



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 7 October 2010

Session 3

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## Scottish Parliament

Thursday 7 October 2010

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

### Supported Employment Workplaces

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):**

Good morning. The first item of business today is a debate on motion S3M-7157, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on the future of Scotland's supported employment workplaces.

09:15

**Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):**

Supported employment provides more than 800 jobs in more than 20 businesses throughout Scotland. Those jobs are especially valuable because they give access to work to hundreds of disabled people who would otherwise be at high risk of exclusion from the labour market.

Only this week, new evidence from the Royal National Institute of Blind People and Skills Development Scotland identified the barriers to employment for people who are blind or partially sighted. As John Legg, the director of RNIB Scotland pointed out, blind or partially sighted people are doing all sorts of jobs in Scotland—from schoolteacher to physiotherapist to astrophysicist. However, on average, people with such a disability are 15 times more likely to be unemployed. That is why the jobs that are provided by Blindcraft in Edinburgh, by Glencraft in Aberdeen and by Remploy in Fife and other places around the country are so important. If there were no supported employment, the alternative for many workers would be unemployment. That would be no less expensive for the public purse and far less fulfilling for the people involved and their families.

I am delighted that staff from supported businesses throughout Scotland will be with us in the Parliament today. It is important that they and others should understand that supported employment is held in high regard by members of all parties.

There is broad recognition of the reality that people in such businesses face. If supported workplaces were forced out of business or forced to lay off their disabled staff, many workers would not move into other jobs and would cease to be economically active. They would stop bringing home a fair day's wage for a fair day's work and they would come to feel that they were a burden, rather than an example to other people. That is

why we welcome the Scottish Government's policy of promoting public sector procurement of goods and services from supported businesses and it is why we initiated this debate—to urge ministers to turn words into action in the public bodies in Scotland for which they are responsible.

The reality is that the future remains uncertain for supported businesses and their staff. There has been policy support from successive Governments at Holyrood and Westminster and there have been highly effective campaigns by staff and their trade unions to secure emergency intervention from ministers when intervention was needed most but, the threat to the future of supported employment has not gone away.

My first parliamentary question to Jim Mather as Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, back in 2007, was sparked by concerns about the future of Remploy workshops in Aberdeen and elsewhere. Our most recent parliamentary debate on supported employment took place earlier this year, when my colleague Richard Baker secured a members' business debate after Glencraft in Aberdeen had gone into administration in November 2009.

I am delighted that Remploy in Aberdeen and a new Glencraft are still in business. Anne McGuire MP, the then Minister for Disabled People, and Alex Salmond, the First Minister, paid heed to representations and responded positively. Bob Keiller and Duncan Skinner of Production Services Network were willing to back a Glencraft 2, and their continuing engagement is a credit to them and to the wider business community in and around Aberdeen, whose support has been critical to Glencraft's rebirth during the past six months.

The threat to Glencraft prompted the previous debate on supported employment; the threat to Blindcraft here in Edinburgh provides the context for today's debate. As happened at Glencraft last year, dozens of disabled people at Blindcraft face the threat of redundancy and the prospect of unemployment. Once again, the threat comes from a city council that supported the workshop in question in previous generations but now thinks that the public subsidy of supported employment is no longer affordable. As was the case last year, the trade union representatives of the affected workers are campaigning to save jobs and are asking for our support.

The Blindcraft workers deserve our support. I hope that the City of Edinburgh Council will have a change of heart—as Aberdeen City Council eventually did, after PSN, Scottish Enterprise and the business community got involved at Glencraft—and decide that funding a supported employer is money well spent. However, simply to continue a subsidy is not enough.

When I and other members expressed concerns about Remploy to Mr Mather three years ago, he made the obvious point that ministerial responsibility for the enterprise lay not with him but with ministers elsewhere. However, he was quick to accept the point that we made, which was that the Scottish ministers can make a difference by directing public procurement policy in a way that is helpful to supported employment providers.

Disabled workers and their unions are not looking for handouts from Governments, councils or anyone else. What they want is the opportunity to do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay and to go home with the satisfaction of knowing that they have earned every penny and made a useful contribution to the wider community. That is what this debate is all about.

Ministers responded positively on the issue of public procurement. Jim Mather was good enough to invite me to attend one of the stakeholders meetings that were set up to take the issue forward. I welcomed his invitation.

The means of promoting supported employment are ready to hand. Under article 19 of European Union directive 2004/18/EC, on the co-ordination of procedures for the award of public works contracts, public supply contracts and public service contracts,

"Member States may reserve the right to participate in public contract award procedures to sheltered workshops or provide for such contracts to be performed in the context of sheltered employment programmes".

All that is required to reserve a contract is that most of the employees concerned are disabled people who

"by reason of the nature or the seriousness of their disabilities, cannot carry on occupations under normal conditions",

and that contracts of significant size should be open to tenders from supported employment providers throughout the EU.

**Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con):** The motion in the member's name is excellent. Does he have a view on what the timetable for article 19 contracts ought to look like?

**Lewis Macdonald:** It needs to look like delivery in a measured period. Ministers can set a timetable that gives an indication of their commitment. It is for ministers to say what bodies that are under their direct authority can achieve, but I hope that we are talking about months rather than years.

All of article 19 of the public procurement directive was given legal force by the previous Scottish Executive, under the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2006. A policy position whereby public bodies are urged to reserve

contracts to supported employment providers was therefore a straightforward one for the current Scottish Government to take, and it built on decisions that had already been taken in Scotland, at Westminster and in Brussels. Ministers adopted the position, as we acknowledge in the motion. In a response to my colleague John Park in March this year, John Swinney confirmed what he had said in a written answer to a parliamentary question:

"It is Scottish Government policy that every public body should aim to have at least one contract with a supported factory or business."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 24 April 2009; S3W-22484.]

The policy is supported by parties across the Parliament.

The issue is not whether the policy is right but whether it is producing results, and the evidence so far is that results are few and far between. Last week, we followed up parliamentary questions by asking the Scottish Parliament information centre whether any public body in Scotland had reserved a contract under article 19 in the three years since the Scottish ministers issued the guidance note, "Social Issues in Public Procurement".

It is fair to say that SPICe found it difficult to get a clear and consistent answer from civil servants to that straightforward question. Perhaps the minister will say on the record today whether the award of a contract to Capability Scotland by Marine Scotland followed the reservation of the contract under article 19. Whatever the minister says about that, the number of reserved contracts is either none or one. That means that all, or all but one, of the public bodies for which ministers are responsible have yet to deliver on the policy objective that they have been set by awarding at least one contract to a supported factory or business.

Public bodies have been told that they should use article 19. John Swinney has told them, and Jim Mather has told them. Indeed, in his foreword to the Scottish procurement directorate's new publication, "Supported Businesses in Scotland: Creating value in a socially responsible way", Mr Mather urged public bodies not to settle for just one contract per agency but to

"make the maximum possible use of reserved contracts for supported factories and businesses".

It is good to encourage businesses and it was good to produce a list of supported businesses, to point public bodies in the right direction. It is also good to hold events that get all the relevant people into a room at one time to discuss the subject—I am sure that Jim Mather has facilitated such events. However, there comes a time when talking is not enough and things must start to happen.

When Iain Gray visited Blindcraft in Glasgow a few months ago he called on the Scottish Government to appoint a dedicated champion for disabled workers. We reiterate that call today. We want there to be someone whose job is to turn encouragement into action and get contracts reserved and orders placed.

We go further today because we believe that the need for action is all the more urgent. We would like the Scottish Government not only to appoint a disabled workers champion but to set a timetable for every public body for which it is responsible to reserve at least one contract under article 19 of the EU public procurement directive and regulation 7 of the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2006.

If ministers agree today to set a timetable, we believe that the logjam will be broken. An open-ended aspiration is easy to postpone. An objective that must be achieved by a set date is a different matter, and there is nothing like a ministerial ultimatum to concentrate a chief executive's mind. The Government should set a challenging timetable, and results will follow.

Some very imaginative and creative things are happening in the supported employment sector. For example, Remploy in Aberdeen, in my constituency, has moved from a traditional workshop model to become a hub for social enterprises—some on and some off the existing factory site. Remploy in Leven has developed a specialism in offshore and marine clothing and equipment. Other supported employers have made specialist provision in relation to Ministry of Defence requirements and other specialist areas. Glencraft and other bodies of that type have been doing a lot of work to win contracts from the private sector—a move that is essential to the mixed economy of successful supported employment.

Significantly, those agencies are doing a lot of work to enable disabled workers to move from supported to mainstream employment when they are able to do so. That is right and proper and is the best outcome for many of those disabled workers.

It is important to recognise that supported employment will be required for as long as disabled people want to work, as long as the wider community believes that going to work is a good thing for disabled people to do, and as long as some of those disabled people do not have the skills or physical ability to take part in mainstream employment. If we want a sustainable future for supported employment providers, we cannot rely only on short-term fixes or simple public subsidy. Mainstreaming, where it is possible, will never be able to meet demand. Public procurement is

essential to the delivery of some certainty to the sector in the longer term.

If ministers are not able to turn words into action on public procurement, we will again see crises like the crisis at Glencraft last year and the crisis at Blindcraft in Edinburgh this year, with disabled workers fearing for their personal futures and the sector itself in peril. However, if ministers choose to move to the next stage and set a demanding timetable, they can make a difference. Disabled workers want public bodies to reserve contracts under article 19 sooner rather than later. For disabled workers such as those at Blindcraft in Edinburgh, that progress must be made without delay.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Scottish Government's policy that every public body should aim to have at least one contract with a supported factory or business, as set out in its *Social Issues in Public Procurement* guidance document in October 2007 and reiterated as part of the *Scottish Sustainable Procurement Action Plan* in October 2009; welcomes this approach as the most effective means of public policy support for the sector; regrets the lack of evidence that this policy has been effectively pursued over the last three years, and calls on the Scottish Government to set a timetable for every public body in Scotland for which it is responsible to have at least one contract with a supported factory or business.

09:28

**The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather):** The Government welcomes this opportunity to recognise the value of supported workplaces and the contribution that they make to the Government's purpose of creating a successful economy with opportunities for all.

Today I will make clear our appreciation of the value of the sector, set out what we are doing to provide support, and make sure that Parliament gives the sector and its people a tangible boost, allowing disabled people to work, develop, progress and be all that they can be.

We support the development of strong, sustainable business models to enable a healthy future for such organisations and, more important, for the people whom they employ. Our focus is not limited to supported workplaces, although there is no doubt that we value strongly the role that they play. The Scottish Government's supported employment framework shows how we will support disabled people to work across the employment spectrum, thereby increasing the number and range of opportunities and reducing barriers to employment.

Supported workplaces are familiar to us all. They have bolstered the lives of many people with hope and tangible opportunity. However, the world

is changing. Some workplaces have moved to a social enterprise model; they are real businesses whose focus is on delivering social outcomes rather than distributing profits to shareholders.

Meanwhile, there are roles for Government in that modernisation. Our record levels of support for social enterprise, including business development, are key to making it happen. The Government harnesses and channels the energy and ideas of people across Scotland, including procurement professionals, local authorities, community planning partnerships, entrepreneurs—social or otherwise—and local communities. About a year ago, we ran a session in Glasgow that saw social enterprise very much under debate.

The Government is perennially conscious of the fact that we must all find ways to support these businesses, and to see that Scotland supports them. Not enough of us have bought products or services from one of Scotland's 24 supported employers.

I am particularly pleased that the motion before us welcomes our approach to using the power of procurement to provide supported employment opportunities. That approach is built on article 19 of the EU public procurement directive.

We need to find new solutions to old problems, and those solutions must find new ways of meeting the needs of our supported workers—a goal that will require all our input and expertise. We are driving the work forward. The Scottish Government has asked public bodies to develop strategies and tangible plans to place business with supported employers, and there are tangible building blocks to help them to do that.

Of course, we have to be careful about setting unilateral objectives and deadlines for others, and we have to be careful about triggering one-off, token compliance.

**Lewis Macdonald:** We propose timetabling today. What does the minister mean by tangible milestones and markers of progress?

**Jim Mather:** We are minded to support timetabling, with the commonsense caveat that we do not want to trigger token compliance. We want individual bodies to take decisions that take account of their business needs and requirements. We want it to be done right, so that the potential of our supported workplaces can be realised. Instead of tokenism, when targets are met but real opportunities are missed and long-term sustainable potential is damaged or lost, we want relationships that develop and are mutually rewarding for all, with a continuing flow in the development of business. Just as in Lewis Macdonald's description of Remploy, we want supported business to evolve into resilient businesses with strong revenue streams that can

also change their services in line with what customers want, and what potential new customers might want.

As for article 19, there are things that the Government is doing, and should be doing, to encourage and enable a stronger market for the services of our supported employers. Article 19 allows the beneficial treatment of supported employers in procurement, allowing public bodies to reserve participation in a tendering exercise to organisations where more than 50 per cent of the workforce is disabled. We need to broadcast that today. Article 19 has the potential to provide real value, and we are committed to doing even more to encourage use of that option across the public sector.

Meanwhile, our commitment continues to be about growing the market, while recognising that that will take time. Supported businesses understand that they have to market and sell. Our private and public sectors also need to understand the opportunities that those enterprising businesses provide. The old-fashioned picture of supported employment is changing and our approach also needs to change.

Last month we saw the launch of Specialisterne Scotland, which provides employment for people with autism, affording them the opportunity to use their unique and considerable skills in the world of information technology. In truth, the public sector can buy from supported workplaces, but only if those workplaces provide something that we need to buy. We know that there are examples of good practice out there. Registers of Scotland is already working with the supported employment organisation Haven Products on the provision of temporary staff.

Earlier this week, we circulated Scottish procurement policy note 10/2010, on reserved contracts, to supported employment organisations and to more than 2,000 public sector buyers.

**George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab):** Will the minister give a tangible boost to the workers at Blindcraft in Edinburgh who will be in the Parliament later today? Blindcraft is threatened with closure and the loss of 70 jobs. Will he convene a meeting between himself, the City of Edinburgh Council and other interested parties, to see whether there is any way in which that closure can be averted?

**Jim Mather:** I am taken with that proposition, although my time is finite. I am very motivated to do that and will make my best efforts. We have seen the experiences of Remploy and Glencraft in Aberdeen. When we bring people together, things begin to happen. The member has my commitment to do my very best to make that happen.



I draw attention to the fact that we have made enhancements to the public contracts Scotland website, which is our public sector procurement portal. The enhancements allow third sector organisations to register as supported employers and sign up to the suppliers development programme, which helps organisations to be successful suppliers.

As the motion states, it is the Scottish Government's policy that every public body should aim to have

"at least one contract with a supported ... business".

Public contracts Scotland now provides us with the means to make that happen.

**Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** Minister, you have £6 billion of purchasing power. Why has the Scottish Government not used those means to buy uniforms for firemen, policemen and nurses or beds for the hospitals, prisons and university residences? What are you doing? You are doing nothing.

**The Presiding Officer:** Speak through the chair in future, please.

**Jim Mather:** I read this morning Wendy Alexander extolling Donald Dewar's characteristics in debates such as this. I wish that he was with us today.

Public contracts Scotland and the "Scottish Sustainable Procurement Action Plan" provide us with a real means to begin to make progress and get out the message about what is being done.

For example, the Scottish Government uses Capability Scotland's St Judes laundry to provide laundry services to Marine Scotland's fleet and we are exploring opportunities for facility management and the fit-out of the Scottish crime campus at Gartcosh in North Lanarkshire, although members will understand that I cannot go into detail on that. We are also engaged with our design and print contractor on the possibility of subcontracting print work to supported businesses.

In addition, the Scottish procurement directorate has been working to help supported businesses and third sector organisations compete for public sector opportunities. For example, public contracts Scotland will automatically issue an alert to purchasers to highlight that there are supported businesses that are capable of providing the goods or services that they require. It will also report on the number of contracts awarded to supported businesses, along with third sector organisations and other groups. That will be a very important way for us to demonstrate the progress that is being made.

In July, we published "Supported Businesses in Scotland: Creating value in a socially responsible

way" with the British Association for Supported Employment. That publication profiles for the first time supported businesses that currently operate in Scotland.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** In the members' business debate in January, which I am sure the minister recalls, I asked him directly whether he would consider reserving contracts in the huge Southern general hospital development. He agreed at that stage to consider every option. Will he confirm whether any contract has been reserved at the Southern general? If not, when will he examine the options so that contracts can be reserved to help supported businesses?

**Jim Mather:** I try to be a polymath, but I do not have that detail. We will write to Johann Lamont and tell her what has happened on that.

Later this month, we will use the Procurex Scotland conference to highlight the services and benefits that supported businesses can offer public sector bodies, and we are providing assistance to supported businesses to ensure their attendance at and contribution to the event.

We are taking real, tangible action. Together with our partners throughout the public sector and beyond, we expect to see real progress soon. However, our approach is much broader than article 19. Supported workplaces need to be successful organisations in their own right. They are capable of competing, and are doing so. In 2008-09, Scotland's public sector spent £26.4 million with supported businesses. Clearly, there is scope to increase that through further use of article 19, public contracts Scotland and the new levels of engagement that we are talking about.

We do not rely on article 19 alone. Alongside the opportunity to reserve contracts, community benefit clauses are being used to drive social value from public spending. We can use such clauses to open up opportunities for local organisations to compete and to provide goods and services to Scotland's public sector. In addition, under such clauses, contractors have committed to provide more than 2,000 targeted recruitment and training opportunities in public contracts.

Public benefit clauses also provide opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises and social enterprises. For example, the well-named Unity Enterprise—a social enterprise that provides opportunities for disadvantaged and disabled young people and adults—has been awarded the on-site catering contract for the construction of the national indoor sports arena and the velodrome for the Commonwealth games.

There are good examples of article 19's use in Scotland and elsewhere. We know that there is more to do and we shall do it in partnership with

others, including the Parliament. We have a range of tools in our kitbag to ensure that that happens and we accept that article 19 is an important lever. We are determined to make it work harder for our supported business.

I call on the Parliament to recognise that progress requires us all to collaborate to help supported workplaces to evolve into the most resilient businesses that they can be, to open up markets and to bring supported workplaces to the centre of the push for social enterprise.

I move amendment S3M-7157.2, to insert at end:

“, and notes the recognition given to sustainability in the procurement reform programme and in particular the progress on community benefit clauses.”

**The Presiding Officer:** We have a little bit of time in hand and I am happy to offer members a minute extra to the time that they have been advised that they have.

09:39

**Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con):** The Labour Party has brought an extremely important issue to the Parliament. It has a well-drafted and intelligent motion and the tone taken by its opening speaker, at least, was absolutely appropriate and constructive. The amendment in Jim Mather's name is also supportable. The Conservatives will support the motion, our amendment, obviously, and the amendment in Jim Mather's name.

The key issue to have been raised so far by Lewis Macdonald and responded to by Mr Mather is the timetable for ensuring that a Government policy of one contract for supported businesses from each public authority is realised. Opposition parties always call on Governments to do things faster and ensure that things are implemented but, in this case, the call for speeding up is fair and reasonable.

The Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 have been in force since 31 January 2006 and, as we heard, we have had a procurement policy for three years. In October 2009, “The Scottish Sustainable Procurement Action Plan” was published and then, in September this year, the “Scottish Government Sustainable Procurement Delivery Plan” was published.

