver and which has shown that, in office, it will look after education.

It is perhaps important to remember why we are going down the curriculum for excellence route. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Ken Macintosh: It is important to restate the principles that underpin the development of the curriculum for excellence, which Mr Adam and some of his colleagues may have forgotten. As members know, the Labour Party and the Liberal party introduced the reform at least partly because we believe that there is a fundamental need to address the needs of a huge swathe of young people in Scotland who are disengaged and are missing out on the benefits of education. Despite the strengths of the Scottish education system, it has been widely felt for many years that there have been too many exams and that there has been too much teaching for exams. Teachers thought that their role was overly prescribed. There is a particular problem among a cohort in our secondary schools who are unlikely to need qualifications to proceed to college or university and who remain unmotivated and disengaged from learning as they progress through high school. By focusing more on learning rather than simply on content, it was hoped that the new curriculum would be more stimulating and engaging, and that it would allow the development of vocational options for many who would be best served in that area.

It is not surprising that the curriculum for excellence has been embraced and endorsed by schools and pupils throughout the primary sector. With its open learning and greater use of projects, the model suits the style of teaching in primary schools, where one teacher often leads the class across a range of subjects, for example. However, the division of the secondary curriculum into departments and subjects has proved to be more of an obstacle. Teaching the curriculum in secondary schools has long been dominated by the need to progress our children towards their exams in their fourth or fifth year. The proposals for the new curriculum initially suggested that there would be a clean break between a more open style of learning in the first three years of secondary school and the fourth, fifth and sixth years, when pupils would focus on the examinable curriculum. Unfortunately, the minister has been unable to answer straight questions, such as whether any of the work in third year or earlier

would be part of the examinable curriculum. There is already a fear that, as pupils learn and progress at different speeds, they will begin to split from second year onwards. The fact that we still do not know what the new exams in fourth year will look like is particularly unsettling. Teachers, parents and pupils all want to know what their final destination will be. It is up to the minister to steer his way through the reforms without losing sight of the fact that our schools are not broken—far from it—and that they work well for most pupils.

Although the new curriculum should be more engaging for all pupils, it is important to remember that exams still have a very important place and are motivational for many pupils—those who are motivated by the desire to gain the qualifications that they need to gain entry to university later in life. Similarly, although there is a new-found emphasis on learning—on helping to create good learners—subjects such as the sciences require a healthy grasp of content and will always rely heavily on accumulated knowledge, as the Royal Society of Edinburgh and others have pointed out.

None of the obstacles or complexities that surround the curriculum for excellence is insurmountable. The previous cabinet secretary took a step in the right direction when she responded to history teachers' concerns about the content of the new curriculum, for example, and established a working group that involved those teachers. Although the current cabinet secretary has responded with some additional resources, which are welcome, some of his reactions, such as the new website, seem more like gimmickry. Writing to parents smells of panic. For the curriculum for excellence to be successful, the cabinet secretary needs to stop berating Opposition politicians for having the nerve to criticise him and start to do more to win over teachers and parents by taking decisions on the exam structure and the available resources to make it work. Dismissing teachers' gripes by saying that they need everything written down or handed to them on a plate is hardly the right way to go about things. The cabinet secretary needs to work with parents and teachers and listen to their concerns to make the curriculum for excellence work for all.

One of the original aims and hopes behind the curriculum for excellence was that it would reprofessionalise the workforce and allow teachers the room and time to teach according to their abilities rather than to a prescribed curriculum, but the mismanaged introduction of the reforms and the treatment of newly qualified teachers have led to dismay and demoralisation. New probationers are widely reported to be the most qualified and motivated of recent generations, but unfortunately they find that no teaching jobs are available when they leave university. Those who find work have to

take temporary contracts or exist on supply. The Government's response has not been to fulfil its pledge to maintain teacher numbers, but to cut the teacher training intake dramatically. Yet again, the SNP Administration appears to be responding to rather than shaping events.

The recent threats of strike action from the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association and working to rule by the Educational Institute of Scotland over the implementation of the new curriculum demonstrate how bad relations between the Scottish Government and the profession have become. Those who rely on public services in this country are learning the hard way that the election of the SNP Scottish Government means one thing: more nats, fewer teachers.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with concern the reduction in the numbers of teachers and classroom assistants since 2007 and the sharp rise in the proportion of newly qualified teachers who cannot obtain permanent or even temporary employment; further notes the widespread disquiet that exists among teachers and parents over the lack of preparedness for implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence and, in particular, the lack of clarity over new qualification arrangements; recognises that the Curriculum for Excellence is a wide-ranging reform with significant resource implications, and calls on the Scottish Government to reach an early agreement with local authorities and teachers organisations that guarantees the necessary preparation time and resources for successful implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence.

09:30

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): It is deeply appropriate that Ken Macintosh gave that speech when "Alice in Wonderland" is at the top of the movie charts. I would never call any of my political opponents a Mad Hatter, but the cap—or hat—may fit. The reality is that Ken Macintosh's presenting himself as the Lenin or Marx of Scottish politics in a socialist perspective is oppositionalism for oppositionism's sake. Labour has created a financial desert in Scotland and is now claiming that that is somebody else's fault.

I have serious points to make about education.
[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Michael Russell: We heard not a single serious point about education from Ken Macintosh. I want to describe what is happening and what still needs to happen in Scottish education and why that is a serious matter. It should be treated seriously, not in the way that Ken Macintosh and his colleagues are treating it.

I begin by focusing on the curriculum for excellence, which should be at the heart of the

debate. A lot of criticism of the curriculum for excellence is being heard. I always listen and respond to criticism, but I believe that there is a strong relationship between the Scottish Government, teachers' organisations and individual teachers. I foster that relationship through constant discussions and constant listening. For example, at a meeting with the EIS that took place very recently, it convinced me that additional time was needed for curriculum for excellence implementation. I listened and announced last week an additional in-service day in 2010. In my regular discussions with the teachers' unions and others, I continue to address details and difficulties.

Ken Macintosh rose—

Michael Russell: I am not taking any interventions from Mr Macintosh. I want to describe what is happening in Scottish education.

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): The cabinet secretary never takes interventions.

The Presiding Officer: Order. I have heard enough of you today, Mr McMahon. Thank you.

Michael Russell: I emphasise to members how serious the matter is. The picture of teachers who are not confident and cannot decide how to teach until they receive central Government edicts that some members are trying to paint is a travesty. The picture that Mr Macintosh has presented is a travesty.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Michael Russell: No, I will not. I am sorry, but I must address the topic with real seriousness. The principal Opposition party has misrepresented what is happening in Scotland's schools, and it is my duty as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning not to allow that misrepresentation to go forward.

This week, I met Frank Lennon, who is headteacher at St Modan's high school. He was quoted yesterday in *The Herald*, and I quoted him yesterday at the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee. He is clear, as the vast majority of teachers are, that the curriculum for excellence

"provides the best opportunity in a generation for teachers to be freed up to use their creative powers and passion for learning to motivate and inspire young people".

At the same meeting in Stirling, I met parents who urged me not to listen to any requirement for further delay. That call has been supported by the national parent forum, which has called on the management board to maintain momentum towards implementation. It has said that it

believes—teachers believe this, too—that the curriculum for excellence offers better opportunities for Scotland's learners. It would be deeply irresponsible to listen to the calls from Ken Macintosh and Labour, which would disrupt the curriculum for excellence and our schools. The wreckers of Scottish education are on the Labour benches—Labour members wish to disrupt the curriculum for excellence and our schools for party-political advantage. Let every parent in Scotland hear that message clearly.

Concerns about our education system have been acknowledged since the Scottish Parliament was established in 1999. By 2002, those concerns had led to two major initiatives. I was fortunate to be there at the beginning, as a member of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, which held an inquiry into the purposes of Scottish education. I commend those members of the previous Scottish Government who had much more serious intent in relation to education than any member on the current Opposition front bench has and who brought forward the national debate on education.

Those two initiatives concluded that the Scottish education system was overassessed, too centralised and insufficiently deep, that all the aspects of learning were not joined up and that the system was not moving forward in relation to international comparisons or domestic assessment. There was broad agreement that what Scotland needed was a balanced, modern curriculum that placed excellence at its core. The curriculum for excellence was, and is, the answer to that list of problems. There was, and is, consensus that it is the right way forward, which is why one of my first actions as cabinet secretary was to emphasise my commitment to it. The curriculum for excellence will, for the first time, provide our education system with a coherent route from nursery through to a range of positive, sustained destinations. The curriculum for excellence tackles the challenges of our current system. The current S1 and S2 experience can squeeze out time for what we know helps children to learn and develop. The curriculum for excellence makes connections across the curriculum, making learning deeper and richer.

This country began the journey towards the curriculum for excellence with our schools in 2004. However, between 2004 and 2007, not enough was done to take it forward. Since then, when I have visited schools, I have been hugely impressed to hear the enthusiasm for the changes that the curriculum for excellence has already brought about and for how much more teachers plan to achieve. Of course, in any society, there is always resistance to curricular change—that is the history of education. Delays have characterised every educational reform in every country. The

leading educationist Keir Bloomer told me recently that although standard grades were first mooted in the late 1960s, by the time of their introduction, they were in place for the children of the children for whom they were first designed.

Resistance to change is understandable, but it is not an option. Equally, we will not take risks with our children's future. The curriculum for excellence management board has assured me—unanimously—that the existing programme plan remains realistic and achievable. I have accepted the board's advice with regard to the timetable for the introduction of the new national qualifications. I remain open—very open—to what the unions and others are telling me about the need for more detail. That detail is being brought forward. I remain open to any member in the chamber who tells me that extra detail is needed. I remain open to practical suggestions—I am not open to the empty rhetoric that we heard from Ken Macintosh. I will continue to monitor implementation closely.

Of course, over the entire period that I have been in my post I have listened to concerns. I was the one who asked for the survey to be undertaken. It did not produce the results that Ken Macintosh gave; at least, it did not produce the results of a partial nature that he gave. Where there were messages from the survey—and I listened to them—I responded to them. That is why, before we even published the results of the survey, I brought in what I call the 10-point plan. *[Interruption.]* A member on the Labour benches who used to be an education minister is laughing. I can only think that she spent her entire time in office laughing. That is why some of the difficulties exist in the curriculum for excellence today.

We are giving targeted support to every school that needs additional help. Between August and December, schools will receive the support that they need as the curriculum for excellence moves into secondary. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education is spearheading that work in partnership with every local authority and others. Additional practical materials have been published in summarised versions. Excellence groups are bringing subject teachers together with non-teaching experts. All of that is proceeding right now. There will be five regional events that will assist headteachers to share experience. Additional materials for pupils and parents are being produced. For anyone to call communication with parents "desperate" is desperate in itself. I have written to every primary 7 parent, as I should and as my duty demanded. The national parent forum is providing recommendations about what other materials are needed.

Another aspect of the 10-point plan is to simplify the means by which we will formally recognise literacy and numeracy. I have acknowledged the

importance of literacy and numeracy as first-order questions. I want to ensure that the curriculum for excellence makes a real difference. Again, it was my duty to ensure that the existing proposals are the right ones for the circumstances. That is precisely what I did. The framework for assessment sets out what we want children and young people to achieve. A strong package of support has been put in place, including £3 million of new money—even at a time when Labour has laid waste to the public finances—and we are building the national assessment resource. I have convened a wide-ranging group of organisations with different perspectives on learning, the members of which are advising me on the implementation of the curriculum for excellence. The group met for the first time on 2 June and will meet again in September. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Michael Russell: Support is being provided. Teachers who are able to model confidence, motivation and a professional ethos to learners are being encouraged. Teachers are being equipped with new knowledge, understanding and skills. I meet teachers every day who give the lie to the type of teacher whom Ken Macintosh presents. I meet teachers who are enthusiastic about working collegiately to share and improve their practice and that of their colleagues. I meet every day inspired leaders in education and inspired leaders in schools—

Ken Macintosh: Will the minister take an intervention?

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

Michael Russell: I will finish my point, then I will take Mr O'Donnell's intervention. *[Interruption.]* I am willing to take constructive interventions.

Those inspired leaders are listening to what Ken Macintosh, for example, is telling them and are saying to themselves, "Thank goodness he is not in the education ministry. Thank goodness he never will be."

Hugh O'Donnell: Among the people to whom the cabinet secretary says that he speaks every day, has he had conversations with the many unemployed teachers and heard their reaction to the situation?

Michael Russell: Indeed, and I deeply regret the situation. The overexpansion of teacher numbers under the previous Administration created the problem. I am endeavouring to tackle the issue in two ways: first, I am always looking to encourage local authorities to employ more teachers if they can, given the circumstances; and, secondly, I have reduced the number of teacher training places. In time, that will have an effect.

That is a practical response to a situation that I am concerned about and think about every single day. I regret that we are there; I want to try to make a difference.

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Michael Russell: No. I have a point to finish. My time is almost up.

I want to make a point about school buildings. Others will talk about the subject. Indeed, Mike Rumbles has already spoken about the circumstances in his area to *The Press and Journal*. I hope that, when we come his speech, he gets his facts right, because he did not get them right in the P and J.

We have continued to build schools and to take children out of unacceptable circumstances. However, we will not mortgage the future. The reality in Scottish education budgets is that so many of the problems and pressures have come about because of the unsustainable nature of private finance initiative costs. The foolishness of the previous Administration in allowing that to happen—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Michael Russell: —is now being paid for in teaching jobs.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): Rubbish.

The Presiding Officer: Mrs Craigie.

Michael Russell: The reality is that there is a direct link between encouraging PPP and PFI—encouraging unsustainable expenditure—and meeting day-to-day expenditure on teachers and other matters. The responsibility lies firmly with the previous Administration and its foolishness—if only its members had the honesty to admit it.

In all that we have done and achieved, there is a real test. Labour says that it wants 2,000 more teachers at a cost of £80 million per annum and that it wants to bring back PPP. Of course, there is no money for PPP in the private sector, as we see south of the border, but Ken Macintosh can apparently magic it up. But will he build more schools? The reality is that neither of those things will happen. That is empty rhetoric from Labour. What a tragedy to apply it to the future of Scotland's children.

I move amendment S3M-6580.3, to leave out from "or even" to end and insert:

"employment; further notes the unanimous recommendation of the Curriculum for Excellence Management Board, including the representatives of the major teaching unions, that implementation in secondary schools should begin in August 2010; notes the announcement of a 10-point plan to support implementation

including an additional £3 million, tailored help for secondary schools that need it, increased training for teachers and improved practical materials; recognises that the Curriculum for Excellence embodies the cross-party recommendations of the 2002 report by the Education, Culture and Sport Committee into the purposes of education, and calls on the Scottish Government to listen to teachers' and parents' concerns over the new curriculum and reach an early agreement with local authorities and teachers organisations that guarantees the necessary preparation time and resources for successful implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence."

09:43

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): I am tempted to say that headmasters who shout are usually under considerable pressure.

If there is one issue that has dominated the education brief over many long months—obviously, it has raised the temperature—it is the curriculum for excellence. It has dominated our debates and our discussions with parents and teachers not only because it represents a major change in our approach to education in our schools, but because of the extent of the difficulties that we are encountering in the lengthy and sometimes tortuous planning process. I accept that some of those difficulties are understandable and necessary, but others are entirely avoidable.

The Scottish Conservatives have been supportive of the main principles of the curriculum for excellence since the start, specifically the need to enhance education in its widest sense so that the educational experience better reflects the needs of individual schools and individual pupils and because of the opportunity that it should afford to simplify and strengthen the rigour of our examination system. With hindsight, I suspect that it was never totally clear that this radical change was one of teaching methodology rather than a change to the finer detail of the curriculum. If the change was designed to help teachers to think more about the way in which they teach, how they can inspire an increasingly wide diversity of pupils in their classrooms and about how schools—primary and secondary—can be better linked into, and more responsive to, the needs of the world of work, culture and outdoor learning, then it has to be a good thing.

However, the real challenge has been to ensure that much of that skills-based philosophy can be achieved without any threat to discrete subject teaching, the basic skills of literacy and numeracy and the essential knowledge that equips for life after school. The cabinet secretary knows my concerns about what I see as the threat to academic rigour in some of that process—concerns that I share with people such as Professor Lindsay Paterson and Professor John McLaren—and I am grateful to the cabinet

secretary for discussing those concerns further with me recently. I suggest that that issue is very much at the root of teachers' concerns, especially in secondary schools. The expectation among the public and parents, and maybe even some teachers, was that there would be a new curriculum, but in fact that was never the intention. The undoubted need to address issues in teaching methodology was quite properly accompanied by questions about what exactly had to be taught and, for secondary 4 to 6, what had to be examined.

I am the last person in the chamber to argue that education is all about exams, but the reality is that they are vital in anyone's school career and for subsequent job prospects, and to a large extent they represent the endgame for our senior pupils. I am conscious of the hard work that is going on within the Scottish Qualifications Authority to provide the details of the new exam structure, but I suggest to members that that work has been made much more difficult because of the Scottish Government's own confusion about what it has been trying to achieve.

We were told that there were to be stand-alone literacy and numeracy tests, then we were told that there were not. We were told that there was to be a simplification of the exam structure to reduce the burden of assessment, yet we heard about new exams that were to be introduced, accompanied by complaints from School Leaders Scotland that the assessment burden would actually increase. We saw confusion, much of which alarmed our employers and higher education institutions, about what was to be internally and externally assessed. We were promised more formal vocational courses for schools, but we have yet to hear how that will be delivered.

On top of that, we had the extraordinary sight of the cabinet secretary having to tell the civil servants six weeks ago that much of the documentation that accompanied the guidance notes for the curriculum for excellence was woolly and vague and should be rewritten in plain English. That occurred no fewer than seven years down the road of development work that was designed to improve the literacy skills of the pupils but was largely unintelligible in its own composition. It is little wonder that teachers and parents remain so confused about what is going on.

The Labour motion mentions some of those concerns, but it quite rightly also highlights concerns about teacher numbers and the resulting fears about whether sufficient resources have been made available to support the development work for the curriculum for excellence. I would add to that the specific issue of the undue pressure

that has been placed on our local authorities, not just as a result of the financial pressures of the economic downturn, but as a direct result of the overtly ambitious Scottish Government manifesto commitments: 18 or fewer pupils in primaries 1 to 3; universal free school meals for primaries 1 to 3; maintaining teacher numbers; two hours of PE per week; and five days of outdoor education, to name just some. Not only were those not deliverable, given the resources available, but in many cases they were not the priorities of local government—class sizes and free school meals being clear examples of that. The combination of huge financial pressures and the headaches of trying to deliver the Scottish Government's very rigid national targets were too much for most authorities and were a major reason why some of the focus was removed from the curriculum for excellence development work, which has been the main concern for teachers and parents.

I do not believe that it is in anyone's interest to scaremonger on this issue. That is why we deplore any moves to engage in industrial action, which would serve only to harm the best interests of those we are trying to help, namely the pupils. I began my own teaching career in the 1980s and well remember the difficult environment that was created by industrial action, which took away some of the activities—many of them outside the classroom—that sought to involve children in the wider educational experience that we have all agreed is so central to the curriculum for excellence.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Does the member agree that many of the extracurricular activities that children can engage in involve school playing fields, many of which now lie completely empty at evenings and weekends because of PFI contracts that deny pupils the chance to use them?

Elizabeth Smith: I do not doubt for a minute that there are issues about playing fields. That has been the case for 20 years, and I fully acknowledge that my party was involved in some of that. However, my point is that we will never be in the position to offer extracurricular activities if we cannot provide the facilities for staff. Industrial action harms nobody but the pupils. We really must take that on board.

I suggest that there are many issues that we must deal with and that it is important that we are positive about doing so. The curriculum for excellence has many good points and can be delivered. However, it will not be delivered unless we have a different mindset about how we approach our schools. I have no doubt that the vast majority of parents across Scotland would agree with that. The teaching unions, which were represented on the curriculum for excellence

management board, need to understand that there is a willingness out there to make this work. However, we need clarity, vision and some kind of direction from the Government.

Will the cabinet secretary himself end up as a successful learner, an effective contributor, a confident individual and a responsible citizen? There is not much doubt about the confident individual part of that—Mr Russell is not known to be a shrinking violet when it comes to schools policy, or any other policy for that matter; nor is there much doubt that he is an effective contributor, who is blessed with a way with words that could beguile many of us if we were not so wise to his political rhetoric. So, that leaves the successful learner bit. The iron chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, said:

“Only a fool learns from his own mistakes. The wise man learns from the mistakes of others.”

I suggest to the cabinet secretary that there is still a lot of learning to be done, and that it must be done very quickly indeed. Teachers, parents and pupils are confused and concerned; they need clarity, direction and a responsible citizen as the man at the top.

I move amendment S3M-6580.1, to insert at end:

“, and deplores the threat of industrial action by some teaching unions, which will impact adversely on many of the extra-curricular activities that take place out of school hours and that are such an essential part of the wider educational experience for so many young people.”

09:51

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): In 2007, the SNP inherited record numbers of teachers, unparalleled spending of £1 billion annually in our universities, and real—if members will excuse the pun—concrete investment in our schools. Sadly, the SNP has failed to build on that legacy. As I have said in the chamber before, I am proud of the Liberal Democrats' record on education. When in government with Labour, we delivered more teachers in Scotland's classrooms, more money in our further and higher education institutes and a clear programme of school building. Now, there are 2,500 fewer teachers in our classrooms, and Mr Russell seems remarkably blasé about it. I do not recall Fiona Hyslop, Michael Russell or anyone else from the SNP standing up and saying to people in 2007, “Actually, we have too many teachers,” which is what he tried to tell us yesterday and what he has tried to tell us today. I would have more trust in the cabinet secretary on that point if that was what the SNP had told the people of Scotland three years ago.

Yesterday, the cabinet secretary informed the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee that he had no powers to stop local government reducing teacher numbers and that to demand micromanagement of the figures would be counter-productive. Perhaps it is just me, but I do not think that a cabinet secretary should be quite so happy to pass the buck to local government for such a decline in teacher numbers. I do not recall any appendices or caveats in the 2007 manifesto that said that the SNP had no power to deliver on that issue.

At the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee yesterday, we attempted to question Mr Russell about how accountable national Government and local government are for the money that they spend on education and how open they are to scrutiny of delivery on the key promises that the SNP made in 2007. Having explained why ring fencing and micromanaging are wrong, the cabinet secretary outlined that, in some situations—including the provision of extra teaching resources for the curriculum for excellence—there has been an agreement with local authorities that extra cash will, as a special case, be used for a specified purpose. I asked the cabinet secretary yesterday why that was different from ring fencing. I do not believe that any of the Opposition was convinced by his response.

The cabinet secretary's argument seems to me to be fatally illogical. We can have no confidence when the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and local authorities sign up to deliver lower class sizes through the concordat, despite the fact that the cabinet secretary tells us that the policy was fully costed and supported, but apparently we can have confidence that occasional special arrangements will be delivered. It all rather begs the question: if the cabinet secretary can deliver on those issues, why has he not delivered on teacher numbers, class sizes, school buildings and all the promises that the SNP Government made to the pupils and parents of Scotland? To simply write that off as political rhetoric, as Mr Russell did yesterday, is to show contempt for the parents and pupils of Scotland. We can only hope that the electorate choose next year to consider carefully not only what the SNP said in its manifesto, but what it has delivered—or not delivered—in the past three years.

Whether we think of the lost teachers, the decline in places on teacher training courses or the plight of probationary teachers, the picture is pretty bleak. In 2009, 3,478 teachers were allocated a probationary year, but only 354 teaching posts are vacant at present. I agree with the EIS that that is shocking. Education professionals should be in our classrooms. To train them but not use their skills is a waste of talent.

Of course, we cannot ignore the budgetary situation that we face. The United Kingdom has a massive deficit as a result of Labour's recession and dealing with that will not be easy. However, cutting education budgets is not the way forward. It is neither the right action today nor the right path for the future—it is short-sighted.

The SNP has exacerbated the budgetary situation. Costly policies such as free school meals have added an extra burden on local authorities that are struggling to meet the demands that are placed on them while balancing their books. The Government needs to get its priorities right.

My colleague Mike Rumbles will expand on school buildings. It is disgraceful that, three years after coming to power and nine months after the first tranche of funding was announced, the Government has only just given the go-ahead for the first round of investment in the school building programme. Building work will commence this year, but the first primary school will not be delivered until 2011 and the first secondary school will not be delivered until 2013. It is highly likely that no schools that have been begun and funded under the SNP's school building programme will be delivered in the Government's lifetime. That is a far cry from the manifesto commitment to match our school building programme brick for brick.

That is not simply a result of the global economic situation, as the SNP would like us to believe. It is a result of the Administration's chronic mismanagement of the process and its lamentable Scottish Futures Trust experiment. The investment that the previous Administration made means that pupils from my constituency are now learning in new and refurbished high schools—Craigmount, the Royal High, St Augustine's, Forrester, Broughton and Craigroyston. When I attended Craigroyston's prize giving the other evening, I had no doubt that the investment in that new school was bearing fruit in educational attainment, discipline and the school's wider ethos.

We share the concerns that Liz Smith and others have expressed about the changes to literacy and numeracy testing and the confusion about tests, assessments and the new qualifications. However, we welcome the principles behind the curriculum for excellence, which has been the subject of many debates in which I have made the Liberal Democrats' position crystal clear. In the past two years, we have called for more support for teachers, information for parents and extra resources for schools. When the cabinet secretary has found those resources and listened to the calls from us, from other members and from the teaching unions, we have welcomed that. However, we know from our constituencies that preparation and support are patchy. On a

recent committee visit to the City of Edinburgh Council, central officials said that all was well and that they were putting in place what was needed to make the curriculum for excellence happen on the ground. However, Boroughmuir high school's respected headteacher told us something completely different.

There are 54,000 primary 7 pupils whose futures depend on proper implementation and adequate resourcing, and concern remains that progress is patchy and that secondary school teachers feel ill-prepared for the shift to the curriculum for excellence—three quarters have said that they do not have enough information to implement it properly.

We are concerned that teacher unions feel the need to threaten industrial action, but we fundamentally believe that teachers have the right to do that. If they feel unable to implement the curriculum for excellence because of a lack of support from the Government and if they feel that they are being asked to do something that is unachievable and which they believe to be wrong, they have the right to threaten industrial action. It is up to the Government, local authorities and everybody to provide the support on the curriculum for excellence that teachers need to ensure that they do not take industrial action.

We want the curriculum for excellence to be implemented and we want it to succeed. The curriculum for excellence management board met yesterday; we need clarification on what it discussed and what action was decided to address teaching unions' concerns and avoid industrial action.

The curriculum for excellence has the potential to improve learning and to make it relevant to all our children and young people. We must grasp that potential, but we cannot get away from the fact that the SNP is not delivering, which is an uncomfortable truth for the cabinet secretary. The Liberal Democrats and other Opposition parties will continue to articulate that uncomfortable truth to the people of Scotland.

I move amendment S3M-6580.2, to insert at end:

“, and notes that the Scottish Government's package of education failures includes the abandonment of SNP election commitments to reduce class sizes in P1 to P3 to 18, dump student debt and match brick for brick the previous administration's school building programme.”

10:00

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The Parliament has held the SNP to account many times. The gap between what the SNP manifesto promised Scottish parents, children and young people and what has been delivered is significant.

The SNP's promises were easily made, but they are proving extremely difficult to deliver because of the Government's failure to protect and prioritise education. The SNP Government has tried to move the goalposts for many pledges, but the fact remains that delivery has fallen far short of what was promised.

Class sizes of 18 for primaries 1 to 3 were promised. The Government might find it hard to accept, but parents thought that that would be delivered. Now we have an extremely watered-down policy that relies more on falling school rolls than on any positive action to reduce class sizes.

The SNP made commitments to deliver free school meals, to provide access to qualified nursery teachers and to deliver two hours of quality PE a week by a qualified teacher—all policies that, if they are being delivered at all, are being delivered inconsistently throughout the country and with no guarantees that they are reaching the children who need them most.

The Government gave a clear commitment to maintain teacher numbers—that was central to its plan to deliver smaller classes. The Government has rolled out the excuses for not maintaining numbers, but that was its commitment. The failure to deliver has meant that teachers are unemployed and that public investment has been wasted on student teachers who cannot obtain jobs. That is a waste of enthusiastic and well-informed graduates.

Promises were made on school buildings. The SNP inherited a programme of new build and refurbishment that has stalled. The previous Labour-Liberal Executive created momentum in the school building programme that has been lost. Cuts are now being made to education budgets throughout the country at a time when the sector faces new challenges and needs to be resourced properly.

That is the context for the curriculum for excellence. No one in the chamber relishes having to return to the debate on the continuing concerns about the roll-out of the curriculum for excellence. In August, pupils will start secondary school who expect a fundamental shift in their learning experience. They and their parents deserve to have confidence in the changes that will happen.

We all have a stake in the curriculum for excellence. It has had a lengthy passage through Parliament yet, weeks from its introduction, an unacceptable level of uncertainty and unease about its implementation continues. When Michael Russell took over as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, we were told that the curriculum for excellence had been taken in hand. At Easter, we were assured that the timetable was realistic and could be delivered. It is

unfortunate that that confidence is not shared throughout the sector.

It is understandable that parents are cautious about significant educational change, particularly when it involves a change to examinations. It is unacceptable that, as their children are about to begin secondary school, parents remain uncertain about the exams that their children will sit and the curriculum for those exams. Parents are not sufficiently reassured that every school has a clear exam route to higher education. Uncertainty remains about the expectations of higher education under the new curriculum. Although entrance to university will continue to centre around highers and fifth and sixth-year qualifications, the national qualifications will be the doorway. Concerns among teachers and parents about examinations and preparedness cannot continue into the new school year.

There remains uncertainty about preparedness, concern about course content and tensions over workloads. Caution continues about subject readiness. It might be easier for some subjects to adapt to a multidisciplinary approach to teaching, but in subjects such as science, a lack of confidence remains.

The reliance on supply teachers raises concerns about teaching consistency and classroom commitment to the new curriculum. We need to raise the status of teacher education and provide proper resourcing of continuing professional development in the future.

Cuts to school budgets are having an impact not just on some subjects but on devolved school budgets—the pots of money that can deliver flexibility and innovation in schools and support the holistic learning that comes with the curriculum for excellence.

I am concerned about the limitations that are being placed on school buildings that the Scottish Government will partly fund. The Government's provision of only partial resources on a like-for-like basis lacks the ambition that is needed to create modern and contemporary buildings that can deliver the new curriculum.

If the new curriculum is to be delivered imaginatively and creatively, colleges and universities should be engaged, as they can provide opportunities for pupil education as well as teacher education. It is a curriculum for three to 18-year-olds, and more can be done to engage adult learning institutions in delivery and supporting delivery.

The Scottish Government urgently needs to improve the context in which the curriculum for excellence will be introduced. The announcements from the EIS conference at the weekend are concerning. The EIS has been supportive of the

curriculum for excellence, but it is now calling for a delay in the exams and has voted to pursue a work-to-rule policy, which is extremely worrying. The Government must urgently address its concerns about implementation.

The continuing worry around resourcing must be addressed. Teachers are struggling with current funding settlements; rightly, they are also worried about the future. The Government must show commitment to Scottish education and the introduction of the curriculum for excellence. If we are to have confidence in the changes, it must reach an agreement with local authorities to protect education funding and staffing levels.

10:05

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Like the cabinet secretary, I am astonished at the self-reinvention of Ken Macintosh, the newest of new Labour MSPs, as a scion of the left. He even appeared to mention the dreaded S-word—socialism. No doubt Diane Abbott can count on his vote in the forthcoming Labour leadership stramash. As for the SNP being like the Tories, it is not our former members of Parliament who stampede to join George Foulkes in the House of Lords, it is not our party that introduced tuition fees and expanded PFI, and it is not the SNP that is in formal coalition with the Tories in five Scottish local authorities.

I state my opposition to the motion. I will focus my remarks on concerns about the reduction in the number of teachers since 2007 and the problems that newly qualified teachers face in their attempts to secure a job.

Ken Macintosh: Will the member take an intervention?

Kenneth Gibson: I will move on a wee bit before letting Mr Macintosh in. I know that, whenever I mention him, he always leaps up seconds later.

It is true that the number of teachers who are unable to find permanent or even temporary employment is a problem. However, there are a number of reasons for that.

Ken Macintosh: I have no wish to respond to personal remarks and will address the policy issue. Can Mr Gibson tell me why extending free school meals to the children of better-off parents, extending free prescriptions and freezing the council tax, while putting up council house rents, are progressive policies?

Kenneth Gibson: I am sure that Mr Macintosh's constituents in Eastwood would be interested in his answers to some of those questions. He probably recalls that a number of organisations that are active in the anti-poverty area made clear

to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee that provision of free school meals would be beneficial to all children. My figures may be slightly off, but well over 100 organisations—114, if memory serves me well—supported the Scottish Government's policy on the issue. None of the anti-poverty organisations opposed our policy, unless Mr Macintosh can name one. I am happy to sit down to let him do so.

Karen Whitefield: Will the member take an intervention?

Kenneth Gibson: No, if the member does not mind—I am not even a quarter of the way through my speech, and a third of my time has gone. I was responding to a point by Mr Macintosh; he was the member to whom I was hoping to give way, but sadly he did not intervene.

Labour councils are using the future of Scotland's children for party-political ends. I will put some figures on that. Labour-led councils are responsible for two thirds of this year's drop in teacher numbers. The November 2009 figures indicate that more than a quarter—28 per cent—of teacher posts that were cut by councils were cut by Glasgow City Council. The number of posts that were cut in Glasgow was 379, out of 1,348 throughout Scotland. Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee colleagues will recall that the reason given for that in evidence was falling school rolls, because Glasgow does not believe in smaller class sizes.

