



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 3 June 2010

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 3 June 2010

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

National Health Service

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-6469, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on the national health service.

09:15

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Three weeks ago, we came to the Parliament to debate the NHS quality strategy against an emerging backdrop of cuts being made to front-line services in the NHS. This week, the Labour Party seems to be the only main Opposition party that wants to hold the Scottish Government to account for its cuts to the NHS—cuts that are made in Scotland by the Scottish National Party.

I am sure that we all recall with a degree of fondness the SNP's election slogan: "More Nats, less cuts." It did not really work for the SNP then and it sounds pretty hollow now. It is perhaps more a case of more nats, fewer nurses. The hypocrisy of their claiming to protect front-line services on the one hand while, on the other, presiding over the worst cuts since the advent of devolution is breathtaking and hugely disappointing. Cuts to the numbers of doctors, nurses, midwives and physiotherapists—all involved in providing front-line services—are only some of the cuts proposed.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Jackie Baillie on having a grammatically correct slogan, in contrast to the Scottish National Party. I ask her to tell us, so that I can properly follow her line of argument, whether the Labour Party's position is that the NHS in Scotland is underfunded. If it is, by how much is it underfunded?

Jackie Baillie: No, that is not the case at all. As I develop some of the arguments on finance, perhaps Nicola Sturgeon will realise that she has less of a share of the Scottish budget than she deserves and requires.

I will take members through the arguments about how the finance stacks up, but I will first rehearse some of the emerging numbers on doctors, nurses and midwives. I am not, as the Tories would claim, fixated by numbers, but we need to understand the scale and likely impact of sweeping job reductions. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde intends to cut 1,252 posts from its

workforce. More than half of them are nurses. NHS Lothian reports that more than 700 jobs are to go this year alone and that the total will be 2,000 next year. More than half of them will be nurses. In NHS Tayside, 588 jobs are to go. In NHS Grampian, it is almost 600 and in NHS Highland just over 100. NHS Lanarkshire, NHS Ayrshire and Arran, NHS Forth Valley, NHS Fife and NHS Borders all plan reductions. As many as 5,000 jobs may go in this year alone.

At least the comment in NHS Grampian's workforce plan is refreshingly honest:

"It is recognised that there is a risk that such changes to the workforce will bring with them a significant impact to the continued provision of services at current levels. It is unclear how the organisation will be able to maintain the achievement of certain standards and, in some situations, this could lead to a reduced service."

Let me put that more simply: it will have an impact on front-line services. The standards that NHS Grampian may not achieve relate to cancer, cleanliness and the care of newborn children. It is, therefore, critical that all the NHS workforce plans be published.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing spent much of yesterday phoning the trade unions and offering them a new partnership forum in which to examine the details of the workforce plans. She was, apparently, not happy with some of those plans, and I understand why. I also understand from a Scottish Government response to the Scottish Parliament information centre that it is up to NHS boards to publish their workforce plans and that that could take up to October.

Therefore, I am delighted that the cabinet secretary appears to have agreed to publish in the next day or so—let me get this right—the data relating to the plans, which effectively amounts to the same thing as the plans. I called for that three weeks ago and have called for it on various occasions since. Nothing short of full publication of workforce plans for this year and indicative plans for next year will do. Some boards even have three-year plans. However, I am disappointed that the cabinet secretary decided to act only yesterday when faced with the Labour motion on NHS cuts.

Leaving aside the timing, I also welcome the opportunity for the trade unions to have a direct influence on the workforce planning, sitting round the table with the cabinet secretary. That is as it should be, and I commend her for that. However, I regret that it appears that one of the SNP press team went on to spin the message to the media that the trade unions had signed up and were comfortable, the implication being that they accepted that the job cuts were inevitable. That, of course, is simply not true: the trade unions were

clear yesterday that they are opposed to job cuts and remain opposed to them.

Although I am pleased that the cabinet secretary is responding to Labour's call for transparency, she must be aware that her response cannot be a short-term political fix to get her out of a tricky debate. We now expect to see results and real, substantive changes to health board plans. Does the cabinet secretary have the final sign-off of the plans or are they ultimately for boards to determine? She has never shirked her responsibility and I respect her for that. She regularly tells us that the buck stops with her. I applaud that approach, but do the health boards understand it?

For Murdo Fraser, I will turn to money—it is never far from our minds. There is no doubt that we face real economic challenges and a tightening of future budgets. That should exercise us all, but the SNP must stop indulging in its usual fantasy economics and be honest with members for a change.

Let us talk facts about finance. Fact 1 is that the Scottish budget has an extra almost £1 billion on top of last year's money. That is an increase, not a cut, but let us not allow the facts to stand in the way of a good story. Fact 2 concerns the budget allocation to health. The cabinet secretary tells us that there is £264 million extra on the health budget line, but does not tell us that that is the lowest settlement made to the NHS in Scotland since the days of the Tories.

On fact 3, I must apologise to members because I said three weeks ago that the £264 million extra represented a real-terms increase of only 0.1 per cent. I got that wrong. It appears that I was being overgenerous. According to figures from SPICe—who will explain the matter to members far better than I can—there is a rounding effect in the overall budget figures, which means that the increase in the health budget is less and the real-terms figure is a decrease of 0.4 per cent. Is that complicated? Absolutely. However, to put it simply, the £264 million represents not a 0.1 per cent increase in the health budget but a 0.4 per cent decrease. I am grateful to SPICe for putting me right. Imagine thinking that there had been an increase—albeit one of tiny proportions—when the reverse was the case. That happened at a time when the budget for the NHS in England was rising by 4 per cent. Labour's record is much better than the SNP's.

The savings that were outlined to the Health and Sport Committee were described as efficiencies. Health boards have to achieve those so-called efficiency savings, which are already assumed in the budget allocation. Perhaps the cabinet secretary would listen instead of shouting at Duncan McNeil, because those efficiencies are

actually cuts. There must be no more pretending; let us call a spade a spade.

The SNP promised that there would be more staff in the NHS at the end of this parliamentary session than when Labour left office in 2007. To be frank, that promise does not amount to much. Let us look at the facts again. Fact 1: the SNP's claim of 10,000 extra staff is taken from the public sector employment survey; it is perhaps interesting to note that, according to information from SPICe, that figure was not provided in briefings from civil servants to ministers. Fact 2: the whole-time equivalent figure—that is, the actual number of full-time posts—is 8,200. Fact 3: if we take out the year for which the previous Labour-Liberal Administration budgeted, the actual number of extra whole-time equivalent posts under the SNP is 5,100. The maths ability of members is not so strained that we do not realise that subtracting 5,000 cuts from 5,100 posts gives us precisely 100 more posts. Surely the SNP promise is not achieved by this appalling sleight of hand.

However, that rather misses the point. One has to assume that the extra staff were necessary to cope with rising demand. Indeed, the NHS is treating more patients than ever before. One wonders whether, if we remove that additional capacity, it will inevitably have a detrimental impact on patient care. Is the cabinet secretary suggesting that those posts are all unnecessary? Can she tell the chamber how many she will cut, and will she guarantee that none of them will be from front-line services? We have another SNP promise, but we do not need to wait for the SNP Government to break it, as it does not amount to very much to start with. I am disappointed, as this appears to take Government cynicism to a new level.

There is more. It is not just the number of posts that will go through redundancy; there are proposals to review the skills mix, freeze vacant posts and reduce hours. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde plans to replace almost 400 registered nurses and midwives with half the number of nursing assistants. Let me be clear that having an appropriate skills mix in any team is always welcome, but that is not the issue. This is substitution—nothing more, nothing less. Glasgow is not alone: Highland, Grampian, Fife, Forth Valley—the list goes on.

What is the impact on front-line services? In the previous debate I gave examples of some of the services that will be cut or altered. In NHS Lanarkshire we have seen the cancellation of the 130-bed acute mental health facility, the removal of podiatry services and the halving of the number of smoking cessation staff. That is a matter of much regret, but emerging in Glasgow is another reduction, this time in the number of beds.

Members know that there have been changes in how patients are treated and that services are consequently redesigned, but that is not what is going on there. It is a straight reduction to save money.

I will share with the chamber details of e-mails that were sent to me both last week and this. I have been told by a group of consultants in Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board, who are unanimous in their view, that the impact on patient services will be “drastic”—their word, not mine. There was also a matter of fact statement that beds across NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde are being reduced by 20 per cent, and a senior surgeon is reported to have said:

“I’ll be very surprised if patients’ operations aren’t cancelled just before surgery”.

I understand that the figure of 20 per cent has been denied, but that the health board has admitted that it will be 5 per cent. That is about 350 beds.

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

Jackie Baillie: No, I am running out of time.

I am concerned that the consultants, who are operating on the front line, are saying that the reduction in beds is a lot more. Who are we to believe—the health board or the consultants?

As I said, last week the consultants said that surgery would be cancelled; this week I have been contacted by two constituents, one of whom had their surgery cancelled with less than four hours to go. The constituent was told that it was human error and that there were too many admissions, and she was told that the surgery might be postponed to July or August. It was not about the availability of the surgeon; it was about beds. Today she got a call with a date for next week—she is mightily relieved because she is actually quite ill. However, it is not as simple as that, as she needs to phone the hospital at 5.30 am to check that a bed is still available; otherwise she need not come in. It is a problem with getting a bed.

That is only one recent illustration of the situation, but I am conscious of time.

These are the consequences of the real cuts that the SNP is making to the NHS. It will seek to transfer the blame to others, as is ever its way, but it is responsible. The SNP promised to protect front-line services, but on the evidence so far I regret to say that it has failed. We cannot have the kind of hypocrisy that allows the SNP on the one hand to promise to protect front-line services but on the other to preside over cutting nurses. This really is a case of more nats and fewer nurses, and I suspect that the people of Scotland would

prefer fewer nats and more nurses. That is a view that I share.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with concern emerging details of workforce projections submitted by NHS boards at the request of the Scottish Government; notes that thousands of posts are proposed to be cut across the NHS in Scotland and that these include frontline staff such as nurses, midwives and allied health professionals; further notes that job and service cuts are taking place in this financial year when the overall Scottish budget has increased by almost £1 billion; believes that such a loss of frontline posts will inevitably have a detrimental impact on patient care, and therefore calls on the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing to publish the workforce projections immediately and intervene urgently to prevent cuts to frontline NHS services.

09:29

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I welcome the debate because it gives me a chance to state again that the NHS is a top priority for this Government. That is evident in the decision that we took this year to give the NHS a real-terms increase in funding despite the fact of a real-terms cut in the overall Scottish budget amounting to £500 million.

Our commitment to the NHS will also be evident in the decisions that we take in future. The new coalition Government has promised real-terms increases for the NHS and that is welcome. If that commitment is honoured, we will ensure that every single penny of the resulting Barnett consequential is applied to the NHS in Scotland. That is the strength of our commitment to the NHS.

Let us contrast that with Labour, whose demand for more money for the NHS now that it is in opposition is staggering in its hypocrisy. Let us remind ourselves of what Labour said when it was still in government. On 10 April 2007, Jack McConnell said that, if Labour won the election, education would get all the extra spending and other departments—including the NHS—would have to “cut their cloth” accordingly. If Labour had won the election and Jack McConnell had continued as First Minister, the NHS would have had less money, not more.

Jackie Baillie: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: No, thanks. Not just now.

That was before we had Alistair Darling promising cuts “deeper and tougher” than Margaret Thatcher’s.

Today, we have Jackie Baillie, again with breathtaking hypocrisy, talking about bed numbers in Glasgow. Putting to one side for the moment the

fact that she is downright wrong in her assertion and even the fact that 2009 was the first year in a decade when the number of beds across Scotland actually increased, let us look at this key fact: between 2000 and 2007—under Labour, in case Labour members have forgotten—bed numbers in Glasgow reduced by 2,030. Jackie Baillie is therefore right about a 20 per cent reduction in bed numbers; unfortunately for her, it happened under Labour and not the SNP. That is the reality of Labour on the NHS, and that is why I will take no lessons from Labour members on standing up for the NHS.

We will protect the NHS, but let us talk reality. Even with that commitment in this and future years, NHS budgets, just like everybody else's budgets, are tight and will continue to be tight for the foreseeable future. Let us be clear about one thing: that is a direct result of the economic and financial mess presided over by the previous Labour Government.

The job of this Scottish Government, and my job as health secretary, is quite simple. It is to ensure that the NHS manages the financial challenges that it faces in a responsible way, without compromising the quality of patient care, and to ensure that it takes the right decisions now to secure the sustainability of its services. That is the responsibility of government. It is tougher than opposition, but it is a responsibility that I will not shirk from.

In recent years, NHS boards have been challenged to deliver services more efficiently and they have done so. Over the past three years, the NHS has secured £537 million in efficiency savings, every single penny of which has been reinvested in front-line care. That commitment to reinvest efficiency savings continues this year.

The drive to deliver services more efficiently involves looking at staffing requirements, and this year, as in all years, NHS boards have been producing workforce projections. The projections of some boards have already been shared with area partnership forums locally and are in the public domain—they are Glasgow, Lothian, Grampian, Tayside and Highland, together totalling reductions of approximately 3,100. I have asked the chief statistician today to publish on the Scottish Government website the workforce projections of those and all other NHS boards, and they are now available in SPICe. The remaining 17 boards that I have not already mentioned are between them projecting a net reduction in posts of 624 this year.

Let me make it clear that all the projections are subject to on-going discussion with unions locally. They are not set in stone. I expect boards to maintain a downward pressure on reductions by working hard to maximise non-workforce-related

efficiencies. I also want to make it clear that I expect local partnership discussions about how efficiency savings targets are to be achieved to be genuine, robust and meaningful.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): As that work proceeds, will the cabinet secretary confirm that health boards will be able to retain the 2 per cent efficiency savings next year, too?

Nicola Sturgeon: We have made it clear that we want boards to retain efficiency savings. We will decide on future years once we know the budget for future years. Our commitment to the NHS is beyond doubt. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: In scrutinising the workforce projections that boards have submitted, I have insisted on three key guarantees. First, I have made it clear to boards that staff efficiencies must not compromise the quality of care. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. Would members mind not debating among themselves across the chamber, please? The person who should be speaking is the person who is on their feet.

Nicola Sturgeon: NHS boards have a responsibility to demonstrate that efficiencies can be achieved by service redesign, by advances such as increasing day-case rates and by greater productivity. I hope that we all welcome and encourage that.

To ensure that the commitment to quality is delivered in practice, I am establishing a national scrutiny group—to which Jackie Baillie referred—that will comprise unions, NHS employers and the Scottish Government. The group will subject board workforce plans to on-going scrutiny to ensure that they are the result of genuine partnership working and that they do not impact adversely on the quality of patient care. The group will liaise closely with local area partnership forums and will raise concerns with the Scottish partnership forum and directly with me.

Jackie Baillie: I repeat my question. Does the responsibility for signing off workforce plans fall ultimately to the cabinet secretary or is it a matter for health boards?

Nicola Sturgeon: As Jackie Baillie should know if she looks at these things, we operate through partnership working, discussion and dialogue in the NHS. The scrutiny group's detailed remit and operation will be finalised shortly, but I am pleased to say that the main NHS trade unions—Unison, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Midwives, Unite and the British Medical Association—have all welcomed the group and agreed to participate.

The second guarantee that I have given, and I repeat it today, is that there will be no compulsory redundancies in the health service—no one in the NHS will lose their job and any Opposition politician who suggests otherwise is doing a disservice to those who work hard in our NHS.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Grampian Health Board is to make redundant or not fill vacancies in 500 posts, so that is completely unplanned—the board has no idea where the vacancies will arise. From a human resources and management point of view, that will not work.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am not sure whether Mike Rumbles advocates a policy of compulsory redundancies—if so, the Government disagrees with that. The commitment to no compulsory redundancies gives NHS staff job security that few others—certainly no one in the private sector and few in the public sector—enjoy in the current economic climate, but those who work in the NHS thoroughly deserve that job security.

The third guarantee that I give—to which Jackie Baillie should listen carefully—is that more people will be working in the NHS at the end of this parliamentary session than at its start. That is another example of the Government's commitment to the national health service.

Most reasonable people—I accept that that does not include all Labour members—are understandably concerned about the financial climate's impact on public services, but they will welcome the guarantees that I have given and our commitment to guiding the NHS through difficult times in a responsible and managed way. Labour's approach of sitting on the sidelines and shouting "cuts" is not only hypocritical in the extreme but insulting to the Scottish public's intelligence.

The public know the reality of Labour's financial legacy. The public know that we are dealing with Labour's mess. Labour members' refusal to accept the reality of the situation and their determination to bury their heads in the sand—compounded by their daily calls for even more spending—are not clever politics, regardless of what they think. That is just another reminder that Labour is a party with no economic or financial credibility or competence whatever. Labour is showing itself to be barely fit for opposition, let alone government.

Any position of responsibility in the NHS is tough—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: Such a position is tough in the best of times and tougher still in difficult times. However, my commitment to the NHS, to those who work in it and to the services that it provides

means that I have a duty to support the NHS in facing up to these difficult times and to ensure that it is in a fit state to weather the financial storms that lie ahead. That is exactly what I as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing intend to do.

I move amendment S3M-6469.1, to leave out from "with concern" to end and insert:

"the real-terms increase for the NHS budget in 2010-11 despite the previous UK administration cutting the Scottish Government budget by £500 million; notes the commitment by the new UK coalition government to real-terms increases in the NHS budget in future years and agrees that all resultant Barnett consequential should be applied to the NHS in Scotland; understands that, notwithstanding the above, NHS budgets are tight as a result of Labour's economic mismanagement and that all NHS boards require to deliver services more efficiently, but welcomes the commitment that quality of patient care will be the paramount consideration, that there will be no compulsory redundancies in the NHS and that there will be more staff in the NHS at the end of this parliamentary term than there were when Labour left office in 2007."

09:40

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I agree with Nicola Sturgeon. What has been laid bare this morning is what will for the next 11 months undoubtedly be the Labour Party's line of attack on the SNP Government and—when it fits better—on the parties of the United Kingdom coalition Government. The line is to raise the spectre of cuts in the NHS and elsewhere and to try to lay the blame for them at the door of the Scottish Government or the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties as it so fits. That is a deeply dishonest line of attack with which we should have no truck.

After listening to Jackie Baillie setting out the case for the prosecution, I fear that she has watched too many screen adaptations of John Grisham novels. Picture the scene in a crowded courtroom in a hot southern US state: Jackie Baillie is the dogged district attorney, in the Susan Sarandon role, and Nicola Sturgeon is cast as Sandra Bullock playing the sparky young defence attorney. Sadly for the prosecution, its case is full of holes and the jury of the Scottish people is unlikely to be convinced.

The argument that Labour sets out in its motion is that cuts are being made to the NHS, that they will have a detrimental impact on patient care and that the cabinet secretary should intervene urgently to prevent them. The motion's subtext, which is not made explicit, is that the cuts result from NHS budget cuts. It is curious that, when I intervened to press Jackie Baillie on the point, she denied that the Labour case was that the overall NHS budget had been cut; she was less convincing later in her speech. I am now altogether confused about what Labour blames the cuts on—is it management in the NHS or cuts

in the overall budget? If Jackie Baillie would like to intervene to provide clarity, I would be delighted.

Jackie Baillie: Every penny of the consequential from the UK Government's health budget to the Scottish Government has not been applied to the health budget. How else can the Scottish Government explain the funding increase of 4 per cent for the NHS in England but a 0.4 per cent decrease here? That is a consequence not of the overall budget but of decisions that the SNP Government made to give health less.

Murdo Fraser: Jackie Baillie makes a different point from that which she made in response to my intervention. The Labour Party's position is now that not enough money is being spent on the NHS. However, as Nicola Sturgeon said, the fact is that NHS spending in Scotland has risen, as it has in previous years.

If cuts were made to the Scottish budget, the responsibility for them would rest fairly, squarely and solely with the Labour Party, which was responsible in government for the most chronic mismanagement of the public finances in our country's history. Any cuts that are coming to the Scottish budget are Labour cuts—not Tory cuts, SNP cuts or even Lib Dem cuts.

If the Labour Party were honest in its concern about NHS funding—if it were really concerned that Barnett consequential were not coming through to the NHS in Scotland—we might have expected it to make proposals to increase NHS spending in this year's budget discussion. However, the Labour Party lodged not a single amendment to the Budget (Scotland) (No 4) Bill to provide for additional funding for the NHS. Neither has the Labour Party indicated which budget lines should be cut to fund an increase in the NHS budget. Any party that argues seriously for more money must make it clear where that will come from. Labour has failed on that score.

Like the rest of the public sector, the NHS has of course been tasked with finding efficiency savings. Those efficiency savings of 2 per cent per year are lower than those that were recommended by Jackie Baillie's good friend Wendy Alexander. When Wendy Alexander was Labour leader, in a period that has now been conveniently airbrushed from Scottish Labour history, she famously called for efficiency savings of 3 per cent per year—half as much again.

Jackie Baillie: Does the member acknowledge that the 3 per cent included both cash and time-releasing efficiency savings, whereas all of the SNP's 2 per cent savings are cash savings?

Murdo Fraser: The important point is that efficiency savings mean that money comes out of the budget. I am interested to hear that the Labour

Party is retreating from the position that Wendy Alexander took.

I reject Labour's proposition that efficiency savings will automatically have a negative impact on front-line services. The challenge for the NHS is to ensure that savings can be made but that front-line services are protected. We believe that that can be done. As we pointed out last weekend, by changing the way in which drugs are procured—moving to generic drugs from brand-named drugs—six health boards have been able to save more than £20 million per year; the others could follow suit. There are savings to be made. We reject the nonsense that that will automatically have a negative impact on patient care.

The final and most damning criticism of the Labour case on cuts is that it is sheer rank hypocrisy. After all, as the Minister for Health and Community Care, Jackie Baillie's colleague Andy Kerr—a man who, unsurprisingly, is now rarely seen at health debates in the Parliament—proposed real cuts to front-line services: namely, the closure of the accident and emergency units at Monklands and Ayr hospitals. Voters in Lanarkshire and Ayrshire will remember that those real, front-line service cuts were proposed by Labour, not by the Scottish Government or the Conservative party.

I welcome the terms of the Government amendment, especially the reference to the UK Government's commitment that health service spending will be protected. The Barnett consequential from that will mean additional money from the Scottish Government. I welcome Nicola Sturgeon's commitment last week, which she has repeated today, that all of those Barnett consequential will be applied to the health service.

Even with the additional sums, there will be a need for efficiency savings. What is important is that front-line services are protected. In the NHS, we should measure outcomes, not inputs. By doing things differently, we can find money to be reinvested. We should test the NHS not by the number of people who are employed in it but by the quality of patient care. It is important that we shift our perspective.

My amendment makes a further point about NHS funding—that Labour's jobs tax would have removed £40 million from the budget of the NHS in Scotland. Thank goodness that the new coalition Government at Westminster is reversing that proposal, which will mean more money for the NHS. I am sure that that decision will have the full support of Labour members, so concerned are they about NHS funding north of the border.

I fear that, today, the district attorney will be disappointed. Having heard the case for cuts that

Jackie Baillie has set out, I fear that it is not so much a question of the case being not proven as of there being no case to answer.

I move amendment S3M-6469.1.2, to insert at end:

“, and also welcomes the commitment from the UK coalition government to reverse Labour's increase in national insurance, which would have cut £40 million from the budget of the NHS in Scotland.”

09:48

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): We are not making much progress on the central issue. We got closest to it in the few words that Murdo Fraser said about the need to focus on outcomes, not inputs. So far, there has been barely a reference to patients, far less a reference to patient care. That seems surprising and a bit odd, given that we are debating the NHS.

The difficulty in this debate for both the Government and all of us who are in opposition is to do as every speaker so far has said, which I shall repeat—to have a more open and honest debate about the NHS and where we think that it is going. Jackie Baillie was right to refer to real-terms increases, but we have not discussed the fact that real terms are measured by a number of indices that do not include NHS inflation. That makes the term rather curious.

Jackie Baillie cited the figures for redundancies that have been announced. However, the starting point for a more honest debate is the figures that health boards have supplied for the amount that they need to save just to break even. Those are telling as regards their management. Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board is £62 million short, Forth Valley NHS Board is £26.5 million short, Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board is £6.75 million short and Lothian NHS Board is £31 million short.

Nicola Sturgeon: I will take Ross Finnie back a couple of sentences, as I know that he attaches great importance to precise language. Will he care to correct himself and to acknowledge that the numbers that he referred to are not redundancies, given the commitments that I made earlier?

Ross Finnie: I will come on to the workforce issue, but I want to start by establishing the basic position. The public do not understand a debate in which we are told that more money is being supplied to the health service but in which the same health service is threatening to make redundancies. That is the service's phraseology, not mine. The terminology may be unhelpful, and the cabinet secretary may have a grievance about it—we will come on to that—but that is the situation. My colleague Mike Rumbles will elaborate on the real problems and threats to

services that his area faces and will pose a number of serious questions that are not being answered openly and honestly.

I am confused about where we are trying to go. It appears that the situation is serious and that all of the health boards that I have mentioned must make savings just to cover where they are, never mind any future cuts that may be in the pipeline—those are not the issue. What is the health boards' position? Again, there is huge disappointment. One cannot generalise, but, when pressed by the Health and Sport Committee, the health boards' approach was astonishing. They appeared to have managed to make many savings, in many areas of their activities, without any real difficulty. I was not impressed. That suggested to me that managers, who are there to manage every pound from the public purse, have not been doing the job as well as they should. Boards should not be in the position of still seeking extra savings for their budgets to break even. Based on the evidence that they gave to the Health and Sport Committee, they should have been managing the situation in the first place.

Many people have constructively contributed to this debate, but I must give credit to the Royal College of Nursing. Although 40 per cent of all manpower costs are in nursing, the college has not shouted and bawled from the rooftops that there cannot and must not be any change. In fact, it has supplied every member with an interesting briefing in which it talks constructively about how we can improve the delivery of services but lays down clear conditions that any health board must meet.

There are other issues about which health boards are not being honest. What is meant by non-filling of posts? That can lead to huge inefficiencies. It appears that if someone leaves, their post will not be filled. Is that post needed or not? Non-filling of posts and voluntary redundancy can result in people whose skills we need leaving. Using those phrases outside the context of proper workforce planning is nonsense.

The Royal College of Nursing makes sensible suggestions about service redesign, which it defines as

“new ways of providing health services more efficiently but still meeting patient need.”

The point of service design must be to reduce the amount of care that patients require, which, in turn, reduces the cost. If health boards across Scotland did that, we would be talking about proper efficiencies and proper management.

The point that we want to make in this debate is quite clear. I am glad that the cabinet secretary is taking responsibility for establishing a scrutiny group and that she will retain responsibility for

exactly what workforce planning will mean. That is not a simple solution but a thoroughgoing exercise that will involve a whole range of criteria. There has to be a robust risk assessment of what the changes will mean for the safety and quality of the health care that is to be provided. That will require nationally agreed workforce and workload planning tools, and there must be the right quality and range of skills and the education and training to support that.

The cabinet secretary will have to return to the chamber to report on the outcome of the scrutiny group so that members of the Parliament can test all those elements as rigorously as they need to be tested.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank Ross Finnie for his thoughtful analysis. Does he accept that when Audit Scotland was invited to look at efficiency savings, it said that it was unable to validate them? That is why looking at them closely will be so crucial.

The Presiding Officer: Please respond briefly, Mr Finnie, and you must close thereafter.

Ross Finnie: Yes, I accept that. That was an astonishing discovery by Audit Scotland, and I have commented on it in the chamber before.

In accepting that we must move forward and focus our attention on patient-centred care, we on the Liberal Democrat benches are clear that many questions are yet to be answered. In our amendment, we focus on workforce planning and a series of objective criteria that simply must be met. We welcome the establishment of the scrutiny group but, more important, we look for the outcome of its work to be reported to the Parliament so that it can be subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

I move amendment S3M-6469.1.1, to insert at end:

“, and calls on the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing to publish immediately NHS boards’ workforce projections and to carry out robust scrutiny, including risk assessment, of the impact on the safety and quality of patient care and the provision of frontline NHS services.”

09:57

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): The First Minister and indeed other ministers and cabinet secretaries talk about deferring cuts until next year. We all have news for them: the cuts are here now, and they are savage. As for the £500 million—

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Will the member take an intervention?

Helen Eadie: I am only just starting.

As for the £500 million, again, I have news for colleagues: the Government simply cannot spend the same money twice.

Fears have emerged that there will be significant job losses as NHS Fife seeks to make almost £10 million of savings in the current financial year. Just how many job losses are involved is being withheld from the public in Fife. We are told that the losses will be achieved by not filling posts and through natural wastage, but, as Mike Rumbles has said, that is probably the worst sort of non-planning that we could have. If anyone wants to see the dramatic effect that it is having, they need only look at the front pages of our local newspapers, which are reporting the cuts. That is happening all over Scotland, so it is not a figment of anyone’s imagination. It is happening, and it is happening now.

The decision by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde sent shock waves through the health service in Scotland. As Jackie Baillie rightly said, one estimate has put the total number of health posts that will go throughout the country at about 5,000. Understandably, the trade union movement has reacted furiously to the announcement of those job cuts. The unions have branded the situation as an absolute disgrace.

I will give one piece of anecdotal evidence. When I was scanning NHS Fife’s board papers yesterday, I was concerned to notice some evidence of the impact of the cuts. Under the consideration of an endowment request, committee members were asked to consider a request to purchase an ultrasound breast scanner for radiology. There is nothing unusual about that. The papers said that the new scanner would replace the existing unit, which is old and considered to be a clinical risk. The committee members approved the purchase, which totally wiped out the scanner appeal endowment fund. In my eyes, it is sad that we are having to resort to using endowment funds to replace essential equipment, and the very fact that the scanner was regarded as a clinical risk illustrates Ross Finnie’s point that we need to demonstrate the impact on patients.

As choices have been made by the SNP Government, supported all the time by the Tories, we have to remember that they have all been about populist, giveaway budgets at the beginning of the Government’s term of office, leaving nothing in the pot to address all the issues that need to be addressed now. If we know anything, it is that dealing with staffing costs is the most critical factor. We should consider the evidence that Tim Davison of NHS Lanarkshire gave to the Parliament’s Public Audit Committee on 24 March. He told the committee:

"It is absolutely inevitable that we have to reduce our wages costs. There is no avoiding that."—[*Official Report, Public Audit Committee*, 24 March 2010; c 1609.]

The Royal College of Nursing's briefing states:

"As nursing and midwifery posts make up over 40% of the NHS workforce, this is the section of the workforce that is likely to be hit the hardest."

It goes on to outline precisely the kind of measures that will be taken, such as the loss of posts through natural wastage. Those measures will just result in a huge lack of planning for redesign, on which the Health and Sport Committee has taken evidence from health boards throughout Scotland. They said clearly that we must ensure that redesign is done carefully and on a calculated basis and that we do not have random cuts that leave health service staff demoralised and in a situation where they just do not know what surprises will come around the corner next. That is the danger.

When we read board papers from throughout Scotland, we find that they are all undertaking risk assessments, but they all say that, in the current climate, they cannot be sure what the actual risk to their patients will be. That must concern parliamentarians and ministers. We speak to visitors to the Parliament all the time and we hear what they are saying. It is worrying when we hear that specialist clinicians are being taken away to serve on wards and their specialist skills are no longer used. We have been reassured in all the arguments and debates that we have had, for example on the "Right for Fife" plans, that the way forward is not just to rely on consultants and doctors but to have specialist nurses and paramedics, but I have news for the cabinet secretary: if those people are not there to be those specialists, where does that leave all the arguments that were used to persuade us to agree to the changes in the "Right for Fife" plans and the changes that we have seen in the NHS throughout Scotland? The situation is not acceptable.

It will be unforgivable if the Parliament agrees to the amendments in the names of Nicola Sturgeon and Murdo Fraser. I hope that colleagues will support Labour's motion, because Labour is showing that it cares very much and that the health service is our priority. That has been demonstrated over the years by the massive amounts of public funds that have been invested in it throughout the United Kingdom but, more important, here in devolved Scotland.

10:03

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow) (SNP): Given the seriousness of the matter in hand, I wondered whether the Labour Party would recognise how important the subject is to the people of Scotland. I wondered whether Labour members would treat it

appropriately or would simply launch into their "SNP—bad people; Labour—good people" party rhetoric, so I had two versions of my speech ready. One version was inspired by Jackie Baillie's words to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee on 4 March 2008, when she said:

"I think that we have a duty to be accurate in the chamber and not to mislead anybody either unintentionally or deliberately."—[*Official Report, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee*, 4 March 2008; c 151.]

Quite. Call me naive, but, encouraged by those words, and looking forward to a sensible and sincere debate, I prepared a version of my speech that is full of phrases such as "working together" and "cross-party support for NHS workers". As members can see, it is rather light in weight, for I held out little hope, and how right I was.

What we have just heard is the largest Opposition party in the Parliament absolutely revelling in the irresponsibility of obstructionist, partisan oppositionism, choosing scaremongering over constructive, honest and rigorous debate in the chamber. I guess that I will not need the first version of my speech.

I want to consider three things: the Labour Party's problem with amnesia, the cabinet secretary's excellent record and, last but not least, the people who should be at the heart of the debate.

I still intend to be constructive in using the second version of my speech, but I cannot ignore the fact that the Labour Party seems to be suffering from self-inflicted collective amnesia. It seems to have forgotten that it crippled our health budgets with private finance initiative/public-private partnership project repayments, and it appears to have slipped the minds of Labour Party members that, in 2007, the Labour Party committed to diverting money away from the health budget. Departments, including the health department, would simply have had to cut their cloth, according to Lord McConnell, who was but an ordinary man of the people in those days.

Perhaps those times are too far back for Labour members to remember, so let us consider more recent events. This year, the NHS capital expenditure budget was cut to the tune of £129 million. That was a Labour cut—it was the first on its deeper-than-Thatcher wish list. John Swinney rightly moved to address that issue, first by using end-year-flexibility money, and then by reluctantly cancelling the Glasgow airport rail link. That is the same rail link that we have heard so much about from Labour members.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

Anne McLaughlin: Jackie Baillie ought to know from what I have just said that I am not giving any more airtime to the Labour Party today.

The SNP Government is taking forward the largest health project in Europe. There is massive capital investment in the new Southern general in Glasgow, but apparently, unless the Labour Party is able to print money, Labour members would prefer that their city council colleagues were able to get from Glasgow City Council chambers to the airport for their fact-finding missions slightly faster using GARL. That is up to them. Speeding up the removal of Labour councillors in Glasgow is tempting in some ways, particularly when we consider the fiasco that is unfolding over community health and care partnerships. We have had from Labour a preferred option of spending on GARL, a promise to divert money away from health—I wonder whether Labour is now saying that it would have broken that promise—and real cuts from its bosses down south.