Delivery activity 13 in that most recent document is:

“Develop a strategy for awarding at least one contract to a Supported Business or Factory”.

That is absolutely right, but it calls for a strategy to be developed by 30 November 2010. Given the length of time that the regulations have been in force and the importance of public sector contracts

to supported businesses up and down the country, it is right to call for a timetable and it is appropriate that the Government put one in place so that article 19 contracts are awarded.

Later in my speech, I will return to the timetable with a word of caution. However, the minister's response was fair in that we must be careful that the timetable does not become simply a tick-box exercise, although the principle of having a timetable that proceeds as quickly as possible is absolutely correct.

The regulations have been in force since January 2006, but everybody agrees that not many contracts—whether zero, a handful or one—have been reserved under article 19. The reason for that is unclear. One suggestion that Richard Baker made in his members' business debate in January is that there is a lack of awareness of article 19. From memory, I think that he quoted a council in the region that he represents, which, when asked why nobody used reserved contracts, responded that nobody had asked it to use one. That may be hearsay, but it is what was said in the debate. If any council is unaware of article 19 or has not been asked to use it, it is extremely helpful that we have a debate such as this one and get all the parties to support the motion. Anything that moves the debate on is to be welcomed.

I turn to our amendment, which has two parts. The second part says that we should encourage main contractors to take on subcontractors that are supported businesses. That tries to take the issue one step further, although we cannot compel main contractors to do it.

Having one direct contract between a public authority and a supported business is a good start, but trying to foster a culture in which those who contract with the state give serious consideration to taking on subcontractors that are supported businesses would be a good way to take the matter forward. It would create supplier diversity in the supply chain and help businesses to achieve their corporate social responsibility targets.

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** The member talked about making use of subcontracting. Does he agree that the initial tender document would have to say that any public procurer would have to consider article 19? Otherwise, the competitive position would discourage exactly what he wants to do.

**Gavin Brown:** I do not think that article 19 would cover getting the main contractors to give business to supported workplaces. Article 19 is about a direct relationship between the state and the organisation with which it is contracting. The member asked about the initial tender document. There are two possibilities: either the council or the national health service board would put in its

contract with the main contractor a clause providing that the contractor has to give a certain percentage of the subcontract to a supported business, or Government and public bodies as a whole would take the carrot approach of encouraging main contractors, as a matter of policy and practice, to give an element of subcontracts to supported workplaces.

I turn to the issue of the timetable. I think that I made my position clear that a timetable is absolutely right and appropriate, but we have to be careful not to put an arbitrary date of a matter of months on it just for the sake of doing so. We need to take all public authorities and public bodies with us. They have to be active, rather than reluctant, participants. If they are reluctant participants they will probably give only one contract to a supported workplace. Given that there is no strict policy on the value of the contract that has to be given to a supported workplace, if the timetable is too arbitrary and too short, there is a danger that they will simply give a low-value contract, such as a £10,000 contract, to the supported workplace, whereas if they had waited six or seven months, they might have given a £1 million contract to a supported workplace. We do not want them to low-ball, just so that they can tick a box; we want them to award more than one contract if that is appropriate.

The Labour Party was quite right to lodge the motion and we certainly support it. It is right to call for a timetable. However, I, like the minister, sound a note of caution about the exact timetable that we specify, so that we get the best for supported workplaces as opposed to public bodies simply ticking boxes.

I move amendment S3M-7157.1, to insert at end:

“and, in so doing, take account of the fact that there may be a small minority of public bodies that will face practical difficulties in achieving this aim, and, in addition, believes that main contractors should be actively encouraged, on a voluntary basis, to use supported employment organisations as subcontractors on public sector contracts.”

09:47

**Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD):** Supported employment refers to the practice of providing opportunities for disabled people to enter into work. Individuals learn on the job with support from co-workers and job coaches who match the skills, preferences and experience of the employee to appropriate roles and positions. Employees then have the ability to develop their skills and seek further training as desired.

Organisations such as Remploy are important in helping those with disabilities enter into mainstream employment. Supported employment opportunities allow individuals to enter into work,

while traditionally employment rates among those with disabilities have been low. For example, in 2008 only 48.1 per cent of people with disabilities were employed. Although such employment has obvious financial benefits, the opportunity to work also brings additional physical and mental welfare benefits.

In February, the Scottish Government published “The Supported Employment Framework for Scotland”, which aims to raise awareness about the benefits of supported employment, ensure that it is seen as an integral part of local employment services and help agencies work together to ensure that individuals make the transition from training to work. The framework also includes an action plan for the Scottish Government, local authorities and related agencies.

Although the Scottish Government has previously stated its intention to ensure that every public body has at least one contract agreement with supported business—a position that it reiterated in its sustainable procurement action plan—as of January this year only one such contract had been awarded. As of July, there are no current contracts with supported businesses.

Aberdeen City Council and the City of Edinburgh Council have recently been criticised for cutting support to certain supported initiatives. Such criticism is not entirely fair. Aberdeen City Council colleagues worked tirelessly to find a way for the Glencraft enterprise to continue and even agreed to waive the factory’s £225,000 rent for a year.

Similarly, the City of Edinburgh Council has been in discussions with all involved to try to make Blindcraft a more sustainable concern and is now putting out its considerations to a 30-day public consultation to try to find a way forward to support Blindcraft. That move was supported by the Scottish National Party and Conservative councillors on the council, who voted in favour of the plans. It is worth noting that, if it were not for the United Kingdom Government’s financial mismanagement, councils throughout the country might not have to be making such stringent plans for the future, which would leave enough money to fund supported employment opportunities.

**George Foulkes:** Mike Pringle shares my concern about the future of the 70 jobs at Blindcraft. Forget about the votes in the council and party politics, what is he doing with his Liberal Democrat colleagues, who control the City of Edinburgh Council, to get round the table with the minister and others to try to find a way forward, instead of just talking about it and pretending that he is interested in it?

**Mike Pringle:** I thank George Foulkes for that intervention. We cannot ignore party politics—that

is what it is all about. The council is trying to make a decision. I have spoken to my colleagues on the council and they are doing what they can. I will talk about that in more detail later and if George Foulkes wants to intervene again, I will be happy to discuss it with him.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats support the concept of supported employment. Everyone has the right to work and to undertake employment that is both meaningful and rewarding. It is therefore essential that appropriate training and work be provided for people who have disabilities or health conditions. Ideally, people should where possible be supported to move into mainstream employment through training and gaining practical work experience. However, supported workshops have played and always will play an important role.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats also support the use of article 19 of the EU public procurement directive, to which others have referred. That provision allows for public sector contracts to be reserved for workplaces where more than 50 per cent of the workforce are disabled. By using article 19, public sector organisations can make their money work twice as hard, delivering both social outcomes and procurement benefits. That approach links in with our intention to maximise the use of community benefit clauses in public procurement opportunities.

I turn specifically to the question that George Foulkes raised with regard to Blindcraft. The City of Edinburgh Council has commenced a 30-day statutory consultation period with the staff at Blindcraft regarding the two remaining options identified to deliver savings.

**John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Given the nature of the contract, does the member think that the statutory consultation is perhaps too short? Given that more than 70 jobs are involved, might it be useful for the council to extend that period to look further at different options?

**Mike Pringle:** It is a statutory consultation period. It is set down in law that it has to be 30 days. I understand that it has to be 30 days as a minimum.

If we are honest, the councillors and others have long been aware of the financial challenges that Blindcraft has faced over the years. As far back as 1999-2000, I was on the board of Blindcraft. It was losing substantial amounts of money then and we continued to try to support it and keep it going. At that time, we were living in a better economic climate, in which the council perhaps had some spare money.

**George Foulkes:** I know that Mike Pringle is genuinely concerned about this matter, because I have discussed it with him. He can take up John

Park's suggestion by suggesting to the City of Edinburgh Council that it delay the start of the 30-day period to give more time for consultation. If he does that—and if he persuades the council to do that—I can give him half a dozen suggested ways in which the council can save money without the closure of the Blindcraft workshop in Edinburgh.

**Mike Pringle:** I am happy to talk to my council colleagues and to put those suggestions to them.

Over a number of years, the council has considered various ways of reducing the level of subsidy that Blindcraft requires. A major restructuring of the organisation took place in 2004, which resulted in some cuts to the workforce. Since then, despite the introduction of measures such as tighter stock control and the exploration of new markets to reduce cost, the deficit remains too high to be affordable.

I highlight the fact that Blindcraft is not a charity, but a trading operation of the City of Edinburgh Council. The difficult economic climate is having an impact: bedding sales figures are down and many bedding companies have gone into administration. As a result, Blindcraft is making beds at a massive subsidy per disabled person and not enough people want to buy them.

The council has tried hard to attract other public sector partners to buy Blindcraft products, but those approaches have not been successful as the costs are not competitive. I understand that Kenny MacAskill was approached to ask the Scottish Prison Service whether it might help, but unfortunately nothing happened as a result.

It is completely unrealistic to ask other parts of the public sector to share the City of Edinburgh Council's burden in the current financial climate. Despite all efforts, the current annual council subsidy to Blindcraft is £1.1 million per annum, and the overall deficit funding that has been provided in the past eight years has exceeded £11 million. The council has acknowledged that it is unable to continue to subsidise Blindcraft at the current level, which is a sum that is equal to more than £30,000 per disabled person. That is £30,000 that is not being spent on care packages, learning support and other front-line services for the growing number of people with disabilities for whom the council cannot afford to provide a service.

Trade unions have been fully engaged in the process and are considering various options. The council's budget motion, which was agreed in March, identified the need to find savings of £700,000 in the current financial year. Extensive negotiations have taken place and two options remain, both of which require the redeployment of staff, hence the need for the statutory consultation. There are currently 53 permanent employees, of

whom 34 are disabled. The council is mindful of its responsibility towards staff and has commissioned the RNIB to offer a confidential and voluntary assessment for all staff, which around 80 per cent have taken up.

**The Presiding Officer:** The member should close now.

**Mike Pringle:** I am just concluding, Presiding Officer.

The most important thing at present is to continue to support the staff through this period and not to prejudge the outcome of the consultation. I know that the situation is difficult for MSPs, and more so for the employees of Blindcraft and their families, but we must be mindful of the chronic economic situation that the council and other public sector bodies now face.

09:57

**Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** I am deeply disappointed that we have had to have this debate today, because in the debate in January members on all sides of the chamber agreed that the Parliament supports workplaces with supported employment. Lewis Macdonald was right to say that supported employment is about giving disabled people the opportunity for dignity and access to employment.

It is not good enough to turn up at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour to alert people—as the minister's notice did earlier this week—to the opportunities that exist for procurement contracts. We all know that: the issue was debated in the chamber in January and ministers made commitments that action would be taken.

It is astounding that so little information came forward while members were researching the issue prior to the debate on exactly what contracts have been signed and what has happened in terms of procurement. The SNP has been in government for three years, and procurement is one of its Achilles' heels. There is always a great deal of talk about procurement, but there is not enough action.

It is not good enough for the minister to say that he supports projects such as Blindcraft when things are now happening. Mike Pringle is right to remind us, and the council briefing makes clear, that the 30-day period began on 28 September, so there is not much time to resolve the issue.

Although the minister has committed to more action on procurement in the short term, that will not automatically help the Blindcraft workers. It is a typical decision by our Lib Dem-SNP council that has been taken without values, without seriously examining the better alternatives and certainly

without considering the impact on people with disabilities.

I know that Mike Pringle genuinely wants to save Blindcraft and look after the workers, but it is not good enough for him to say that it costs £30,000 a head for those workers and that the money could be spent on other disabled people in our city. The issue is how we can best support all those people.

If the Blindcraft project that is currently trading shuts down, what will happen to the staff? We know that we are in the middle of an economic recession and that people are suffering the Salmond slump, and those workers will not have easy opportunities to get jobs.

Members need look only at the briefing from the Leonard Cheshire Foundation, which makes clear that disabled people face discrimination in education and employment: 11 per cent leave school without qualifications and 54 per cent experience discrimination at school, college or university. People already experience problems not just because of their disability but because of how they are treated, and that situation will get worse if Blindcraft closes.

Jim Mather mentioned that the world is changing. We know that, and there could not be a worse time for people to be made redundant no matter who they are in the workforce, but if they have a disability it is harder for them.

In the previous debate on the subject, I said that Blindcraft was set up in 1763 and that it has survived previous financial recessions, so surely we can protect those jobs. Jim Mather is right to say that he does not want token compliance: I do not think that any of us wants that. We want proper compliance and proper procurement contracts, and we want to have those reported back to us.

I was astounded that Johann Lamont's question could not be answered, as the subject of the Southern general hospital contract—and the issue of the Commonwealth games—was raised in the debate in January. What has happened? It should not be impossible for the minister to report back to us.

If Jim Mather thinks that there is a problem with the type of products that are produced, he needs to say so, because we need an honest discussion rather than recycling the debate every six months. Does the minister think that Blindcraft is producing the wrong products: yes or no?

**Jim Mather:** Sarah Boyack calls for honesty, but she polarises the argument, which will get us nowhere. She also ignores the fact that, as I said, we have contracts in place with supported businesses for the Commonwealth games. If we

polarise the argument and there is a lack of collaboration, we will get sub-optimisation. Supported businesses want optimisation; they do not want us to be at one another's throats on the issue.

**Sarah Boyack:** I accept that, but the problem is that we had exactly the same debate in January this year. There has been time for the minister to bottom out some of the issues and come back to the chamber, but all that we have had is the new alert to tell people that there are opportunities for procurement. We need to do more.

The minister said that we need mutually rewarding relationships. We all want that, and procurement could deliver it. He mentioned the need for strong revenue streams to come through, and that is what we all believe procurement can potentially give. That is why we lodged the Labour motion, and that is what we want to hear from the minister.

My colleague George Foulkes asked the minister whether he would meet Blindcraft. I was grateful that the minister said yes, but he needs to get the council round the table. As Mike Pringle said, the council faces a lot of difficult decisions. It has put the matter out to consultation for a period of 30 days, which started on 28 September; that is why the minister is getting passion and demands for action from Labour members. Action is required now: the issue was flagged up in January, but nothing has happened.

If nothing happens in the next month, it is clear that those jobs will go. Mike Pringle has made the case for action. We know that difficult decisions need to be made, and that requires banging heads together and sitting people down to seek solutions. Minister, the time to act is now. We cannot hold another debate in six months' time, as Blindcraft will not be here. We plead with the minister to meet the people at Blindcraft and the city council, because something needs to happen now.

Decisions need to be made on public procurement. If the minister does not think that Blindcraft is producing the right products at the right prices, he should say so up front and we should seek a solution. If Blindcraft does not exist, there will be no supported employment for those staff in Edinburgh; no one will pick up the threads of that problem. That is why we are getting angry, and why we need the minister's support rather than just warm words and reassurance. We took those in January this year, and now people want to move forward together.

Today's debate gives the minister the opportunity to come back and deliver on the commitment that he made in January that he and the Government would help. We need that help to be put into practice now.

09:54

**Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP):** I am sad to say that, as Mike Pringle has pointed out, the Labour Party's motion ignores a vital element. It refers to the three years from 2007 without mentioning the global financial meltdown that occurred in that period and which has made it necessary for every council to examine carefully every financial decision that it takes. Moreover, it conveniently and entirely ignores the threat to sheltered workplaces from the huge worsening of the financial situation that was caused by the gross incompetence and mismanagement of the last Westminster Labour Government, which has resulted in Britain in general and Scotland in particular being especially hard-hit, as evidenced in the pound's calamitous fall against other world currencies.

**George Foulkes:** Will the member give way?

**Ian McKee:** I ask Lord Foulkes to listen for a bit. He can intervene later if he feels that I have not covered the point that he wanted to make.

How much more able would our councils have been to fulfil their social duties had Gordon Brown been more responsible with public finances? We live in difficult times and councils are faced with having to make some of the most difficult decisions they have ever had to make if they are to balance their books.

I want to look at the future of one supported employment workplace—Blindcraft in Edinburgh—as it is in the parliamentary region that I represent. The options that it is said to face are stark: either it closes or it is turned into a unit to train disabled people in a wide range of workplace and life skills with a view to enabling them to move into mainstream employment. Although it is true that consultation on the options started on 28 September and will last 30 days, I must also point out that since 2009 there have been 18 meetings with the unions about Blindcraft. As a result, to say that there has been no consultation prior to this 30-day consultation period is blurring the issue slightly.

Why have things come to this pass? Over the past eight years, Blindcraft has received more than £11 million from the City of Edinburgh Council with a net subsidy of £1.06 million in 2010-11. Currently it has 58 full-time employees, of whom 34 are blind or otherwise disabled, although I point out that the degree of disability varies.

**George Foulkes:** Like me, Dr McKee is not standing for Parliament next May. Surely he has the freedom at last to stop spouting this party-political propaganda and actually stand up for the constituency that he was elected to represent.

**Ian McKee:** I have some positive remarks to make. In any case, I really think that it is a little bit pot-kettle for Lord Foulkes to talk about spouting party-political dogma.

In its 2007-08 and 2008-09 audits of the City of Edinburgh Council's accounts, Audit Scotland, a non-party-political body, drew attention to the fact that in respect of Blindcraft the council was failing to comply with the statutory requirement that all significant trading organisations break even on a rolling three-year basis. That is obviously still not the case for Blindcraft, even though its status as a sheltered workshop means that the social cost of employing disabled workers is recognised and already allowed for.

Eight years ago, Blindcraft was involved in bed manufacturing and wire and PVC window production. In 2004, the then Labour City of Edinburgh Council administration attempted to save money by slashing the number of employees and cutting loss-leading activities, which left bed manufacturing as the business's only remaining function. Since then, there has, unfortunately, been a significant decrease in demand for beds, mainly because of the effects of Labour's recession. I should, however, point out that in July the council used article 19 to buy beds from the company.

Members will, I know, be aware that the bedding trade is divided into two sectors: the retail consumer market and the contract market to hotels and other large organisations. Since the downturn in 2008, the retail consumer market has contracted by 10 per cent and, although precise figures are not yet available, the contract market is following the same pattern. However, that is not the only bad news for British bed manufacturers. The current enthusiasm for foam mattresses has led to significant market penetration by eastern European and third-world producers, who benefit from much lower labour costs and other overheads. The shrinking of the market and new competition are affecting all of Britain's 110 bed manufacturers, some of whom are, along with the unions, at least beginning to query the propriety of competition from a heavily publicly subsidised, albeit worthy, venture such as Blindcraft.

Glencraft in Aberdeen, as we have heard, is a similar social enterprise that is also engaged in bed manufacture. It, too, was facing a similar deficit and its future was in doubt. However, the enterprise has been saved, at least in the short term, and has been helped by the intervention of local businesses such as the Aberdeen-based Production Services Network Ltd. There has been no similar surge of support for Blindcraft from private businesses in Edinburgh and, in any case, one has to wonder about the long-term security of

jobs in such a situation and in view of what has happened to the bed market.

I have dwelt on Blindcraft's problems because the business is in my region, but I am sure that the problems that it faces are not atypical. When money suddenly becomes short and when local authorities throughout Scotland are faced with making massive savings, such ventures are bound to come under increasing critical scrutiny. Although I support the sentiment behind Lewis Macdonald's motion that we speed the day when every public body has at least one contract with a supported business, I doubt that that will make much of an impact when the total market for the supported business's product is slipping away.