All councils are facing financial pressure, thanks to the Westminster cuts that Labour has imposed on Scotland. I say to Mr Rumbles that we would not have to endure such cuts if Scotland were independent. Of course, SNP councils—Perth and Kinross Council, East Ayrshire Council, Stirling Council and East Lothian Council—were able to increase teacher numbers in 2009.

Why do Labour-led councils make cuts while SNP councils are hiring? Let us look at what the EIS has said. On 6 June, it said on BBC Online:

"Promises have been made to reduce class sizes in our schools, and the progress has been extremely limited to date.

Some local authorities have openly refused to work towards their commitments to reduce class sizes, in defiance of the Scottish Government's stated aims and the concordat that local authorities freely entered into.

The message to the Scottish Government and local authorities is clear—teachers expect the promises made to them on class sizes to be kept, and teachers will do everything possible to hold our political leaders to account."

That message is directed to local authorities and the Scottish Government.

I turn to the sharp rise in the number of newly qualified teachers who cannot obtain permanent or even temporary employment. Teacher numbers

are decided many years in advance. The number of teachers who did their probation year in 2008-09 was decided in 2006-07—before the SNP came to power—for those who took the postgraduate diploma in education route, and in 2003-04 for those who took the bachelor of education route. Labour and the Liberal Democrats—who were its pals at the time, but have now switched sides—were the ones who got their sums wrong.

It was preposterous for Mr Macintosh to say that there are no teaching jobs in Scotland. As of 1 June, 280 teaching jobs were advertised, 95 of which had been unfilled for three months or more. In its motion, Labour describes the decline last year in the proportion of newly qualified teachers who went into permanent, full-time work as a sharp fall, but that decline of 10.4 per cent is smaller than the decline from 2004-05 to 2005-06, which was 15.5 per cent.

Ken Macintosh: Will Mr Gibson take an intervention?

Kenneth Gibson: I would really like to, but I am only halfway through my speech and am tight for time.

The Labour Party has forgotten about its disgraceful management of Scotland's education system. Ms Craigie is whooping with shock, but there were far more unemployed teachers under Labour in 2000, 1999 and 1998—1,015, 1,230 and 1,675 respectively—than there are now. Mr Macintosh said that at the end of the session there will be 100,000 pupils in "bad" or "poor" schools. That is a lot better than the figure of 260,000 that Labour bequeathed to us in 2007.

The Scottish Government is concerned about some of the problems and is committed to resolving them with utmost haste. We are supporting early retirement. More than 10,000 primary, secondary and special school teachers over 55 could retire at any time. More than 20 per cent of teachers in 2009 were aged 55 or more. Anthony Finn, the chief executive of the General Teaching Council for Scotland, said in December:

"Indeed, given the number of older teachers expected to retire over the next couple of years, I expect that we will need all the teachers we are currently training to fill future vacancies."

We are addressing that problem. Councils have been given a borrowing facility of £10 million to support the costs of early retirement and to pave the way for the employment of new teachers this year and next.

There are hard times, many of which are unforeseeable and unavoidable, especially after Labour wrecked the UK economy with its imposed recession. The Scottish Government is committed to education and making progress in these difficult

times. One of my colleagues said to me yesterday that this debate would be only the

"latest in the long line of lie-drenched fear-dominated hypocrisy-laden Natbashing education debates."

I hope that future speakers from the Labour benches will make clear that that is not the case. Sadly, so far it appears to be.

10:12

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):

Over the past year or so, a number of debates in the chamber have been directly about the curriculum for excellence or have touched on it. That should not be surprising, as reforming our education system is one of the most important tasks that the Parliament will undertake.

During this period, there has been widespread support for the principles of the curriculum for excellence. The aim of placing the individual child at the centre of the education experience is welcomed by professionals and politicians alike. Similarly, the drive to reduce the burden of overassessment has been welcomed. As I have mentioned previously in the chamber, my local authority, North Lanarkshire Council, is leading the way in implementing some aspects of the curriculum for excellence in primary schools.

This is not political point scoring—[*Interruption.*] Rather than sighing, the cabinet secretary should listen to what I am saying, because I am trying to be constructive—that is what he wanted. It is not true that, because people raise concerns, they are scoring political points. Consistent and, unfortunately, persistent concerns have been raised about aspects of curriculum reform. That is regrettable but, as responsible politicians, we have a responsibility to address those concerns, which have focused on the practicalities of implementing the curriculum for excellence rather than its principles and ethos. In particular, teachers in secondary schools have raised concerns about readiness for the new qualifications.

The cabinet secretary refused to take an intervention from me earlier, as he had said that he wanted to listen only to constructive points. I will try to be constructive. Will he tell us when children will sit the new qualifications and how they will be assessed? No one in Scotland is clear on those points, which are not political points but points of fact and substance that the Government needs to address. I acknowledge that the Scottish Government has taken steps to address some concerns, but many teachers and professionals in our education system are not convinced that we are ready or sufficiently resourced for the implementation of the curriculum for excellence in August.

The extent of concern was made crystal clear in the recent report "Curriculum for Excellence Management Board Survey of Teachers". The cabinet secretary suggested that Mr Macintosh misquoted the report, but I mention it again because it is important that we realise what Scotland's teachers said in response to the survey. Every teacher in Scotland was surveyed and about 24 per cent—almost 15,000 teachers—responded. The responses show that Labour members are not scoring political points but raising the serious and substantial concerns of a large number of teachers.

Teachers were asked about their confidence in delivering literacy and numeracy qualifications. According to the findings, only 24 per cent of the 7,023 secondary teachers who responded

"expressed some level of confidence that they will have sufficient information and support to draw evidence from across the curriculum for the award of Literacy and Numeracy Qualifications while 72% ... were 'not at all confident'."

I welcome the recently announced proposal for literacy and numeracy units to be built into English and maths qualifications, to simplify the system for formally recognising those skills, but the announcement has come a little too late and does not provide sufficient clarity.

The survey report went on to say that only 23 per cent of secondary teachers

"expressed some level of confidence that they will have sufficient information and support about the senior phase to enable them to plan for the delivery of courses which lead to National 4 and National 5 qualifications, while 72% ... were 'not at all confident'."

Similar levels of concern were expressed about the ability to deliver a broad general education. Teachers also said that there was a need for improved guidance on and support for the implementation of the curriculum for excellence. At the time of the survey, there was considerable confusion about many aspects of the practical delivery of the new curriculum, in particular assessment.

The cabinet secretary's 10-point plan attempts to address some of those concerns, but there remain questions about whether it goes far enough. Like him, I am regularly in schools, and I know only too well that we have confident, articulate, committed teachers. Teachers are right to raise their concerns, because ultimately they will be responsible for implementing the revised curriculum in August. The cabinet secretary should not dismiss their concerns so lightly.

Given that we have not yet felt the full force of the impending budget cuts, it is worrying that the SNP Government has presided over a fall in teacher numbers and the creation of a jobs vacuum for newly qualified teachers. In 2007, the

SNP promised to maintain teacher numbers, but the cabinet secretary told the Parliament today that we overinflated teacher numbers and did not need all those teachers. That is not what parents and teachers in Scotland think. By 2009, teacher numbers had dropped to 50,610—a reduction of more than 2,000. During the same period, pupil to teacher ratios increased slightly across primary, secondary and special schools.

That is a betrayal of the young teachers who entered training in the not-unreasonable expectation that they would have a job on completion of their degree. Instead, in recent weeks I have met teachers who are off to teach in Dubai and Canada. Indeed, last week three probationary teachers applied to work for me in the Scottish Parliament. When they were asked why, they said that they did not want to leave teaching but that they would rather have any job than sit on the dole. The situation is simply not good enough. Those young teachers would make a real difference to Scottish education. It is tragic that we are losing many of our brightest young teachers and it is unacceptable that the Government chooses to ignore their concerns.

The Scottish Government will play its usual game of claim and blame: it will claim for itself schools that it never funded while blaming the UK Government and local government for the decline in teacher numbers. However, the people of Scotland are increasingly showing their dissatisfaction with a Government that constantly carps, "It wasnae me." They want a Government that is honest when it has tough decisions to make. A Government that always seeks to blame others ultimately looks weak. I urge the Government to listen to the legitimate concerns of Scotland's parents and teachers and to support them to implement the curriculum for excellence.

10:21

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):

Two hundred and forty-four million pounds in one year—that is how much money was siphoned out of local authority education budgets straight off last year, before authorities had bought even a pencil. Some £244 million was siphoned off and wasted on paying the private profits of bankers who run the special delivery vehicles of PPP and PFI projects. Nearly quarter of a billion pounds a year has been stripped out of the scarce resources that are available to local authorities for education. The money has been lost as a result of the credit card mortgages that Labour took out on Scotland's school estate, yet Labour members have the brass neck to swan into Parliament with a motion that complains about the scarcity of resources—and that is before we face the cuts that will be imposed by the Lib Dem and

Conservative Government as a result of the massive economic failures of Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling.

The biggest irony of all is that PPP/PFI was supposed to be a fantastic way of moving the risk of large-scale capital projects away from the public sector and into the private sector. Somehow it did not turn out that way; what little risk transferred came thundering right back at us when the UK Government started firing our money at the banks. Now we are in the interesting position in which public money is being used to prop up private financing of public projects in which private profit is the overriding concern. The public purse is paying through the nose for the privilege. Some 5 per cent of the education budget has gone. One pound in every £20 has vanished from education resources and the situation will only get worse.

Revenue expenditure on education has increased massively under the SNP Government and is more than double the level when Donald Dewar was First Minister. We spend £5,000 per primary school pupil per year, compared with less than £2,000 in 1999, and we spend getting on for £7,000 per secondary school pupil per year, compared with just £3,000 in 1999. The Government has ensured that Scotland's schools are well resourced, and has done so in partnership with local authorities. It respects councils and values their position and their right to run their areas. The resources will help to deliver the important changes that are coming in Scottish education, as will dedicated staff members and committed parents.

Like Karen Whitefield, I speak to teachers regularly, most of whom tell me that they are ready to implement the curriculum for excellence and that they are looking forward to doing so. However, they are increasingly telling me that they are sick fed up of hearing politicians talking them down, saying that they are not able to implement the new curriculum and suggesting that they are not professional enough to do their jobs well. They tell me that morale is being affected by the constant onslaught on their professionalism. They say that teachers are feeling the pressure and that parents and pupils are being unnecessarily worried by the harpies' continual wailing, which they want to stop. Politicians should stop talking down Scotland's education system and stop blighting children's lives with petty point scoring and instead get on with the job of delivering improvements in Scottish education.

Perhaps Opposition members should listen to the sage advice of Robert Brown MSP, from the old days when he was Deputy Minister for Education and Young People, who said:

"The curriculum for excellence programme will produce a curriculum for children from three to 18. Moving to a single

curriculum that starts at age three, with the early stage of the revised curriculum going to the end of primary 1, has the radical potential to extend the child-centred, active learning approaches that are used in nursery into the early years of primary. That is extremely important. Good work is being done in many schools and other establishments across Scotland in that regard. From experience across the sector, we know that transitions are always difficult. Continuing the active learning style of nursery into primary 1 will make the transition from pre-school and nursery to school easier. It is vital that the eagerness and enthusiasm for learning that young children have in early years settings are maintained throughout their school careers.”—[*Official Report*, 8 February 2007; c 31922-3.]

I could not agree more.

Many ministers in the previous Administration did a lot of work to start the development of the system that SNP ministers are now implementing. It is sad that their colleagues appear willing to discard that work for the sake of some newspaper headlines and petty political point scoring. Yes, Ms Whitefield—petty political point scoring indeed. It offers little advantage politically and much damage educationally. Those members might wish to reflect on the fact that ill-considered actions can have serious long-term effects. They might want to remember that the newly qualified teachers who cannot find work now entered teacher training under the previous Administration as a result of hasty decisions based on poor workforce planning by Labour ministers. Those newly qualified teachers who cannot find employment, who are noted in the Labour motion, are unemployed because Labour failed them. They entered teacher training on Labour’s watch to fill vacancies that Labour predicted but which never came. Labour played a cruel trick on those young professionals.

The motion is based on false premises. Labour hopes to divert attention from its failings. It is just as well that we have an SNP Government that is working to make Scotland smarter and more competitive and to give Scotland’s children the best possible start in life.

10:27

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): In the course of the first eight years of devolved government, when we had a coalition Government in Scotland, I was pleased that new primary and secondary schools were built in my constituency: new schools at the Hill of Banchory and Lairhillock, and a new academy at Portlethen. Those schools were built as part of the public-private partnership scheme that was initiated by the Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition Government. As a result, children from those school catchment areas are being educated in modern and well-equipped schools.

When a change of Government occurred three years ago, in 2007, little did we know that the new

SNP Government’s promise to match the previous coalition Government’s school building programme “brick for brick” was simply campaigning rhetoric. Little did we know that that promise to continue with the school building programme was like the SNP’s promise to dump student debt, to get rid of the council tax and to give £2,000 to first-time house buyers. Although the list goes on, I do not have time to go through all of the promises that the SNP made in its election campaign and the disappointments since it was elected. Ken Macintosh was far too kind to the SNP Administration in his speech, hence my intervention. I thought that he had identified an SNP promise on schools that had been kept, but unfortunately Mr Macintosh was being too polite to the cabinet secretary—pity that that courtesy was not returned.

Not one school has been built in my constituency since this sorry excuse for a Government came to power; not even one school has been started with the extra funding promised by the Scottish Government. Although the SNP Administration has promised to fund two thirds of the £43 million that is needed for Mearns academy at Laurencekirk in my constituency, that is not expected to happen until 2016—and we are supposed to be oh so terribly grateful. Not only will no school be built in my area under this Government, but the schools minister does not expect Mearns academy to be built under the next Scottish Government, which will be elected in 2011. The SNP is great on promises and awful on delivery.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To add to Mike Rumbles’s concerns, he might want to check Aberdeenshire Council’s pockets, because he will find that the two thirds relates not to the cost of building the school but to a notional formula, which will be significantly less.

Mike Rumbles: I made the mistake of being too kind to the SNP Government.

My point is that our children are educated only once. None of the children currently attending Mearns academy will be educated in the state-of-the-art facilities that they deserve. I do not want to hear the excuse from the cabinet secretary or his back benchers that financial times are hard. This Government has never planned a school building programme in my constituency, even in a time of relative plenty.

Ian McKee: The previous Government did not pay for it.

Mike Rumbles: The member is wrong.

Aberdeenshire Council has great plans to use money from its budget to build and renew several primary schools throughout the shire and to build a new community school campus at Alford—no

thanks to any new funding from the Scottish Government. The cabinet secretary knows that there is a desperate need for new and refurbished academies at Kemnay, at a cost of £38 million; at Stonehaven, at a cost of £34 million; and at Banchory, at a cost of £18 million. That is not even on the radar of the SNP Administration. It should dump its ideological opposition to using private funding and launch a new round of public-private partnership funding so that those schools can be built or refurbished. I ask the cabinet secretary to drop his ideological problem in that respect.

It is worth repeating that our children are educated only once. We need new schools now. I find it amazing that SNP members attack Labour for using political rhetoric when political rhetoric is all that we have heard from the SNP today. If ministers refuse to take the necessary action to help to build new secondary schools in Aberdeenshire, the people of Aberdeenshire will have the opportunity at the ballot box next May to eject them from office. I am sure that they will take that opportunity.

10:32

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I pay tribute to the dedication of staff at all levels in schools and nurseries in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth—staff who are committed to providing the best possible opportunity for the young people in their charge. I was proud to be a member during the first two sessions of this Parliament and I am proud of the legislation that was passed in that period to deliver quality and access for every child, especially the legislation that was designed to provide additional support when needed. How sad it is to see what has happened in the three years since the nationalists came to government. Additional support for our most needy children is reducing. The Government's just ask radio campaign is seen as a sick joke by parents who are trying to do the best for their child, and who are wondering why the SNP is spending so much money on a meaningless advertising campaign when a few thousand pounds needs to be invested in their child's future.

It is sad that the new school building programme has disappeared and to see the effect that that is having on children and the construction industry. The SNP—especially its back benchers—would do well to listen to what is being said. Contrary to what Christina McKelvie said, I can come to Parliament holding my head high. I want to see more schools like St Patrick's primary in Kilsyth, which was built using the PPP method of funding. It provides a positive and pleasant environment for nursery and primary-age children and facilities, such as playing fields, that can be used in the evenings and at weekends. Unfortunately, under

the SNP and its SFT—or schools fantasy trust—we will all need to wait before we see more schools.

We take part in today's debate at a time when figures show that up to 70 per cent—yes, 70 per cent—of newly qualified teachers fail to find work. I am grateful to Kenny Gibson for reminding us what a difference Labour made by increasing teacher numbers between 1997 and 2007. How sad it is to find that, after only three years of an SNP Government, teacher numbers are falling. The excuses that the cabinet secretary gave for that were disgraceful. No wonder he has been looking to the skies throughout this debate and turning his back on speakers whenever those points have been made.

If the First Minister and cabinet secretary—who seem to live in their own naive utopia and want to silence criticism wherever it comes from—believe that their party is doing a good job in leading education in Scotland, I can tell them categorically that that is not the case. Across the board, the SNP has failed. The SNP's fruitless promises to parents, pupils, teachers and university and college students are clear to see in its policies, the majority of which have fallen by the wayside.

Contrary to SNP press office statements, the teacher crisis has been caused by the SNP. As colleagues have stated, more than 2,500 teacher jobs have been cut, as have the jobs of more than 1,000 support workers. In my constituency of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, I have witnessed at first hand how teachers have lost their jobs and how newly qualified teachers who cannot find a position have been forced to up sticks and move to England or overseas simply to find work. Such are the dire straits in which our educators have been placed by the SNP. *[Interruption.]* Rather than just sit on their backsides making comments, SNP members should sit up and intervene.

Kenneth Gibson: Will the member give way?

Cathie Craigie: I am happy to do so.

Kenneth Gibson: Is it not the case that unemployment among teachers is proportionately higher in England, Wales and Northern Ireland than it is in Scotland? Yes or no?

Cathie Craigie: Mr Gibson, I was elected to represent the people of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth in the Scottish Parliament. Under the devolved settlement, I want the best possible education experience for our young people. The SNP is taking its eye off the ball in education and my constituents are suffering because of an incompetent SNP Government.

The figures do not lie. The General Teaching Council for Scotland's figures show that only 25 per cent of teachers have signed a permanent full-

time contract. The EIS has said that such shocking figures “paint an alarming picture”. When the SNP set out its key pillars of education back in 2006—all of which have since, without question, crumbled—Fiona Hyslop said:

“The SNP will provide teachers the time, space and resources to teach”.

Far from providing teachers with resources, the SNP is not even providing them with jobs. The fact is that the SNP Government has failed our teachers since it came to power three years ago. Its cuts have damaged the teaching profession and threatened the education of young people not only in my constituency of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth but the length and breadth of Scotland.

Sadly, the SNP’s action on teachers is not its only failing: its class size policy was a shambles from the word go; its unfunded promises to university students were a disgrace; and its pledge to match Labour’s school building programme “brick for brick” has left the bricks stockpiled in the brickworks and construction workers sitting on the couch. That is another disgraceful let-down by the SNP.

When Fiona Hyslop was axed, there was a belief that she might—just might—be replaced by someone who was willing to sort out the mess that she left. We got Mike Russell, who should have been able to stand up for education, but he has simply carried on from where his predecessor left off. He lives in his own fantasy SNP bubble.

As colleagues have said, the Scottish Government is very quick to play the blame game, which—apart from independence—seems to be the only policy that it is sticking to. The blame is given to Westminster or to local authorities; it is never given to the SNP. Well, it is about time that the SNP took responsibility for its actions in government. How can the Scottish Government justify cutting the budget of local authorities by £270 million—more than £17 million of which is to be taken from North Lanarkshire Council—when it has twice as much to spend as Donald Dewar had? If North Lanarkshire Council had followed the Scottish Futures Trust model for the schools that that council has built under PPP, the cost to the taxpayer would be £1.2 million more per annum—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): You should be finishing now, Ms Craigie.

Cathie Craigie: As a result of SNP cuts, local authorities are being forced to cut front-line services as well as review and even close schools and nurseries. As the minister knows, that is happening in my constituency.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be finishing now, Ms Craigie.

Cathie Craigie: Since 2007, the SNP has without doubt damaged education—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, Ms Craigie, but you must finish now.

Cathie Craigie: And that has not been without impact. The SNP should move over and let Labour take control again.

10:41

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): The motion that is before us today ranges over two topics, whose only direct relationship is that they are both in the field of education. As time is limited, I will concentrate specifically on the part of the motion that deals with the introduction of the curriculum for excellence and associated matters.

Last week, those of us who were in the chamber experienced at first hand the depressing negativity of the Labour Party when it comes to implementation of new ideas. At that point, Labour members expressed fears about introducing minimum unit pricing for alcohol, on the ground that no one else had done it before. In their eyes, the idea that Scotland should be a trail-blazer rather than a camp-follower was obviously too fraught with danger even to be entertained.

Today, their fear is about the introduction of the curriculum for excellence. Everyone thought the curriculum for excellence was a brilliant idea when it was conceived in the first few years of the millennium, but now that we have come to its practical application, the attitude is different. Those who say that Scotland is not up to it are raising their voices once more, as we heard especially in today’s rather scattergun opening speech. I can assume only that some people are worried that, if children are taught more about economics, they will realise the enormous financial burden that the previous Government has placed around their necks, thanks to PFI.

Let us consider a little of the history behind the curriculum for excellence. In 2002, the then Minister for Education and Young People, Cathy Jamieson, launched a national debate on education. She described that as an unprecedented move to involve everyone in Scotland in discussing the future of school education. Briefing packs were sent to every local authority and school in Scotland and to every organisation that expressed an interest in hosting a national debate event. A national phoneline was set up. Press and radio advertisements were commissioned to raise awareness of the debate and to let people know how they could participate. In that way, teachers helped to shape the curriculum for excellence as long as eight years ago.

In 2004, there followed the report “A Curriculum for Excellence—The Curriculum Review Group”. That report was enthusiastically received by the Labour-Lib Dem Administration, which pledged in its response, among other things, that

“We will work closely with teachers to ensure that the changes will work in the classroom.”

At this stage, in the spirit of consensus, let me congratulate Cathy Jamieson, Peter Peacock and all those who were involved in steering the future of Scottish education all those years ago. I appreciate that the parents of schoolchildren who were consulted then are not necessarily parents of schoolchildren now, but one thing that we can be sure of is that both parents and teachers have been widely involved in the development of the curriculum for excellence over many years.

Since the advent of the SNP Government, teachers have been even more widely consulted. Representatives of both the Educational Institute of Scotland and the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association are included on the management board that supervises the programme. In the future, a stakeholders group that includes a large representation from teachers will advise on future developments of the curriculum for excellence. Its first meeting took place earlier this month, and its next will be on 22 June.

I appreciate that new ways of working come more easily to some people than they do to others. In particular, primary school teachers have for many years worked in an environment in which projects and joined-up activities have been the norm, so they should find little difficulty in coping with the changes. The situation is different in secondary schools, where single, stand-alone subject teaching has been more the norm. Although secondary teachers have welcomed the theory of the curriculum for excellence, they might have reservations about their ability to put it into practice. New skills might be required along with new ways of working with pupils and colleagues. To help to prepare for that, many specific measures have been taken, such as additional in-service days, targeted support and extra funding.

It is understandable that parents and teachers become concerned when ways of teaching that have been in place for years are replaced, but the curriculum for excellence is one of the most well-trailed policies ever. It has the support of educationists from all over the world, and now is the time to put it into practice.

Finally, I will say a word about the qualification arrangements. Although secondary 1 pupils will be learning under the new curriculum, the first new qualifications will not be offered until 2013-14, so nothing is imminent. There is a more important point to be made here, however. We need to move

away from the teach-to-test mentality that has so hamstrung Scottish education in recent years. In these early days, the emphasis should not be on devising a test for the curriculum before that curriculum is in place. The emphasis should be on encouraging, even inspiring, pupils to undertake more research, analysis and independent thought, which are skills that they will need in later life, when a person can expect to have to adapt to the changing work and life circumstances of the time. Of course there will be support materials and development for assessment and qualifications, but those are not the most important needs today. We are sure that they will come.

Labour members can be proud of the curriculum for excellence, a project that they nurtured in its infancy and which is now on the verge of confident maturity. Let them put aside the negativity that they have expressed today and join in welcoming a development that will once more place our country at the forefront of educational progress.

10:46

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in today's debate. The power of education to change people's lives is what brought me from education into politics.

This is an opportune time to be discussing teacher numbers, among other things, given the cabinet secretary's performance at the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee yesterday, when he said that teacher numbers had been unsustainable under the previous Labour-led Scottish Executive. Given that the 2007 SNP manifesto promised to maintain teacher numbers in the face of falling school rolls, Michael Russell's remarks were cynical. Indeed, he and the SNP leadership owe the parents, pupils and teachers of Scotland an apology for a manifesto that was nothing more than a cynical exercise to win votes with absolutely no intention or way of implementing it.

To be charitable, the education manifesto was written by Fiona Hyslop, who was seemingly totally oblivious to John Swinney's plans for the concordat. It is no wonder that the electorate is turning its back on the SNP when it cynically offers cheques that simply cannot be cashed. When it comes to education, the SNP has not just ripped up the manifesto: it has shredded it, poured petrol on it, and set fire to it.

Tempting though it is to dwell on the many ways in which this Administration is failing our young people, I will focus my remarks on the important role of literacy in the curriculum. I give a cautious welcome to the way in which the Government has

responded to the report of the literacy commission that Labour set up.

The promotion of improved literacy levels is shared across party politics. Every one of us in this chamber realises that literacy is key to Scotland's future. Of course, it is a central plank of the curriculum for excellence and is key to pupils becoming confident individuals and independent learners. When the literacy commission reported, the cabinet secretary promised to bring forward an action plan for literacy. We were told that that would happen in June. Perhaps the cabinet secretary can tell us whether that is still going to happen in June and, if not, when we will have it. There are still areas that require clarification, particularly in assessment, so I would be grateful if Mr Russell could update Parliament on those.

The naive proposal to assess literacy through a cross-subject portfolio seems to have been dropped. Although I accept that all teachers have a responsibility to teach literacy, the proposal was not sufficiently focused and it lacked accountability. I welcome the fact that the responsibility for assessing literacy will be with English departments, but it is vital that there is a distinct literacy component within assessment of English. Perhaps the minister could elucidate on that. Will there be a separate literacy assessment? That is absolutely key.

Does the Scottish Government now recognise the concept of functional literacy? In past responses to parliamentary questions, we have been told that the Scottish Government does not recognise that concept. As the cabinet secretary knows, such a concept is fundamental to the literacy commission's proposals, and without a benchmark for basic literacy, we will continue to merely describe a child's progress, as we have done in recent years through the five-to-14 language assessment.

If the Government accepts that it is no longer acceptable for 13,000 pupils to leave primary school without functional literacy, it follows that any literacy action plan must tackle head-on the failure of some pupils to reach basic literacy levels. Assessment of functional literacy is central to the pioneering work that has been done in West Dunbartonshire and Clackmannanshire, and the excellent work that is being done in North Lanarkshire and, I am delighted to say, in Midlothian Council's recently launched literacy strategy.

Of course, the assessment of literacy needs to be embedded right through from nursery to school leavers. I say "from nursery" quite deliberately, because it is vital to screen for pre-literacy communication skills in nursery, and to couple that with picking up on children who have complex

needs and require intensive work, for example through nurture groups.

Hugh O'Donnell: I am sure that Rhona Brankin will know better than I that there has been a lot of debate and discussion around functional literacy and technology. Young people use text messaging and abbreviations. How does Rhona Brankin feel about that being part of an assessment process of what I regard as genuine literacy? There has been some debate about that, particularly in *The Times Educational Supplement Scotland*.

Rhona Brankin: That issue is slightly separate. The basic point about being able to measure a child's acquisition of literacy is the fundamental concept of what constitutes a basic functional literacy that allows people to function within society. That is the sort of basic literacy that I am talking about.

Low literacy rates are linked to deprivation, but it is also important to know that, even in areas of deprivation, such as West Dunbartonshire, intensive work with pupils can achieve real success. We cannot begin to tackle the persistent low levels of attainment by too many pupils in Scotland without tackling the underlying cause for many youngsters, which is their failure to master functional literacy skills.

Does the cabinet secretary recognise the need for a national plan for literacy to have defined outcomes that can be measured? West Dunbartonshire Council achieved functional literacy levels across its schools within 10 years. One of the key features of successful literacy plans is that they set out clear targets or outcomes, and there is a structured plan for evaluating their success. Millions of pounds have been spent on literacy over the years, but few projects have been sustained, and any literacy plan must be sustainable. Government is key to achieving that long-term sustainability.

I regret that I must end on a negative note. Cutting learning support staff levels and classroom assistants means cutting some of the key staff for delivering a step change in literacy. If the Government is committed to eradicating illiteracy from Scotland, it will require commitment and strong leadership across the education sector, across councils, from parents and, critically, from the Government itself. We simply cannot afford to continue to fail pupils. They deserve our commitment and support.

Is the Government up to delivering a step change in literacy? I certainly hope so. Everyone in the chamber hopes so, but the omens are not good. I ask members to support the motion in the name of Des McNulty.

10:54

Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): I do not think that today's debate has been Parliament's finest hour. Many of the speeches have been directed to the hustings rather than parliamentary debate. Perhaps it is an end-of-term aberration, but teachers and parents will have every right to be disappointed—especially if today has been a trailer for forthcoming electoral attractions.

Education has, rightly, always been a Scottish priority, and we all have an interest in ensuring that our national education system upgrades, improves and meets the needs of 21st century Scottish society.

The serious issues of teacher employment opportunities and curriculum innovation are being deliberately used as political propaganda in the fundamentally flawed motion that is before us, which simply misses the point. It is simplistic to treat fluctuating trends as being somehow endemic problems, especially for party-political purposes. Teacher recruitment is, in reality, a complex management problem that involves many and changing variables including teacher numbers, population changes, school rolls—which can rise and fall—the age ranges of teaching staff, and subject specialisms. In the current times of financial decline, the general economy also comes into play.

Ken Macintosh: Will the member take an intervention?

Andrew Welsh: Later.

Prediction of future teacher demand is a very difficult procedure. If we add into the mix the length of teacher training and a four-year time span, we see that the accusations that are made in the motion point right back to the Labour Party, which held power for the relevant years. Indeed, councils in which Labour is currently in power are responsible for two thirds of this year's drop in teacher numbers.

No credit is given for the positive signs that are being created. The number of post-probationers not in employment has halved since October, and Scotland has the lowest teacher unemployment in the UK. There is no point in playing the blame game in a sector and profession that is crucial to the future of our country. The decline in teacher numbers began some time ago, and the "sharp decline" that is claimed in the motion is in fact a smaller decline than in recent years.

The real task is to ensure that Scotland maintains its traditional emphasis on having an education system that is fit for the 21st century, that is based on traditional Scottish values and which uses modern thinking in tune with the needs of this century. Traditionally, Scotland has had a

unified system from elementary education through to university, which has been designed to allow every student to progress as far and as fast as their ability can take them. That sees education as a continuous process that is available to all. As a former secondary teacher and further education senior lecturer, I believe that we should be considering what I see as being the gaps between primary and secondary, and between secondary and the further education and university sectors.

In the past, we all relied on information that we carried in our heads, but today's world has information overload, requiring other skills such as analysis, co-operation, co-working and interaction, communication skills, discrimination and judgment. The walls of our primary schools throughout Scotland show that those lessons have been learned, and I have seen at first hand excellent pupil-teacher interaction, as well as pupil interaction, creating a positive teaching environment. That is what the curriculum for excellence is all about: modern methods for modern situations.

We should all remember that the curriculum for excellence is a method and an approach to teaching. It is important that secondary education becomes a natural progression from primary and that further education and universities all form part of an interlinked continuum, raising students to higher levels on the foundations and methods that are laid down at each stage of development. I did not hear any of that earlier on, and I wish I had because that is at the heart of Scotland's education future. If that were introduced, it would fulfil the historic and far-sighted objectives that were the basis of Scotland's traditional educational strengths.

It is time to make the system work as a co-ordinated, progressive and integrated continuum to give Scotland an education system that is adaptable and fit for the 21st century. I regret that the real issues have rarely been addressed today and have instead been drowned out in party-political rhetoric. Scottish education deserves better than that.

10:59

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I had intended to make a critically constructive contribution, but the tirade of personal abuse that was the cabinet secretary's opening speech, and which has been reflected in the speeches by some of his back benchers, makes that rather more difficult. Nevertheless, I will do my best to be constructive because I am not negative about the curriculum for excellence, and I am desperate for it to deliver the best possible outcomes for the children of Scotland and for Scotland's future.

There were good and sound reasons for wanting to introduce a more flexible approach to the curriculum. The rigid subject-bound approach in secondary schools was, for many children in S1 and S2, not delivering. The period of adapting from a topic-and-project based approach in primary school to separate subjects delivered by different teachers in different classrooms too often resulted in a period of stagnation in the early years of secondary school and, in some cases, in a deterioration of children's skills and confidence.

I have observed in schools examples of excellent practice that would fit in very well with the principles of the curriculum for excellence. I attended Dumfries high school a couple of weeks ago—to partake of a school dinner, but that is a totally different issue—where I was given the chance to drop in on an S2 environmental project, which was exemplary. The young people were looking at the changes in the school's environment over the past 100 years and were collecting samples of plants, insects and so on. The science teacher was working with a creative writing teacher and an art teacher, and he was brimming with enthusiasm. I could see that enthusiasm being caught by his pupils, who in front of my eyes were developing their skills of observation and classification, which are key scientific skills. I said to the headteacher afterwards that it was the type of learning that was envisaged by those who had conceived the curriculum for excellence.