Despite all of that, our NHS in Scotland has performed incredibly well under Nicola Sturgeon's leadership. NHS funding is at record levels in the toughest financial circumstances since devolution began. The usual cry from the Labour pantomime, with principal boy Jackie Baillie leading the chorus line, is, "Oh no, it's not," but the health board chiefs beg to differ, and they have no axe to grind. When he gave evidence to the Public Audit Committee earlier this year, the chief executive of NHS Grampian, Richard Carey, said:

"the financial performance of the NHS in Scotland hitherto has been a success story. The levels of funding that we have enjoyed during the past few years have enabled us to grow the health service in a positive way".—[*Official Report, Public Audit Committee*, 24 March 2010; c 1609.]

What have the additional funding and sound stewardship meant for the patients and the workforce, who really ought to be at the heart of the debate? Deaths from cancer, heart disease, stroke, AIDS and suicide are all down, waiting times have been decimated beyond recognition, and hidden waiting lists are, I hope, gone for ever. Those are quite remarkable achievements in an economic climate that has been tougher than the party to my left—geographically speaking only—ever had to deal with. I dread to think how it would have managed.

The last time that I spoke in such a Labour debate, I was so angry that I lost my voice for three days.

Members: Hooray!

Anne McLaughlin: I know; some would say that that is no bad thing. My mother said, "Just try to be nice in future, Anne." I explained to her that that is difficult with such motions. That is not

because the SNP is being criticised, but because of the unnecessary fear and alarm that are instilled in people who have difficult enough jobs as it is without also having to worry needlessly about losing them.

I will end with the last part of what Jackie Baillie said to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee in March 2008. She said:

"Do not underestimate the extent to which people will study the words that are spoken in Parliament and take meaning from them."—[*Official Report, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee*, 4 March 2008; c 151.]

With that mind, there is no excuse for a motion and speeches that refuse to recognise the position of strength from which the NHS will face the inevitably tough times ahead, that ignore the cabinet secretary's promise that quality of service will be at the heart of all planning, and that blatantly disregard the fact that there will be no compulsory redundancies.

I can reach only one conclusion from what I have heard today: Labour members put their party before NHS workers, their politicking before Scottish patients, and their need for headlines—I say to Helen Eadie that headlines do not make things true—before the truth. They should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves for that.

10:10

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

We are proud of the NHS, and our constituents rightly expect us to ensure that the service continues to deliver for them. That expectation is why so many parties in the latest UK general election stated that they would protect health spending. Unfortunately, in Scotland, where we have an increased budget, NHS boards are now facing cuts. More nats, fewer nurses.

Those cuts are happening now. Between Christmas and the end of the financial year, NHS Highland closed beds in an essential rheumatology unit to make cash savings. It did not pretend that that was done to improve patient care; rather, it needed to save money. It is now reviewing that service in order to move it closer to patients, but it has stated that any changes must be cost neutral. Everyone knows that it takes more staff to deliver services closer to people's homes, especially in remote and rural areas, where professionals must travel large distances to get to their patients. How can the changes be cost neutral when more staff will inevitably be needed to deliver the same level of service? The only conclusion that I can reach is that that is another cut rather than a service improvement.

The rebalancing care argument has been used to cut beds in various local hospitals throughout the Highlands, but there has been no corresponding rise in staffing numbers in the community. The Government and health boards deny that those cuts impact on patient care. However, following recent bed closures at Portree hospital, a patient told me that they were forced to travel to Broadford hospital because no beds were available in Portree. They were required to make a journey of more than 26 miles on poor roads that can be treacherous in the winter. I cannot see any efficiencies in that or any improvement in patient care.

I want to touch on the inequalities of health board funding allocations due to the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee formula. That formula was implemented in 2008, despite the adverse impact that it would have on remote and rural health boards.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Rhoda Grant: I want to make my point.

At that time, the cabinet secretary acknowledged that the data that were used for the formula were poor at best. Because of that, she set up the technical advisory group on resource allocation to review the data and refine the formula. That group has been sitting since then, but the formula remains unchanged. I was told in an answer to a written question that it met only four times last year and that it would report early this year. From subsequent questions, I have learned that it will not report until August. Why the delay? What action has the cabinet secretary taken to speed up the review? I suspect that the advisory group could more aptly be called the long grass group. Perhaps the Minister for Public Health and Sport will reassure me.

Shona Robison: Will Rhoda Grant clarify that it is Labour's position to oppose the NRAC formula? If so, what health boards would it take money from to make the funding change that is being suggested? Clarity on that would be useful.

Rhoda Grant: I do not think that any party supports a formula that is based on data that are not right. The cabinet secretary has admitted that the data are incorrect and she has set up an advisory group, which is indeed a long grass group. *[Interruption.]*

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Shona Robison should stop muttering.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Mr Foulkes, if members have to stop muttering, I will tell them so.

Rhoda Grant: Delivering health care in remote and rural areas is more expensive because of sparsity and geography. NRAC has forced NHS

Highland to consider cuts that were previously thought to be too scary and untouchable. It does not take an advisory group to tell the cabinet secretary that the formula is wrong and that it needs to be changed.

I and other Highland MSPs recently met NHS Highland, which told us that it was looking at a staffing cut of 100 people—70 from management and administration and 30 from the nursing staff. That begs the question how services can be delivered closer to the community with fewer nurses. Therefore, we rightly complain about cuts in nursing jobs. There will be cost savings by caring for patients in the community, but they will not come from cutting nurses.

We cannot ignore the jobs of backroom staff either. Less administrative support will mean that medical and nursing staff will take more time away from direct patient care to do administrative work. My mother was in hospital recently, and most of my dealings were with nurses and doctors, but I was given valuable information and support by ward receptionists and medical secretaries. If that support were removed, it would place an additional burden on front-line staff. Although we rightly guard nurse numbers, we must also ensure that we value the support workers and their jobs. New technology can create efficiencies. However, the health service is not renowned for its fast implementation of technology.

We face problems with the number of junior doctors, which has fallen from 4,500 in 2008-09 to 2,400 this year. In the past, health boards faced challenges filling junior doctor posts in some of their most remote and rural areas, and indeed in some specialties. In August last year, NHS Highland had 27 unfilled vacancies, seven of which have still to be filled. With numbers falling, it is impossible to see how the situation will not be worse this year. If those posts are not filled, locums will be required to fill the gaps, leading to higher costs. I raised those concerns with the cabinet secretary in health questions, and she appeared unconcerned. I ask her to look again at the issue to ensure that it does not become a problem.

Efficiency is welcome, but cuts are not. The Scottish people rightly value their health service and its dedicated staff. Those staff do not need uncertainty. They do not need to see their jobs slashed—such cuts would be a false economy. The health service needs to be modernised and to use technologies to deliver services more efficiently. Cutting front-line staff to balance the budget is not the answer.

10:16

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):

During the near half century that I have been associated with the NHS, there have been enormous changes in what it has delivered and how it has delivered it. Techniques, drugs and procedures are available now that were undreamt of when I was a medical student, and others are long since obsolete.

From what was a paternalistic organisation, where the consultant was god and the patient was the passive recipient of what was thought to be best for him, the NHS now rightly seeks to involve the patient at every level of his journey through the system. There is a much greater emphasis on prevention of disease and, increasingly, patients are encouraged to take personal responsibility for managing their long-term medical conditions. More and more demands are placed on the NHS, which to some extent is becoming the victim of its own success. People are living far longer, which is made possible by the long-term treatment of many conditions that killed off previous generations.

Thankfully, since the inception of the NHS, Governments of whatever colour have remained committed to it, and resources have been made available whenever possible to enable it to flourish. Medical fashions have come and gone, and political ideologies have influenced how the organisation has developed and been managed. Despite that, though, as we have heard today, we still have a health service that, although not perfect, is one that we can be proud of, and an NHS workforce that is committed to doing its best for the patients it serves.

It is therefore good news, when our new Westminster Government has to face up to the enormous debt crisis left by the outgoing Labour Government, that the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition has clearly stated its commitment to the NHS by guaranteeing a real-terms increase in health spending in each year of the Parliament. It is further good news for Scotland that the SNP Government has agreed that all resultant Barnett consequential will be applied to the NHS in Scotland. That means that the financial crisis that we have inherited from Labour should not impact on the NHS as it will on other public services.

However, if the NHS is to live up to the rising standards of patient care that people nowadays expect and deserve, it has never been more important to ensure that resources are deployed efficiently and effectively. There is an urgent need to look at how the NHS delivers and to consider introducing reforms that will achieve our ambition to have a world-class NHS that delivers the best health care possible. I agree with Ross Finnie that we had a helpful and constructive briefing from the Royal College of Nursing.

Patient needs are paramount, and any changes and efficiency savings must ensure that patient welfare is not compromised. As Murdo Fraser said, that is achievable; by considering carefully the outcomes for patients under the care of the NHS, and planning with that in mind, it should be achievable. Easy accessibility is very important for patients, which is why my party believes in local provision of NHS services wherever possible. If we make local access easy for patients, it becomes easier for them to self-manage their long-term conditions. With the help of good primary care services, they are less likely to need the much more expensive secondary and tertiary services that are provided in our major hospitals. That is one way of saving money for the NHS.

Local access is important day and night, which is why we feel that out-of-hours cover must be improved, particularly in more remote parts of the country such as Kinloch Rannoch, with whose petition to the Parliament I have a great deal of sympathy; I hope that the cabinet secretary responds appropriately to it. The need for local accessibility is why we fought the previous Scottish Executive's plans to centralise A and E and maternity services. It is why we were delighted that A and E services were retained at Ayr and Monklands, and why I as a North East Scotland MSP was relieved when Andy Kerr was finally persuaded, after a hard-fought campaign, to retain and develop some of the local maternity services in Aberdeenshire. It was also important for the north-east that we were able to retain neurological and children's cancer services in Aberdeen, rather than having them centralised in Edinburgh or Glasgow, as proposed by Labour. Such centralisation would have been to the detriment of patients.

As the NHS evolves, service changes and efficiencies will always be necessary, but those must all have the interests of patients at their core. Some of the best improvements come from suggestions made by members of staff. Health boards will always benefit from involving staff in any plans that they have for generating efficiencies. Small changes in delivery can lead to far-reaching benefits for patients.

Of course, people are fearful of change, particularly when that change can affect how staff are deployed in running the service. However, I do not share Labour's gloomy outlook on the future. We have been assured that there is a commitment to having no compulsory redundancies in the NHS in Scotland, but there is also a realisation in the service that funding is going to be tight for the foreseeable future. I think that staff will willingly do their best to deliver efficiencies while protecting high standards of patient care. I welcome the independent scrutiny group that is being set up,

which I have no doubt will make certain that standards are kept high.

When resources are under pressure, priorities become increasingly important. For my party, it was extremely important to reverse Labour's plans to increase employers' national insurance, which would undoubtedly have put jobs at risk in the NHS. We also oppose the SNP's plans to abolish prescription charges completely, because the money that that would lose the NHS would, in our opinion, be far better spent on treating patients than on affording free prescriptions to people who are able—and indeed willing—to contribute towards their cost.

In the hard times ahead, it will be essential to deliver health care in the most cost-effective and efficient way possible. However, that need not and should not be to the detriment of patient welfare. It is therefore important that health boards and Government consider carefully their current workforces and skills mix, and produce workforce plans that will ensure that those are appropriate to meet the current and future needs of the service. That is why I am happy to support the SNP and Conservative amendments.

10:22

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): It is with sadness rather than anger that I note the depths to which a once-proud party has sunk, as exhibited in the tawdry motion that lies limply before us today—a motion lodged by a party that pledged in the 2007 Scottish parliamentary election not to increase health service expenditure. It is a motion lodged by a party that has placed health boards throughout Scotland in hock for years to come as a result of its incontinent, wasteful expenditure on expensive PFI projects—

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Ian McKee: If I have time, I will certainly give way.

It is a motion submitted by a party that promised to close vital A and E departments, against the will of the populations they serve. While we are on that point, let not the Lib Dems try to hide under a stone, because they were involved in that policy as well.

The Scottish public can be very pleased indeed that they rejected the Labour Party and its colleagues as the guardians of its vital health service. How dare that party carp now, when others have to sort out the mess created by its mishandling of our finances at a UK level. As the outgoing Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Liam Byrne MP, accurately remarked, all the money has gone—and it was that lot that spent it.

Let us consider a few facts. It is a fact that, when the four years of this parliamentary session are over, there will be more doctors, nurses and other health service workers—apart from managers—than there were when the SNP Government took over from Labour. It is a fact that, despite these troubled financial times, there will be no compulsory redundancies in the Scottish health service. How many other organisations and businesses can make that promise? It is a fact that all changes taking place will be monitored rigorously to ensure that quality of service is not compromised.

That latter point about quality is very important, because although we value the dedication and professionalism of our staff, we must not forget the main purpose of the health service. It is not primarily an employment agency whose worth can be measured by the increasing number of folk it employs, as is implied in the motion. The value of the health service, as Murdo Fraser so ably put it, is the standard of care that it provides and the health outcomes that ensue.

As treatment protocols and procedures change and new technologies become available, staff needs inevitably change. In the dim and distant days when I was a youth, hospitals employed scores of nurses and other staff to look after patients with polio who needed to be treated in so-called iron lungs, which were huge machines that kept people alive when their breathing muscles had become permanently paralysed. Today—thank goodness—such machines are relegated to museums. The development of effective immunisation against polio has seen to that. However, that has also meant that all the hospital staff who were involved are no longer needed for those tasks.

Do we really subscribe to the theory that posts that are no longer needed should continue to be filled in order to reach some artificial employment target? The example of polio is history, but there are plenty more recent examples. The introduction by health boards of lean management techniques, including kaizen blitzes, has meant that various procedures can be conducted equally or more efficiently with fewer staff. Members of staff are involved in that process. Operations or other procedures that, in the past, involved weeks of in-patient care now allow patients to be discharged home after just a few days. Maternity hospitals used to be called lying-in hospitals because of the length of time for which mothers remained in them. Now, mums can return home within hours of giving birth.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Does the member think that that is always wise, particularly in the case of breastfeeding mothers?

Ian McKee: The length of time for which a woman remains in hospital after giving birth is a matter of clinical judgment, but I do not think that it was right for women to stay in bed for days and days automatically, as used to be the case.

Hip replacement operations used to involve a hospital stay of three weeks; now, it is more like three days. Keyhole surgery for abdominal and other complaints also reduced the length of in-patient care. Modern local anaesthetic techniques enable much more day surgery to be undertaken.

The redesign of such services reduces the burdens on hospitals and the requirements for staff. Of course, that often places an increasing burden on primary care resources and results in some consequential increases in the need for primary care staff, but the vast majority of general practitioners are independent contractors and the staff whom they employ directly are not included in the figures before us today. Not only are those figures theoretical projections, rather than an accurate snapshot of the situation; they are potentially misleading, because they do not reflect the total pool of health workers who are employed in primary care.

Health boards were created to reflect and respond to local circumstances. It was rightly thought to be incorrect for masses of relatively small decisions to be micromanaged from St Andrew's house. A combination of the spinelessness of many appointed non-executive directors of health boards and the tendency of central Government to centralise has tended to vitiate those responsibilities.

I hope and believe that the advent of directly elected health boards will restore some balance but, even before that happy day, we must give individual health boards more freedom to manage their resources as they see fit, which includes vacancy management. We all have to make savings, as money is scarce. Let us trust those appointed to manage local services to do the job, provided of course that they also submit to and satisfy external, independent quality controls.

The motion is tawdry and opportunistic. Let us give it the fate that it deserves—total rejection—and let us support the SNP amendment.

10:29

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Plans to cut 500 jobs over the next year are on the verge of being approved by Grampian NHS Board. According to reports in *The Press and Journal*, it estimates that 226 jobs will be cut by leaving vacancies unfilled and some 274 will be cut through voluntary redundancy. It is all very well for the health secretary to say that there will be no compulsory redundancies, but surely

that is not the point. It is about reducing the number of staff employed to serve patients. I thought that we were supposed to have a patient-focused service. The health board's proposal will reduce the service that patients receive—there can be no getting away from that fact. If that is not the case, what on earth has the health board been doing over the years employing those staff?

What about effective workforce planning? Redundancy is supposed to be about posts, not people. If posts are to be reduced in the most appropriate way—for patients—having voluntary redundancy and not filling vacancies will result in unplanned gaps throughout the health service. The health secretary needs to acknowledge that fact and deal with it appropriately.

Ian McKee: Does Mr Rumbles accept that, for the eight years that his party in coalition with Labour was running the health service, the form of vacancy management that he so graphically described was commonplace?

Mike Rumbles: No. I thought that we had changed the whole process. I thought that, over the years, we had won the battle to ensure that we focused on the patient, not the staff, the building or anything else.

Nicola Sturgeon rose—

Mike Rumbles: I will proceed and give way again in a moment.

If we are to focus on the patient, proper workforce planning is essential to the task.

In addition to the proposed cut of 500 staff posts, we are being told that almost 30 major and necessary projects are facing the axe in the NHS Grampian area. Proposed new medical centres or investment upgrades across my constituency, such as at Banchory and Braemar, and in other parts of Aberdeenshire, such as Inverurie, Inch and Kintore, are to be shelved, with the health board discussing budget cuts of up to £100 million.

That comes at the very time when both the new coalition Government at Westminster and our Scottish Government here in Edinburgh are assuring us that no cuts will be forthcoming this year and the Scottish Government is taking up the offer from the coalition Government not to reduce current budgets.

I asked Brian Adam whether he would be in the chamber to hear this, but obviously he is not. I heard him on the radio this week criticising those of us who were asking questions about this issue. He said that we should “get real” about these “inevitable” cuts. I was shocked that a fellow north-east MSP could indulge in that, instead of fighting our corner for the people whom we serve.

Shona Robison rose—

Mike Rumbles: Let me finish the point.

Brian Adam well knows that the funding formulas used by the Government in allocating cash to the north-east are already discredited but, instead of fighting our corner, he seems to be saying that we should roll over and accept the inevitable.

Shona Robison: If Mike Rumbles, whose party is now a party of government, is saying that staff numbers should remain static and there should be no change to them, from where would he take the money to fund that? If he is not saying that, is he arguing for compulsory redundancies as an alternative to what we are suggesting? It has to be one or the other.

Mike Rumbles: I have never said that staff numbers should be frozen. What I am pointing out to the health secretary is that her statement that there should be no compulsory redundancies is not patient focused.

Nicola Sturgeon *rose—*

Mike Rumbles: Do I have time to give way again, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly.

Nicola Sturgeon: Shona Robison's point deserves to be answered. I take Mike Rumbles back to his attack on the policy of having no compulsory redundancies. Is he arguing that we should have compulsory redundancies or that staffing numbers should never change to reflect changes in service delivery? It has to be one or the other.

Mike Rumbles: I am surprised that the health secretary is suggesting that I am saying that staff numbers should never change—of course they change. Ian McKee made a great point about the iron lung and the staff associated with such treatment. We should be doing that all the time, but I am astonished that the health secretary does not recognise that and seems to relegate the importance of efficient, effective and proper workforce planning. That is what it is all about. It is interesting that the Scottish health secretary is unaware of that.

I return to the point that I was making about the plans to take away £100 million of investment in decentralising the health service in Grampian. There has been a huge drive for decentralisation, which I thought the health secretary backed. This is the very time when many of our health services can be administered more effectively and efficiently in rural community hospitals and health centres in places such as Aboyne and Banchory in my area. People can use those centres instead of having to travel 60 or 80 miles every time they want to see somebody for treatment. The health board's approach is wrong-headed and I hope that

the cabinet secretary will address the issue. It is a huge mistake to put that investment on hold.

Something very wrong is going on here. Why is the Scottish Government saying that it is protecting our budget from the forthcoming cuts that the rest of the UK will face as a result of the coalition's emergency budget on 22 June? We are being told that we will not face any cuts to devolved budgets this year. That offer was given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and accepted by our First Minister. What, then, is going on at the behest of the Scottish Government? Why are our health boards meeting to draw up these huge cuts in our health service budgets?

In summing up the debate, the minister needs to be open and frank about what is going on here. The Government has more money available to it than ever before. Why, therefore, is Grampian NHS Board being instructed—I assume that it is and that it is not doing this of its own volition—to cut £100 million from its budget and slash 500 jobs? Our constituents have a right to know and the minister has a duty to tell the Parliament.

10:36

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): I start by commending Murdo Fraser for his sterling defence of SNP policy. It is clear that that alliance is alive and well. It certainly augurs well for their political future, although whether it does anything for Murdo remains to be seen.

Those of us who have been members since the early years of the Parliament will recall the numerous complaints that we received in our constituency postbags and at our surgeries about health-related problems. People were concerned about the length of time they had to wait for an appointment to see medical staff and about the quality of care and facilities. Those complaints justified the very real investment in the health service that the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition Executive made to address those problems.

Was the investment justified? It was. Did it work? I think that it did. If members think of the inquiries that we receive from our constituents, I suspect that most of us would say—or would have said until recently—that there has been a significant fall in the number of health-related complaints. That is not to say that such complaints have been eliminated completely or that we will not receive individual complaints about things that cannot be justified, but the general picture is that the volume of such complaints has reduced. However, like many other MSPs, I am beginning to see a recurrence of complaints about waiting times, waiting lists and the level of service and other general concerns about the health service.

Murdo Fraser was right to say that we should measure outcomes and not look only at inputs. Ian McKee ably identified where progress can be made and has been made in the health service over many years. The problem is not that new techniques and methods of health service delivery are resulting in staff no longer being required; it is that advances mean that conditions can now be addressed that previously could not be addressed. Despite the progress that Ian McKee described, demand for our health service has not reduced. People now, rightly, have a higher expectation that the health service can meet their needs and demands. That is what we have to address.

We will always be faced with the perennial problem of whether we should have a bottomless health budget that allows any medical condition to be treated, irrespective of the cost. That is a philosophical and ethical debate and it will, no doubt, continue for many years. Yes, it is right for us to look at outcomes and not only at maintaining health service jobs, but the demands on the health service are sufficient to justify maintaining the number of medical staff at existing levels.

Anne McLaughlin said that it is wrong to spread unnecessary fear and alarm among staff about their jobs, but I think that she missed a fundamental point about the concerns of health service staff. By and large, health service staff are dedicated to the health service—they are dedicated to their patients and want the best for them. When health service staff express fear and concern, they are talking not only about their own jobs but about the impact that colleagues' job losses have on their ability to deliver the service that they believe they should deliver for patients. Staff are concerned. I am sure that Anne McLaughlin has heard the same comments from medical staff that I have heard. People are worried about their ability to do their job if the cuts impact in the way that is being suggested.

As Ross Finnie rightly said, the debate should not be about only budgets and figures. He said that there was barely a reference to patients in the motion but, understandably, any debate on the NHS is predicated on the amount of money that is available and the number of staff who are required to do the work of our health service.

However, Ross Finnie was right in saying that it is the human story that is important in a debate such as this. I will conclude by raising some of the complaints that I am now hearing in increasing number in my constituency work—and I have no doubt that the situation is replicated elsewhere. All the complaints that I will raise relate to podiatry services, which can at times be dismissed as not being vital but which are critical to the quality of life of many people in our communities, particularly the elderly. The first case is that of an elderly

gentleman who had received chiropody treatment at the Royal Alexandria hospital in Paisley. Recently, he had need to contact the podiatry service again but, when he did so, he was told that he would have to wait at least six weeks for an appointment. After telling staff that the nature of his problem meant that he could not wait that length of time, he was told, "You will have to go private then." Is that the answer that we now want to give to elderly people if they can no longer get the service to which they had been accustomed—just go private? Ministers need to reflect on that.

I was contacted by another constituent with diabetes. We all know the significance of the problem that diabetes causes and will continue to cause in Scotland. My constituent used to have his toenails cut every three months, as his mobility was made difficult if the nails were left to curl. He has not had a home visit since October of last year. His carer has tried time and again to make an appointment for him, but she was told, "Well, you can just cut his nails." Are we trying to shift the responsibility on to carers?

Shona Robison: Will the member take an intervention?

Hugh Henry: No, thanks.

The third and final example involves a woman whose mobility was restricted as the result of a broken ankle. She contacted the podiatry service in Paisley only to be told that no home visits were available and given no appointment for a later date. That is the human impact that the cuts are having even before we start to see the consequences of a loss in staff numbers. That is something that the Parliament needs to address.

10:43

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): We are committed to the success of the NHS in Scotland, and are interested specifically in the quality of front-line patient care. That deserves the highest priority and should be the fundamental principle when deciding policy and budgets for the NHS. The SNP Government has a proud record of working to improve the NHS and patient care. We have created greater access to dentists, introduced the phasing out of prescription charges, cut waiting times—thanks, in part, to our abolishing Labour's hidden waiting lists—and met key targets for cancer treatment.

Listening to the speeches from Labour members in the debate this morning, one could be forgiven for thinking that the huge cuts that are being imposed on Scotland this year and those that will come next year have nothing to do with their Westminster bosses' shockingly inept handling of the UK economy. Under the previous Labour Government, unemployment increased by one

million, gave the UK its biggest deficit in history and widened the gap between rich and poor to its greatest extent in 80 years, according to the former Secretary of State for Health, Alan Milburn.

Let us consider what this week's *Economist* says, to put in context the legacy that the SNP Government in Scotland and the coalition Government in the UK must deal with. Projected economic growth in the UK this year is less than a third of that of Australia or Canada, a sixth of that of Brazil and a seventh of that of Singapore. Manufacturing output this year is projected to be a quarter of the European average.

Iain Gray, Labour's group leader in Holyrood—dithering, as usual—has failed even to say what Labour's position is on the £332 million cut that the coalition Government has said can be imposed in this or the next financial year. What level of leadership are we receiving from the Labour Party on that issue?

Labour planned to introduce 3 per cent efficiencies in the NHS, 50 per cent more than the SNP's 2 per cent—and would have been top-sliced. The SNP allows for the reinvestment of savings back into NHS front-line services, whereas Labour planned to move that money from the health budget to education. That would have meant £77 million less for Scotland's health services, according to Labour's own manifesto commitment and the comments that Jack McConnell made when he was Labour's First Minister prior to the 2007 election.

The SNP Government has made it a priority to provide the greatest possible quality of care. Despite the cuts from Westminster, we have increased NHS resources by £264 million this year. We should recall—as my colleague Anne McLaughlin pointed out—that the Labour Party made no proposal whatever to increase spending on the NHS this year. In fact, Labour would, no doubt, have taken money from the NHS in other budgets to put into the white-elephant project that is the Glasgow airport rail link. Amazingly, there was an eruption of opportunism one week after this year's election—suddenly, the Labour Party became all too interested in the NHS.

One of the problems that Scotland must face is the legacy that we inherited on PFI.

Paul Martin *rose*—

Kenneth Gibson: Paul Martin has bounced up and down every time PFI has been mentioned. He will now be like a hen on a hot griddle, desperate to intervene.

Paul Martin: Will the member give way on that point?

Kenneth Gibson: I will let my esteemed colleague Mr Martin in, but I ask him to let me

actually say something first on the issue, before he comes in with his pre-prepared comments.

£1.1 billion in payments will have to be paid by the NHS over the next five years alone. Between 2011 and 2015, NHS Lothian will pay £271 million for the Royal infirmary of Edinburgh, despite the capital costs of that hospital being only £206 million; NHS Lanarkshire will pay £136 million for Wishaw general, a project that is worth £121 million; and £106 million will be paid for Hairmyres hospital, which is worth only £68 million.

Paul Martin: I thank Kenny Gibson for giving way. He is concerned about the Labour Party's support for PFI. I remind him that his minister is signing new PPP projects, one being in my constituency, at Stobhill hospital. The minister has recently signed an extension to the PPP project there. Does he defend the minister on that?

Kenneth Gibson: The most savage indictment of Labour and its pals in the Lib Dems when they were in power is not that PFI contracts were signed; it is the level of interest that Labour agreed to. Would Paul Martin buy a flat for £100,000 and agree to pay £120,000 in interest over four years? I do not think so, yet he is happy to see his colleagues do that with public money. The PFI payments will come to £8 billion over the next few years.

So desperate is Labour to make some capital on issues around the NHS that the Labour Party group leader, Iain Gray, has tried to mislead the chamber. For example, on 13 May, he stated at First Minister's questions:

"a new kidney unit is being cancelled in NHS Ayrshire and Arran".—[*Official Report*, 13 May 2010; c 26190.]

My colleague Willie Coffey wrote to Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board about the issue, and the chief executive replied:

"the renal dialysis bays have been increased on the Crosshouse site with a second phase which brought the capacity to 40 bays ... The strategy also set out a proposal to build another unit within NHS Ayrshire and Arran and also to expand home based haemodialysis."

Jackie Baillie: Will Kenneth Gibson take an intervention?

Kenneth Gibson: NHS Ayrshire and Arran's chief executive went on to say:

"In terms of your specific question regarding the cancellation of our Kidney Unit, I can confirm that the Renal Satellite Unit is still on the Board's Capital Plan to deal with future hospital capacity if that is required."

Everything that is happening in Scotland should be kept in context.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member take an intervention?

Kenneth Gibson: I am in my last minute. Otherwise, I would have done.

Jackie Baillie: No?

Kenneth Gibson: I have got seconds left.

The bottom line is that Labour is misleading us. We should recall that the NHS down south was told to make 10 per cent cuts in staffing—137,000 jobs over the next three to four years. We should hear no more of Labour's crocodile tears on that issue.

If Scotland had full fiscal powers, including over oil and whisky revenues, we could mitigate the too-often arbitrary whims of Westminster. Sadly, Labour and some other political parties that are represented in this place would rather have Scotland lose money in its budgets and in its health service. The best way forward for Scotland's NHS is to secure the re-emergence of Scotland as an independent sovereign state with full control of its own resources.

10:50

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): To return to the topic in hand, the delay in being clear about the number of jobs that are to be lost in NHS Scotland because of SNP cuts has brought anxiety and confusion. For example, NHS Tayside announced in one week that 500 jobs were to go over two years and, the following week, it announced that the 500 posts were to go over a single year. We need clarity on what is happening and why it is happening, not confusion.

The Scottish Government is quoted as saying—and repeats—that staffing levels have gone up by more than 10,000 under the SNP, and that cuts are now needed to make health boards more efficient. However, in a comparable period, between May 2001 and the end of 2003, the number of staff who were employed in the NHS under Labour rose not by 10,000 but by 11,800. Is the SNP's mantra just an attempt to soften the blow of the cuts?

Where does the 10,000 figure actually come from? To repeat one of the important points that Jackie Baillie made, it appears to come from the public sector employment survey. Between the first quarter of 2007 and the end of 2009, there was indeed an increase of about 10,000 staff, but those are head-count figures that do not distinguish between part-time and full-time staff. Once that is taken into account, the 10,000 extra head count shrinks to about 8,200 full-time equivalent staff.

Let us compare that with the figures that were released recently by three health boards: 1,200 full-time equivalent posts are to go in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde over the next 18 months, 700

full-time equivalent posts are to go from NHS Lothian, and 500 full-time equivalent posts are to go at NHS Tayside. That is already 2,400 posts, with next year's figures still to come—and that is on top of the ward closures that have already been announced, including in Tayside.

Shona Robison: I am not sure whether Marlyn Glen is referring to the Royal Victoria hospital. Does she acknowledge that the clinicians there have said that they support the move to Ninewells? They want to be assured that the quality of service there will be as good as that at the Royal Victoria. It is misleading to suggest that they oppose the ward move.

Marlyn Glen: Sadly, it is not just the ward at the Royal Victoria that we are talking about—it is also ward 31 at Ninewells. That has been in the press, and Gerry Marr has been involved. There is huge concern about the matter.

To recap, there are the employment figures, and there is what we know so far about ward closures. It is clear already that thousands of posts will be lost in NHS Scotland, even more than the 2,000 posts in teaching that have been lost so far under the present Government. The SNP has shown that it cannot even protect public services in the good times, when its budget is rising.

The SNP refused to publish the information swiftly, so we must listen instead to what the people who work in the NHS are saying. They say that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde plans to replace more than 380 registered nurses with about 220 nursing assistants, which is more than 160 fewer staff over the next three years. NHS Grampian is to freeze vacancies for nurses this year, as has already been mentioned.

If the NHS supposedly has too many staff now, and it needs to be made more efficient, why do professional bodies such as RCN Scotland report otherwise? Why do the Scottish results of the Royal College of Nursing's 2009 employment and morale survey show that 44 per cent of nurses think that patient care is compromised at least once or twice a week, 51 per cent think that there are not enough staff to meet the needs of the patients for whom they care, and 52 per cent think that they are too busy to provide the quality of patient care that they want to provide?

We hear from the Government that NHS services are being redesigned to improve efficiency and quality. We are not against change just because it is change. I am sure that some services can be redesigned to be more efficient. However, changes must be costed and supported, and it is self-evident that if change is to be successful there must be full and proper consultation of staff.

The releasing time to care initiative pilots have enabled the time that nurses spend on direct patient care to increase by up to 40 per cent. That is good news. However, at a time when health boards are being ordered to make millions of pounds of so-called efficiency savings, how will the Government guarantee the finance that will enable the initiative to be introduced successfully in all health boards?

We must consider SNP cuts in services and posts in relation not just to current provision but to the promises that the SNP made but did not keep. I will give three examples. First, in its 2007 election manifesto the SNP promised to double the number of school nurses. There were 221 school nurses in 2007, but in two years the SNP increased the number by just 36.

Secondly, the SNP promised to reduce the use of antidepressants by 10 per cent by 2009. According to the manifesto, that was to be achieved through the use of counselling and talking therapies in each community health partnership area. The initiative would be backed with ring-fenced funding to health boards and local authorities. However, in reply to my inquiries, Dundee City Council and Angus Council said that they had received no such funding from the Scottish Government for those services in 2008-09.

Thirdly, in December 2006 the SNP website carried a commitment to introduce a breast screening programme for women over 40—the current approach is to screen women over 50. That has not happened, either. Meanwhile, in England, the NHS breast screening programme has been phasing in the approach from this year.

It is disappointing that it has taken a Labour debate to force the cabinet secretary to publish the workforce projections. The cabinet secretary must urgently intervene to prevent cuts to front-line NHS services and to promote the best possible patient care.

10:57

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): It is no surprise that the tone of the debate has been a wee bit less than constructive. However, Ross Finnie made a valid point when he said that patients should be central to the debate. I am sure that he will find that my speech reflects that concern.

Helen Eadie talked about the use of endowment funds when there is a shortage of funding. The League of Hospital Friends Inverclyde has operated at the Inverclyde royal hospital since 1973 and has donated more than £1 million to local health services. Last week it donated a £50,000 eye scanner to the health board.