What is more important is that we seek sustainability by helping supported businesses to develop in such a way that they are prepared to face the challenge of meeting future needs not the needs of yesterday, and it might well be that the drive to seek radical solutions occasioned by the current financial crisis will open the way to a new and sustainable future for Scotland's supported employment workplaces.

10:11

**John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate, in which the chamber had struck almost a consensual note until Dr McKee got up.

The debate has certainly given the Parliament the opportunity to send out a strong message. The minister, for example, has agreed on the importance of sitting down and finding a solution to this issue, particularly with regard to the circumstances that face Blindcraft in Edinburgh. I also welcome Mike Pringle's comment that he would speak to his Liberal Democrat colleagues to see whether something in that respect might happen. I suggest, though, that if we are to find a way forward it would be sensible for any such discussions to be tripartite and to involve employee representatives as well as the council and the employer. No one has a monopoly on good ideas, particularly when it comes to saving jobs.

I am sure that Mike Pringle appreciates that the consultation period is actually of a minimum of 30 days—and is actually the bare minimum that one would expect when one is talking about a business with fewer than 100 employees. Given such circumstances, the day-to-day issues that the employees have to deal with and the fact that they are not in the kind of normal mainstream workplace that many of us encounter each day, I think that it would be useful to take a wider look at how we might enhance the consultation period by making it longer and more meaningful and

ensuring that it focuses on getting a positive outcome for the people who work at Blindcraft.

I pay tribute not only to a couple of people but to the trade unions in promoting the article 19 campaign and trying to remove the barriers to employment that disabled workers face. After the members' business debate in January, we met the unions and were left in no doubt that any progress that could be made by the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government and the wider public sector in Scotland would make a huge difference to the people they represent.

Since entering Parliament, I have taken an interest in such issues. In fact, before coming into Parliament, I became aware of the circumstances facing Remploi in Cowdenbeath and came to know an awful lot about sheltered workshops because of the work that the local member, Helen Eadie, was doing. I am sure that Mrs Eadie will say something more about that later.

The fact is that we are talking about a very small portion of the £8 billion to £9 billion-worth of goods and services that we procure in Scotland every year, but I have seen at first hand the huge difference that that very small portion can make. I was very fortunate to visit Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries in Springburn, where the contract that has been reserved has made a huge difference to the workforce. It has been more of a hand up than a handout and has allowed it to compete on a level playing field with private sector companies and get into markets that it would otherwise have been unable to get into.

As well as providing employment for people, Blindcraft provides opportunities for young people with disabilities. I met a young boy who had attended a school for the blind in Glasgow. By his own admission, he had little chance of going into mainstream employment but, because Blindcraft was participating in public sector contracts in a good way that was allowing it to be competitive, it had been able to initiate an apprenticeship programme for that young person. He now has a career in front of him that, in normal circumstances, he would never have had.

It is important to note that the decisions that we take in the Parliament have a lot of human consequences. If we promoted and publicised article 19 more widely, we would have a better chance of changing the culture in the public sector and the attitude towards reserving contracts. That would have a far greater impact than we could ever estimate—it would affect thousands of people.

On a more general point, the current economic climate means fewer opportunities for disabled workers. We want more disabled people to go into mainstream workplaces. That is absolutely right,

although there is a role for sheltered workshops. However, many disabled workers who are trying to get into the mainstream workforce are frustrated. I was contacted by a young constituent who had spent almost £3,000 of his own money getting a heavy goods vehicle licence, but he had struggled even to get an interview. I tried to help him along the way through Jobcentre Plus. I wrote to the minister, Skills Development Scotland and Skills for Logistics, the sector skills council. However, at every point, my constituent came up against barriers.

We must recognise and consider that wider issue. Taking a step forward on public sector contracts could provide an opportunity for the private sector to look a bit differently at contracts and the opportunities that can be provided for disabled workers. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has improved the situation, but we need to allow employers to participate more regularly in such schemes and ensure that the approach is about not only meeting minimum requirements, but changing the culture in the workplace.

There has not been much disagreement in the debate, but just having a policy does not necessarily mean that it will work. I want us to promote article 19 more widely. We have tried to ensure that community benefit clauses are promoted more widely, too. In my experience, I have found that in some local authorities those clauses work well. For example, Clackmannanshire Council in the region that I represent has done well with community benefit clauses. In other areas, there is very little awareness of them. On the minister's amendment, although we agree on the policy, the issue is how we promote that policy throughout the country.

The debate is about removing barriers—barriers for disabled workers, barriers in Government and barriers for employers. It is about ensuring that everyone in the country can reach their full potential in driving forward the economy and that everyone has an opportunity to work.

10:18

**Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and to highlight the on-going efforts to provide a bright future for the Glencraft supported employment factory in Aberdeen. We all know that supported employment facilities provide an invaluable service to disabled people. They provide skills and training that help workers in their future careers and, most important, they provide vital employment to people with disabilities, who often find it harder than others do to find employment in the main stream, as John Park highlighted.



Unemployment rates among disabled people are significantly higher than they are among the rest of the workforce, so any measure that helps to counter that is welcome. Disabled people are no different from anyone else in their desire to have meaningful work and to receive a fair wage for their efforts. However, supported places are valuable not only for the social good that they provide, but for the long-term benefits that they offer to the public purse. The cost of supporting a person with disabilities is roughly halved if they are in employment. In 2009, the Scottish Government helped 23 supported workplaces with funding to the tune of £26.4 million, precisely because it recognises their value.

As we have heard, the economic downturn has not left supported workplaces unscathed. Local authorities are trying to make resources stretch further than ever, while demand in many business sectors has fallen. That has created massive challenges for supported workplaces—not least for Glencraft in Aberdeen. When Aberdeen City Council had no option but to end its annual subsidy of £470,000 to the factory, the workforce at Glencraft faced extremely worrying times. The business could not find a way to operate without a subsidy and eventually went into voluntary administration.

Glencraft has, however, become something of a success story for assisted workplaces by making the transition from local government subsidy to self-sufficiency. The personal intervention of the First Minister was critical in bringing on board the locally headquartered Production Services Network to offer support to a revived operation. The support of PSN financially and in providing expertise and advice to Glencraft was essential in giving workers hope for the future. Just as important were the decision of Aberdeen City Council to waive rent arrears for the factory so that it could become more financially viable, and support from the Scottish Government.

**Sarah Boyack:** The member says that the First Minister's intervention was crucial. Can we count on the same support and intervention for Blindcraft in Edinburgh?

**Maureen Watt:** If the member will let me continue, she will find that I believe that lessons can be learned from the Glencraft experience. I hope that Blindcraft in Edinburgh has been in touch with people at Glencraft in Aberdeen to find out exactly how it secured private interest in helping the factory. I am sure that similar businesses in Edinburgh could be brought on board. As my colleague Ian McKee said, it is important that all Edinburgh members in the Parliament work together to make that happen.

There remain challenges for Glencraft, not least of which is the need to raise £0.5 million to secure

new fit-for-purpose premises from which to operate. However, the real lesson is about the importance of businesses, members of the public, local authorities and the Scottish Government working together to secure a viable future for supported workplaces. I am sure that, for Blindcraft in Edinburgh, a good outcome is a possibility.

Just last month, there was a fantastic fundraising effort that involved almost 200 people making the 17-mile walk from Banchory to Aberdeen through the night to raise £20,000. We should all pay tribute to those people for their efforts. People in Aberdeen have a special place in their hearts for Glencraft, which has been operating since 1863. I am sure that supported workplaces elsewhere are in a similar situation. In such times, we all need to buy that extra bed or replace our bed earlier to help those businesses to survive. People need to buy the products.

In Aberdeen, businesses such as local hoteliers and public agencies are represented on the new board of Glencraft.

**Johann Lamont:** Does the member agree that that is exactly why we need more urgency on article 19? The aim is to give businesses work. It is not about people giving them a hand by perhaps buying something from them; it is about giving them stability from which they can show that they have business acumen and capacity to deliver. We must recognise the failure to do that. I am sure that the member will recognise the importance of article 19 in that regard.

**Maureen Watt:** I absolutely agree that it cannot be a tick-box exercise. The approach must be long term and there must be a sustainable business with products that are competitive in the marketplace. People will not buy products if they do not provide value for money or are not competitive.

We have a good and on-going success story in Aberdeen. That approach must be rolled out to other supported workplaces throughout the country; they can have a viable future. The commitment of the staff and all those who work at Glencraft is a great benefit. To me, that is the big society already in action, and David Cameron is a Johnny-come-lately on that. It can work when people come together.

10:25

**Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD):** As other members before me have done, I recognise fully the role that is played by supported employment in giving people with disabilities access to employment opportunities. I support the role that it can and does play in meeting the aspirations of those who seek to move into

mainstream employment through supported employment.

I have visited a number of the organisations, and the commitment of those who are involved in supported employment placements is unquestionable. We have spoken quite a lot about supported employment businesses, but we need to recognise that there are many organisations across the country, such as social enterprises, that are providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities or who are recovering from alcoholism or drug addictions.

I support the social enterprise model. One of the organisations that I have visited is Haven Products, which competes effectively in a commercial market across a range of its activities. I recommend to colleagues that we look at the support models that are offered by Haven and Momentum Scotland, which provide much wider access to mainstream employment for people with disabilities, depending entirely on the needs and aspirations of the individuals. As other speakers have said, it is incumbent on the Government to bring to bear pressure on other public bodies to offer support through their procurement policies and article 19. I am not convinced that the Government has done that effectively.

If we are to root our main equalities agenda in the concept of mainstreaming, we must all understand that the routes to mainstreaming are varied and we must maximise opportunities for people. When I look at Haven's success in combining an ethos of support for people with multiple barriers to gaining employment—whether they have brain injuries, mental health issues or learning difficulties—with the organisation's business success in working with, for want of a better phrase, a range of hard-nosed, results-driven commercial organisations, I am convinced that if supported employment is to develop, we have to consider that model. Organisations must review how they are addressing that model if we are to give people opportunities to move into the mainstream job market, if that is what they want to do and there are opportunities to do so. There are job coaching, job buddying and a range of other opportunities, but such approaches have to focus entirely on the individual's aspirations and abilities. That is what our mainstreaming equalities agenda should be about.

In order to develop both the people who work in those organisations and those who wish to move into mainstream employment, the sector needs our public sector to buy into the value that supported employment offers. We spoke about article 19, but part of the issue is about guiding such organisations on how to get on to a tender list in the first place. I have seen mainstream companies that seek to benefit from the

procurement money that is available at local authority and national Government level struggle to get over the bureaucratic hurdles just to get on to a tender list. Somebody needs to look at that situation pretty closely, particularly in relation to article 19. I am not convinced that we have got it right.

There has to be a conversation, not just with the employers, but with the people involved, who have to get round the table to establish what they want for their lives. This cannot be yet another situation in which people with disabilities have things done for and to them but not with them; that model of operation belongs in a different century. The situation in Edinburgh highlights the need for us to look at how we take forward the equalities agenda in relation to people with disabilities and how we maximise opportunities for those people to meet their aspirations. That should not be a decision that is made on their behalf by people sitting in a room.

10:31

**Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** I, too, extend a warm welcome to the representatives from the sheltered employment workshops workforce in the public gallery, especially those from Edinburgh, Glasgow and Fife. I am sure that we are all pleased to have them with us today.

In particular, I pay tribute to John Moist of the GMB without whom Friends of Remploy, which has existed for more than 10 years in the Scottish Parliament, would never have been started. Lyn Turner of Unite also deserves special praise for his dedication and commitment to the cause of all sheltered employment workshops personnel across Scotland, and I am sorry that he cannot be with us today. I extend the same thanks to John-Paul McHugh, Steve McCool and John Steele—who has now retired—of Community.

I speak on behalf of many of my constituents who are employed in the Remploy factory in Cowdenbeath and the various sheltered employment workshops that I have visited in different parts of Scotland over the years. Those people are highly skilled and proud of their work. Because my communities have a tradition of coal mining and heavy industry, the people there suffer a high level of disability. The Cowdenbeath Remploy factory has been a crucial local employer over the years.

Scottish Government ministers have behaved like poodles in their work and commitment to sheltered employment over the past three years. It is clear to me that ministers have simply rolled over and had their tummies tickled and done little or nothing to challenge themselves or anyone else to make a difference for workers in sheltered

employment workshops. I say to the minister that although I am sorry to change the tone of the debate, I feel very angry on behalf of all those people who work in sheltered employment workshops in Scotland. He has done nothing over the past three years to bring compelling evidence to us that Government contracts are awarded to such workshops.

**Jim Mather:** I wonder whether the member was here when I made my opening speech and talked about procurement reform, the fact that we are bringing together businesses to broadcast their work, community benefit causes, our commitment to article 19 and our support for the Labour motion today.

**Helen Eadie:** Those are fine words, but that is all that we have had from this Government about sheltered workshops over the past three years. It is not good enough. These people's jobs, livelihoods and futures are at stake. They are angry and I am angry for them. My colleague Sarah Boyack put it much more eloquently than I can—she is so passionate, but able to present her argument in a cool and rational way, whereas I just share the burning anger that the people who work in sheltered workshops are feeling. It is impossible to get the message across to the minister and, indeed, to every other member in the chamber.

Every one of us has purchasing power, but how many MSPs have used any of their allowance to purchase directly from sheltered employment workshops? They could do it. The head of procurement in the Scottish Parliament, Lynn Garvie, has been the one and only champion in Scotland to use article 19. She is a shining example to us. She has shown us the way and given us technical answers. If we want someone who can answer the practical questions that were put by Brian Adam, Lynn Garvie is the one to go to. I have nothing but absolute admiration for her commitment. She talks not just about having one champion, but about appointing champions throughout Scotland in all the different Government agencies.

I say to the minister that we have contracts for uniforms for the police, the fire service, the ambulance service and nurses and beds in hospitals, prisons and universities. The Government could purchase a catalogue of products. However, when I visited Blindcraft a month ago, I was told that it gets its university contracts from England and that premier hotels from England buy from it. I will buy a new bed from Blindcraft. How many of us in the Parliament will follow the advice of Maureen Watt, who has now disappeared from the chamber? How many of us will buy a new mattress from Blindcraft? More

important, which Government contracts will order new beds from Blindcraft?

Such organisations do not want charity; they want our conviction. They want business and they want to show their ability. When I visited Blindcraft, I was impressed that people who are totally blind were using electric guns and working complicated technological machines.

The speech that I wrote has gone out of the window—it is useless. I feel angry at some comments that I have heard, because they do not reflect reality. I do not want just one champion; I want civil servants and every minister to champion supported employment and I want ministers to direct their officials to ensure that contracts are reserved. That can be done—article 19 gives us that ability. I am proud that my union has played an important part in ensuring that.

We can consider what the Ministry of Defence has done: its special quick-don uniforms for high-emergency situations of real danger have been made in Cowdenbeath, where I come from. The Ministry of Defence has millions and millions of pounds of such contracts. If that can be arranged in London, why cannot we do that in Scotland? What is lacking in ministers in Scotland? Why cannot they provide such contracts?

It is time that people got off their seats and that civil servants were out there. It is time to consider the opportunities that are available. Remploy makes trousers for the Post Office and bags for newspaper groups, for example. It has made furniture for MSPs. For every new school that we build—if we build any new schools, which is a debatable point—why do we not have contracts to purchase furniture from Remploy or other sheltered workshops?

We do not want handouts. These are good people and we must provide for them. It is a bit like Pastor Niemöller's prayer: "They came for the Jews, they came for the trade unionists, they came for me, and there was no one else to fight for me." We must fight for these people. We are their champions and we must deliver for them.

I feel nothing but absolute outrage and anger at the attitude of organisations such as the City of Edinburgh Council. Lesley Hinds has proposed over and over again many ways in which the council could address the issues. All the political parties need to get round the table and take a fully co-operative—or mutual—approach. The Government uses the word "mutual", but I do not think that it knows the meaning of the words "mutual" and "mutuality".

Everyone must get round the table and ensure that they make a difference for the people in Blindcraft and all the other factories. The experiences of Glencraft last year and Blindcraft

now are like a train coming down the line. All the other sheltered workshops will be affected if the Government does not get a move on and sort out the problem.

10:38

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP):** I, too, thank Lewis Macdonald for bringing this important debate to the chamber. We all agree that, at times of economic difficulty, vulnerable sections of society are in even more danger than usual of being marginalised, as the mainstream population is more prone to pulling up the equality ladder behind itself. It is incumbent on all of us to keep at the front of our minds the fact that we have an inclusive nation in which everyone counts and in which everyone must be treated as equally as possible.

Mainstreaming equalities is important. Lewis Macdonald said that mainstreaming should sometimes be put to the side and we should take more positive action on behalf of some sections of society, but I would like everyone to be considered to be in the main stream in the not-too-distant future. Unfortunately, that is not the case at the moment.

Of the general population in Scotland, 80 per cent work. That is not enough in itself, but only 37 per cent of people with disabilities have work, despite years of worthy talk from politicians of all parties and all Governments. Everyone has paid lip service to the idea that citizens with disabilities should be treated in a more befitting manner; it has taken a wee while to deliver on that.

As other members have done, I welcome the opportunity to discuss the future of Scotland's supported employment workplaces and to discuss people with disabilities who are looking for employment outside such workplaces. Helen Eadie sometimes becomes slightly aerated about the issue, but I know that that is because of her commitment. The welcome disability report that was issued four years ago shows that she has a genuine case.

It is important to talk about the whole range of people with disabilities who are looking for employment and for access to ordinary employment. As the Equal Opportunities Committee's disability reporter, I am—obviously—interested in the issue.

It is a self-evident truth that paid employment offers the best route out of the poverty trap in which many people with disabilities find themselves. A variety of inclusive policies has been developed over the years with the aim of removing barriers to employment for those who are furthest from the labour market. The obstacles to employment for people with disabilities should—

sadly—be familiar to us all. As I said, less than half the disabled people in Scotland are in employment, in comparison with more than three quarters of the general population. It is our duty as a society to overcome that.

All too often, disabled people are held back by low expectations. Those are sometimes their own, because society has led them to think that they cannot contribute fully, and they are sometimes the low expectations of the rest of us, who believe that people with disabilities cannot contribute to the same degree as we can. Of course, that is nonsense, as everybody in the chamber knows. That mindset has never had a place in Scotland and certainly has no place today.

It is important to recognise that many supported employment workplaces have been successful. Members might not know that Blindcraft Glasgow, in the region that I come from, began as a workshop for visually impaired people and has expanded to employ workers with other disabilities. The workforce consists of 125 employees who are registered disabled. It is important that public bodies support such workplaces. It is unlike me to do so, but I congratulate Glasgow City Council on its support for Blindcraft Glasgow, which has provided an example that I wish many other local authorities and public bodies would follow.

Outside the debate about supported workplaces, I very much welcome the minister's list of examples of good practice that the Scottish Government has initiated. I am pleased that Glasgow Housing Association has been a big winner in the programme and has provided 1,500 places for disabled people in recent years. I am also pleased that 10 per cent of the workforce in the construction phases for the 2014 Commonwealth games is guaranteed to be for disabled people. Those big-ticket issues point all public bodies in the direction of ensuring that people with disabilities are not at the bottom of the list for employment and are included in employment programmes.