I also recently presented Duncow primary school with its second green flag. That gave me a chance to chat with its eco committee, which includes children as young as primary 3. Without a teacher being present, they were able to describe to me what they had done to get the award. They communicated effectively—part of what the curriculum for excellence is about—and they were clearly developing early science skills.

I studied science and I also taught science, admittedly mainly to adults, and I have some concerns about the way in which the curriculum for excellence will be implemented in science education. It is great to get young people interested in and enthusiastic about science, but there is a time when the "Wow!" factor has to develop into core competencies, skills and knowledge. That development will and should be challenging, and those competencies, skills and knowledge are not identical across the spectrum of sciences.

I know that the teaching unions have expressed concerns that teachers may be expected to teach unfamiliar subjects because of the interdisciplinary nature of the coursework. I have had some experience of that, as I was required to teach both geology and biology when I taught the Open University science foundation course, but had

never studied either in my life. It told me something about the learning and teaching experiences, but it was challenging. I know that teachers, in particular, will be sensitive to the effect that their possible lack of confidence may have on their pupils' learning.

I know that the science baccalaureate is intended to prepare school students to study science and engineering at university; we had a presentation on the science baccalaureate at the cross-party group on science and technology a few months ago. There was a lot of enthusiasm from those who are involved in its delivery, and I imagine that many students will be enthused, but I am not convinced that it will be right for all students or that it is a panacea.

First, pupils who are going on to study scientific subjects need to develop their problem-solving skills and knowledge before the senior stage, which commences in S4. Students will need, for example, to distinguish between physics and biology and other sciences and to know which disciplines they are attracted to. That is obviously tied in with both teaching resources and the new qualification arrangements.

Secondly, I am concerned that the science baccalaureate might narrow students' focus. It seems to be more in line with the English A level system and the three-year honours degree. The flexibility of the four-year Scottish honours degree has its advantages—the cabinet secretary addressed a reception last week to celebrate the success of Scottish science and engineering, during which he described being forced to take a science subject at university and then really enjoying studying it. I had the converse experience at university of not being allowed to do extra maths and being forced to do philosophy, which I then really enjoyed. The fact that we have a broad curriculum, even at higher education level, that brings us out of our comfort zone and allows us to learn new things, is a strength of our system, and I would not like us to lose it.

My final point on the curriculum for excellence is on how it fosters what I would call general scientific literacy. I must say that that is an area in which previous education regimes have failed. Too many people feel that science is too difficult and that they cannot do it. The vast majority of people do not have the confidence in their own scientific judgment to challenge what they are told by the media or advertising, which leaves them open to being conned.

I believe that what is perhaps even more important is that everyone can enjoy science at some level, just as they can enjoy sport or the arts at some level. One of the great strengths of the curriculum for excellence is its potential to give children the confidence to engage with science—a

confidence that, I hope, will grow with them. That will not be achieved if we do not get the curriculum for excellence right. Rushing it in without proper consultation and discussion with those who will deliver the curriculum will not result in the kind of education system that we all want.

I will finish on a local issue. Kenneth Macintosh mentioned the pressures that are building in the Scottish education system at the moment. I know that the cabinet secretary has had—and possibly still has—an interest in Dumfries and Galloway, and I wonder how he feels about the loss of 23 teachers in this current year, the potential reduction in the numbers of classroom assistants and the removal of school transport from places such as Stranraer and Heathhall in Dumfries. We are seeing reductions in the quality of our education in that area at the very time when we should be seeing consolidation, given that there is a new curriculum coming in.

11:06

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): Not entirely unexpectedly, this has been a fairly bad-tempered debate, and such exchanges shed more heat than light on the subject. Mostly, that is done for political effect. However, on this occasion, there can be little doubt that the debate has shown that there is a broad consensus—with the exception of SNP back benchers—that this Government has overpromised and underdelivered on education. Member after member has demonstrated, with a litany of genuine facts and figures, just how poorly the Government has performed. We heard from Mike Rumbles about his constituency experience, and we heard from others about teacher numbers. A couple of references were made to posts that are available—Kenneth Gibson mentioned a figure of 280 posts. However, most of them are not entry-level posts but promoted posts or posts that call for people with specialist skills. Probationary teachers cannot apply for those posts, because they do not have the necessary experience.

The curriculum for excellence is causing huge concerns. Those concerns are coming not from the Opposition parties—although we are voicing them—but from the teachers' unions. Our contributions to this debate are reflecting their concerns, because they represent people who are at the front end of delivering what is, principally, a good way forward.

Mike Rumbles and Kenneth Macintosh were too gentle with the Scottish Government. The fact is that it has not delivered on any of the manifesto commitments. I do not remember an appendix to the manifesto that said that the commitments would be fulfilled only if the moon was in the right phase, or whatever.

Christina McKelvie: What about the Liberal Democrats' commitment to abolish the Scotland Office?

Hugh O'Donnell: The Government has huffed and puffed—as its back benchers continue to do from sedentary positions—but it has failed to deliver. From the First Minister to the most recent Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, we have heard a tale of woe, full of sound and fury but signifying almost nothing. We have listened as SNP back benchers have stood up to try to defend the indefensible: the total failure of the Government to keep the promises that it made to the people of Scotland slightly more than three years ago.

Even more galling are the facile complaints from cabinet secretary after cabinet secretary that this is all someone else's fault. We hear, "It's the big bogeyman in London who has cut our budget," or "We don't employ teachers; it's the councils." It is either Westminster's fault, or it is the bad wee councils, who are not doing what is asked of them. I have to say that the most culpable people are those who will not accept culpability for their role in this situation. The misdirection of funding towards vanity projects such as free school meals for every child amounts to nothing less than mismanagement.

Ian McKee: I seem to recall that it was the policy of the Liberal Democrats some time ago to reduce income tax, with a cost to the Scottish exchequer of around £800 million. Where would that money have come from, in today's financial situation?

Hugh O'Donnell: The tax policies will be fully addressed in the forthcoming emergency budget. However, if we are talking retrospectively about parties' policies, I have to say that the SNP has no room to criticise anyone else, given its leaflets about dumping the student debt and mortgage grants for first-time buyers.

This Parliament has news for the SNP Government, whose leader thinks that it is more important to write to local authorities about spurious issues around schools than to apologise to teachers and parents for the shambles that his Government has made of running the education system. That type of approach is just like shifting the deck chairs on the Titanic, but without the nice music to compensate for the disaster ahead. No amount of bluster from the First Minister or flowery rhetoric from the current cabinet secretary will disguise the ineptitude of the Government's handling of the most important job of any Government: the education of our children. In the best of times, that is important, but in these times of economic challenges it is critical.

However, the Government's desperation to drive forward populist agendas and an agenda that no one wants has led it to take its eye off the ball. It has let down Scotland, its teachers and its students. The Government's failure will not be forgotten and is unlikely to be forgiven easily. The Government has failed, and will be punished for its failure.

11:12

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)
(Con): Inevitably, I suppose, a debate about the roll-out of the curriculum for excellence has become entangled with other issues around the Government's education policy. That is because when there are competing demands for resources—the implementation of the curriculum for excellence requires resources—the budgetary choices that are made by the Government, and its errors and failures, are bound to have an impact on that and to lead to criticism, even in relation to subjects on which there has been an impressive degree of consensus in the chamber, ever since the proposals set forth by the review group in its report "A Curriculum for Excellence" were published and accepted by the previous Scottish Executive in 2004. Further, it is a fact, I am sorry to say, that the number of teachers and classroom assistants has been in decline since 2007 and that there has been an increase in the proportion of newly qualified teachers who cannot obtain employment.

If the cabinet secretary is complaining that there was an overexpansion of teacher numbers under the previous Scottish Executive, why did the SNP say that it would maintain those numbers? Why was that pledge enshrined in the concordat that the SNP signed with local authorities? Mr Russell is smiling. Perhaps he would like to explain that.

Mike Rumbles: He cannot.

David McLetchie: No, he cannot. Mr Russell sits in silence. That is an extraordinary situation that is rarely seen. However, on this fundamental point, Mr Russell is stunned into silence.

It is certainly a fact that there is widespread disquiet about the implementation of the curriculum for excellence. Karen Whitefield was quite right to say that we in the Parliament have a responsibility, as does the Government, to listen and respond to that.

Those facts have to be weighed up against the back-cloth of a Government that was elected on a fraudulent and totally unrealistic policy on class sizes and which was stubbornly determined to put feeding children free of charge at taxpayers' expense ahead of educating children free of charge at taxpayers' expense. However, on that subject, I remind Kenneth Macintosh and others in

the Labour Party who rightly criticised SNP priorities in that respect that we would not have the policy if the Labour Party had had the guts to vote against the relevant Scottish statutory instrument when it came before the Parliament for decision. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats voted against it, but I am afraid that the Labour Party was guilty of the same spineless populism of which it accuses Mr Russell. That, I am afraid, is the fact of that particular matter.

Let us not forget that the architect of the class sizes policy was not the hapless Fiona Hyslop, who carried the can for it, but her successor, one Michael Russell, now the cabinet secretary, who in an earlier guise told an SNP conference that it could all be achieved within five years. Well, he kens better noo. That is not just a function of the crisis in the public finances that we have inherited from Labour, although that will, no doubt, be used as an excuse. No, the fact of the matter is that the policy was never doable—and in some respects not even desirable—even in the best of times for the public finances.

All that is a salutary lesson that an important change such as the introduction of the curriculum for excellence requires focus, the establishment of priorities, the resourcing of those priorities, and the determination to see the job through without distractions. It will never be achieved by people who have the attention span of a gnat. Hugh O'Donnell encapsulated the SNP's problem succinctly when he said that the Government has overpromised and underdelivered. The failure to focus is a charge that can rightly be levelled against the Government. The cabinet secretary needs to buckle down to the task with teachers and ensure that they and our schools are properly equipped and resourced to implement this important change.

In that context, however, I must say that, while we support our teachers, we deplore the threats of industrial action, from which our children and young people would be the losers. The unions are represented on the management board for the curriculum for excellence, which voted unanimously to press ahead with the start date in August. They should accept the consequences of that decision and work with the Government to see it through. Teaching is a vocation and teachers are members of a profession. Their union leaders do their reputation and public standing no good whatsoever by promoting industrial action with such irresponsible posturing.

I congratulate my colleague Elizabeth Smith on her informed and authoritative contribution to the debate. She pointed out the critical link between the curriculum and qualifications, as did Karen Whitefield. The two things must march in tandem, so how can we possibly implement a new

curriculum in August but delay implementation of a new structure of examinations and assessment by a year? It cannot be done. It strikes me as a recipe for a dog's breakfast. It is not fair to our teachers and it is certainly not fair to our young people, who should be at the centre of all this. The Government could do better and it must do better. That is why I support the Labour motion and the amendments in the names of Elizabeth Smith and Margaret Smith.

11:19

Michael Russell: This has been a somewhat dismal debate. That is what I expected, so I am not disappointed. I want to set out at the beginning of my response that the truth of Scottish education is that, as we speak in this political bubble today, hundreds of thousands of good pupils are being taught by tens of thousands of good teachers in thousands of good schools. That is the reality in Scotland. It is a reality that I support, and it is one that the Parliament should support. The judgment on the Parliament is when it fails to do that and, indeed, when we have education debates that run entirely contrary to the principles of education. Every teacher whom I know wants to ensure that there is positive reinforcement so that those who are allegedly not doing well will do better. Instead, we have just had negativity.

Andrew Welsh got it absolutely right—I congratulate him on his speech—when he called the Labour speeches a rehearsal for the next election. That is exactly what they were. As a former critic, let me say exactly what notices I would give them. To start with, the casting was deeply unconvincing. The lead was very weak indeed and the supporting performances were often over the top. The script was badly written. I do not think that anybody will book the performance for a four-year run.

However, I have two exceptions to talk about—two impressive performances that were potential Oscar winners. I want to be serious about them. I find it quite extraordinary that I am saying it, but Rhona Brankin's speech was important and searching in terms of what we need to talk about in the chamber, because she addressed real issues of literacy. The action plan will come forward and it will be a national action plan. It will not come forward in June, because I have asked the management board to intensify work with officials and others, including the literacy commission, for example to look at—*[Interruption.]*

It is unfortunate that any member, including Richard Simpson, should attempt to make jokes about this important issue. He is doing so from a sedentary position, which is most unfortunate.

The role of learning difficulties needs to be taken into account in the action plan. I agree

entirely that benchmarking is important, and we need to have a real handle on the scale of the problem. Statistics on adults will be published in July. We need to see the issue as wider than just an issue for children. Hugh O'Donnell's point on the technological connections is correct, and there is a lot of discussion about that. We need the national plan, and we will have it. I am grateful to Rhona Brankin for raising it.

I also thank Elaine Murray for her speech. There are many good schools, including in Dumfries and Galloway, in which I maintain a strong interest. I look forward to seeing her there yet again. We work hard on a range of issues of science in schools. Professor Anne Glover, the Government's chief scientific adviser, has established a science and engineering education advisory group, which I have been involved with, and which is looking at teacher confidence in science, examples of good teaching, links to the CFE, and indeed the idea of enthusiasm for science. I will ask Anne Glover to engage with Elaine Murray on those issues, because I thought that she made a positive contribution on them.

The rest of the Labour contributions were like the present world cup football games. They were full of annoying and distracting noise. Labour members really are the vuvuzelas of Scottish politics. They engage the lungs and not the brain. I want to go through a list of points that were raised, but let me start with two points. Claire Baker, Margaret Smith, Ken Macintosh, Karen Whitefield, Mike Rumbles, Cathie Craigie, Rhona Brankin, Elaine Murray, Hugh O'Donnell and, I anticipate, Des McNulty all demand more public expenditure. Where are they? What have they been looking at in the past few months? The reality of the situation means that that will not happen. The more they argue in the chamber for more public expenditure, the more foolish they will seem.

I want to be entirely clear about the Government's—

Margaret Smith: Will the minister give way?

Michael Russell: No. I really must make progress. I will take the member in a moment.

The Government has delivered, we are delivering, and we will go on delivering real educational progress in Scotland.

Elizabeth Smith: Will the minister give way?

Michael Russell: No. I want to finish this point.

We have delivered record funding even as Labour's squeeze took hold. We have delivered the smallest ever class sizes in Scotland, and when difficulties arose in that policy, we negotiated. We did not stamp our feet as Labour seemed to want us to do. We have delivered substantial progress on PE. More children are

having free school meals, and I am absolutely not ashamed of that. More schools have been built or refurbished, and we have prevented further damage to the public finances by stopping the ridiculously expensive and ruinous PPP. *[Interruption.]* I will come to Mr Rumbles in a moment; I hope that he is waiting for that.

There has been successful support for the curriculum for excellence, despite Labour's attempt yet again to undermine it. We have more CPD and a review of teacher education. I could go through that list again and again. I am very proud of the fact that this Government has delivered and will go on delivering in universities and schools. When the going gets tough as a result of Labour's catastrophic management south of the border, which is affecting us all, we will continue to work.

I am sorry that Mr Macintosh and Karen Whitefield have such a complete misunderstanding of the secondary curriculum.

Ken Macintosh: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Michael Russell: I do not want to take an intervention from Mr Macintosh; I want to tell him where he got it wrong in his opening remarks.

The qualifications will be built on prior learning, there will be no artificial split between S1 and S3 and S4 and S6, and there is for the first time a coherent curriculum. As Mr Macintosh knows, it is not the Government's duty to be centrally prescriptive on these matters.

Karen Whitefield used the phrase "jobs vacuum". What an extraordinary position to take. Of course teacher unemployment is a problem in Scotland, but it is significantly lower than elsewhere in the UK. The figure is 5.3 per cent in Scotland; 7.4 per cent in England; 8 per cent in Wales; and 11.8 per cent in Northern Ireland. Moreover, 86.5 per cent of post-probation teachers have found employment as a teacher in Scotland, while less than 1 per cent of post-probationers have left the teaching profession and have no intention of seeking teaching employment in future. This Government has taken and continues to take action, and I think that in these matters there should be a realistic recognition of facts rather than an indulgence in fantasy.

On school buildings—

Rhona Brankin: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Michael Russell: I have a great deal to cover and I am almost running out of time.

Members: Aw!

Michael Russell: I, too, regret that I am running out of time. I would be happy to go on getting rid of

the myths that we have been listening to all morning.

With regard to the myths that we heard from Mr Rumbles, funding for Mearns academy and Ellon academy will commence in 2012-13. That is not what he said. Given the standard procurement, design development and consultation timescales, not to mention issues related to identifying appropriate sites, it is very unlikely that the council—even if it wants to—will be in a position to commence either project earlier. I am pleased to say that on 2 June 2010 the provost of Aberdeenshire, Councillor Bill Howatson—I am sure that Mr Rumbles will want to talk to him, as he is a Liberal Democrat ward member in Mearns—said:

"Today's announcement will be welcome news for the communities served by Mearns Academy ... Clearly a lot of work has been undertaken to progress us to this stage and I am grateful that Aberdeenshire's needs have been recognised in this round of funding."

Mike Rumbles: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Michael Russell: I hope that Mr Rumbles is about to withdraw his criticism.

Mike Rumbles: I and my Liberal Democrat colleagues welcomed that announcement, but that was before we knew that the Scottish Government was not going to complete the project until 2016. That is what I said.

Michael Russell: The date of 2012-13 is what has been confirmed and recognised. Aberdeenshire is the only council in Scotland—

Mike Rumbles: Listen!

Michael Russell: The member should listen to this. Aberdeenshire is the only council in Scotland to have been awarded funding for two secondary schools. Indeed, the funding needs for all the schools mentioned in today's *Press and Journal* article have been widely known since 2005. I regard Mr Rumbles's position as quite extraordinary, particularly given the fact that he supported PPP projects whose cost in 2008-09 represented more than 4 per cent of Aberdeenshire's gross revenue expenditure on education. Unfortunately, he has supported proposals that are impoverishing the council that he is talking about—

Mike Rumbles: Shameful.

Michael Russell: —and now he is blaming somebody else. As the member says, that is indeed shameful.

Claire Baker's point that Labour's school building momentum has been lost is also the opposite of the truth. That momentum is what is leading to the millstone that, by 2020, will

consume 10 per cent of education budgets. She needs to think about that very carefully indeed.

The curriculum for excellence is vital and there is huge support for it. It is moving ahead in a constructive and positive way. Where problems exist, we are addressing them; I am working with every school and teacher in Scotland who has come to me with problems and I would welcome the involvement of all parties in the chamber in that regard. Karen Whitefield is right: where there have been genuine concerns, I have addressed them. Indeed, I will go on addressing them. However, we have to address genuine concerns and listen to what people outside this bubble are saying.

There are many such quotations that I could use. Last night, at a parents' event at Trinity academy here in Edinburgh, the headteacher, Alec Morris, said, "Curriculum for excellence? My reaction is: bring it on." That shows the Scottish education system's enthusiasm for what is happening, and the people who are involved in it would not recognise the system that many members have described this morning. That is sad but, as is so often the case, the reality is outside this chamber.

11:29

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie (Lab)): Presiding Officer, I hope that you can give the cabinet secretary the benefit of your advice on appropriate classroom manners, because I am not sure that the approach that he has taken to this debate is what we would have wished. The angrier he gets, the more unbelievable the statements he makes.

The cabinet secretary mentioned "Alice in Wonderland" at the start of his opening speech. In many ways, the reference covers some of the contributions not only from him but from the rest of the SNP benches. For example, Andrew Welsh talked about fluctuating trends in teacher employment, but the reality is that since 2007 the line on the graph showing the numbers of teachers in our schools has been going down. Kenny Gibson seemed to think that unemployment levels among young teachers in Scotland were acceptable, perhaps even praiseworthy. I have to say, though, that the 85 per cent figure is a complete con; about 30 per cent of those teachers have permanent jobs, and one can get up to 85 per cent only by including anyone who has ever been in a classroom anywhere. That is not the reality and is not the sort of thing that we expect.

There are three things that we have not heard from the SNP benches today. The first is contrition or any acknowledgement that, since the SNP took office in 2007, we have had a catalogue of broken

education promises on student debt, class sizes, school meals, the number of hours of PE, school buildings and teacher numbers. There have been other failures that, although not highlighted as promises in the SNP manifesto, have been real nevertheless. The sharp rise in the proportion of newly qualified teachers unable to find jobs and the mismanagement of the implementation of the curriculum for excellence are examples of issues on which the SNP made no promises in advance of the 2007 election; since then, however, its performance in that regard has been woeful.

The cabinet secretary's rose-tinted version of the SNP's stewardship of education bears no resemblance whatever to the reality as experienced by teachers and parents out there. The people out there know that schools have suffered year-on-year cutbacks under the SNP. As anyone who voices criticism of the cabinet secretary is treated as an enemy of Scottish education, I will, to parry the North Korean-style response, quote the general secretary of the EIS, whose commitment to Scottish education cannot be doubted. Last Friday, Ronnie Smith told the EIS conference that across Scotland

"we see attacks on instrumental music instruction, the non-replacement of departing teachers and the reduction in teaching support staff".

All those cuts are direct results of the SNP's concordat with local government, an agreement that delivered the tax priority of the SNP—a freeze in council tax—at the expense of education and other council services.

Michael Russell said yesterday that one of the reasons for falling teacher numbers was undoubtedly the unprecedented financial pressure on local authorities. However, it is his Government that through the concordat has forced authorities to make swingeing cuts not just in teacher numbers, which are down 1,300 from last year, and classroom assistants, of which there are more than 1,000 fewer compared with 2007, but in school budgets, which have been pared back to the point at which teachers tell me that they cannot replace the ink drum in the photocopier when it runs out or the bulb in the classroom projector when it fuses. Because of the SNP, teachers cannot do their job.

Every year that goes by puts more pressure on school budgets and things will get worse next year. The holes in the Scottish Government budget that have resulted from the SNP's frittering away of the £1.5 billion accumulated end-year flexibility that it inherited mean that, next year, Mr Swinney will start with a sizeable deficit before any of the decisions made by Mr Osborne and Mr Alexander are factored in. For schools, which are already under pressure from the cabinet secretary to provide a fig leaf for class sizes and school

meals and squeezed by the concordat, the prospect of further reductions, with no sign whatever of a plan from Mr Russell and his colleagues, is a betrayal.

The second thing that we have not heard from the SNP this morning is any understanding of the problems that secondary teachers face in implementing the curriculum for excellence from August. It is clear that Mr Russell is in denial about that, believing that the implementation is on track and that all the outstanding issues are being resolved. However, as Ken Macintosh pointed out, secondary teachers are saying something quite different. They have highlighted the lack of information from the SQA about the new qualifications, the lack of materials from Learning and Teaching Scotland and the lack of resources for vital professional development as barriers to the curriculum's successful implementation.

Of course, the fault does not lie with Mr Russell alone—his predecessor failed to treat preparations for the implementation with the required urgency. Belatedly, Mr Russell has turned hyperactive, with a new website one week, HMIE being told to drop school inspections and support implementation the next and experts being asked to rewrite key documents. Those things and other more fundamental steps should have been thought about before Mr Russell pre-empted the survey of teachers' views, which his Government commissioned, and instructed that the curriculum for excellence would go ahead in August. Mr Russell's 10-point plan, which he announced in March, does not address the top-line issues that were raised in the survey: the lack of clarity in the examination arrangements and the vagueness of the specification of changes in teaching practice that the curriculum for excellence is supposed to introduce. I highlight the comments that Liz Smith made on those points.

Now, with two working weeks left before teachers and pupils begin the new curriculum, too many secondary teachers are still saying that they have not got the information, resources or preparation time that they need for successful implementation in August. Our objection is not to the curriculum for excellence. We support it, and we have never argued for a delay in implementation. Our point is about the SNP's failure to implement the curriculum for excellence properly, for which Mr Russell and his colleagues are solely responsible.

The third thing that we have not heard from the SNP benches is honesty about the circumstances under which the curriculum for excellence is being introduced. Yesterday, Mike Russell said that, with historical hindsight, the number of teachers was actually artificially increased over a period of time and that that was unsustainable. It is correct that

the Labour and Liberal Democrat Administration increased the number of teachers. Money was allocated for the purpose of reducing class sizes, providing better support for schools in areas of high deprivation and improving standards. The SNP's withdrawal of that resource has led to increased class sizes and taken money away from schools where it is most needed, and it is leading to cuts in specialist provision.

By casualising employment for young teachers, by making it more difficult for schools to find the required time or resource for professional development and by driving down staffing establishments, the SNP has jeopardised the implementation of the curriculum for excellence. As the Conservatives do, I hope that there will not be a strike over cuts in school budgets but, even if a strike is averted, much of the vital good will and co-operation that are needed to make the reforms a success have already been eroded.

The particular problems that the secondary sector faces as a result of the Scottish Government's mismanagement of the implementation of the curriculum for excellence should not overshadow the threat to successful implementation in primary and secondary education as a result of the SNP cuts. If the original timetable had been adhered to, the curriculum for excellence would have been up and running a year ago. Because the process has been mismanaged, implementation will take place in the most difficult circumstances possible and, to use Mr Russell's phrase, at a time of extraordinary financial pressures.

It is the Scottish Government's job to anticipate, to prepare for every contingency and to ensure that nothing is allowed to get in the way of our young people's education. Labour's motion sets out the key defects in the implementation process so far and calls on the Scottish Government to reach an early agreement with local authorities and teachers organisations that guarantees that the curriculum for excellence will be delivered successfully. Our young people deserve the best that we can provide.

One of the costs of having an education debate is that we get to hear twice from Michael Russell. He has chosen to respond to the genuine points that have been raised with his usual bluster. He has blamed the previous Labour-Lib Dem Executive, the previous Labour Government at Westminster, Labour councils and the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat Administration. Last week, he was blaming backsliding teachers. However, we are debating his Government's record, and the statistics show absolutely unambiguously that, on his watch, there are fewer teachers, fewer classroom assistants, more

unemployed newly qualified teachers and less money in school budgets.

The downward trend has not been reversed. Indeed, the crisis is gathering pace. Newly qualified teachers cannot get jobs and more children are being taught by a succession of supply teachers as vacancies are frozen. Rome burns and our Nero is slashing music instruction. Parents and teachers can see that this emperor has no clothes. The risks that are associated with implementing the most wide-ranging reform in Scottish education for a generation are not being properly managed. The SNP Government is failing in its obligations and responsibilities. I urge members to support the motion in my name.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

Carers Strategy

1. Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what measures will be included in its carers strategy to ensure that local authority budget cuts do not impact negatively on carers. (S3O-10948)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): We are developing the carers and young carers strategy in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and working closely with carers organisations, health boards and other organisations. Subject to agreement with COSLA, the strategy will set out our joint vision for Scotland's carers, the outcomes that we collectively wish to achieve and a wide range of action points that are intended to work towards those outcomes and that vision.

No one can escape from the fact that we can expect real-terms reductions in public expenditure in the coming years. In the forthcoming spending review, we will give priority to the protection of front-line services, many of which are crucial to carers and young carers. In the light of the decisions in that spending review, we will work in partnership with COSLA to take forward the carers and young carers strategy.

Sarah Boyack: I welcome the fact that we will have a carers strategy in the near future. I welcome the carers who are joining us in Parliament today during carers week and pay tribute to the fantastic support that they give to their families. Without them, the financial cost to the public purse would be billions. Given the economic context that the minister talked about, will she remind local authorities of their duty to support carers and consult them fully when cuts are proposed? The concordat is not working for carers, particularly older carers. Will she commit to ensuring that local authorities use equality impact assessments to ensure that carers do not lose out disproportionately in budget decisions? I am sure that I do not need to remind her of the problems that we had in Edinburgh recently with the care tendering process, which thankfully was abandoned.

Shona Robison: I join Sarah Boyack in welcoming carers to the Parliament. I acknowledge the hard work and efforts of unpaid carers day in, day out. I meet them regularly. I pay tribute to the hard work of their representative

organisations, which have worked incredibly hard to develop the carers and young carers strategy, which will be published soon.

We are in a difficult financial context. As I said, we will work hard with COSLA to ensure that front-line services, many of which carers rely on, are protected. The Government has invested additional money in supporting carers—£13 million during the current session of Parliament—to give real support to carers, more respite and better support through the health service.

One thing that the City of Edinburgh Council has done well is the development of its home care reablement service, which has been a lifeline to many carers and much appreciated by all who use it. It has freed up 40 per cent of capacity to invest in supporting other people who require home care services. It is just a pity that Sarah Boyack's Labour colleagues on the council chose to oppose that positive move.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Does the minister agree that it is time to review the carers allowance, which, under the previous Labour Government, remained low at £53.10 a week? Does she agree that that is not a very generous reward for carers who look after family members and loved ones, thereby saving the taxpayer millions of pounds a year?

Shona Robison: I agree. On behalf of carers organisations that wished us to do so, we made several representations to the previous United Kingdom Government on the carers allowance. Those representations were not only on the level of the allowance but on the unfairness in the rules about those who have reached 65. We will continue to make those representations to the new coalition Government on behalf of carers and carers organisations in Scotland.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I am concerned about the situation of informal kinship carers, who are usually grandparents who have essentially rescued their grandchildren from the care of drug-addicted parents and are often left literally holding the baby, with little or no support and no financial help. Does the minister have any plans to ease the plight of that group of carers?

Shona Robison: We recognise and value the extremely important support that kinship carers give children in Scotland. A lot of work has been done to support kinship carers. However, I am sure that the member is aware that there have been some issues to do with benefits. We want to continue to have discussions on those issues with the new coalition Government.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The Government has said that the consequential of any increase in expenditure

on health in England and Wales will be relayed to Scotland, too. Does that apply to any increase in investment in respite for carers in England and Wales, especially for young people, to which the UK Government has said that it is committed? Will those consequential come to Scotland, too?

Shona Robison: We are aware of the announcement of £20 million from 2011 on, to which I assume the member refers. Of course, we will discuss those matters as part of the spending review, which is about to begin.

As I said in my first answer to Sarah Boyack, carers' respite is a huge priority for the Government. Actions speak louder than words, so the fact that we have put in additional resources for carers' respite over this session of Parliament demonstrates that it is a priority. I assure Jeremy Purvis that carers' respite will be a major priority for the Government.

Adaptations and Home Care Packages (Children)

2. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what additional support it will provide to children with life-threatening and life-limiting conditions to ensure that their homes are provided with all necessary adaptations and that appropriate care packages are put in place to allow them to remain securely and comfortably at home with their families for as long as possible. (S3O-10973)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Children with life-threatening and life-limiting conditions are supported in various ways by local authorities and the national health service. Local authorities have a duty to provide a range of services for disabled children to help the child to lead as normal a life as possible. The Scottish Government published new guidance on the provision of equipment and adaptations in December 2009 to assist local authorities and their NHS partners in promoting a consistent approach to the assessment for, and provision of, equipment and adaptations.

Under the getting it right for every child approach, children with additional support needs should be assessed and a single integrated plan should be developed if required.

A managed clinical network for children with exceptional health care needs has been set up to ensure that each child has access to a full range of specialist care. A sub-group of the network is looking at pathways of care, including home care.

Des McNulty: The minister will be aware that I have a constituent with twin daughters, one of whom requires 24-hour palliative care, who has experienced considerable difficulties in accessing the care packages that she requires and in

working between local government and central Government responsibilities for aids and adaptations. Her case highlights gaps in the system, and I would certainly welcome an opportunity to discuss with the minister the circumstances and what help can be given to that family and other families in similar circumstances.

We have very good care for children who are about to die in hospices and elsewhere, but it seems that our system does not work as well as it might for children who have a life-limiting condition that restricts the amount of time that they have, which is indeterminate, I would certainly welcome the opportunity to discuss with the minister how we can deal with such circumstances.

Shona Robison: I would certainly be happy to discuss that with Des McNulty. I understand that the director of social work was in contact with the family concerned about two weeks ago and that the visit is being followed up. I also understand that Des McNulty will meet the leader of West Dunbartonshire Council, Councillor Ronnie McColl, in just over a week's time. Councillor McColl has informed me that he will be happy to give him an update at that meeting.

Business Rates Transitional Relief Scheme

3. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that Scottish businesses have been put at a competitive disadvantage to their English counterparts by the decision not to introduce a business rates transitional relief scheme. (S30-10989)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Around 60 per cent of ratepayers in both Scotland and England are better or no worse off after the recent revaluation. For those ratepayers, the average annual saving in Scotland, before appeals and reliefs reduce bills further, is more than £1,300 per property. In England, with a transitional relief scheme, the average saving for the same group is only £770. In addition, relief schemes in Scotland, notably the small business bonus scheme, are significantly more generous than in England. I therefore see no competitive disadvantage for businesses in Scotland.

Alison McInnes: Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce says that every organisation in the region, large and small, will be paying on average £1,580 more than last year. The region faces an increased rates bill of £30 million per year. More than half the organisations in the region—private, public and third sector—will be paying increases that would have qualified for transitional relief in the past.

The cabinet secretary should stand up for Scotland's businesses, stop talking about the red herrings of small business rates relief and the appeals process and deal with the missing third strand: transitional relief. Will he face up to the fact that these crippling increases, which were introduced with only five weeks' notice, will create lasting damage to our businesses in the north-east, which will threaten jobs and investment? Crucially, will he pledge to work constructively with the chambers of commerce throughout Scotland to identify and introduce a fair transitional scheme?

John Swinney: That was a rather illuminating contribution from Alison McInnes, as she referred to small business rates relief as a "red herring". If it is now a Liberal Democrat policy that small business rates relief and the Government's small business bonus scheme are a "red herring", we look forward to communicating to every small business in the country the fact that the Liberal Democrats are against the small business relief that the Government has put in place for the past three years.