According to Helen Eadie's logic, surely that means that there has been a shortage of funding in health boards in the West of Scotland since at least 1973.

There is some amnesia on the Labour benches about the NHS in Scotland and about the financial implications for public services in Scotland and throughout the UK as a result of the shambles that is the UK public finances. Members should make no mistake: we will be paying for the debt that was left by Labour at Westminster for many years to come, and the population of Scotland and the UK will suffer. The best thing the Scottish Parliament can do is to try to find a united voice to speak out against further cuts to the Scottish budget. We had cuts of £500 million from the previous UK Labour Government, and cuts of £332 million have been deferred until next year.

There are a few points that need to be aired. There are issues in the public sector; there always have been and always will be. Nothing in this world is perfect and the job of every Government, whatever its political hue, is to try to improve the services for which it is responsible.

If Labour thinks that job losses

"will inevitably have a detrimental impact on patient care",

as it says in the motion, we must question why staffing levels in 2007, when Labour was in power, were lower than they are now. Surely if we follow Labour's logic we must agree that Labour underfunded and underresourced the NHS in Scotland for eight years.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: I need to make progress.

Labour wanted to close the A and E facilities at Ayr hospital, Monklands hospital and the Inverclyde royal hospital. However, I am thankful that all the units were saved: the first two by the SNP Government and the IRH by a vociferous campaign by the people of Inverclyde. If the units had closed, more staff would have been made redundant under Labour.

Let us consider maternity units, particularly in the West of Scotland. The removal of consultant-led services at the IRH and the Vale of Leven hospital and the centralisation of services at RAH in Paisley during the previous session of Parliament had an effect on delivery of care. Pregnant women might well have been sceptical about the services that were available locally while they were being directed to go elsewhere, which left a question about the viability of services. I am thankful that Nicola Sturgeon agreed to instigate an independent scrutiny panel to consider the future of community midwife units. Recently, there was a record number of deliveries in the CMU at

the IRH, which proves that keeping the unit at the IRH was the correct decision.

Labour seems to have forgotten about the services that were under threat when it was in power. It might also have escaped Labour members' memories that Labour attacked the programme to make and then to reinvest 2 per cent efficiency savings. The former Labour leader in the Scottish Parliament, Wendy Alexander, said that 2 per cent was not an ambitious enough target and that the target should be 3 per cent.

During the Labour campaign in 2007, Jack McConnell said that education would get investment but other budgets would need to "cut their cloth". How can Labour seriously claim that the NHS in Scotland would have been in a better position under Labour? Labour's position on the NHS is somewhat opportunistic and typifies the negativity of which much of Labour politics reeks.

No element of the public service is perfect—there is always room for improvement and greater efficiency. The taxpayer wants to know that they will get the services that they require and that service delivery will improve.

There are three central points about the SNP Government's delivery of health services. First, we have 10,000 more NHS staff members than we inherited from the Labour-Lib Dem Administration. Secondly, funding for the NHS in Scotland is at record levels and, thirdly, the cabinet secretary has given a commitment that there will be no compulsory redundancies.

Service redesign is happening across a range of public services, and more joined-up working is taking place, instead of the silo approach of the past. I do not for a minute think that any member would seriously argue that the old silo ways of working are acceptable in the challenging financial climate. We should be striving for more joined-up working, better service delivery for patients and better outcomes for patients and health care staff.

I will continue to campaign for strong local service delivery in the West of Scotland, as I did before I was elected. Under Labour, campaigns to save services in the community in which I live were a regular occurrence, so I am thankful that there has been a period of stability since then, although there have been issues, for example the CMUs.

There are challenges ahead, but I am sure that, with strong leadership, we can weather the storm while ensuring that the safe delivery of health services remains at the forefront of the health agenda.

11:04

Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP): I think that most Scots have not just a political commitment but an emotional attachment to our national health service. That is right and understandable. The NHS touches our lives at every age and stage—the good times and the bad. All of us will have had the experience of seeing sick or dying loved ones being cared for by the NHS. The fact that I have a son is due almost entirely to the expertise, skill and care that was available in NHS Lothian. Those are debts that I will never be able to repay, but that is the thing about the NHS—it is not about paying, but about meeting patients' needs, and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing has never deviated from that core value, that belief, that conviction.

It is very easy to play politics with the NHS and it is all too easy to scare people and go for the cheap political hit. However, given these financially chastened times and Labour's legacy—an economic and financial mess that it has walked away from, abdicating all responsibility to the Tories and Liberal Democrats in London—we should take some comfort from the fact that there will be no compulsory redundancies, P45s or redundancy notices.

Jackie Baillie: Does Angela Constance acknowledge that the SNP is presiding over and is responsible for the lowest allocation of funds to the NHS in decades? In fact, there has been a 0.4 per cent decrease at the same time as a 4 per cent increase in England. I think that that demonstrates Labour's record in Government.

Angela Constance: I actually wonder whether Ms Baillie can count. If we want to talk about cuts, let us talk about Labour cuts. It was the Labour UK Government that cut the NHS capital budget by £129 million in 2010-11 as a Barnett consequential of spending in England.

Despite the toughest financial circumstances since devolution—and contrary to what Jackie Baillie says—NHS funding in Scotland is at record levels, with a 4.3 per cent increase, if we include the efficiency savings that, unlike other Governments, the SNP Government allows public agencies to keep for reinvestment in front-line services instead of clawing them back or top-slicing them. Despite the £500 million decrease in the Scottish budget, all health boards in Scotland have benefited from a real-terms increase. Moreover, Nicola Sturgeon's amendment clearly states her commitment to apply Barnett consequentials to NHS Scotland if the UK coalition Government's commitments to increase health spending come good. We are clearly in difficult times, but the NHS in Scotland faces them from a comparatively strong position.

I began by speaking about the emotional attachment that all Scots have to the NHS. Historically, the Labour Party has benefited from that attachment. No more, though: the Labour Party tore up its own legacy and reneged on its social contract with the people when it introduced public-private partnerships. It is Labour's biggest shame: it was all about buy now, pay later and it now means having to pay £1 billion over the next five years and getting one hospital for the price of two. Over the next year, the unitary charges for the Edinburgh royal infirmary will be £271 million, or £65 million more than its capital cost of £206 million. That is galling when one thinks that a magnetic resonance imaging scanner costs £1 million to run; that free prescriptions cost £40 million a year; and that £65 million could employ 3,000-plus nurses. After looking at its position on this matter, I do not think that we will be taking any lessons from the Labour Party.

Dr Simpson: Will the member give way?

Angela Constance: No, I am not accepting any more interventions. I have already given way to Jackie Baillie.

The Labour Party also oversaw creeping managerialism; indeed, it was managerialism gone mad. I had the privilege of working for five years as a social worker in a state hospital. It was a great hospital, and we in Scotland can be proud of it. Social workers, like doctors and nurses, work with people, but I found myself having to count things: the number of meetings I attended, things that I was obliged to do under law, and things that had absolutely no bearing on patient care. Of course, somebody else had the job of counting the things that I was obliged to count, so I have to wonder about the ratio of managers to front-line staff.

We certainly should not let Labour away with its amnesia, so we should keep repeating that there was no commitment in the Labour manifesto to increase health funding. Instead, all sectors, apart from education, were to "cut their cloth".

Both recently and in times gone by, there has been much reflection in this Parliament about the economic need for more powers. We need to grow our economy to pay for the social democracy that we want. When it comes to the NHS, the Labour Party might have the past, but the SNP has the future.

11:10

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Angela Constance's speech was important in setting out the relationship between the NHS and its users, and I associate myself with her remarks. That particular relationship is deep and special.

I will try to draw out from the previous speeches the points with which I and my party are in accord. Jackie Baillie referred to sweeping job reductions and read out the various figures in that respect. It is true, as Rhoda Grant said, that NHS Highland recently confirmed that 100 jobs are to go. Whatever the financial reasons are—the various arguments have gone back and forth across the chamber this morning—the fact is that those 100 jobs are going.

Jackie Baillie was correct to say that NHS workforce plans must be published and be totally transparent, and I have no reason to doubt that we shall soon be in that situation. However, she also raised the important question whether at the end of the day the cabinet secretary will sign off those plans. That certainly needs to be addressed.

The cabinet secretary mentioned, again, the cuts from Westminster and referred to the fact that the new UK Government is going to protect and, in fact, increase NHS spending. She also talked about reinvesting efficiency savings in front-line services. However, on the question of who signs off the workforce plans, she mentioned partnership, which I feel is something that still needs to be explored and is certainly fundamental to points that I will make towards the end of my speech.

Murdo Fraser made several valid points, in particular when highlighting the fact that Labour did not lodge any amendments to the budget with regard to NHS services. He also raised a very sensible point about drug purchasing, which is an issue that should be kept in mind.

In speaking to my party's amendment, my colleague Ross Finnie was quite correct to say that we need to focus on outcomes, patient care and patients. Indeed, I am grateful to other members for complimenting him on highlighting what is—or at least what should be—the nub of this debate. Mr Finnie also mentioned NHS inflation, which is sometimes not built into the figures in the way it should be, and pointed out that health boards are having to make savings just to break even or to stay where they are. Rightly, he wondered just how convincing is the quality of management, and provided some good examples about which we might well raise some questions in that respect. He also asked about the effect of the temporary non-filling of posts or redundancies on those who remain and who have to take on the burden, and he asked what the independent scrutiny group would come back to Parliament with. As our amendment makes clear, the group's findings must be brought to the chamber, because we need to hear what the cabinet secretary has to say and each of us needs to be clear about what is going on. This issue is too important.

Rhoda Grant's speech made my ears prick up. She is certainly correct: we Highland members simply do not understand why the rheumatology unit in Dingwall seems to be on the list for downgrading and for having beds removed. I do not think that Ms Grant will disagree with my contention that, unfortunately, there was not the level of dialogue between service users, the professionals and the NHS bosses that we would have liked. She also referred to the difficulty of recruiting junior doctors. As NHS Highland has confirmed, recruitment is very difficult in Highland and most difficult of all in Caithness. I find the situation extremely worrying and we are all keeping a very close eye on what that might mean for health service delivery in that remote part of the country, and whether people are getting the level of service that they deserve.

As I said, Rhoda Grant referred to rheumatology services and junior doctors, but I feel that one other issue nicely highlights what we are facing. I am sure that other Highland members will, like me, have had e-mails from concerned constituents about midwifery services in central and east Sutherland. If it would be all right with the Presiding Officer, I would like to read out an extract from one such e-mail. Its author says:

"I am writing to you as I am concerned about a proposed change within NHS Highland with regards to midwifery services in Central & East Sutherland. At the moment most of the community midwives in the area have a 'dual role' as a community midwife and district nurse. As far as I am aware it is planned that dual role positions will no longer exist and a midwifery service will be offered separate from that of the district nurse. It seems that the number of midwives will be reduced to 2.2 posts to cover the vast Central & East Sutherland area. I understand that the existing CMWs/district nurses have opted to revert to single roles as district nurses rather than re-apply for the new positions, indeed one is retiring as a result."

To a layman like me, that does not seem to make any sense whatever. On the face of it, it looks as if what is proposed will result in an increased cost.

I would like to establish to what extent the cabinet secretary signs off such decisions. Are groups involved in looking at such proposals? Decisions on such matters must be given extremely careful consideration. How on earth will 2.2 midwives be able to cover the vast bulk of Sutherland, given that two midwives might be required for a delivery? One thing is for sure—if NHS Highland goes ahead with its proposal, it will mark the beginning of the end of home deliveries, which would be most unfortunate.

I will conclude with a point that I make in every health debate in which I speak. Everyone has a right to a basic level of health services, even if they live in the most remote parts of the country. That is why I read out the e-mail, and it is why I whole-heartedly recommend that the amendment in Ross Finnie's name be supported.

11:16

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

Several Labour members mentioned the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition at Westminster. I remind them that the governor of the Bank of England confirmed the feasibility and advisability of tackling the deficit this year. He said:

"The bigger risk at present ... would be for a new government not to put in place clear and credible measures to deal with the fiscal deficit."

I thank Ross Finnie and Hugh Henry for concentrating on the outcomes of quality of care and ensuring the essential skills mix. I agree with what Rhoda Grant said about NHS Highland's rheumatology unit, for treatment at which there is no waiting list. All Highland members attended that unit, where we saw at first hand what could be done. The same quality and intensity of service could not be offered in a patient's home. I also thank my colleague Dr Nanette Milne, who always brings to debates the background of her own experience and her experience as the wife of a GP.

We are grateful to the Labour Party for selecting health as the topic for this morning's debate. In the current dire financial circumstances, it is right and proper that we discuss our national health service. It is also right and proper that we set the standard for debate in Scotland by focusing on patient care and treatment, managing long-term conditions, prevention and public health. For too long, the NHS has been judged by how many beds it provides, how many wards it runs, how many hospitals it has and how many prescriptions it hands out. As Ian McKee said, such judgments are made against a background of modern day surgery, which allows patients to go home on the day of surgery rather than having to stay in hospital for up to two weeks, as used to be the case. Hip replacement patients used to be hospitalised for up to three weeks. They are now in hospital for as little as three days. Last night, at a round-table discussion on infant nutrition, the midwives and health visitors told us of mothers leaving hospital six hours after giving birth, without even returning to a ward. Mothers who have had a Caesarean section, who used to face a minimum stay of 10 days, can now go home after three days.

Today's debate also takes place against a background of efficiency savings in Scotland's NHS. I do not think that I was the only member of the Health and Sport Committee to be shocked to find out about the waste that is being rooted out of the NHS, which begs the question why taxpayers' money was not spent more efficiently in the past.

I will give some examples. NHS Ayrshire and Arran found energy savings of £230,000. NHS

Lanarkshire reduced its hospitality costs by 50 per cent and its postage costs by £120,000. Another health board cut its costs in half by sharing a store for aids and adaptations. A representative of NHS Borders told the committee that it had a “fair bit of duplication” because there were separate waiting lists for primary health care teams and community teams. Merging those two waiting lists enabled the board to make better use of resources and to streamline services for patients. None of those changes affected front-line patient care.

In evidence to the committee, it emerged that NHS Lanarkshire could take £1 million out of its public health budget and could guarantee that that would not affect patient care or public health now or in the future. I asked the witness from NHS Lanarkshire about that three times and she stated firmly that that was the case. The same health board has cut 117 jobs, all in administration. The witness from NHS Lothian said:

“although there has been significant investment across the NHS, there has not necessarily been huge activity gain, so there is an issue with productivity.”—[*Official Report, Health and Sport Committee*, 12 May 2010; c 3157.]

Dr Simpson: Does Mary Scanlon agree that it is quite hard for NHS Lanarkshire to justify the cut in the number of smoking cessation nurses in that area from seven to three? Surely that will affect one of the main issues that the Parliament has been concerned about—the number of people who continue to smoke, especially in deprived communities.

Mary Scanlon: Before commenting on that, I would like to find out what is being done in community pharmacies, which I recognise play an excellent role in smoking cessation, and whether they could pick up more people. I would prefer to focus on more people stopping smoking, however that is achieved. We might be looking at only half the equation.

The point that has been made by many Labour members and others is that how the efficiency savings that are sought are managed is the critical issue. I do not want the NHS to stifle innovation or not to adopt a modern approach to the delivery of high-quality services. There are many examples of spending to save in the NHS, and in that regard I make no apologies for again mentioning mental health. Giving patients the appropriate early diagnosis, early intervention and early treatment, tailored to their individual needs, would prevent stress, anxiety and mild depression from becoming severe, chronic and enduring in the long term.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: I will do, once I have finished my point.

The provision of good care and treatment at the right time would not only save money in the NHS, but allow people to continue to work rather than being destined for a life on benefits.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The member’s time is up.

Mary Scanlon: I apologise for not taking the intervention.

Finally—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—I am sorry, but the member’s time is up.

11:23

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): I have listened carefully to the debate and, leaving to one side some of the alarmist, scaremongering and misleading rhetoric, some excellent speeches have been made, which have focused on the fact that we can be truly proud of our health service and its staff. Only recently, we debated the outcomes of those efforts—the fact that waiting times are at a record low and that the performance of the NHS continues to improve. I was pleased to hear so many members focus on those outcomes, as they are what are most important to patients.

I pay tribute to everyone who works in the health service in Scotland and reiterate the guarantees for the future that Nicola Sturgeon gave in her speech. This Government was quick to recognise the huge contribution that is made by all those who work in our NHS.

In our first year in office, we published “Better Health, Better Care: Planning Tomorrow’s Workforce Today”, which established our direction of travel to ensure that NHS workforce planning is fully integrated with service and financial planning so that workforce changes fully reflect emerging models of care in the modern world and contribute to efficiency and best value for money. That is right and proper. It is important that the projections that have been debated today—which are in no way about arbitrary cuts or the downgrading of services, whatever the nay-sayers may say—are set against that backdrop.

I want to respond to some of the comments that were made in the debate, because a number of them were important. I will start with Jackie Baillie. There is confusion at the heart of Labour’s argument. On the one hand, in response to Murdo Fraser’s intervention, Jackie Baillie said very clearly that she does not believe that the NHS is underfunded and yet, minutes later, she turned that on its head and claimed that, in some way, the NHS is underfunded. I will talk about the figures in a moment. If the latter is the case, at no point has Jackie Baillie or any Labour member in

this Parliament said where the extra money should come from—perhaps she will tell us now. She and all her Labour colleagues missed the opportunity to lodge amendments to this year's budget; I certainly did not notice Labour lodging any amendments to the budget to change the funding for the health service. If the major Opposition party in the Parliament thinks that more money should be made available to the health service, it has a responsibility to tell us where that money is coming from. If Jackie Baillie would like to tell us now, that would be most helpful.

Jackie Baillie: I will give three places for starters: homecoming, referendum and national conversation. Labour has not underfunded the Scottish budget. The SNP has been solely responsible for a 0.4 per cent decrease in the health budget when the health budget in England has risen by 4 per cent. Where is the missing money?

Shona Robison: The figures are very important. Jackie Baillie has just reiterated the 0.4 per cent figure.

Jackie Baillie: It came from SPICe.

Shona Robison: Jackie Baillie talked about the SPICe figure earlier and she has just done so again. It is interesting to note that Labour has not put the SPICe figure into the public domain. I wonder why—could it be that the figures that Jackie Baillie is talking about are for the overall health and wellbeing budget rather than the NHS budget? The overall budget was of course reduced because of the capital acceleration of the housing budget, which Labour supported. We should also remember that we requested a further £350 million from Darling to spend on housing this year, and Iain Gray supported that, but Alistair Darling refused.

SPICe has confirmed that, had the Labour Government given us that £350 million, and had we spent it all on housing as promised, the overall health and wellbeing budget would have increased by 3.2 per cent in real terms, which is 5.5 per cent in cash terms. I can only describe as sleekit the use of those figures by Jackie Baillie.

Jackie Baillie: Coming from you, that is outrageous.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Shona Robison: I move on to some of the more reasonable contributions that have been made during the debate. Murdo Fraser exposed very well the hypocrisy of Labour's position; Labour members do not like the truth.

Ross Finnie made an important contribution, but we must be careful about the language that we use. No compulsory or voluntary redundancies are being proposed. Only two boards are looking at a

very small-scale voluntary severance scheme. It is important that we send out an accurate message to staff about that point.

Anne McLaughlin made an excellent speech, reminding us all of the good outcomes that the NHS is delivering, despite the challenging financial environment.

Rhoda Grant made clear her opposition to the current NRAC formula for health board funding, and confirmed that that is Labour's position on the matter. We are entitled to expect the Labour Party to clarify what formula it would support and which health boards would be the losers under its alternative formula. We will pursue an answer to that question.

Nanette Milne reminded us of Labour's collective amnesia about what happened under its term of office when children's cancer services, neurological services, maternity services and accident and emergency were under threat of being centralised. Labour members have very short memories indeed, and Nanette Milne reminded us of that.

Ian McKee made a considered speech and laid out facts to correct some of the fiction. He talked about how service redesign can release resource to be better invested. He mentioned keyhole surgery, day surgery and the shift of the balance of care towards primary care, which was one of the most important points in the debate. The fact that GPs and other staff who are working in primary care are seeing the shift from the acute sector is important. Everyone in here talks about supporting that shift, so I hope that when that happens, and resources are moved from acute to primary care, members do not stop supporting it. The previous Administration supported that policy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister should be winding up now.

Shona Robison: I will finish on this point. Mike Rumbles made an important point, and I say to him that it is important that changes in staffing levels are not ad hoc. The redeployment of staff to the posts that need to be kept is important and it will be managed properly. It will not be ad hoc. I hope that I have reassured Mike Rumbles on that point.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister must stop there.

Shona Robison: I am happy to support the cabinet secretary's amendment.

11:31

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I will deal with some background figures first. There is no doubt that the coalition has

promised that the NHS will be protected in real terms by a future increase in the next Parliament. We can all agree on that point. We should also be able to agree on the fact that the relative spend on the NHS in Scotland, compared with England, is less. There is no doubt about that. The SPICE figures make it absolutely clear.

The other historical fact on which we can all agree is that the funding for the NHS more than doubled under the Labour and Liberal Administration. We can agree on that, and therefore accept all the points that a number of members have made about the vast improvement that has occurred in the health service during the past 11 years of devolution. There is no doubt about that. As Hugh Henry said, we must also recognise that there are some real challenges with new technology, new drugs and the increasingly ageing population.

There is one other financial fact that we need to get out of the way and state very clearly. When Labour and the Liberal Democrats left office, the SNP inherited £1.5 billion of end-year funding, which was banked with the Treasury. It has now been unbanked and spent, so it is simply gone. That creates a problem. If that amount has been poured into the system, we will face problems in the future.

Another financial point that we need to get clear is the point about NRAC that Shona Robison referred to and which Rhoda Grant mentioned in her speech. Labour supports NRAC as a concept.

Shona Robison: That is not what was said earlier.

Dr Simpson: I want to make it clear to the minister—she should not mutter about it—that we clearly support NRAC. However, when the Health and Sport Committee questioned the NRAC people, we required them to examine the data on which NRAC was based. A critical analysis of that needs to be done, and we have not got it yet. Rhoda Grant made the point that the Government has kicked it into the long grass. We were promised a critical analysis of NRAC in the early part of this year, and we have not got it yet.

When the economy is growing, NRAC is not so important, but when it is contracting, at a standstill, or has been cut in real terms, as SPICE says that it has been, NRAC becomes fundamental to boards such as the Borders, Grampian, Lothian and Highland.

Let us look at the situation around efficiency savings and cuts, which we have to distinguish between. I welcome the fact that the cabinet secretary has, under pressure, finally published the workforce plans. I regret that that was not done some days ago, because if it had been, this debate might have been based on the facts for all

the health boards and not just those four boards that presented their findings to the Health and Sport Committee.

The Labour Party is accused of being negative about this whole thing. I say to Anne McLaughlin and others that we entirely accept the fact that we must make efficiency savings and changes. As Jackie Baillie said, we are not opposed to changes in the skills mix; however, when changes in the skills mix are presented as a reduction in staffing, with 300-plus qualified nurses being swapped for 220 unqualified ones, that is a cut. I cannot understand why the Government cannot see that that must be a cut. We are not against changes in the skills mix.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Dr Simpson: I am sorry, but I have very limited time.

Other efficiency savings could be made. The introduction of voice recognition software may allow us to reduce the number of secretaries. However, as Rhoda Grant and Hugh Henry pointed out, if that meant that patients did not get the information that they needed, which receptionists and secretaries often provide, that would not be a good thing. We could reduce the number of records that are held, the number of lost records, the number of attendances and the number of did-not-attends, which the Government said that it would do but has not succeeded in doing. We could reduce the number of bank staff and premium-rate locums, but if that were done in the way that it is being done in Glasgow that would be unacceptable. If getting rid of bank cleaners resulted in a reduction in the number of cleaning hours, that would be not an improvement in efficiency, but a cut.

Another example is the fact that heart failure nurse specialists in Glasgow are now being required to do 8 per cent of their work on the wards. That might not be a bad thing if they were in the cardiology wards and it kept them connected to their teams, but they are not even in the cardiology wards—they are in totally random medical wards. Were those heart failure nurse specialists whose job is to keep patients out of hospital underworked? No, they were not; yet, they are now being redeployed to save bank nurse and locum costs. The way in which the situation is being managed is inappropriate.

I welcome the national scrutiny group that the Government has set up—I suspect as a result of the pressure that we have been putting on it—but how does that work with the nurse partnership arrangement and who will finally sign off the workforce plans? The Government has not made that clear. Is it still to be the boards or will the cabinet secretary have the final responsibility?

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Dr Simpson: I will give way in a second.

According to the figures that we have got through SPICe in the past few minutes, 68 doctors are going, 1,523 nurses are going and 230 allied health professional posts are going. Those posts are going—they are not being replaced by more allied health professionals and nurses; they are being removed from the system. In my book, those are cuts.

Let us turn to vacancy management. As a doctor, I have suffered under vacancy management. Vacancy management is entirely appropriate when it is decided that a post is not needed any more and it is planned that, when the post holder retires, they will not be replaced. However, we are not talking about that. History shows that, in the 1980s, when vacancy management was a big factor, when a vacancy came up management delayed the appointment of an individual to it. In NHS Forth Valley, a paediatric consultant gave six months' notice of the fact that he was retiring but the post was not advertised until the month after he retired. That post was still necessary, but it took another four months to appoint someone to it, during which time the health board saved four months' pay and great stress was caused to the other professionals.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, the member is in his last minute.

Dr Simpson: I apologise.

Vacancy management is not planned—that is Mike Rumbles's point. Voluntary redundancies are not the planned cutting of posts; they are asking people whether they would like to go if they are offered good terms. We did that in the universities and we lost people who were really needed. That does not work.

We are not against efficiency savings and improvement, but the Government's proposals are SNP cuts. If we get more nats, we get fewer nurses—that is undoubtedly the case, and the Government's figures, which are in SPICe today, prove that. We will have 1,523 fewer qualified nurses in the health service in Scotland this year—more nats, fewer nurses.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

Nurseries (Fife)

1. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it will take to support nurseries in the independent sector in Fife that have seen the rates on their buildings increase by between just under 30 per cent and 200 per cent in the absence of transitional rates relief. (S3O-10754)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): We are taking a range of actions to support businesses, including independent nurseries, in Scotland. On 10 February, I announced a package of measures to support all businesses in Scotland following the 2010 revaluation, amounting to around £700 million in 2010-11 alone. That includes the most generous reliefs available in the United Kingdom, which, in total, will be worth around £2.4 billion to Scottish businesses over the next five years.

Marilyn Livingstone: Will the cabinet secretary welcome representatives from Fife nurseries who are in the public gallery today to hear his response to my question? This is a serious situation that will impact heavily on future provision. What help will be available to support Fife nurseries now until their appeals against the outrageous increases can be heard in the autumn at the earliest? What support will the cabinet secretary make available to families who will not be able to meet the increased costs? Will he consider transitional relief and commit to meeting Fife Council to urge it to reconsider the unsustainable increases in rates for nurseries in Fife?

John Swinney: Decisions about the valuation of business properties are undertaken by independent valuers who follow a methodology that is consistent throughout the country and is published by the Scottish Assessors Association. I acknowledge the fact that, in some circumstances, people face significant increases in their rates bills. However, equally, many businesses face significant reductions in their business rates bills. As I have confirmed to Parliament before, although not to Marilyn Livingstone, the approach that we have taken to setting the poundage rate brings benefits to businesses throughout the country and was a major factor in my decision on transitional rates relief. I take it from Marilyn Livingstone's question that the businesses about which she is concerned have appealed against

their valuations, which is the correct approach for them to take. I encourage any business that is concerned about the issue to follow that course of action.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Will the cabinet secretary confirm, as he did in correspondence with me this week, that in each year from 2008 to 2010-11 the yield from businesses paying business rates and taxation has been higher than the Government's forecast? Indeed, businesses have paid £170 million more in rates, not all of which has been redistributed to local authorities. Where is the money that nurseries, hotels and other businesses are paying through large increases in bills going?

John Swinney: Mr Purvis will be aware that the yield from business rates must take account of the fact that there will be years in which appeals come through that deliver a lower rates income than might be expected. Such factors are netted off year by year to ensure that we have stability in the business rates income. The crucial point about how non-domestic rates income plays into the local authority settlement is that the Government gives a guarantee of the resources that will be paid to each local authority in non-domestic rates whether or not that figure is realised. That guarantee must be given over a number of years to ensure the delivery of stability in local authority finance.

Devolution

2. Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it plans to engage with the development of the United Kingdom Government legislation to transfer further powers to Scotland. (S3O-10817)

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government is engaged in a constructive dialogue with the United Kingdom Government to secure transfer to the Scottish Parliament of the responsibilities and powers that Scotland needs to succeed. Having previously spoken to Danny Alexander, I was pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the new Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Moore, earlier today.

Ross Finnie: I am pleased that the minister wishes to engage in a constructive dialogue. Does that mean that the Scottish Executive will make available the appropriate number and level of civil servants within its control to engage not only with the Scotland Office, but with the Treasury?

Fiona Hyslop: It is clear that the Scottish Government has a responsibility to work directly with the United Kingdom Government to take forward any legal transfer of powers, as the Scotland Office acknowledges. It is appropriate

that there is constructive dialogue between Governments.

UK ministers will be supported by their civil servants and, as the minister acting on behalf of the Scottish Government, I will be supported by my officials.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): It is now generally recognised that the Calman proposals as published are not in Scotland's interest. To what extent has the intergovernmental debate moved on? Is it clear which of the original Calman recommendations the UK Government supports?

Fiona Hyslop: It is not clear to us at this stage which of the original Calman recommendations the new UK Government supports. We know that the previous UK Government did not support all the Calman recommendations—indeed, it rejected nine of them.

The Labour Party is the only party that supports the full and immediate implementation of the Calman proposals, and last week this Parliament rejected that position. Issues have been overtaken by events, but constructive discussions are taking place. I am sure that everyone in this Parliament will have the opportunity to express their views, as they did in the debate—and indeed the vote—last week. I was encouraged to hear that parties in this Parliament support the UK Government's willingness to consider giving this Parliament greater fiscal responsibilities.

Autism

3. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made in revising or withdrawing section 5 of "The Autism Toolbox", "Overview of Interventions", following its acceptance of the findings of the review in November 2009. (S3O-10776)

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): "The Autism Toolbox: An Autism Resource for Scottish Schools" was written by a multiprofessional writing team, overseen by a working group and published by the Scottish Government in April 2009. We were approached in July by an individual who raised concerns about a section of the toolbox, the "Overview of Interventions". There has been no formal review; however, we have taken account of the views of professionals who have developed, written and commented on the toolbox.

It is clear that there are a range of views among professionals about the effectiveness of some of the interventions that the toolbox sets out. It is also clear that this is an area of developing research.

Having reflected on the text of the toolbox and the comments from professionals, I consider that

the "Overview of Interventions" section of the toolbox needs to be updated. I have written to local authorities to advise them of that decision, to ask them in the interim not to base decisions solely on that section and to seek views on the extent to which the toolbox has informed practice.

Robin Harper: I thank the minister for responding to an issue that was raised with the Government as long as a year ago, and on which a satisfactory conclusion has still not been reached. All good science is subject to peer review. Will the minister direct his officials to meet my constituent, Mrs Mahoney, and experts on applied behavioural analysis as soon as possible to discuss plans for updating the toolbox and amending the section on ABA? Will he direct his officials to show how they will ensure that in future the entire toolbox is monitored, revised and kept up to date on an on-going basis?

Adam Ingram: I understand that my officials have already contacted Robin Harper's constituent via Govan Law Centre to offer a meeting. I will ask them to ensure that it takes place as quickly as possible and to provide me with an update following the meeting.

In response to the second part of Robin Harper's question, I hope to get a continuous flow of feedback from our autism spectrum disorder reference group on how the toolbox is operating in practice.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Question 4 has not been lodged.

National Health Service Patients (Private Facilities) (Complaints)

5. Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether NHS patients referred to private facilities for treatment have recourse to the NHS's complaints process and, if not, for what reason and whether patients are informed of this before treatment. (S3O-10826)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I can confirm that national health service patients who are referred to private facilities as part of their NHS treatment have recourse to the NHS complaints procedure.

Margaret Smith: The cabinet secretary is aware of a constituency case that I am dealing with in which a lady was sent by NHS Lothian to a private hospital where she suffered a neurological injury that has left her permanently disabled. The NHS has passed the complaint to the private hospital, which has asked that it be sent on to the individual surgeon and his defence team for a response.

All those barriers to the truth have upset my constituent and added to her distress. Is the cabinet secretary content that such complaints are being dealt with properly? Is she content with the way in which NHS boards choose the hospitals to which they sub-contract care? Will she meet me to discuss the general concerns that this disturbing case raises?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Margaret Smith for copying me the details of the constituency case. As she will appreciate, I will not refer in detail to the circumstances in which a particular patient found themselves. However, it is important that anybody who has an adverse experience in, or while they are under the responsibility of, the NHS has full recourse to the complaints system.

The system is rightly independent of ministers, but I am happy to meet Margaret Smith if it would be helpful to discuss how she can best represent the interests of her constituent in this matter.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Has the cabinet secretary any information on the number of NHS patients who are receiving care in private facilities in comparison with in previous years?

Nicola Sturgeon: I do not have the precise numbers at my fingertips, but I am happy to provide them to Ian McKee. The Government has made a clear commitment to using taxpayers' money to build NHS capacity rather than the capacity of the private sector, as was the policy of the previous Administration.

We will continue our policy, and private hospitals will continue to be used only at the margins when NHS boards need them for strategic reasons. Our commitment is to the publicly owned and publicly delivered national health service.

Ferry Services (Review)

6. Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will report to the Parliament on the outcome of its review of ferry services. (S3O-10748)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The consultation document is currently going through the Cabinet clearance process. After that, there will be a 12-week public consultation during the summer. A draft Scottish ferries plan will then be prepared. Because additional environmental information needs to be included, the draft plan will then undergo a further six-week consultation. The plan will then be finalised and presented to the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee. Thereafter it will be published and launched on a date that is still to be agreed.

Charlie Gordon: Given that, according to previous ministerial answers, ferry fares in

communities that are not covered by the road equivalent tariff pilot have increased by 9.8 per cent since 2008, will the minister guarantee that options to reduce fares for those communities will figure in the review?

Stewart Stevenson: As far as I can ascertain, there has been no substantive review of ferry policy and practice that covers the whole system for more than 100 years. I assure Charlie Gordon that every aspect of ferry provision will be considered. Issues such as appropriate fare levels and whether ferries are the right transport solution in certain circumstances or whether other options exist will form part of our consideration.