As Mike Pringle said, for the foreseeable future supported workplaces will be specifically required to employ disabled people. The demand for positions in those workplaces exists, so we need a demand for their products.

It is of great importance that article 19 is promoted as widely as possible and that the first-class products of Scotland's supported workplaces are put at the top of procurement agendas. I will make a suggestion, even though I have been told that I may be flying a kite that will not go anywhere. One intervention by the Scottish Government might be to encourage Scottish Enterprise to deliver product diversification advice to supported workplaces, so that they may benefit

in the same way as private industry does. Scottish Enterprise may be reluctant to involve itself in social enterprise businesses, but it should be encouraged to do so, as it has the expertise to help supported workplaces to ensure that there is a market for their products.

As the world changes, product development is always important, but it is no more important than social responsibility. The progress that the minister and his colleagues have made through community benefit clauses shows the Scottish Government's commitment to supporting disability employment. However, the minister will agree that article 19 must be delivered to ensure that supported workplaces achieve the position in society that they deserve and that people with disabilities are seen as full and equal partners in society.

10:46

**Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab):** I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this debate. I thank Bill Kidd for his thoughtful speech, in which he recognised that, even in times of adversity, choices can be made. I am troubled by the emergence in part of the debate of a new orthodoxy that we cannot do things because of the economic difficulties in our country. As David Cameron said yesterday, we have had such difficulties before, but we came through them.

The new orthodoxy uses the difficult times as an excuse not to try to do something about an issue that unites the chamber. There is not necessarily a great gulf between the passion that Helen Eadie expressed and the commitment that the minister expressed in his opening remarks. We will be judged on how we bridge that gap over the next period to deliver for the individuals who are watching this debate from the public gallery.

First, we have £8 billion or £9 billion at our disposal that could be redeployed, re-examined and reconfigured, working with organisations such as Co-operative Development Scotland and Scottish Enterprise, to deliver a much more effective dynamic around the issue. We should do that. The minister made the same point in January. Such work should be encouraged over the next period.

Secondly, although we have economic difficulties, public infrastructure will continue to be built in this country. The logic of the new Prime Minister's speech yesterday is that the private sector should fill the gap that the public sector can no longer fill through taxation; that seems to be the economic theory that he is proposing. Let us see whether we can engage with the private sector to fill the gap. I have my doubts, but if that is the test and examination, let us have a go at it.

A range of organisations have made submissions to us today. People want to have the opportunity to get work and to develop their career. They want fair pay and to engage with wider society. Bill Kidd touched on the experience of individuals with disability, who have not been able to fulfil their employment aspirations. No one disagrees that they should be able to fulfil those aspirations, so let us try to make a difference.

Over the past few weeks, speeches have been important at the party conferences. However, I have been rereading a speech that Mario Cuomo made in 1984, as he surveyed the landscape of Reaganism in America. He said:

"The Republicans believe that the wagon train will not make it to the frontier unless some of the old, some of the young, some of the weak are left behind by the side of the trail. 'The strong,' they tell us, 'will inherit the land.'"

If we do not make decisions now and in the immediate future, many of the people who are much more vulnerable in an economic recession may find that their opportunities are substantially diminished or—in the case of the individuals at Blindcraft's factory in Edinburgh—may not have work at all. That would be a legacy of failure.

A couple of members have mentioned Glasgow Blindcraft. My colleague Charlie Gordon and I were part of the local authority arrangement in the late 1990s. Budgets were particularly difficult at that time, but we made a conscious political choice to try to preserve the work of Blindcraft, because we thought that it was important as part of our wider social obligation. We had inherited a disadvantaged budget because of reorganisation. The cross-subsidy money from Strathclyde Regional Council did not necessarily come to the city of Glasgow. We made a choice, tough as it was. I am not saying that other choices that we made were not difficult, but we had to defend those. I am worried by the orthodoxy that is emerging on the issue.

A number of months have passed since January, but we have not made the progress that we should have made. I hope that we can make that progress. The minister has announced that he will step down at the end of the session. As he reaches the sunset of his parliamentary career, legacy is an important issue. We all want to leave a wee footprint; some of us leave big size 11 footprints over some things. However, the minister has an opportunity to drive forward on these issues for the better, so that when he is enjoying retirement—if that is possible—he can reflect on that legacy and say that he has done something on supported workplaces. I hope that that suggestion will invite a positive response from him.

**Jim Mather:** I welcome the member's comments. There is a shared potential for legacy

in the Parliament. By the way, there are no plans for an obituary.

**Mr McAveety:** I have almost been legacied out by Commonwealth games debates with all of the various organisations in Glasgow. I know that a number of other members have engaged in those discussions.

One of the key opportunities that I mentioned in January, which is still important, is the major development of 1,500 new houses, a care home and associated support facilities in the east end of Glasgow. Even reasonable estimates suggest expenditure of £0.25 billion; the figure may be much higher if we factor in some of the contributions that we hope for from the private sector. That is a lot of money. With a reasonable bit of will and by pulling people together, one legacy of the development could be a commitment to procurement from both public and private contributors. I know that Glasgow City Council will support that.

I mention the development for another reason. In the next few weeks, a community development trust will be established in my community of Dalmarnock. The purpose of the trust is to get the benefits from such big investment back to the locality, which would make a real difference. One experience of previous big events over the generations is that money does not go back to the areas that are most immediately affected. The trust's work is relevant to Hugh O'Donnell's point about mutual enterprises, will provide community benefit and will fulfil a social obligation to those whom we regard as the most vulnerable in our society.

I am conscious of the need to leave time for other members, but I will conclude with two important points. First, we have choices to make over the next period. Anything that the minister can do to address the immediate concerns relating to Blindcraft's Edinburgh factory will be helpful. As all members who have spoken have indicated, a strategy for development is also needed.

Secondly, Mario Cuomo's speech contained another great quotation that is relevant to the debate about our country's direction of travel. He said:

"We believe in only the government we need, but we insist on all the government we need."

We need Government to assist in this process to make a difference. I hope that the minister and the Government can do that for the benefit of supported workplaces in Scotland.

10:53

**Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** We all agree that more can always be done, but the Scottish

Government is to be applauded for officially proposing a target and for the work that it has done so far. Members from all parties have mentioned a number of positives. Of most relevance is the Scottish Government's sustainable procurement delivery plan, which was published only last week. Delivery activity 13 of the plan states that, by November 2010, the Scottish procurement directorate

"will develop an implementation plan for buyers to achieve" the objective of

"awarding at least one contract to a Supported Business".

I look forward to seeing that objective being achieved. All members, regardless of political party, will share that wish.

I was a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee a number of years ago, and Bill Kidd referred to our investigation during the committee's inquiry on disability. One thing that came across loud and clear from the people from whom we took evidence and from the businesses that we visited was that, regardless of their disability, people wanted to be treated absolutely equally and absolutely the same as any other worker in the workforce. That is the premise on which we have to start not just this welcome debate but any strategy that is pursued.

The debate is not just about getting people back into work and the associated economic benefits of that; it is about improving their quality of life. Working results in improved self-esteem and a feeling of usefulness. Work and being part of a working community can result in physical benefits as part of an active life. The general improvements in physical and mental wellbeing are plain for everyone to see, but there are often worries that some people will be worse off financially. That comes across in every part of the workforce. People who return to work sometimes worry about loss of benefits and so on, but I looked at studies that North Lanarkshire Council carried out, which showed that, on average, people are £124 better off as a result of returning to work. We should consider that premise, too. As well as wanting to be treated equally, people are better off physically and in their pockets if they are working.

It is clear for all of us to see that supported employment provides both an improved quality of life and clear financial benefits. There is a further, equally important benefit, especially in these difficult economic times: the saving and gain not just for people but for the public purse, as a result of fewer benefit payments being made.

In mentioning that added benefit, I am aware that I am straying into issues that are outwith the control of this Parliament—into issues that are reserved to Westminster. Lewis Macdonald

touched on that in his speech when he mentioned ministers in other places. The fact that the powers on this issue are reserved to Westminster limits this Parliament and whatever Government is in power from using every means at our disposal to ensure that supported employment has every opportunity to flourish and succeed.

**Helen Eadie** *indicated disagreement.*

**Sandra White:** I see Helen Eadie shaking her head, but I think that we should consider every single possibility.

**Helen Eadie:** Will Sandra White go back and ask all her ministers which of them have examined all the possibilities for using contracts to purchase from sheltered workshops? As I said, a vast array of products is available. There are catalogues a foot high with items that can be purchased. It is not as if sheltered workshops are not making useful things; they are making things that are really useful and needed.

**Sandra White:** I absolutely agree with Helen Eadie on that. I bought a bed from Blindcraft, not just because it was from Blindcraft but because it was of a better quality. I can certainly ask ministers about that if Helen Eadie wants me to, but I also suggest to her that we should not bring party politics into it. Her party was in power for eight years, and she can ask her former ministers, too. I will leave it at that.

I spoke earlier about how we can encourage growth in supported employment. A few ideas have come to my mind, which I believe should be given serious consideration. Lewis Macdonald spoke about creating a people's champion, and I think that someone else picked up on that idea. That might be a good idea, and it certainly should not be ruled out, but there are barriers to it, as several members have mentioned, which we should be aware of.

Like Bill Kidd, I might be flying a kite that is not going anywhere, but I have various ideas that I think we could bring into the process. First, in creating employment, supported workplaces take people off benefit and increase tax revenue. Would it not be worth considering lowering national insurance contributions for such enterprises so as to increase their profitability and allow them to expand with greater ease, given that that extra public revenue is already being accrued through increased personal taxation and a reduced extension of benefits? That is one idea.

Secondly, could we not consider providing VAT relief for such companies to improve their competitiveness? Could we award certain tax breaks for companies that enter into partnership with supported-employment enterprises? That might even be within the competence of the Scottish Government.

It is important to put forward such ideas, and I do not think that Bill Kidd and I are just flying kites. We are presenting our ideas, and they should be listened to.

As regards the future of supported-employment workplaces, we are working within certain rules that tie our hands behind our backs, but we should consider every possibility that might help to achieve the desired aim of everyone in the chamber, regardless of their political party.

Bill Kidd and Frank McAveety mentioned Blindcraft. Have representatives of the City of Edinburgh Council spoken to their counterparts in Glasgow City Council? They should perhaps do that. Blindcraft Glasgow seems to be very successful—it is making a profit just now and it is working well. Perhaps that could be reciprocated in Edinburgh.

We must remove the barriers that are faced by people who go into supported employment. The aim of public bodies having contracts with supported workplaces is really worthy. I agree with Helen Eadie that many companies could work with them, and we should leave no stone unturned in that regard. The aim is worthy, and I hope that we achieve it sooner rather than later.

11:01

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** This is a serious subject, but it has a fairly narrow focus. I hope that members do not come away from the debate thinking that article 19 is a silver bullet that will solve all the problems that are associated with sheltered workshops. There is a history of challenges in this area, whether in Remploi workshops or in those that form part of the Blindcraft group—which is not actually a group, as the Blindcraft facilities have grown up independently in different parts of Scotland. The history of Blindcraft shows that a number of facilities went some time ago.

We need a financially sustainable, competitive business model that actually works. That is not to say that there should not be an element of support, as we have some social responsibility here, but it cannot be unlimited.

I am always impressed by Helen Eadie's passion and commitment to this subject. She articulates well the arguments in favour of continuing this type of work. However, I gently point out to her that part of the wider debate was initiated by the major review of Remploi's sheltered workshop facilities throughout Scotland a few short years ago, which resulted in 17 factories closing throughout the UK and 11 factories merging. As part of the campaign that was successfully run by the unions and interested politicians, 15 factories were saved, including all

those in Scotland. However, that was against the background of a programme that would lead to a reduction in support per member of staff from £18,000 per annum to £9,000 per annum by 31 March 2013. Some factories in the Remploy group required £48,000 per annum in support for individual members of staff. That is part of a general shift in an attempt to cherry pick—in some people's minds—the easier members of society who are disabled and get them into the workforce, and to move away from the idea of sheltered workshops towards the inclusion of disabled people in the mainstream workforce. That may well be a worthy and sensible aim, but we have to consider it in the wider context. That issue is part and parcel of the debate.

We should not look just at the use of article 19. That can be an important part of the weaponry that is available to ensure that sheltered workshops have a sustainable future, but it is not the only thing that needs to happen. I remember well the campaign to save the Remploy factory in Aberdeen, when I, along with a range of other politicians, engaged with the public and private sectors in an attempt to generate financially sustainable business models that would work. Thankfully, at least in the short term, that has worked but, unfortunately, there are no guarantees for the future. We cannot ignore the general financial climate. There is a business downturn, which will impact on sheltered workshops.

**Lewis Macdonald:** Does Brian Adam agree that for Remploy in Aberdeen and for many of the other sheltered workshops to which he refers, use of article 19 on public procurement offers the quickest method for this Parliament and this Government to make a difference?

**Brian Adam:** It is not up to just the Parliament and the Government to make a difference; it is up to all of us to make a difference. I fully accept that use of article 19 is part of the weaponry, but I do not wish it to be seen as the only thing that needs to happen. Even when we intend to use article 19, we need to be sure that all the partners are involved, not just the Government. The Government does not do everything at its own hand. We must ensure, as the Government set out in its plans, which were published in "A Working Life for All Disabled People: The Supported Employment Framework for Scotland", that we engage with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to ensure that councils play their part when they procure and that NHS boards—which Helen Eadie rightly drew attention to—and a range of Government bodies do the same.

In addition, we need to follow the example of the work that has been done with Glencraft in Aberdeen by ensuring that the private sector, through its corporate social responsibility, engages

in that process, and we must encourage places such as Glencraft and Blindcraft in Glasgow and Edinburgh to look at appropriate niche markets and to engage with the private sector to fill them, which will give a better opportunity for a sustainable future.

Frank McAveety's call for the Government to leave a legacy was completely appropriate, but he omitted to mention that it has already left such a legacy, because we have changed the set-up for Glencraft in Aberdeen.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan):** Wind up, please.

**Brian Adam:** It is not totally out of the woods yet, but the social enterprise approach that has been adopted has significant public and private sector support. I think that that model could be used elsewhere—for Blindcraft in Edinburgh or Glasgow, for example. A level of co-operation between those organisations would be appropriate.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to the wind-up speeches.

11:08

**Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** I have listened to the debate with great interest for a reason that members will be aware of, which is that my wife is disabled, so disability issues are important to me and my family.

I felt that the minister, Lewis Macdonald, correctly identified the problem.

**Mike Pringle:** He is not the minister.

**Jamie Stone:** I am so sorry—Lewis Macdonald spoke on behalf of the Labour Party; I am used to thinking back to days gone by. He said that our concern today was the future of disabled workers, and he called for a disabled workers champion, which we could consider in the fullness of time.

Jim Mather—let me get this right—the minister, said that we must find ways of supporting such businesses. He, along with Lewis Macdonald and other members, mentioned the crucial article 19 and the issue of 50 per cent of the workforce being disabled. He talked about promoting the products that such people produce and the importance of producing what we need to buy.

In his intervention, George Foulkes encouraged the minister to hold a meeting on the situation of Blindcraft in Edinburgh involving all parties. I think that his proposal was accepted by the minister and by my colleague Mike Pringle later in the debate. I believe that a conciliatory approach to such matters is being adopted in the Parliament, which must be welcomed.



Gavin Brown talked about a timetable for ensuring that contracts are in place and said that it must be a real timetable for real events rather than just talk. He argued that information about article 19 must be disseminated as broadly as possible. In his intervention on Gavin Brown, which was about subcontracting, Brian Adam asked whether the use of article 19 should be mentioned in the tender documents. As I am not a lawyer, I cannot answer that, but ministers might need to consider that point and to take legal advice. Gavin Brown also said that participants must be active and enthusiastic. That is hugely important, and I will return to that turn of phrase when I conclude.

Mike Pringle touched on the financial situation that is faced by the city councils in Aberdeen and Edinburgh. He told us that Edinburgh City Council had commenced the 30-day consultation procedure with staff at Blindcraft, which he said had been agreed by the unions. He said that Blindcraft was not a charity and made an issue of the economic reality of the situation in which we are living. He concluded by making two important points: he said that we must not prejudge the consultation and that we must support the staff at all costs.

Sarah Boyack—who is no longer in the chamber—made an impassioned plea from the heart and, in a tremendously detailed speech, Ian McKee made particular reference to the financial background. Bill Kidd made an equally impassioned but perhaps more thoughtful contribution. As for Helen Eadie, all that I can do is tell managers of public services to get the sandbags out if they see her coming up their path. There is no doubt about her commitment to and her strength of feeling on the issue.

John Park's account of a constituent of his who spent nearly £3,000 in getting an HGV licence and then found numerous barriers in his way surely touched us all. Hugh O'Donnell harked back to what Gavin Brown had said when he asked how we could guide the organisations in question in getting on to tender lists.

Maureen Watt made a very interesting speech in which she described how Glencraft has gone private, apparently successfully. Brian Adam touched on that, too. I know that my colleague Mike Pringle has already spoken to Councillor Paul Edie of the City of Edinburgh Council to establish whether we can replicate in Edinburgh what has been done in Aberdeen. That is extremely important, and it will be looked at and discussed.

Brian Adam made two important points. First, he said that we must be careful to ensure that we do not all view the use of article 19 as some sort of silver bullet. That is true, because it will not necessarily be a cure-all. Secondly, he reminded

us of the reality that the business model must work.

That takes me to my concluding point, which harks back to Gavin Brown's point that participants should be active and enthusiastic. I am sure that many other members have, like me, bought a Blindcraft bed. In fact, I have two of them and can vouch for their high quality. A parallel can be drawn with the fair trade movement, the great success of which some of our Labour colleagues have been behind. It reached out to people's consciences and encouraged them to buy fair trade products by saying that, in doing so, they would help. We know that the fair trade products that are on sale in the Co-op are not always the cheapest, but they are good and gradually all of us have been converted to fair trade chocolate and other products. I think that there is a wish to do the best among people in this country. If we can do what we did with fair trade products, by getting the idea into people's consciousness and getting it to touch their consciences, with the products that Blindcraft, Glencraft and other organisations that employ disabled people produce, we can underwrite their success. That way, we will do what Brian Adam urged—make a business model that works.

11:15

**Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con):** A number of points of view have been expressed and a number of constructive suggestions have been made in the debate, which has been interesting and largely consensual. However, I detect that, although all members are completely in line with the direction of travel, there are concerns about the speed of travel. We require to address that issue.

The debate, which is to do with article 19 of the EU public procurement directive and all its ramifications, is important. In his opening speech, Lewis Macdonald constructively highlighted the importance of employment in supported employment workplaces. We are talking about 800 jobs. Lewis Macdonald highlighted that a high proportion of disabled persons are unemployed, and Bill Kidd underlined that point. Therefore, there is undoubtedly a value in supported employment workplaces, and that value affects those who are directly employed in them as well as their families.

Supported work environments are a complex issue. We know that people who are disadvantaged through disability find it difficult to secure meaningful employment and that supported work environments such as those at Glencraft and Remploy offer jobs to people who would find it very difficult to get employment elsewhere. They also offer much more meaningful employment than the kinds of job that would be

offered to that group of people in the conventional jobs market. People who work in such enterprises feel safe, are able to benefit from peer group association and, of course, receive on-going support. Those factors are critical in keeping them involved and are of great benefit to them and the wider community.