I have had discussions with Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce, which I agreed to do in response to a question from Lewis Macdonald. I have considered its material: a survey of 440 businesses out of a total of 23,700 in the area, and out of a total of 213,000 that were covered by a survey that I placed in Parliament about the effect of business rates revaluation. The Government is engaged in that discussion, but I reiterate that 60 per cent of businesses in Scotland are better off or no worse off as a consequence of the recent revaluation. On average, Scottish businesses are £1,300 a year better off as a consequence of our decisions, which is better than the situation in England.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There seems to be a growing tendency for questions and answers to be taking on all the characteristics of speeches. I want members to speed up the process a bit please.

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary think that it is good enough just to say to those who are facing increases of 100, 200 or 300 per cent in their rates that they should appeal?

John Swinney: If Mr Whitton is going to complete his proposition, he should also be prepared to go to the companies that have made significant savings, to which the independent evaluation process has indicated that they are entitled, and tell them that he wants to put their business rates up.

The Presiding Officer: Question 4 was not lodged.

International Flights (Costs)

5. Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the costs of international flights from Glasgow compared with those from London. (S3O-11014)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The cost of international flights from Glasgow compared with the cost of such flights from London is driven by a combination of competitive pressure and demand.

Stewart Maxwell: The minister might be aware of the research that I undertook recently, which showed that a family of four flying from Glasgow to Florida this summer will pay £1,000 more than a family flying from London, despite the fact that the return flight from London takes an hour longer than the Glasgow flight. The travel companies have stated that the reason for the extra cost from Glasgow is the greater loads per plane that travel from London compared to from Glasgow. Does he agree that, if it were £1,000 cheaper to fly from Glasgow than from London, the load figures would be the exact opposite of what they are now and that perhaps the fact that it is £1,000 cheaper to fly from London skews the load figures and causes Scottish families to travel to London to get their holiday flight?

I urge the minister to stand up for Scottish families. What will he do to tackle the situation and stop my constituents in the West of Scotland and all Scottish travellers being ripped off by some travel companies?

Stewart Stevenson: The member makes a range of interesting and valid points. I have recently met the managing director of Glasgow airport and I assure the member and others that she is working hard to gain additional services and is using pricing as part of the mechanism for doing that. I have also met business interests that are looking to develop a Scotland-based airline. One of the key issues is that airlines find it easier to provide cheap, cost-effective services from their home base. We are at a significant disadvantage in that regard. We will continue to work with the interests that are working to deliver an airline for Scotland.

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab):

Does the minister agree that one way in which Mr Maxwell's concerns could be assuaged would be through the development of additional direct international flights serving Scottish airports, which could be achieved by reinstating an amended version of the air route development fund? That has long been sought by Labour and is supported in the Confederation of British Industry Scotland manifesto, which was published this week.

Stewart Stevenson: The member will be aware of the rules governing the use of air route development funding. We cannot support routes to catchment areas of more than 5 million. However, the European Union is reconsidering the rules and we are optimistic that the controlling regime will enable the reintroduction of a scheme of some kind to support airlines. That is something that we will watch and respond to.

Renewables (North-east Scotland)

6. Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how much it estimates has been invested in renewable energy and supporting infrastructure in the north-east under the current Administration. (S3O-11022)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): There has been significant investment in renewable energy and support for infrastructure in the north-east since May 2007. Over the period, ministers have approved more than 300MW of renewables capacity in the north-east, which we estimate will have attracted private sector investment of the order of £300 million. Government support for renewables includes the establishment of the Scottish European Green Energy Centre in Aberdeen in 2009, which has already supported successful bids to the European economic recovery programme with a total value of more than £100 million. In addition, significant support has been provided by our enterprise agencies for both projects and infrastructure development. Those levels of investment reflect the huge opportunities in the north-east and the Government's commitment to delivering on them.

Maureen Watt: I am sure that the minister will agree that those are encouraging levels of investment. Nevertheless, if Scotland is to achieve its renewable energy potential, more will be needed. Does he believe that gaining access to Scotland's fossil fuel levy to encourage further investment in renewables is vital for the renewables industry in the north-east and throughout Scotland? Does he believe that the refusal of the previous Labour United Kingdom Government to consider allowing that was indefensible?

Jim Mather: I welcome the new UK Government's commitment to review the arrangements for Scotland's fossil fuel levy. That is a long-overdue step in the right direction. We are working with the UK Government to ensure that the funds are released as soon as possible in addition to the Scottish budget. The fossil fuel levy surplus could support the further development of the renewables sector in a way that would maximise its strategic long-term benefit to all Scotland. There is no doubt that the north-east will

play a leading role in Scotland's renewable energy future. As to whether the previous Government's position was indefensible, I believe that it was perverse and potentially damaging.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

7. Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland)

(SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (S3O-11017)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison):

The Scottish Government welcomes the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Our approach to implementing the convention in Scotland complements our existing work to promote disability equality and independent living for disabled people. We are working with disabled people, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Scottish Human Rights Commission to raise awareness of the convention among disabled people in Scotland and to ensure that the work that we are doing to uphold the human rights of disabled people in Scotland is adequately reflected in the United Kingdom's report to the UN. Disabled people and other interested parties will have an opportunity to comment on the UK's draft report early in 2011.

Christina McKelvie: I thank the minister for that very helpful reply. It has been a whole year since the convention was ratified by the UK and progress everywhere seems to be slow. I assume that we can be assured that the Government is making every effort to implement the convention. Does it intend to offer a disability impact assessment on each piece of legislation that it introduces in the future to help to meet the general obligations under article 4 of the convention?

Shona Robison: We recognise the importance of considering the implications of equality in the development of Scottish Government legislation and will continue to do so. The Scottish Parliament's procedures require Scottish Government bills to be accompanied by a policy memorandum that must include an assessment of any effects of the bill on equal opportunities.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): In respect of services that are delivered at local authority level, can the minister confirm the importance that is given to equality impact assessments in single outcome agreements to ensure that people with disabilities have the entitlements and the services that they need?

Shona Robison: As I have said in Parliament on a number of occasions, we will continue to work with local authorities to ensure that we get the best outcomes for services for people with

disabilities. That is why we are undertaking work on self-directed support through the strategy and the proposed bill. I hope that Johann Lamont will give her support to that.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-2476)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today, I will have meetings to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Iain Gray: In March, I asked the First Minister whether the curriculum for excellence would be ready in time. Since then, things have gone so well that the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association is planning industrial action, and the Educational Institute of Scotland agreed last week to ballot teachers on a curriculum for excellence work to rule. Can the First Minister explain why teachers have had to take that action?

The First Minister: Changes in the curriculum, and in Scottish education in general, have always been met by some degree of uncertainty. I can go through the list for Iain Gray. There were similar calls from the teaching unions when higher still was being introduced, for example. With the efforts of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, we are seeing a substantial and increasing body of opinion rallying behind the curriculum for excellence. Of course, it would help if some of Iain Gray's self-proclaimed enthusiasm and support for the curriculum for excellence was reflected in his words in the chamber and he matched his enthusiasm with his attitude to the new curriculum.

Iain Gray: I am not sure how having a ballot on industrial action for the first time since 1986 can be described as rallying behind the education secretary. I think that the education secretary's view is similar to that of the First Minister. The education secretary has said where he thinks the problem lies. He has said that teachers who sit back and expect everything to be done and handed to them on a piece of paper are bound to be disappointed, and he has told teachers in no uncertain terms that they

"are not going to get everything on a plate".

Mike Russell thinks that the problem is lazy, whingeing teachers who should get on with things. What arrogance. Does the First Minister agree with his education secretary?

The First Minister: I do not share Iain Gray's interpretation of the motions at the EIS's annual conference last Friday. He will know, for example, that a motion to boycott the new curriculum was rejected at the conference. He has probably also

noticed the speech that was made by the general secretary of the EIS, Ronnie Smith, who reflected on his political career in teaching unions. He talked about

"budget and service cuts being visited upon our schools and colleges and universities in the twilight years of a Labour Government".

There seems to be substantial recognition in the EIS leadership of where the responsibility for a lack of public spending lies.

I do not share the attitude that people are whingeing about changes in Scottish education. There is an argument that some politicians in the chamber are whingeing about a range of attitudes. In fact, if Iain Gray is not careful, he will become the vuvuzela of Scottish politics. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

Iain Gray: The First Minister really needs a new joke writer.

I, too, have read Ronnie Smith's comments. He looked back to the 1980s and said that 40,000 teachers marched against cuts then and that 10,000 teachers are marching against cuts under the Scottish National Party. He asked what kind of progress that is.

As for not boycotting the curriculum for excellence, the trouble is that the First Minister does not understand how curriculum development works. People do not need to boycott it; if they work to rule, they will kill the new curriculum stone dead.

The First Minister should listen. Teachers are under pressure because the Government has cut their numbers, not their class sizes. The Government has left teachers having to beg parents to buy jotters and pens for their classes and now it is asking teachers to create courses out of chaos. Teachers have neither the time nor the money that they need. That is why they are taking industrial action against the SNP Government. This week, 55,000 Scottish children will go to their primary school prom; in August, they will go to high school. Can the First Minister look their parents in the eye and tell them that the curriculum for excellence will be ready?

The First Minister: I point out to Iain Gray that there was a motion before the EIS conference to boycott the new curriculum. That motion was rejected because the Educational Institute of Scotland does not want, in Iain Gray's words, to

"kill the new curriculum stone dead".

That is what Iain Gray and his party want. The EIS substantially supports the new curriculum, largely because many of its members are in primary schools, where the curriculum for excellence has

already been implemented successfully. Iain Gray must not project his own political feelings on to the delegates of the Educational Institute of Scotland. It is one thing to interpret Ronnie Smith's remarks to the conference; it is another to quote them. Ronnie Smith spoke of

"budget and service cuts being visited upon our schools and colleges and universities in the twilight years of a Labour Government."

I suspect—this is an interpretation—that Ronnie Smith realises that, if cuts of £500 million are made to the Scottish budget by the Labour Government—*[Interruption.]* The Labour Government cut the Scottish budget by £500 million. Even given the increasing share of that budget that this SNP Government has allocated to local authorities, the cut to their budgets is still roughly £150 million, or an average cut of £5 million per local authority. That seems to have a pretty strong logic. If a Labour Government at Westminster cuts the Scottish Government's budget by £500 million, a share of that will fall on local authorities—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: Given that fairly straight and impeccable logic, how can Iain Gray seriously deny the Labour Party's responsibility for the economic and financial pressures that face every level of government in Scotland?

Iain Gray: Frankly, if you have £34 billion, which is £1 billion more than you had last year, and you inherit £1.5 billion of resource for a rainy day, logic says that there should not be cuts in our schools, but there are.

When I taught, pupils had a single transferable excuse: "It wisnae me." That is what we are hearing from the First Minister. He is either saying, "It wisnae me, it was the Westminster Government" or, "It wisnae me, it was the big, bad councils." In Mr Russell's case, we are hearing, "It wisnae me, it was the teachers complaining. They should just get on with it." As an excuse, it was laughable in kids; it is pathetic in a First Minister of Scotland.

Parents and teachers do not believe that the curriculum for excellence is ready and they know whose fault that is. They saw Maureen Watt fail, they saw Fiona Hyslop fail, and they are now seeing Michael Russell fail. A real First Minister would step up in person, get the local authorities and teachers around the table and guarantee the resources and preparation time to make this work.

The Presiding Officer: Question please.

Iain Gray: Will Alex Salmond do that or will he, too, fail our children?

The First Minister: Getting people around the table, including representatives of the teaching unions, is exactly what the curriculum for excellence management board has done. With teacher representation, the board is working much better than it did under the previous Administration.

Let us get on to the point about funding. Over the past three years, the percentage funding to Scottish local authorities has risen from 33.39 per cent of the Scottish budget under the previous Labour Government to 34.08 per cent this year under the SNP Government. If the share allocated to local government is increasing, but Iain Gray believes that local government does not have adequate finance to perform its duties and provide services, then it follows logically, does it not, that the overall cake must be too small. Therefore, the £500 million cut that was implemented by the previous Labour Government is pertinent, because if the share for local government is increasing—as it is—then it follows, by logic, that the blame must lie with the cuts implemented by the previous Labour Government.

Of course, if Labour was arguing that more money should be spent this year, that would be one thing, but so many people on the Labour benches—including Andy Kerr, sitting to the left of Iain Gray—want a further cut of £332 million implemented this year. How can it be that so many members of Iain Gray's party, including aspirants to the leadership such as David Miliband, want to cut the Scottish budget even further than the cuts already implemented by the previous Labour Government, while Iain Gray turns up week after week demanding higher spending? If anybody on the Labour benches can come up with an answer to that conundrum, they should be immediately promoted to the front bench. Any resignations that there have been have not happened in this Government.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S3F-2477)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I will meet the Prime Minister next week.

Annabel Goldie: A year ago, at First Minister's question time, I raised the issue of Salduz v Turkey, the human rights case concerning the right of a person who is detained by the police to get legal advice. Last week, the Lord Advocate issued interim guidelines on that very point. A year ago, I asked what steps the First Minister had taken to assess the potential impact of the Salduz ruling on Scotland. I did not get an answer then, and nothing happened until last week. So can I ask the First Minister, in the 12 months since I first

raised the issue, how many suspects have been interviewed without a solicitor, how many of them were convicted and how many of those convictions could be appealed?

The First Minister: Annabel Goldie has missed out a rather pertinent fact in the story. She was absolutely right to raise the issue last year, and I hope that I gave a considered reply. However, the issue came to court in Scotland in October of last year, when seven Court of Session judges, in the case of the Crown v McLean, found in favour of the Lord Advocate's position that Scots law is compatible with the European Court of Human Rights and the European convention on human rights. That was the unanimous ruling in the High Court by seven Court of Session judges last year, subsequent to Annabel Goldie's question.

Of course, it is absolutely correct that the joint working group has been meeting for a year, looking at all possible contingencies in terms of the live case before the Supreme Court, on which we will not get a ruling and a judgment until October. However, I think that it would be unwise to plan wholesale changes to the Scottish legal system when the Court of Session judges unanimously supported the position that our legal system is compliant with the European convention. Equally, however, it is sensible to have in place contingency measures for all eventualities, such as the operational guidance and advice that the Lord Advocate issued last week.

Annabel Goldie: The events as narrated by the First Minister involve his admission that the Lord Advocate is making contingency plans, to use his phrase. Time will tell whether the stable door should have been bolted 12 months ago, rather than last week. Given that the Lord Advocate now has contingency plans to safeguard future prosecutions and that the First Minister has alluded to Government contingency plans, exactly what are those plans? If the pending judgment is adverse, and retrospective in effect, the doors to Scotland's jails could be flung open and there could be far-reaching implications for our criminal justice system, the safety of communities and victims' peace of mind. What are those contingency plans to which the First Minister referred? He needs to plan now and not start rushing around the day after the court judgment is issued.

The First Minister: I must be cautious about commenting on a live court ruling. If an adverse ruling came from the Supreme Court, the retrospective aspects would date back to 1999. Annabel Goldie might remember the issue that involved the European convention and prisoners that was settled last year through co-operation between the then Westminster Government and the Parliament. The retrospective element of that

dated back to this Parliament's creation. The idea that the retrospective element could have been removed by taking action last year is wrong.

A balance must be struck. If the ruling on the European convention were accepted, as Annabel Goldie suggests, that would involve substantial changes to the Scottish legal system. In their judgment in the McLean case, the Court of Session judges drew attention to a range of other protections in the Scottish legal system. I will not list them all, but they relate to corroboration; the fact that silence does not imply guilt in Scotland's system, unlike other legal systems; and the pertinent point that suspects can be detained without charge for only six hours in Scotland—that timescale is much longer in other legal systems.

I make the point to Annabel Goldie that it is perfectly right and proper for the law officers to make contingency plans—as they have done—to protect the public interest. However, it would be entirely wrong to pilot through wholesale changes in the Scottish legal system before a court judgment said that they were necessary, particularly in the light of the Court of Session case, which I hope that Annabel Goldie has read, in which seven Court of Session judges said unanimously that our current system was convention compliant.

Another issue is that the new Government at Westminster—or at least Annabel Goldie's party's part of it—planned substantial changes to how the European convention is interpreted in what that party called British law, by which I think that it meant Scots and English law.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

3. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-2478)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the secretary of state in the near future, but I am sure that a meeting could take place in the relatively near future.

Tavish Scott: It is an important step for our Parliament, Presiding Officer, that you are hosting a meeting between committee conveners and the Secretary of State for Scotland today.

From independent economic forecasts, everyone now knows how bad the public finances are. Labour's former Chief Secretary to the Treasury admitted that there was no money left so, in Scotland, we must spend taxpayers' money wisely. However, last week's Finance Committee report says that the SNP Government's budget planning is patchy and lacks urgency and leadership. Given that, is this the best time for Scottish Enterprise to advertise the contract that I am holding up to spend £400,000 on corporate-

branded gifts? That is £400,000 of taxpayers' money on golf balls, stress shapes, hip-flasks and mouse mats.

The First Minister: I will offer a quick correction. I understand that the Secretary of State for Scotland is meeting parliamentary committee conveners. I have no responsibility for the Parliament and I have no role to interfere in any way in that meeting, but I am happy to welcome it.

As for the budgetary pressures, Tavish Scott is right: there is no question whatever but that the previous Administration wrecked the public finances. *[Interruption.]* Well, most fair-minded people would say that the comment that the previous Labour Government wrecked the country's public finances is pretty reasonable and fair. *[Applause.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: It is unreasonable to diminish the work of Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Development International. Substantial evidence from the assessment of SDI as an agency that attracts inward investment shows that SDI is among the best-performing agencies in the world. Just last week, we received substantial evidence that the efforts that SDI is making to internationalise Scottish business are bearing fruit.

I remind Tavish Scott that the export figures that were released last week showed an increase in Scottish manufactured exports of 3.5 per cent in the past year, which compares with a fall throughout the UK of 5.3 per cent. It should be recognised that that substantial effort owes huge amounts to individual companies. However, Tavish Scott would do well to acknowledge that, whatever particular criticisms he might have, SDI and Scottish Enterprise are performing extremely well for Scotland in very difficult circumstances.

Tavish Scott: Let me try the question again. Would not the £400,000 of taxpayers' money to which I referred be better spent by Scottish Enterprise on helping the people who are losing their jobs? Yesterday's figures show unemployment still rising at double the rate of the rest of the country. People who have lost their jobs will be asking why the Government's priority is corporate gifts, not protecting jobs.

Is it not time for the First Minister to get a grip on every line of Government spending? Last week, a report put Scotland bottom of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries for business start-ups, yet our main economic agency is spending time peddling contracts for novelty golf balls. That Scottish Enterprise tender deadline was yesterday lunch time. Will the First Minister show some leadership today, stop that £400,000 contract and make the priority jobs, jobs, jobs?

The First Minister: The priority of SDI and Scottish Enterprise is jobs. I will give Tavish Scott an example of what SDI is doing to assist companies. In 2005-06, 662 companies were assisted by Scottish Enterprise's internationalisation efforts. The figure now stands at more than 900, which indicates that the efforts that SDI and Scottish Enterprise are making are bearing substantial fruit. That is validated by the most recent manufacturing export statistics. During a substantial recession of extraordinary proportions, inward investment figures are also holding up extremely well in Scotland. I say to Tavish Scott that the people who are making substantive efforts to promote Scotland abroad are doing an excellent job. It would be encouraging if, just occasionally, all the parties that are represented in the chamber were to underline and support their efforts.

The Presiding Officer: For the sake of accuracy, I point out that the meeting with the Secretary of State for Scotland to which committee conveners and business managers have been invited will be hosted and chaired by my deputy, Trish Godman, not by me.

Asylum Seekers (Detention of Children)

4. Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what discussions have taken place between the Scottish Government and the United Kingdom Government regarding the detention of children of asylum seekers. (S3F-2482)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Over the past three years, we have made repeated representations to the United Kingdom Government on the detention of children. We welcomed the proposed ending of detention at Dungavel. We are opposed to detaining children anywhere in the United Kingdom, but we welcome the review of the detention of children that the UK Government announced last month and its recognition that there is a serious problem. We are clear that it is unacceptable for children to be detained anywhere in the UK and have offered whatever assistance we can provide to the UK Government to enable it to bring forward its intended policy.

Anne McLaughlin: One of my constituents is 10-year-old Precious Mhango, who has twice been detained. The experience had an horrific effect on her emotional and physical wellbeing, as I witnessed first hand when I visited her in Dungavel last year. However, when she was transferred to Yarl's Wood, the deterioration in her health was dramatic. It resulted from the fact that she and her mother were completely isolated from their close-knit group of friends and supporters. Those supporters will continue to fight for Precious and

her mother, but no one can guarantee that they will not be detained again. The only difference is that, this time, Precious would leave St Maria Goretti primary school at 3 pm and be in Bedfordshire by nightfall, with no warning. Does the First Minister agree that, however well intentioned the change, that situation is just wrong?

The First Minister: I agree. I share the member's concerns about the transfer of children from Scotland to Yarl's Wood. The welfare of children should be the Parliament's paramount concern. Locking up children in England rather than in Dungavel does not solve the problem; indeed, it could be argued that it compounds problems for children. We have expressed our concerns to the Home Office. The Minister for Culture and External Affairs has written to Damian Green, the UK Minister of State for Immigration, to request that the Home Office review the case of Precious Mhango and her mother Florence. There is a huge consensus across Scottish society on that point. The case should be reviewed.

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): Will the First Minister clarify what contingency plans the Scottish Government has in place to deal with the responsibilities that it has in relation to such young people's health, education and general wellbeing when they are returned to mainstream society in Scotland?

The First Minister: I point out that when those children have been in mainstream society in Scotland they have been well looked after by a combination of Government and local authority agencies throughout the country. The problem exists not when families are outside detention centres but when they are inside detention centres.

Of course, the prospect of being taken to a detention centre understandably provokes uncertainty and anxiety in families. Whatever the particular anxiety is in the case that Anne McLaughlin raised, which I absolutely share with her, I want to respect the moves that the UK Government is making to end a situation that I hope that all parties in the Parliament regard as unacceptable.

Police Interviews (Procedure)

5. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government will inform the Parliament of any changes in police procedures for interviewing suspects. (S3F-2492)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Lord Advocate issued interim guidance to the police on 9 June, which required them to offer detained suspects access to a solicitor before and during

interview in serious cases with immediate effect. That will be rolled out to all cases on 8 July. The Lord Advocate has decided to publish the terms, and copies of the guidance have been lodged in the Scottish Parliament information centre.

Richard Baker: The change in procedure will have implications for many aspects of the Scottish legal system. Does the First Minister have an initial estimate of how much additional funding will need to be made available through legal aid to achieve the change?

The First Minister: No, I do not have that estimate, partly because the Minister for Justice is engaged in discussions to resolve that and a range of other issues.

Richard Baker is aware that, because of the separation of powers, decisions of the kind that we are discussing lie with the law officers and the Lord Advocate. It is right that the Minister for Justice is involved in a range of discussions, to cope with any eventuality in relation to his responsibilities, but Richard Baker will be aware that the key responsibility in terms of decisions and the issuing of guidance properly lies with the Scottish law officers. That is the system of governance with which we have lived for a substantial time.

Free Personal Care (Affordability)

6. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister, in light of the recent comments by Lord Sutherland on free personal care, whether the Scottish Government considers that this policy is affordable in the long term. (S3F-2483)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to free personal care, which delivers real benefits and better outcomes to more than 50,000 older vulnerable people throughout Scotland. Lord Sutherland made it clear in his report that we need to adapt policy to address demographic changes in the medium and longer term. We are currently asking people across Scotland to consider the future care demands and needs of older people and we will listen to what people have to say in the context of that consultation.

Murdo Fraser: I welcome the First Minister's response. I am sure that all members value the policy of free personal care and welcome the Westminster coalition Government's pledge to protect health spending, which will mean that funds in the area will be available to the Scottish Government through Barnett consequential.

The First Minister will know that Lord Sutherland has called for a single budget to be established for health and social care, to provide savings to

plough into front-line services. Will the Scottish Government give active consideration to the idea?

The First Minister: I am sure that that view will be put forward.

People who take the view that because of budgetary pressures free personal care must be jettisoned are looking at the issue far too simplistically—I know that Murdo Fraser is not among those people. Free personal care was one of the great achievements of this Parliament—in a united fashion—and the proper funding of the policy has been one of the great achievements of this Government during the past three years, because the policy was not properly funded before that. There is joint political interest in maintaining the policy, which is meaningful and important to people in Scotland.

How we organise and deliver social services and the health service is a substantive point for debate. It might well be that changes of the nature that have been described could produce substantial savings without jeopardising the care that is given to people.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Given that the delivery of free personal care has saved the Treasury £40 million per annum in attendance allowance, would it be equitable if the Conservative-Liberal coalition were to return that money to Scotland?

The First Minister: That would be a substantial and important contribution to the respect agenda.

12:29

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Europe, External Affairs and Culture

Publishers

1. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions it has had with representatives of Scottish publishers. (S3O-10930)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I attended Publishing Scotland's annual conference in February this year. The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism facilitated a discussion session for the Periodical Publishers Association on 4 May.

Scottish Government officials have held discussions with Scottish Enterprise and creative Scotland to investigate the possibility of holding an industry event on the future of publishing in Scotland.

Jamie McGrigor: Is the minister aware of the very real concerns of Scottish publishers about the Government's on-going centralising book procurement policies, especially with regard to VisitScotland, Historic Scotland and the public and educational library sector? What action will the Government take to address those concerns and ensure that procurement includes small businesses and the local economy, and therefore does not lead to a loss of diversity of range and supply? It may otherwise appear to people that a Scottish National Party Government is creating a system that offers big English companies hard contracts and small Scottish businesses only bland words.

Fiona Hyslop: I refute that last comment. In tough times, there is an onus on all of us in national and local government to ensure that we get the best out of any contracts, but we are sensitive to the points that Jamie McGrigor makes with regard to local providers. In response to his first question, the current contract is not a Scottish Government contract; Scotland Excel is taking it forward.

There is currently no provision for local small Scottish publishers in 75 per cent of the business that is being tendered for, but Scotland Excel has told us that it will engage with publishers, and with small publishing companies in particular, with regard to the remaining 25 per cent of the contract. That part of the business, which involves specialist books, is worth £2 million, and small

Scottish publishers can bid for it as they have done in the past.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): As well as encouraging small Scottish publishers, will the procurement process that is used by local authorities and others give recognition to subject matter that specifically relates to Scottish culture?

Fiona Hyslop: The responsibility for that area lies with local authorities. However, ministers have relayed to them that, with regard to the curriculum, it is important that they take into consideration that the subject matter and content must reflect an understanding of Scotland and its many and diverse areas of interest.

In the discussions that Scotland Excel has confirmed will take place, it will discuss with publishers its engagement in the supply of specialist books not only by provider, but—as the member suggests—by content.

Commercial Television (Local News)

2. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on the provision of local news on commercial television. (S3O-10972)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government believes that it is essential for viewers in Scotland to have a choice of quality Scottish news. I have already made that clear to Ed Vaizey, the United Kingdom Government Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries.

Following the announcement last week that the new UK Government has decided not to implement proposals to pilot independently funded news consortia on channel 3, it is important that its alternative proposals are able to safeguard and enhance the news that viewers in Scotland receive. I am keen to work as constructively as possible with the new UK Government to ensure that its proposals for local television meet the needs of Scottish viewers.

Pauline McNeill: Does the minister agree that the decision by the Conservative-Liberal coalition to reverse the pilot for an independently funded news consortium will be a fatal blow to public service broadcasting in Scotland? Is she concerned about local news in Scotland for that reason? Is she concerned about the future prospects for STV?

The minister has said that she has already had discussions with her UK counterpart. Will she assure the Parliament today that she will continue to press and meet with the relevant ministers to ensure that there is an alternative solution for broadcasting in Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: I was reassured during my discussion with Ed Vaizey that he was aware of the situation in Scotland, the need to address promptly any alternatives to IFNC and the need to bear in mind any consequences in Scotland. It is too early to say what the consequences of any proposals will be because we do not yet know what they are. Jeremy Hunt has commented:

“I want to carry on talking to those who submitted bids about ideas.”

I understand that a full media action plan will be published in the autumn. We will work with the UK Government to secure the best interests of Scotland.

I reiterate something that I have said to the chamber before about broadcasting. Scotland's interests will be best served if we form a collective cross-party view on the interests and needs of Scottish broadcasting. I hope to have the opportunity to work with colleagues from across the chamber so that in the new context of the Conservative-Lib Dem UK Administration, we can make sure that we have strong local news as well as a plurality of news. Those are at the biggest risk in relation to what might happen, but as I said, we are in the early stages. In order to ensure that we know where we are going, discussions need to take place between the Scottish Government and the UK Government as well as in the Scottish Parliament.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The minister will be aware of my party's initiative on a new Scottish digital channel, subsequently taken up by Blair Jenkins's Scottish Broadcasting Commission. Does she accept that such a channel could help to provide the plurality for the local TV news services that Pauline McNeill described? Would she and her Government still favour a digital channel if it were to be funded by paid advertising or sponsorship instead being a publicly funded channel under the model favoured by the SNP Government?

Fiona Hyslop: We have an opportunity to shape a digital channel for Scotland within the context of what I think the UK Government will propose. The cost model is essential. That is why Nicholas Shott, the head of UK investment banking at Lazard, is looking at the potential for commercially viable local television channels. It is important that the UK Government shares its costing and budgetary scenarios with us because, although the proposal painted might have opportunities for Scotland, as Pauline McNeill pointed out correctly, it might not offer the solution that best suits Scotland. We have to work with the UK Government to find out more about its costings. We should also continue to pursue a digital channel for Scotland. In the long run, that is certainly the best option for Scotland; in the

shorter term, it might be an opportunity that we should grab with both hands if it is offered as part of the UK Government's solution.

India

3. Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to encourage collaboration between Scotland and India. (S3O-11008)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government recently published its India plan, which sets out the four key areas of trade and investment, education and science, tourism, and culture. We are working with our key partners, which include Scottish Development International and the Indian consul general, to deliver the plan's objectives.

The First Minister will be in India for the Commonwealth games in October and will undertake a number of visits and engagements to support the India plan.

Rob Gibson: Will the minister expand on what cultural connections can be made between India and Scotland with a view to the next Commonwealth games, which will come here, and the surrounding cultural potential of those links?

Fiona Hyslop: There is enormous potential. I was pleased recently to witness preparation in Glasgow for the handover ceremony. The Scottish Chamber Orchestra recently toured India, supported by the Scottish Government. We sponsored the Calcutta book fair, at which Scotland was a key theme. In the future, film and television will be a particular focus. The second leg of an exchange is taking place to coincide with the Edinburgh international film festival. There are also fantastic opportunities through the memorandum of understanding and cultural heritage with West Bengal. Importantly, there will also be a great focus on Scotland at the handover of the Commonwealth games in October, right through to next year with the 150th anniversary of the birth of West Bengal's national poet, Tagore, and the opportunity to celebrate domestically those relations and cultural collaborations.

Dance and Musical Theatre (Support for Young People)

4. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to support talented young people who wish to achieve excellence in dance or musical theatre. (S3O-10991)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government supports young people aiming for excellence in dance or musical theatre through the work of the Scottish Arts Council and the national performing

companies, and through support from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council to the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

Funding for the national centres of excellence in dance and music is included in the local government settlement. The Scottish Arts Council provides funding for various programmes that provide opportunities for talented young dancers and young performance groups.

Mike Pringle: The minister will be well aware of the serious situation regarding residential capacity and funding at the Dance School of Scotland. When the halls of residence came under threat—for the end of the current year—it was feared that four pupils who study there but who live in my Edinburgh South constituency would face a long commute or the tough decision to leave. Thankfully, they have been given a reprieve for this year. However, the situation is set to reach crisis point later, with the University of Glasgow's plans to sell the existing halls of residence possibly leading to the end of residential provision at the school and to the loss of its national status. Does the minister agree that it is vital that Scotland has a dedicated national centre of excellence for dance and musical theatre? Will she commit to working with Glasgow City Council and the school community to examine funding options to secure the future of the valuable residential provision at the school?

Fiona Hyslop: I understand that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning's officials are in contact with Glasgow City Council regarding the subject, and that they will continue those discussions. It is not the Scottish Government's understanding that residential facilities will be withdrawn at the school. I understand that the University of Glasgow could offer to extend the lease for an additional year, if need be, if an alternative to Dalrymple hall cannot be found in the meantime.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Given her roots, the minister will be aware that the Ayrshire Fiddle Orchestra undertook an extended tour of China last year, playing to full houses and standing ovations and performing for many thousands of people. It was effectively an ambassadorial role for the orchestra in promoting Ayrshire and Scotland. Given the value of that tour, is there a way for that type of cultural exchange to be better recognised and better supported by Government in future?

Fiona Hyslop: I am working with creative Scotland to identify opportunities to support more international collaboration and better co-ordination of what already happens. I, too, congratulate the Ayrshire Fiddle Orchestra. I have seen it perform on a number of occasions, and its members are fantastic ambassadors for Scotland. We would better serve the people of Scotland and

international audiences, however, if there was better co-ordination of some of the international work that goes on.

Malawi (LGBT Citizens)

5. Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with the Government of Malawi about the treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual citizens and what support it is giving to human rights and equality organisations working to tackle homophobia and transphobia in Malawi. (S3O-10994)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): During my visit in February, I raised in discussion with the Government of Malawi the concerns that had been expressed in Scotland about the general issue of human rights in relation to gay rights.

On 19 May, I wrote to the hon Etta Banda MP, Minister of Foreign Affairs, expressing my disappointment at the outcome of the court case regarding the two men who had been imprisoned in Malawi and who were subsequently pardoned. The Scottish Government's co-operation agreement with the Government of Malawi identifies priority areas for development funding, including civil society and governance, and some of the projects that we are funding contribute to the strengthening of human rights. An example is Challenges Worldwide's capacity building for justice project, which will build the capacity of a range of public sector and civil society organisations that are working in Malawi to promote the rule of law and access to justice. We will continue to work with Malawi in the context of strengthening human rights within civil society and governance systems.