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): I echo the sentiments that Charlie Gordon expressed in his question. The minister will be aware of the concern among people in my constituency about the effective removal of the lifeline ferry services to and from the constituency at the end of April. Will the minister give a commitment that the ferries plan will contain a protocol for any future diversion of lifeline ferry services for whatever purpose, a definition of an emergency and an agreed process of consultation on that protocol?

Stewart Stevenson: As Liam McArthur is aware, services continued across the Pentland Firth when we had to divert the Hamnavoe to rescue citizens from throughout the British isles and beyond from Norway. The Pentland Ferries operation continued, and had the capacity to support all requirements for travel across the Pentland Firth.

That operation, of course, took place at a time when demand was comparatively low. We would always wish to engage as far as possible with anyone who is affected by sudden changes in plans. However, it is worth pointing out that weather is the predominant factor that affects ferry services. On that occasion, it was clear that there was a substantial benefit to people who were in distress in another country, and it was entirely appropriate that we did what we did. I congratulate Andrew Banks on supporting the needs of the people in Orkney.

Gaelic-medium Education

7. Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): A dh'fhaighneachd do Riaghaltas na h-Alba dè bhios e a' dèanamh a dh'obair le comhairlean a tha ag iarraidh, no tha deònach, sùil a thoirt air siostam anns am biodh foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig na roghainn àbhaisteach anns na ciad bhliadhnaichean anns a' bhun-sgoil.

To ask the Scottish Government what it will do to work with local authorities willing to consider making Gaelic the default medium of education in

the early years of mainstream primary education. (S3O-10789)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Following our response to Bòrd na Gàidhlig's action plan, we are working with the board, education bodies and local authorities to identify potential areas where progress can be made with Gaelic education in schools.

Curriculum for excellence already provides schools and practitioners with guidance on the use of Gaelic as the medium for learning and teaching. As part of that, the experiences and outcomes across all curriculum areas will be made available in Gaelic for the start of the new school year.

Alasdair Allan: The aspiration of my council—Comhairle nan Eilean Siar—is that, as far as possible, every child in the future should start their education in Gaelic. That aspiration is welcome, but does the minister agree that unless it becomes reality, it is difficult to see how Gaelic can survive as a community language in the islands?

Michael Russell: I have the strongest sympathy for the aspirations of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in that regard. I have met the convener of its education committee and am happy to offer my support for the initiative. The other authorities are unlikely to take that route but I agree that, unless radical action is taken on Gaelic in Scotland, the prospects for the language look bleak. Anything undertaken in that direction will have my support and that of the Scottish Government.

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Although I support the sentiment behind Alasdair Allan's question, I ask the cabinet secretary to give an absolute assurance that local authorities with no interest in Gaelic will not be coerced into adopting it into mainstream primary education.

Michael Russell: There has never been, is not and will never be such a policy from any Scottish Government.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Oh, be clear.

Michael Russell: Mr Rumbles does not think that that is clear enough but it is absolutely and utterly wrong to say that any authority has ever been coerced into adopting Gaelic in mainstream primary education.

I say to Mr Brocklebank, who has a good track record of supporting Gaelic, that to raise the issue simply sows doubt in the minds of people who have shown hostility to the language. There is no need to raise it. The reality is that, even in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's plan, there is an absolute commitment to English-speaking parents; a capacity for English-medium education will

always be sustained. The promotion and advancement of Gaelic does not threaten any other language; sadly, other languages have threatened Gaelic almost to death.

Community Health and Care Partnership Framework (Glasgow)

8. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde in respect of the community health and care partnership framework in Glasgow. (S3O-10740)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The original CHCP scheme of establishment for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and the revised scheme were jointly developed by the NHS board and Glasgow City Council. Following detailed discussions with officials, the scheme was approved by ministers. The timetable for implementation was also clearly set out in the revised scheme of establishment, and the revised arrangements were intended to strengthen joint working locally. The difficulties have arisen since Glasgow City Council's decision not to proceed to the agreed timetable for devolution of full budgets to the CHCPs, but I very much hope that those difficulties will be resolved by the partners locally.

Bill Butler: Like the cabinet secretary, I am a Glasgow MSP and am extremely concerned at the current impasse between the health board and the council on the matter. The cabinet secretary will not need reminding that some of our most vulnerable constituents depend on the services that CHCPs provide. Given her Government's stated desire for sharing services and partnership working between agencies, will she assure those constituents that she will use her considerable influence to ensure that the health board accepts Glasgow City Council's offer of talks, brokered by the highly respected Sir John Arbuthnott, to achieve a positive resolution for all concerned?

Nicola Sturgeon: Bill Butler and I both share a desire for CHCPs to work successfully in Glasgow. If a health board takes a decision that I think is wrong, I never hesitate to say so but, in this instance, Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board deserves praise for the commitment that it shows to CHCPs.

It helps nobody to play a blame game on the matter, but it is worth pointing out that the health board has fully devolved budgets for primary and community care, amounting to some £500 million. Glasgow City Council has not done likewise for the services for which it is responsible. That leads to an imbalance in the CHCPs that must be addressed. I certainly hope that the council uses the good offices of Sir John Arbuthnott, and I hope

that that exercise leads it to review its position and to get back to a commitment to the timetable and the commitments that were agreed jointly and to which I referred in my initial answer.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general questions. Before we come to the next item of business, all members, I know, will wish to join me in welcoming to the gallery the recently appointed Belgium ambassador to the United Kingdom, His Excellency Johan Verbeke. [*Applause.*]

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-2443)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Presiding Officer, with your permission I will take a few moments to express my shock at the appalling events that unfolded in Cumbria yesterday and to inform the chamber of the assistance that Scotland has been able to provide.

I know that the entire Parliament—indeed, the whole of Scotland—will join me in offering deep sympathy to those affected. The emergency services acquitted themselves superbly in extremely difficult circumstances. Yesterday they included officers from Dumfries and Galloway police, who provided assistance to their colleagues in Cumbria by deploying an armed response unit and by taking over Cumbria police's motorway policing duties. In addition, the Scottish Police Services Authority has provided scenes-of-crime officers to support the forensic work. The national health service in Dumfries and Galloway has been in contact with Cumbrian colleagues to offer assistance. To date, no patients from the incidents have been treated in Scottish hospitals, but the facilities are on standby if required.

I have written to the leader of Cumbria County Council, Councillor Eddie Martin, to convey the Scottish people's condolences and to offer any further assistance that we can. Scotland has had its own experience of tragedy on this scale, and just as our thoughts remain with those affected by those appalling crimes, our sympathies today are with the families and friends of the victims of yesterday's shootings in Cumbria.

Iain Gray: Members on this side of the chamber would of course wish to be associated with the condolences and sympathies for those who suffered in yesterday's terrible incident and with the support for those who are working in its aftermath.

This week, there are no surprises or leaked documents, just the Scottish Government's own official figures on how many new teachers have found a job. The Educational Institute of Scotland called the numbers "shocking". Others have called them "disturbing" and "a tragedy". They are certainly a disgrace. Can the First Minister possibly disagree?

The First Minister: The ability of post-probationary teachers to get employment is a

huge concern. The numbers cause us great concern. It should be said that we are now approaching 90 per cent of post-probationers in employment, which is a much better position than in the previous survey. It should also be said that teacher unemployment in Scotland is much lower than it is in England, Wales or Northern Ireland. Although the figure is too high, I suspect that that is an indication that councils are responding to a difficult situation, just as the Scottish Government is. Iain Gray will also have to have in mind the public expenditure pressure in which I think everyone else in the country would accept that his previous Government at Westminster had a substantial part to play.

Iain Gray: The public spending pressure that the First Minister faces in this year—it is this year that we are talking about—is that he has more money than he has had in any previous year. The figure of 90 per cent of new teachers in employment is pure and simple spin. It includes, for example, teachers who are on a supply list, sitting at home and hoping that the telephone might ring so that they might get a day's work. The truth is that three out of four new teachers cannot find a permanent, full-time job. We trained those teachers, parents want them in our schools, and pupils need them in front of them, teaching them, right now. Can the First Minister explain why three quarters of them cannot get a permanent job?

The First Minister: Let us look at the reality of the funding that has gone to local authorities. The percentage of the Scottish budget that is allocated to local authorities has risen in each of the past three years—from 33.63 per cent to 33.99 per cent and to 34.08 per cent this year. If the problem is not the overall size of the budget, given the increased percentage of funding, perhaps Iain Gray might like to reflect on the fact that the only way to change the situation and increase the percentage of funding to local authorities is by reducing funding for other services, such as the national health service. Of course, the Labour Party's position is not that we should increase funding to local authorities and reduce funding elsewhere but that we should increase all funding everywhere. That position is extraordinary, untenable and ridiculous.

Iain Gray: We have heard before the excuse that local government had the money but spent it on something else. We heard it from Fiona Hyslop just before she was sacked. The problem is not the envelope of spending; the problem is that the Government has cut 2,500 teaching posts from our schools.

Yesterday, Mike Russell said on television that teachers who are accused of incompetence should be suspended automatically. What about a Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong

Learning who cannot deliver his promise on teacher numbers, who cannot deliver on class sizes, who cannot find jobs for three quarters of new teachers, who will not build a single school in four years and who has had to write to 50,000 parents to apologise for the mess that he has made of the new curriculum? That is incompetence, so will the First Minister suspend Mike Russell?

The First Minister: The vast majority of councils throughout Scotland place a strong priority on driving down teacher pupil ratios in terms of class sizes and teacher numbers. The average primary class size has reached a new record of 23.1 pupils, which is down from 23.2 in 2008, 23.3 in 2007 and 23.6 in 2006.

In a difficult situation, the vast majority of Scotland's councils place a high priority on employing as many post-probationary teachers as possible. Not every council has such a priority. Some councils do not believe that class sizes are a serious issue—they think that other priorities exist. For example, Glasgow City Council has halved the number of post-probationers whom it employs from 225 to 107 this year; Midlothian Council has cut its numbers by a half from 49 to 27; and North Lanarkshire Council has cut its numbers by more than a quarter. In fact—amazingly enough—the decline in the employment of post-probationers is concentrated hugely in Labour councils.

Before Iain Gray comes to the chamber to weep crocodile tears for unemployed teachers, it might be interesting if he had a word with his colleagues in local government and asked them to apply the same priority to employing teachers as do many other councils throughout Scotland.

Iain Gray: Our Administration raised the number of teachers in our schools to 53,000 and the First Minister promised to keep that figure there. He should not accuse me of crocodile tears for teachers. He started by blaming the Westminster Government and ended by blaming councils. When will he take responsibility?

Every year, the First Minister has had more money, and every year, he has thrown more teachers on the scrap heap. What are those teachers doing? They are applying for jobs in England, looking for jobs in Canada and heading for jobs in the middle east.

The First Minister brought up the health service. He is right—what I described is not just happening in our schools. Nicola Sturgeon admitted today that the teachers will be joined by more than 1,500 nurses. It is a Salmond shambles all round. Is the First Minister's message to young Scots, "If you want to be a teacher or a nurse, emigrate"?

The First Minister: Unfortunately, Iain Gray had prepared his fourth question before I pointed out in my first answer that unemployment among teachers in Scotland, although too high, is substantially lower than unemployment among teachers south of the border.

I turn to Labour's attack on the health service. I remind Iain Gray that the quality of health care remains our top priority and that there shall be no compulsory redundancies in the national health service in Scotland. Contrary to Labour's scaremongering, we now know for certain that far more people will be employed in the national health service in Scotland at the end of the SNP Government's four-year term than at the start, under Labour control.

Iain Gray accused me of finishing with my previous answer, but I have not finished with him just yet. Let us consider the consequences of his line of argument. The Labour Party wrecked the public finances of the United Kingdom, imposed a £500 million cut on the Scottish budget this year, went into an election campaign saying that it was considering cuts that would be tougher and deeper than those of Margaret Thatcher, and then ran away from government. Under its Kerr-Baker analysis, it wants to impose another £332 million of cuts this year, and it is hoping beyond belief that everyone else in the country will accept its view that everyone else is responsible for the actions of the Labour Party and the Westminster Government. That is not a credible position. There is not a single person in Scotland outside the Labour ranks in the chamber who will absolve the Labour Party of its individual and collective responsibility for the financial circumstances that we now face.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S3F-2444)

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

Annabel Goldie: I hope that, when the First Minister meets the Prime Minister, he will pledge to work with the United Kingdom Government on issues such as tackling problem drinks through taxation and dealing with general practitioner contracts, because his minority Scottish National Party Government has, quite simply, stalled.

Nicola Sturgeon has said that the Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that everyone in Scotland can access high-quality health care

"when they need it, regardless of where they live."

No one could disagree with that, so what on earth has gone wrong in Kinloch Rannoch, a community that is being denied acceptable out-of-hours GP cover? Why has the Scottish Government ended up in court over the issue? Why is the First Minister's Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing refusing to talk to the community of Kinloch Rannoch and refusing to intervene? Why has the Scottish Government broken its promise to provide high-quality health care when and where people need it?

The First Minister: As I recall, the community of Kinloch Rannoch came to the committees of the Parliament. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing and the health minister will be delighted to speak to that community.

Annabel Goldie should not give the impression that the health service in Scotland is doing anything other than providing outstanding care. As she knows, with the support of some members, we saved accident and emergency units across Scotland. We have the best waiting times on record. The cancer treatment target for the health service in Scotland has been met for the first time. We are abolishing prescription charges, without the support of some parties that are represented in the chamber. Crucially, we have wiped out bed blocking. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order. There have been enough individual interventions from sedentary positions for the time being.

The First Minister: I watched this morning's debate, during which a number of members—most at least on the Conservative benches—made the point that we should think about how patients see the national health service in Scotland. It is significant that the recent Scottish social attitudes survey, which was published on 11 May, showed that more people are satisfied with progress in the national health service than ever before. That is evidence of the public response to the efforts of our people in the national health service. I know that Annabel Goldie would not want to give the impression that we have seen anything other than an outstanding performance, an improved position and improved public satisfaction.

Annabel Goldie: The question that I asked was about out-of-hours GP cover, and I used the illustration of a particular community that is suffering such a significant problem that the Scottish Government has ended up in court over the issue. I also remind the First Minister that we know from a question to him on a previous occasion in the chamber that, since the renegotiation of GP contracts, emergency call-outs of the ambulance service have soared.

The First Minister might be fond of basking in the roseate impression that he likes to create of some of our public services in Scotland, but I remind him that the issue that the community is concerned about actually covers a great deal of Scotland, unless one happens to live in the central belt or metropolitan or urban areas. I ask the First Minister again whether his health secretary will now intervene. In comment to the media, she has apparently explicitly declined to intervene. How many other rural communities in Scotland lack acceptable out-of-hours GP cover? Does he even know?

As the Westminster Government is committed to renegotiation of GP contracts, will the First Minister, in his imminent meeting with the Prime Minister, commit his Government to that process?

The First Minister: I will certainly ask the Prime Minister on Annabel Goldie's behalf whether he is going to reopen negotiations on GP contracts, which I could point out were introduced not by this Government but by a previous Administration.

The point is that communities in Scotland have satisfactory out-of-hours cover. I am proud to represent a rural community and I know what the situation is with out-of-hours cover. Of course people in many communities throughout Scotland, not least in our rural communities, would like to have improved services. That is absolutely the case. They are getting improved services, as I indicated to Annabel Goldie in my answer to her first question. Our battle is to maintain those improvements in the health service.

I do not accept, for example, the criticism that is often made of NHS 24. Particularly in circumstances such as the recent threatened flu pandemic, NHS 24 has proved its worth. It was outstanding in its performance.

I know that Annabel Goldie wants to quote a particular instance, and she is quite entitled to do so. All that I am saying is that she should not give people the impression—because it is not true—that the national health service is not responding superbly throughout the country, not least in rural areas, in providing the health services to which people are entitled.

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-2445)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I will meet the Secretary of State for Scotland next week.

Tavish Scott: First, I associate my party with the sentiments of the Parliament on the terrible events in Cumbria yesterday.

The First Minister announced the start of the Scottish Investment Bank in April 2009, to the Scottish Trades Union Congress. He announced it again in April 2010, once again to the STUC. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth was asked by the Parliament's Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee in May about money in the Scottish Investment Bank for businesses, and he said, "It is available now." Fourteen months after the first announcement, is it available now?

The First Minister: The money has now been allocated. It is an interesting question. The purpose of the Scottish Investment Bank is to bring additional funds to help enterprise in Scotland. One of the difficulties in bringing additional funds was the difficulty that we had with the Treasury in getting it to accept the argument that, if we bring in additional funds from, for example, the European Investment Bank, the Treasury should not deduct that from the block grant to Scotland, which would rather defeat the purpose. Thanks to the work of the finance secretary, we found a method of substantially allocating and making able the funds for the Scottish Investment Bank.

I think that it is going to be a splendid innovation to increase the availability of funds to fast-growing businesses in Scotland. It is broadly welcomed across Scottish society and by both the STUC and the Confederation of British Industry, in a unique alliance. Therefore, I think that it should also be supported by others, even—lo—unto the Liberal Democrats. I am sure that, when I meet the new Scottish secretary, I will be able to persuade him not only that he should support the Scottish Investment Bank but that he should combine with the Scottish Government in seeking a more co-operative attitude from Her Majesty's Treasury so that we can further increase the funds, with European money, to the Scottish Investment Bank.

Tavish Scott: The problem is that all of that was true 14 months ago. On Tuesday this week, the First Minister said that it is urgent that small and medium-sized businesses are able to get loans, but on the same day, the finance secretary had to admit to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee that his bank is not available for businesses to access at this time. Announcement follows announcement, but not one Scottish Investment Bank penny is being invested in Scottish business and jobs. Fourteen months after the Government announced the bank, there are at least another six months to wait before any money goes out the door, although jobs are being lost every month. A hundred jobs have been lost this week in Peter Scott & Co in Hawick, hundreds more have been lost in the Royal Bank of Scotland, 50 have been lost in Dumfriesshire, and

90 have been lost in Midlothian. Small businesses and the wider economy need an investment bank lending. Is not the project just another Scottish National Party vanity project that is long on publicity, but very short on delivery?

The First Minister: I point out to Tavish Scott that the co-investment funds that are available are being invested daily. Those funds continue to be part of the Scottish Enterprise mix. The idea behind the Scottish Investment Bank was substantially to increase funds, and that is happening. Tavish Scott rightly pointed out that funds will be available from the Scottish Investment Bank in this financial year.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): When?

The Presiding Officer: Order, Mr Purvis.

The First Minister: That will be a substantial improvement for Scottish business.

Now that Tavish Scott has, by extension, a role and responsibility in government, I am sure that he will agree that, with financial powers available to the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government, we will not have to bypass Treasury regulations in order to effect substantial increases in investment funds in the future. Given that people throughout Scottish society think that that is a powerful new initiative that will help Scottish business and jobs, cannot the Liberal Democrats find it within themselves to say that the idea might be a good one that is worthy of their support?

The Presiding Officer: A number of members have requested to ask questions on recent events in the middle east. I do not have time to call all of them, but I call Pauline McNeill.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): Given that the First Minister is responsible for the general welfare of all Scots, will he join me in condemning the loss of civilian life due to the Israeli commando attack on the flotilla that was heading for Gaza with international aid in international waters? One of my constituents, Hassan Ghani, who was on board the ship when it was attacked, is now in Istanbul and is traumatised, but at least he is safe.

On the BBC's "Question Time" recently, the First Minister called for a review of trading relationships with Israel. How can he take that forward in his Administration? Can he act on that in any way? If he can, he will have my support and that of all Scots who demand that the blockade on Gaza be lifted and that Israel abide by international law.

The First Minister: I am glad that the member's constituent has now been released, albeit that he is not yet home in Scotland. Four Scots have been involved in the recent incident. One is home and

the other three are in the same position that her constituent is in.

The Scottish Government strongly condemns the Israeli authorities' actions. We have added our voice to that of the wider international community, and call for the immediate lifting of the Israeli blockade of Gaza. The Deputy First Minister has made statements on the matter, and I have written in the strongest possible terms to the Israeli ambassador.

The issue of the immediate lifting of the blockade has, of course, been debated in the Parliament. I think that motion carried the support of the overwhelming majority of members. It is particularly important at the present moment that the wider international community responds to the atrocity on the high seas. We believe that a ship that is bound for Gaza with a Scottish captain piloting it is at risk if the Israeli Government continues its blockade and actions in international waters. Therefore, the Parliament should speak with an overwhelming majority and say that the Israeli action is unacceptable, insupportable and should stop forthwith.

Police Officers (Recruitment)

4. Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what progress has been made to meet the Scottish Government's target of recruiting 1,000 additional police officers. (S3F-2456)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Cabinet Secretary for Justice announced on Tuesday that, as at 31 March 2010, there were a record number of 17,409 police officers in Scotland. That is 1,175 more than we inherited, at March 2007, and therefore we fully anticipate that we will meet our target of recruiting 1,000 additional police officers in the lifetime of this Parliament.

By using the extra funding provided by this Government, and thanks to the efforts of the Scottish Police College in training record numbers of recruits, chief constables throughout Scotland have ensured that as many officers as possible are deployed on the front line. They are to be congratulated on their efforts.

Angela Constance: I am particularly pleased to note that, for the first time ever, there are more than 3,000 police officers in Lothian and Borders. Now that an additional 1,175 police officers are patrolling the streets of Scotland, does the First Minister agree that if we are to support those new officers in striving to make our communities safer, it is now more important than ever that we tackle Scotland's battle with the booze?

The First Minister: I do. The response, in terms of front-line officers, was absolutely necessary

given the situation that we inherited. It has had a large role to play in the decrease in recorded crime and the fact that crime statistics in Scotland are at their best level in a generation. However, it does not remove the obligation on all of us to consider the underlying causes of crime. There is no question but that Scotland's relationship with alcohol is one of the feeders of crime and disorder in our communities. As well as backing our police and the increase in the number of officers, we should have the courage, as a Parliament, to tackle the underlying causes of Scotland's problems.

Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill (Minimum Unit Price)

5. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will accept the view of the Health and Sport Committee that the Government should seek to amend the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 to specify its proposed minimum unit price. (S3F-2454)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): As I have made clear a number of times, it is our intention to bring forward a specific price before a final vote is taken by the Parliament. We are happy to reflect further on the specific recommendations made by the Health and Sport Committee. I am greatly encouraged that Dr Simpson continues to show great interest in minimum pricing, despite his party opposing the policy before any evidence was taken by the Health and Sport Committee. Minimum pricing is backed by many who have considered the evidence: those in the health professions, including all the public health directors in NHS Scotland; the four United Kingdom chief medical officers; and the British Medical Association.

Dr Simpson: We already knew that the Government had agreed to make an announcement before stage 3 of the bill. However, if we are to have a proper debate on the whole issue of pricing—as opposed to minimum unit pricing—why will the First Minister not name his price now rather than waiting until the stage 3 debate in the autumn?

The First Minister: We have made it clear that we will name the specific price before the final vote is taken in the Parliament.

If Dr Richard Simpson is just waiting for the price before he rallies behind the policy—in line with the rest of the medical profession and, just this week, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence—I am certain that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing would want to engage in dialogue.

I had the impression that the Labour Party had adopted a principled position north of the border against minimum pricing, while simultaneously having a principled position south of the border in favour of minimum pricing. Dr Simpson is one of the more open-minded people on the Labour benches and will want to consider the merits of the issue. I hope that, at some point, he will rally behind the progressive policies of this Government.

Year of Homecoming (2014)

6. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the benefits to Scotland will be of designating 2014 as the next year of homecoming. (S3F-2446)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I thank the member for his question and the enthusiasm with which he welcomed the Scottish Government's announcement. I have a copy of his press release, in which he calls for Bannockburn to be

"the focal-point for Homecoming in 2014."

Scotland's first homecoming year was a great success. It attracted 95,000 additional visitors and generated £53.7 million in additional tourism revenue for Scotland. It makes sense to build on that success in 2014 when our next year of homecoming will coincide with the staging of the Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup, and, of course, the 700th anniversary of the battle of Bannockburn, a pivotal moment in Scottish history.

Murdo Fraser: I thank the First Minister for his reply and for the interest that he takes in my press releases. What lessons does he believe that the Scottish Government can learn from homecoming in 2009? I know that he said that it was a great success for Scotland. Why then have we seen the disgraceful sight of Scottish National Party ministers briefing the press against the current chief executive of VisitScotland, the very agency tasked with that important job?

The First Minister: I have to say that I did not think that that question was as good as the press release, which I much prefer. It is simply not true that SNP ministers have acted in the way that Murdo Fraser described, but no doubt he will be able to pursue that particular aspect of his question after the statement that will be made later today.

I do not think that I did justice to Murdo Fraser. I did not communicate to the chamber the full flavour of his press release, which has now been handed to me. He said in his press release:

"The Battle of Bannockburn was where Robert the Bruce led a significant Scottish victory against the English during the Wars of Scottish Independence. It is of national importance to Scotland and in four years' time we will mark the 700th anniversary of this battle."

I welcome Murdo Fraser to the cause.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Has the First Minister spoken to the chairman of VisitScotland in the past few days about the leadership provided by the chief executive of VisitScotland, and, if so, what did he say?

The First Minister: No, I have not done that.

12:32

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Justice and Law Officers

Police (Common Performance Management Platform)

1. Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when the common performance management platform will be running in all eight Scottish police forces and the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency. (S3O-10764)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The common performance management platform will bring together information from several different areas of policing, including crime, custody and road traffic collisions. My understanding is that some of that information will be available to all forces and to the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency later this year, with other source systems being added during 2011 and early 2012.

Mary Mulligan: As the cabinet secretary will be aware, it was generally accepted that the new platform would be operational by April 2009. What are the major problems that have caused the delay? What exactly is he doing to address those problems?

Kenny MacAskill: As Mary Mulligan no doubt understands, this extremely complex project aims to bring together information from eight different police forces and many different aspects of policing into one place. Such a complex and technical project is beyond the normal skills and resources of police forces and requires interaction with the Scottish Police Services Authority. I assure Ms Mulligan that all those who are in charge of the project, whether at the SPSA or at the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, are doing everything that they can to bring it in as speedily as possible. When the system comes in later this year—albeit only in part—I am sure that it will add to the information that is available and will contribute to making Scotland a safer place.

Prison Officers (Prosecutions)

2. Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how many prison officers have been prosecuted for crimes involved in supplying drugs to prisoners since 1999. (S3O-10784)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service does not hold details of the occupation of those who are reported for prosecution on a particular charge, therefore the information requested is not available.

Elizabeth Smith: The cabinet secretary will be aware of Policy Exchange's recent very disturbing research, which found that 85 per cent of prisoners in England and Wales reported that they could get hold of drugs if they wanted them. Almost half of all prisoners reported that drugs were easily available, with some saying that they were available from prison officers. What steps is the Scottish National Party Government taking to investigate the situation in Scottish prisons and to deal with any prison officers who might be involved in supplying drugs to prisoners?

Kenny MacAskill: We discuss such matters regularly with the Scottish Prison Service and, indeed, with the Prison Officers Association. I think that we are remarkably well served by the POA and the SPS in Scotland. I can confirm to Ms Smith that we have been advised that, since 1999, three prison officers suspected of supplying drugs to prisoners have been charged. Although those cases were investigated by the police and/or progressed to court, none resulted in a conviction, but all three prison officers were dismissed by the SPS.

I am aware of the report about the situation south of the border, to which Ms Smith referred. The SPS and the POA treat the matter with the utmost concern. In every instance there will no doubt be some who will be corrupted, but, in the main, the SPS serves our country remarkably well. The member can be assured that anyone involved in such matters will be dealt with most severely, if not by the courts, certainly by the institution that manages our prisons.

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): There is no doubt that a central task in tackling drug usage in prisons is to stop the transfer of drugs into prison. What steps is the cabinet secretary taking to achieve that? What use is the Government making of modern technology in that regard, such as modern scanning chairs?

Kenny MacAskill: Two factors should be mentioned. On modern scanning chairs, yes, some new equipment is being introduced. Equally, sometimes the old-time religion works well: the sniffer dogs that the SPS employs do a remarkably good job not simply in finding drugs that prisoners possess but in tackling the problems that the SPS faces in dealing with visitors, suppliers and other workers.

I assure the member that the Government takes the matter extremely seriously. The Minister for

Community Safety is involved in the drugs aspect. When we are dealing with drugs, we are dealing with serious organised crime, and for that reason I established the serious organised crime task force, which includes not only the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency but the Scottish Prison Service. There might be the odd instance of a girlfriend passing drugs to a boyfriend or vice versa, but many of the people who seek to transport drugs into prisons are serious organised criminals. For that reason, we established the task force.

Yesterday, I was delighted to announce that, in one year, more than 600 people have been detained and brought to account, that drugs worth £40 million have been seized and that significant assets in excess of £5 million have been recovered by the Crown and are being ploughed back into our communities.

Knife Offences (Sentences)

3. Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what percentage of those prosecuted for carrying a knife in the last year have received a sentence of six months or less. (S3O-10781)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): In 2008-09, 18 per cent of those convicted of handling an offensive weapon received a custodial sentence of six months or less.

The number of people who have been caught carrying a knife is down 11 per cent since 2006-07, and the average custodial sentence for those who are caught has increased by two thirds since 2006-07, and is now more than eight and a half months. The reduction in knife carrying should come as no surprise, given this Government's record, including record investment in youth diversionary activities through the cashback for communities scheme, record investment in the national violence reduction unit and record numbers of police officers on the streets.

Ted Brocklebank: I am sure that the cabinet secretary is aware of the blight that knives cause in our communities, and of their cost in terms of lives and the public purse, through the national health service and policing. Does the cabinet secretary agree that knife carrying is totally unacceptable? Will the Government reconsider its position and support the Scottish Conservatives' amendment at stage 3 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill that will ensure that those who carry knives will be under no illusion about the penalty that they will face, which will be two years in prison?

Kenny MacAskill: We must first consider the facts. More searches are being carried out than ever before—more than 250,000 in Strathclyde alone. Fewer people—albeit still too many—are carrying knives, and the system is dealing ever more severely with those who are. The system is working.

We have a significant cultural problem with knife carrying. However, Ted Brocklebank would do well to consider that, if we are going to change the culture in Scotland, as the First Minister and others said earlier today, the battle that we face is not only against the blade; it is against the booze. It is about time that the Tories stepped up to the mark with regard to changing not only the culture of knife carrying but the machismo culture that goes with alcohol abuse.

Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP):

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the best outcome for Scottish communities with regard to knife carrying is not that there are short or long sentences but that there is less knife carrying? Will he join me in congratulating the police on their efforts, which helped to reduce the number of knife-carrying offences in Strathclyde by 16 per cent in 2009-10?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. It was a pleasure to be with Chief Constable House in Dundee yesterday, because his statistics show not only a 16 per cent reduction in knife carrying last year but a 12 per cent reduction in serious assaults. The hard work of officers in Strathclyde Police has resulted in a 32 per cent reduction in the number of handling an offensive weapon crimes in the force's area since 2006-07. We should remember that that is against a backdrop of the lowest recorded levels of crime in Scotland in almost 30 years, the lowest homicide rate in Edinburgh in 20 years and the lowest homicide rate in Glasgow in 10 years. There is a problem, but things are working. Further, as I said, it is not simply about tackling the blade; it is also about tackling the booze.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):

Why has the cabinet secretary lodged an amendment to delete the provisions for minimum mandatory sentences for knife crime that were passed by the Justice Committee at stage 2 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill? That is particularly puzzling, given that the president of the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents, Chief Superintendent David O'Connor, has said:

"we find it increasingly difficult to oppose calls for the introduction of a minimum mandatory period of imprisonment of six months for any person carrying a knife ... in a public place."

Kenny MacAskill: I have done so because I take the advice of Chief Constable David Strang,

Chief Constable Stephen House and Chief Superintendent John Carnochan of the violence reduction unit, all of whom have argued that the proposal by Mr Baker and others would not work. We do not need an unseemly bidding war, with six months from Mr Baker, two years from Mr Brocklebank and four years from Mr Bain, the member of Parliament for Glasgow North East—yes, four years he said, simply for carrying a knife. Why not add a zero to that or two zeros and let us get on with it? We have to support the measures that are working—tough enforcement, more stop and searches, visible enforcement in the courts and ploughing money back into diversionary activities to ensure that kids are given the opportunity to be all that they can be. Members can say what they like, but the record speaks for itself. In Strathclyde and elsewhere, progress is being made.

Policing (Scottish Government Responsibilities)

4. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what its responsibilities are regarding policing. (S3O-10816)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Police (Scotland) Act 1967 sets the legislative framework for policing in Scotland. It defines governance arrangements for policing, and those are carried out through the tripartite agreement. The Scottish ministers set the strategic direction for policing and provide a share of the required resources through police grant; police authorities set the overall budget, monitor performance and hold their chief constable to account; and chief constables are responsible for managing their budget and delivering operational policing for their force area.

Robert Brown: The cabinet secretary has claimed repeatedly that he has no responsibilities whatever with regard to the deployment of Tasers and that that is an operational matter for chief constables. Will he therefore comment on one of the key points in written evidence to the Justice Committee from Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary for Scotland in 2007, which states:

"Contrary to popular belief, the operational autonomy of chief constables extends only to control of operational policing as it occurs, not to operational priorities, strategies and policies?"

Will he also comment on the recent textbook "Municipal Policing in Scotland", which indicates that the Scottish ministers have powers to make regulations about the issuing, use and return of police equipment? Is it not the case that the red laser dot points firmly at the cabinet secretary, and is it not time for him to reconsider his stated position on the issue?

Kenny MacAskill: The Scottish ministers do not have legislative powers to direct the police on operational matters. We have no competence to issue guidance on the use of firearms, including Tasers, since the matter is reserved to Westminster. For the same reason, the Scottish Parliament has no power to legislate on that.

In 2004, the Scottish ministers in a Labour-Lib Dem coalition supported trials of Tasers in Scotland, which led to the operational use of Tasers starting in 2005. Mr Brown might have been dealing with matters expeditiously then, but what we are seeing now is a bit of cant and gross hypocrisy.

Members can rest assured that, when officers are in situations in which they and members of the public face danger, they will have the Government's full support in doing what is necessary. The matter is an operational one, but Tasers are used proportionately and legitimately by hard-working and brave Scottish police officers to defend themselves and other citizens in our communities. We will make no apology for that and we will never interfere in it.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the problems that are associated with Tasers have been exaggerated, and that if anyone wishes to avoid coming into conflict with police officers armed with Tasers, they simply have to refrain from acting violently?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. We must realise that much of the argument by Amnesty International on the issue is based on information from the United States of America. I admire a great deal of things in that country, but I do not admire many of its law and order approaches. If we are to have a study and to criticise the police, that should be based on what takes place here and not on routine firing in Phoenix, Arizona or anywhere else. The argument is predicated on misinformation.