As I said, there is dissatisfaction with the speed of travel. That is why we are at pains to state that the principle of a timetable is correct. Gavin Brown stated that clearly in his speech. It is important to move the debate on. We need to consider the issue of tender documents and the involvement of subcontractors. However, it is important to stress that we are looking for active rather than reluctant partners, because we will get the results that we all seek to achieve only when we take people with us.

Helen Eadie raised a number of issues in her impassioned speech. She will be pleased to learn that I, too, have deliberately bought furniture from Blindcraft and have been extremely satisfied with it. However, the issue is that there seems to be a general unawareness of article 19. I know that the Government has taken steps to make more people aware of it, but we will have to be much more in the faces of local authorities and other public bodies if we are to succeed.

Sandra White made several interesting suggestions, but perhaps she misled us slightly on the target date of 30 November. I know that that was entirely inadvertent. That target date is included in the "Scottish Sustainable Procurement Action Plan", but it is the target date for developing the strategy, not for its implementation. If that were the implementation date, I think that there would be wider satisfaction around the chamber.

John Park and other members raised the issue of awareness of article 19. He also raised the issue of finances, as did Frank McAveety. The value of public procurement depends on the basis on which it is calculated. The figure may be £5 billion or £9 billion—Frank McAveety mentioned that figure. Even if we took the value as being £5 billion, and 1 per cent of that were to go to such organisations, that would be £50 million. That would provide a turnover for the 24 supported workplaces in Scotland and the effect of the money would be significant.

There is consensus around the chamber, but we need to move things on much more vigorously, otherwise we could see a highly disadvantaged section of our population that currently has the chance to fulfil important individual and collective roles not being able to fulfil those roles to the extent that it is doing.

11:20

**Jim Mather:** Earlier, I set out a range of actions that the Government is taking to provide a better future for our supported employers and the people they serve—employees and the wider community. Having heard members' speeches, I want to reiterate a few points.

The Government is taking action to deliver on the potential of article 19. We are working hard on our intention that every public sector body should have a contract with a supported employer, using article 19. We will bring forward a timetable for that. The Scottish procurement directorate is making that happen by promoting the potential of supported employment organisations, and we will deliver even more for supported workplaces and the public sector over time by further developing the capability of public contracts Scotland. We are also making more of community benefit clauses. Supported employers are a key and identifiable recipient of our broader suite of support to social enterprises.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I very much welcome the minister's commitment to bring forward a timetable, but when does he expect to do that?

**Jim Mather:** We will do it bearing in mind the caveats that Gavin Brown and other members have mentioned. Gavin Brown suggested that an early, arbitrary date might not be right. We want to optimise the balance of speed and materiality. We do not want tokenism; rather, we want to be real, and we want people to realise the totality that is available. A lot has already been done to get out the message about what is available, and I hope that the people of Scotland, let alone our public bodies, take account of that. We are keen to ensure that we handle matters in a way that means that we generate more successful businesses that are able to adapt, innovate, evolve and align with customers. To achieve that end, I firmly believe that consensus is crucial.

Members may have seen on the news today that Archbishop Tutu has retired. We should bear in mind his efforts to get truth, reconciliation and a new beginning for a whole country. Perhaps that is what we need for supported businesses. Many multiple truths have been expressed in the chamber. We need to align them with a common goal to help us to achieve the resilient models that we want to see in our businesses. The majority of speeches have been very much along that line. Lewis Macdonald got to the nub of the matter. He considered the impact of supported businesses on people and the benefits that they can deliver in enabling people to contribute in a fundamental way.

I am a great fan of Marcus Buckingham, whose big proposition is that we all have strengths. The

great thing about supported businesses is that they give people strengths and resilience from having a sense of purpose in life. We are good at finding problems and we are getting better at solving them, but we need to celebrate successes. The successes of Remploy and Glencraft in Aberdeen are there to be understood, replicated and taken forward. They should be part of the solution along with article 19 and other elements.

I was taken by Gavin Brown's speech, which was thoughtful. We do not want people to have a tick-box mentality that means that they will buy one bed or one desk that is produced in a supported employment workplace and feel themselves to be in a state of grace; we want a meaningful relationship. We want to seek to help and progressively grow the sector as a joint venture involving the Scottish Government, local authorities, public bodies and Scotland plc. We need to remember the dangers of command and control, and that things can go awry.

I was equally taken by Mike Pringle's contribution. Mike identified and opened up the human side of the issue: the welfare, mental health and physical implications, and the fact that people have more autonomy and choice in their lives. It was at that point that George Foulkes intervened, on the issue of Blindcraft. I reiterate my commitment to seeing what we can do on that. The key issue there is to get everyone in the room. During the debate I have made a list of the people who should be there, including the local authority, the Department for Work and Pensions, customers, suppliers, other public sector players, the hospitality sector, the Scottish Social Enterprise Coalition, Glencraft, philanthropists, retired tradesmen, managers and teachers, unions, Social Firms Scotland, councils for voluntary service, Jobcentre Plus, Skills Development Scotland, other private sector companies and Scottish Enterprise.

**George Foulkes:** I welcome the minister's reaffirmation that he will bring all the interests together. In view of the fact that we are now in the 30-day consultation period, will he assure us that that will be done as quickly as possible?

**Jim Mather:** Yes. I will do my level best. Next week is recess and I would be prepared to put time into that. As always, when I run a stakeholder event, everyone must be involved in making it happen. Making someone het is not necessarily the answer. We do it together, and we can do it constructively.

Sarah Boyack started by expressing her deep disappointment. We have to move forward from a blame game mentality on an issue such as this. I refuse to be defensive in this climate. We are doing a great deal and we will do more.

Johann Lamont raised the issue of the Southern general. I can tell her that the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde contract has used community benefit clauses, and 10 per cent of the workforce will be new entrant trainees. The contractor, Brookfield, is working with the Scottish Government on the ready for business programme to identify subcontracting opportunities for social enterprises. Positive and constructive things are happening.

Ian McKee was another voice seeking sustainability and in favour of supported businesses identifying future needs together with their customers. We very much welcome that. John Park made a point that I had been keen to make about broadcasting what is working and promoting the toolkit in a positive way.

Maureen Watt described the excellent lessons from Glencraft. I reiterate that we should have Glencraft in the room when we talk to Blindcraft in Edinburgh.

The contribution that struck me most came from Frank McAveety. He hit the right note when he talked about the wagon train mentality of Mario Cuomo—a mentality that we totally reject. There is a new book out by two guys whose father was a lecturer at Anderson college in Glasgow. Called "The Puritan Gift: Reclaiming the American Dream Amidst Global Financial Chaos", it essentially makes the point that the more we come together in common cause, and the more we try to promote the strength of our society, the more we will lift all the boats and move things forward. Frank McAveety's comment about legacy strikes a chord with all of us.

A guy called Steven Pinker makes the great observation that the one thing that drives all of us, whether it is the razor king or John Harvey-Jones, is the desire for peer group esteem. There is a chance for the Parliament to have peer group esteem on this issue. There is a chance for all of us to play our part. I was interested in Frank McAveety's proposition and in what he was trying to do in Dalmarnock to allow resources to remain there. We have been trying that in Argyll and Bute. Equally, we pass audit on both of his choices on Edinburgh and strategy.

All in all, it has been a useful debate. A lot has come out of it; it has been cathartic. Now is the time for Scotland and supported businesses to move on. We will do that best by doing it together.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Johann Lamont to conclude the debate. You have until 11:40.

11:29

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** You leave me to do the sums, then.

I repeat my earlier apologies to the Presiding Officer's office. Due to circumstances beyond my control, I was slightly late for the beginning of the debate. I was delighted not to miss any speeches, other than part of the speech by my colleague Lewis Macdonald [*Laughter.*] I had a good sense of what he was going to say, so it was fine.

This is an important debate but we must put it in context. In their briefings, Leonard Cheshire Disability and others reflected that challenging the scandalous level of unemployment among people with disabilities must be about more than tackling the issue of sheltered workplaces. I could not agree more.

There is a demonstration today in the Parliament highlighting the need to recognise the human rights of disabled people at a time when budget choices are being made. That understanding of the broader context of the needs of disabled people has meant that we on this side of the chamber continue to press for a skills strategy that understands inequality in the workplace, the lack of opportunity for people and the challenges faced by disabled people in particular. That is why we have been so critical of the single outcome agreement process.

I am sure that Bill Kidd will agree that the Government has persistently refused to ensure that single outcome agreements that determine spending in local authorities are equality impact assessed. If that is not done, how can we ensure that the needs of disabled people in relation to education, employment strategies and every local authority service are being met, and that the political choices that are currently being made do not disproportionately disadvantage people with disabilities? That is the reason for our commitment to the broader issues of disability and it is why we continue to express concern that the changed role for Scottish Enterprise means that it is not working to address the employment needs of people with disabilities in the way that it might have done in the past.

We look to Westminster with dread as we see the downgrading of a commitment to tackle inequality and the possible dismantling of the bodies that monitor progress in equality. Not only is it possible that people will be more disadvantaged, but there will be no machinery to ensure that decisions on that are challenged.

However, the fact that we cannot do everything does not mean that we cannot do anything. I was surprised by the defensiveness of some members in their speeches. Dr McKee, especially, seemed to expend more energy on explaining why things

could not be done than on considering the positives. That is in sharp contrast to Frank McAveety's contribution, in which he explained precisely how someone who has political power can make political choices that can make a difference.

It is disappointing that action on supported workplaces, using article 19, has not been properly recognised. Despite what the minister said, I remain disappointed that the huge project at the Southern general has done so little. The minister says that it is a problem if we make one person het. I say to the minister that he is het. He is the minister. He has the capacity—a capacity that some of us long for—to drive things forward. We want the Government to lead by example. The minister is not a dispassionate observer of what is happening at Blindcraft and how we can make a difference using article 19.

There is a huge issue about mainstreaming employment opportunities for people with disabilities. We should challenge employers on their disgraceful record. We owe it to people who work in sheltered workplaces not to say, "You can only go that way." We must recognise that there is the opportunity to go either way.

I accept what Gavin Brown said about the importance of debating in measured tones. I am a good example of how that is done. However, I wonder whether people in the disabled community sometimes feel that our measured tones reflect complacency. No member would want that.

In the Tory amendment, Gavin Brown talks about balance and the importance of reflecting the challenges for some public bodies. We recognise that and we would hope that the timetable would reflect the fact that some bodies will be unable to move as quickly as others. However, that must not slow the process down; we must recognise the power of the measure. We understand the differences among various bodies, but we expect speedy action from the minister on publishing the timetable.

We do not want Gavin Brown's amendment to be a get-out clause, but we acknowledge that in speaking he made a number of positive suggestions about subcontractors and, on that basis, we can support his amendment.

Mike Pringle talked about how difficult it is to support sheltered workplaces in tough economic times, but the reality is that when we are in tough economic times, because of what is happening at a UK level, people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable. We must do more and not use the economic situation as an explanation for doing less. Tackling inequality is not a task just for when the sun shines; at this time, we need even more

positive action to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups.

Ian McKee made the same point. He said that we are in tough times and so perhaps we should expect that the more vulnerable people will suffer. However, that should be not an excuse for not acting, but an imperative to act. The implication of what Ian McKee said is that we are talking about good works, charity and doing people a favour. It is not about that; it is about allowing people a level playing field on which they can show and prove their potential. In a decent society, we owe it to people with disabilities to support them; it is not a question of our feeling good about offering them an opportunity, in the way that was suggested.

**Ian McKee:** The implication of what I said in my speech is that when the hard times come, there is little point in continuing to subsidise the production of something for which the market is falling. We should be devising sustainable ways of changing patterns so that the needs of the future—not of the past—are considered.

**Johann Lamont:** In tough times, the Government should redouble its efforts to make a difference and use the powers that it has to do that.

I agree absolutely with Bill Kidd in commending Glasgow City Council and its work through the Commonwealth group and City Building, but we know that it did not happen by accident. It happened because active political choices were made.

We can make a difference to disabled people through the use of specific contracts and I was disturbed by the minister's blinkered view, which he has given in Parliament before, that the Scottish Government does not really need anything that sheltered workplaces make. If there was a disabled champion in the Government, they would look at the contracts, speak to the sheltered workplaces and have a dialogue about the potential for them to meet the Scottish Government's desires. I made a point about the concerns about the Southern general hospital, where a huge opportunity was missed.

**Jim Mather:** I wonder whether the member heard me talk about the Southern general in specific terms. If she did not, she can refer to the *Official Report*.

**Johann Lamont:** I listened all too carefully. I accept that the Government has used community benefit clauses; what I am saying is that not one contract has been reserved under article 19. A huge opportunity, which would have increased the benefits that come from the community benefit clauses, has been missed.

No one is in favour of tokenism, but if every public body in Scotland reserved one contract to a sheltered workplace, let us imagine the difference that that would make to the workplaces and what it would tell the public body about how things can be done. It would make a seismic change that would move such contracts from tokenism to common practice.

There is a broader issue about understanding the power of the public purse to drive change and create opportunities, especially at a time of economic difficulties. The idea that public spending is problematic is promulgated at a UK level, but we know that public investment can stimulate private sector activity. In housing, for example, the Scottish Government rightly brought forward its budget because the private sector understood that public money could sustain jobs and skills in the short term. It is simply not good enough for ministers—this is a feature of the SNP—to go on at length about what they care about and develop strategies and then not do the hard work of delivering on those strategies. It is a question of tough action and getting the contracts in place. That, rather than reflecting on the discussion and explaining how somebody else is not doing the work, is how we can make a difference.

With a budget of £8 billion, the reservation of one contract—possibly—is abject failure and it speaks of the values and priorities of the Scottish Government. It is hardly surprising when the Government's entire mindset is to talk about the powers that the Parliament does not have. The Government should use the powers that it has to create economic opportunity and to drive good practice into the private sector.

We will support both amendments because of the key recognition that the Government has not done enough so far and that a timetable will be produced. This is not a question of tokenism. The minister said that the Government does not rely on article 19 alone, but the problem is that it does not rely on it at all. That is about its priorities.

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** You must close, please.

**Johann Lamont:** I will make just this last point.

**The Presiding Officer:** Very quickly, please.

**Johann Lamont:** The minister mentioned Donald Dewar. Donald Dewar understood that we get power to make a difference to people's lives. The Government should use the power that it has to make the difference and to support sheltered workplaces.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on the future of Scotland's supported employment workplaces.

## Scottish Executive Question Time

### General Questions

11:40

#### National Dementia Strategy

**1. Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to ensure that the national dementia strategy's aim of strengthening the integration of health and social care services is met. (S3O-11654)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon):** Strengthening the integration of health and social care responses to dementia is a central aim of the national dementia strategy. The strategy said that we would provide national support and funding to a local national health service board and local authority partnership to demonstrate the value of a whole-system approach. Because of the high level of interest and the quality of applications, we have now decided to support three partnerships—in North Lanarkshire, Midlothian, and Perth and Kinross. That complements activity in implementing national standards in dementia care pathways and work to use outcomes data locally to measure and compare the impact of dementia services.

**Margaret Smith:** At a recent briefing meeting with NHS Lothian, local MSPs heard of progress on the strategy. The strategy sets targets for NHS boards to deliver agreed improvements in early diagnosis and service response by March 2011. Will the cabinet secretary say whether similar targets have been set for local authorities with regard to social care services and, if so, whether similar progress has been made?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Let me say first that I appreciate the tenor of the member's question, and I hope that she has no doubt about the importance that the Government attaches to the work. The national dementia strategy is the first ever dementia strategy in Scotland.

The member will be aware of the different performance arrangements that we have with health boards and local authorities. For health boards, I set what are known as HEAT—health improvement, efficiency, access and treatment—targets. For local authorities, we have the concordat outcomes-based approach. However, the work that we have done with local authorities on the strategy and its implementation leaves me in no doubt that there is a commitment across local authorities to ensure that they play their full part.

**Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab):** Is the minister aware of the serious human rights issue in the inappropriate prescribing of antipsychotic drugs to older people with dementia in care homes and hospitals? What steps is she taking to tackle that serious and sadly all-too-common practice?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I am aware of the issue and of Rhona Brankin's long-standing interest in it. We have had exchanges in the chamber on the issue, and I know that she has also had exchanges, and perhaps correspondence, with the Minister for Public Health and Sport. The issue is complex, as I know the member appreciates. Rather than try to summarise it, I am more than happy to write to her, and meet her if she would find that helpful, to go into some of the issues and explain the steps that the Government is taking.

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary recognise the value of the voluntary sector in dealing with dementia cases? For example, East Kilbride dementia carers group has come to an arrangement with South Lanarkshire Council on the use of direct payments so that care is personalised on the choice of the dementia sufferers and their family on what is best for their wellbeing. Is that something that she would encourage other local authorities to investigate?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Yes, I recognise and greatly appreciate the role and contribution of the voluntary sector. East Kilbride dementia carers group is one of many examples of voluntary organisations making a big contribution. I would encourage not just local authorities but health boards and the statutory sector in general to look innovatively at how they can work even more closely with the voluntary sector.

In my experience over the past few years in the job, I have found that the voluntary sector, because it tends to be close to the service users, is often the most innovative, flexible and fleet of foot in finding solutions to difficult problems. I certainly agree with the tenor of Linda Fabiani's question.

#### NHS Highland (Dunbar Hospital)

**2. Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it is having with NHS Highland regarding the future of Dunbar hospital. (S3O-11656)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon):** I have recently written to the member on this important matter and confirmed that I am aware that services at Dunbar hospital are currently being examined as a part of a wider review of services throughout west Caithness by

NHS Highland. I have asked the board to keep me informed as the review progresses. The board has been clear that its objective is to ensure that services in the area meet the needs of local people, that they remain of the highest quality and that they continue to offer best value for taxpayers' investment.

**Jamie Stone:** I look forward to receiving the cabinet secretary's letter.

NHS Highland does not appear to be listening to the people on the ground at all with regard to providing what is best for the area. Local people did not want an office-hours accident and emergency service in Thurso and they did not agree to four beds being removed from the hospital. Will the cabinet secretary look into why the views of local people are not being taken into account and see whether she can bring this to a stop?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I will make two points to Jamie Stone, both of which I hope will be helpful. As members appreciate, we have had debates on this issue frequently and will no doubt have them in the future. Health care is not delivered in a static way. Boards are always seeking to enhance and improve the quality of services that they provide in the community because, generally speaking, people want to be treated as close to home as possible and, as far as is possible, in their own community. That work often has an impact on in-patient services.

The second point is that I expect health boards to engage positively, constructively and meaningfully with local communities when they are contemplating change. I have made that crystal clear to a number of health boards on a number of occasions in relation to a number of issues. I will continue to make that clear to boards, including NHS Highland in this regard.

**Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary recognise the need for respite beds for geriatric patients in this case? Local people are concerned about that issue. Will the projected need for beds at the Dunbar hospital be reduced by modern treatments?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Rob Gibson is making the point that I made in my first answer. I do not want to pre-empt in any way the consultation that is under way with regard to Dunbar hospital and others in the area. As medical technology advances and the modes of delivery of health care progress, more people can be treated in the community, and the pattern of health services that we provide has to adapt over time to reflect that. That does not take away from the fact that I expect local communities to be fully involved in the discussions and decision making around all the

decisions, which, on occasion, can be very difficult to make.