Margaret Smith: I welcome the action that has been taken by the cabinet secretary following the arrest of the two gay men concerned in Malawi. I welcome the Government's support for Malawi, given the obvious needs in the country and the historical links between our two countries. How will the Scottish Government go about re-examining its aid relationship with Malawi in future? What changes, if any, have been made to the existing aid arrangements, and what new processes will the Scottish Government undertake regarding aid donations to ensure that Scottish taxpayers' money is targeted where it is needed in ways that support equality and human rights in Malawi?

Fiona Hyslop: Bids for projects by Scotland-based charities working in Malawi are subject in the first instance to independent evaluation, and to on-going rigorous and robust evaluation thereafter. We are confident that the resources that we are providing reach those in need. We do not provide money to the Malawian Government as such; it

goes to Scottish non-governmental organisations working in the area.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): In Malawi, as in much of Africa, issues around sexuality and gender identity are strongly contested in a way that this country has moved on from in recent generations. Therefore, does not the Government have a responsibility to recognise that there will be people who will violently oppose the progressive values of human rights and equality, and to be proactive in seeking out allies for those progressive values in an effort to increase its capacity to act as an advocate for human rights and equality in Malawi and other parts of Africa in the future?

Fiona Hyslop: I refer the member to my original answer, in which I mentioned some of the capacity-building, governance and human rights aspects of projects that we are already supporting.

As the member is no doubt aware, not that long ago there were people in this country who did not have the same views that he and I do on some of the issues in question, and there are still some people of whom that is true. We must be tolerant of other nations and countries and understand that progress on that journey may take longer elsewhere than it did here. We cannot impose a value system; we must help people to develop it themselves. However, I hear the points that the member makes.

European Union Accession Eight Countries (Cultural Links)

6. Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to enhance the cultural links between Scotland and the EUA8 nations, from where many of the migrant workers who contribute to the Scottish economy and society come. (S3O-11011)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Migrants from eastern Europe have made a fantastic contribution to Scotland's economy and culture. Our links with the EUA8 countries of eastern Europe are strong and enduring, and the Scottish Government continues to develop closer relations that are based on mutual respect and shared interests.

Bill Kidd: My hope is that we in Scotland can benefit as much as possible from our migrant communities and that they can do the same from us. Are any specific links or bonds being developed with the Governments of the A8 nations of the EU, from which many members of our migrant communities come and where they maintain good family relations?

Fiona Hyslop: Yes. The links that are being developed are varied. I offer to write to the member to explain what they are. I recently

discussed with the Slovenian ambassador to the United Kingdom the possibility of strengthening cultural and tourism links between Scotland and Slovenia on the back of the 2012 Olympiad. In addition, I stress that our relations with Poland are particularly strong, and a number of cultural events and exchanges are taking place that the Scottish Government is supporting through our expo fund.

Taiwan

7. Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to develop relations with Taiwan. (S3O-10998)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): We have developed commercial links with Taiwan through Scottish Development International's office in Taipei and its activities. In addition, next month VisitScotland will undertake a sales mission to Taiwan to promote Scotland as a tourist destination.

Brian Adam: What further steps will the Government take to encourage engagement with Taiwan to increase trade, education and cultural links?

Fiona Hyslop: In the first part of this year, SDI has been involved in two major activities in Taiwan, in the renewables and electronics sectors. It led a delegation of Scottish companies at the offshore wind energy workshop, and earlier this month it accompanied three Scottish companies at opto Taiwan, which is one of the world's largest international opto-electronics shows.

We would certainly alert our universities to the education opportunities that exist in Taiwan and, as far as cultural links are concerned, I am sure that the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on Taiwan, of which Brian Adam is a member, will help to advise the Government on what aspects we could pursue.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): I draw to the minister's attention a letter that I received from Scotland's Colleges that confirms that Scottish colleges have very limited engagement with Taiwan. Does she agree that the development of student recruitment opportunities in Taiwan should be explored further? Will she undertake to look into how the Government may assist Scotland's Colleges in that regard?

Fiona Hyslop: I am sure that that is an issue that the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council might want to look at. I remind the member that universities and colleges are independent organisations that will identify the areas in which they want to develop. It would be wrong for the Government to tell them where they should go. That said, the education fair that is about to commence is an example of the

opportunities that exist for such institutions to showcase what Scotland has to offer.

Education and Lifelong Learning

Schools (Pupil Safety)

1. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to ensure pupil safety in schools. (S3O-10947)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Regulations already place on education authorities a general duty, without prejudice to any other legal duty, to secure, as far as is practicable, the safety of pupils when they are under their charge.

Claire Baker: Is the cabinet secretary aware that about 140 playground supervisors in Fife are to lose their jobs, which will compromise the safety of pupils in schools such as Methilhill primary and community school, where the playground is also a public right of way? What action will he take to address parents' concerns about pupil safety in the playground because of Fife Council's decision?

Michael Russell: Fife Council has advised the Scottish Government that it is well aware of its responsibilities for playground supervision. I understand that, although the dedicated post of playground supervisor is being removed from the council's establishment, playground supervision will not cease and, indeed, cannot cease under regulations. All headteachers are reviewing arrangements for deploying support staff in their schools. In that, as in all matters, they are expected to deploy resources with health and safety as the main priority.

Local authorities have a statutory duty of reasonable care for the safety of pupils who are under their charge. Local authorities must ensure that, in primary schools with a roll of 50 or more and in special needs schools, at least one adult supervises pupils when they are in the playground at break time. I repeat that Fife Council is aware of its statutory duty and is expected to make appropriate alternative arrangements to ensure pupil safety in the playground.

New Teachers (Employment)

2. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it will take to improve the employment prospects of newly qualified teachers. (S3O-10983)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The Scottish Government has taken several actions to support post-probation teachers into work. We

made the difficult but necessary decision to reduce the intake of student teachers, which will free up more posts for newly qualified teachers. We created a scheme to allow local authorities to borrow up to £10 million to cover the up-front costs of early retirement and to free up jobs for newly qualified teachers. It is disappointing that only two councils have so far applied to participate in that scheme, but we all know that some councils—Fife Council, North Ayrshire Council, Argyll and Bute Council and others—are encouraging teachers to retire early and are managing that through existing resources.

We continue to work closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and local authorities to achieve better reconciliation between local and national teacher workforce planning with a view to re-establishing an appropriate balance between teacher supply and demand.

Karen Whitefield: Does the cabinet secretary share my concern about the growing casualisation of the newly qualified teaching workforce, as highlighted in the General Teaching Council for Scotland's employment follow-up survey, which was published in May? That survey found that 26.5 per cent of newly qualified teachers depend on supply work and only 30 per cent have secured permanent posts. Does he agree that, although we will always need a small pool of supply teachers, an overreliance on supply teachers will undoubtedly have a detrimental effect on the quality of the learning and teaching experience in our schools?

Michael Russell: There is no growing casualisation of the teaching workforce. Such a phrase was first used and continues to be used by Labour and it is inaccurate. Of post-probation teachers, 86.5 per cent—an estimated 2,600—have found employment as a teacher in Scotland. That is an increase from 72.5 per cent in October 2009.

Job opportunities for teachers occur throughout the year. They did so this year and last year and they have always occurred in that way. The teacher vacancy survey shows that 354 vacancies were advertised on 19 February and the COSLA jobs portal shows that 280 teaching posts were being advertised on 1 June.

We are working hard to drive down teacher unemployment figures. Elements of the issue have always been difficult to deal with but, however serious the financial situation becomes, we will continue to work on teacher employment as a priority. I hope that good will across the chamber will support that activity.

Dyslexia (Early Identification)

3. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it is taking to ensure the early identification of children and young people with dyslexia. (S3O-10938)

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): Good foundations for learning start in the early years, which is why the curriculum for excellence places literacy and numeracy at its heart and makes those skills every teacher's responsibility. That means that all teachers must be alert to observe and respond to literacy difficulties such as dyslexia.

On 1 June, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning launched the assessing dyslexia toolkit for teachers, which the Scottish Government funded and which was developed in partnership with Dyslexia Scotland. It aims to help all teachers to identify the signs of literacy difficulties and dyslexia early in a child's school life, to ensure that the right support is put in place to enable every child to reach their potential.

Margaret Mitchell: What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that all teachers are supported and trained in the use of that important toolkit? Given that continuous professional development is an important part of raising teachers' awareness of dyslexia, is the minister concerned about the patchy provision of CPD dyslexia training for teachers across Scotland? For example, only 84 teachers in North Lanarkshire have attended training days in the past five calendar years, compared with 201 in East Ayrshire and 204 in South Lanarkshire over the same period. What can he do to improve those figures, to aid early identification?

Adam Ingram: The toolkit will help teachers to identify the signs of literacy difficulties and dyslexia. That will help schools more effectively to meet the needs of the pupils concerned and ensure that the right support is in place to enable them to reach their full potential. I repeat that, under the curriculum for excellence, literacy and numeracy skills are the responsibility of all teachers. I expect continuous professional development to reflect those priorities.

Higher Education (Financial Accountability)

4. George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will examine ways to make higher education establishments more accountable for their expenditure. (S3O-10955)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): This is an important question. Given that less than half the sector's income comes from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, it is

obvious that the arrangements that are in place for accountability should be proportionate and appropriate. We believe that current arrangements meet those tests. However, the chief executive of the funding council is ultimately accountable for ensuring that the institutions that it funds utilise those funds properly. As an overarching requirement, section 7 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 requires the council periodically—usually annually—to assess institutions' compliance with the fundability criteria. The council does that by monitoring financial reports and forecasts and examining annual accounts.

George Foulkes: I am grateful to the minister for that helpful answer. Has he seen reports about the £4 million that the University of St Andrews has spent on a new luxury residence for its principal and about the fact that almost all the principals of Scottish universities earn substantially more than the Prime Minister? In view of the fact that most of the funding of higher and further education comes from the Scottish Government and the United Kingdom research councils, does he agree that there is a need for much greater transparency and accountability? Will he consider what action might be appropriate to achieve that?

Michael Russell: I am inured to people earning more than I do; I am sure that Lord Foulkes is inured to people earning even more than a member of the House of Lords does. However, he makes a crucial point, although we should not exaggerate the issue. Universities, in particular, are autonomous institutions. In some cases, the majority of their funding does not come from the taxpayer, although in others it does. The key issue is transparency. I agree with Lord Foulkes that transparency is an absolute and should not be gainsaid by any of the universities' actions. At this time, when there is very substantial pressure on public funds, all parts of the public sector—including those that are not totally within the public sector—need to be aware that they are being watched and that the Scottish public is judging how they spend their funds. As a Government minister, I am very aware of that. I am sure that people in other parts of the sector are aware of it and hope that all will live by that rule.

“Go Outdoors!”

5. Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment ministers have made of the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland's and the Scottish institute for residential child care's “Go Outdoors!” guidelines. (S3O-10932)

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): I welcome and have endorsed

the recent publication by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Scottish institute for residential child care of the “Go Outdoors!” guidance and good practice on encouraging outdoor activities in residential child care.

Nanette Milne: In what has been described as a generation of cotton-wool kids, what plans does the Scottish Government have to support staff who fear that they will be blamed or even sued if something goes wrong during an outdoor educational activity?

Adam Ingram: That is one of the key questions that need to be addressed. Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People and SIRCC have done so for residential child care, which is particularly risk averse when it comes to giving children and young people the opportunity to play outdoors. It is crucial that we try to roll back the risk-averse culture that we have developed in this country over the past 20 to 30 years. The member should be encouraged by the number of initiatives that we are taking as a Government to address the issue. Most notably, I visited various parts of the country this week to see projects in our go play initiative, which encourages free play activities using the outdoors and tries to build community spirit and encourage community development, which may be what has eroded over the past 20 or 30 years, causing the fear for children to grow within society.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Robert Brown is not present to ask question 6. I refer members again to the Presiding Officer's strictures on members who lodge questions but do not show up in the chamber to ask them. That shows disrespect to all of us in the Parliament.

School Building Programme

7. Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how the school building programme aims to maximise the number of schools benefiting from improved facilities. (S3O-10935)

The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Keith Brown): The Scottish Futures Trust is managing Scotland's schools for the future on our behalf. It will bring extensive expertise to bear to ensure that efficiencies are realised through authorities working together to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort and to maximise the number of schools across Scotland benefiting from improved facilities while delivering value for money for our investment.

Derek Brownlee: The Scottish Futures Trust has made some pretty impressive claims about the number of schools that it will be able to fund

through its funding streams, based on driving down procurement costs. Is there scope to reduce the cost of procurement of schools further without negatively impacting on the educational experience provided within them? How many more schools could have been built in the past under the previous school building programme if construction costs similar to the ones that the SFT seems to be confident that it can deliver had been adhered to?

Keith Brown: The second question is quite speculative, so I will have to take some time to come back to the member with the answer, which I am sure will take a fair bit of working out. However, he is right to point out that the SFT has identified that savings can be made by authorities working together. I know from my own experience that small councils found it extremely difficult and expensive to put together private finance initiative projects, because they had to take on all the paraphernalia of consultancy fees and devote large amounts of their senior officers' time to them. They were often replicating work that was being done in a neighbouring authority. Having authorities work together is one way in which the SFT can bear down on costs. By centralising some of the expertise that it has, not least in relation to architecture and the design of schools, it can also increase both the efficiency with which we build the schools and the number of schools that we can build.

The other point that Derek Brownlee rightly raises relates to construction costs. I think that some of the confusion over costs has arisen because we have announced our programme of school building at 2009 prices, even though what councils receive will be at the price they have to pay—obviously, the costs will be inflated over the years of the construction. The SFT has identified a reduction in construction costs of perhaps 20 per cent because of the recession. It is right that we take the maximum benefits of low construction costs while they are there.

I will get back to Derek Brownlee on his second question in due course.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Is it the case that the Scottish Executive is funding schools only on a like-for-like basis and that any improvement to the facilities must be funded by the local authorities themselves and not by the Scottish Executive?

Keith Brown: In essence, what the member says is true. We have said to each council that has presented a proposal for either a secondary or a primary school that we will replace the school—it is not exactly like for like as it takes into account the development of the school roll over time—but we will not fund as part of that programme the additional costs of, for example, new community or

leisure facilities. We are taking that approach because it maximises the number of schools and the number of pupils we can benefit throughout Scotland. We have taken more than 100,000 pupils out of sub-standard schools already and aim to do much more than that in due course.

One of the constraints that we face is the legacy of previous private finance initiative/public-private partnership costs, £60 million of which was unfunded, which has created a legacy cost for individual councils. As Lord Myners said,

“There is nothing progressive about a Government who consistently spend more than they can raise in taxation, and certainly nothing progressive that endows generations to come with the liabilities incurred by the current generation.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 June 2010; Vol 719, c 625.]

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Is the minister aware that the three PPP secondary schools in the Borders, which he seems to criticise, offer accommodation in excess of that to which the Scottish Futures Trust would contribute? Is it not the case that the generation of schools that were constructed before the Scottish Futures Trust's one-size-fits-all approach will be better and offer better facilities for our young people than those with a design prescribed centrally by one agency for all schools in Scotland that are funded through the programme?

Keith Brown: Perhaps the key fact to bear in mind is that we are spending more—around £700 million per year on average—than the previous Administration did. Also, we are bringing schools to fruition more quickly than the previous Administration did. It took that Administration six and a half years, I think, even if we give it the first two years of the Labour Government in the United Kingdom.

We must try to maximise the number of pupils who can benefit from the programme. I do not criticise the PFI/PPP schools themselves, but I criticise the funding method, which has left us a legacy under which, before they spend 1p on a teacher or any school materials, councils spend 5p in every £1 towards PFI/PPP costs. We cannot simply allow that figure to rise over the next few years if we are not going to damage our children's education, so it is right that we maximise the value for money that we can get for the programme, which means trying to get as many pupils as possible out of poor conditions.

New Primary Schools (East Dunbartonshire Council)

8. David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with representatives of East

Dunbartonshire Council regarding capital provision to build new primary schools. (S3O-10984)

The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government has had no discussions with representatives of East Dunbartonshire Council specifically regarding capital provision to build new primary schools. The Scottish Futures Trust is in continuing discussions with the council regarding the replacement of Lairdsland primary school, which will receive funding from the Government under our Scotland's schools for the future programme.

David Whitton: As the minister mentioned, the Government had already intimated to Lairdsland primary school—as it happens, the one that my children went to—that it would be given £4 million towards the construction of the new school. However, earlier this month, a new funding package was announced and, instead of £4 million, the council is now being offered only £2.4 million because of the new formula that the SFT has drawn up based on the number of pupils and an allocation of space per pupil. The council has to make £8 million of cuts to its budget next year and £2.5 million does not cover a third of the new school's cost. How does the minister expect it to fund the badly needed new Lairdsland school?

Keith Brown: The funding that has been agreed with the SFT and the council is based on a base cost of £2,350 per square metre, which has been derived from a review of current construction costs. We are confident that that covers the costs of the replacement of the existing school.

It may be that, as in some other cases, there has been some confusion about additional facilities, although it has always been made clear that we would not fund those. There is a great deal of discretion in the SFT programme if the council wants to provide further leisure facilities, libraries or community facilities, and the cabinet secretary has asked the SFT to be flexible in applying that discretion.

The costing must be fair because we must be fair to councils throughout Scotland. It is adequate to provide for the funding of the new school. The cost of the new school is comparable with the amount spent per square metre of school space in previous PFI/PPP schemes, so I am confident that East Dunbartonshire Council will be able to provide the facility.

There is no question but that we live in straitened times. The former Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that there is no money left, but we have money left. We put money aside for the school building programme and it will ensure a new school for East Dunbartonshire Council.

Scots Language Resources (Curriculum for Excellence)

9. Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will support the provision of resources in the Scots language as part of the curriculum for excellence. (S3O-11005)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Aye, we will. The Scottish Government actively promotes the teaching and learning of Scots in the curriculum. The curriculum for excellence guidance offers flexibility to teachers to design inspiring and stimulating material to raise the profile of Scots in the curriculum. Learning and Teaching Scotland provides and signposts a wide range of resources to support high-quality learning and teaching in and through Scots.

Linda Fabiani: The cabinet secretary will be aware of the good work that the cross-party group on the Scots language has carried out over the years. It has an education sub-committee, which includes education professionals. Will the group's views be taken into account on which parts of the curriculum would be of best use for the Scots language and which organisations would be best placed to help in that provision?

Michael Russell: I am aware of the sub-committee's good work. I was unable, alas, to meet the sub-committee when I was last scheduled to do so because of a most regrettable clash of parliamentary business. I think that an important contribution is being made by the individuals involved, whom I am encouraging to talk to Learning and Teaching Scotland and to a range of other providers. I personally will have conversations with one or two of those involved shortly. I believe that everyone should work together to make this happen. Scots has an important place in the curriculum and should be taken forward as one of the issues that broadens and deepens Scottish education.

Economy (Support for Young People)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a statement by Keith Brown on supporting young people in the context of the economic climate. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:55

The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Keith Brown): Young people are our future workforce. They represent a pool of talent that we must nurture and invest in if we are to achieve our goal of sustainable economic growth. However, it is also true that recession hits young people the hardest and can do them disproportionate and lasting damage—as most of us who have lived through previous recessions will be aware. Sadly, the high price that was paid because of previous Governments' failures to tackle the effects of earlier recessions on young lives is still evident.

This time, we were not prepared to accept the prospect of another lost generation. From the word go, the Scottish Government has recognised the threat, which is why we have helped to build provision that helps young people to avoid the worst effects of the downturn. So far, we have made provision for record-breaking levels of investment in higher education, further education and training provision. We have made young people a priority for the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and for Skills Development Scotland, we have introduced 16+ learning choices, which will offer appropriate post-16 learning to all our young people and, through ScotAction, we have provided an additional £16 million in 2009-10 for 7,800 apprenticeship starts and a further £16 million in 2010-11 to sustain those apprentices in training. In addition, we have made a commitment to Parliament that we will do yet more to stimulate growth, including creating the right business conditions and a new skills strategy that will position Scotland for recovery.

Although youth unemployment in Scotland has increased, our record on youth unemployment is the best in the United Kingdom. Our youth unemployment is still lower—at 14 per cent—than the 17 per cent that is recorded for the rest of the UK. However, we cannot be complacent. Although we are out of recession, we know that the recovery is fragile and that job prospects remain uncertain. Throughout the downturn, we have remained vigilant and proactive. We have anticipated movements in the labour market and we have acted swiftly and decisively.

Last year, we noted that a greater number of young people stayed in learning after the summer. Of course they did; with the number of school leavers going into a job down by 7 percentage points—the largest fall since 1992—a higher proportion returned to school. Indeed, the figure was up by more than 3 percentage points. In addition, a higher proportion went into college and university—the rise there was nearly 6 percentage points. That is good, because we want young people to stay in learning because that is the best way to improve their long-term employability. It is heartening that so many young people and their parents and carers also see that value. That increase in the number who are continuing in learning is also a clear demonstration that our institutions—our schools, colleges, universities and training providers—are able to respond effectively to increased demand.

However, more returners last year means that we are likely to have more leavers this summer. We recognised the challenge that such an increase would present in the coming year. Correspondingly, we have been planning in order to ensure that the whole process is managed as effectively as possible in the interests of young people. To that end, earlier this year I established a small task force to consider how we could best respond to such a development.

First of all, we had to understand the problem that we are dealing with. Let me give members the facts, in so far as we can predict them. From the information that we have been able to cull—not least from young people themselves—we expect a relatively modest increase of about 3,000 in the number of young people leaving school and college this summer. However, the figure could be greater. As I said, we are currently relying on information about young people's stated plans, but the reality might turn out to be different as young people change their minds and circumstances change. The vast majority of those 3,000 people are school leavers, most of whom will want to remain in learning or move into training, although some will want employment.

Although we expect that there will be more leavers than usual right across Scotland, the challenges in meeting increased demand for learning will, self-evidently, be more acute in areas that have high levels of youth unemployment. From previous recessions, we know that young people who already struggle—people such as care leavers—can be doubly disadvantaged. The Government is taking swift and decisive action to deal with the pressure. We believe that we know the scale of the problem, where it will be most acute, and which young people will need most help. We also know what support young people are going to need, and what employers need to help us to help young people.

Today, I am announcing a comprehensive and affordable package of incentives and support. This will comprise 800 vocational pathway opportunities for young people. It will include an incentive of £1,000 for up to 2,000 employers who take on a modern apprentice who is a care leaver, or other young person who might otherwise struggle to get such an opportunity. It will also include around £400,000 for a new entrepreneurial intervention. In addition, £300,000 will be made available for graduate advice, information and work placements. Crucially, there will be a brand new Skills Development Scotland employer one-stop shop called step forward Scotland. In recognition of the fact that young people have a variety of interests and ambitions, there will be around 1,000 new volunteering opportunities.

That comprehensive offer builds on and complements existing Scottish Government investment. We have made available £15.3 million for 4,100 additional college places. Last week, the First Minister announced 5,000 additional all-age modern apprenticeship places, and young people will have access to those opportunities. Altogether, and notwithstanding the additional measures that we announced recently, we will produce another £6.5 million in additional measures that build on the wide range of opportunities and support that is already available across Scotland.

I will be clear. We are not creating jobs; we cannot do that. We are also not guaranteeing places; no Government has ever done that and we are not doing it. Our priority is to ensure that every young person who is leaving school, college or university this summer has the support that they need for as long as they need it, so that they can move into long-term sustainable employment. Skills Development Scotland will help us to deliver that. Our intention is that absolutely no one should fall through the net. When the jobs market is tight, those who are harder to help, such as care leavers, tend to get pushed to the back of the queue, and that is not acceptable. Our focus is on all young people, but we will emphasise vulnerable groups.

The job of Government is to lead and to act decisively. We have to make our priorities clear, mobilise all the resources that are at our disposal, and ask our partners to step forward for Scotland, which is precisely what we have done and will continue to do. Over the past few months, we have spoken to many people about our hopes and fears for young people. We have spoken to employers, local authorities, colleges, the voluntary sector, trade unions and many others. In all my time in public service, I have rarely encountered such consensus on a single issue. Tackling youth unemployment must stay right at the top of the agenda.

Employers, especially smaller employers, are often pressed for time, so we need to make it as easy as possible for them to access young people who are looking for opportunities, which can produce great benefits. This afternoon, I met some young people from Edinburgh who had found employment with an Edinburgh hotel group, which had invested in them by giving them training opportunities. That is exactly the kind of activity that we want to maximise.

I am certain that everyone in the chamber this afternoon can subscribe to our view. We might debate how best to tackle youth unemployment, but we must tackle it. The package that I have announced today is specifically designed to deal with the pressure that has been created by this summer's leavers. It will not make youth unemployment go away, and it will not distract us from the bigger job that is still to be done. I have every confidence that the efforts that we have made during the past few months, and the response that we can expect from our partners, will make a massive difference to our young people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister will now take questions on the issues that have been raised in his statement. The next item of business is due to start at 25 minutes past 3. Members who wish to ask a question should press their request-to-speak buttons.

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)
(Lab): I thank the minister for early sight of his statement.

He said that tackling youth unemployment must stay at the top of the Government's agenda. He is right, and I agree with him. That is why Labour argued for extra funding for modern apprentice places in last year's budget. We did so again this year, and I am pleased that the Scottish National Party listened to our arguments. We also fully support the creation of a one-stop shop for information on how to access youth training funds at Skills Development Scotland—something that is long overdue and which I have previously discussed with the minister.

The minister will be aware of the briefing that was produced this week by the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils, which reported that 20 per cent of Scotland's employers are reporting skills gaps, especially in the retail motor trade and the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism industries. What steps are being taken in his new measures to point young people to where vacancies exist? Can he offer some further explanation of what is meant by the new entrepreneurial intervention and how that will work? I warmly welcome moves to give extra help to care leavers, but will he outline in a bit more detail how that assistance will be

delivered? Finally, when will we see the new refreshed skills strategy to which he referred?

Keith Brown: I thank David Whitton for those questions; I will try to answer each one.

I will take the last question, on the refreshed skills strategy, first. Mr Whitton will acknowledge that the skills landscape—if I can put it that way—across the United Kingdom is changing rapidly, and we have had to take a bit more time to take that into account, although we will not hold up the strategy for too much longer. Some of the points that he made about skills gaps that have been identified by employers will be addressed through the refreshed skills strategy. As I have done with the statement today, I will do what I can to ensure that he gets early sight of that strategy, which should help to answer some of the questions that he has asked.

It is fair to say that no Government has done as well as it should have done for care leavers, and we accept completely that it is not an easy issue to resolve. Through the one-stop shop, we intend to ensure that all care leavers are not left once they leave care. They rely on the state to a great extent throughout their lives up to that point, so it is only right that the state does not run away and leave them to fend for themselves when they leave care.

Each care leaver will, through Skills Development Scotland, be given a key worker who will work with them. It will not be a one-off contact. Once they have made contact in the first instance—we will encourage everybody to make contact, whether they are employers or young people—there will be a continual monitoring and presenting of new opportunities as they arise for the young person. In addition, I have written to every single one of Scotland's colleges to ask them to have particular regard to that group of people and the opportunities that they represent.

We will also revisit the issue over the course of the summer. We know that the situation will change over the summer, but we also know that we will not get some of the relevant hard facts until September, or perhaps even later. We have a serious intention to deal with the issue, and the incentive that I announced—the £1,000 that is available for up to 2,000 employers—will make substantial inroads.

The last point is on the one-stop shop. It seems obvious that we should introduce one, and the idea has been mentioned over many years in relation to various public services. However, it is much easier to say than it is to do, as it requires substantial systemic change. Although we are making the change for the particular pressure that we envisage, we think that it will produce long-term benefits for the whole skills agenda in forthcoming years, as people will find it easier to

access the skills agenda. That is particularly the case for employers, who will have one place to go to get answers to their questions and will not be shunted around different agencies, and for young people, who will also have one place to go to get the answers that they want. We hope that the marrying up of demand and supply will help us to achieve a positive outcome.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I, too, thank the minister for prior sight of the statement.

I have three areas of questioning. First, the minister mentioned the fact that the Government cannot create jobs, but it is, nevertheless, in the position to create incentives, one of which has been the reduction in business rates. Is the Government mindful of the comment by Iain McMillan of the Confederation of British Industry that the private sector will be the basis on which new jobs can be created? Will the minister tell us a little more about how the Government will proceed with that?

Secondly, the minister said that it is better for people to be in learning because that is the best way for them to improve their opportunities. That is usually true, but not always. The idea of insisting that people go to college or university is sometimes a little away from the truth of what some people would like to be able to do. Will the minister provide us with a little information about how schools and colleges could be better interlinked for formal vocational training at school level? There are opportunities that are not just about staying in learning institutions, which the minister mentioned in his statement, and they should be pursued further.

Thirdly—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I must stop the member there, as she is going on a bit too long, and we might run out of time.

Keith Brown: On the first question, there are specific incentives. The adopt an apprentice schemes that are run under the ScotAction programme will continue over the course of the next year. They are incentives for young people to get opportunities, but they are also incentives for employers, because they allow them to take on people with support from the Government. The reason why we have always stuck with an employer-based approach to apprenticeships is that we recognise that, as the member suggests, these things are best done through employers rather than colleges or universities.

The new £1,000 incentive will help the private sector, as businesses will have access to that money and will take people on, hopefully at a higher rate than they would otherwise have done.

I did not mention Mr Whitton's point about the entrepreneurial intervention, which is also relevant to the question that has just been asked. I recognise that it is the case now, more than in other recessions, that some young people will express an interest in setting up their own businesses. It is certainly easier to do that today, particularly with regard to information technology and web-based businesses. In recognition of that, we have put together a new initiative that will not cut across existing ones. It will give people education and practical advice in that regard and will move them towards a positive outcome. That initiative has been positively accepted by people in the employers' organisations—including, I believe, Iain McMillan.

We are providing other opportunities. We recognise Elizabeth Smith's point—that young people have a different set of options that they want to choose from, and that college and university are not always the best option. We have to ensure that they have that opportunity where nothing else is available to them. However, through initiatives such as the volunteering initiative and the entrepreneurial initiative, we are trying to present young people with different opportunities, and we are hopeful that that will be positively received by them.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I also thank the minister for the advance sight of the statement and for the other information that he provided.

Can the minister confirm that all of the programmes will be delivered for young people in rural as well as urban areas, no matter what background they have?

Does the minister accept that the one-stop-shop approach would have more credibility were it not for the fact that the changes to the structure of Scottish Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland, which was set up as a separate agency, removed a one-stop-shop approach in many rural areas, with the removal of the local Careers Scotland offices, which were integrated into Scottish Enterprise and worked in direct partnership with local businesses and councils?

Can the minister confirm where the £6.5 million that he refers to as being "additional" comes from within the budget lines, given the fact that the Government has indicated that it is operating within a fixed budget, and that all the money has already been committed?

The minister made no reference to programmes for young people who are currently in school, particularly those who are in their fifth and sixth years in secondary school. I am thinking specifically about concerns over the funding for the get ready for work programme and the training

for work programmes. Will those programmes continue in their present form, with the current levels of funding?

Keith Brown: The programmes will apply to rural areas as much as to urban areas. There is one caveat, however, which is that we have identified particular hot spots across the country—ones that we could probably all identify—where there is greater need. The same opportunities will be presented across the country, but it is only right that there should be a more intense application of them in the areas of greatest need.

On SDS and Scottish Enterprise, SDS represents a coming-together of four organisations. That rationalisation has happened already. Such things are never straightforward and must be worked at over time, and there is a continuing process whereby we are trying to make the situation more rational. I am more than happy to listen to any suggestions that the member might have about how we can do that even better and how we can make services as cost effective as possible, at a time when we are examining public finances.

On the budget lines, we have created the initiatives through a combination of new money—I mentioned the £15.3 million that is associated with college places, which is not part of this announcement—and through being more efficient with some things. We have also ensured that the money from some projects that have reached the end of their time and will not be carried forward is applied to that priority. I am happy to get back to the member with more information, if he would like to know exactly which budget lines the money has come from. I do not want to provide the information now as it would prevent other members from asking questions.

I am not entirely sure about the member's point about fifth and sixth year pupils. I will pick that up when I check the Official Report. The 3,000 figure that I mentioned comprises 2,000 of those whom we expect to leave school and 1,000 of those whom we expect to leave college. It is not our intention to keep people in those places if they do not want to be there and we can provide other opportunities for them. However, I am happy to get back to the member with more information, if I have not answered his question.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will try to get in as many questions as possible, but they must be brief, so I ask the minister to keep his answers correspondingly brief.

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): Two successful elements of the support that the Scottish Government has provided to young people during the recession are the adopt an apprentice scheme and the two-for-one scheme,

which aim to promote and encourage the take-up of apprentices by businesses and to ensure that, wherever possible, apprentices have the opportunity to complete their training. Will the minister set out his future plans for those schemes and confirm whether they will continue into next year?

Keith Brown: I confirm that the invest in an apprentice and adopt an apprentice initiatives will be kept and rolled forward to next year. We believe that they have been extremely successful. That is perhaps underlined in some of the figures that I mentioned earlier in relation to our relatively positive position on youth unemployment compared with the rest of the UK. The initiatives that we have taken in the past year to ensure that young people have those opportunities are partly responsible for that.

I am afraid that I cannot say what will happen beyond next year because we will have a comprehensive spending review in which we have to analyse everything that we are doing. I therefore cannot guarantee what will happen, but the initiatives will continue for the next year.