I agree whole-heartedly with Mr Aitken that Scottish police officers act legitimately and proportionately in circumstances in which they or members of the public face danger. A Taser was recently used in West Lothian, when a member of the public was incarcerated by a man with a knife. The police have made no apology for that and I certainly make no apology for it. The officers who were involved acted appropriately and correctly, and in that they have my full support.

Naloxone

5. Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action will be taken following the report of the short-life working group on naloxone. (S3O-10805)

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): I believe that naloxone has the potential to save lives. That is why I asked the national forum on drug-related deaths to develop a national protocol and guidelines on naloxone provision. The forum has approved and submitted to the Scottish Government the final protocol and guidelines, along with a report of its investigations. My officials are examining the report's recommendations, which will inform the roll-out of the national naloxone programme. We intend to work with partners in the sector, offering appropriate central resource, to roll out the national supply of naloxone across Scotland.

Anne McLaughlin: I am interested to hear that. I know that the roll-out of the naloxone programme has been welcomed across the country.

I draw the minister's attention briefly to the issue of prescribing, which is one of the challenges in the naloxone programme, and ask for his thoughts. Currently, naloxone can be prescribed only to the drug user. However, as members have already agreed, if the user has overdosed, naloxone will be administered not by them but by their families, friends, drugs workers or hostel workers. What would have to happen for the prescription status of naloxone to be changed? Is the Scottish Government prepared to consider the options that are available?

Fergus Ewing: Anne McLaughlin is right to say that naloxone is a prescription-only medicine. The supply of such medicines is governed by the Medicines Act 1968. The current legal position is that only named patients can be supplied with naloxone, despite an amendment to the 1968 act that allows anyone to administer naloxone to save lives. That said, in the roll-out of naloxone across Scotland, we will provide a national training resource to health boards and alcohol and drug partnerships, so that they can provide training to key workers, as well as the families and friends of those who are at risk. I will seek to ensure that the provision is extended to people who are in charge of hostels and homeless accommodation, where the risks of death may be higher than elsewhere. In the near future, I will raise with the United Kingdom Government the issue of naloxone's status as a prescription-only drug.

Swift Justice

6. Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made to ensure swift justice following a conviction. (S3O-10796)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): As the First Minister said to the chamber on 20 May 2010, the Government has provided record levels of funding to strengthen the system of community service and to speed up

start and completion times. That is the right preparation for the new community payback order, which has been welcomed by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and is having an impact. The audit of community sentences that was carried out in November 2009 showed that 286 offenders commenced their work placement within seven days in that month, compared with only 85 offenders in the same month the year before.

Joe FitzPatrick: People south of the border will be pleased that the UK Government is now focusing on reducing reoffending, as the Scottish Government has done for some time. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that a robust community service system contributes to meeting that aim?

Kenny MacAskill: We are working with partners and stakeholders in the Association of Directors of Social Work, local authorities and community justice authorities. As I said in my initial answer, the latest statistics show that offenders are being sent out to repay their debt to the community more quickly than ever before, with the majority starting manual labour within seven working days. The figure has risen to 63 per cent in 2009, from just 19 per cent in 2008. More are also finishing within the 12-month time limit, with 62 per cent of all local authorities in 2009 ensuring that offenders completed their community service orders within 12 months, compared with 50 per cent in 2008.

We believe that, fundamentally, those who have committed low-level offences and do not require to be incarcerated for the safety of our communities should not be given free bed and board, courtesy of the taxpayer, for seven days, 14 days, three months or whatever. They should go out and do some hard work to make our communities better and safer by clearing snow for the old ones, building cycle paths and so on.

Guilty Pleas (Sentence Discounts)

7. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will consider reviewing the discounts given on sentences to accused persons who plead guilty at different stages of the trial process. (S3O-10783)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Sentencing decisions in individual cases remain a matter for the sentencing judge, who has heard all of the facts and circumstances of the offence and the offender and is able to take into account any factors that he or she considers to be relevant. We believe that Government has a responsibility to ensure that the appropriate framework is in place in Scotland to promote fairness and justice in sentencing. In light of that, we are taking forward work on the creation of a Scottish sentencing council, which will be tasked

with creating a system of sentencing guidelines for Scotland. Those proposals are being taken forward in the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill.

David McLetchie: Is the cabinet secretary aware that a one-third discount off a sentence, although not mandatory, is almost invariably applied by the courts irrespective of the circumstances that surround a guilty plea? Does he think it right that a full discount should be given to an accused person who is plainly bang-to-rights guilty, as opposed to an accused person in a case where guilt is less easily established and where justice would indeed be served by the candid and early admission of guilt?

The cabinet secretary mentioned the sentencing council that will be brought into being under legislation that is before the Parliament. Can he assure us that the council will examine sentence discounts as part of its work programme?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. I can also advise Mr McLetchie that consideration of the matter is continuing in the High Court. In a recent appeal case—*Her Majesty's Advocate v Graham*, which might not be known to Mr McLetchie because it took place only on 27 May—the advocate depute for the Crown invited the court to issue guidance on the sentences that are appropriate for offences involving indecent images of children. That related to the giving of a significant discount. The member will be glad to know that the court widened the scope of the appeal in the light of the Crown's request that it should provide guidance on the matter, and the Lord Justice Clerk confirmed that he entirely agreed with the view that judicial guidance on sentencing for such offences is now opportune.

Mr McLetchie has raised a valid point. It is being dealt with—quite correctly—by the High Court, but I assure him that it will also be dealt with by the sentencing council.

Rural Affairs and the Environment

Wildlife Corridors

1. Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it has taken to improve the legal protection of wildlife corridors in the urban environment. (S3O-10814)

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): We have taken measures to improve the promotion and protection of wildlife corridors through the planning system. In 2009, the Scottish Government published the second national planning framework, which identifies the central Scotland green network as a national development. The aim is for a strategic network of woodland and other habitats, active travel routes,

green-space links, watercourses and waterways that provides an enhanced setting for development and other land uses and improved opportunities for outdoor recreation and cultural activity.

In February, the Scottish Government published the consolidated Scottish planning policy, which states that development plans should identify and promote green networks where that will add value to the provision, protection, enhancement and connectivity of open space and habitats in city regions and in and around other towns.

Sandra White: I thank the minister for her interesting reply, which I will pass on to the people who asked me to raise the question.

The minister might be aware of the proposed development of Otago Lane in Glasgow's west end, which is opposed by residents because of the effect that it will have on the character of the area and the wildlife corridor of the River Kelvin. Unfortunately, Glasgow City Council has refused to undertake an environmental impact assessment. What avenues can residents pursue to ensure that such an assessment is undertaken?

Roseanna Cunningham: The member will be aware that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the merits of an individual planning application. On the question of what steps the residents might be able to take to trigger an environmental impact assessment, I point out that the Scottish ministers are empowered to make directions in relation to the need for an EIA in certain circumstances. It is open to members of the public or other third parties to write to officials with information suggesting why they consider that a proposed development requires an EIA, even though neither the planning authority nor the applicant takes that view. Scottish planning circular 8/2007 provides further guidance and information. The member might wish to read that.

Rural Specialist Food Production

2. Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what contribution rural specialist food production has made to the Scottish gross domestic product in the last year and whether information is available on the balance between home and export sales of such rural products. (S3O-10799)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Information on specialist food production is not held centrally, but I can comment on food production more generally. The latest available figures show that, in 2007, the food and drink supply chain generated value added of almost £9 billion for Scotland's economy. The member might be interested to know that Scottish food export sales rose by 20 per cent to £934 million in 2009

and that total international sales of Scottish food and drink increased by 6 per cent to £4.06 billion in 2009, which was an all-time high. I am sure that the Parliament welcomes that.

Christopher Harvie: That is gratifying information.

What measures could be put in place to improve the situation of rural small and medium-sized enterprises that produce specialist foodstuffs? There is a remarkable number of those enterprises, and their production is commendable, but they suffer from pricing pressures from supermarket chains, which means that they tend to go for exports. However, when they do so, they discover that a lack of export credit lending is available from banks.

Richard Lochhead: I am sure that if the member attends the Royal Highland Show in a couple of weeks' time, as other members no doubt will do, he will see on display at that major event the products of many successful food producers in rural Scotland. Many new companies that produce specialist foods in Scotland are, of course, doing very well. I am sure that members welcome the fact that, despite the very tough economic backdrop, demand for local food has been sustained and consumers are standing by local food producers in Scotland.

I take Christopher Harvie's point about exports. Over the past year or two, many businesses and others have raised the lack of access to export credit guarantees, in some cases with the Scottish Government but mainly with the United Kingdom Government. We continue to monitor the situation closely.

A range of support is available to producers. Support is available in the export field from Scottish Development International and other agencies and through our own grant schemes and support mechanisms in Scotland. Many companies that are doing very well in specialist foods have benefited from significant grants in recent years.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The minister will be aware that one of Scotland's key exports is whisky. What proportion of Scottish whisky uses Scottish grain?

Richard Lochhead: The member has raised what is an on-going concern for growers of malting barley in Scotland. My understanding is that around 90 per cent of the barley that is used for Scotch whisky originates in Scotland. I know that that is a concern to some producers, who think that the figure should be much higher. Whisky producers argue, of course, that they would not necessarily want to put all their eggs in one basket, in case Scotland suffered a bad harvest, for instance, which could lead to problems for the

wider whisky sector. It is only right that all whisky producers in Scotland source as much of their barley as possible from Scottish producers so that we can make it clear that all the elements of a good bottle of Scotch whisky originated in Scotland.

European Union Agricultural Support Schemes (Penalties for Rule Breaches)

3. Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what work is under way to increase proportionality in the penalty system for farmers breaching European Union rules. (S3O-10827)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government is working at all levels to press the European Commission urgently for more proportionality in the penalty system under cross-compliance. Indeed, I directly raised the issue with the Commission in March this year and specifically raised it in recent conversations with the new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs secretary of state and the new DEFRA minister of state. Scottish Government officials will meet European Commission officials on 9 June to press the matter further.

Nicol Stephen: I appreciate the efforts that are being made in representations to the European Commission, and hope that they are successful.

I am keen to find out how Scotland's approach to breaches under cross-compliance compares with that of other EU nations. Is it not the case that compliance enforcement and penalty levels in Scotland now tend towards heavy-handedness compared with the approach that is taken in other European Union nations? If that is the case, why?

Richard Lochhead: Wales and Northern Ireland, for instance, are taking actions similar to those being taken in Scotland to increase the penalties that we believe must be enforced in order to protect Scotland's wider single farm payment level. We have investigated what has been happening in some other countries.

The member is perhaps alluding to claims that we are taking a much tougher approach in Scotland than is being taken elsewhere. We have no evidence of that. We agree with the sentiment of the member's question that the current penalty system is disproportionate. We fully accept that. We cannot have people with large herds, for instance, suffering large penalties just because of one or two mistakes with their paperwork. That is disproportionate and we should address that, but we must also put things in perspective. We should bear in mind that last year's single farm payment, for instance, was 15 per cent up on the previous year's payment. We reckon that only

around 30 farmers received single farm payments that were lower than those of the year before because of the penalties. That is out of 20,000 single farm payment claimants in Scotland. I hope that that helps members to put the matter into perspective.

Although we have a disproportionate penalty system, we have to avoid the European auditors penalising Scotland for not enforcing the regulations properly. That would lead to huge fines and, potentially, a huge slice of single farm payments being kept by Brussels. Farmers would then suffer even more than they do as a result of the disproportionate system.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): The cabinet secretary will be aware that the revised guidance, informing farmers of rules that they had previously been inadequately made aware of by Government, concerning integrated administration and control system submissions, did not reach many farmers until after this year's closing date for IACS submissions, which was 17 May. If those farmers, having completed their applications in good faith, are subsequently found to have made an incorrect IACS submission, will they be exempt from any penalties arising from mistakes made as a result of the Government's lack of timely clarification of the rules?

Richard Lochhead: Land eligibility is at the core of the issue to which the member refers, and none of the regulations on that has changed as such. We held public meetings around Scotland, which many farmers attended, to update farmers on the exact eligibility criteria. In addition, we put information on our website and worked with the various farming associations to ensure that they were able to filter the information down to their members.

I accept that there was a problem with the printed guidance that was sent out to the industry, which I am told was down to printing difficulties. I very much regret that the guidance arrived so late, but we granted an extra couple of weeks, to the end of May, for applicants to amend their forms if they felt that there were adjustments that they had to make. We are taking a sympathetic, pragmatic approach to accepting those forms but, as I said, we have to enforce the regulations. If the European auditors come to Scotland, or other countries, and see that what we or they are doing is not right, we or those other countries will fail the audit. We are trying to avoid major fines in the form of a reduction in our single farm payments.

Crofting (New Entrants)

4. Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is encouraging new entrants into crofting. (S3O-10828)

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): The Scottish Government is encouraging new entrants to crofting in a variety of ways. Financial support is available from specific crofting grants and the Scotland rural development programme. The Scottish Government arranged a modification to the SRDP in October 2009 to lower the amount of agricultural activity required to qualify for the support for new entrants to 25 per cent. Obviously, that is significant for crofting. At the same time, the Scottish Government agreed a modification to the crofting counties agricultural grants scheme to allow an extra 10 per cent assistance to be made available to those under 40 years of age. That will be the subject of secondary legislation in the near future.

The croft house grants scheme, currently under review, provides up to £22,000 assistance to help crofters to live on the crofts that they work. The Crofters Commission, acting under ministerial direction, is taking forward an absentee initiative. That in turn may free up crofts where the residency requirement is not being met, which should provide tenancy opportunities for new crofting entrants.

Jamie Stone: I thank the minister for her detailed and thoughtful answer. The minister has lodged amendments to the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill, which has reached stage 2. In my view and that of my constituents, the acid test of the bill is whether it encourages crofters in going about their daily work, and whether it encourages or discourages new entrants. There is some controversy in the crofting community about certain aspects of the bill. Will the minister apply that acid test to the bill?

Roseanna Cunningham: Jamie Stone will know that there is rarely unanimity among crofters about any proposal in respect of crofting. I do not suppose that we will achieve more unanimity than previous Governments on any aspect of what we are doing.

The fundamental thrust of the bill is to deal with the twin problems of absenteeism and neglect in the crofting communities. It is precisely those twin problems that are, in effect, closing off opportunities for new entrants to crofting. If we can tackle those—which is what the bill is about—we stand a good chance of ensuring that more crofts become available for new entrants to crofting. That will be very much the test of the success of the bill when it is passed by the Parliament.

Food and Drink Promotion (North-east Scotland)

5. Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to promote food and drink from the north-east. (S3O-10793)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Through the national food and drink policy, the Scottish Government works with partners to deliver a wide range of actions that support the food and drink industries in Scotland. In particular, I was delighted to attend the Scotland food and drink excellence awards last month, which were hosted in Moray, and at which over a third of the winners were from north-east Scotland. On Saturday, I will attend the taste of Grampian festival and I look forward to sampling the best of the north-east's larder. I urge all north-east MSPs to attend that magnificent event.

Nigel Don: I thank the cabinet secretary for his encouragement. The food and drink sector is, of course, very important to my constituents, with some 45,000 people employed in the industry in the north-east. How will the £300,000 of extra funding that the Scottish Government is providing this year to promote Scottish food and drink be targeted in the north-east, and how will that money be used to protect jobs and to grow the sector in these challenging times?

Richard Lochhead: The resource to which the member refers is only one of many made available to north-east food and drink companies. Since March 2008, 44 projects in the north-east have received awards of almost £9.5 million under our food processing grants. I can assure the member that not only the £300,000 but a range of other resources are being made available to help build Grampian and north-east Scotland's already magnificent reputation for food and drink. I will be happy to send the member a list of some of the more successful projects to make him aware of the exciting things that are going on in respect of food and drink.

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): Obviously, one of the ways in which the Scottish Government could promote food and drink from the north-east, or from other regions of Scotland, such as Dumfries and Galloway, is by promoting the procurement of locally produced food by the public sector. What steps is the cabinet secretary taking to encourage Scottish Government departments, councils and health boards to procure food locally?

Richard Lochhead: The member will be pleased to know that I recently launched an initiative—I will send her the details, in case she missed it—that is all about promoting local procurement, which we would all like to see in public authorities in Scotland. I launched the initiative at a high school in Perth, where some excellent work is taking place. I assure the member that the Government is pushing this agenda as hard as possible and that we share her view that our public authorities, hospitals, prisons,

schools and so on should, as far as possible, when they legally can, serve up Scottish food and drink to their customers, their patients or whoever. That is one way of supporting the industry and, of course, helping our people to access good Scottish food and drink.

Waste Management (Infrastructure)

6. Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what it is doing to promote the development of waste management infrastructure. (S3O-10755)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government has allocated £80 million from the zero waste fund direct to local authorities for 2008 to 2011 to deliver services and waste management infrastructure. That money is, of course, above and beyond the record levels of funding provided to local government over the period 2008 to 2011.

The Scottish Government, through capital grant schemes administered by zero waste Scotland, is also supporting the development of infrastructure to treat organic waste and reprocess plastics. A range of other measures has also been taken.

Paul Martin: Given that food waste and other organic matter are 34 per cent of what we throw away, I am sure that the cabinet secretary agrees that such infrastructure is crucial. However, many of my constituents who live in tenemental properties and flats have nowhere suitable for the type of recycling that I am sure the Scottish Government would like to promote. Will the Scottish Government look at a joined-up approach with local authorities, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and other agencies to ensure that the problem is not thrown on the scrap heap?

Richard Lochhead: We do not like anything to be thrown on the scrap heap these days. That is, I hope, one of the objectives of the zero waste plan that we will launch next week. The member highlights a good issue. Some of our cities and larger communities face a big challenge to install recycling infrastructure to help tenement residents. There have been some trials, and I know that Glasgow, for example, as Scotland's largest city, faces a big challenge and is looking into a number of solutions to tackle the problem. I give a commitment to the member that I will continue to urge local authorities, zero waste Scotland, SEPA and others to work together to address the issue.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): What additional measures will ministers consider adopting to cut the amount of biodegradable waste that goes into landfill?

Richard Lochhead: I guess that the answer is: watch this space. We will address the issue in our

zero waste plan, which we will launch next week. The Parliament debated the plan in the chamber just over a couple of weeks ago. The member highlights the very good point that we should not send that kind of waste to big holes in the ground—in other words, to landfill. We cannot continue to waste resources that have a value.

VisitScotland

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a statement by Jim Mather on VisitScotland. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement and there should therefore be no interventions or interruptions.

14:55

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): I wish to make a statement to Parliament in response to a request by the Opposition parties following recent newspaper speculation about personnel matters at VisitScotland. Specifically, I would like to clarify the Scottish Government's position regarding the media coverage about the chief executive of VisitScotland, Philip Riddle. Clearly, all operational matters, in particular personnel matters within VisitScotland, are the responsibility of VisitScotland's board and management. It is therefore proper that, earlier today, they made a statement on Mr Riddle's position. In that statement, it was confirmed that Mr Riddle is in discussion with VisitScotland. In that light, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on Mr Riddle's position until those discussions are concluded.

Members will know that Mr Riddle was appointed to the post of chief executive of VisitScotland in 2001. Since then, the industry has faced and managed its way through a number of difficult challenges that have impacted on Scotland and Scottish tourism businesses. Those include the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in 2001, avian and swine flu, the recent global economic downturn and the current disruption to air travel that has resulted from volcanic ash. In that period, Scottish tourism has not only coped with those threats but matured, strengthened, come together and grown. It has proved to be resilient. Last year, it produced the first upturn in visitor numbers in five years, in terms of both domestic United Kingdom and overseas visitors.

That success story is vital to Scotland. The sector accounts for more than £4 billion of Scotland's gross domestic product and plays a crucial role in developing and maintaining Scotland's image and our rural economies. Already, as is evidenced by the sector's performance in homecoming Scotland 2009, it is clear that tourism has strengthened Scotland's recovery while still having massive potential for further growth. In order to consolidate that aspiration, VisitScotland will this year lead the industry in a shared focus on Scotland's iconic food and drink—the first of a series of themed

years—as we build towards a second year of homecoming in 2014.

Only last week, the chair of VisitScotland announced a new series of marketing campaigns to boost visitor numbers and spend including, for the first time, a campaign that is targeted specifically at the home market. The campaign seeks to persuade many more Scots to holiday in Scotland. It will persuade us to make the most of our natural and cultural heritage, to discover some of our many hidden gems and to enjoy the friendly welcome for which Scotland is famous the world over. With expenditure of £5 million, VisitScotland aims to generate additional tourism revenue of £100 million through its seasonal marketing campaigns.

Also last week, the First Minister published the results of the independent evaluation of Scotland's first year of homecoming. The target was to deliver an 8:1 return on the core investment of £5.5 million, by generating £44 million additional tourism revenue for Scotland. Homecoming Scotland 2009 exceeded that target by delivering £53.7 million additional tourism revenue for Scotland, which is a 10:1 return on investment. The independent research, which was published on 21 May 2010, set out the undoubtedly positive impact of Scotland's first homecoming year. The celebration delivered a string of benefits to the country and bolstered Scottish tourism during one of the toughest global economic downturns. As a result, there can be absolutely no doubt that VisitScotland and EventScotland have performed important leadership and co-ordination roles in the delivery of homecoming 2009.

As Roger Goodyear of the Portsoy maritime festival said last week at a homecoming legacy event in Edinburgh:

“This was not a damp squib—it was successful—with more to come”.

I agree with him.

As regards the current situation, I understand the concerns of members and their desire for certainty, clarity and a continuing focus on growth. That is exactly what I am here to confirm today.

As members would expect, I regularly hold meetings, attend joint events and have discussions with various senior representatives of VisitScotland, including the chair and chief executive, at which we discuss matters relating to the performance of Scottish tourism and of VisitScotland in particular.

As I have stressed already, all issues relating to the employment of VisitScotland staff, including the chief executive, are the responsibility of its board and not of Scottish ministers. Of course, I expect to be kept informed about important final

decisions that the board makes in relation to its senior staff. However, the legislation under which VisitScotland was founded is clear in stating that personnel issues are a matter to be dealt with by the public body itself. Indeed, that is the case with most non-departmental public bodies. In addition, VisitScotland's management statement and financial memorandum make that principle clear.

I hope that this statement assures members that the tourism industry continues to strengthen in difficult times, and that the specific matter that triggered this statement is properly an operational matter for VisitScotland's board.

For our part, the Scottish Government will continue to focus its efforts on providing strong support to enable the tourism sector to strive for greater performance and to achieve yet more growth for Scotland's economy.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): I thank the minister for early sight of his statement.

What is at issue is the reputation of VisitScotland and whether it is as free from political interference by ministers as Mr Mather asserts. He is making a statement today on behalf of the Government—in other words, on behalf of all ministers. As the minister responsible for tourism, did he—or any other ministers—have discussions with the chairman of VisitScotland about the future of the chief executive prior to the meeting of the VisitScotland board in Inverness on 14 May? Did any Scottish Government special adviser have such a meeting or discussion with Dr Cantlay or with any other member of the board on this matter prior to the board meeting of 14 May? Did Mr Mather meet Dr Cantlay at any point between that date and the press reports of Sunday 30 May?

The First Minister told us earlier today that he had not spoken to the chairman of VisitScotland about the matter in the past few days. For the avoidance of doubt, can the minister confirm whether the First Minister talked to Mike Cantlay at all at the weekend? Did he speak to him at all on Sunday 30 May? Did John Swinney, who is sitting beside the minister, have such a conversation with Dr Cantlay the weekend just past? Did Mr Mather have such a conversation himself? Has the tourism minister at any point in the process discussed the issues with the long-serving chief executive of VisitScotland, whose achievements he has just outlined and whose future now appears to be in jeopardy?

Jim Mather: I noted the press coverage and Mr Macdonald's contribution, which essentially assumed that because the chairman of VisitScotland would not discuss personnel matters with the media, ministerial intervention was involved. I still struggle to see the logic of that

connection; it must be the logic that flows from previous Administrations.

Of course I meet Mike Cantlay regularly, and I will continue to do so. I met him in April—shortly after his appointment—in the United States, and I met him again in Glasgow on 20 April. I spoke to Philip Riddle on 14 May. No special advisers have been involved. The First Minister met Dr Cantlay at a discussion on the homecoming evaluation on 25 May.

The key point, however, is that personnel issues are operational matters for VisitScotland—there they will stay.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

The minister seemed to absolve himself of responsibility in the matter by using VisitScotland's management statement and associated financial memorandum as the basis for his reasoning. I have examined the document and I am a bit surprised by the minister's position. It seems to me that the management statement treats the chief executive differently from other members of staff of VisitScotland who would qualify under the heading "staffing", perhaps because the chief executive is the accountable officer.

In relation to the board's responsibility to appoint a chief executive, it says in the management statement that the board will

"in consultation with the Department set performance objectives and remuneration terms linked to these objectives for the Chief Executive which give due weight both to the proper management and use of public monies and to the delivery of outcomes in line with Scottish Ministers' priorities".

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Are you going to ask a question, Mr Brown?

Gavin Brown: Will the minister review what is in the management statement and perhaps take a slightly different view? He said that the issue is not any of his responsibility, but I do not think that the position is as he outlined it in his statement.

Jim Mather: Had I had Mr Brown as an adviser, I might have looked at the issue differently. However, the member must recognise that this Government believes in autonomy and operational independence. Members should think about what we have done with local government and about the ethos whereby people have the chance to run things and make a success of them.

We charged Mike Cantlay and his board with achieving great results and with moving our wonderful tourism industry forward in whatever way they decide to do so. We have given them the operational freedom to do that. That will continue to be the case.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

The minister said that VisitScotland's statement "confirmed that Mr Riddle is in discussion with VisitScotland."

He forgot to mention that VisitScotland's statement goes on to say:

"To give Mr Riddle space to conduct these discussions in the light of unhelpful media speculation at the weekend, he will not undertake Chief Executive duties in the meantime."

The minister brightly pointed out that staffing is the responsibility of the board of VisitScotland, but the board, and in particular the chair, are appointed by, and are responsible to, the Scottish ministers. I again ask what discussions the minister or any other Scottish minister had with Dr Cantlay, either prior to, during or after his appointment as chair of VisitScotland, regarding the position of the chief executive of VisitScotland. Will he also say when he was made aware that Mr Riddle's position as chief executive was under discussion?

Does the minister really expect us to believe that within weeks of his appointment a new chair of a public body would seek to get rid of his chief executive without the knowledge and at least tacit approval of the sponsoring minister? I suggest that the minister either knew what was going on, in which case he is culpable, or did not know what was going on, in which case he is culpable.

Jim Mather: There is a pattern here. Mr Smith wrote to me earlier in the week to say, in essence, that in the absence of a denial from VisitScotland's chairman in relation to plans, the assumption is that the Scottish ministers were involved. There is a fancifulness about Iain Smith's attempt to create a conspiracy theory.

We are happy to be accountable for what we are accountable for, but we are talking about matters that are of operational import to VisitScotland. Clearly I spoke to the chairman after the coverage at the weekend. The situation now is that we want this wonderful organisation to move forward with the support of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament. We are all looking to play our part in ensuring that we get the improved results that are achievable. The basis for decisions on that will be the combined wisdom of the board on what is best for VisitScotland.

Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): VisitScotland recently set out to members who represent the north-east a series of initiatives and campaigns for the coming years, which will build on the huge success of homecoming 2009 in Aberdeen and the north-east. Can the minister confirm that the expectations for those campaigns

chime with the Scottish Government's aim to make tourism in Scotland a growth industry in the face of the Labour-induced recession?

Jim Mather: I can be categorical about that. The industry has made real progress—homecoming 2009, for example, has been a huge success—but I think that most of us who have got close to this wonderful industry realise that it has infinitely more to deliver.

Homecoming, in particular, has been a big help in giving us extra momentum at a very difficult time. Last year, the Scottish tourism industry grew by 2.7 per cent at a time when tourism the rest of world fell by 4 per cent, and we now have a legion of people stepping up and telling us the significance of homecoming and why it has made a material difference. Earlier, I quoted Roger Goodyear, who is from Lewis Macdonald's neck of the woods, who described the event's impact on Portsoy. At the same legacy event, Robin Worsnop from Rabbie's Trail Burners called it "a huge success" and said that it had allowed the company to realise significant business growth of 30 per cent.

The tourism industry is poised to move forward and we want that to happen. Looking at the experience of New Zealand and other countries, and understanding the uniqueness of the Scottish proposition, we know that the industry can grow ad infinitum and be the showcase for Scotland, giving us the chance to sell other goods and services—primarily food and drink this year—and to ensure that Scotland becomes an absolutely-must-visit destination for anyone who speaks English, aspires to Scottish values or has been taken by anything Scottish from golf to whisky.

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): The minister has confirmed that he spoke to the chairman of VisitScotland on Sunday. Will he confirm whether John Swinney or the First Minister also spoke to him? In his discussion with the chairman, did the minister discuss the leadership of the chief executive of VisitScotland?

Jim Mather: I think that I have to correct Ms Alexander, because just yesterday I had a conversation with Mike Cantlay in which John Swinney was involved, which gave us an understanding of what was happening and how he was reacting to the press coverage at the weekend. That was perfectly right and seemly, and a productive conversation ensued.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I am not sure that it is satisfactory that only at this stage of the questioning do we find out that just yesterday the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth and the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism had discussions with the chairman of

VisitScotland about the position of the chief executive. Last year the cabinet secretary wrote to the chairman of VisitScotland, asking him to ask the chief executive to forgo part of his bonus this year. The Scottish Government has already involved itself in the chief executive's terms, conditions, pay and remuneration, but now the Parliament is told that it has no involvement at all. How long—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Jeremy Purvis: How long will the discussions about the chief executive's position last, or is that a question that the cabinet secretary and the minister forgot to ask yesterday?

Jim Mather: I think that we are going to be hung for being involved too much or hung for not being involved enough. I suspect that Jeremy Purvis does not understand autonomy, VisitScotland's remit or our expectations. I must tell members that if the Parliament is going to operate with political parties trying to micromanage organisations, it will get sub-optimal results. When we bring in talented people, we have to give them the space and the right to optimise the job that we have given them.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): The legislation that established VisitScotland makes it clear that personnel issues are to be dealt with by the public body itself. Does the minister agree that, as he and others have previously pointed out, any employment matters in this respect are for the chief executive, the chairman and the board of VisitScotland and that the kind of misleading comments that we have heard, not only today but on other days, damage Scotland's tourism industry?

Jim Mather: I think that such comments are damaging and that there is a real and really unhelpful conspiracy mindset with regard to this matter.

On television, Lewis Macdonald said:

"The fact that Mike Cantlay has been asked four times and not said either way about Philip Riddle reinforces the view that ministers have ordered his removal."

Where is the logic in that? Where is the understanding of how a chairman of a public body should handle himself and treat his staff? To discuss someone's personnel issues on television, in full view of the nation, would be totally unseemly. Today, Mr Macdonald asked for urgent clarification. He has received urgent clarification from us and from VisitScotland.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I had intended to ask about the future plans for homecoming, which is an important issue in my area in Burns country, but I must seek further clarification from the minister.

Far from giving us more information, he seems to be obfuscating or perhaps not giving us all the information in response to the questions that have been asked. It is important that he is clear. For the record, did Mr Swinney have a discussion about the issues in question on Sunday? Was the leadership of VisitScotland discussed during the conversations that took place yesterday? If so, will the minister provide some clarity on those points for the record?

Jim Mather: I have said repeatedly that the issue at stake is an operational matter for VisitScotland, and that continues to be the case. The conversation that we had last night covered all the issues that one would have expected it to. We must leave VisitScotland to deal with that operational matter so that it can optimise the situation. Debating that further in Parliament and putting more issues on the table and into the public domain is not helpful and will not get Scotland or the Scottish tourism sector the result that it wants, needs and deserves.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Can the minister confirm that the £10 million budget cut that was reported in the *Sunday Herald* is a projection rather than an actual cut? Does he agree that as we face tight economic times, it is important that all organisations deliver value for money and that VisitScotland bring in as much tourism revenue as possible at as efficient a cost as possible?

Jim Mather: I have absolutely no idea where that figure came from. The tourism sector is coming together in an unprecedented way. Resources are available not only in the private element of the sector but in Scottish Natural Heritage, RSPB Scotland and Historic Scotland. It is clear that if those resources are brought together with local authority moneys, there is a lot of muscle in a sector that is now beginning to realise the uniqueness and quality of the Scottish product and its potential to follow the Scotch whisky industry as a sector of our economy that premiumises and that will do really well in the future.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): The minister has quite rightly outlined a number of the achievements of VisitScotland during the years of Mr Riddle's leadership. In the light of those achievements, does he believe that Mr Riddle is being treated fairly and appropriately? Given that he is the minister who is responsible for the sponsoring department that looks after VisitScotland, I think that that is information that he can share with the Parliament.

I reiterate the call that has been made by my colleagues and ask for the third time, for the avoidance of doubt, whether Mr Swinney had a conversation with Dr Cantlay on Sunday.

Jim Mather: I repeat that Mr Swinney did not have a conversation with Mr Cantlay on Sunday. As I said in my statement, Philip Riddle—whom I know well, as members would imagine—has made a strong and significant contribution to VisitScotland and Scottish tourism since he began in 2001. The delivery of VisitScotland strategy is an operational matter for the board. That is where the responsibility properly lies and that is where I intend to leave it.

Student Fees

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-6472, in the name of Michael Russell, on student fees.

15:19

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): It gives me great pleasure to introduce this debate today. It is important that we set out the belief held across the chamber that education is the cornerstone on which this country's social, cultural and economic success was founded, and that it will be our platform to achieving even more in these early years of the 21st century.

Scotland has a long, proud and distinguished educational heritage. We have a healthy curiosity for finding out new things. Scotland is, and always has been, a learning nation. That is exemplified by our long-established commitment to universal school education, our extensive network of colleges and our world-class universities, three of which feature in the world's top 100.

Scotland was the first nation to provide universal primary school education for its children, and we have continued to lead the way on education. Our universities are of the highest standard. They are some of the most successful places in the world to conduct research and deliver knowledge. We have 0.1 per cent of the world's population, but we have 1.8 per cent of the world's university research. Only Switzerland is ranked higher than Scotland in the world in terms of the number of research citations relative to its gross domestic product. Scotland is third in the world for the impact of its research—impact is the coming term in relation to research frameworks. Scotland's international standing is such that almost 50 per cent of university income—an important figure—is derived from competitively won sources.

We have an enviable legacy of invention and discovery, from James Watt right through to Dolly the sheep. At the University of Glasgow, clinicians adapted radar technology to pioneer ultrasound imaging, which is now used worldwide by obstetricians in the care of expectant mothers and their unborn babies.

Again and again, we have innovated and invented. We have asked ourselves the fundamental questions of science and nature, and we have found the answers. We should be proud of that history, but history moves on. We cannot rest on our laurels. We have to keep learning, continue to aspire to achieve excellence and keep innovating, and we have to be aware of what

threats to our position, reputation and achievements are on the horizon.