### Victims and Witnesses (Support)

**3. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to support victims and witnesses. (S3O-11613)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** We are building on our record funding of victim support organisations, introduction of victim statements and extension of the victim notification scheme by reviewing provision for victims in order to further enhance their role within the criminal justice system. Separately, we are also reviewing support for witnesses.

**David Stewart:** What proportion of the cabinet secretary's budget is spent on victims?

**Kenny MacAskill:** I do not know the precise proportion, but I can say that we put £4.2 million into Victim Support Scotland in 2010-11. That is a record amount, which was warmly received by the organisation when I hosted and made the opening speech at its international victim support conference earlier this week. I know also that Victim Support Scotland is the envy of many other victim support organisations elsewhere in the world.

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Question 4 was withdrawn.

### People Trafficking

**5. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action it will take to ensure that people traffickers are prosecuted and that their victims are protected and supported. (S3O-11583)

**The Lord Advocate (Elish Angiolini):** The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service is committed to disrupting human trafficking through the investigation and prosecution of these offences, including confiscation of assets and profits. As I explained to the Equal Opportunities Committee earlier this week, only a small number of offences of human trafficking have been reported to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service by the police. Of those reported, two cases were unable to proceed due to a lack of sufficient admissible evidence, and the other cases are currently under consideration.

There have been a number of successful prosecutions for criminal offences against a background of people trafficking, such as identity offences, trading in prostitution, managing an immoral house, knowingly permitting premises to be used as a brothel and knowingly living on the earnings of prostitution.

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service is working with the Scottish Government and other relevant agencies to ensure that the victims of human trafficking are identified as such at an early stage and are provided with the appropriate support and protection at the beginning of the investigative process.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I take this opportunity to thank the Lord Advocate for all the superb work that she has done over the past few years and to say how sorry we are that she is leaving her post.

Will the Lord Advocate confirm that, in the new trafficking guidance, which I believe is to be issued soon, there will be a presumption against prosecuting the victims of trafficking? Can she say why there have been several successful prosecutions of people trafficking in England but none in Scotland? Is there anything that the prosecution service or other public services could do to help to rectify that situation?

**The Lord Advocate:** I thank Mr Chisholm for his kind remarks. However, I am not going immediately and I hope to be around for some months yet.

On the identification and support of victims, the guidance that we will issue to prosecutors this week will contain a presumption against prosecution where there are credible factors and criteria identifying an individual as a victim of trafficking in the context of these offences. That will be an important part of ensuring that we encourage victims of trafficking to come forward and co-operate with the authorities. As I mentioned on Tuesday, many of the victims have grave suspicion of authorities and might not come from a culture in which co-operation with the police and other authorities is something that they would do. Therefore, we have to overcome barriers that, although they also exist with some victims in other contexts, are considerable in this context. The issue of support is also important.

On the number of prosecutions, only four reports have been made to prosecutors, and we can do no more than consider the cases that come to us. Certainly, there is evidence that an organised crime element is involved in trafficking in Scotland. I think that 3 per cent of those who were identified as being part of a hierarchy of organised crime are involved in human trafficking. There is certainly no complacency, but the reality is that the vast bulk of trafficking activity takes place south of the border, which is why significantly more prosecutions occur down south.

Nonetheless, along with the police and the other relevant agencies, we are alert to the activity that is taking place. The guidance to prosecutors will ensure that they are alert to the need to recognise victims of trafficking not only in the

context of trafficking or prostitution but also in the context of crimes such as domestic abuse or crimes that the victims themselves might have committed. Prosecutors should be aware of the criteria and the indicators that people with whom they deal might be victims of trafficking.

### **Carers and Young Carers Strategies (Implementation Group)**

**6. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on developing the carers and young carers strategies and when the implementation group will be set up. (S3O-11605)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon):** The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities jointly published the carers and young carers strategy on 26 July. We have been discussing issues to do with the implementation group with COSLA, which is our partner in the strategy. Invitations to a range of stakeholders to participate in the group will be issued shortly.

**Des McNulty:** I hope that the minister will join me in repudiating the comments about carers that were reputedly made by the Conservative candidate for Clydesdale, Colin McGavigan.

Carers centres across the country fear that they might face substantial cuts in their budgets, many of which have been at a standstill for three, four or five years. However, those centres are critical to the carers support infrastructure and deliver preventive carers support, which prevents crisis situations from arising. What discussions has the minister had with COSLA since the implementation of the strategy, and how will local authorities' implementation of the strategy be monitored?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** In a rare display of Labour-Scottish National Party unity, I join Des McNulty in repudiating the comments that have been attributed to the Conservative candidate. Carers make a tremendous contribution, often above and beyond the call of any duty, and we should all be extremely grateful to them for that.

I recognise the responsibility that the Government has to carers. I also recognise that we have a considerable way to go to fulfil that responsibility. One of the commitments that the Government set, which was reflected in our concordat with local government, was a commitment to increase the amount of respite care that is available to carers. Although there is still work to do, there is considerable and welcome progress towards meeting that commitment.

Discussions with COSLA are on-going. The strategy is a joint publication, which was approved



by the COSLA convention prior to formal approval by the relevant committees of COSLA. There are 114 action points in the strategy and there will be considerable challenges in taking all those points forward. That is why it is important that we continue to have close co-operation with our local authority partners.

### **School Mergers (Consultation)**

**7. Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what requirements local authorities must meet when consulting on proposed school mergers. (S3O-11618)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** When proposing school mergers, local authorities must undertake a consultation, using the updated and robust processes that are set out in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

**Aileen Campbell:** Is the cabinet secretary aware of plans by South Lanarkshire Council to close and merge a number of rural primary schools in the South of Scotland? Will he confirm that the council is obliged to follow the robust procedures that are set out in the 2010 act, which the Scottish Parliament passed?

Is the cabinet secretary also aware that the council is proposing significant changes to the school day in some secondary schools? What consultations and procedures are councils required to carry out and adhere to on such proposals?

**Michael Russell:** There are statutory requirements in relation to school days and, in particular, the amount of time for which children are taught through the year.

I am aware of South Lanarkshire Council's proposals and I confirm that the council, like every other council, must follow the robust and updated procedures that the Government laid out. There is also guidance under the 2010 act, which is very clear and suggests that, when such matters are being considered, local communities should be encouraged to come forward with ideas and alternatives.

I stress that there should be a process of consultation and dialogue, not of dictation, as South Lanarkshire Council—and every other council in the same situation—moves forward.

**Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Is the cabinet secretary aware that North Lanarkshire Council is considering closing Abrohill nursery school? Will he confirm that, when local authorities are consulting on closures or mergers of nursery schools, they are required to meet the same

improved standards as they must meet when they consult on school closures or mergers?

**Michael Russell:** That consultation would normally have to be undertaken. The general principles also apply.

In the difficult circumstances in which a proposal is made for any closure, it is important that there is a genuine process of consultation, that the process is open and transparent, that the views and representations of parents and the community are taken into account and that alternatives are considered in a constructive and imaginative manner. Those are prerequisites for moving forward.

### **Supported Employment**

**8. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive when a minister last visited a supported employment workshop. (S3O-11585)

**The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Keith Brown):** I had an opportunity to visit Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries on 6 July, where I met staff and employees. RSBI is a successful example of a supported employment workshop that offers training, development and career progression, to benefit people with disabilities and the local economy.

**Helen Eadie:** Will the minister tell the Parliament what state the order books are in for the relatively small number of sheltered workshops in Scotland? Is he aware which workshops have empty order books? What meetings has he convened with ministerial colleagues to address the developing crisis for sheltered workshops throughout Scotland?

**Keith Brown:** I had a chance to listen to some of the debate this morning, when such issues were raised. I acknowledge the genuine commitment and compassion that Helen Eadie has displayed on the matter, in the debate and in discussions with me. I hope that she acknowledges that there is the same commitment on the Government benches. We provide direct funding for some supported employment workshops, in Aberdeen and other areas.

The member asked about orders. Of course, it is not possible for us to provide contracts if we have no requirement for the goods but, in areas in which we have a requirement for goods, we are closely considering whether we can place contracts that will benefit the workshops. That work is continuing.

As was mentioned in the debate, where we can we also use the European Union public procurement directive, in relation to reserving contracts for supported factories. That is helping

the order books of the workshops that Helen Eadie mentioned. I am happy to get back to the member with the other information for which she asked, although that is held by individual workshops.

**The Presiding Officer:** Before we come to the next item of business, I am sure that members will want to join me in welcoming to the gallery the Rwandan high commissioner to the United Kingdom, His Excellency Ernest Rwamucyo, and the deputy high commissioner, Ms Linda Kalimba. *[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-2617)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** Monday will be the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Donald Dewar's death. As that will fall during the recess, I thought that members might like to join me in recognising the vision and intellect of Scotland's first First Minister. *[Applause.]*

As to my duties for the rest of the day, I will be joining the leaders of the other devolved Administrations in speaking up for jobs and families and, by means of a joint declaration, protesting at the depth and ferocity of the coalition's cuts and the threat that they pose to economic recovery.

**Iain Gray:** On behalf of the Labour Party, I thank the First Minister for his kind recollection of Donald Dewar.

The First Minister's rates bombshell is costing the national health service £5 million. NHS Grampian alone will be hit for more than £750,000, but it has a great plan to get back £400,000 of that cost. It is asking nurses to work an extra shift for nothing. In June, those same nurses got a nice letter from Nicola Sturgeon saying

"none of you will 'lose' your job ... it is job security I think you deserve."

She did not mention that they would have to work for nothing to keep their jobs. Does the First Minister think that that is what our nurses deserve?

**The First Minister:** Before talking about the national health service, Iain Gray should check his facts. It is simply not true that nurses in Grampian are being asked to work for nothing. What is true is that when this Administration took office it pledged to spend more on the national health service than the Labour Party, which, it should be remembered, was going to make the NHS cut its cloth. Also, Iain Gray recently declared that he would not guarantee to allocate the Barnett consequential to national health spending in Scotland.

Whatever Labour's position on the national health service, we can be sure that more money will be spent more effectively by this Administration than would be spent by any other party in the chamber.

**Iain Gray:** The First Minister needs to check his facts. What Labour has said about the NHS budgets is identical to what John Swinney has said. There is no difference whatsoever.

I think that the First Minister will find that surgical nurses in Grampian are being asked to work an extra shift and, in return, they are being given unpaid 15-minute breaks throughout their other shifts. In my book, that is being asked to work extra for nothing. I suppose they should be glad of it, because if they accept that proposal they will have jobs. The fact is that the NHS is cutting 4,000 jobs, of which 1,500 are nursing jobs. At the same time, health boards plan to spend £30 million on agency nurses to fill the gaps. Does the First Minister accept that we cannot cut 1,500 nurses from the health service without impacting on patient care?

**The First Minister:** Iain Gray's second question gave away the inaccuracies in his first one. Those nurses will be working the same number of hours for the same salary; that does not sound to me like working for nothing. If Iain Gray was paid per question, nothing would be overpayment for him.

The guarantee that we have given the national health service is clear. There will be no compulsory redundancies in the national health service and more people will be working at the clinical end of the national health service at the end of the current Administration than there were when we took office in 2007. The reason that we are able to give that guarantee is our commitment to pass on the consequentials to protect national health spending in Scotland.

Iain Gray might think that that is inconvenient. I happened to be watching "Newsnight Scotland", when he was asked that very question, and he refused to give that guarantee. If he has changed his mind under the tutelage of Andy Kerr, perhaps he should tell the chamber.

**Iain Gray:** The nurses in Grampian will be delighted to hear that the First Minister believes that they are making up what they have been asked to do because, as far as they are concerned, they are being asked to work more for no more money.

Let us talk about patients and guarantees. Let us talk about Janet Adams, who is living in pain while waiting for surgery in Grampian. Her general practitioner referred her to the orthopaedic clinic on 14 July. The Scottish Government guarantees her an appointment by this week, but she has been offered an appointment by Christmas. She does not have that guarantee. Is the First Minister's NHS waiting time guarantee just another promise that he cannot be bothered keeping?

**The First Minister:** Let us be clear about the start of that question: I would never accuse nurses

in Scotland of giving misleading information; I suggested that Iain Gray was not in command of his facts. The reason why I suggested that is that nurses are not being asked to work extra hours; they are being asked to work for the same salary. Those are the parameters of the NHS Grampian consultation.

Iain Gray should bring forward the facts on individual cases within the national health service and they will be answered case by case. However, let us remember that waiting times in the national health service in Scotland are at an all-time low under this Administration. The reason for that is the record investment that we have made in the NHS in Scotland. The Labour Party did not guarantee such investment at the previous election, which is one of the reasons that it lost in 2007, just as Iain Gray's refusal to guarantee consequentials is a reason that it will lose in 2011.

**Iain Gray:** Here is what the Royal College of Nursing says:

"This change in working arrangements is clearly to the detriment of our hard-working and overstretched members who are bearing the brunt of the cuts that are being made by NHS Grampian."

The First Minister is making it up as he goes along, and so is Nicola Sturgeon. Yesterday, she cancelled a new health centre in Mull and, today, she uncanceled it in a hastily arranged radio interview. John Swinney plundered £5 million from her hospitals while her back was turned. *[Interruption.]* Nurses are being asked to work for nothing. Nursing jobs are being cut and millions wasted on agency replacements. Kirkcaldy accident and emergency—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Order.

**Iain Gray:** Kirkcaldy accident and emergency unit is closed by staff shortages. Procedure rooms in half of Scotland sit idle most of the time. The Scottish Ambulance Service call centre has crashed twice in the past few months. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing is asleep at the wheel. When will the First Minister tell Nicola Sturgeon to get a grip?

**The First Minister:** For the fourth time, I clarify that nurses are not being asked to work for nothing. The terms of the consultation are the same hours for the same salary. It could not be clearer than that. Of course, the quotation that Iain Gray used from the RCN did not allege that nurses were being asked to work for nothing. At some point during or after this question session, he will have to retreat from his position yet again.

I would have thought that Iain Gray would welcome the fact that we are able to go ahead with the capital investment for the health centre on Mull. That seems a good thing to me. We are able

to do that despite the fact that, although we might think that the coalition Government's statement that it would protect real-terms spending on health would include the capital budget and the revenue budget, we have been unable to get any clarity about that over the past few months. The coalition Government's confusion about whether the protection of real-terms spending on health includes the capital budget is similar to Iain Gray's confusion about whether the consequentials would be passed on to the health service in Scotland.

The position with the national health service is that patient satisfaction is at a record high and waiting times are at a record low, thanks to the investment of this Government.

Before Iain Gray talks about accident and emergency, he should remember that if it had been up to the Labour Party, accident and emergency wards would not exist all over Scotland.

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

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

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-2618)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** I have no plans to meet the secretary of state in the near future.

**Annabel Goldie:** Nearly half a million methadone scripts are being given out every year in Scotland. That figure has soared over the past five years. Let us be clear what that means: every minute of every hour in every day, a methadone script is issued in Scotland. Of course methadone can have a role to play for some addicts on their road to recovery, but the BBC reports today that Scottish pharmacists now want that number cut. We know that many addicts never wanted to go on methadone in the first place and many who are on it want off. We simply cannot switch people from an illegal drug and park them on a prescribed one. Does the First Minister agree?

**The First Minister:** The direction of travel in addressing the drugs problem in Scotland has been agreed several times by this Parliament and has carried substantial support throughout the chamber, which I think has been a strength in comparison to the previous situation.

As Annabel Goldie knows, under Fergus Ewing's leadership—this is endorsed by the Parliament—the accent is on recovery. The methadone supervision arrangements are local schemes between NHS boards and certain pharmacies in the area. However, the accent of our approach to the drugs situation in Scotland is to put an emphasis on recovery, as opposed to the prescription of methadone.

**Annabel Goldie:** I welcome the First Minister's commitment to putting recovery at the heart of the strategy. That strategy, to which we both agreed, was a watershed in the approach to drug abuse in Scotland. However, a new strategy and political will are not enough if the change is not being delivered on the ground. The simple truth is that every month 1,000 people join the Scottish drugs misuse database. Put that together with the methadone prescription levels and it is clear that the sea change in policy two and a half years ago has not become a sea change in practice on the ground. Will the First Minister set up an independent review to report to this Parliament on why, for too many addicts, the road to recovery is still not a reality?

**The First Minister:** The role of pharmacists is laid out in the prescription guidelines and the drug misuse and dependence guidelines of clinical management. We will welcome further considerations of those guidelines on the advice of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society.

The Parliament confirmed its endorsement of the Government's direction of travel on 15 September. That has been backed up by record funding for drug treatment, something that Annabel Goldie and others called for and that she will now acknowledge. Health boards have received £28.6 million for front-line drug services in 2010-11—an increase of 20 per cent that exceeds this party's manifesto commitment. That funding is spent on recovery-focused services, in line with the drugs strategy, to help people recover from drug problems.

When we have discussed this issue as a Parliament over the past few years, no one has believed that there is quick and easy answer, but one prerequisite for success in combating the drugs menace in Scotland was to get agreement, unanimity and a collective purpose among politicians. The Parliament has achieved that. Certainly the emphasis should be on delivery. Certainly I am prepared to examine any action that can increase the impact of the direction of travel, but let us not at any price go back to a situation where Scotland's drug problems were used as a political football between political parties as opposed to being treated as a major social problem that we must address collectively.

### **Cabinet (Meetings)**

**3. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-2619)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** The next meeting of the Cabinet will discuss issues of great importance to the people of Scotland.

Tavish Scott should know—I suspect that he will endorse this—that the last meeting of the Cabinet gave particular acknowledgement to the contribution of our Lord Advocate, Elish Angiolini. She has spent 10 years as a law officer, is the first woman to hold the high office of Lord Advocate and is a radical reformer who has made a huge contribution to the Scottish judicial system in her term of office. *[Applause.]*

**Tavish Scott:** I entirely endorse those words and support the theme of the First Minister's acknowledgement of the Lord Advocate's contribution to her role in our judicial system.

Today Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary said that the number of police forces in Scotland should be cut. At the same time, the First Minister's Government has been interfering in chief constable appointments—slowing them down, creating obstacles and getting in the way. The Northern Constabulary is just one example of that.

In July Mr Salmond's spokeswoman said:

"We have no plans to move away from eight police forces but neither do we have a blueprint for policing in the future."

Three months on, a bit nearer the future, does the Government have a blueprint for policing in Scotland?

**The First Minister:** The blueprint for policing in Scotland during the past few years has been to have a record number of officers on our streets, a 32 per cent reduction in the crime rate and historic record clear-up rates for crime in Scotland. That is a particularly effective demonstration of the implementation of justice in Scotland.

I know from Tavish Scott's questions in previous weeks that he has focused his concern on the importance of local police boards. For most people, however, the measurement of the effectiveness of the police service is the visibility of a police presence on our streets—we did not get the Liberal Democrats' support for moving in that direction—and the record fall in crime rates in Scotland, which is partially a result of that effective instrument.

People look upon crime and the approach to crime in terms of the record on delivery. That is hugely important to people, and perhaps more important than the precise organisation and number of police boards in Scotland.