The member's question, for which I thank her, has brought back to my mind Mr Purvis's question about the get ready for work and training for work programmes. It is the case that those will continue. As I think Mr Whitton said earlier, we announced 35,000 opportunities this year with a slightly different balance between apprenticeships and other opportunities. Not only will those flexible opportunities continue, but there will be more of them this year.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): The minister said that the Government is aware of where the problem is most acute. Does he agree that the problem of youth unemployment is particularly acute in North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire? How will he ensure that areas such as Lanarkshire can access not just a fair share of the additional resources and opportunities but a larger share, if the needs of Lanarkshire's young people are more acute than the needs of young people in other parts of the country?

On the minister's 1,000 volunteering opportunities, in what ways are they different from the opportunities that are offered by Project Scotland? Is there perhaps an opportunity for the Government to overturn its misguided attempts to get rid of that organisation?

Keith Brown: On the member's final point, we intend to work, and are working, positively with Project Scotland. She might recall that, at the time when the Project Scotland initiative was controversial, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth encouraged Project Scotland to be involved in exactly the kind of

initiatives that we are discussing and to work with Skills Development Scotland and others in order to do that. We will be working with Project Scotland, and the engagement on that so far has been positive.

The member's other point was about North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire. Representing Clackmannanshire, I am well aware that there are intense hot spots around the country. I repeat the point that I made previously: where there is greater demand, we will meet it, using the same solutions that we see throughout the country. We have used that approach in the past. It was done to an even greater extent with college funding last year, which went to specific colleges to cover the areas of greatest need. This year, we recognise that there will be demand throughout the country, but that does not prevent us from giving the greatest support to those that are in greatest need, and we recognise that North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire are two of those areas.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): I want to ask about the entrepreneurial intervention. I listened to the minister's answer to Elizabeth Smith, but it is still not clear to me what is actually going to happen with the money. Can he give us some details and say how it will be different from, say, the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust or the business gateway?

Keith Brown: First, we have involved PSYBT in the construction of the initiative. It will be a new product. It will not replace something that already exists but will fill a gap in the market. It will create a structured entrepreneurial learning path for school leavers, building on what we have done already under "Determined to Succeed: Enterprise in Education".

The initiative will be targeted at higher-level achievers—primarily pupils who have participated in Young Enterprise Scotland's company programme—and will comprise first, a programme of immersion in theory; secondly, as I have already made clear, practical experience with a local entrepreneur; and thirdly, market testing and business start-up activities. First, we have to identify the participants in order to carry out marketing and awareness raising. That work will start this month. Familiarisation will take place over July and August, applications will be selected in August and the programme itself will start in September. This sort of approach has never been taken before in this context and I reassure the member that the initiative is genuinely new; however, we very much hope that it will provide a template for future activity.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): As someone who has two sons who will graduate this summer, I should probably declare an interest. In

any case, I certainly stress the need for swift action to support summer leavers.

I have previously raised concerns about the scrapping of Scottish Enterprise's graduates for business scheme. Of the 250 graduates who had internships under the scheme, two thirds found employment with those businesses. What is being done to replace that successful scheme? Moreover, is the minister able to give further information on how the £300,000 for graduate advice, information and work placements that he mentioned in his statement will be delivered?

Keith Brown: Margaret Smith might be aware of the talent Scotland graduate placement programme, which will be rolled out at the end of the month by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and which aims over the next three years to place approximately 720 graduates in three-month to 12-month projects with businesses in Scotland. HIE will also provide 160 undergraduate placements over three years. The scheme will replace the now discontinued graduates for business programme that Scottish Enterprise ran and—I say in response to the other part of her question—will be provided through the talent Scotland website, linked to the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services shared vacancy service, in order to ease access for businesses and graduates. Work to update the website is under way. The scheme will involve a working partnership including AGCAS, SDS, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, HIE and Scottish Enterprise. For its part, the Government has agreed to provide £60,000 this year to support the position of project manager to be based at AGCAS. There are other elements to what we are doing for graduates, and I am happy to provide the member with more information.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): If the one-stop shop, which for a number of reasons is a very welcome initiative, proves to be successful, will the minister consider expanding its role to help small businesses and sole traders and allow them to continue to take on young people beyond this summer's student intake?

Keith Brown: I thank the member for that important question. Some employers, especially smaller ones, have found it difficult to access easily skills and training opportunities, partly because of the plethora of different agencies and organisations. That is why the one-stop shop is so important. Although we have very much focused on ensuring that the initiative is introduced to deal with the pressure from the summer leavers that we have identified—I thank SDS, in particular, for the huge amount of work that it has carried out to ensure that it works right from the start—I acknowledge Sandra White's point that it will

produce huge benefits for small employers and sole traders, who often do not have enough time, or who need assistance to navigate the skills landscape.

As I said earlier, the idea is that with a single phone call the employer will get information about different agencies. Of course, they might well have to go to another agency for more in-depth information—there is nothing wrong with that—but they must get a proper and full response with that first phone call. We certainly want to continue the initiative, because we think that it will have real benefits.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Can the minister assure Parliament that any additional resources, such as the all-age modern apprenticeships, will be directed to where they will have the greatest impact and meet industry needs? For example, although the new Forth crossing will be a major job-creating project, Fife colleges have told me that they are finding it very difficult to provide the number of apprenticeships in areas such as welding. Will today's action plan deliver to young people skills that are matched to industry needs, including those of major projects, and will the minister take steps to address the issues that Fife colleges have raised?

Keith Brown: The issue has already been raised with me in relation to at least one college—Carnegie College—and I have undertaken to Mr Whitton that I will look at the pressure that has been identified in that respect. The driving feature of the schemes is that they are demand-led—in other words, people come forward to take up the opportunities—but we are more than aware of future large-scale capital projects and the skills demands that they will make on the Scottish economy, and are directing resources towards those ends.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement.

Poverty Framework

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-6581, in the name of Alex Neil, on the poverty framework.

15:25

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak about the actions that the Scottish Government is taking to tackle the important issues of poverty and income inequality in Scotland. We are determined to provide opportunities for all to flourish and to tackle the injustices of poverty in Scotland. There is no doubt that we all face major challenges in the current difficult economic climate, but that makes it more, not less, important that we focus our efforts on helping those who are least well off in facing the impact of the downturn.

Today, about 17 per cent of Scots live in relative poverty. Overall, poverty rates have remained the same for too long, although we are pleased that pensioner poverty has fallen significantly in the past year. However, there are no grounds for complacency. Currently, the poorest 30 per cent of households receive 13 per cent of Scotland's income, while the richest 30 per cent receive more than half the income. In the past 10 years, no progress has been made on tackling income inequality. The Government wants us all to live in a fairer nation as well as a wealthier one, which is why we set our ambitious solidarity target, to increase the proportion of income that is received by the poorest 30 per cent of households by 2017.

The fact remains that too many people live below the poverty line, and radical action is required to address that. We are especially concerned about those who are caught in persistent poverty—the people who are most scarred by the experience of living in poverty and who lack the opportunities and resources to escape its clutches.

We know that there are concentrated geographic areas that suffer from multiple deprivation and where people live in, or at very high risk of, poverty. Many of those areas have been in deprivation for a long time. Entire communities as well as households can suffer the effects of persistent poverty. Of the data zones that were in the bottom 15 per cent in the Scottish index of multiple deprivation in 2004, 83 per cent were still there in 2009.

The consequences of living in poverty extend beyond material deprivation. One example is the striking relationship between imprisonment and deprivation. A 2005 study showed an almost

perfect correlation between risks of deprivation and levels of imprisonment. We know that 45 per cent of all prisoners come from the 15 per cent most deprived areas in Scotland. There are many other examples of the negative consequences of people living in poverty. It impacts on educational attainment, health outcomes, aspirations, employment levels, benefit dependency and overall quality of life. The Government is determined to do what it can to address the root causes of poverty once and for all and to bring about the change that the nation deserves.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): On educational attainment, does the minister recognise the assertion by the Educational Institute of Scotland in its document "Poverty and Education" about the role of the education maintenance allowance in producing positive outcomes by allowing people to stay on in school? Does the minister regret the fact that his Government reduced funding for the education maintenance allowance?

Alex Neil: Actually, we focused the education maintenance allowance on poorer people, in a way that it was not focused previously.

Early intervention sits at the heart of our three complementary social policy frameworks: "The Early Years Framework", "Equally Well" and "Achieving Our Potential", which are joint Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities frameworks to tackle poverty and income inequality in Scotland.

The core principles of "Achieving Our Potential" are to tackle the drivers of poverty and income inequality in Scotland; to maximise the potential for people to work; to make work pay for those who can work; and to support those who cannot work and those who are experiencing poverty now.

Some of the groups of people who are most at risk of persistent poverty are pensioners, disabled people, women and children. The latest statistics show that relative pensioner poverty in Scotland fell from 21 per cent to 16 per cent over the past year. That is an encouraging sign, and we hope that the range of measures that we have in place to help pensioners will help that trend to continue. I welcome the commitment by the new coalition Government to re-establish the link between the annual increase in the pension and the annual rate of wage inflation from 2012.

Older people continue to be an important target group for the Scottish Government's income maximisation work under "Achieving Our Potential" and they have benefited substantially from the energy assistance package. We also fund the Scottish helpline for older people to help vulnerable older people to maximise their income.

The Scottish Government also introduced free Scotland-wide bus travel. The Parliament introduced free personal and nursing care and we have provided a record number of central heating installations for pensioners in their own private accommodation in the past two years to help to alleviate pensioner poverty.

Twenty per cent of Scotland's children live in poverty. We cannot let poverty blight more generations of our young people. That is why we have taken radical measures to intervene early and to address both the causes and consequences of child poverty.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): For the sake of accuracy—because this is important—what is the minister's source for that figure? The statistics that the Government published on 20 May state:

"The percentage of children in relative poverty ... increased from 20 percent to 21 percent".

For the first time in a very long time, the downward trend has reversed.

Alex Neil: Across Scotland and the United Kingdom, the percentage of people in relative poverty is now at 17 per cent. That is the figure for all individuals. For children, the figure is 21 per cent. Over the piece, the long-term trend over the past three years, for example, is still on a downward path.

We have a range of policies to help to maximise the income of people who are in work as well as those who are not in work. We also have policies on employability and skills initiatives. In the longer term, we are investing in our children through the early years framework and getting it right for every child.

We are also taking forward the development of the Scottish Government's child poverty strategy. That is still in its early stages, but we can be sure that support to enter and sustain employment will be a high priority. In order to move out of poverty, people need good job opportunities, and we believe that decently paid, sustainable employment is the best route out of poverty for people and their children.

I want to mention disabled people. Many people still have to live with difficult and often complex barriers to employment. For example, despite improvements over the past decade, the employment rate for disabled people in 2008 was only 48.1 per cent, compared with the general population figure of 74 per cent. That is why, together with COSLA, we have published a supported employment framework for Scotland, which aims systematically and effectively to provide the mechanisms that are necessary to support disabled people's move to paid

employment in the open labour market. The framework sets out our shared determination to support disabled people who want to work to get into employment. It seeks to put in place the vital ingredients that are required: well-trained and qualified staff, professional standards for service delivery and consistent quality, irrespective of postcode.

We want a more consistent, person-centred approach, with sustained employment as a realistic and achievable outcome for the individual. It is not about work experience, volunteering or taster sessions; we want people in real jobs, properly integrated and rewarded. People have a right not to be dependent on benefits and a right to make the progression into work. That is good for them and their families and communities, and ultimately it is a prerequisite to allow the whole of Scotland to flourish.

There is poverty among those who are in work, too. It is important that people have access not just to employment but to reasonably well-paid employment if they are to escape the poverty trap. It is encouraging to see living wage campaigns gathering momentum. Paying a living wage brings benefits to employees and employers. Employers can expect to benefit from increases in productivity, greater staff loyalty and motivation, easier recruitment and retention, reduced absenteeism and higher-quality staff. I am proud to say that from August this year, no one in the employ of the Scottish Government will be paid less than a £7-an-hour living wage.

Johann Lamont: Will the minister give way?

Alex Neil: I have already given way and I am just about to finish.

I welcome the coalition Government's plans to increase the personal allowance over time to £10,000. That should help to make work pay and encourage people to move from welfare to work.

Poverty has been a blight on Scottish society for far too long, for children, pensioners and disabled people and for some people in work. We in the Parliament must all—especially in these difficult times—do everything that we possibly can to reduce poverty among all those groups in Scotland, with a view to eliminating the blight of poverty from our society.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the continuing approach set out in the Scottish Government's poverty and income inequality framework, *Achieving our Potential*, to take long-term measures to tackle drivers of poverty and income inequality in Scotland, to maximise the potential for people to work, to make work pay for those who can and to support those who cannot work and those who are experiencing poverty now; recognises the need to focus on those people and communities who experience longer-term persistent poverty, and supports the need to streamline the

welfare system while ensuring that reforms provide better protection for, and do not further disadvantage, vulnerable people, particularly in these challenging times.

15:37

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I am happy to participate in the debate, and I join Alex Neil in supporting the aspiration that he described at the end of his speech. However, the test for us is not our aspiration, but what we do to deliver on it and address the serious issue of poverty, particularly at a time of great change.

The reality of what precipitated the economic crisis—the failures in the global private markets that led to the banking system requiring Government intervention—has curiously been transformed into an argument that the crisis was caused by big government and a public sector that was too big, as if all public sector workers were useless bureaucrats rather than people who are employed to deliver services for some of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens. They are people such as care workers, classroom support assistants and those who work in child care, employability and educational support, and they work directly to address issues around poverty. I trust that our Lib Dem colleagues will bring their pressure to bear on the coalition to ensure that the hostility to big government does not involve attacking services that are required by the poorest in our communities.

Labour's amendment acknowledges the existence of the framework approach, but argues that it is not enough to have an approach; we need to be serious about delivering on it. I wish to say something about the weakness of the Scottish Government approach and the gap—not for the first time—between words and action. I will speak about some of the key challenges and provide some examples of how a national approach can be national and how the powers of the Parliament might be used.

The Scottish Government presided this year over an increased budget, but the reality is that whatever the size of the budget, it is simply a dereliction of duty not to maximise its impact among the poorest in our communities. A useful starting point is provided by the Child Poverty Action Group, which argues that Scottish Government and local government budgets should be poverty proofed. If the Scottish Government took even a moment to poverty proof one of the critical elements that it often identifies in its poverty strategy—the council tax freeze—that would reveal that whatever it is, it is not an anti-poverty strategy. It is disappointing that the Government continues to resist the idea that single outcome agreements should be poverty proofed. I urge the minister to consider taking that

approach, because it would cause a shift from asserting good works to doing what works.

The Scottish Government does assertion—indeed, the minister is a master at it—but it must trouble us all that a written answer to Bill Butler revealed that the centrally held poverty budget has been cut by a third. I understand that that funding could be used to support financial advice work, benefit uptake work and so on, which are all important to poor families. If one claims to take a national approach, one needs evidence of its effectiveness. There needs to be monitoring and assessment to test the gap between saying and doing, but also to allow government at every level to reflect on and amend what it is doing to address weaknesses or ineffectiveness.

There is a well-rehearsed debate on the concordat and single outcome agreements. It is not an academic debate; the framework approach is predicated on its being delivered through locally determined single outcome agreements. We can put aside the ludicrous haste with which the concordat and single outcome agreements were cobbled together as an approach; the lack of consultation with, for example, the voluntary sector; and the total lack of thought-through indicators. The reality is now serious. There is no effective monitoring, no reflection on input and clear evidence that too many services are subject to a postcode lottery. We know that local authorities are under pressure and are not helped by claims by the Scottish Government about resources and a lack of funding, and that local authorities are making difficult choices, but surely those choices should be shaped by basic standards across local government throughout the country.

In this carers week, the problem is highlighted by a clear example of what the lack of a national approach means. Information that we obtained under freedom of information legislation about the lack of assessment of unpaid carers showed three staggering elements: the huge variation in approach across Scotland; the apparent reluctance to assess unpaid carers, perhaps because, once assessed, the need has to be met with resources; and the number of local authorities with no information about the number of carers in their area.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): The member talks about national projects and policies and working together. What does she say about the green paper on the national project proposed by the Westminster Government that would have taken money away from carers? That is neither national nor local; it is disgraceful.

Johann Lamont: It is also not a policy. There was a green paper and the response to it was unhappy. I am asking us to look at what we can do

here. The fact is that currently, only 3 per cent of unpaid carers have their needs assessed and most local authorities do not even know how many unpaid carers they have. That is a simple example. If we acknowledge that, as in the words of the motion, we have a responsibility

“to take long-term measures to tackle drivers of poverty”,

what is the Scottish Government doing to address the needs of carers whose caring responsibilities often hold them in poverty? It is simply not good enough to look away or to blame others. If the Government is to take a national approach, it must address the problem of the wide variation in carers’ experience across the country.

As I said, the framework is underpinned by single outcome agreements. We all acknowledge the role of the voluntary sector in reaching out to communities and understanding how poverty is lived and what needs to change. The sector is pivotal in that regard. However, when voluntary sector organisations persistently express their concerns about the lack of specific indicators to test and shape local government and national priorities—for example, on disability—they are simply ignored. There is a lack of seriousness in the Government’s approach that includes a cavalier disregard for any process of reporting, which means that voluntary organisations have to fund their own interrogation of single outcome agreements. If the Government is serious, that cannot be acceptable.

In my remaining time, I will flag up some areas in which the powers of this place could be used more effectively. The minister acknowledged the critical role of work and talked about the concentration of unemployment in some communities. Does he still think that it is acceptable that Scottish Enterprise no longer has any geographical role to support community regeneration and create employment opportunities for people in our poorest communities? It is important to support those who lose their jobs, but we need commitment and evidence of action to deal with those who are further away from work. The danger is that while supporting people who have lost their jobs, those who are further away from the market move even further away as the tougher employability actions of the Government become deprioritised. I urge the minister to reassure us on that point.

The minister spoke about pay issues. We need to establish what is being done to tackle problems around equal pay. I would welcome an update on the role of the Scottish Government in helping women who are currently trapped in equal pay tribunal processes. I would also welcome some progress in what the Scottish Government is doing with regard to the living wage.

Low pay is particularly prevalent in the tourism and retail industries. What is the Scottish Government doing in its tourism strategy to tackle that? What levers are being used to advocate for and reward those businesses that have a living-wage approach? The minister says that the national health service is a living-wage employer. Will he confirm that, in the Scottish Government, the living wage extends to agency and contract workers?

We all recognise the power of public spend. Can the minister confirm that the public procurement process includes a positive assessment for bidders who include commitments to the living wage? Can the minister give examples of how public procurement procedures incorporate the provisions of article 19 of the European directive on public procurement, which allows contracts to be reserved to sheltered workplaces? I would welcome some examples of current spending by the Government where that has been done, as it is an obvious way of tackling poverty among people with disabilities.

In recognising the importance of the Scottish Government’s role in tackling poverty, I ask the minister whether he and his colleagues have reflected on what constitutes front-line service—I refer here to the point that I made about the education maintenance allowance. The most vulnerable people need services from mental health groups, carers groups and voluntary organisations to get them to the point where they can access front-line services, and my fear is that those services will be the first to go, and that most vulnerable people will not even get to the point where they can use front-line services in future.

I urge the minister, together with us, to wrestle with these tough questions. What are our priorities? How do we balance the roles of local government, central Government and voluntary organisations? How do we ensure that financial pressures do not impact disproportionately on those who need small amounts of enabling support in order to access services? I also urge the minister to ensure that what he says is followed by action. If he does that, we will certainly support him.

I move amendment S3M-6581.2, to leave out from “to take” to end and insert:

“; further notes the findings of research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust that child, pensioner and overall poverty fell faster in Scotland than in any other part of the United Kingdom during the period of the previous UK administration, led by Labour, but notes concerns raised by anti-poverty organisations, such as Save the Children and the Poverty Alliance, that single outcome agreements do not give sufficient priority to meeting shared poverty targets and have created further problems in terms of monitoring progress and accountability; therefore urges the Scottish

Government to review the impact of the concordat and single outcome agreements to ensure a clearer focus on reducing poverty and that measures are put in place to monitor progress made at the national level, and further, in this European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion and given the critical role for the Scottish Government in tackling poverty, calls on it to report to the Parliament detailing how it will use all the powers at its disposal to tackle poverty and disadvantage."

15:47

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The Government has asked us to debate its strategy "Achieving Our Potential", and it will be the focus of my speech. The document starts with strong rhetoric from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing. In fact, her foreword is rich on rhetoric. She starts by saying:

"This Government has a new level of ambition for Scotland".

She goes on to say that the Government will bring forward

"a fairer distribution of wealth which we believe is key to tackling poverty. That is why we have set a national target to increase the proportion of income received by the poorest 30% of households by 2017."

Three years into the Administration, it is right to scrutinise the work of the Government and to hold it to account for its record in that regard. We recognise that there are some deep-seated, community and social elements around the issue of poverty. The constituency that I represent and the region of the Borders of which it is part have some of the lowest wages in Scotland. They are considerably lower, on a per capita basis, than in Glasgow.

UK Government figures on alcohol morbidity show that alcohol morbidity in my constituency is 30 per cent of the UK average whereas in the Glasgow Shettleston constituency it is 600 per cent of the UK average. Life expectancy is 20 years lower in some parts of Glasgow than it is in some parts of the Borders, and that is over a distance that it takes only an hour and a quarter to travel.

The issues around poverty are wider than simply addressing income, but that is the focus, and it is one of the biggest drivers. It is therefore welcome that the minister recognised the Liberal Democrat contribution to the work of the UK coalition Government in moving towards lifting the threshold of income tax. If we lift it to £10,000—below which level people will not pay income tax—that will affect 530,000 people in Scotland and will be one of the biggest, most progressive income tax or other tax changes that this country has seen for a generation. That can be added to the welcome announcement that there will be a triple lock for pensioners from next spring, so that

pension increases will be determined either by prices or by earnings, or there will be a 2.5 per cent increase, whichever is greatest. That is a very good step in the right direction. We know that there is too much inequality and unfairness in Scotland. Those are two major ways forward.

In "Achieving Our Potential", the Government says:

"The success of the Framework should be judged by the extent to which it influences investment decisions and action in all parts of the public sector in Scotland".

That is the mechanism for monitoring the progress of the Government's strategy and on which we can hold the Government to account. The document even provides a link to the Scotland performs website. Just two of the nine relevant outcome indicators within economic growth, productivity, participation, population, solidarity and cohesion show improving performance—I know because I looked before I came to the chamber—four show no improvement in performance and three show worsening performance. That is not encouraging if we want to find the way forward. In addition, the Government's official statistics, which I quoted to the minister, show that, for the first time in a decade, the prospect exists of the downward trend for child poverty turning around. All that should give us considerable cause for concern.

The Government's framework contains a clear commitment on something that it has said could have one of the biggest impacts in reducing poverty. In the section entitled "What more we will do", it says:

"The Scottish Government will legislate to replace the regressive, unfair Council Tax with a fairer system of local taxation, based on ability to pay. This change will help to lift an estimated 90,000 people out of poverty. This will provide a vital financial boost to low and middle-income households across the country as the biggest tax cut in a generation."

Much was promised by this Government, but so far little has been delivered. In its place, the Government has provided the council tax freeze, which has not been progressive. Between 2008 and 2012, that policy will cost £700 million, which means that it could be one of the biggest—if not the biggest—revenue funded policies of this Administration.

Let us look at the impact of that policy on a low-income family in Scotland—one that earn less than £15,000. We know that such families, who live predominantly in band A houses, make up 40 per cent of Scottish households. Many of them receive benefits that allow them to get a discount on their council tax, if not a 100 per cent discount. Let us compare their position with that of a high-income family that earns more than £100,000 a year and lives in a band G house, which is the second most common band for the highest-earning households in Scotland. Under the council

tax freeze, the low-income family will have got zero extra pounds in its pocket, whereas the high-income family will have gained £138 a year. Such a policy is not progressive. We know that the biggest impact of that £700 million policy over the past two years and next year will be experienced by those who are earning the most and who live in the biggest houses in Scotland. That is simply not fair.

Unless we have a change of direction—perhaps by following the UK Government's example—the trend on child poverty will match the trend on other kinds of poverty and will reverse.

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Jeremy Purvis: I am afraid that I simply cannot.

We must continue the trend of reducing child poverty.

I move amendment S3M-6581.1, to insert at end:

“, and believes that the Scottish Government should introduce a fairer pay policy that gives a real-terms pay increase to those on the lowest wages in the public sector while paying no bonuses to higher earning staff in 2010-11 and 2011-12.”

15:53

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I support the motion in the name of Alex Neil, but I emphasise the fact that the Conservative party shares the objective of all the parties in the Parliament of ensuring that relative poverty is cut as quickly as possible. Our problem is that we find ourselves in an economic situation in which such objectives will be harder to fund. Consequently, they might be harder to achieve.

It is a serious concern that some poverty figures may have gone into reverse over the past year, because that coincides with an economic decline that has cut the resources that are necessary to deal with the problem.

I agree with much that has been said and I support the Government's motion, but I will concentrate on issues on which my views might differ from those that have been expressed and for which an alternative strategy might be found, if necessary.

We need a fairer nation in which wealth is properly distributed—I hope that no one doubts that. I might differ on occasion not because I do not have common ground, but because I suggest that creating wealth is the solution to poverty at least as much as is redistributing wealth. Any perspective that I give on the poverty situation is about how we foster wealth creation in the broader

economy and about how we distribute that wealth, ideally at one and the same time.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I admit that I am a little puzzled. Until the recent recession, we had sustained and consistent economic growth for a long period, yet our society has become more unequal—the gap between rich and poor has widened. How does Alex Johnstone sustain the position that creating wealth creates by definition a more equal society?

Alex Johnstone: I thank Patrick Harvie for his question, because he moves me on to a case study that I will use to demonstrate that, although we have had a problem in recent years, it has a solution that can be used effectively.

In the past five to 10 years, we in Scotland have created strong economic growth. We could argue about how that compares with other parts of the United Kingdom, but many jobs were created in Scotland. At the same time, the increasing dependency culture—the effect of the greater and increasing safety net that was provided—meant that it was more and more difficult for people who required work to take up the jobs that were created. That led to significant immigration levels. I do not object to immigration, but I am worried that many jobs that were created were taken by people who moved to Scotland for them rather than by people who were already here and who could have taken them.

In the recent general election campaign, I knocked on many doors and I was particularly taken by one group whom I met—single mothers. An extraordinary number of single mothers wish to be part of the workforce and have skills that they want to deliver into the workforce. Despite that, the support that they are provided with makes it virtually impossible for them to return to the workforce. Seeing such a huge and well-motivated group of people in the economy unable to take advantage of the opportunities that are provided for them seriously disappointed me.

The challenge is that we in Scotland require to rebalance our economy. Through a period of considerable wealth, we grew the public sector and consequently became more dependent on the redistribution of the wealth that we had. Some see the current situation as an effort to bridge the gap between the position that we were in some years ago and a return to that position in a year or two. I do not believe that we will find ourselves in that situation. We need to think hard and objectively about how we achieve an economy that generates wealth and redistributes it effectively, so that we can begin to reduce poverty, not necessarily through the primary redistribution of wealth from top to bottom but through the creation of wealth at the bottom.

That is why I particularly support the position that Jeremy Purvis described. If he had been on the doorsteps of West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, he would know that I argued for the policy of raising personal allowances to take low-paid workers out of the tax system. By taking that option, we will deliver the opportunity for a huge number of people who are able and willing to work to benefit from their efforts. That is one way out of poverty. Increasing personal allowances also gives us the opportunity to focus again on concentrating our support on people who cannot take up such an opportunity. If we have a continuing difficulty in generating the necessary wealth, it is important to focus our efforts on those people.

We in Scotland are lucky. Poverty here is largely relative. In comparison with many parts of the world, even the poorest in our society are relatively wealthy. Those who have seen some of the coverage of what happens in South Africa at the moment will realise that we are lucky. However, here in Scotland we have a fundamental responsibility to end dependency culture, wherever possible, to give those who are in a position to do so the opportunity to benefit from their own hard work and effort, and to concentrate the support that is necessary on those who need it most. For that reason, we support the principles that lie behind the Government's motion and will continue to work to ensure that our economy is rebalanced, so that we can provide progress in years to come.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The debate will be tight, so I will keep members to six-minute speeches. I call Jamie Hepburn, to be followed by Irene Oldfather.

16:00

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am sure that Irene Oldfather, too, will begin by saying that, in the European year for combating poverty and social exclusion, it is right that we should have this debate. Poverty is a scandal wherever it exists. In this world of plenty, and our land of plenty, the fact that any human being—let alone the estimated one fifth or so of people in Scotland who are defined as being in poverty—should go without the means to meet their basic needs shames us all and is an issue, above all others, that cries for justice.

Tackling and eradicating poverty should be front and centre of the policy agenda of any Government, of any colour—not simply because it is morally the right thing to do, but because it is in the enlightened self-interest of society as a whole to narrow the gaps between the rich and the poor. With poverty and deprivation come challenges of ill health, crime, antisocial behaviour and lower

educational attainment that impact on society as a whole and end up costing us more. All of us benefit from a more equitable society.

I welcome the approach that is taken in the poverty and income inequality framework, which was published less than 18 months ago. In the framework, the scale of the challenge that faces this country in tackling poverty is set out clearly. Ambitious targets to meet that challenge have been set. In addition to backing the UK-wide target to eradicate child poverty by 2020, the Scottish Government has established its solidarity target of increasing the proportion of income that the poorest 30 per cent of households receive by 2017.

The Government's framework uses the powers that are available at present to make what progress we can. A total of £435 million has been invested in the fairer Scotland fund over three years, £60 million has been invested in measures to tackle fuel poverty, and wide-ranging support for credit unions and the third sector has been made available.

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Jamie Hepburn: I will take a brief intervention, as we are tight for time.

Mary Mulligan: The member mentioned the fairer Scotland fund. Would it not be more effective if there were a way of measuring its impact? At the moment, there is not.

Jamie Hepburn: We should always be willing to assess the impact of any measure. I will come on to the issue of how we can tackle poverty really effectively.

The motion recognises the importance of being able to work as a means of lifting individuals and families out of poverty. That is confirmed by the most recent report of the growing up in Scotland study, "The Circumstances of Persistently Poor Children", which finds:

"Being without paid work, and in particular regular work, is often cited as the key influence on poverty."

For that reason, I welcome the Scottish Government's continuing commitment to supporting jobs in our economy, the number of apprenticeship places in recent years and the announcement earlier today by the Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning.

The poverty framework demonstrates the Government's commitment to tackling poverty and inequality. I note that some progress is being made. Absolute child poverty has fallen, but rates of relative poverty remain too high. Currently, 16 per cent of pensioners live in relative poverty. That is an improvement on the situation previously, but

the figure is still too high. The task now is to speed up the rates of progress—a task that is all the more challenging, as the motion suggests, because of the economic circumstances in which we find ourselves.

It is also challenging because of the limited powers that are at the disposal of the Parliament and the Scottish Government. Johann Lamont talked about the powers to tackle poverty that are at our disposal. I accept that those powers exist, but they are limited in relation to the challenge. Although we can and must make inroads to mitigate the effects of poverty, the powers to tackle the root cause of poverty—the unequal distribution of wealth—are not particularly in the hands of the Parliament or the Scottish Government. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's recent report "Devolution's impact on low-income people and places" reflects that fact when it concludes:

"Support for tackling poverty in the devolved countries came ahead of powers to act".

Although I accept that the political will to act in Scotland is real—and I think that that is the case across all parties—the ability to act is constrained. I believe that small, independent countries have consistently been able to demonstrate that poverty reduction and better social equality are not only possible, but compatible with economic development.

That brings me to the exchange between Alex Johnstone and Patrick Harvie. I agree with Patrick Harvie's point that the generation of economic growth does not necessarily lead to a more equal society. The converse can be true: more equal societies can generate growth. For example, Norway has been ranked among the five most highly developed countries in the world—the UK, incidentally, ranked 21st—and it is a regular top performer in the United Nations human development index. Looking beyond crude economic measures, the New Economics Foundation, in its index of human wellbeing and environmental impact, ranks Belgium, Finland and Sweden above the UK in its ranking of western nations. Given his previous criticism of me, Murdo Fraser might be interested to know that Venezuela ranks 38 places above the UK in that table. Sadly, he is not in the chamber; he will learn about that when he reads the *Official Report*.

In September last year every member of the Parliament was presented with a copy of "The Poverty and Justice Bible" by the Scottish Bible Society to mark its bicentenary. Throughout that edition of the bible, injunctions to end poverty are especially highlighted. I was drawn, in particular, to Isaiah's call, echoed by John F Kennedy in his inaugural address some 50 years ago,

"to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free".

That is the challenge that we must constantly strive to achieve. To do so, we need to rise above petty party-political differences, and we need the powers that best come with independence.

16:06

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):

This has been an interesting and important debate that goes to the heart of one of the great social problems. As Jamie Hepburn said, in European terms it is a timely debate, because, as the Labour amendment notes, 2010 is the European year for combating poverty and social exclusion.

I take a moment to acknowledge the contribution of Scotland's voluntary sector to promoting awareness of poverty during this designated year and to thank the many organisations that have provided briefings for members and that work tirelessly to promote this agenda. Activities in Scotland are being led by a range of organisations, including Save the Children, which is taking its museum of poverty on a tour around the country, and the Poverty Alliance, which has organised 10 regional seminars to highlight the future challenges in tackling poverty and is supporting five community members to attend in Brussels the European meeting of people with direct experience of poverty. That is all to be commended.

On 30 September I will host a reception, in conjunction with the Poverty Alliance, to mark the year. The Poverty Alliance has been funded by the Department for Work and Pensions to create three short films highlighting what communities are doing to address poverty on their own behalf. We intend a first showing of the films at our reception in September, so I ask members please to mark that date in their diaries—I hope that the minister is listening and will make a careful note.