The Government's core purpose demands that we create a successful Scotland with opportunities for all—a place where people want to contribute to increasing their own, and our country's, prosperity. Enabling everyone to participate and benefit in such a society means that we have to ensure that our lifelong learning journey is open, accessible and free from barriers. The Government has done much to widen access to education for our young people and to remove financial barriers. For example, I am proud that we have reintroduced the principle of free higher education in Scotland by abolishing the graduate endowment fee, and I praise those who did that along with us.

However, we are now operating in a tremendously difficult economic environment. It is a situation we neither created nor expected. The Westminster Government has already cut more than £500 million from Scotland's budget for 2010-11. We now know that we will have to make further savings of at least £332 million next year. In his recent report on the outlook for Scottish Government expenditure, our chief economic adviser, Dr Andrew Goudie, predicts that we will not return to real-terms growth for a decade. Clearly, we will have to work even harder at maintaining our strong focus on achieving positive outcomes for the people of this country.

The recession has brought particular challenges for education. Demand for college and university places is rising significantly. However, one should not believe all the newspaper headlines about cuts to funding and student places; still less should one believe those who trumpet those things in the chamber or in the newspapers. Unlike in England, where cuts to university budgets of £449 million for 2010-11 have already been made and where there is now a further reduction of £200 million, we have not imposed any cuts on university funding in 2010-11. In fact, funding for universities is at record levels.

When this Government came into power in May 2007, universities' share of the Scottish budget increased for the first time to more than £1 billion. By 2010-11 this Administration will have invested more than £4 billion in higher education. This year, the resource budget for universities has gone up by more than £40 million, or 2 per cent in real terms. Universities' share of Scottish Government spend remains higher under this Administration than it was under our predecessors.

Our achievements do not stop there. We have provided support for an additional 7,500 higher education students this year and will continue to do so in the next academic year. We have provided a £30 million package to increase the income of more than 75,000 students in the next

academic year. We have increased discretionary funds by 17.1 per cent from the £14.04 million that we inherited to £16.44 million for the current academic year.

However, there are challenges ahead, which I will list. In relation to our universities, we cannot hide from what Lord Browne might say in his review of higher education funding and student finance in England, which is due to report by this autumn. It will pose difficult questions for us in Scotland on how we fund our universities and our university students. Any increase in tuition fees in England could lead to a funding gap for Scottish students and institutions, which could have a negative impact in Scotland. We cannot allow that to happen. It is, therefore, vital that we keep the interests of Scotland's higher education sector at the top of our agenda and that, together, we agree an acceptable and sustainable method of funding higher education in the long term.

Some have been calling for an independent review of the way forward for Scottish higher education. I understand that, but I strongly believe that it is not the right approach. I do not want it; more important, university principals do not want it, students do not want it and business leaders do not want it. They have made it clear that they do not want changes to be imposed on them by an independent commission comprised of the great and the good. I know, from my discussions with students, staff, principals and those in industry, among others, that there is strong support for a partnership approach in which those who are most closely involved with higher education work together to develop a unique Scottish solution. I believe we can do that.

We want the brightest and the best from across the higher education sector to be given the opportunity to think creatively about what that unique Scottish approach to sustainable funding for Scottish higher education might be, no matter how radical. In that discussion, only one thing is off the agenda—tuition fees. The Government does not believe that the answer to our future funding issues is tuition fees. I stated publicly this year that the Government will not introduce tuition fees in Scotland, and there has been considerable support from the sector for that. Liam Burns, the president of NUS Scotland, was quoted as saying at the time:

"This will be a relief for many hundreds of thousands of Scottish students studying at university, particularly following a great deal of speculation from university leaders ... I hope this announcement can put to rest the idea of tuition fees ever coming back to Scotland",

adding significantly,

"so that we can move the debate on to how we fund our universities in a fair and sustainable way."

That is exactly right.

I am pleased to have recently signed up to the vote for students campaign run by NUS Scotland, pledging to vote against any increase in top-up fees in the rest of the United Kingdom—and I was not alone. I understand that just under 1,500 Westminster parliamentary candidates vowed to do the same, some of whom are in the chamber today.

Looking ahead to how we might meet the challenges, I talk regularly to those who are involved in the provision of higher education learning.

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): Ooh.

Michael Russell: Mr McLetchie is surprised that I do that, but that is a sensible thing for me to do in my role. It is important that we have that dialogue and then move from dialogue to action. That is the process in which we are engaged. The action will follow once we know what the Browne report has to tell us.

I am making my way around Scotland and the sector, talking to, and listening to the views of, students, student leaders, university principals, unions and the entire stakeholder community. I have been accused by some members of holding secret discussions. There is a difference between secret and private. If members want to add their voices to those discussions, let them do so today. I am very open to listening to what members have to say, as long as there is a commitment to that discussion that leads to a collective solution, rather than a simple sloughing-off of the issue on to the great and the good. On 22 June, we will have a student summit at which I will be able to talk to Liam Burns and many of his colleagues about the progress that we have made and what is still to happen.

David McLetchie: Can the cabinet secretary tell us why the Government objects to an independent commission on higher education but is happy to appoint an independent budget review group to give views or guidance on how the resources might be allocated?

Michael Russell: Those are two very different tasks. As somebody who supported the independent budget review group, Mr McLetchie will know that the task in Scotland—a small country with only 20 institutions—is for the institutions to bring solutions together to the table and to take ownership of those solutions together. That is far better than having some commission of the great and the good telling the higher education sector what to do. I have found enormous support for that approach in the universities. Any member who supports some sort of commission of the great and the good is going against what the

universities themselves believe will work for them, and I do not think that they should do that lightly.

I encourage Mr McLetchie and others to raise their voices on their vision of higher education. I want to hear suggestions for future funding. I want open and constructive debate across all the political parties—even debate from a sedentary position, such as Mr McLetchie is still engaged in. I want a debate that recognises the educational, economic, cultural and social importance of Scottish universities and which produces ideas for a Scottish solution that is based on the Scottish core principles of access and excellence and will maintain the reputation and effectiveness of Scottish higher education in future generations.

We can do that—it is within our grasp if we work together. There are two ground rules: first, we must respect one another's positions and try to work constructively, and, secondly, access to education must be based on the ability to learn and not the ability to pay.

I move,

That the Parliament commends the National Union of Students' student fees pledge on the basis that any rise in fees in England and Wales would be detrimental to the interests of Scottish universities; congratulates those who have signed the pledge, and believes that student top-up fees should have no place in Scotland.

15:30

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

Achieving a secure, sustainable, long-term funding settlement for Scottish universities is an issue that has been lacking direction from the Scottish Government for the past few years. The Government has so far refused to address the challenges and failed to provide a serious response to the pressures that universities face.

The Government motion on the Browne review is a distraction from the real issues that face Scottish universities. Michael Russell is known as a man who has been prepared to grasp the thistle, and he has been in post for long enough now to know that university funding is a particularly prickly one.

The Government motion focuses on decisions that are to be made by the UK Parliament, and regrettably the Liberal amendment does the same. Although that appears to be an attempt to influence the decision in England and Wales, it ignores the political reality of the UK Government. It is for the UK Government to make the decision on where to go following the Browne review—a Government that is dominated by Conservative members who were honest enough not to sign the pledge and supported by the Liberals who, although they signed the pledge and even went as far as bringing forward a plan to scrap fees in their

UK manifesto, have now put aside their principles for power.

Although we all recognise that any changes to the fees system in England and Wales may lead to a funding gap for Scottish universities, such a divergence in policy is a reality of devolution that the Scottish Government must deal with. It is true that academics and their research will go where they can access the best departments and work with the best people, but it is a mistake to think that that will happen only within the UK. Departments do not compete only with others in Cambridge or Manchester, but do so with departments in Boston and Tokyo. We should not narrow the debate to focus only on the impact of decisions that the UK Government has yet to make.

It is not good enough to say that if the cap comes off in England and Wales, Scottish universities will have a problem, or that if that could only be avoided, the Scottish university sector could carry on as before. It is not accurate to suggest—as both the Government motion and the Liberal amendment do—that if only the fees remained the same in England and Wales, Scottish universities would not face severe financial challenges.

We should look at the Scottish National Party's record. In 2007, the comprehensive spending review short-changed Scottish universities, delivering an amount that was far short of what they had argued for in order to remain competitive and play their part in growing the Scottish economy. The Scottish Government's response to the sector's concerns was to establish the joint future thinking task force. That body was criticised for being too exclusive and too narrow in its focus and for not involving students and trade unions, and it was exempt from discussing resources, which was the very issue that had prompted its creation.

During the past few years we have seen real-terms cuts in university funding and increasing pressure on the sector. Scottish students continue to face financial hardship, which impacts on their ability to finish their studies. Redundancies are being announced and there is tremendous pressure on places, with the prospect of talented people being denied the opportunity of a university education.

Although we can identify the Scottish Government decisions that have led to those problems, the Government's real failure has been its reluctance to engage meaningfully in addressing those and future challenges. As we face a future of real economic challenges and a tightening of public spending, the SNP can no longer continue to put its head in the sand.

Michael Russell: I am familiar with the Labour litany of gloom, but I want to know how much Claire Baker would spend on universities this year and next, and where the money would come from with regard to other public spending priorities. She has an obligation to tell us that, in light of her speech so far.

Claire Baker: The very real concerns about the sector, which Michael Russell has identified, are why Labour is calling for an independent review. Those are serious problems that need to be addressed. We agree with the cabinet secretary that the issue should be taken forward on the basis of consensus, but we think that a review would be the best way to achieve that.

On student fees, Labour in Scotland is clear about its record. In the Scottish Parliament, Labour, in coalition with the Liberals, abolished up-front tuition fees, and the political consensus on that exists to this day. Different decisions were made by the United Kingdom Government, but that is devolution. Following the Cubie review, Labour introduced a graduate endowment alongside the young person's bursary. That supported the principle that graduates should make a contribution when they are working to help to ensure that others, especially those from low-income backgrounds, are given the opportunities from which graduates have benefited.

Following the scrapping of the graduate endowment, it became clear that the SNP was not prepared properly to plan for the future financial sustainability of the sector, in respect of both universities and students. Since the SNP came into government, there has been a reluctance to tackle the long-term challenges of future university funding in a way that would maintain Scotland's competitiveness; sustain the level of research excellence that we have been proud of and which is so important to our economy; produce the graduates that are needed to grow the Scottish economy; and continue to extend opportunities to more students while ensuring that students are properly supported and receive a high quality of teaching. We believe that an independent review is the right way forward because we are serious about finding a long-lasting solution to the difficult challenges that the sector faces.

An independent review is not about the great and the good getting together but about being transparent and fair. By involving people in the sector and beyond in the debate, a review would take forward policy based on reason and insight. Crucially, it would build consensus. Given the comments that have been made by Professor Bernard King of Universities Scotland, by NUS leader Liam Burns and by Sir Andrew Cubie, it is clear that the sector wants that debate. I agree with the cabinet secretary that the future of

university funding should be about building a consensus. We all need to agree on the continuing, if not growing, importance of the sector, which needs a clear financial route for the future.

Although I welcome the whispers that are coming from the cabinet secretary's office that the current financial situation is not sustainable and that new solutions must be found, I question whether he is going about that in the best way. So far, the Government-led attempt to address university funding challenges through the joint future thinking task force has failed to tackle the big issues but has tiptoed around the debate. Similarly, the Scottish Government tried to control the consultation on "Supporting a Smarter Scotland: A consultation on supporting learners in higher education" by presenting three options, which were then widely rejected. The track record of such Government-led debate is not good.

However, the Government appears to be floating other solutions. It claims to have lots of ideas on university funding but refuses to detail any of them. There is no need for the cabinet secretary to be so shy. He might find that others are willing to take part in the debate. From answers to parliamentary questions, it appears that the cabinet secretary is having a wide-ranging discussion that does not exclude the option of a graduate contribution. I think that the Parliament would appreciate some clarity and transparency on the Government's direction of travel. What is the scope of those considerations and discussions?

The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Keith Brown): In the interests of transparency, and in light of the note from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury of the out-going Labour Government that said "there is no money", can the member at least say whether she thinks that university funding should increase or decrease in advance of her proposed review?

Claire Baker: I have already answered that question. We recognise that the sector is facing serious challenges to which there are no easy solutions. There will be difficult decisions for whoever is in government. However, the best way to achieve a long-term funding solution for the sector is to have an independent review that looks at university funding along with student support.

I imagine that, as the afternoon wears on, members will rehearse some old arguments, but we have already had those debates in Scotland. We abolished up-front tuition fees, and there is a political consensus to keep matters that way. We must now turn our attention to solutions that will provide universities with a secure, long-term financial future that allows them to flourish and which provides a fairer funding model that ensures

that students are properly supported while they study.

I move amendment S3M-6472.1, to leave out from “commends” to end and insert:

“supports the continuing political consensus against the introduction of upfront tuition fees in Scotland; recognises the funding challenge facing Scottish universities if they are to remain internationally competitive, continue to achieve research excellence and widen access to higher education, and calls for an independent review of university funding.”

15:39

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): Over the past few weeks, there has been a great deal of talk of Calman—Calman plus, Calman lite and so on—but it is worth remembering what Calman is all about. It is about the powers of this Parliament, and how they can be used for the benefit of Scotland.

Today’s debate reminds us of one area in which Scotland has been different from the rest of the United Kingdom and in which we believe that it should continue to be different: student fees and student finance more generally.

Colleagues from across the chamber have helpfully pointed out the views of Liberal Democrats south of the border on the matter, and will no doubt continue to do so. They are quite at liberty to do that but, as far as the Scottish Liberal Democrats are concerned, that is an irrelevance. This is a devolved matter, and the Scottish Liberal Democrats remain committed, as we have been throughout the years of devolution, to the demise of fees—up front, top up, backside foremost or whatever.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats have always been serious about supporting students and funding higher and further education, and our record in government and in opposition is evidence of that. In government, with the Labour Party, we abolished tuition fees, even though London Labour had introduced them and continued to support them. Some might say that the Labour Party agreed to the Liberal Democrats’ demands for tuition fees to be abolished so that it could secure power, but I would not be so churlish. We found a Scottish solution, which has meant that nearly 200,000 Scottish students entering Scottish institutions have not paid fees, resulting in a total of £4 billion less debt for Scottish graduates. Meanwhile, English students are likely to have around £18,000 each of tuition debt alone. In opposition, we voted with the present Government for an end to the graduate endowment, and last year we worked with all the other parties to secure an extra £30 million package for student finance.

Michael Russell: It is unlike me to pay tribute to the Liberal Democrats, but what Margaret Smith has said is entirely fair. For the avoidance of doubt, I confirm that I will support her amendment, which gets to the nub of the matter and shows the Liberal Democrats’ bona fides. I hope that others in the chamber will be persuaded by her speech.

Margaret Smith: I welcome that statement, and am tempted to sit down at this point and say that the job may well be done. However, let me plough on.

Our record proves two things: that we will work with others to deliver change, and that we believe that access to education should be based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay. In our eight years in government, universities and colleges received an average increase of more than 5 per cent a year, and funding reached a record level of £1 billion annually. In our record of action, we have demonstrated our support for poorer students whose backgrounds could prevent them from entering higher education. We know that, with only 14.9 per cent of higher education entrants coming from the most deprived areas, there is still a great deal of work to be done in terms of social mobility in Scotland—that work would be at risk if student fees were to be reintroduced. That is why we cannot follow the route that has been mapped out by the Labour Party and the Conservatives, who we believe want top-up fees in Scotland.

However, we also understand and recognise that living costs are a major factor in students’ accumulation of debt. That is why we have backed the National Union of Students’ call for a minimum income guarantee for students, and I am pleased that the Parliament continues to move towards that.

We know that times are tough. Labour’s recession has hit hard. However, we want the Scottish Government to work with all the political parties in this chamber and with the UK Government to try to protect, support and enhance our education systems. That is the sensible thing to do today and the smart thing to do for tomorrow.

Although the matter is devolved, we recognise that the findings of the Browne review of higher education funding and student finance in England and Wales, and any subsequent UK actions, will need to be considered by the Scottish Government and this Parliament in due course.

At the moment, funding for Scottish and English universities is roughly comparable, but there are concerns around the possibility that any cuts in university funding in England will lead to consequential cuts here, and it has been suggested that, if English universities charge higher tuition fees or have uncapped tuition fees

following the Browne review, a split could emerge in the standards of our institutions and of our teaching between Scotland and the rest of the UK. However, we cannot and should not make substantial assumptions about what changes will be made before the Browne report is even published.

Others might think that they know what the coalition agreement says, but it is worth remembering what it actually says. It states:

"We will await Lord Browne's final report into higher education funding, and will judge its proposals against the need to: increase social mobility; take into account the impact on student debt; ensure a properly funded university sector; improve the quality of teaching; advance scholarship; and attract a higher proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds."

Everyone in this chamber would share all those aspirations with regard to the future of Scottish universities .

The Scottish Government should be ready to respond to whatever decisions are made. It must ensure that it is thorough in its examination of the matter and the potential impact of fee increases in England, and then it and this Parliament must make the right decisions for Scotland .

The cabinet secretary is right to say that there will have to be consultation and possibly some form of green paper. Although we do not yet have much detail about the cabinet secretary's proposal, we believe that the consultation will have to be inclusive not only in terms of its subject matter, so that it can cover the question of fees and the wider issues of student finance and impacts on university services and competitiveness, but in terms of the consultees. On that, Claire Baker was absolutely right. Lessons must be learned from the experience of the joint future thinking task force on universities, from which staff, unions, students and some universities felt very much excluded. The solutions will and must come from inside the Scottish university sector, but the review will have to listen to the views of industry, colleges and other key partners.

We believe in open, accessible and attainable higher education that is available to everyone, regardless of their background. Bringing back tuition fees would be a huge step backwards for Scotland and its students. Scotland has built a consensus against up-front tuition fees and we have shown that we can have a world-class higher education system without them. Let us do all that we can to strengthen that consensus, to build a sustainable way forward and to strengthen Scotland's university sector for the future not only of the sector, but of our country.

I move amendment S3M-6472.2, to leave out from "commends" to end and insert:

"notes the ongoing review of higher education and student finance in England and Wales; recognises that the Scottish Government will need to consider any outcomes of this review and the potential impact on Scottish universities; commends the National Union of Students' student fee pledge, and welcomes that, thanks to the actions of the previous and current administrations in Scotland, full-time Scottish higher education students studying in Scotland do not pay tuition fees or top-up fees."

15:45

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): The cabinet secretary began his speech by expressing how strong the tradition is in our university system, and he was right to do that. That we have three universities in the top 100 in the world is a considerable feat for Scotland. As politicians, we have a duty to ensure that that tradition endures, but the Parliament should be in no doubt about the extent of the challenge that we face.

Scotland is at a major crossroads on the funding issue. The latest statistics show unprecedented levels of entrants to higher education in Scotland. In the previous decade alone, the number of students attending university increased by almost a quarter. That comes at a time of the most severe budget constraints for a generation, when £17 million has been lost from the education budget following the abolition of the graduate endowment; university pension funds are in crisis; there is a growing funding gap between England and Scotland; and the proportion of gross domestic product that we allocate to higher education is less than that in nations such as the US, Australia, Korea, Japan and even China.

That extent of the financial challenge is bad, but so too is the extent of the social and economic challenge. Just how can we maintain and increase levels of academic excellence and the quality of our research base as well as widen access to higher education institutions while keeping higher education affordable and competitive? From that perspective, I am sure that many members have sympathy for students' concerns, as expressed in their petition on the issue. They are right to flag up the possibility of worsening financial discrepancies between England and Scotland and they are right to be concerned about the implications for higher education in Scotland.

The issue runs much deeper than that. I agree with the cabinet secretary and the Liberals that it would be unwise to make too many pronouncements on those issues of concern until the Browne review reports later this year. However, I do not accept that waiting for the Browne report should preclude the Parliament from pursuing urgent action on other matters. It is in that respect that I want to repeat our call, first made by my colleague Murdo Fraser in 2007, for a

full and independent inquiry into the future funding of higher education, and that is why we will support the Labour amendment this afternoon.

I know from the cabinet secretary's previous utterances, and from his speech today, that he will reject that call outright, so let me explain why he is wrong to do so and wrong to insist that any review of higher education can be carried out from within the sector.

First, we need to have the courage to address some of the most difficult and perhaps controversial questions that face the sector at large. That includes the question whether far too many people are at university. Far too many people are frightened to ask that question.

Before I am attacked for heresy, let me be clear about why the question must be asked. If we are to continue to deliver the highest quality of education possible, we must make that education available to all students who are genuinely academically able and well motivated, irrespective of their background or income levels. We should never allow ourselves to be dictated to by a percentage target, such as the 50 per cent target that was a mantra of the Blair era, as such targets put additional pressure on our young people and on schools to push them towards courses for which many are unsuited. I flag up the high first-year drop-out rates in some of our universities, which are higher than those in other parts of the UK and abroad. That suggests that some of those students should not be at university in the first place. Why does that happen? It is partly because of the culture of insisting that higher education is always a more socially acceptable option than vocational professions and trades are. That myth—and it is a myth—has done a great disservice to education in this country. It is high time that we did something about it. To do so, we need to take on board the opinions of many more stakeholders than just those in the sector.

Secondly, there is a need to take a much more holistic approach to education. I have heard the cabinet secretary say that several times, and I agree. We need far better articulation of higher education with schools and colleges, and with business and industry. That is another reason why we should be keen to listen to other perspectives within an independent inquiry. How ironic it would be, at a time when other stakeholders in Scotland are being fully consulted about the curriculum reforms that may underpin the new Scottish Qualifications Authority exams, and when the Browne review board in England has included representatives from all walks of life, for us to allow only the higher education sector to have an input into higher education reform. In my view, that would be extremely short-sighted. It is just another reason why the cabinet secretary is wrong.

The cabinet secretary is wrong for a third reason—because of the nature of the question that must be asked about future financing. I have heard the SNP rant on about saying no to top-up fees and that we must do nothing to lose the right to free education in this country. I am happy to say, just as my colleague Murdo Fraser has said in the past, that we do not believe that students should pay up-front fees for their education. However, I will not rule out students making a contribution to their education in some way once they have graduated, and I strongly believe that Scotland cannot afford to rule that out. Conservative members have been consistent in that view for some time.

We agree whole-heartedly with key figures such as Sir Andrew Cubie and Dr Brian Lang and with those student and lecturer representatives, including the Coalition of Higher Education Students in Scotland and the University and College Union, who argue vociferously that we need a full and comprehensive debate about the financial perspective. We are no longer in a world in which we can continue to encourage more and more people to go into higher education, at the same time as maintaining and enhancing academic excellence, without addressing the funding issue, especially the growing gap between north and south of the border.

Like the cabinet secretary, I began my speech with a statement of fact: that Scotland has been a proud standard bearer of excellence in university education. As a politician, I am not prepared to accept anything less, and neither should any other politician in the chamber. We need a full and independent inquiry, and we need it now.

15:52

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):

It was a good day for Scotland, a good day for Scottish education, a good day for Scottish students and a good day for the principle of equality when the SNP Scottish Government finally abolished tuition fees in Scotland by getting rid of the graduate endowment tuition fee. That was some eight years after the Lib Dems had said that the removal of tuition fees was non-negotiable, just before they negotiated it.

I will take a second or two to quote Jim Wallace, speaking in the chamber on 17 June 1999. At the time, he was the leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats. He is now a member of the Westminster Government, so his comments were pertinent then and still have resonance now. Mr Wallace said:

"The Labour Government at Westminster opted for means-tested student loans and means-tested tuition fees. My party accepted that maintenance grants should be turned into loans, but the Liberal Democrats opposed the

introduction of tuition fees—means tested or flat rate. That remains our position.”—[*Official Report*, 17 June 1999; c 592.]

The Lib Dem manifesto for the recent election contained a commitment that stated, very simply:

“We will scrap unfair university tuition fees”.

In what I am about to say, I do not ignore Margaret Smith’s passionate confirmation in her speech that the Liberal Democrats in the Scottish Parliament support free education. However, the question is what the Liberal Democrats consider to be an unfair university tuition fee. Do they think that there might be fair university tuition fees? If so, are they prepared to impose them?

At the end of April, on a visit to Oxford Brookes University, Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg said that he would abolish tuition fees but, during his party’s conference in September last year, he made clear that he had already decided to dump that pledge as part of his “savage cuts”. It has sometimes been said that the Liberal Democrat is the only animal in the world that can sit on the fence and keep an ear to the ground on both sides. I think that that is unfair and would like to believe that there is a firm commitment somewhere in the deep, dark recesses of the Clegg bunker.

David McLetchie: Ms McKelvie’s comments on the dumping of pledges by the Liberal Democrats are interesting, but could she tell us about the dumping of the pledge to dump all of the debt that students have incurred? Was that not in the SNP manifesto? I have not heard a word about it in the past three years.

Christina McKelvie: Absolutely. It was in the SNP manifesto, but David McLetchie knows that Treasury rules prevented us from doing that. Now that he has friends in the Treasury, perhaps he should ask them to look at it again with a favourable eye and consider whether Scotland can do it.

I wonder whether the position of the Advocate General, Baron Wallace of Tankerness, remains the same as it was in the good old days when he was Jim Wallace MSP. Do the Lib Dems still oppose tuition fees, as he suggested they did when we were all young—or maybe when some of us were young—or do they now oppose only unfair tuition fees? Do they believe that there might be fair tuition fees somewhere? Is it the Clegg of the campaign or the Clegg of the conference? Might we see Baron Wallace fix another fudge like the graduate endowment? That is the UK Government’s tail. The dog, of course, is the Conservative party.

Today, the most senior Conservative in Scotland is the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, David Mundell MP. In the 1999 debate that I have already mentioned, Mr Mundell,

as an MSP, made clear his opposition to tuition fees when he said:

“I hope that Liberal Democrat members will be prepared to follow Neil Wallace’s brave words and join us in lifting the iniquitous burden of tuition fees from Scottish students.”—[*Official Report*, 17 June 1999; c 614.]

I could not agree with him more. Unfortunately, it seems that he will not be holding that position. He must have taken the lady’s advice when she said,

“You turn if you want to.”

David Mundell is part of a Government that will raise the top-up fees at English universities because that will be Government policy and because the loyal Opposition at Westminster is the shower that introduced tuition fees in the first place. Increasing top-up fees is a Labour policy from before the election. The Conservatives will push through the increase in university fees with the support of the Labour Party and the Lib Dems will abstain so that they can say, “It wisnae me, guv. A big boy done it and ran away.”

We know that increased tuition fees will not result in increased funds for the institutions; we know that they are a means of reducing public investment in education; and we know that they will just result in lower public investment in English universities. They might have a knock-on effect for the Scottish budget, as the NUS and others fear. Universities in England are about to be on the end of yet another funding squeeze and another hard round of cuts.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): This is all very interesting, but would the challenges be any different if Scotland were independent?

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): We would have the resources to tackle them, for a start.

Christina McKelvie: Aye—absolutely. My colleague Kenny Gibson has just answered that from a sedentary position. There will be increased resources at the time. We expect the sun to shine on Scottish education then, and it will continue to shine. If Robert Brown is coming over to the idea that independence is a better idea for the universities, I will send him a membership form.

Fortunately, we have a different set of circumstances here in Scotland. While the Labour Government in London in the shape of Peter Mandelson was cutting £398 million from the English universities’ budget for the current financial year, the SNP Government was increasing the Scottish universities’ budget by £40 million. In 2008, Universities UK produced research called “Devolution and higher education: impact and future trends”, which showed that, in 2006, Scottish universities had a funding advantage over English universities of some £454

per student per year. The fact that that gap will now have widened is evidence that the SNP Government has served Scotland well. I wish for England's sake that it had a Government as committed to high-quality provision.

We cannot be complacent, though. We are already in a tight financial situation and the news from south of the border suggests that it will not be getting better any time soon. I do not believe that any party in the Parliament will be able to guarantee any future budget without reservation. Access to education should be based on the ability to learn and not on the ability to pay. I am delighted to be in a country that still has free education, but we have a hard task ahead of us to ensure that it remains. I am clear that we should ensure that the principle of free education remains in Scotland.

15:59

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I hope that there can be a degree of consensus during today's debate. I am sure that we all recognise the importance of higher education in Scotland. In a world where it is becoming increasingly unsustainable, not to mention unpalatable, to compete in the low-wage, low-skills economy, it is vital that our training and education establishments provide us with a highly skilled workforce. It is also worth stating that higher education has its own intrinsic value and that a better-educated society is a culturally richer society.

We agree on the value of higher education, but there is some debate about how we can fund a high-quality and inclusive higher education system. No serious or mature politician in this chamber can think that we can simply wave a magic wand and independence will deliver money for higher education. No matter how Scotland is governed or what Government it has, we will all have to face up to the funding of our higher education system.

I hope that we can agree on some issues, but there will be issues on which we disagree. I do not think that any of us wants up-front tuition fees to return to Scotland. There is political consensus on that in Scotland, but recent press reports have made it clear that there might not be such a clear position on student funding in England. It will be difficult for many students to understand how a politician who pledged to vote against any proposal to increase top-up fees best demonstrates that in-principle commitment by abstaining in a vote and allowing the Tory Government to remove the cap.

Margaret Smith: Does the member accept that it is almost as difficult for many students to

understand why a party should have said that it had no plans to bring in tuition fees but then brought them in in government, as the Labour Party did?

Karen Whitefield: We abolished tuition fees in Scotland. The question for Margaret Smith is what the Liberal Democrats will do in the next few years. I am sure that people will be interested in that. There will undoubtedly be many difficult policy pills for both parties in the coalition in England to swallow over the next few years.

I fully understand why the Government has sought to highlight and exploit the issue of student fees in its motion. The motion attempts to divert attention away from the looming funding crisis that the Government is facing and for which it is ultimately responsible, but the SNP tactic of blame and claim—of blaming others for bad news and claiming credit for good news—is wearing thin. Any Government that is worth its salt must have the courage to take responsibility for difficult decisions as well as for easy decisions. To be fair to the cabinet secretary—I am not often accused of being fair to him—he has recognised that there is a significant and complex challenge. I commend him for that, but it must be said that he has been very short on detail on how he will deal with the problem. Vague hints about partnership with the private sector are all well and good, but we all know that that will never address the funding gap that Scottish universities face.

A recent report in *The Herald* stated that the Scottish Government told universities to expect cuts of 3.2 per cent each year for the next three years. That will make it next to impossible for universities to expand the number of places that are offered to meet increasing demand.

Michael Russell rose—

Karen Whitefield: I will let Mr Russell in shortly. I noted that he said that we should not always believe everything that we read in the papers. If *The Herald* got things wrong and Scottish universities will not face such cuts over the next three years, will he say so and give the universities that reassurance?

Michael Russell: There are no figures attached to the discussions about the pressures that exist, except those that I have given. The overall pressures on the Scottish budget are in great part the result of the Labour Party's mismanagement of the economy. On saying that there should be no cuts, I echo what the First Minister said during First Minister's question time this morning. It is utterly unrealistic to take the stance that Karen Whitefield is taking across every part of the public sector, and I am afraid that the people of Scotland will not believe it.

Karen Whitefield: It is utterly dishonest of the SNP Government to say that there are cuts, when the Scottish budget has grown year on year, every year under devolution, and is now greater than it has ever been in the past 11 years. Any cuts that are made now are as a result of the mismanagement of Scottish government by the SNP.

Will the minister tell us how he plans to enable universities to raise the levels of funding that will allow them to remain competitive with universities throughout the UK and globally? Will he tell the Parliament with whom he has had discussions about funding and what feedback he has had from the heads of Scottish universities about his proposals?

Scottish Labour is in favour of establishing an independent review, which would help to take some of the party politics out of the issue and would seek to offer solutions that could be supported by all parties—not a review by the great and the good but a review by all key stakeholders in order to provide a long-term solution and sustainability for the higher education sector in Scotland.

It is clear that, with impending spending cuts, the status quo is not a viable option. Action must be taken to ensure the sustainability of our universities. Funding is central to that. I mention the role of our further education colleges. At present, they are often seen as the poor relation of Scotland's universities, in terms of funding and perceived status. That is not acceptable and must change. Colleges provide valuable training and educational opportunities for many of my constituents and often provide a valuable gateway into higher education or employment.

It is vital that the minister encourages far stronger partnership working between Scotland's universities and colleges. That can only be of benefit to Scotland's students and could provide opportunities for cost savings.

Any future funding arrangement for Scotland's universities needs to provide stability and long-term security. The best way to achieve that is through political consensus—consensus that can be achieved only by taking some of the political heat out of this difficult issue and by establishing an independent review into the funding of higher education. After that, the challenge will be for all members—or, rather, for those elected to the next Parliament—to do what is in the best interest of students, universities and the nation.

I urge members to support the amendment in Claire Baker's name.

16:07

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): It has been a rather odd debate. It is particularly odd that the background to the debate should be a situation that we have inherited from the previous Labour Government, which introduced tuition fees throughout the United Kingdom and top-up fees in England and Wales, and was all set to increase top-up fees had it continued to govern after the recent election. Against that background, it is also rather odd that Karen Whitefield appears to be nit-picking about what the coalition Government in London may or may not do in future. By its nature, coalition government involves an element of coming together of policies from different perspectives and an element of compromise. Neither party in a coalition has the absolute ability to implement policies that, in an ideal world, it would have liked to implement. The Labour Government had none of those difficulties. It had an absolute majority in the Commons, albeit on a minority of the vote in the country, and was able to do what it liked. We saw what it liked, and the country did not like what it saw.

Claire Baker *rose—*

Robert Brown: I will leave that one. We have gone far enough on that rather esoteric issue.

I am among the people who benefited from a student maintenance grant and free education at university. Although it did not occur to me at the time that there could be such a thing as tuition fees, which are an evil modern invention, I have always thought that I was privileged to go to university—it was a privilege that my parents and those who went before me did not have. Not least as a consequence of my experience, I have always been a strong supporter of the expansion of university access, choice and opportunity over the past 40 years, and I have consistently opposed university tuition fees. It was a significant achievement when Liberal Democrats, entering the new coalition in Scotland in 1999, were able to reverse the direction of travel from the then Labour Government and to abolish tuition fees in Scotland. Kenny Gibson rightly pointed out where the introduction of the fees came from. I have no doubt that that decision represented not just my views and those of Liberal Democrats but the views of the broad majority of public opinion in Scotland, championed by the NUS and many others throughout the UK. I am therefore glad to welcome the on-going campaigning on the matter by the NUS and its student fee pledge.