**Tavish Scott:** That is a pretty clear illustration of what will happen if the Scottish National Party continues. I do not believe that having a single police force for Scotland will reduce crime or improve the detection of criminal activity.

On the First Minister's point about delivery, Northern Constabulary solves two thirds of crime in its area, while some areas do not manage to solve half of the crime in theirs. A single chief constable for Scotland would know that he or she owes their contract and their future entirely to the justice minister. It will be a highly political post and a highly political appointment. Such a police chief would never be out of the justice secretary's office, and would never be in the local communities that he or she should be serving.

The conveners of the police boards for Northern Constabulary and Grampian Police are against the centralisation. The north, the north east and the south west will not be well served if the police force is centralised and run from Glasgow.

The First Minister is also a north-east MSP. Will he today rule out a single police force for Scotland, which his local police board opposes?

**The First Minister:** I am in discussion with partners in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, and that is how the work is being carried forward.

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** Will you rule it out?

**The First Minister:** Before Tavish Scott rejects any proposals for change, let us look at the work by ACPOS, which indicates for the first time that—

**Mike Rumbles:** You will not rule it out.

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Rumbles.

**The First Minister:** —around 25 per cent of the policing budget is spent on headquarters functions across the eight forces.

**Mike Rumbles:** Will you answer the question?

**The First Minister:** At a time of huge pressure on public spending, is it not appropriate that, with our partners in COSLA and the chief constables, we look at whether that figure can be cut so that we can continue to protect the front line of policing? That seems to me to be a reasonable position.

All that I will say to the sedentary interjections from Mr Rumbles is that if he is so convinced—

**Mike Rumbles:** You were asked to rule it out.

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Rumbles, I warn you.

**The First Minister:** —that the Liberal Democrats have the right approach to policing, why are his colleagues south of the border consulting on abolishing police boards and introducing police commissioners on the American model? Is that just another sign that the Liberal Democrats are saying one thing in office south of

the border and another thing in opposition north of the border?

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Rumbles, I am aware of your discomfort but, as the first Presiding Officer used to say, this is question time, not necessarily answer time.

#### **National Health Service (Alcoholic Parents)**

**4. Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is regarding the claim by Children 1<sup>st</sup> that the NHS is not doing enough to tackle drinking among the alcoholic parents of 80,000 children. (S3F-2622)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** The Government recognises the serious toll that alcohol misuse by parents and carers takes on our children. One child affected is one too many, which is why we have outlined a package of bold measures that seek to address the problem.

We are working to improve support services for those children and families who are already affected by parental substance misuse. That has been backed by a record investment of almost £100 million in those services.

It is crucial that we prevent problems from arising in the first place. Alcohol awareness week—which runs until Sunday—and alcohol brief interventions can help people to make better decisions about their drinking for their own and their children's benefit.

The national health service is tackling alcohol abuse in Scotland, but public services cannot manage the problem alone. It is time that members in the Parliament took a stand and supported all the provisions in the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill.

**Ian McKee:** I share the First Minister's concern about the adverse effects that excess parental consumption of alcohol has on dependent children. I also share the opinion that the problem of alcohol in this society cannot be dealt with by the national health service alone; that price is the major factor; and that the health of adults and children would be greatly enhanced if opposition parties agreed to support minimum unit pricing, which has the overwhelming support of professionals in the field. Does the First Minister agree?

**The First Minister:** Over the past two years, the health service has made 82,000 alcohol brief interventions to help those drinking at hazardous and harmful levels to cut down. In his question, Ian McKee mentioned Children 1<sup>st</sup>. Given that some members on the opposition benches in the chamber do not appear to like the direction of my

answer, I should point out that on minimum unit pricing that organisation said:

"we welcome minimum pricing as one means to begin to address parental alcohol misuse. We believe that minimum pricing will represent a step towards reducing heavy drinking by parents, currently a common feature of children's lives."

Children 1<sup>st</sup>, like the variety of professional, expert and compassionate opinion in Scotland, supported the Government's direction of travel. What a pity that some members of this chamber failed that challenge.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Children 1<sup>st</sup> has also suggested intervention in early years to help parents deal with their substance abuse and to prevent children from entering the cycle of abuse. Does the First Minister agree that, if we are to protect the children of drug and alcohol-abusing parents in Scotland, we need more health visitors providing a consistent service to all families and focusing on those in need?

**The First Minister:** I know that everyone in the chamber supports the work that health visitors carry out the length and breadth of Scotland and that we would all like to be in a public spending situation that would allow further investment to be made. However, the member should remember that the roll-out of alcohol brief interventions was designed to ensure that early interventions were made to help people to reduce their drinking before it became a serious problem. Although we all aspire to improving public services, members of parties that are moving in the opposite direction will at some stage have to recognise that calls for public investment are incompatible with measures to reduce spending.

**Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD):** Does the First Minister agree that part of the problem of excess parental consumption of alcohol might be down to the fact that only 15 per cent of Scots can estimate correctly the number of alcohol units in a normal-strength bottle of wine?

**The First Minister:** That is a very reasonable point. Indeed, that is why we must put our efforts into providing information and spreading the message throughout society.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** The First Minister will have our support when he suggests action that is effective and legal. Minimum unit pricing is not the key issue. Does he agree that the biggest problem is that, contrary to what he outlined, very little has been done since the publication by the previous Scottish Executive of "Hidden Harm" to identify children living with parents who are addicted to drugs or alcohol? Does he also agree that instead of simply estimating the numbers he needs to take action to

find out where those children are and what intervention is required with a degree more urgency that he has displayed?

**The First Minister:** I refer to the 82,000 early interventions that the health service has carried out to identify and confront problem drinking before it becomes a problem and also point out that among the many organisations and people who supported the Government's approach to minimum unit pricing was Tam Baillie, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People.

I know how the Labour Party chooses to interpret its failure to support a key social policy that would have done a lot of good in Scotland in a whole variety of ways. However, I say to the member that it is extraordinary to claim that pricing is not an issue in alcohol consumption, to refuse to support measures to reduce consumption through pricing and to oppose any move to give this Parliament any powers over, for example, excise duties that would allow us to address the issue in other ways. Such a position is extraordinary and will be to the eternal shame of the Labour Party in Scotland.

#### Rate Revaluation (Successful Appeals)

**5. Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what percentage of business rate appeals was successful after the 2005 revaluation and how many the Scottish Government expects to be successful this year. (S3F-2634)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** Successful business rate appeals after the 2005 revaluation reduced the rateable values of those who appealed by just under 4 per cent. Appeals that are lodged following the 2010 revaluation will be dealt with in a timely manner and must be disposed of by the valuation appeals committees before December 2013, although in practice the vast majority will be resolved through negotiation with the assessors before that date.

Since the 2005 revaluation, we have introduced groundbreaking measures to support Scottish businesses. The latest figures show that, under the Government's measures, almost half of all properties in Scotland, particularly in the small business sector, pay no business rates at all.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I thank the First Minister, although I did not ask him by how much the rates bill had been reduced. I asked him what percentage of businesses had been successful in appeals. Perhaps he will reply in due course to that question, of which he had notice.

Does the First Minister agree with the comments of the deputy assessor at Grampian valuation joint board that the 40 per cent increase in appeals this year reflects the fact that many small businesses

no longer benefit from rates relief because of this year's revaluation? Does he acknowledge that 86,000 businesses are worse off? Will he now, finally, respond to the calls from the chambers of commerce and many small firms up and down the country for the Government to provide transitional relief for the businesses that are worst affected?

**The First Minister:** Sixty four thousand small businesses throughout Scotland no longer pay business rates. If it had been up to the Labour Party, that figure would be zero, since Lewis Macdonald opposed the small business bonus scheme.

On the precise ability to cope with appeals, I have been doing a little bit of research into a little bit of history, and I have been looking in particular at Aberdeen. It is true that there has been a sharp rise in appeals against valuations this year, but I have compared it with the 2000 valuation, when Lewis Macdonald was the planning minister and, lo and behold, in Aberdeen there were 4,221 appeals against the revaluation in 2000 compared with 3,645 this year. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**The First Minister:** Why is that the case, one wonders? Of course, back in 2000, when the Labour Party was in office, there was no small business bonus scheme, so many more people in small businesses were forced to pay rates. There was no renewables rates relief, for example, and the rural scheme was inadequate compared with what it is now.

However, the key feature of the situation when Lewis Macdonald was the planning minister is that the poundage rate in Scotland in 2000 was 45.8p compared with the English level of 41.6p. Under the current Administration the Scottish and English poundage rates have been equalised, which means that every business in Scotland has received that benefit and that bonus.

#### Managed Diagnostic Imaging Clinical Network (Emergency Teams)

**6. Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking in response to the report by the managed diagnostic imaging clinical network showing that specialist emergency teams are not on call in many major hospitals. (S3F-2627)

**The First Minister (Alex Salmond):** The Scottish Government commissioned the review and welcomes the report, which describes the many areas of good practice in radiology. It also points to the opportunities for national health service boards to collaborate in providing out-of-hours care for such specialist treatment. We

expect NHS boards and clinicians to take the report into account in planning their services.

**Jamie Stone:** Half of Scots who suffer internal bleeding have no out-of-hours access to state-of-the-art interventional radiology treatment. Doctors have warned that dozens of patients are dying because 10 health boards, including NHS Highland, fail to provide that service out of hours. Hospitals have been fitted with specialist treatment rooms, yet many of them are sitting unused outside normal hours. Given that such medical emergencies affect about 7,000 Scots every year, will the First Minister assure me that he is doing everything in his power to end the postcode lottery of access to potentially life-saving treatment?

**The First Minister:** I say again that we commissioned the review and we welcome the report. Jamie Stone should be careful before taking press reports at face value.

Dr Iain Robertson, lead clinician on the managed diagnostic imaging clinical network, and one of the report's authors, has said:

"The recent press article misrepresents the report content and purpose. It would be a great pity if this article was to impair the collaborative work that we should undertake to further improve access to this service."

It is not just a commitment on radiology in the future that I can give to Jamie Stone; I can tell him what has happened over the past few years. At March 2009, NHS Scotland spent £230 million on radiology services compared with £178 million in 2007—an increase of 22 per cent.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I return the First Minister to the report and quote the following:

"We could not within the report, and should not make any estimate of mortality for centres without formal access as a number of potential outcomes could occur including successful conservative management, provision of an ad hoc/informal service or transfer to a neighbouring centre."

Does the First Minister agree that the headline in *Scotland on Sunday* that said "Patients dying", was, to put it politely, not only misleading but scaremongering?

**The First Minister:** I refer again to what one of the report's authors said about the newspaper report. We commissioned that report precisely because we wanted to see where improvements could be made. The thrust of the report is about using skilled staff and equipment imaginatively, but working across traditional health board boundaries to provide out-of-hours care in an improved fashion. The report recognises that after the increases in expenditure on radiology the issue is not fundamentally one of resource and that access could be improved without major resource investment. It was precisely to get that sort of informed dialogue and information that we

commissioned the report. We welcome the report's findings, albeit not all the press coverage that surrounded them.

12:31

*Meeting suspended until 14:15.*



14:15

*On resuming—*

## Scottish Executive Question Time

### Finance and Sustainable Growth

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan):** Question 1 was not lodged.

#### High-speed Rail

**2. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to support a high-speed rail link to Scotland. (S3O-11644)

**The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson):** The Scottish Government has pressed and will continue to press Scotland's case for inclusion in a United Kingdom high-speed rail network. We are actively engaging in discussions with the UK Government to that end.

**Robert Brown:** Does the minister agree that the northern section of the high-speed rail link from Manchester to Glasgow and Edinburgh provides by far the best return on investment—the cost benefit ratio is around 7.6 to 1—because of the huge potential for modal shift from air to rail?

Can the minister enlighten us on the responsibilities that the Scottish Government has for supporting the project in Scotland? What steps has the Government taken, particularly since the debate in May, to scope the work at this end and to ensure that the option of starting the work from Glasgow, in parallel or association with the development from London, is firmly on the table?

**Stewart Stevenson:** I endorse absolutely what Robert Brown said in relation to the importance of the northern part of the HS2 network. Frankly, if the line does not come all the way to Scotland, the economic return and—fundamentally—the climate change impact that can be derived from getting people off planes and on to trains are much diminished. Of about 7 million journeys a year, just over 1 million are by train; most of the remaining journeys are by air. We have, of course, had input in the HS2 study. I will meet the UK Minister of State for Transport, Theresa Villiers, on 4 November, and this is one of the subjects that we will discuss.

Scottish ministers' powers are, strictly, to let the franchise for the ScotRail area; we are, of course, also responsible for investment in the infrastructure. We carry some responsibility, but we must work with colleagues south of the border

to ensure a consistent and cohesive way forward. I share absolutely Robert Brown's aspirations.

### Youth Unemployment

**3. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth has met the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to discuss tackling youth unemployment. (S3O-11581)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** I have done so. Tackling youth unemployment is a high priority for the Scottish Government. I keep regularly in touch with Cabinet colleagues as we continue to take forward action to ensure that young people have the skills that they need for future employment. Most recently, we focused on summer leavers—from school, college and university—and agreed a £6.5 million package of additional support.

**Rhona Brankin:** The cabinet secretary may be aware of recent Scottish Trades Union Congress analysis of unemployment figures that shows that the number of young people claiming jobseekers allowance for six months or more in Scotland has risen by 33 per cent in the past year. The same analysis shows a very worrying rise in my constituency of Midlothian of 95 per cent over the same period. Given that young people in my constituency are less likely to go into higher or further education than young people elsewhere in the country, I am concerned that the situation may get even worse. In order to avoid denying a whole generation opportunity, what plans does the Scottish Government have for targeted support for areas such as Midlothian, where youth unemployment is rapidly rising?

**John Swinney:** I am aware of the STUC report to which Rhona Brankin refers, which is a thorough analysis of this challenge. She raises important concerns on behalf of her constituents.

Through the summer leavers initiative in particular, the Government is trying to recognise the fact that particular points in the calendar and—the data point us in this direction—areas of the country are more susceptible to unemployment. The summer leavers initiative was designed to accept the principle that targeted action is required and to focus action where it can provide the greatest opportunities for young people.

I will be happy to consider any suggestions that Rhona Brankin has in relation to the situation in Midlothian. Through the services that have been put in place by the Government, the work of Skills Development Scotland and the activities of the college network, people in Midlothian will have access to a range of different opportunities.

However, if there are specific gaps in the range of support that is available, I would be happy to consider those, as, I am sure, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning would be.

**Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD):** Can the cabinet secretary clarify the situation with regard to winter leavers and access to colleges? How many places are there? What capacity is available in the college sector to address the challenges of winter leavers?

**John Swinney:** Our recognition of the summer leavers issue shows that we recognise that there will be certain points in the calendar when the challenge in finding appropriate destinations for young people who are leaving school, college or university becomes more acute. An interesting fact about the summer leavers activity is that we put in place capacity that was not fully utilised—we overprovided in terms of the scale of the problem that we expected. I hope that Mr O'Donnell will be reassured that we have taken measures to tackle the issue and that, from the information that is currently available to me, we appear to have achieved that in the summer.

We will, of course, prepare for the different stages in the calendar when the problem might become more acute. Decisions on further provision in the years beyond 2010-11 will be influenced by the conclusions of the spending review. Nevertheless, I am confident that we have opportunities available in the current financial year to deal with the challenges that we may face.

#### **Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route**

**4. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive on what date it estimates that work is likely to commence on the construction of the Aberdeen western peripheral route. (S3O-11578)

**The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson):** As we have made clear on a number of occasions, the legal challenges submitted to the Court of Session have already caused significant delay to the construction of the Aberdeen western peripheral route. We remain totally committed to delivering the project and to its being completed as soon as possible, but we have no alternative but to wait for the outcome of the appeals before substantial progress can be made on that much-needed project.

**Richard Baker:** Does the minister agree that the delays to the commencement of construction of the western peripheral route have made it all the more important to address congestion in Aberdeen by not delaying other important transport improvements, including the

improvements at the Haudagain roundabout? The minister has said that that work should not begin before the western peripheral route is completed. Why is that approach necessary?

**Stewart Stevenson:** The member will know that we have identified the nature of the intervention for the Haudagain roundabout and that we are continuing to make the necessary preparations. One of the issues in relation to the Haudagain roundabout is the fact that the major contribution to relieving congestion at that part of Aberdeen's road network will be the opening of the Aberdeen western peripheral route itself. For reasons of good use of public funds, we want to draw together a range of transport interventions in Aberdeen in a single funding package. To proceed in any other way would significantly increase the costs and create a range of difficulties in the current—and, indeed, any other—climate.

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** I wrote to the minister on 1 February, asking whether he would consider including the A90/A937 junction redevelopment in the contracts for the AWPR. A reply from David Middleton contains the line:

"As the statutory procedures have still not been completed, it is too early to say whether or not any new elements could be included in the procurement process."

Eight months later, is it still "too early to say"?

**Stewart Stevenson:** We are seeking to bring together a range of transport interventions in one large package that will give us economies of scale. Subject to approval being granted, those will include the Balmedie-Tipperty intervention, a number of park-and-ride facilities, the Haudagain roundabout and the AWPR. However, as we have not yet moved to a position of financial close on a range of projects, we are in a position to achieve further economies of scale by looking at other opportunities.

#### **Public Authorities (Island Areas)**

**5. Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it is giving to bringing about closer working between local authorities and national health service boards and other public authorities in island areas. (S3O-11617)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** Following my meeting with the conveners and chief executives of councils in the Highlands and Islands on 27 May, my officials have been liaising with the Highlands and Islands group of councils to clarify the key issues and challenges in sharing service provision across sectors. In particular, the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities are actively supporting

efforts by health boards and local authorities to develop better joint working arrangements. The development of an integrated resource framework will enable partners to make better use of existing resources to deliver new models of care locally. I understand that Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and NHS Western Isles have already completed the first stage of that process by mapping out their current models of service provision. That work will continue to develop.

**Alasdair Allan:** The cabinet secretary is clearly aware of the arguments for still closer working between health boards and local authorities. Does he agree that there is a particularly strong case for that among island authorities, where the replication of bureaucracy between two bodies with coterminous boundaries is often not in the interest of service users?

**John Swinney:** There is significant merit in Dr Allan's point. In my previous answer, I mentioned the focus on the integrated resource framework, which assists in trying to bring together the working priorities of the relevant public bodies. Particularly in island communities, opportunities exist to find ways of encouraging and enhancing joint working, which is of course to be welcomed. The Government will continue to support that process and to work with our public sector partners on achieving integration that focuses services on the needs of individuals and delivers better outcomes for those individuals.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Of our three island communities, Orkney seems to be leading the way on closer working between local authorities and NHS boards, with the setting up of Orkney health and care in April this year. Given that governance arrangements in the NHS are different from those in councils, will the cabinet secretary work with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing to support Orkney health and care to overcome what are seen as serious obstacles?

**John Swinney:** Inevitably, in such processes, obstacles can emerge in the working practices and accountability directions of different public bodies. I assure Mary Scanlon that the health secretary and I are actively supporting all that joint working. It is important that we ensure that we deliver the approach that I set out in my second answer to Dr Allan, which is about focusing on the achievement of better outcomes for individuals. That should drive the approach that public bodies take.