Although the commitment of the voluntary sector is admirable and the goals of the year are to be welcomed, they need to be met and matched by Government and European Union-wide commitment. That brings me to the EU 2020 strategy—the EU's economic strategy for the next decade. Europe continues, even in these times of global economic instability, to be one of the wealthiest areas of the world, but some 84 million people—one in every six Europeans—is affected by poverty. That is why the new economic strategy proposed a platform against poverty, with the original idea of setting a target to reduce poverty by 25 per cent across the EU, lifting some 20 million people out of poverty. That is an ambitious but necessary target. However, some member states have been unhappy about a single measure and target for poverty reduction and, at the

employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs council meeting last week, a compromise proposal was advanced. We are in danger, in this European year for combating poverty, of negotiating the poor out of our economic strategy in a bid to adopt the easiest way and the lowest common denominator. If the financial crisis demonstrated anything, it surely demonstrated the need for financial and internal market policies to be complemented by strong, co-ordinated, concerted social agendas.

The Poverty Alliance is campaigning to introduce the toughest measure possible and I hope that the Parliament will offer its support for those endeavours. The Council of the European Union is meeting today and tomorrow, and I know that the minister is listening carefully. There is still an opportunity to influence the agenda. Belgium is set to take over the EU presidency in July and I have already raised the matter with the Belgian ambassador, who was extremely supportive of ensuring tough safeguards.

In a debate such as this, it would be remiss of me not to mention the progress that needs to be made in my constituency. If I tell members that there is a 14-year gap between the average life expectancy in Fullarton in Irvine and that in Fairlie, which is 14 miles to the north, they will see the scale of the challenge that we face.

I have no doubt that the structural, chronic unemployment that my constituency has suffered—dating back to huge job losses in ICI—is a huge contributory factor. North Ayrshire continues to experience some of the highest levels of unemployment, as well as high rates of child poverty. Although the Irvine Bay Urban Regeneration Company is playing its part, the solutions are long term and, in constituencies such as mine, direct intervention is necessary. The Government's motion mentions

"the need to focus on those people and communities who experience longer-term persistent poverty"

and I would welcome some comment in the minister's closing speech about how North Ayrshire could benefit from that.

I will reflect for a moment on global poverty. A letter that I recently received from the Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland pointed out that the recession has forced 100 million people throughout the world to live on less than \$1 a day and that 400 million children are chronically or seriously malnourished. I agree with NIDOS that support should be given to those affected wherever they are. In doing that, we need to resist the temptation to reduce aid or policy commitments to the most vulnerable and the poorest in our society.

I support the amendment in Johann Lamont's name.

16:12

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): A great number of my constituents are, like Irene Oldfather's and those of other speakers, among the lowest paid. If members remember that that is compounded by the relatively high cost of many of the essentials of rural life, they will appreciate the scale of the problem that we face.

I apologise to members for repeating myself, because I have said these things many times before, but I will underline them again. The cost of heating fuel is disproportionately high in the far north of Scotland, and those bills are faced by people who can ill afford them. The cost of motor fuel is a subject on which members have heard me and many others in all parties speak during the 11 years that we have been in the Parliament.

Alex Neil: Does Jamie Stone agree that any increase in VAT would add to that burden?

Jamie Stone: That is a complicated equation, but I admit that it could do. It must be considered, which is why I hope that, in the budget, the coalition Government in the UK will do something to address the cost of rural motor fuel. It has an impact on the cost of everything else, as I have often said, from a fencepost to a newspaper or a tube of toothpaste. That is why I hope that there will be some movement from London.

Historically, the cost of motor fuel has been a big issue. When I was first elected, I and others took a petition to Her Majesty's Treasury, pointing out to the then chancellor, Gordon Brown, that something had to be done. I cast my mind further back to 1983, when it was one of the reasons that Hamish Gray lost his seat and Charles Kennedy stepped on to the political stage. The problem has existed for a long time.

In my constituency, the problem is compounded still further—I know that this is a tale of woe, but it is true—by the fact that there is not much public transport. The cost of travelling on what little public transport there is, never mind running one's own car, to get to an appointment at Raigmore hospital, or the doctor in Wick or to buy the messages in Thurso hits the pockets of people who cannot afford it.

Poverty is related to employment. That brings me back to the subject of Nigg and Dounreay, on which members have heard me speak before. As Dounreay continues to be decommissioned, jobs are going. At Nigg, we see a shocking stalemate that is, frankly, a blight and something must be done about it. In the days when both those sites

were at their height, they provided employment. Whatever members might feel about nuclear energy, the point is that Dounreay gave people decent wages and, in doing so, halted and turned in the opposite direction the numbers of people leaving the Highlands. The Highland clearances did not stop when the lairds were banned from removing people from their estates but continued right through the first part of my lifetime and throughout the lifetime of my father before me.

The irony is that the remotest areas now offer some of the greatest employment opportunities. Because broadband makes access so much more direct, it has made the playing field more level and it should be possible to persuade companies, whether in manufacturing or services, to relocate to remoter areas. There is also an irony—a beneficial irony—in that the remotest areas have the greatest potential for renewable energy. The tides that rip through the firths and the winds that howl in some of the furthest away parts of Scotland, including in my constituency, now offer great potential. I say for the record, however, that the jury is still out on the performance of the enterprise networks in delivering on that potential. I have often said that we will need a leap of faith of the scale that put Nigg into building oil platforms in the 1970s if we are truly to maximise the benefits of what the First Minister has described as our potential to become the Saudi Arabia of renewable energy.

I whole-heartedly support the point that Jeremy Purvis makes in his amendment. According to the Highland Council website, 31.1 per cent of the workforce in the Highland Council area works in the public sector. That is higher than the equivalent figure for Edinburgh. It is evident, therefore, that the economy of my constituency and of the whole Highlands and Islands rests on the public sector. Indeed, Charles Kennedy's brother—I have mentioned Charles already—drives a lorry for the Highland Council roads department. The public sector affects every family, so we should not underestimate the important boost that the proposal would bring.

Johann Lamont: I acknowledge the point that is made in the Liberal Democrat amendment, but does not the Government also have a role in influencing the private sector to pay properly? Will the member support the calls to use the levers of Government to ensure that a decent wage is paid in, for example, the tourism and retail businesses that are critical in his constituency?

Jamie Stone: I will seek to support any intervention that tries to increase the lowest wages. Ironically, I will be entering the job market myself a year from now, when who knows what might lie before me.

To go back to my point about the public sector, it is worth remembering that, if we can increase the basic wage, we can start to tackle some of the root causes of poverty, not just in my constituency but throughout Scotland. That is the wisdom behind Jeremy Purvis's amendment, which states a very important principle. I am grateful for the Conservative party's support for it and I hope that members will be able to coalesce around the amendment at 5 o'clock.

16:18

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Despite our many differences, one thing that we all share—I mean this sincerely—is a desire to tackle poverty and income inequality. Regardless of which party has been in administration here in Scotland, tackling poverty has always been and, I think that it is fair to say, will remain a priority.

Given that we share a desire to tackle poverty, it is disappointing that some seem to want to use the issue to make political gain at the expense of engaging in a constructive approach to tackling it. As we listen to the debate, I hope that we can work together towards an agreement on the practical measures that can be taken to address the problem. *[Interruption.]* If Mary Mulligan wishes to intervene, I am quite happy to take her intervention.

I believe that the fairer Scotland fund, to which other members have referred, has delivered, and is delivering, real results in the fight against poverty. More than £400 million has been earmarked to tackle the social and economic disparities that exist in our most deprived communities and I agree, as I have said many times before, that we should monitor the outcomes and where that money goes. For more than 50 years, my area of Glasgow has suffered extreme poverty and, although money has been ploughed into certain areas, we have never seen an improvement. Therefore, I believe that we need to monitor where the money goes and what the outcomes are.

Johann Lamont: Does the member agree with the voluntary organisations' call to the minister to put in place proper reporting that will allow for the monitoring and accountability that they say are absent?

Sandra White: I remember a number of voluntary organisations coming to talk to me, and they are right to say that we should be looking at monitoring. However, the Labour Party, and Johann Lamont in particular, should stop scaremongering when they speak to the voluntary organisations; some of the organisations are quite worried, and they are being told that their funding will be stopped or limited when that is not quite the

truth of the matter. I ask Johann Lamont to think that over, because our voluntary organisations and the communities that they serve must have faith in the Government. It is unfair to scaremonger.

On deprived communities, it is important to remember that inequality and poverty are not uniform throughout Scotland. They are different in different areas and any strategy must have at its heart the unique local dynamics of the area. Jeremy Purvis touched on that earlier. It is important to recognise both the need to enable local authorities to analyse the reasons behind the inequalities that exist in their communities and the expediency of doing that, and to work constructively with the communities to implement local policies that will best benefit the most needy. The concordat is important to the delivery of those aims.

The Labour Party amendment mentions concerns raised by anti-poverty organisations. It might be worth noting that the concordat promotes a framework of evaluation and response that allows any concerns or suggestions to be taken on board and used to inform and mould agreements with individual local authorities that reflect recommendations from such organisations. It might also be worth noting that the Poverty Alliance document recommends that in

“future revisions and negotiations on the concordat between the Scottish Government and Cosla opportunities are created to allow for large scale national demonstration projects to tackle address poverty and social exclusion.”

I am sure that the minister will take that into consideration during any such negotiations. Such suggestions are welcome in this debate, and they highlight the need to be constructive rather than to criticise any approach that has, at its heart, the elimination of poverty. The Poverty Alliance also recommends that further work be done to ensure that all P1 to P3 pupils will be able to access free school meals; I hope that the Labour Party will support that recommendation.

The Poverty Alliance's recommendation 7 asks that

“All parties in the Scottish Parliament work together to ... reduce the burden of the council tax”

on those who are on low pay. As we know, it is disappointing that the Labour Party does not support the Scottish Government's action in freezing council tax for the past three years, which has undoubtedly helped thousands of families throughout Scotland.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the member address the way in which the council tax freeze has helped to put more money in the pockets of people who live in bigger houses than in those of people who live in smaller houses? The Government has done no

equality assessment of that measure, which is regrettable.

Sandra White: I take on board what Jeremy Purvis said, but it is not necessarily absolutely true. Plenty people who live in larger houses are poorly off as well. I point to some of the houses in the area of Glasgow that I represent. People seem to think that everyone in the west end of Glasgow is well off, but I am sure that Robert Brown, who is sitting next to Jeremy Purvis, can tell him that many who live in such houses are not that well off. The council tax freeze has been better for everyone throughout Scotland. I ask the member to remember that.

The Poverty Alliance's criticism of the current local taxation system is that it is

“fundamentally regressive, particularly for those in low paid work”.

It goes on to say that it hopes that all parties will

“find a suitable way of reforming the current system”.

We all know that when the Scottish Government proposed the introduction of a fairer local taxation system, its proposals were unfortunately dismissed out of hand and everything was done to ensure that they would not gain parliamentary support or be the subject of reasoned debate.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): You must close, please.

Sandra White: I am sorry that I am being cut short, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: You were not being cut short, but you are now. I have no extra time; I am sorry, Ms White.

16:24

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): I will take the hint, Presiding Officer, and press on immediately.

This debate is obviously timely as we get into the economic decline and slump, and as lots of tough decisions have to be made by politicians, as we have heard. I represent a community that has some experience of joblessness and poverty, which is still with us from the last recession—it has lasted decades. It is important to remember, when we are making tough decisions, that unemployment and poverty are costs too, and they can be measured looking back over 20 years. We should not just look at deficits and everything else; it is important to take poverty into account.

We need to learn some lessons from the mistakes that were made many years ago and which have left us with communities that are severely damaged. There are high levels of unemployment, and poverty in terms of not just

income but, as other members have said, ambition, education and health. The minister was right to say that, in these difficult times, we need to maximise our effort and focus our attention on helping those who are least able to help themselves. The failures of the banks should not be borne on the shoulders of the poor. We cannot allow that to happen.

Governments need to be judged by their actions and not just their words, although at this time their words and actions are both worrying enough. We have heard lots of talk of job cuts in the public sector, with all the costs that they will mean, and at the same time talk of cutting benefits, too. That happened all those years ago, and it is happening again.

Already we have seen the end of the future jobs fund, which has given 400 young people in my constituency the opportunity to experience work for the first time. It is gone. The Secretary of State for Scotland told us today that it is not sustainable, but what is not sustainable is long-term unemployment and youth unemployment, and all the chaos that comes from that.

To be fair, attempts to address the tax system and make it fairer, as mentioned by Jeremy Purvis and under the long-held view of the Liberal Democrats, would help to break down the barriers for people to get into work. That is eagerly supported by the other party in the Government: the Conservatives, who are not progressive. The reason why they are so enthusiastic—

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Will the member give way?

Duncan McNeil: Just a second—let me make the point.

The reason why the Conservatives are so supportive may be that they recognise that middle-income earners will benefit the most. We must watch out for that when we criticise the Scottish Government for its mistakes, such as freezing the council tax, which Jeremy Purvis is right to say does not benefit the poor. In difficult times, we should also look at policies such as free bus fares for 60-year-olds who are going to work in Edinburgh and Glasgow while the part-time female worker on the minimum wage pays £12 to £15 a week to go to work. That is not fair and should not happen. We cannot sustain free prescriptions for me while cancer patients go without. That is what is not sustainable in difficult times.

We have a test that will define us as politicians, political parties and a Parliament in these hard times: the decisions that we make over the coming weeks. They are what are important.

As we have heard today, people want to work. I support enthusiastically the right to work and the

work ethic, and whatever we do with the benefits system must be used to support the people who want to work and to support the work ethic. However, people should not be driven from unemployment and compelled to work if they are terrified and have been imprisoned in unemployment. Some people do not know how to cope with a job and are not educated enough to get up in the morning to go to work. They fear for the family's income and perhaps see work as a threat to that. However, they want to work, and we must give them routes to that.

I have some questions for the minister on that. Governments should not campaign on the living wage, which is also important to support the work ethic, and other issues; Governments should act. We need action not just from the Government but across Governments. On 5 May, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing said that she wanted as a matter of urgency to arrange for the Scottish Government to speak to the new Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to ensure that we could get flexibility in the system that would enable us to tackle the barriers to work and employment. Perhaps Mr Neil can tell us what progress was made at that meeting, if it has taken place.

I see that I am running out of time. I urge the minister to act on equal pay, which is a poverty issue. It concerns working women who are living in poverty. We have had three inquiries in this Parliament to tackle the issue of equal pay, but we have failed to do it and have blamed others for not doing it. It is time to act, and I hope that the Scottish Government will act—

The Presiding Officer: I must stop you now, Mr McNeil. I am sorry, we really have no time to spare.

16:31

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): A lot of good points have been made in this debate. Rightly, Jeremy Purvis said that poverty involves not only money but the wider issues around morbidity, addiction and quality of life. That links into the point that was made by the minister about issues of multiple deprivation and perhaps explains why there are some differences between the situation in the Borders and the situation in certain parts of Glasgow.

When Duncan McNeil was waxing lyrical about Government policy in action and all that, I was struck by the question of why, when the Labour Government poured all that money into the banks, it did not insist on dealing with the bonus culture, which had been the cause of many of the problems that we are now dealing with.

Duncan McNeil: Will the member give way?

Robert Brown: No, I will continue.

It is often good to have a strategy for things, not least for tackling poverty and income inequality. It is a demonstration of concern. It shows that high-level thinkers in Government are having cerebral moments worrying about it. If anything, it is even more exciting to have a framework, as that is a precursor to action—action is surely just around the corner.

Today, of course, we have the excitement of an approach—indeed, a

“continuing approach to take long-term measures to tackle drivers of poverty and income inequality in Scotland”.

However, struggle as I might, I have found it beyond my abilities to take all that much meaning out of the SNP Government motion. The soporific phrases of the motion could fit almost any conceivable policy mix, but seem focused on the responsibilities of Westminster, rather than those for which the minister—my favourite minister, I should say—is accountable to this Parliament.

Alex Neil: I should point out that the member's spokesman contributed to the drafting of the motion.

Robert Brown: I thank the member for that information.

The Labour amendment—if I may move on to more profitable territory—is a little better, although it is true that it suggests that everything that moves should be monitored. The job creation potential of the economically vital monitoring and evaluation industries under Labour is clearly enormous and is capable, by itself, of wiping out the nation's fiscal deficit.

The banking crisis revealed in all its ugliness the glaring gap between those at the top and those at the bottom of our society. It was a manifest demonstration of the reality that, after 13 years of a Labour Government, the gap between rich and poor in Britain had widened, and it illustrated the favour that that Government showed to people in the casino part of the economy, which contributed a great deal to the current disaster that the nation has to navigate.

In summing up for the Liberal Democrats, it is worth my saying that programmes that were begun under the first two Labour and Liberal Democrat Governments in this Parliament for free central heating systems, support for debt advice, tackling homelessness and free personal care have made a significant difference and have been broadly continued under the present Government, to its credit. Such policies were substantial drivers of an anti-poverty strategy. However, the giveaways by the SNP to better-off people in relation to prescription charges and school meals

contrast with a continuing failure to secure an adequate weekly allowance for kinship carers.

Like Jeremy Purvis, I want to talk about the opportunities to make Scotland a more equal society that, paradoxically, arise from the banking and financial crisis. For some time, Liberal Democrats have campaigned on the issue of the bonus and top-salary creep that has crossed from the private sector to the public sector. There is a curious amalgam of public sector empire building and private sector bonus culture that has produced unsustainable salaries at the top of the public sector, particularly in quango land and the world of arm's-length external organisations, where there are bonus levels that most of us would think are unsuited to public service.

Liberal Democrats have been impressing on the Scottish Government the need for a fairer pay policy in the public sector that hauls back pay bills and bonuses at the top in order to secure real-terms pay increases to those on lower wages. I think that I am right to say that there is a £651 million pay bill for those who earn more than £80,000 in the public sector. The bonus culture should be taken out of the system at that level.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Robert Brown: I am sorry, but I have limited time. I ask the member to forgive me.

There is some mileage, too, in the concept of the living wage campaign—the minister touched on that—under which public and private sector employers voluntarily undertake to pay a living wage, which is currently £7.15 an hour. According to the Poverty Alliance, 370,000 workers in Scotland are paid less than £7 an hour, including 8,500 in the national health service and more than 15,000 in councils. I echo what Johann Lamont said and ask the minister to confirm when he concludes the debate whether the NHS is covered by the undertaking that he gave earlier about Government employees. I recognise that it is not an easy challenge, but impacting on that group is vital, not just for those who are directly employed but, as Johann Lamont pointed out, for those who are paid for by the state but work in the private or voluntary sectors. The issue is the in-work poverty that the Poverty Alliance has identified.

Liberal Democrats in government in London are making their contribution to helping families on low and medium incomes, as the minister rightly acknowledged. The coalition agreement contains a range of important measures in that area. Insisted on by Liberal Democrats, they are based on the concept of fairness in the tax and benefits system. They include the commitments to raise the tax-free threshold to £10,000, to relink pensions to average earnings, and to hold a fair

pay review in the public sector to implement our proposed 20-times-pay multiple.

The debate on poverty is important, complex and on-going. Oxfam comments in its briefing on the feeling of lack of control and hope that is experienced by people and communities who live in poverty, on the lack of security of people with weak financial assets who are reliant on borrowing and benefits, and on the dominance of inequality. The Liberal Democrat amendment is based on taking effective action to tackle the issue in public sector pay policy, but that must be linked with a wider range of effective actions across the board. Poverty and inequality blight the life opportunities of many in Scotland. They form a scar across our country that is no less important than the physical scars that were left on our landscape by declining industries, and they must be tackled effectively.

16:37

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): Many people will be shocked by the stark statistics that we heard today, especially those on the massive differences in life expectancy in different, but sometimes neighbouring, communities. I recognise the passion in Duncan McNeil's speech, but it is a sad fact that, after 13 years of so-called socialist government at the UK level, income inequality is at its highest since records began and UK working age poverty stands at its highest level since 1961.

History teaches us—this is a fundamental Conservative principle—that the single most effective way in which to lift people out of poverty is to grow the economy so that more people are in work and earning enough money to allow them to provide for themselves and their families, and to provide the wherewithal for decent pensions and good welfare. Therefore, every available adult of working age must be given the incentive to do that; the stronger the economy, the better the welfare system will be. A good welfare system is required financially to enable those people who are unable to work or who find themselves temporarily out of work.

We are living in difficult economic times and we are faced with unprecedented challenges over the public finances, but it must be a Government priority to ensure that job creation and economic competitiveness underpin policy decisions. The rise in unemployment that was revealed yesterday is disappointing; Scottish Chambers of Commerce was right to say that it will be down to the private sector, which Johann Lamont mentioned, to drive our economy forward and create new development opportunities. I ask the minister to help it to do that.

Jamie Stone mentioned fuel poverty, which is a real issue in many parts of the Highlands and Islands region. Figures from 2008 suggest that more than a quarter of Scots live in fuel poverty—we are all aware that fuel price rises since 2003 have exacerbated the problem. Yesterday, I chaired the cross-party group on renewable energy and energy efficiency, which received excellent presentations from energy saving Scotland and WWF Scotland on the good work that is being done to find community-scale solutions to energy efficiency. Although much excellent and often innovative work is being done, many concerns have been expressed about the support that is available to communities who are seeking to improve energy efficiency. I ask the minister to help those groups.

As well as finding ways of making the economy more competitive, the Scottish Conservatives have a range of practical policy measures that we believe will tackle the consequences of poverty. For example, we propose the introduction of a universal health visitor service attached to general practitioner surgeries to provide support to families from the birth of a child until it reaches the age of five; after all, according to research, the first five years are the most important in ensuring a child's health. Although we recognise that there is no magic bullet for reducing all health inequalities, we believe that that sort of measure empowers individuals to make the right decisions and lead healthier lives. Annabel Goldie's sterling efforts also secured the new national drug strategy, which was published in May 2008.

Jamie Stone: Will the member give way?

Jamie McGrigor: I am sorry—I am afraid that I do not have time.

Much of today's debate has focused on the very concentrated and highly visible problems of poverty in urban Scotland. That is understandable, but as a Highlands and Islands MSP I try to speak out about the poverty in some of our remote communities, including those in our small islands, which can be just as serious. The primary industries of our rural economy remain under real pressure and I hope that, in his closing remarks, the minister will give an assurance that he takes tackling rural poverty just as seriously as challenging urban problems.

We hope that the Scottish Government will take a constructive approach to working with UK ministers on shared aims. In that respect, I commend to members the recent speech by the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, entitled "Welfare for the 21st Century". In it, he rightly identifies the current problems in the current benefits and tax system, which far too often disincentivises people from finding work and imposes prohibitive marginal tax

rates on too many people who want to return to work, making the option of work simply not economically viable for too many people.

I would accept an intervention from Mr Stone now.

Jamie Stone: I thank the member for giving way. He talked about getting health visitors to go round rural communities. Such a scheme would be very welcome. Could it be combined with the provision of rural patient transport, which is a problem that we have all experienced in the Highlands?

Jamie McGrigor: Rural transport's spasmodic and often inefficient nature is a huge problem. Because such transport does not really fit in with people's way of life, the car becomes absolutely vital for those who live in remote areas.

We agree with many elements of "Achieving Our Potential", notably the focus on economic opportunities as the key to achieving a wealthier and fairer Scotland. As it is right to prioritise work as the main route out of poverty, every effort should be focused on creating the right conditions for companies and individuals to create jobs in Scotland and on helping the small businesses that are key to Scotland's economy. We look forward to ministers' delivering the poverty framework.

16:43

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate on poverty. Its timing is particularly apt, because in Scotland progress on reducing and eradicating poverty has stalled. Indeed, like many others who have spoken this afternoon, I have real concerns that the Scottish National Party Government does not have any idea how to restart previous initiatives.

I point to the minister's motion, which he seems to have drafted in co-operation with others in the chamber—who I have to say looked a little puzzled—and in which there seems to be a tacit acceptance—

Jeremy Purvis: I counsel the member not to confuse acquiescence with active support.

Mary Mulligan: I am always pleased to give Mr Purvis the opportunity to distance himself.

The motion seems tacitly to accept that the powers to assist people in poverty rest elsewhere, but there are actions that this Government can take with our partners in local government to help people move out of poverty. Members have outlined many of them this afternoon.

One of the most contentious issues in the past, although not particularly in today's debate, has been the usefulness of single outcome

agreements in identifying and monitoring actions to tackle poverty. The hope of the partnership between the Scottish Government and local authorities was that poverty issues could be addressed locally and flexibly and identified in the single outcome agreements so that the outcomes could be measured. However, given that so few local authorities and community planning partnerships identified the issue in the single outcome agreements, it is difficult if not impossible to monitor the actions that are being taken. Only nine SOAs have stated that local anti-poverty strategies have been developed and only one stated that the local authority is working to embed the anti-poverty framework into its single outcome agreement. As the briefings that members received from Save the Children and the Poverty Alliance said, that makes it difficult to see the usefulness of single outcome agreements.

I will respond to a point that Sandra White made. What I was trying to say about the fairer Scotland fund when I intervened earlier was that it is all very well investing in that fund, but if we do not know what the outcomes are it is difficult to say whether the fund is effective or working and therefore difficult to know whether to invest in it in future. That was my point with regard to monitoring. I say in my defence that although I have raised the issue on several occasions with the minister, such monitoring is still not possible.

Most members recognise that work is a major route out of poverty, but members from Duncan McNeil to the minister have acknowledged that even some people who are in work remain in poverty. The introduction of a minimum wage, which I must say was not supported by all political parties that are represented in the chamber, was a big improvement for those who were on low pay. However, there is still much debate as to the level at which it should be set. I welcome the Labour Party's inclusion in its manifesto for the 2010 general election a commitment to a living wage of £7 an hour. If such a move is to have its full impact, it needs to happen in the public sector for permanent staff and for temporary or agency staff. The Scottish Government can set a good example on that, just as our colleagues at Glasgow City Council have done. We need private sector employers to work towards that end, too. They need to respond to the challenge of ensuring that everybody has a living wage.

The private sector must also operate more flexibly, for example on hours of employment, which can be particularly important for employees who have caring responsibilities. That brings me to child care. If we accept that employment is one of the most important routes out of poverty, it is essential to recognise the importance of affordable and flexible child care. The Local Government and Communities Committee report on child poverty

recognised child care as one of the most important supports that are necessary for parents to access work and training, so the minister will imagine how disappointed I was to hear just last week that West Lothian Council, whose area includes my constituency, is reducing the provision of wraparound care and totally removing it from two schools.

I say freely that West Lothian Council has been a progressive council; my concern is that where it goes other local authorities will follow. My constituent who contacted me about the issue is about to lose her job because her company is moving to Ireland. She says that she will lose her job, her child care and the opportunity to train for future employment that she was trying to take up. No wonder she feels that everything is against her. Child care is essential if we are to encourage not just single parents but other parents and carers back into the workplace. The Scottish Government can give a lead on that. More often than not, child care will be delivered by local authorities and the voluntary sector, but the Government needs to give a clear lead.

This has been a good-spirited if not particularly inspiring debate in which a number of actions and their relative success at addressing poverty have been debated. A number of questions, to which I hope the minister will respond, have been asked. I will outline a few of them. What will the Scottish Government do to address the assessment of carers, which my colleague Johann Lamont mentioned? It is important that carers are fully assessed for the role that they play and that they maximise the income that they can receive. The minister said that carers are one of the groups that most need income maximisation. A full assessment of carers is a legislative requirement, so it should be happening—but it is clear that it is not. How will the Government respond to that?

How will the Government respond to the loss of Scottish Enterprise's role in regeneration? What is it doing in its tourism strategy? Is it promoting better pay for people who are working in tourism and retail, which are two areas in the rural economy that Jamie McGrigor mentioned? When I worked in the retail industry, things were very difficult for people on low incomes. We still have not had a response to that. Perhaps the Government will promote better pay through its tourism strategy.

Duncan McNeil said that we do not need campaigns from the Scottish Government; what we need is action. I hope that we will hear about that from the minister.

16:51

Alex Neil: This has been quite an interesting debate in a number of respects. I want to cover one or two things that members have asked me about.

The Government takes cognisance of the need to address rural poverty as well as urban poverty. A recent example of how we have done that is our introduction of a separate set of assumptions, which recognise the special circumstances in rural areas, for the allocation of housing association grant in relation to rural housing.

The carers strategy has been drafted and our strategic partner COSLA will consider it at its convention on 25 June.

Johann Lamont: Will the minister give way?

Alex Neil: I need to make progress.

It is therefore not true to say that no progress has been made.

The debate has been about poverty, of which there are three major causes in our society: high levels of unemployment, low incomes and poor housing. On high unemployment, I share Duncan McNeil's concerns about the Liberal Democrat Chief Secretary to the Treasury's decision to abolish the future jobs fund, which I think was a useful tool to see us through the recession and provided funding at a critical point.

Duncan McNeil: What representations have the minister, the Government or the First Minister made to the current UK Government with regard to that terrible decision?

Alex Neil: In nearly all our verbal and written communication with the new Government we are stressing the need to maintain every available weapon to safeguard employment, because we see that as the best way out of recession. It is critical to dealing not only with unemployment but with poverty.

I have to say that, listening to Labour members, one would not realise that they have just completed a 13-year period of government. The level of unemployment they have left in this country is among the highest in Europe and the level of youth unemployment under Labour was even higher than it was under Margaret Thatcher, so I do not think that Labour members are in a particularly strong position to criticise others in relation to unemployment.

It is clear that if people do not have an adequate income they are by definition living in poverty. I hope that the new coalition Government will tackle the regressive nature of much of the tax system.

I welcome the fact that capital gains tax will be equated more with levels of income tax—that is a

move in the right direction—but other taxes such as national insurance contributions are regressive, as those who are more highly paid pay a substantially lower percentage of their income than do the low paid.

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Neil: I will in a minute.

I am rather bemused by the fact that Mary Mulligan is proud that the living wage was in Labour's 2010 manifesto. It was in Labour's 1924 manifesto—I know that not because I remember it but because I have read my history. In the intervening period there have been 31 years of Labour government and yet it has not done anything about a living wage in any one of those years, so we will not take any lessons on that.

We should consider that the Labour-controlled North Lanarkshire Council is doing everything in its power to avoid having equal pay and single status for women. Labour's record on employment and dealing with low income has not been particularly proud in London, North Lanarkshire or elsewhere.

The third major driver of poverty is poor housing. That is why we have given such high priority to investment in social housing and why we have record investment and record starts and completions in social housing. It is not just because of the great need to produce more housing—

Mary Mulligan: Will the member give way?

Alex Neil: I will in a minute.

It is also the fact that housing investment creates and maintains jobs. We have, where we can, used community benefit clauses to ensure that local people benefit from the housing investment.

The Presiding Officer: We should have a bit less noise in the chamber, other than from the minister.

Alex Neil: That is a sentiment I share, Presiding Officer.

What I found most strange about Jeremy Purvis's contribution was that he did not mention his own amendment once. That is because he is calling on us to introduce a fairer pay policy. Has he not noticed, as the Lib Dem finance spokesperson, that we have already done that? We have already done everything we possibly can to ensure that people on the lowest wages are treated more fairly and to discourage bonuses for those at the higher levels, even when their contracts were signed by the Lib-Lab pact that was in power until 2007. We have already introduced a living wage in the health service and

we are spreading that to the whole of Government by August this year—something Labour and the Liberals did not do when they were in power.

We have heard that the council tax freeze is not helping poorer people. I ask the Liberal and Labour members who criticise the council tax freeze whether they realise that the minute someone earns £6,000 they have to pay the full council tax. Anyone who is earning £7,000, £8,000, £9,000 or £10,000 is by definition low paid. We are saving those people a fortune year in, year out with our council tax freeze. Yes, we wanted a local income tax—but the Labour Party, supported by some others, frustrated our efforts as a minority Government to deliver it. Then I hear from Johann Lamont, sent by the Scottish Labour Party to the Scottish Parliament to cheer up the nation, criticise us for not poverty-proofing our policies. When she was a minister, there was no poverty-proofing whatsoever.

The Presiding Officer: You must close, please, minister. [*Applause.*]

Alex Neil: Do I not get injury time, Presiding Officer?

The reality is that the difference between those on the Labour benches and us is that whereas we want to spend the money on housing, health and education, they want to spend it on Trident.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-6580.3, in the name of Michael Russell, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6580, in the name of Des McNulty, on schools, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

Against

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross)

(LD)

Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 49, Against 74, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6580.1, in the name of Elizabeth Smith, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6580, in the name of Des McNulty, on schools, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)

Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)

Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)

Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)

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

Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)

Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)

Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)

Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)

Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)

Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)

Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)

Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)

Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)

Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)

Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)

Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)

Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)

Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)

Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)

Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)

Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)

Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)

Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)

Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)

Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)

Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)

Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)

Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)

Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)

Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)

Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)

Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)

Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)

Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)

Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)

Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)

Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)

MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)

Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)

Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)

Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)

Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)

Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)

Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)

McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)

McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)

McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)

McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)

McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)

McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)

McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)

McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)

McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)

McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)

McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)

McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)

Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)

Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)

Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)

O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)

Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)

Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)

Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)

Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)

Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)

Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)

Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)

Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)

Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)

Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)

Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)

Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)

Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 16, Against 107, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6580.2, in the name of Margaret Smith, which also seeks to amend motion S3M-6580, in the name of Des McNulty, on schools, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)

Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

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

Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 47, Abstentions 2.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S3M-6580, in the name of Des McNulty, on schools, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)

Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

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

Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 47, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes with concern the reduction in the numbers of teachers and classroom assistants since 2007 and the sharp rise in the proportion of newly qualified teachers who cannot obtain permanent or even temporary employment; further notes the widespread disquiet that exists among teachers and parents over the lack of preparedness for implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence and, in particular, the lack of clarity over new qualification arrangements; recognises that the Curriculum for Excellence is a wide-ranging reform with significant resource implications; calls on the Scottish Government to reach an early agreement with local authorities and teachers organisations that guarantees the necessary preparation time and resources for successful implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence, and notes that the Scottish Government's package of education failures includes the abandonment of SNP election commitments to reduce class sizes in P1 to P3 to 18, dump student debt and match brick for brick the previous administration's school building programme.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6581.2, in the name of Johann Lamont, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6581, in the name of Alex Neil, on the poverty framework, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)

McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)

Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 45, Against 76, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6581.1, in the name of Jeremy Purvis, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6581, in the name of Alex Neil, on the poverty framework, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)

Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)

Abstentions

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)

Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 59, Against 1, Abstentions 63.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6581, in the name of Alex Neil, on the poverty framework, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)

Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)

Abstentions

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)

Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 60, Against 1, Abstentions 62.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the continuing approach set out in the Scottish Government's poverty and income inequality framework, Achieving our Potential, to take long-term measures to tackle drivers of poverty and income inequality in Scotland, to maximise the potential for people to work, to make work pay for those who can and to support those who cannot work and those who are experiencing poverty now; recognises the need to focus on those people and communities who experience longer-term persistent poverty; supports the need to streamline the welfare system while ensuring that reforms provide better protection for, and do not further disadvantage, vulnerable people, particularly in these challenging times, and believes that the Scottish Government should introduce a fairer pay policy that gives a real-terms pay increase to those on the lowest wages in the public sector while paying no bonuses to higher earning staff in 2010-11 and 2011-12.