Of course, the difficulty is that the context and the costs involved have changed radically since I was at university in the 1960s. Many more students are at university and there has been a shift towards greater reliance on both term-time employment and loan finance to support students

during their time at university. There is the undoubted challenge of top-up fees in England which, as I suggested to Christina McKelvie, would still be a challenge were Scotland to have some form of independent Government. There is now the added pressure of the banking and financial crisis, with its substantial effects on the public finances.

There has been an element of shadow boxing about the debate because, on the one hand, the cabinet secretary has ruled out the idea of an independent review but is very much into engagement and consensus and, on the other hand, people want an independent review, but it is to be all about trying to move forward on the matter. Not terribly much has been put forward by way of new ideas about what the review would do, what the engagement would produce or what the context would be. I do not particularly blame the cabinet secretary for that. It is a very difficult issue and, as Margaret Smith rightly pointed out, it is probably premature to make firm decisions until the Browne review has reported and we see the context in England and Wales.

A significant feature, in addition to the student side of the matter, is the fact that our university sector punches well above its weight and makes a substantial contribution to the Scottish economy. The fact that many of our universities are highly placed in international ratings tables and have very close and developing links with institutions in other countries is a credit not only to our institutions and our academics but to our students. They are, of course, a valuable resource—both those that come from Scotland and those that come to Scotland for their education. Both those aspects will be vital for the economic growth and social development of Scotland in the coming years.

Student debt is, of course, an issue. It is estimated that many students will owe more than £21,500 by the time they graduate. There is no question but that that is a challenge for many, but the key issue remains the challenge of securing an acceptable level of student income while people are at university. We must not only get a wider range of students into higher education but keep them there. The Scottish Government and Parliament should be—I think that this is recognised throughout the chamber—working to create a supportive framework to allow people to realise their potential. For our part, the Liberal Democrats have consistently campaigned for a £7,000 minimum income guarantee for students, to ensure that anyone, regardless of their financial circumstances, can go to university and can further their skills.

The point has already been made about the dumping of the student debt promise by the SNP

Government, and the explanations that have been given are not particularly satisfactory. Nevertheless, we are where we are and we must look at what can be done to move forward on these agendas, because the downside is that increased financial pressures can drive students to engage in unrealistic external workloads, can cause worrying mental and physical afflictions and can increase the drop-out rate, as has been mentioned. A recent report from the Higher Education Statistics Agency showed that Scotland's record on drop-out rates and on attracting students from poorer backgrounds to university remains the worst in the UK, with 9.9 per cent dropping out in first year. That is a difficult and challenging situation.

Curiously, the issue of student fees has been contentious both at the start of our current coalition in London and in 1999 in Scotland. There is again a review examining the issue. Then it was Cubie; now it is Lord Browne's review of higher education funding and student finance in England and Wales. That will make for challenging reading north and south of the border. Any recommendations will have to be studied very carefully by the UK Government and also by the Scottish Government in view of the potential implications for our universities.

I think that it has been acknowledged by all the parties that there should be no implications for student fees for Scottish students. Those have been abolished, they should stay abolished and the agenda should be one of how we secure the finance for higher education funding and for student support that is necessary to achieve the consequences that we want to see for the future of the realm in Scotland.

16:14

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I join colleagues around the chamber in commending the National Union of Students for its student fees pledge.

I also congratulate this Government on its approach to student fees thus far in straitened times. The SNP, of course, stands against both fees and debt. Where possible, we have made genuine attempts to alleviate the problem; it is regrettable that previous Governments have stood against student debt in word, but have increased it.

This Government, with Liberal Democrat help, abolished the graduate endowment tax, removing a charge of £2,289 from about 50,000 students. In addition, the SNP replaced loans with grants for part-time students. I realise that that was not particularly popular with everyone. I remember reading an issue of *Holyrood* magazine in which

Rab McNeil took Ken Macintosh to task for suggesting that a loan is as good as a grant. Mr McNeil suggested that Mr Macintosh might prefer to have his salary in the form of a loan.

The Scottish Government has boosted discretionary hardship funds and trebled career development loans. By contrast, the previous Executive left 370,000 of Scotland's students and former students collectively more than £2 billion in debt. The Opposition has showed where it stands when it comes to fees, and it is not on the side of students.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Kenneth Gibson: My God. That took you about 20 seconds, Ken. I was wondering when you were going to come back to me.

Ken Macintosh: I do not mind Mr Gibson taking a loan of me.

Has overall student debt, by which I also mean credit card debt, gone up or down under the SNP?

Kenneth Gibson: One has to look at the context in which we are living; for example, Labour's catastrophic recession. Labour introduced a recession that has cost 1 million jobs in the UK over the past year and has given us the biggest financial deficit. Also, according to former Labour Secretary of State for Health Alan Milburn the gap between rich and poor is wider than it has been for over 80 years.

Of course, it was Labour's Scottish MSPs who rammed top-up fees down England's throat in the first place. In so doing, they had to overcome a party rebellion that they had created by blatantly breaking campaign promises. How would English students have answered the West Lothian question after Scottish Labour MPs foisted that now failed new Labour policy on them—although that is not to say that old Labour has not also failed them. I do not know what to believe from the Labour Opposition. It opposes fees in its manifestos, but introduces them when it is in government. Back in 1997, when all this began, Labour did not even mention the fact that, right after the 1997 election, it intended to bring in tuition fees—fees that have hurt the pockets of so many of our students over so long.

It is sad to see how the Conservatives have U-turned on the issue over a number of years, given that they fought against tuition fees in high-profile campaigns in at least two elections in Scotland and south of the border. Liz Smith said in the debate that students should make a contribution after graduation. By and large, when students graduate, they get jobs that pay more than those that people who have not had a higher education get, which means that students pay higher taxes

than others do. Students make a significant contribution to their education through the taxes that they pay as doctors, lawyers or whatever—

Elizabeth Smith: Will the member give way?

Kenneth Gibson: Whenever I mention a member, they immediately want to come back to me.

Elizabeth Smith: How can we continue to allow the high number of students at our universities and at the same time provide a funding base at current levels and the money for academic research and excellence if we do not allow those students to make a contribution?

Kenneth Gibson: I could have asked Elizabeth Smith exactly the same question a decade ago. If I had done so, she would have said that she supported free education. The SNP believes that free education is a right. Education should not be only for the sons and daughters of the wealthy people who support the Conservative party in ever dwindling numbers north of the border.

Our universities are highly regarded. On a per capita basis, our students and academics produce world-leading research. Only Switzerland is ahead of Scotland in that regard. Our institutions of higher education need to be funded properly and responsibly to ensure their competitiveness for years to come. Thus far, we have kept up with competing universities south of the border and overseas that receive extra income by hanging debt, like the sword of Damocles, over the heads of their students.

Professor Steve Smith, the former president of Universities UK, testified that Scottish university funding has kept up thus far despite the extra income down south. He said:

"The issue is almost completely irrelevant in Scotland ... It's not something we are thinking about. Because the funding level is roughly comparable, it seems to me there is no issue."

A *Times Higher Education Supplement* report said that Scottish universities had been planning for a freeze with a worst-case scenario of 5 per cent cut in the current financial year. Instead, higher education received a 3.6 per cent uplift, courtesy of the cabinet secretary. Robin McAlpine of Universities Scotland said:

"This has been a good day for us ... This budget puts universities right at the heart of the Scottish Government economic-recovery strategy."

The Scottish Government has done everything that it can to support higher education with 7,500 more students in Scotland this year, compared with 6,000 fewer in England. An increase in the cap on tuition fees south of the border would limit our ability to support universities in the future. Financial support to English universities brings

Barnett consequential to Scotland. If that support is instead brought through top-up fees, no such consequential would come, even through such fees are set out in law and are centrally regulated. As a result of the top-ups, funding per student from central Government revenue in England has fallen in real terms. If England wants top-up fees, that is its business, although I doubt that its students do.

As the motion states

“any rise in fees in England and Wales would be detrimental to the interests of Scottish universities”.

The consequences of that could be solved, however, if the Parliament had full fiscal autonomy or, even better, independence, rather than our hoping that Westminster budget policies will meet the needs of our students. If our students need more debt hanging over them, Westminster policies would certainly meet their needs. We note, however, that our students do not need debt—they need a Government with full financial powers that can deliver unique Scottish solutions.

What about access in the first year of top-up fee applications? The number of English students going to universities in England fell by 4.5 per cent against a previous trend of year-on-year rises. That same year, the number of applications by English students to universities in Scotland increased by 2 per cent.

Should not higher education be available to all Scots, regardless of their ability to pay? The SNP abolished the graduate endowment and, in the two years since, the number of acceptances through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service for Scottish universities has gone up by 17 per cent. We have, by dumping the debt, supported the least privileged people who seek higher education. Although not all of it has been dumped, it is smaller than it was. This Government is moving in the right direction and has already provided much more relief than any other party has even promised.

As for Karen Whitefield saying that, ultimately, Scotland's budget is the responsibility of the SNP Government, I thought it was the Scottish block that decided the resources that the Scottish Government had to work with. Labour's infantile stance of arguing for an increase in every budget yet not suggesting moving anything during budget debates will be seen for the opportunism that it is.

16:21

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Like my colleagues, I am pleased to have a chance to discuss further and higher education, in particular the issue of student fees. I have a slight concern about the terms of today's debate, however. Worries over the funding of our universities and

colleges have been growing for several years. With job losses, cuts in courses and problems with student hardship and widening access, those worries are now very much upon us, rather than it being possible to deal with them at some unspecified time in the future.

My concern—indeed, my disappointment—is that the Scottish Government's motion is framed in terms of what is happening in England and Wales, rather than in relation to the decisions that face us here. It is not as though there is not a host of problems and issues facing us now, as we have heard this afternoon, on which we need Government direction. Some of them are long-term problems, including the structural changes that are already taking place. Universities are putting far more emphasis on postgraduate education than on undergraduate education, part of the motivation for which seems to be that it attracts more funding. The consequence is a rather undignified scramble to attract Chinese and other foreign students at the expense of Scottish undergraduates.

Institutions are beginning to regard themselves as businesses and to discuss business models, rather than being academies of learning. Again, the worry is that that is motivated by the need and desire to attract more funding.

There are further immediate worries, too, including those on science, technology, engineering and maths—the STEM subjects—which are being capped this year, and on threats to courses such as applied music at the University of Strathclyde. Concerns over funding underpin far too many of the decisions that are having to be taken in our colleges and universities.

The National Union of Students has described the system in England and Wales as “broke and broken”, and we certainly cannot be complacent about what is happening before our eyes here in Scotland. For example, some institutions are concerned that their budgets might be cut by up to 20 per cent. According to *The Herald*—as my colleague Karen Whitefield has already mentioned—the Government has told universities to expect 3.2 per cent cuts each year for three years, from 2011. I notice that the cabinet secretary did not deny that in his intervention on Karen Whitefield's speech.

Elizabeth Smith suggested that too many students may be going to university. We cannot deny demand. UCAS has experienced a record increase in applications, which are up by almost a third this past year. Despite that record number of applicants, the Scottish Government has refused to fund any more university places.

We know that the recession has been particularly hard on young people. Colleges have

responded well by providing more places to cope with the sudden increase in demand. That, in turn, has had a knock-on effect on the number of college places that are available for the winter intake and on the widening access agenda, with some people who would have benefited from further education being displaced by the additional applicants.

As I mentioned earlier, there is a fear that undergraduate education is being abandoned at the expense of postgraduate courses. Teacher training is one worrying example. There seems to be little commitment from the universities to teacher education. Jordanhill college of education is destined to be sold off, and the Moray House school of education was similarly threatened until the University of Edinburgh reconsidered the matter. The universities know that there is little money to be had from teacher training, and they give every impression of not being interested, with the result that 70 staff have left positions at Strathclyde university alone. The response from the Scottish Government has been to cut the teacher training intake by 600 places—nearly 40 per cent of places. That does not fill one with confidence in the Scottish Government's commitment to education.

We have the lowest proportion of Scottish students going to Scottish universities since devolution and record numbers of Scottish students are going to England to study. On student support, there has been a series of problems to do with hardship funds, and many institutions are expressing deep anxiety. Last month, management at James Watt College decided that further education students' bursaries will be cut by half in the final month of study. Students were made aware of that only on 13 May. As the James Watt student association and the NUS said, that is unacceptable, because students use bursaries to pay the rent and feed their families and not just for travel, as the college tried to assert.

I have described some of the problems that are before us. Scottish further and higher education might not yet be completely broke or broken, but there is no doubt about the seriousness of the situation. The crucial point is that it is up to the Scottish Government—not the Browne review or Westminster—to decide how to fix the problem. My worry is that the SNP's motion has more to do with political positioning than with providing answers or even working towards a solution. I am not sure that any party thinks that it has all the answers on further and higher education for the long term, but surely the onus is on us to try to work together to reach agreement, rather than focus on our differences.

Scottish Labour's approach is clear. We are ruling out up-front tuition fees. We will not introduce an up-front price tag on education. It is 10 years since we had the debate about tuition fees in Scotland. The argument has moved on. I think that that is the view of the further and higher education sector, too. People who work in education can see the crisis developing. The University and College Union is balloting members on action in the University of Glasgow and the University of Dundee. The union reports 140 job losses at the University of Stirling and 200 job losses at the University of Strathclyde.

I am sure that no member wants us to reach a point at which our universities are so chronically underfunded that a degree from a Scottish university is not worth having.

Christina McKelvie: Shocking.

Ken Macintosh: If someone from the back benches wants to intervene, I will be happy to take their question and respond. It appears not, though.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I will.

I apologise, because I have only just joined the debate. Will Mr Macintosh say which degrees might not be worth the paper they are written on?

Ken Macintosh: That is not the current situation; it is a fear that we have. If the Government does not take action to address the long-term funding problems of Scottish universities, our international standing will begin to decline. We have built up a reputation in this country over centuries, and by not taking action the Government is allowing that reputation to slip through its fingers.

Margo MacDonald rose—

Ken Macintosh: Given that Ms MacDonald was not willing to take part in the whole debate, I will not take another intervention from her.

The argument has moved on in the NUS, too. The NUS is openly discussing graduate student contributions as a workable solution. It would be interesting to hear the cabinet secretary's views on the matter. Claire Baker asked him about it, but he did not respond. Is Mr Russell considering the possibility of a graduate student contribution?

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): No. The member is in the final seconds of his speech.

Ken Macintosh: My anxiety is that the Scottish Government's approach is unsustainable. The motion tells us what the SNP is against but not what it is for. I am not sure that the cabinet secretary and his loyal back benchers believe their own slogans. They try to take credit for

supposedly free education, but education is not free: someone has to pay for it. The question that faces us all is whether the taxpayer will continue to foot the entire bill. It is time to move on. The debate on higher education is moving on, with or without the SNP.

The Presiding Officer: We come to closing speeches. Mr O'Donnell, you may have a little more than six minutes.

16:29

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): Many points have been made but I will resist the temptation to allow the cabinet secretary extended time in which to respond to them.

There is a consensus in the Parliament that there are challenges ahead for higher education. We have heard some interesting speeches, although I felt slightly nauseous about the unique manner in which Mike Russell expressed his support for the amendment in Margaret Smith's name.

Margaret Smith: I was very relaxed about it.

Hugh O'Donnell: That aside, some good points have been made in the debate. The cabinet secretary gave a litany of our higher education system's successes, while acknowledging that there are major challenges to face. He also acknowledged that finding a solution will have to be a kind of community project, although I have to say that many members were sceptical about how such an approach will actually pan out, given the scant detail on it. I have to say that that was a little disappointing.

I was also disappointed by Claire Baker's position, which seemed to be based on accusing various parties of changing their positions on tuition fees and other matters. I think, however, that Margaret Smith clearly addressed that point.

Ken Macintosh: Why are the Lib Dems trying to have it both ways? Why in Scotland are they trying to pretend that they are in favour of the NUS pledge while at Westminster they are supposedly abstaining on the issue?

Hugh O'Donnell: I find it quite surprising that a member of the Labour Party would ask that question. It seems to indicate that Mr Macintosh does not have any concept of how devolution actually works.

Ken Macintosh: So are your Liberal Democrats at Westminster—

Hugh O'Donnell: I answered the question—

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but we cannot have a sedentary debate. Either we have a debate or we do not.

Hugh O'Donnell: I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer. I was trying to find words of one syllable that would be appropriate, but clearly I could not.

Michael Russell: Go on.

Hugh O'Donnell: I also welcome Claire Baker's recognition of the consensus on the reintroduction of tuition or top-up fees in Scotland.

Liz Smith made some very interesting points about the number of students, the challenges that are faced by many of our universities and pension funds, and the general financial circumstances that the country faces. However, the danger with a review is that it lets the Labour Party—I do apologise, I mean the SNP Government—off the hook with regard to how it addresses the matter. Historically, at least, reviews have all too often been used as a way of kicking controversial and challenging issues into the long grass. If we press the SNP Government to do something now, we do not give it that opportunity.

I must give credit to Liz Smith for posing the very interesting question whether we have too many people at university. Are we creating challenges for them by undermining the value of higher education? Should that be included in a review?

Margo MacDonald: Yes.

Hugh O'Donnell: I acknowledge Margo MacDonald's response from a sedentary position.

To Christina McKelvie, who did not take Margaret Smith's intervention and might well regret taking David McLetchie's, I simply reiterate the point that was made by Margaret Smith, who said:

"This is a devolved matter, and the Scottish Liberal Democrats remain committed, as we have been throughout the years of devolution, to the demise of fees—up front, top up"

and—here I paraphrase—any other way.

Ken Macintosh: The Scottish Liberal Democrats.

Hugh O'Donnell: Indeed. We are in Scotland.

Robert Brown rightly pointed out—

Ken Macintosh: Will the member give way?

Hugh O'Donnell: Yes, I will.

Ken Macintosh: What will be the view of the Liberal Democrat Chief Secretary to the Treasury on this matter?

Hugh O'Donnell: A response to that question is for someone well above my pay grade.

Robert Brown rightly pointed out yet again the contradictions in the Labour Party's position, although he was clear about the Scottish Liberal

Democrat position on the matter. In highlighting the changes that have occurred between his time at university and the current situation, he mentioned the high drop-out rate. That issue, which ties in to some extent with the points that were made by Elizabeth Smith, certainly requires serious consideration.

In his usual calm, reserved and controlled manner, Ken Macintosh delivered a flurry of facts and figures but did nothing to convince me that the Labour Party's position on the matter is supportable or, indeed, trustworthy. Consequently, I close by saying that we will, of course, support our own amendment and that we look forward to receiving the Government's support for it.

16:35

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)
(Con): I apologise to the cabinet secretary for missing his opening salvos. Perhaps in the future, those who demand ministerial statements should have enough questions to fill up the time that is allocated to them.

I would like to bring to the attention of Parliament what some may regard as inconvenient truths that the myth makers of Scotland would prefer to ignore or deny, but which are nonetheless germane to the present debate. There are three particular truths relating to the Conservative record in higher education between 1979 and 1997 to which I draw Parliament's attention. The first of those truths relates to the participation rate in higher education, which increased from a mere 12 per cent of our young people in 1979-80 to 34 per cent in 1997-98. The second truth is that that expansion in numbers was achieved without our home-based students being required to pay a penny piece in tuition fees. The third truth is that during that time, there was access to grants and loans, albeit on a means-tested basis, to help students from lower-income families to maintain themselves while they were studying.

As Margaret Smith, Robert Brown and others pointed out, the introduction of tuition fees and the abolition, initially, of grants was, of course, the handiwork of the incoming Labour Government that was led by Mr Blair, albeit that its policy proceeded on the basis of the recommendations that were contained in the Dearing and Garrick reports that the previous Government had commissioned. Whether a re-elected John Major Government would have done the same is one of the what-ifs? of history, but the near threefold increase in the number of graduation photographs gracing the mantelpieces and unplayed pianos of Scotland in that 18-year period is a tribute to a Conservative policy that was born of a desire to widen access and opportunities for our young

people, one of whom might even have been Mr Russell.

Michael Russell: Indeed. David McLetchie and I had the benefit of such an education at the University of Edinburgh. Does he accept that one of the reasons why so many people went into higher education during the Thatcher years was that there were no jobs for them to go to?

David McLetchie: I do not accept that, because the highest increase in participation levels came after Mrs Thatcher ceased to be Prime Minister—as Mr Russell will find if he cares to consult the statistics.

In fairness to successor Governments both here and at Westminster, they have continued that policy. We all want to widen access and increase overall participation levels, but the fundamental problem in Scotland—which is now more acute than ever, thanks to the catastrophic state of the public finances—is about how we can sustain that investment in our young people and their futures.

This Parliament inherited the fees policy of the Blair Government. After some tortuous flip-flopping on the part of the Liberal Democrats, about which we have heard, we ended up with a deferred fee in the form of a graduate endowment, albeit that it was window-dressed as a contribution to the cost of maintenance bursaries. When that graduate endowment was abolished in an act of irresponsibility by the SNP and an act of contrition by the Liberal Democrats, we said at the time that such a decision was premature, and that what we needed was an independent review of the funding of higher education and student support in Scotland that paid regard to trends elsewhere in the UK. That prescient call, which was first made by my colleague Murdo Fraser, was repeated today by Liz Smith, and I am pleased to note that it is supported by the Labour Party. It remains pertinent, given the clueless leadership of a Scottish Government that is allegedly bursting with ideas about how to improve the income of Scottish universities, but which is remarkably reluctant to specify them. If further proof of that was needed, all we have to do is note the cabinet secretary's totally barren contribution on that front today.

There is also a nomenclature issue in the debate. For example, the cabinet secretary referred to "student top-up fees". Does he mean by "top-up fees" any fee or fee contribution that is paid by students while they are at university, or after graduation? Just as we could do with greater clarity on that from the Government, the same might also be said of NUS Scotland, whose pledge is referred to in today's motions and amendments. For example, in its briefing note NUS Scotland says that it is

"still willing to at least look at a graduate contribution",

which Ken Macintosh highlighted in his speech. However, it also goes on to say that

“Tuition fees, deferred or upfront, would be unacceptable.”

There is a great sophistry in the language of this debate, and it is designed to obscure basic truths. Whether it is called a graduate endowment, a graduate tax, a graduate contribution or a tuition fee, and whether it is deferred, up front, or income related, in the last analysis, it is a compulsory contribution that is paid by a student or a graduate, referable to his or her receipt of a higher education. The motivation for exacting such a payment is to increase the funding that is available to universities and colleges to provide that education, and thereby to supplement the support that is given out of the general body of taxation, or it is to fund bursary or grant schemes to help people from lower-income households. Most likely, it is a combination of the two. In the present state of public finances, we need to look seriously at what we can continue to afford to finance wholly out of taxation, and we need to look at what, if any, contributions students or graduates pay, however that contribution is assessed or determined, or whatever it is called. That seems to those of us on this side of the chamber to be the sensible way to proceed. As Elizabeth Smith said, it is madness for the Government to rule out having an independent inquiry into how we address the issue.

16:42

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Before I entered Parliament, I spent 22 years teaching in higher education in one institution, while serving for six years as a member of the court of another university. I can name many people who were, during the Conservative years, displaced from employment and ended up as students in higher education. However, I take David McLetchie’s point that there was a substantial increase in participation rates under the Conservative Government, which was a significant step forward.

I wonder what my colleagues and former students would make of the debate that we have had this afternoon. Everyone who is in higher education is aware of the crisis in the sector. People understand that the funding situation is difficult at the moment and that it will get worse in the years to come. They want to make progress towards solutions, but the tragedy is that no progress is being made in Scotland. The universities are shedding staff, and university departments all around Scotland are slated for closure. Any higher education principal will tell us that the current funding model is unstable.

If every university is reorganising, retrenching, and seeking to attract new sources of income by boosting the number of postgraduate students and taking in more overseas students, that might be a form of salvation for an individual university, although in a competitive world, it is difficult to see how it will provide a route to survival. It is not, however, a route to survival for the whole sector. That is why Labour is in favour of a properly structured independent review of higher education. The urgent task in front of us is to map out the options and alternatives, to identify the parameters within which we should move forward, and to involve all the stakeholders—not just the principals and the NUS, but everyone who has a stake and interest in how our higher education system looks. We have to do that systematically, but the Government is resisting that.

It is clear, from the Scottish Government’s motion and the Liberal Democrats’ amendment, that they do not want to talk about the future of higher education in Scotland, but would rather have a debate about what is going on in England. In my view, that is not what devolution is for. We have a responsibility to the people of Scotland to organise and deliver services in this country. Why on earth do the Government and the Liberal Democrats not want to talk about the crisis that exists and the pressures that are very obvious?

Hugh O’Donnell: Will Mr McNulty take an intervention?

Des McNulty: No. I will not.

When the debate was mooted, it was suggested through the usual channels that the SNP had cooked up the subject for debate, perhaps in conjunction with the National Union of Students, in order to put pressure on the Liberal Democrats by embarrassing them. Surely, one should realise by now that the Liberal Democrats are unembarrassable—they have demonstrated that so many times.

It was interesting to hear Margaret Smith try to slide around the question that was put to her by several members. She has an interesting definition of who is in and who is out of the Scottish Liberal Democrats. Apparently, she is part of the Scottish Liberal Democrats up here, but people such as Jo Swinson, Michael Moore and Danny Alexander, who are Liberal Democrats from Scotland down south, do not have to adhere to Scottish Liberal Democrat policy.

Margaret Smith: Will the member take an intervention?

Des McNulty: I will just finish the point. The promise that those people signed up to in the NUS pledge was to vote against the introduction of top-up fees. That is what they said they would do. What they have now said they are going to do, as

part of the coalition agreement, is abstain from the vote on the issue. That is a broken promise—clear, straightforward and simple. What excuse is Danny Alexander going to give when he signs off the financial arrangements for the new Westminster Government's introduction of top-up fees, should that happen? Is he going to say, "It wasn't me. I didn't mean it. I didn't sign it"? How could he do that? Perhaps the Liberal Democrats can explain that embarrassment. I will let Margaret Smith have another go.

Margaret Smith: I remind Des McNulty that we are in a devolved Parliament. It was the Labour Party in the United Kingdom that introduced tuition fees and top-up fees. By working with Labour in the Scottish Parliament, we allowed Labour members to redeem themselves to some extent by abolishing tuition fees for Scottish students. That happened because we were in a coalition Government in a devolved Parliament. That is what coalitions are about and that is what devolution is about. I am not sure where you have been for the past decade.

The Presiding Officer: I have been in the Scottish Parliament, Ms Smith. I ask you to speak through the chair.

Des McNulty: It is absolutely clear what the Liberal Democrat policy was, what the individuals whom I have mentioned—in fact, all the Liberal Democrats in Scotland—said they were going to do and what they are now saying they are not going to do.

At the end of the day, politicians can position themselves as they like—they respond to the electorate. However, I return to the question of what we are going to do in Scotland. Higher education in Scotland faces some difficult issues and I want to see a rational process that identifies all the issues and considers them systematically. I am talking not just about student funding, but about university funding. They are not the same thing. Let us consider access and the relationship between what universities do and economic development in the broadest sense. Let us talk about our competitiveness in research and how we can advance that while maintaining our competitiveness elsewhere.

According to the Government's motion, Michael Russell sees the Browne review as being the only catalyst for change. If the Browne review is acted on, it will be a catalyst for change, but it is not the only trigger for change. The crisis exists and is evident to everybody in higher education now. So, what is the way forward and why is Mr Russell prepared to speak to principals and student organisations, but not prepared to put any of his ideas in the public domain? He told *The Times* that he was having conversations, but we have no information about the content of those

conversations. He has not put on the record any of the individual issues that he raised. He said that a graduate contribution might be on the agenda, but it is clear from listening to his back benchers today that they do not think that it is. If he cannot even be honest with them, how can he be honest with the rest of us or with Scotland?

The Parliament deserves a lot better. The important question that is before us today concerns what we do about the university sector in Scotland, student funding and all the surrounding matters. That issue deserves not a review by the great and the good in isolation, but a systematic evaluation in which options and alternatives are identified, examined and debated throughout Scotland. That is what the universities want but are being denied by the Government.

The reality is that in any rational debate about the future of the universities, there will not be a single universities' view: every university will have its own interests and its own point of view, as will other stakeholders. Why cannot we debate the issue openly in that way and reach a sensible resolution? We should be having such a debate in Parliament today, and I regret that the Scottish Government and the Liberal Democrats would rather have a different and partisan debate of their own.

16:51

Michael Russell: David McLetchie and I, having benefited from the same university education, have one similarity in our approach to the debate: we both view it as important for myth busting. Unfortunately, however, the myths that I want to bust are much more destructive to higher education than the ones that Mr McLetchie wanted to trumpet. I have no doubt that access to universities increased during the period in which the Tories were in power. There are many reasons for that, some of which may even have been to do with the Tories.

We have heard some very dangerous myths this afternoon from members on the Labour side of the chamber, particularly in what I can only describe as three very dismal speeches from front-bench members. Those myths deserve to be destroyed.

Every Labour speaker has mentioned the need for consensus, which echoes my own desire. However, consensus must be based on facts, and I want to give the facts about a number of things that front-bench Labour members raised, because they need to be corrected. The first is the delusion about resources and funding. The Scottish Government's budget has been cut by £500 million, and further cuts are coming. We must all face that problem.

I was trying to think of a comparison to illustrate the Labour approach—this morning at First Minister's questions, this afternoon and no doubt in the health debate earlier—to the reality of the situation in which we find ourselves. The only comparison I could think of was that, astonishingly, Labour now resembles a group of arsonists who, having laid waste to the Scottish budget and the finances of this entire island, now run about complaining about the heat, the smoke and the sound of fire engines. They are the people who are to blame, and nothing will allow us to avoid that. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Ken Macintosh: Will the member take an intervention?

Michael Russell: No, I will not take an intervention—I have listened to Mr Macintosh quite enough this afternoon. I want to tell the truth, which differs from some of the things that I have heard from a range of Labour members during the debate.

The second thing that needs to be corrected is the extraordinary delusion of front-bench Labour members with regard to devolution. They have spent most of the afternoon attacking the Liberal Democrats for their inconsistencies north and south of the border. Well, there is an answer to that—it is independence, and I dearly wish that members in the chamber would wake up to it.

Even if that were to strain my new-found relationship with the Liberals this afternoon to breaking point, I have to say that for the Labour Party, of any party in the chamber, to accuse others of inconsistency in their stance north and south of the border beggars belief.

I come to some of the financial facts. I was astonished to hear Claire Baker say that the Government had short-changed universities. The figures, which I have in front of me, indicate that universities are receiving more this year than they have ever received. The figures indicate that even in the year in which this Government came into office, we continued to honour the commitment that the previous Administration had made. If we short-changed universities in 2007-08, it was because that was what Labour had planned to do in its budget.

Claire Baker: Will the member give way?

Michael Russell: I will not take an intervention.

We have not short-changed universities. We have continued to increase the resources that are available to universities.

On the comparison between north and south of the border, the extraordinary assertion was made that the previous Westminster Government had

somehow invested in universities while the Scottish Government had not. Let me just make it clear that half the universities in England have already had their budget allocations for 2010-11 reduced. In Wales, the cut was such that all the universities bar one received a reduced budget. That is not the case in Scotland.

Among that whole range of myths, the final myth that we heard from Labour came from Ken Macintosh—always one to make speeches full of half-truths masquerading as facts—who actually made a point of using the word “crisis”. That was an extraordinary thing to do. Incidentally, he also talked down the value of Scottish degrees, which I think was most regrettable. Let me just quote Alastair Sim, who is the director of Universities Scotland. When asked specifically whether a crisis was brewing in higher education, Alastair Sim said, “I don’t really think there is.” Universities Scotland says that there is no crisis, but Ken Macintosh says that there is a crisis. There are no prizes for guessing which of them I would choose to believe.

In all those myths that we heard this afternoon, not a single good argument was given for supporting a review, but three very cogent reasons were put forward by Liz Smith. Although David McLetchie indicated that he hankered after the ability to be true to what he actually felt by just imposing student fees, Liz Smith was, as ever, much more reasoned. She gave three reasons for demanding a review: to be able to discuss the overall number of students in higher education; the need for an holistic approach that brings in business and industry; and her desire for an open debate about the nature of the question, which in other words means that, as the NUS briefing suggests, we should debate the possibilities of postgraduate contribution.

Now, I am not taking a position on any of those things. I am not listening to the siren voices of Labour members, who just want me to say something so that they can contradict it. During this afternoon’s debate, I was very much reminded of the remark from my old friend Andrew Wilson, who said in the first parliamentary session that, if the SNP had invented the light bulb, Labour would have called it a dangerous anti-candle device. That is precisely what we have heard this afternoon. We cannot say anything but it is contradicted.

However, if Liz Smith would like an assurance from me that everything can be included in the discussion and that it will include a wide range of people, I can give her that assurance. Therefore, I hope that I have helped her to withdraw from the pact with the devil—

The Presiding Officer: Order. There is too much noise around the chamber.

Michael Russell: —which is how Labour described the relationship between the Tories and Liberals in respect of tuition fees south of the border. Let me help Liz Smith to withdraw from that terrible pact and to come and join the forces of progress and reason on higher education in Scotland.

Quite contrary to what some have said, I have been absolutely clear about where the debate is going. First, it is vital that we find out what is in the Browne review. It is absolutely unreasonable to say that we in Scotland can ignore that. We need to know what is in the Browne review. However, in the process up to Browne, we need a good discussion about all the possibilities, right across the sector and beyond. That is what is happening.

The next thing that we need to do—Margaret Smith called for this—is to assess the Browne review and to discuss it in this Parliament. We will then need to bring forward a range of possibilities—there is no one set of solutions to the problems that face Scottish universities—and to debate and discuss those in a rational and reasonable fashion. Having heard this afternoon's debate, I have some hope that some members of the Parliament are prepared to do that.

My real problem this afternoon, if I may go back to where I started, has been the complete lack of reason and thought that we have heard from members on the Labour benches. It is quite impossible to argue that the solution to all the problems is simply to ignore the financial reality that we find ourselves in as a result of Labour's mismanagement of the economy. The right solution is to have the type of debate that I am already engaged in. If Labour members wish to engage in that constructively, I would warmly welcome them, despite their performance this afternoon. If they do not, they are the ones who will be devaluing Scottish higher education and undermining Scotland's great reputation.

Karen Whitefield: The fault is always someone else's and never the cabinet secretary's.

Michael Russell: However, I will not let that happen. I hope that the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives will also work with me on that.

Karen Whitefield may, as ever, shout on, but the reality is that there have been no answers from Labour members this afternoon. The job of this Parliament is to find the answers. We are devoted to doing that.

I hope that members will support not just my motion but the amendment in the name of Margaret Smith, because I think that the Liberal Democrat amendment just has it. That will tell the people of Scotland, and elsewhere, that we support our higher education sector, that we know that free access is vital and that we know that we

have a task ahead of us to produce a sustainable future for that important sector.

Points of Order

17:00

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would like to make a correction to an answer that was given by the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism during this afternoon's ministerial statement regarding VisitScotland.

In response to the last question, Jim Mather said that I did not speak with the VisitScotland chairman, Mike Cantlay, last Sunday. I can confirm that I made a telephone call to Dr Cantlay on Sunday afternoon, as I had been surprised to read the newspaper report regarding the chief executive of VisitScotland, and I wanted to establish its veracity.

Mr Mather and I have, obviously, discussed this matter during the week, but I did not inform him of the call that I made on Sunday, hence his assumption that I had not made one. I am happy to correct the record. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

John Swinney: The substance of the newspaper report is, as Mr Mather said this afternoon, entirely an operational matter for the board of VisitScotland.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you for that clarification.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Mr Swinney was sitting next to the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism when he made that statement and answered that question. I am not clear why it has taken him until now to correct the point.

The Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order.

John Swinney: If I may, Presiding Officer. As I said in my point of order, Mr Mather had given his final answer to questions on the statement, at which point the Deputy Presiding Officer concluded proceedings. I felt that it was appropriate to give you notice of my intention to make a point of order at this stage in the proceedings.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Iain Smith is correct to say that Mr Swinney was sitting next to Mr Mather and to express surprise about the fact that he could not correct this error. However, it is also true that Mr Swinney prompted Mr Mather on a number of answers that he gave this afternoon.

One wonders why he could not have prompted him on that one, too.

The Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order for me. The minister has corrected a position that had previously gone uncorrected, and I consider the matter closed.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: I hope that it is one.

Rhona Brankin: Would it not be the case that the cabinet secretary should have seen the statement before it was brought before the Parliament?

The Presiding Officer: That is just a debating point.

John Swinney: If I may stretch your patience, Presiding Officer, which I think that this issue is doing. I am not sure that Rhona Brankin was in the chamber for the entire statement but, as I said, Mr Mather made the point that I have corrected during the last answer to the last question; it did not form part of the statement that Mr Mather read to the Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: I repeat, I now consider this matter closed.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motions S3M-6481 and S3M-6482, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments on advice and assistance on civil legal aid and on the Arbitration (Scotland) Act 2010.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Advice and Assistance and Civil Legal Aid (Transfer of Tribunal Functions) (No. 2) (Scotland) Regulations 2010 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Arbitration (Scotland) Act 2010 (Consequential Amendments) Order 2010 be approved.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

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

The next item of business is consideration of a further Parliamentary Bureau motion, S3M-6483, on substitution on committees.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Bill Wilson be appointed to replace Shirley-Anne Somerville as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Equal Opportunities Committee;

Jamie Hepburn be appointed to replace Bill Wilson as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Public Petitions Committee.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There are 10 questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on student fees, if the amendment in the name of Claire Baker is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Margaret Smith will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-6469.1.2, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend amendment S3M-6469.1, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the national health service, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 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, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 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)

Against

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, 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)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 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)

Abstentions

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: I say for the record that Mr Neil has pointed out that his console was not working during that division. I can tell him that it will not affect the outcome of the vote.

The result of the division is: For 77, Against 48, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6469.1.1, in the name of Ross Finnie, which seeks to amend amendment S3M-6469.1, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the NHS, as amended, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6469.1, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, as amended, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6469, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on the NHS, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 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)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 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)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 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, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Glasgow) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Aberdeen) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

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, 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)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 80, Against 47, Abstentions 0.

Amendment, as amended, agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6469, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on the NHS, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 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)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 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, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline) (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)

Against

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)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 79, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the real-terms increase for the NHS budget in 2010-11 despite the previous UK administration cutting the Scottish Government budget by £500 million; notes the commitment by the new UK coalition government to real-terms increases in the NHS budget in future years and agrees that all resultant Barnett consequential should be applied to the NHS in Scotland; understands that, notwithstanding the above, NHS budgets are tight as a result of Labour's economic mismanagement and that all NHS boards require to deliver services more efficiently, but welcomes the commitment that quality of patient care will be the paramount consideration, that there will be no compulsory redundancies in the NHS and that there will be more staff in the NHS at the end of this parliamentary term than there were when Labour left office in 2007; also welcomes the commitment from the UK coalition government to reverse Labour's increase in national insurance, which would have cut £40 million from the budget of the NHS in Scotland, and calls on the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing to publish immediately NHS boards' workforce projections and to carry out robust scrutiny, including risk assessment, of the impact on the safety and quality of patient care and the provision of frontline NHS services.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6472.1, in the name of Claire Baker, which seeks to amend motion S3M-

6472, in the name of Michael Russell, on student fees, 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)
 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)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 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)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 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)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6472.2, in the name of Margaret Smith, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6472, in the name of Michael Russell, on student fees, 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)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 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)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 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)

Against

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)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McGregor, 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)

Abstentions

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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 17, Abstentions 45.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6472, in the name of Michael Russell, on student fees, as amended, 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)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
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)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
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)
Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
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)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
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)
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
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)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
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)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
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)
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)

Against

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)

Abstentions

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)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 16, Abstentions 46.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the ongoing review of higher education and student finance in England and Wales; recognises that the Scottish Government will need to consider any outcomes of this review and the potential impact on Scottish universities; commends the National Union of Students' student fee pledge, and welcomes that, thanks to the actions of the previous and current administrations in Scotland, full-time Scottish higher education students studying in Scotland do not pay tuition fees or top-up fees.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6481, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Advice and Assistance and Civil Legal Aid (Transfer of Tribunal Functions) (No. 2) (Scotland) Regulations 2010 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6482, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Arbitration (Scotland) Act 2010 (Consequential Amendments) Order 2010 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-6483, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on substitution on committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Bill Wilson be appointed to replace Shirley-Anne Somerville as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Equal Opportunities Committee;

Jamie Hepburn be appointed to replace Bill Wilson as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Public Petitions Committee.

Robert Owen

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S3M-6086, in the name of Bill Butler, on bank on Owen. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the launch of the Bank on Owen campaign, which aims to have Robert Owen of New Lanark commemorated on Scottish bank notes to mark the International Year of Cooperatives in 2012; recognises the contribution that Robert Owen made to Scottish society through his pioneering work at New Lanark where he championed co-operative principles and values; notes that the co-operative sector in Scotland is worth over £3 billion to the economy and that the co-operative business model has proven extremely resilient and reliable during the recent global economic upheaval, and would welcome widespread support for this proposal.

17:12

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): I refer to my entry in the register of members' interests.

I thank the 65 members from across the chamber who signed my motion—a veritable parliamentary majority. In addition, I welcome the support of West Lothian Council, the City of Edinburgh Council and all those people from across Britain and the world who have supported the campaign by signing the e-petition or joining the Facebook group. Finally, I thank the Co-operative Group for its help in co-ordinating the campaign.

The bank on Owen campaign aims to draw attention to Robert Owen's achievements by petitioning banks to commemorate him on a Scottish banknote, to mark the United Nations year of co-operatives in 2012. Robert Owen is widely acknowledged as an imaginative entrepreneur and radical social reformer. He is best known for his time as co-owner and manager of the cotton mills at New Lanark, where he initiated a series of pioneering reforms. He is also viewed by many as a founding father of the co-operative movement. It is my hope that, as a result of the campaign, Owen and his world view of a co-operative commonwealth will become familiar to many others.

In his early years as a factory manager in Manchester, Owen observed that a workforce that was justly treated was not only happier but more productive. That realisation, along with his commitment to education as the primary force in shaping human character, formed the basis of the work that he undertook at New Lanark. As well as possessing considerable business acumen, Owen was an individual of great personal integrity.

Fiercely committed to progressive change, he never sought to evade his social obligations. In the areas of health and education, Owen was an advocate of radical reform that would address directly the issue of social inequality.

During his time at New Lanark, he went out of his way to improve the lives of the workforce, implementing a range of reforms—including free education, health and child care—that greatly improved their quality of life. In its time, New Lanark was a symbol of progress and a practical example that showed that the world could be organised differently and democratically. Today, New Lanark is a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization world heritage site of great historical, social and educational importance. I warmly welcome the Scottish Government's recent decision to subsidise school trips to New Lanark for Scotland's pupils. I would particularly welcome a commitment from the minister tonight that the Scottish Government will throw its considerable weight behind the campaign when it approaches the banks for their support.

Owen rightly disputed the idea that the rich provide for the poor and working classes, arguing that, in fact, the poor and working classes create all the wealth that the rich possess. The idea that the wealth and health of a society can be calculated according to the profits that are amassed at its summit is, unfortunately, still prevalent today. Until recently, banks and corporations were praised for their so-called wealth creation—a philosophy of economic liberalism based on the mistaken belief that money that is accrued at the top of society percolates to the bottom, thus benefiting all. That is the so-called trickle-down theory. The experience of the past 30 years has shown that to be a fallacy. Actually, there has been a dramatic increase in levels of inequality. Taxes that are collected from the City represent a relatively small proportion of its overall profits, which, rather than being reinvested in society, have been subsumed by grossly excessive corporate bonuses, executive salaries and dividend handouts to those who do not need or deserve them.

The near economic collapse of the past 30 months has led to much talk of the need to restructure society. I believe that part of the solution is to be found in the co-operative model, which is a safe and stable alternative to unregulated free-market capitalism. For almost two centuries, co-operatives have operated according to principles set out by Owen—openness, democracy, membership, participation and the fair distribution of profits. Co-operative businesses operate within sustainable parameters. They are dedicated to the rights of their members and employees and the development of local communities. What all co-operatives have in

common, be they retail, housing, financial or consumer, is a sense of responsibility towards their members and employees. Co-operative banks and credit unions do not put their members' savings at risk and co-operative businesses do not recklessly endanger their workers' jobs. Put simply, co-operatives follow Owen's example and put people before profits.

The sector has coped remarkably well during the recession. Co-operatives make an annual contribution of £3 billion to the Scottish economy, but that contribution could be greatly increased. At present, retail co-operatives make up only 9 per cent of the Scottish economy compared with between 21 and 50 per cent in other developed European countries. Members will be glad to hear that there is also room for expansion in many other areas, such as digital and new media, forestry and renewable energy. Implementing the co-operative model in those sectors would help to shore up the economy and reduce our present overreliance on the financial sector.

Given the crisis in the unregulated free market and the fact that public money has been used to rescue financial institutions, I believe that Scotland's banks owe a considerable debt to the public. With big chunks of Lloyds Banking Group and the Royal Bank of Scotland now being owned by all of us—by taxpayers—it is not unreasonable for us to ask that they acknowledge their debt to society by commemorating Owen on a banknote. Indeed, as *The Herald* observed in a recent editorial,

“ensuring bankers have a reminder of more communitarian, humanitarian ideals close by them at all times would only be a good thing.”

That is a perceptive comment and one with which I whole-heartedly agree. Such an initiative would send out a welcome signal from the banking sector that it has renounced once and for all casino banking and reckless lending, and is set to return to its original purpose of providing ordinary citizens with safe and secure saving and credit facilities.

In conclusion, Owen personified the very best of these islands. He was born a Welshman, came of age in England and made his name in Scotland. Every age throws up progressive and imaginative reformers who have a compelling vision of how society could and should be. They make their mark in their own time and speak to us down through the ages. Owen is certainly one of those individuals. He is a person of international renown whose philosophy has contemporary relevance. Banking on Owen is a safe bet.

17:20

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Bill Butler on securing the debate. It is a tribute to Robert Owen's legacy that so many members from the parties that are represented in the Parliament support the motion. I have not checked to see how many members have joined the bank on Owen Facebook group, but I assure the campaign organisers that I plan to be one of them.

Scotland's historic right to print its own banknotes has always been a source of pride. It serves to remind us of the distinctive banking tradition in Scotland and the principles on which many banks were founded. Perhaps we have lost sight of some of those principles in recent years—members discussed that in more detail yesterday. Prudence and balance gave way to the impulse to make a quick buck, and serving wider society gave way to the quest for never-ending growth. Perhaps it is even more appropriate in the context of the financial crisis that we should find a way to commemorate the life and work of Robert Owen and the role that the co-operatives can and do play in society. Featuring Robert Owen on a Scottish banknote can serve those purposes, and I hope that one or more of Scotland's banks can be persuaded to take up the challenge. Of course, as taxpayers, we already hold an 84 per cent share in the Royal Bank of Scotland and a 40 per cent share in Lloyds Banking Group, so there should be ways to persuade those banks other than through petitions and parliamentary debates. The United Kingdom Government has been reluctant to get involved in their day-to-day running, but perhaps it could make an exception in this case at least.

To mark the year of homecoming last year, the Clydesdale Bank launched a series of banknotes, which included a £20 note that featured an image of New Lanark on its reverse side. Our four other world heritage sites featured on the remaining denominations. Those notes are still in circulation and have attracted a lot of interest from residents in and visitors to Scotland.

New Lanark is in the South of Scotland region, which I represent. It contributes much to the economy and culture of the area. Even without world heritage status, it would be a wonderful tourist attraction in its own right. The UNESCO designation has helped to raise its profile; it has also raised its ability to attract support and to develop to preserve, protect and enhance its unique historical features for future generations.

I was delighted that, a few weeks ago, the Minister for Culture and External Affairs was able to visit New Lanark and see Robert Owen's legacy at first hand. As Bill Butler mentioned, the Scottish Government's decision to include the site in the educational travel scheme will allow hundreds, if

not thousands, of children to visit the site each year. Giving young people the chance at an early age to learn about the co-operative movement and to see for themselves what co-operative principles meant to earlier generations should inspire them to learn more and help to take forward such principles and practices into the future.

Robert Owen was the founding father of the co-operative movement and New Lanark was its trail-blazer, but the legacy continues today, and that has proven to be as rich a heritage as the physical walls and buildings of the village of New Lanark.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): We are asking the banks to do something, but perhaps we should also ask the Government to do something. Perhaps we should ask it to produce a programme to encourage the development of the co-operative movement.

Aileen Campbell: I am sure that Jim Mather will, in summing up, comment on how the Government will respond.

The campaign to feature Robert Owen on a banknote is not just a campaign for its own sake, of course, but a recognition that 2012 is the UN year of co-operatives. In adopting resolution 64/136, which established the year of co-operatives, the General Assembly of the UN noted that co-operatives impact on poverty reduction, employment generation and social integration. Worldwide, the co-operative sector has around 800 million members in more than 100 countries, and it has been estimated that it accounts for more than 100 million jobs. Given those vast figures, each of us can see the impact that co-operatives continue to play in our own communities.

In the South of Scotland, that ranges from the familiar high street stores and banking services to the more ambitious initiatives, such as the development of Owenstown. Like New Lanark 200 years before it, the proposal for the new village in South Lanarkshire is that it will be developed on co-operative principles. It will be a model of a sustainable eco-aware settlement for others to learn from and to imitate. Many members will have seen the recent exhibition in the Parliament that promoted Owenstown, and I wish the Owenstown co-operative society well.

Let us hope that there is speedy progress for the bank on Owen campaign so that it can be another lasting tribute to Robert Owen and a real legacy of the 2012 year of co-operatives.

17:25

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I, too, point out my entry in the register of interests.

I congratulate Bill Butler on securing the debate. I apologise because I do not do Facebook; all the same, I am pleased to speak in support of the campaign, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss the contribution that Robert Owen made to improving the conditions of the working class. In particular, as a Lanarkshire MSP, I pay tribute to the pioneering work that Owen undertook at New Lanark, which is in the constituency of my colleague Karen Gillon.

As Bill Butler said, Owen recognised that a more content workforce was a more productive workforce. He demonstrated that it was possible to make a profit while at the same time raising the standard of living of his employees. Many of Owen's ideas and reforms went against the grain in early 19th century Scotland. Indeed, many of his fellow investors were unconvinced of the merits of raising educational and living standards for the workers at New Lanark. It is unfortunate that, two centuries later, business leaders still appear to oppose reforms. For example, the Confederation of British Industry and others argued that the Labour Party's introduction of the minimum wage would have a disproportionate impact on profits.

Owen disliked the factory system, which he believed encouraged social irresponsibility, destructive competition and heartless individualism. For those reasons, he decided to try to revolutionise that system. Given the social irresponsibility, destructive competition and heartless individualism that led to the collapse of our modern banking system, it is a bit ironic that we are calling for Robert Owen to be recognised on a banknote. However, the bank on Owen campaign is about raising awareness of Owen's legacy and, as Bill Butler pointed out, perhaps getting something back out of the banking system.

Owen believed that co-operation and harmonious planning would be far superior and far more productive—in relation to the interests of society—than the divisive and competitive nature of capitalism. I agree with those sentiments. At New Lanark, Robert Owen successfully improved the working and living conditions of all his workers, especially his young apprentices. The conditions in the mills at New Lanark, although pretty awful by modern standards, were a rare exception in their day, and a massive improvement on the conditions in other mills. Owen believed in equality for women and universal suffrage at a time when women's rights were non-existent. He courted controversy by denouncing marriage, as it was then, as a form of slavery for women. He said:

"Women will be no longer made the slaves of, or dependent upon men ... They will be equal in education, rights, privileges and personal liberty."

Owen was certainly not afraid of being controversial. He regarded New Lanark as an

expression of the ways in which the evils of poverty, social disadvantage and ignorance could be surmounted through good education, steady employment and decent housing and health care. In his New Lanark schools, he pioneered new methods of teaching involving the use of pictures, maps and charts. Although he believed that education was essential to a child's development, he recognised that a well-educated workforce was a more productive workforce. He also believed that education should be enjoyable. He stated:

"To train and educate the rising generation will at all times be the first object of society, to which every other will be subordinate".

Owen recognised that despite the severe economic depression in Britain following the Napoleonic wars, safer working conditions were essential in every workplace. Unhappy with the regulations that were introduced in the Cotton Mills and Factories Act 1819, he lobbied Parliament to ensure that better conditions were extended to all workers. In today's volatile financial climate, in remembering Robert Owen we can also be reminded that the conditions that were fought for and won over many years must be protected. This is a good time to remind ourselves that health and safety in the workplace must remain the right of every single employee. We must protect workers' entitlement to withdraw their labour and remove anti-trade union legislation that undermines working class rights and conditions.

Including Robert Owen on an everyday object such as a banknote will remind us of past struggles and help to focus attention on modern working conditions and the continuing need to tackle the social evils of poverty, inequality and repression. One of the criteria by which New Lanark achieved world heritage status was the international cultural influence of Owen's campaign for a better and fairer society. I encourage people to visit New Lanark. I again congratulate Bill Butler on securing the debate and wish the co-op movement and the campaign every success.

17:30

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):

Bill Butler gave a passionate and interesting speech. He made a compelling case for the recognition of Robert Owen in the way that is suggested by the campaign, which I am happy to endorse.

New Lanark is indeed a very impressive place. For the first time, I think, in my time in this Parliament, I am able to say that I agree with Elaine Smith. I do not know whether that will discomfort her as much as it surprised me. It is possible for businesses to make a good profit and to raise the standards by which they treat their

employees. In fact, if we can take a broader lesson out of the theme that Bill Butler and others developed in their speeches about employee engagement and looking after the interests of employees, it is perhaps that it is sensible—for business owners, as well as for those who work in businesses—for everyone to work in the same direction and for employees to be treated fairly.

A good example of where that makes sound business sense—perhaps I come at this from a slightly different angle from Bill Butler—is that if we consider the number of people who have lost their jobs in the recession that we have just come through, although the job losses are very regrettable, they have been much fewer in number than many people feared. In many businesses, employers have taken a very different approach from that which they took in previous recessions. For example, they have engaged with employees—those who are in trade unions and those who are not—and have come to collective solutions. For example, in some cases they have offered paid sabbaticals, while in others they have offered part-time rather than full-time work for a short period to sustain the business.

A striking aspect of the way in which that has developed in recent years is the extent to which it is clear that people in some businesses, who understood that their future was at risk, could see that, although the bottom line is important, the business owners are also looking out for the employees. That creates a degree of loyalty in employees, which has significant value both to them in respect of what they can contribute, and to the business. Whether or not we come to the issue from an economically liberal perspective—I am happy to say that I am an economic liberal, in the same way as I am sure that Bill Butler would be happy to say that he is not—it makes business sense.

It is valid to point out, as Bill Butler and others have done, that there is significant scope to increase the scale of the co-operative movement in Scotland. A Labour wit told me that I should not read into that any suggestion that they would support mutualising Scottish Water. I do not mean it in that sense, but surely there is something that we can learn from successful co-operative models, whether we are talking about the big players such as the John Lewis's of this world or smaller co-operatives. There are many co-operatives in rural areas and in the agricultural sector in the region that I cover—and which Aileen Campbell covers—that operate successfully and align the interests of the people who work in them and the business owners. Even if we do adopt a pure co-operative style, there are other ways in which businesses can ensure that they take employees with them. A sensible employer will do that.

Margo MacDonald *rose—*

Derek Brownlee: I sense that Margo MacDonald is about to put me right on something.

Margo MacDonald: I simply want to suggest that the financial plight of some of our football clubs might be alleviated by an element of co-operativeness being introduced in the way that they are run.

Derek Brownlee: I suspect that Margo MacDonald knows an awful lot more about football than I do. She made a very valid point in her earlier intervention when she suggested that the Government has a role in driving forward the co-operative movement. I hope that we will hear some ideas from the minister on how that might be done. There is no reason, within an economically liberal society, why the co-operative movement cannot be on a greater scale. I wish the campaign well.

17:34

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests, as I am a Labour and Co-operative member of the Scottish Parliament.

I, too, congratulate Bill Butler on securing the debate and on reminding us not only of the importance of Robert Owen but of the huge social and economic importance of the co-operative sector to our economy. Members, including Elaine Smith, have rightly paid rich tribute to someone who pioneered radical social reform and sought to improve, empower and enrich the lives of the New Lanark workforce.

Of course, my area in Ayrshire has a rich and proud tradition of co-operatives. Indeed, it lays claim to being the birthplace of co-operatives through the Fenwick weavers. In 2008, the Parliament debated and celebrated the fact that the Fenwick Weavers Society, which was founded in 1761, is acknowledged as the world's first formally incorporated co-operative society—I took great delight in making reference to that in another place in a maiden speech last night.

The birth of co-operatives was of great importance to Ayrshire and Scotland. It was an era when Robert Burns lived in my adopted home village of Mauchline and Robert Owen's father-in-law, David Dale, was born in nearby Stewarton. David Dale is associated, of course, with New Lanark but also with Catrine—which I said politely and not in the Ayrshire way, albeit that Margo MacDonald would probably recognise it if I had.

Nowadays, co-operation includes developments such as the credit union movement, worker co-operatives and—for Margo MacDonald's benefit, although I am sure that she knows this—even

football supporter trusts. We have Co-operative Development Scotland, which, like many of my Labour and Co-operative Party colleagues, I campaigned for over many years.

Bill Butler's motion makes reference to the United Nations year of co-operatives in 2012. I am obviously excited about that year-long celebration and the potential that it has for my local area and Scotland. In New Lanark and Fenwick, Scotland lays claim to two of the most significant co-operative sites in the world. I hope that the Government seeks to maximise their significance during 2012. The year should provide us with the opportunity to celebrate Scotland's special and unique co-operative heritage and to serve as the catalyst for us to encourage the next generation of Robert Owens and Fenwick weavers.

Like Bill Butler, I welcome the Government decision to subsidise school trips to New Lanark. It is important that we continue to promote and develop co-operative values among our young people; I learned those values by way of my days in a co-operative youth organisation, the Woodcraft Folk.

The radical values of Robert Owen and the Fenwick weavers remain just as relevant today in the 21st century as they were back in their day. I am thinking in particular of the banking sector. Without wishing to introduce a note of controversy to the debate, I say gently to Derek Brownlee that, if the Conservatives are now fully supportive of the mutual and co-operative model—as they seem to suggest that they are—there is no logic in not also supporting it as a model for the financial services sector. I hope that we will continue to hear warm words from all sides of the chamber on the matter.

Placing Robert Owen on a banknote would acknowledge the co-operative movement and his contribution to it in an imaginative and important way. As other members have said, it would also send out a very public message of recognition of the importance of co-operatives in the present day. By recognising Robert Owen in that way, we would not only pay tribute to a remarkable man but acknowledge the thousands of co-operators right across Scotland.

Earlier in my speech, I alluded to the coming into being of the Fenwick weavers in the era of Robert Burns. I will conclude my contribution to this evening's debate with a quotation from another local icon—local to Ayrshire and Lanarkshire—James Keir Hardy. A newspaper account of his speech at an event in 1908 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Robert Owen recounts him saying:

"When Robert Burns died, Robert Owen was 26. It was surprising how much in common these two great men had - the one sung of human life and human brotherhood; the other lived human life and human brotherhood."

It goes on to say that

"It was something for many of them there to be proud of - that they belonged to the same stock as these two outstanding members of their race."

Given that Robert Burns now adorns our currency, it would be fitting—would it not?—for Robert Owen to do likewise.

17:39

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I join with other members in congratulating Bill Butler on securing the debate.

It is a privilege to participate in such a debate. For 11 years now, I have had the honour of representing the fabulous New Lanark. Over that time, I have seen it gain world heritage status. As other members said, New Lanark is now rightly on a banknote of the bank that bears the name of my constituency. That is fitting and appropriate.

People across Clydesdale are rightly proud of the legacy that Robert Owen's work created. New Lanark is a major draw for locals and tourists alike. It also serves as a model of what can be achieved—of what the co-operative movement has done and can continue to do. New Lanark is a gem that we do not yet fully exploit, and I am keen to work with ministers to ensure that that is done. The year of the co-operative in 2012, and the cultural Olympiad the same year, provide ways to do that.

Further progress can be made if New Lanark has a world heritage co-ordinator in place. A meeting is taking place on that issue at New Lanark today, and I hope that the minister will take the matter up with his colleague Fiona Hyslop, so that she can follow it up with Historic Scotland and the co-ordinator can be in post as a matter of urgency and we can fully exploit the opportunities that will exist in 2012.

Why is Robert Owen so important? When he first considered coming to New Lanark, he remarked:

"My intention was not merely to be a manager of cotton mills, but to change the conditions of the people who were surrounded by circumstances having an injurious influence upon the character of the entire population ... The community was a very wretched society and vice and immorality prevailed to a monstrous extent."

In 1799, Owen and his partners bought the New Lanark mills. Shortly afterwards, when he moved back to New Lanark, he resolved to modernise the mill and improve the working and social conditions of his workers. At that time, the mills employed between 1,500 and 2,000 people, including 500 children, who had been removed from parish workhouses and were employed as apprentices. The mill owners were responsible for feeding, clothing, housing and educating their

apprentices, but few of them carried out their responsibilities adequately. As a result, the children were small and pale, their growth stunted by bad conditions. Most of them were illiterate. Safety standards were virtually non-existent, and many children were maimed or killed by accidents at work.

Owen was appalled by the conditions and strove to change things for the better. Only a few men such as Robert Owen realised that the problems were a direct result of poverty and bad conditions. He did not find it easy to convince his colleagues but, in time, he did, and he went on to reform New Lanark in ways that many of us cannot imagine.

Robert Owen said:

"What ideas individuals may attach to the term 'Millennium' I know not; but I know that society may be formed so as to exist without crime, without poverty, with health greatly improved, with little, if any misery, and with intelligence and happiness increased a hundredfold: and no obstacle whatsoever intervenes at this moment except ignorance to prevent such a state of society from becoming universal".

I am more than happy to participate in and support the campaign for Robert Owen to be recognised on a Scottish banknote. That would not only be a fitting tribute to his work and to the progress that has been made; it would serve as a reminder of those words of Owen—a reminder to all of us that there is still much more to do in improving the conditions of workers; in raising wages and securing a living wage for all; in improving the education of all children, regardless of class, wealth or background; and in improving health care for all, regardless of people's ability to pay.

Robert Owen's words go before him—they were ahead of his time. Let us ensure that he is remembered in the correct way: by being placed on a Scottish banknote.

17:43

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate in support of the bank on Owen campaign. Like other members, I congratulate Bill Butler on securing the debate and on the fact that he got more than 60 MSPs to support his motion. Any MSP who is able to unite Derek Brownlee at one end of the chamber and Elaine Smith at the other must be a skilful political operator.

It is absolutely appropriate for us to support the campaign to put Robert Owen's face on a banknote. He has made a significant contribution to Scottish life and society. There is no doubt that the model that Robert Owen set up at New Lanark was very much a trailblazing and groundbreaking one back in the 18th century. Among other things,

he wanted to abolish child labour, set up a free health care system and provide affordable food.

Some of the ideas that were first mooted at New Lanark are still very much alive and debated in the Parliament. Education is central to many of our debates, as are care for the elderly, responsible citizenship, social inclusion and early intervention. Politicians in the 21st century are still grappling with the ideas that Owen put forward in the 18th century about how we can provide effective solutions for the people of Scotland.

Karen Gillon was right to highlight the relevance of the New Lanark site and spoke knowledgeably—as she always does—about the constituency that she represents. I pay tribute to Jim Arnold and Lorna Davidson, from New Lanark, who do so much to promote Robert Owen's work and to educate schoolchildren. During the festival of politics last year, I took part in an event to celebrate the 10th anniversary of devolution, at which we looked at the history and future of the co-operative movement. Lorna Davidson's contribution to the event attracted a great deal of interest and discussion. She talked not only about what Robert Owen had done in New Lanark but about how his ideas remain relevant.

The co-op movement is still very much making a contribution in Scotland. As Bill Butler said, co-operatives contribute £3 billion to the Scottish economy annually. As Margo MacDonald said, there is an opportunity for the Scottish Government to promote co-operatives, which contribute to economic growth as well as a sense of community and wellbeing. In recent economic times, when things have been squeezed, credit unions have made an important contribution. Housing co-ops, too, have made a contribution. West Whitlawburn Housing Co-operative, in my constituency, is one of the foremost housing co-ops in Scotland.

I am delighted to speak in the debate and to support the campaign. The ideals that Owen set out in the 18th century are still relevant. It is not sentimentality that drives us to campaign to put Robert Owen's face on banknotes; we want to provide a platform for ideas that are still relevant in the 21st century.

17:48

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): I congratulate Bill Butler on securing the debate. I have appreciated and enjoyed the speeches from members of all parties. There is agreement on Robert Owen's contribution.

There is also agreement on Scotland's distinguished history in the co-operative movement. Scotland has always played an

important part in the movement at international level. Along with partners in the rest of the United Kingdom, Scotland helped to set up the International Co-operative Alliance, which is based in Geneva. The movement is a major part of the world economy and, as James Kelly said, its relevance is real in the context of not just organisations on the ground but ideas, ideals and values.

We have a job of work to do to build on the fantastic legacy of Robert Owen, which lives on in the likes of the Co-op and John Lewis—Tullis Russell & Company is moving down that path, too. I do not know whether members have read the book “The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better”. The authors advocate much more moving down the path of employee ownership and pinpoint the fact that societies that have large levels of inequality have many negative aspects. There is a case to be made for going back and leaning heavily on Robert Owen’s ideas.

We are addressing Margo MacDonald’s proposition with Co-operative Development Scotland, which assists—and will continue to assist—new and growing co-operatives as well as existing businesses that wish to change to a co-operative employee ownership model.

This morning, when I got up and had my breakfast, what struck me—

Bill Butler: When, after the debate, the bank on Owen campaign writes directly to the Scottish banking institutions, will it have the Government’s unqualified and reserved support?

Jim Mather: I am happy not only to give that support but to build the logic behind that right now.

I do not know whether other members read an ungenerous article by Michael Fry in this morning’s press, entitled “History has been unduly kind to the founder of New Lanark”, but I have to say that I found Mr Fry unduly unkind. It is harsh to judge any 18th or 19th century figure by 21st century standards. Robert Owen was a man of his time who broke the mould and discovered that treating people well and caring for them not only was the right thing to do but produced superior results.

In essence, what we have heard tonight reinforces Robert Owen’s rightness in that respect as well as our journey in the 20th century, which started with Henry Ford taking the same approach to mass production. Things have evolved much more along the lines that Robert Owen put down than was initially the case. For example, when W Edwards Deming, a guy I often talk about who changed the model of business, was once asked by top businessmen in Belfast what his big proposition was all about, he said that his role was to bring joy back to the workplace and give people a sense of pride in their work. Within 25 minutes,

he had convinced them all. Deming also wanted to change the system. In his belief that production was 97 per cent the system’s responsibility and 3 per cent the responsibility of people, he argued that we should not pick on people but fix and improve the system.

Margo MacDonald: I wonder whether the minister could bring joy to us all by saying that the next business in the Parliament will focus on building the co-operative movement.

Jim Mather: I would welcome that, but that is not within my gift. We would have to consult business managers about that.

Robert Owen’s ideas are coming through in the mindset at work now. For example, in Glasgow, there is the Strathclyde institute of operations management, which leans heavily on the work of H Thomas Johnson and Anders Bröms and their proposition that we must focus on the customer and turn them from being loyal and dependent to being an advocate, as well as rewarding employees for their loyalty and ingenuity by implementing their ingenious ideas. Moreover, Rosabeth Moss Kanter from Harvard University has recently argued that companies that have a genuine social attitude and corporate social responsibility in their DNA and bone marrow—in other words, those that live it rather than have it as window dressing—are getting superior results.

During the passage of the Arbitration (Scotland) Bill, we dealt with the top mediator Ken Cloke, who has got the Robert Owen thing in his DNA. He talks about building in our businesses and communities what he has called a ladder of unity, which has six rungs. On the first rung, people are united in opposition, which is not too productive; on the second rung, they are united in a worthy cause; on the third rung, there is a fair and open process; on the fourth rung, there is a relationship in which we begin to like each other and work together in common cause and in the same direction; on the fifth rung, the relationship hangs together in hard times because of experience; and on the final rung, we genuinely begin to care about each other. Robert Owen understood that, we understand it in our families, and we see it in successful businesses.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab): Given the recent announcement that the year of homecoming will be repeated in 2014, will the minister consider the opportunity of celebrating with the rest of the world the United Nations international year of co-operatives in 2012?

Jim Mather: I will certainly look at that again. As a small country, we need to leverage all the significant assets that we have got and Robert Owen’s contribution is monumental. The issue with the banks is certainly important.

One of the examples that Rosabeth Moss Kanter has given recently is that of the Banco Real in São Paulo, which has come out with a new model that will handle the major companies at one end down to the cigarette seller on the street corner at the other. It will be like having the Grameen Bank and the Royal Bank of Scotland under the one roof.

Having Robert Owen's image on our banknotes could help our banks to align with customers, taxpayers and employees. As Cathy Jamieson said, it would send out a very important public message.

It would be interesting to see Robert Owen having a secondary impact, from the grave, on Scotland and the world, just as he did the first time round.

Meeting closed at 17:55.

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