Glasgow's Subway

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-6195, in the name of Pauline McNeill, on securing the future of Glasgow's subway.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes Strathclyde Partnership for Transport's decision to go ahead with its modernisation plan; recognises the important role that the subway plays in Glasgow's transport infrastructure and its significance to Scotland, carrying an estimated 14 million passengers annually; notes that this will be the first major investment project for the service since the 1970s, and hopes that the proposals receive the support that they need to go ahead and that the modernisation keeps Glasgow moving into the future.

17:09

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): Glasgow's subway, the clockwork orange, is Scotland's only underground and is the third-oldest subway in the world. It was built in just six years and was opened in 1896, powered by a sole steam boiler at Scotland Street. It is a unique feat of engineering. It is a much-loved form of transport—if only we could build more of them. Glaswegians have fond memories of the underground, and visitors are amused by the fact that missing a stop means waiting only a few more minutes before a train comes back round again.

Believe it or not, 69,000 people used the underground for the Pope's visit in 1982 in just one day, and that record still stands.

Figures show that 41 per cent of the people who use the subway come from outwith Glasgow—8 per cent of them are from the Stirling area and 7 per cent of them are from North Lanarkshire—so, arguably, it is a system that serves the whole of the country.

The 4ft track gauge and the 11ft tunnel are unique in the world. The first observation that people make about the subway is how small it is, and those unusual dimensions mean that the scope for upgrading it is limited. Sadly, it is now coming to the end of its life and it needs emergency treatment. It needs the Scottish Government to commit to the business plan that Strathclyde partnership for transport has put forward. It is time for those who want to save our subway from closure to focus on the way forward.

There are statutory obligations that are set by the rail regulator, with which SPT must ensure compliance. Its failure to do so will result in the planned closure of Glasgow's underground. Opting for the do-nothing option will have the effect of closing our subway, because it will not

meet the necessary standards. Costs would be attached to that. It would cost £35 million just to infill the tunnels, 1,100 jobs would be lost and there would be more cars on the road and more CO₂ emissions as a result.

The base case would involve modernising the underground's working practices but leaving the ageing technology, which would mean that the subsidy would continue to grow. That is not sustainable in the longer term. Modernisation is the way forward. I believe that the best approach would be to provide smart-card ticketing, new trains and new signalling, to make the stations more accessible and to increase patronage.

The Scottish Government has a duty to support the business case for modernisation. To make it all happen, £6 million of investment would need to be provided every year for 10 years. That would allow SPT to borrow to meet the costs of the project. The plan is modest and sensible, given what it can achieve. The investment would not even be needed in the earlier years of the project, but there must be a commitment to it in the Scottish budget.

Stuart Patrick of the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce said recently that the idea of taking away an existing piece of infrastructure that reduces car congestion in the city would be remarkably short-sighted. That is true, and I think that the public would be quite shocked if our Government presided over its closure.

All of us who rely on the underground have taken its existence for granted but, if we care about it, we must save its future by arguing for its modernisation. If the system is not modernised, the consequences for Glasgow's transport network will be fatal and our hopes for a 21st century transport network for 2014 will slip away.

The underground has been modernised only twice before, between 1935 and 1940 and between 1977 and 1980. There are statutory obligations that SPT must now comply with. If it were modernised and revamped, the subway, which carries 14 million or so passengers each year, could transport up to 18 million passengers by 2040, and it would deliver £280 million-worth of transport economic benefits.

I fully recognise the work that Transport Scotland is doing with SPT and Stewart Stevenson's commitment to consider the business plan, and I have been fully informed by SPT of the work that is in progress. I commend the work of Alistair Watson, the former chair of SPT, who has done an immense amount of work in progressing the proposal. I know from talking to SPT's chief executive yesterday that a programme of meetings with the Scottish Government has been organised to examine the issue in some detail. SPT has

been asked to put an answerable business case on the table and that is what it has done. I would be grateful if the minister could confirm that SPT will proceed with the project if the business plan is agreed and investment is provided.

SPT has already sourced £20 million to kick-start the modernisation process, of which Hillhead station in my constituency will be the beneficiary. It is expected to set the standard for the work on the other stations.

I have always voiced my support for Glasgow's underground and have consistently called for its operating hours to be extended. I believe that the modernisation programme would allow that to happen. I fail to see why the underground's ticket office closes at the same time as our shops close their doors on Sunday, at 6 pm. Moreover, people who want to travel after 11 pm cannot use the subway to get home.

A system that was built in 1896 and modernised substantially only in the 1970s deserves investment now. The subway is important not just to the city of Glasgow but to the whole of Scotland and to Scotland's economy. I hope that the Government will support the plan and provide the investment that is needed. I hope that the Government will confirm tonight that it will save the future of Glasgow's underground.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate, in which speeches will be of four minutes. Many members wish to speak, so I will need to stop members when they reach their four minutes.

17:15

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I thank Pauline McNeill for securing this important debate on the future of Glasgow's subway. Like many members, I have visited and used the subway many times. Indeed, I have walked the line on a Sunday night at 9 o'clock—I think that other members have done that, too.

We all agree that Glasgow's subway system desperately needs modernisation. It was built more than a century ago in the 1800s and its last major modernisation took place more than 30 years ago in the 1970s, as Pauline McNeill said. The subway is at risk of becoming seriously outdated if the problem is not addressed.

The subway has a major need for improvements, such as better access for disabled passengers. As members know, the subway does not have sufficient disabled lifts, which discourages many people from Glasgow and outside Glasgow from using public transport.

Improvements are needed across the board to deliver the Glasgow subway system into the

future. As members will agree, extending the subway's opening hours would greatly benefit the city. Closing the subway at 6 o'clock on a Sunday and at 11 pm during the week in a city such as Glasgow is unacceptable. Providing further public transport after 11.30 pm throughout the week and at weekends would be desirable and would serve as a safe option for members of the public who were returning home from socialising in the city centre.

Redevelopment is needed at stations such as St Georges Cross, whose platform extends for barely 4m. More frequent trains are needed in peak and off-peak times. As members will know, waiting times change drastically throughout the day from four minutes to more than 10 minutes. One day, I waited for 15 minutes at Partick for the next subway service, without notification of the delay at the station. The implementation of a smart card would boost the use of all public transport in the Glasgow area and would be most welcome.

All those measures can be implemented only if SPT is reformed from its foundations. That means no more lavish expenses for councillors' luxury trips and travel at a time when subway services are becoming worse. That situation has angered the people of Glasgow.

Reviving and improving the subway could bring benefits to Glasgow and improve inner-city transport, but SPT must be trusted to do the job. Openness and accountability must be SPT's top priority. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has a president and vice-presidents from different political parties and different local authorities. SPT must adopt such a stance if progress is to be made. It is not in the interests of democracy or the travelling public that only Labour councillors hold senior positions in SPT. SPT must be aware of that. I recognise that Pauline McNeill said that we must all work together, but SPT and Labour councillors must work with other authorities and other political parties to deliver a decent subway for all the people of Glasgow.

As I said, reform of SPT remains essential. At First Minister's question time on 25 February, the First Minister said:

"we will press SPT to reform itself ... if that reform does not materialise, we will consider amending the existing order that defines its constitution".—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2010; c 24033.]

Reform is needed in SPT and evidence of change is needed, instead of the mass spending that I mentioned on overseas restaurants and trips to European final football matches. I genuinely ask members to work together, but we cannot reward people who were given senior positions in SPT and who went on foreign trips. I will not name councillors, but some have been given further senior positions in the council.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member's time is up.

17:19

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): I add my congratulations to Pauline McNeill on securing the debate and on bringing this important subject to the chamber.

Those of us who remember the subway before its modernisation in the late 1970s will recall its distinctive smell—an earthy tang that was unique to the subway—and the shoogie that occurred on every journey because the seat backs were connected to the sides of the carriage while the rest of the seat was connected to the floor. Given that the sides of the carriage moved semi-independently from the floors, passengers were rocked backwards and forwards, sometimes in a fairly violent way. For children, that was part of the excitement, as was descending into an underground world that seemed—and was—dank and dark. Most of the carriages that were introduced in 1896 were still in use when the subway—or the underground, as I still think of it—was closed for renovation in 1977. Until then, smoking was allowed in the rear coach. It is little wonder that a journey on the underground felt like a trip back in time to Victorian Glasgow.

The modernisation of the subway in the 1970s was important, because it introduced brighter and more modern stations and trains, and it brought in safer working practices. The installation of tracks to the depot at Broomloan Road ended the need to remove trains from the tracks by crane, which ensured that the lengthy delays that had often occurred when trains broke down became a thing of the past.

Glasgow's subway is a great way to get around the city—the 14 million journeys that are made every year are testament to that—but there are problems. To someone who lives or works outwith the area of the subway, it is of limited use. Although park and ride seems like a great idea, the lack of a joined-up plan from the local authority and SPT means that controlled parking has been introduced around some of the subway stations in order to control commuter parking, with little account being taken of the needs of those who live in the vicinity of the stations. People who have disabilities or mobility problems must check ahead to ensure that they will be able to access the stations, because some do not have disabled access. The constraints of the system mean that wheelchairs and certain types of pram cannot be carried, which is a real throwback to the 19th century.

The physical geography of the city makes it expensive and difficult to extend the

underground's reach and the combination of hard rock and old mine workings makes for an interesting engineering challenge. As Pauline McNeill said, the width of the tunnels, at only 11ft, makes it difficult to operate additional trains. The gauge width of 4ft also limits the capacity of the system. Many of the stations are still the original model, often in built-up areas. That, too, contributes to the problem of making alterations that would allow everyone who wishes to use the subway to do so. As Pauline McNeill said, another problem that must be capable of resolution is that of Sunday operating times. I hope that future modernisation will address that issue.

If the Glasgow subway is to continue to be a major part of Glasgow's story and is not to be consigned to its history, major investment by the Scottish Government will be needed to secure its future. Make no mistake—without the subway, there would be gridlock across Glasgow city centre, which would, inevitably, spill over into surrounding road systems. That would be bad for business and bad for our environment.

SPT estimates that maintaining the current system would result in costs of £220 million in capital investment and £320 million in increasing maintenance and operating costs. Modernisation would involve a larger capital cost—in the region of £290 million—but a reduced maintenance cost of £100 million.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but I must stop the member.

17:23

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): As a resident of and frequent commuter in Glasgow, I begin by saying how much I value the Glasgow subway. The subway is an asset not just to our city's citizens, but to the many visitors who come to Glasgow from other Scottish local authorities for shopping or socialising, for our museums and parks, for architecture or for our range of festivals. The subway is a vital resource in ferrying not just Glaswegians, but fellow Scots across our city. Without it, both Glasgow and Scotland would be worse off, not just because of traffic and transport problems, but from an environmental perspective. There would be a significant impact on the quality of life for many people. There is also a thriving and growing tourism and conference market in Glasgow, which benefits the whole of Scotland and relies on Glasgow's subway.

The subway's importance is clear. However, more than 100 years on from its birth and around 30 years on from its previous modernisation, it is in need of some care and attention, and of some significant investment.

I was recently fortunate enough to take a tour of the subway tunnels from SPT, so at around midnight I was walking underneath the city, from Cowcaddens through to Buchanan Street and on towards St Enoch's. I was shown the challenges that the stresses and strains of near constant usage and old age present to Glasgow's subway.

Along with my colleague Anne McLaughlin, I met one of the nightshift teams that work unseen under the city's streets to ensure that the subway can operate the next day. They do a fantastic job as they attempt to battle constantly against corrosion, to replace existing parts and to battle the effects of severe water penetration in certain parts of the tunnels.

Looking at the challenges that face Glasgow's subway in the years ahead, I have to say that the situation provides a wake-up call for those who have so forcefully called for the Glasgow airport rail link to be reinstated. GARL was desirable—I said that it was a desirable project—but it was a non-essential addition to the west of Scotland's infrastructure. Let me be clear that the difference between the two is that Glasgow's subway is a vital and essential part of existing infrastructure. With GARL we cannot miss what we never had, but in the case of the subway we must value and invest in what we already have in order to secure it for future generations. That is the core of the Glasgow subway issue.

When I met senior officials to discuss the challenges and opportunities of subway modernisation, I met committed and passionate people. I have no reason to doubt their ability or their competence but, as it is part of the SPT family, I would not want the subway modernisation project to be tarnished with the persistent and serious concerns that exist over the culture and governance at the very top of SPT. I would clearly need significant reassurances that any public money that is spent during a period of public spending cuts that are unprecedented in modern times was being well used.

As a Glasgow MSP I must say that there is a lingering uncertainty and doubt over the culture that existed, and may still exist, within SPT. Let me say, however, that I pledge to work in partnership, across party affiliation and with SPT, to deliver a subway system that is well placed for the 21st century. Perhaps, rather than looking to SPT to leverage in cash, we need to consider alternative ownership options for the Glasgow subway system and thereby to free our subway system from the unwelcome shadow of the old SPT culture. Perhaps we have to think out of the box. Opposition parties sometimes demand cash that may not be there, but we must work together on this project across party-political lines and attempt to identify cash, which will—let us not kid

ourselves—be difficult, and leverage it in to safeguard Glasgow's subway for the future.

17:27

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): I, too, thank Pauline McNeill for bringing the issue before Parliament.

Like Patricia Ferguson, I have some nostalgia for the Glasgow subway. I travelled on it at least twice a day for many years when I commuted to and from school and latterly from my work. I also recollect the shoogle, which was once demonstrated to me by my physics teacher as being a particularly good example of the principle of moments in operation.

There is a serious aspect to the debate. The historical fact is that the subway is now 115 years old. We owe a lot to our Victorian forefathers who had the prescience to construct a transport system of that type—a type that was almost unique in the world at one stage. Unfortunately—perhaps they, too, had money problems in those days—no funding was available to expand the system beyond the city centre, which is a real pity, because underground transport, as we see in many European capitals, has been a substantial contributor to the attractiveness of cities such as Vienna and Paris.

However, we are where we are and, as the subway is suffering from all the accompanying ailments of old age, we must clearly do something to improve it. SPT has come forward with proposals that, at fairly significant cost, would upgrade the subway. Obviously—I am sure that the minister will underline this point—the business case for such investment must be robust. Of course, we will require to examine in the closest possible detail exactly what the business case is and how it can be justified, but I certainly think that there would be a unanimous view that we would all hope that the business case would stand up to the rigours of that examination and present a real way forward on what is, on one hand, a Glasgow institution and, on the other, a very important component of Glasgow's transport system.

As Patricia Ferguson does, I recall the 1970s revamp of the system, which resulted in its being closed for several years. The impact that that had in Glasgow was clearly apparent in traffic congestion, delays and the general hassle that the increase in surface transport caused.

The subway is particularly vital. It has the capacity to transport large numbers of people quickly and safely. Some 90,000 were transported in one day to accommodate the Pope's visit to Bellahouston park. Every second week or so, some 30,000 travel by subway to a locus not all that far away from Bellahouston park to attend a

football match, although I doubt that it is the same client base. Nevertheless, that is a classic illustration of how vital to Glasgow the subway system is.

I was interested in what Bob Doris had to say about the management and ownership of the subway. It must be the first time that I have heard him suggest that private ownership might be an available concept.

Bob Doris: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is not time.

Bill Aitken: We can advance the argument in the months ahead.

The debate is interesting. The subway is particularly important to Glasgow and I hope that we can resolve the situation to the benefit of the city.

17:31

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): This is an important debate, in which the minister's tone and the strength of his commitment in his response will be paid close attention. I pay tribute to Pauline McNeill for securing it.

The subway modernisation is essential; there is agreement about that across parties. As I and others have often said, it is difficult to imagine the congestion in Glasgow without the subway with which the foresight of our Victorian ancestors provided us.

There have been some false starts. A subway extension to the east was proposed at one point and was perhaps always a bit of a chimera. The question of whether the unique Toytown gauge of the railway could be altered with consequent longer-term revenue savings keeps coming up, but it is a non-starter because of the resultant and horrendously expensive consequence of having to widen the tunnels. As has been touched on, SPT has found its senior officials on the wrong end of its own expenses scandal—although we must be careful not to overegg that pudding. However, the scheme that SPT is developing seems to be realistic, cost effective and vital for the future of the network.

There is always caution and caveat as to whether large-scale public sector contracts will be value for money and whether the budget is sufficient, but that is a challenge to be overcome, not a reason for inaction. SPT's figures will, no doubt, be closely examined, but a modernisation with the potential to convert a total capital and revenue maintenance and support cost from £540 million over 30 years to one of £390 million

over the same period is attractive and ought, in principle, to be fundable.

A huge advantage of the subway—as with undergrounds and metros elsewhere—is that its principal stations come up at the centre of key shopping areas, such as Buchanan Street, St Enoch's, Byres Road or Govan Cross. A modernisation would have other opportunities; for example, the chance should be taken to make the stations more accessible to people with mobility problems. Patricia Ferguson touched on some of the challenges of that. Of course, it is not a cheap option, either.

There may also be a limited scope for re-examining the location and suitability of some stations and enlarging the station concourse at others, such as Buchanan Street. Again, the tunnel problem arises in that regard. The signposting of some stations might be improved, and I am told that improving train frequency ought not to be as challenging with a modernised system as it probably would be at present.

Above all, on a single-track system that goes two ways round a loop, there must be—with due regard to passenger safety—potential for automatic or driverless trains. Such a set-up exists in other places, for example the Vancouver skytrain, the Lille metroline and the London docklands light railway. The Copenhagen light metro, which serves the capital city of a country that is the same size as Scotland, is also driverless and operates with 22 stations on two routes. It also serves the airport and carries 50 million passengers, so it is rather bigger than ours. Incidentally, its trains run 24 hours a day, which raises another challenge for Glasgow, where it has long been an irritant that the subway closes too early.

The subway's modernisation is not a project on which the Government has a choice on whether to proceed. The Government has a choice on detail and, to a degree, on timing, but the minister must indicate today that he and his Government will be committed to the modernisation, will do whatever it takes to make that happen and will act with urgency to facilitate SPT in accessing the capital and any support that is necessary for the project to proceed.

Let me make one final point, if I may, on the question of how the work is to be funded. Within the umbrella of SPT's financing, it should be possible to find a mechanism to provide for the burden on central Government funding, other than perhaps some support funding to kick off the project. We must find that mechanism and make it work quickly because the longer the delay, the more the modernisation will cost us, and the more it will cost Glasgow not to go ahead with it.

This is an important debate, so I look forward to the minister's response.

17:35

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): I join others in congratulating Pauline McNeill on securing tonight's debate.

Being a Glaswegian, I love our subway. For those who have not had the privilege of being born in Glasgow, I should explain that "subway" is the Glasgow name for the underground. I still remember and like the aroma that the traveller catches on alighting down the stairs on the central platform of the Glasgow subway. The smell is hard to describe, but it would be unmistakable even if a person was blindfolded and led into the subway without knowing. Therefore, my speech on the motion is delivered with my passion for, and fond memories of, the Glasgow subway.

Although the subway is, at 130 years old, the third-oldest such system in the world, one might have expected that the basic routes—or, more accurately, the route—would have been extended. Sadly, that is not the case—not a single metre has been added over the long time in which the subway has been in existence. Although no expansion has taken place, the population that the original system was designed to cater for has changed significantly. Many of those in the communities that benefited from being served by a station were moved into the schemes on the outskirts of Glasgow or into the new towns and villages outside Glasgow such as—to name but a few—Bearsden, Milngavie and Bishopbriggs. They were moved even as far away as Cumbernauld. In my view, we have an underground system that did not travel with its customers or extend to where people now live.

By contrast, other countries not only extended their 20th century infrastructure but, starting from scratch in the 21st century, have built what can only be described as magnificent underground systems that travel hundreds of miles, rather than just the few miles that the Glasgow underground covers. I am genuinely interested in underground systems and have boarded underground trains in countries ranging from Chile to China. Over many years, we have heard hundreds of excuses as to why we cannot, or should not, expand the Glasgow underground. One lame excuse is that the solid-rock formations prevent any expansion. Apparently, solid-rock seems to stop expansion only in Scotland, whereas in other countries it is seen as a benefit to the stability of the engineering project, which seems to be kind of strange.

I wish our subway—my subway—well, but I fear for its long-term future if we do not bite the bullet and meaningfully grow the system to reach out to

the customer base that was lost so many years ago. We might lose forever that wonderful smell of the Glasgow subway.

17:39

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Like others, I add my thanks and welcome to Pauline McNeill for lodging the motion. I apologise for having added my name to the motion only today at this late stage, but she can be assured of my support.

Pauline McNeill and other members have mentioned the affection in which the Glasgow subway is held, so let me just ponder the roots of why the system is held in such affection. My memories of the subway go back only to around the time following the 1970s refurbishment. As a poorly child, I was frequently taken into Glasgow to attend Yorkhill hospital, so the little bit of the journey that went from Partick to the subway station at Kelvinhall and back again was always a bit of highlight.

Whenever I was taken into Glasgow as a child, I always looked forward to that ride on the subway. Part of the reason why we have these feelings about the subway is to do with some of its shortcomings. The fact that it is just one little loop is kind of charming—it is charmingly modest. The small size of the rolling stock is also a problem in some ways. It makes new rolling stock hard to find and more expensive to procure, as the SPT report suggests, but it also increases the affection that we feel for it. Again, the vehicles are kind of charming. Far be it from me to suggest that everything that is small in size is big on charm, but there is something in that.

That affection is strong, but many people who use the subway are increasingly aware that the system has seen better days and desperately needs investment. As Robert Brown would, I would love it if we could replace what we have with something like the Copenhagen system, but let us be realistic; that would not be modernisation. To achieve that kind of system, we would have to rip it out and start again, and we would have to spend much more substantial amounts of money. I would love it if we could do that, but while the political landscape is still committed to spending billions on the road building programme instead of on public transport, I am not hopeful that we will get that sort of commitment. I am, however, hopeful that we can get the proposed modernisation programme approved. For years, Glasgow's public transport has lost out to the road building programme that takes up the bulk of capital spending, and has seen the cancellation of the Glasgow airport rail link, which Scottish National Party members said was a vital part of the future of the west of Scotland's transport system, while crossrail is still struggling to gain the

backing that it deserves from a Government of any complexion.

There are positive points to welcome in the proposal, certainly around the refurbishment of rolling stock and stations, integrated ticketing and improvements in accessibility, which is something that we need to achieve. We could go further, even within the limitations that we face. The project ought to consider energy. An underground infrastructure should be able to pump energy up to the buildings on the surface. Heat-pump technology could be an environmental benefit and a source of revenue to the owners and operators of the subway. Improvements to passenger comfort and services such as wi-fi should be cheap, easy and relatively simple to do in a small system.

Ultimately, I would like to see the system expanded, extended, and integrated with cycle routes and so on. If that kind of money and political backing is going to be available, it will require Scottish Government recognition that Glasgow's subway is nationally important. That is long overdue, and I look for the minister to confirm that tonight.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: At this point I am prepared to accept a motion without notice to extend the debate by up to 10 minutes to complete business

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 10 minutes.—[Pauline McNeill.]

Motion agreed to.

17:43

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): I congratulate Pauline McNeill on organising this debate on the Glasgow subway. In 1930, the authorities changed the name from Glasgow subway when it moved from a cable-hauled system to an electric system. The name was changed to call it the Glasgow underground and my parents and thousands of other Glaswegians insisted on continuing to call it the subway. SPT changed the official name back about 10 years ago.

As a previous chair of Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority, I was involved in the centenary celebrations of the subway in 1996, so I am well aware of the store of good will in the city towards the subway. However, no one owes the Glasgow subway a living.

The minister likes to tell us facts, and I am sure that he is well aware that, on the Glasgow subway, the outer circle runs clockwise and the inner circle runs anticlockwise. Perhaps he can tell us whether he has travelled on the Glasgow subway lately.

I recall travelling on the subway before the 1979 modernisation in the same wooden carriages from the cable-haul days of 1896, which incredibly included brass match-strikers for smokers. How times have changed. It is the same with the 1979 modernisation: the subway is now looking tired, and another more radical modernisation is required.

SPT, the subway's operator, has a modernisation plan under which patronage could rise from 14 million trips a year to 18 million by 2040. There would be capital costs at today's prices of around £290 million for that scheme, and I understand that SPT is seeking Scottish Government revenue contributions to service loan debt of around £6 million to £8 million a year for 10 years. Given the undoubted constraints on the Scottish Government's capital budget for transport, those requested revenue contributions sound like potentially good leverage, and I hope and trust that the minister is giving them serious consideration.

The modernisation must be future proofed. Not long after the 1979 modernisation, the then Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive installed a huge-capacity fibre optic cable in the subway tunnels, not just to service the signalling and telecommunications system but with enough spare capacity so that the broadband is still used today, by the universities, for example. That is an example of joined-up thinking and future proofing that could stand us in good stead in the future, for virtually any and all transport projects.

The modernisation thus far is supported by 20—now 21—MSPs who have signed Pauline McNeill's motion. They are drawn from four political parties, and Glasgow's sole Tory has now put his cards on the table, probably because the subway serves his beloved Firhill. I console Patrick Harvie by agreeing that size does not necessarily matter.

In December 2006, in the *Evening Times*, Nicola Sturgeon said:

"We want to deliver fresh ideas to build a transport system fit for the 21st century; not an antiquated out of date public transport network."

I trust that, if the minister makes a grant to SPT for modernising the Glasgow subway, he will consider whether he seriously wants to make it a condition that SPT's statutory governance arrangements must be changed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the member's time is up.

17:47

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Let me first declare an interest as president of the Scottish Association for Public

Transport, and let me thank Pauline McNeill for lodging the motion.

I want to hear something for another rather unknown Scottish inventor. Who here has heard of Andrew Hallidie, who lived from 1836 to 1900? He was from a Dumfriesshire family who settled in the United States, and he pioneered steel wire rope. Not only that, he installed the cable haulage on probably the most famous trams in the world: the ones that go up and down the hills in San Francisco. Under his patent, the Glasgow subway was started in 1896. The technology was supposed to be used on the first London tube lines, but London went for electric traction from the beginning. London therefore had the first electric tube lines; Glasgow did not follow until the 1930s.

Unfortunately—this must be acknowledged—the transatlantic importations, which at one level gave us the Glasgow subway, must be seen against another example. Almost the first electric urban railway in Britain was the Liverpool overhead railway, which was started in 1890 and was electric hauled from the start. With the changes in the docks, it fell out of use and was completely demolished and scrapped in 1956. That could so easily have been the fate of the Glasgow system, but the fact that it is underground means that the remarkable coaches were preserved, almost like dinosaur eggs, right up until they were modernised in the 1970s.

Of course, the subway has an unfortunate nickname—the clockwork orange. Anyone who has seen the tremendously brutal film of that name will not warm to that description.

We should remember that undergrounds can be closed. There lies under the centre of London the once very useful post office electric railway, which has not seen a train for the past four years or so, although it is still preserved, like a sort of engineering sleeping beauty.

When Glasgow launched its motorway programme in the 1960s, many of the communities that depended on the subway were banished throughout the west of Scotland, as Gil Paterson said. Further, the high rises, which would have fed down to the subway, were a system of building that did not survive very long.

That leaves us in an awkward position, because we have just seen another Scottish invention, deep-sea drilling by positioning, run BP into terrible problems in the Gulf of Mexico. Although the technology enabled people to drill at depths of 1.5km under the sea, no one had a plan B for what to do with something went wrong. That is an illustration of how our desperate desire for oil is going to land us quite literally in deeper and deeper water.

The price of oil at the moment is \$77 a barrel. It is likely that, within 10 years, it will be more than \$200. That means that we ought to take advantage of the sort of low-carbon technology that we already have in place in, for example, the Glasgow underground.

I do not think that I can comment about what Bill Aitken said about privatisation. However, I point out that it does not seem to have been terribly successful in London, where all the privatised public transport is now back in public ownership.

It is important that we take action to retain the valuable utility that we are discussing tonight.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should conclude on that point, Mr Harvie.

17:51

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): It is true that we are discussing the clockwork orange, but this one is a little less toxic than the cinematic version. It is clear that members throughout the chamber are deeply in love with this little toy train in Glasgow.

For Charlie Gordon's benefit, I say that, as a minister, I have travelled on Glasgow's subway on a number of occasions. Indeed, I travelled by train from Edinburgh to Glasgow Queen Street station and then by subway, wearing my dicky bow tie and full evening gear, to speak at a dinner in Glasgow, and I returned by the same method, without more than 60 or so Glaswegians attempting to make fun of my garb. That is less than the usual number, but people in Glasgow are gallus, engaging and very distinctive, and we can apply that description equally to the Glasgow underground.

Pauline McNeill referred to the record number of 69,000 people who used the underground during the last papal visit. I have seen that we are going to have to find parking for nearly 1,600 buses for the next one, and that is only the first indication of the issues that will engage Glasgow police, Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government during the months of preparation for the papal visit in September.

Pauline McNeill also talked about the modernisation of working practices, and it might be worth making the point to Robert Brown that no one drives the trains in the subway. The people who are at the front of the trains are there simply to open and close the doors. However, there are successful examples of improving and modernising working practices.

Pauline McNeill referred to a request from SPT for £6 million a year from the Government for 10 years to pay the interest on the money for the

modernisation work. I should point out that, during our discussions, it emerged that the necessary funding would be £6 million a year for 30 years. However, we should not place too much emphasis on that as an inhibitor to making progress.

The issue of the operating hours of the subway was referred to by a number of members.

Sandra White referred to the need for a smart card system. I have talked to SPT about that. We are already using the international ITSO standard for the card for the bus concession scheme. We are extending its use, and it is being used in the smart card pilot on the ScotRail system between Edinburgh and Glasgow. I recently wrote to one of my opposite numbers at Westminster who is engaged with the subject of smart cards, and I suggested that the logical thing to do would be to adopt what is an international standard and a card that is capable of carrying a significant number of different services. For example, the card could be a library card for local authorities. Indeed, it could carry commercial services, as well as enable people to access and pay for public services. There is momentum behind that.

Patricia Ferguson quite astonished me, I have to say. She is wearing much better than I thought she was. I did not realise that she was old enough to remember the previous system. She is wearing her years well. I am afraid that, although I am pretty confident that I am substantially in advance of her in years, I came to the subway post its modernisation 30 years ago.

Patricia Ferguson: I point out to the minister that I did mention that I found the subway interesting as a child.

Stewart Stevenson: Indeed. No discourtesy of any kind was intended. Anything that I said was meant to be a compliment rather than a discourtesy. I ask the member to be absolutely confident about that.

Bob Doris talked about the tourist and conference market and made an interesting point. When most of us go to a strange city, we sniff out the local transport options, because we tend not to have taken a car with us. We tend to travel by public transport, whereas at home things might be different. Bob Doris said—I paraphrase—that the subway needs TLC. I wish that I had had an opportunity to walk through the tunnels at midnight. I hope that somebody is listening. You never know. There is probably a gap in my diary somewhere.

Pauline McNeill: It could be arranged.

Stewart Stevenson: Yes—I have a suspicion.

Bob Doris also mentioned governance issues at SPT. I will not say much about that. Whatever concerns we have about that, I think that we can

successfully detach the subject of the subway from any governance issues that remain to be dealt with. We will, of course, keep an eye on them.

I am slightly cautious about alternative ownership options, because I am conscious that, in changing the ownership structure of our ferry companies, we incurred a substantial tax bill when we transferred assets from one company to another. My memory is that the bill was of the order of £11 million. Although there is something to be looked at there, we need to be cautious and ensure that we get value for money.

Bill Aitken had his schoolboy reminiscences as well, and talked about mathematics, which is a subject that is relatively close to my heart.

Robert Brown made the important point that the Government has a role in facilitating SPT's access to capital while not creating an unnecessary burden on central Government. That is exactly the kind of engagement that we are having with the subway. It might often just be a question of guarantors or the visibility of Government engagement—we will see.

Gil Paterson loves our subway. I hope that he loves other people as well. Patrick Harvie correctly pointed to the distinctiveness of the Glasgow subway, which creates its charm. Charlie Gordon pointed to the thrown nature of the Glaswegians who would not give up the name that they treasured. Fibre optic technology is, of course, important. Christopher Harvie bravely navigated away from the subject several times but always came back. I admire that utterly.

It is too early for the Government to give a commitment to support the project financially, but I assure members that we will continue to work closely with SPT to ensure that all the options have been explored on financing, on the technical issues and on the best way in which to deliver and manage Glasgow's subway, so that it can continue for a long time to come to provide a vital transport service to Glasgow, the west of Scotland and people from further afield.

Meeting closed at 17:59.

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