Often, when I am involved in discussion on those questions, governance issues are portrayed as insuperable obstacles. In my experience, I have seen much invention and innovation at the local level that has overcome some of the challenges. I am certainly prepared to consider any suggestions that would help in that process.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 6 has been withdrawn.

### **Council Tax Freeze (2011-12)**

**7. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on supporting a council tax freeze in 2011-12. (S3O-11571)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government's clear preference is to extend the council tax freeze for a further year in 2011-12. Following the independent budget review, we are discussing the issue with our local authority partners and other stakeholders.

**Murdo Fraser:** The cabinet secretary should be clear that, in that ambition, he will have the support of the Scottish Conservatives. Does he agree that, as hard-working families across Scotland struggle with the consequences of Labour's recession, they would welcome a council tax freeze for a further year? Will he join me in condemning a Labour Party that is determined to hit those hard-working families with punishing council tax increases at a time when they can least afford to pay them?

**John Swinney:** I am not sure that I would venture on to such party-political ground on such a harmonious Thursday afternoon in the city of Edinburgh and our national Parliament. However, there is some substance in Mr Fraser's remark, which is a pleasant change.

One of the other issues with which members of the public are wrestling is the question of increased VAT, which, if my memory serves me correctly, was a product of the decision making of the Conservative-Liberal coalition in the United Kingdom Government.

The council tax freeze has been of enormous benefit to members of the public. It has protected them from the exponential increases in the council tax that took place under the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrat-Labour Executives. Thankfully, the council tax has been frozen since this Government came into office in 2007.

**David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab):** I was goaded into getting to my feet by Mr Fraser, whose knowledge of international economics could be written on the back of a stamp. As we all know, it was not Labour's recession; there was a global recession.

As far as council tax goes, we should not be surprised at the unholy alliance that is now emerging between the Tories and the Scottish National Party, because we are getting into budget negotiation time and that is usually what happens.

What does the cabinet secretary say to members of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, including SNP councillors, who are urging him to drop the council tax freeze?

**John Swinney:** I am always intrigued by Mr Whitton's assessment of the unholy alliances that exist. The last time I looked, in East Dunbartonshire Council—[*Interruption.*] I think that my friends in the Liberal Democrats know where I am going here. In East Dunbartonshire Council—

**Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP):** And Inverclyde Council.

**John Swinney:** I am always grateful for help from the back benches. In East Dunbartonshire Council—the council area for which Mr Whitton is a member of Parliament—there is an unholy alliance between the Labour Party and the Conservatives in freezing out the SNP from the administration.

There are many examples of the necessity of political co-operation in this new political world that we all occupy.

I say to Mr Whitton that I am discussing the issue of a council tax freeze with our local authority partners and will continue to do so.

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** Has the Scottish Government carried out an estimate of who has gained most from the council tax freeze—families in the lowest income decile or families in the highest income decile?

**John Swinney:** Mr Purvis will know that we have published much analysis on that point. All citizens who pay the council tax will have appreciated that the council tax has not increased at all since this Government came to power—the citizens and council tax payers of Scotland will have welcomed that.

#### **Indoor White-water Rafting (Edinburgh Waterfront)**

**8. Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Executive, further to its decision to support tax increment financing for developments on Edinburgh's waterfront, whether it is aware of the plan by XStream Scotland to build the world's first indoor white-water rafting facility there. (S30-11575)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government is aware of plans by XStream Scotland to build an indoor white-water facility within the Edinburgh waterfront area.

Scottish ministers gave provisional approval last week to the City of Edinburgh Council to progress its tax increment financing proposal for Edinburgh

waterfront, subject to Parliament being content. The council will use the TIF model to fund £84 million of public infrastructure that it believes is vital to kick-start the necessary commercial development. The infrastructure planned by the council includes a new link road, pier and esplanade, which could deliver £660 million of private investment.

**Margo MacDonald:** I thank the cabinet secretary for his reply, but he did not talk about the white-water rafting facility and its direct relationship to the money that has been promised. However, I simply seek an assurance that the business plan for that world-class water sports facility will be considered on its merits, in relation to several Government policies around health and outdoor sport. Will the cabinet secretary investigate whether his department, or whichever department is more appropriate, can arrange a meeting with all interested parties—Forth Ports, the City of Edinburgh Council, sportscotland and so on—to ensure that this national, state-of-the-art facility does not slip through our fingers?

**John Swinney:** I mentioned my knowledge of the white-water facility in my original answer. I have some detailed knowledge of white-water rafting, based on the level of activity that is undertaken in my constituency—outdoors, I might add—by the white-water rafting fraternity. If Margo MacDonald wants to suggest a group day out white-water rafting on the River Tay or the River Tummel, she need only lodge a parliamentary question to me.

It is clear that there are many opportunities for development on the Edinburgh waterfront, and I hope that the Government's provisional approval of the TIF proposal will open up a new flexibility for the city council to maximise the economic opportunities that exist.

I would be happy to discuss with Margo MacDonald some of her questions regarding XStream Scotland. I understand that the facility has been suggested as a private development, and we will consider any relevant issues that arise in that regard. I stress, however, that the TIF model opens up new opportunities for the city of Edinburgh to further realise its economic potential, and I am delighted that it has taken such an opportunity to develop new ways to move forward.

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab):** Does the cabinet secretary recognise that the completion of the tram project is vital for developments on Edinburgh's waterfront, and in west Edinburgh as Tesco Bank acknowledged in a statement last week? Will he consider the use of TIF as an important tool for plugging any funding shortfall that may arise in completing the route to Newhaven?

**John Swinney:** As I said in my previous answer, the TIF proposal that the council presented to me focuses on the development of new public infrastructure, which will undoubtedly assist in the development of the waterfront.

Mr Chisholm is familiar with my perspective on the tram project. I have at all stages encouraged the resolution of the disputes that present an obstacle to the project's completion, and I hope that all parties will take that approach in resolving those questions.

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** Will the cabinet secretary give us an idea of which other councils have approached him about the use of TIF schemes? What progress has been made in Aberdeen on the city's TIF plans?

**John Swinney:** I will not give an exhaustive list of the authorities with which I have discussed TIF as there have been quite a number. However, I can confirm that Aberdeen City Council has expressed a desire to progress that approach, and we will ensure that its proposal is given due consideration.

#### **Infrastructure Projects (Community Benefit)**

**9. Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what actions it has taken to ensure that large-scale infrastructure projects benefit workers in local communities. (S3O-11636)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** In February 2008, the Scottish Government published a report and guidance on the use of community benefit clauses in public procurement. Those clauses are now being used in a variety of infrastructure projects to deliver wider social benefits, including targeted recruitment and training, and opportunities for social enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises.

**Stuart McMillan:** The cabinet secretary will be aware that we have discussed community benefit clauses before. In Inverclyde, three groups of organisations—the urban regeneration company, the local authority and housing associations—have such clauses in their infrastructure projects. However, this week yet another constituent—who is a joiner—told me that he has been unemployed for two years and just cannot get a job.

Much of the work that is going on benefits people outside the Inverclyde area. What more can be done to strengthen or further utilise the community benefit clauses to ensure that local people in the communities where the work is taking place benefit from them?

**John Swinney:** I understand Mr McMillan's perspective, and we have discussed the subject

on a number of occasions. As I said in my previous answer, we have put the concept of community benefit clauses into our procurement regulations and guidance. That is a helpful step, as it structures the way in which individual projects can be progressed and benefits can be obtained for local communities.

I assure Mr McMillan that we will take every opportunity in promoting the Government's procurement guidance to stress the advantages of community benefit clauses, and we will actively ensure that they are included in our public procurement contracts.

#### **Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Transmission Charging Review)**

**10. Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the Ofgem transmission charging review and the potential outcomes. (S3O-11639)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather):** Scotland has some of the best renewable energy resources in Europe. I therefore welcome the review of charging, which the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets announced in Glasgow on 22 September. The review shows that Ofgem is starting to listen to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament, which has also backed the call for an independent review.

We have had significant consultation and discussion already in Scotland on transmission charging, including the publication of our alternative approach and the options for change. It is critical that those efforts be factored into the review. The review must deliver a fairer charging system as well as fundamental and lasting change that will help to deliver Scotland's energy future.

**Maureen Watt:** Does the minister believe that a situation in which electricity suppliers in north-east Scotland face some of the highest transmission charges in the United Kingdom is incompatible with promoting renewable energy? Does he also believe that Ofgem's current practices must change if we are to reach our ambitious climate change targets?

**Jim Mather:** Yes, I agree. Generators in the north-east are being charged £20 per kilowatt hour in comparison with a subsidy of £5.87 per kilowatt hour in south-west England. Scottish generators, which, on the whole, produce 12 per cent of UK generation, are paying 40 per cent of UK transmission charges, which is about £100 million a year more than their fair share.

We have to work with Ofgem to ensure that we have everything aligned to optimise our low-carbon ambitions and to allow the renewable energy sector to fulfil its remarkable potential.

Ofgem essentially must be aligned with Scotland, its Government, its developers, its utilities, its communities, its economy and the ambitious carbon targets. The status quo is not an option.

#### **Underdeveloped Commercial and Industrial Land (Urban Areas)**

**11. Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it has taken to encourage better use of underdeveloped commercial and industrial land in urban areas. (S3O-11629)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** We have invested more than £90 million in urban regeneration companies since 2007, supporting the delivery of transformational projects in key regeneration areas across Scotland. Since 2008, we have invested £36.6 million through the vacant and derelict land fund, providing five of the most affected local authorities with the means to de-risk development within their boundaries.

This year, we set up a £50 million joint European support for sustainable investment in city areas fund; JESSICA is an innovative new European funding model that will capture and recycle development gain and lever in significant new public and private co-investment to support urban regeneration. As I mentioned previously, I recently announced our backing for the first tax increment financing pilot that is being used to support development at Edinburgh's waterfront project.

We have been working closely with public and private sector partners to determine the causes of obstacles to development and supporting infrastructure. We will issue a report on our findings and next steps later in the year.

**Bill Kidd:** I thank the cabinet secretary for his very full reply. Is he aware of the desolate situation at Drumchapel shopping centre in Glasgow? Apart from a small supermarket, the centre now has only one limited row of shops for a population of more than 9,000. That requires local residents to make bus journeys to get to any sizeable shopping centre; in an area of generally low average incomes, that is a considerable financial strain. Will the Scottish Government look into helping facilitate partnership development with the current owners of the site?

**John Swinney:** I will certainly examine the issue that Mr Kidd raises and determine whether there is any way in which the Government or its agencies can assist in bringing together parties to try to encourage development. We clearly have a range of different interventions in place to support regeneration in urban communities. The issue that

Mr Kidd raises is worthy of further examination to determine whether more can be done.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 12 has been withdrawn.

#### **Tax-varying Powers**

**13. George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what consideration it has given to using the Scottish Parliament's tax-varying powers to increase revenue. (S3O-11587)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** We made it clear at the outset of this Administration that we did not intend to use the income tax-varying powers available under the Scotland Act 1998. That has remained our position since.

The Government believes that Scotland needs the full range of economic levers, including meaningful powers relating to taxation and borrowing, to enable us to help the Scottish economy grow and to put forward an alternative to the decade of spending cuts that is proposed by the United Kingdom Government.

**George Foulkes:** I remind the cabinet secretary that the SNP is in power here. Circumstances have changed since it was elected. He and his ministers have constantly been moaning about a lack of powers to raise extra funds, yet those powers exist. They were the subject of the second question in the referendum. I ask him once again—I have tried before—to explain to the Parliament why he is afraid to start the process that would raise funds that could provide much-needed revenue and capital expenditure for the Government.

**John Swinney:** I reassure Lord Foulkes that I am afraid of absolutely nothing. The question is, what is the appropriate step to take in relation to taxation decisions that affect the population of Scotland? As I said in my answer to Mr Fraser, the population in Scotland is facing significant increases in taxation as a consequence of the economic situation that we face. If Lord Foulkes's answer to that is to put more and more taxation on the shoulders of—

**George Foulkes:** What is the cabinet secretary's answer?

**John Swinney:** Lord Foulkes asks what my answer is. He got my answer a moment ago but he did not like it. I am now telling him what the flaws are in his argument and his answer. Piling income tax increases on top of council tax increases and VAT increases would result only in Lord Foulkes coming to the chamber and moaning about the burden on hard-pressed families. We will not put a burden on hard-pressed families in Scotland.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary is aware that a tax increase of 3p in the pound under the tax-varying powers would cost taxpayers on £30,000 a year an additional £676 a year. Although that might not be a lot to Lord George Foulkes, it would certainly be a lot to most ordinary families. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that, together with Labour's plans to scrap the council tax freeze, represents a double whammy for middle-income families that are already hit hard by Labour's recession?

**John Swinney:** Mr Gibson makes a number of fair points about the stance that Lord Foulkes has explained to the Parliament. I reiterate that we must recognise the economic and financial circumstances of individual citizens in our country, given some of the other tax decisions that the United Kingdom Government has taken. When we add that to the challenges that we face on public expenditure, the course of action that Lord Foulkes suggests seems to me to be a damaging one for the people of Scotland.

#### **Co-operative Sector**

**14. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what the estimated value is of the co-operative sector to the economy. (S3O-11582)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government recognises the importance of co-operative enterprises in contributing to the growth of the Scottish economy and providing jobs and wealth across Scotland, but also in bringing a wide range of social benefits to our local communities. Recent research that was commissioned by Co-operative Development Scotland shows that co-operatives in Scotland employ some 28,000 people and generate an annual turnover of just over £4 billion.

**Bill Butler:** I thank the cabinet secretary for his fearless answer. Given the huge economic, social and cultural importance of the co-operative sector to the country and the unique role that Scotland has played in the development of the sector via both the Fenwick weavers and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation world heritage site at New Lanark, will the cabinet secretary inform the Parliament how the Government plans to play its part in the UN international year of the co-operative, which is scheduled for 2012?

**John Swinney:** First, I acknowledge Bill Butler's long-standing interest in the role of co-operatives in our society. I add the comment that, in terms of the business models and corporate structures that exist in our country today, we are at a moment when the co-operative structure has a great deal to contribute to the decisions that we may take in

the years to come, recognising the values that the co-operative movement brings of sharing activity and working together within communities and sectors to deliver the greatest benefits that we can possibly create.

Mr Butler is correct in referring to the UN international year of co-operatives in 2012. We would look to Co-operative Development Scotland to structure any participation in the year. It is rather early to provide precise details, but I assure Mr Butler that CDS will be involved in that planning. If there are particular contributions that he wishes to make to that process, I am sure that they will be warmly welcomed.

#### **Fossil Fuel Levy**

**15. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in securing the fossil fuel levy moneys held by HM Treasury. (S3O-11625)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** I recently discussed access to the fossil fuel levy with Treasury ministers both at a finance quadrilateral meeting on 15 September and in my meeting with the Secretary of State for Scotland on 27 September. I also wrote to the chief secretary on 30 September to press for the early release of those funds in a way that is additional to the Scottish budget.

**Kenneth Gibson:** Does the cabinet secretary agree that if the coalition Government wishes to retain even a shred of credibility regarding its respect agenda, it must return that money to Scotland to boost jobs and investment in our renewables sector?

**John Swinney:** It would be a helpful intervention if the United Kingdom Government were to find the means of releasing that resource to be deployed in support of renewables development in Scotland. By statute, the resources in the fossil fuel levy must be used to support renewables development. As has been demonstrated over many months and years, Scotland has a fantastic opportunity in the area and the United Kingdom Government has the capability to take a decision that would be to the long-term benefit of investment in the Scottish economy. I assure Mr Gibson that that objective has been at the heart of my interventions in all my discussions with the United Kingdom Government.

**George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab):** Does the cabinet secretary recall that both he and the First Minister said in June that they confidently expected the new coalition Government to agree to release that money? Yet, we are now in October and despite all his meetings, letters and persuasion, we are not getting it. Why, does he

think, has the coalition Government been so obdurate and why has it not accepted his arguments?

**John Swinney:** In fairness to the coalition Government ministers, they are not the first ministers whom I have contacted on the subject. The one thing I will say about the current coalition Government is that at least it is prepared to talk about the issue in a meaningful fashion. I could produce for Lord Foulkes reams of correspondence. He might paper the walls of his Parliament office—if that were permitted—with the letters that I sent to the previous Government asking it to take steps on the fossil fuel levy moneys.

It is only reasonable to ask ministers in the United Kingdom Government to take that step. It is equally reasonable to ask them to consider the matter fully, properly and timeously. I hope that United Kingdom Government ministers will take that decision in the comprehensive spending review, which is when they advised me that they would consider the issue. My confidence in that respect is strong, because there is no decent reason why that resource should not be made available to support renewables development in Scotland in addition to our departmental expenditure limit.

#### Renewable Heat Incentive

**16. Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what representations ministers have made to the United Kingdom Government regarding the renewable heat incentive. (S3O-11621)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather):** In July I wrote to the UK energy minister, Charles Hendry, to stress the need for a renewable heat incentive to support the development of the sector and to help achieve our renewable heat and wider climate change targets.

In addition, officials continue to liaise with the Department of Energy and Climate Change to ensure that Scottish interests are fully represented in the design of the renewable heat incentive, given that we have worked so hard with DECC and others to prepare the ground for it in Scotland.

**Nigel Don:** The minister will be aware that it is difficult to overstate the importance of incentives in promoting the growth of renewable energy and that we have a huge opportunity, not merely for manufacturers but for installers and those who train and accredit them. Can the minister give me some encouragement by saying whether his efforts with the UK Government will bear fruit? The renewable heat incentive is hugely important to the renewables sector.

**Jim Mather:** Yes, I can give the member a commitment that we will continue our focus on the matter. This year we have hosted numerous stakeholder events specifically on renewable heat and heard at first hand about the importance of renewable heat to Scotland, not just from manufacturers and installers but landowners, farmers, forestry interests, haulage interests, housing associations, local authorities and so on. Scotland is ready for it and the renewable heat incentive is crucial to our aim of building a viable and diverse renewable heat industry. I will continue the dialogue with Westminster to ensure that Scottish interests are listened to.

#### Recruitment

**17. Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how many people have been recruited externally and internally by it and its agencies since February 2010, and how many of these posts were permanent. (S3O-11572)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):** In the Scottish Government core, 179 people were externally recruited and 305 people were internally recruited. In Scottish Government agencies, 69 people were externally recruited and 54 people were internally recruited. Of the 179 externally recruited posts in the Scottish Government core, 83 were permanent. Of the 69 externally recruited posts in Scottish Government agencies, 47 were permanent.

**Derek Brownlee:** Those figures come when the Scottish Government has a presumption against external recruitment. How much has that presumption saved on what would have been spent if it had not been in place?

**John Swinney:** That question is difficult to answer. The judgment about whether to fill posts internally or externally is based on whether a business case for appointments exists. It is not automatically presumed that a post must be filled. A judgment is applied to whether it is essential to fill the post, given the financial constraints in which we operate.

I assure Mr Brownlee that the recruitment constraints that I have described to Parliament are key to managing the number of people who work in the Scottish Government. As I have said, recruitment cannot be halted entirely, because some posts require to be filled to maintain the proper operation of the Government's functions at the core and agency levels.



## Skills Strategy (Refresh)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-7164, in the name of Keith Brown, on the refresh of the skills strategy. The debate is fully subscribed and no time is spare, so members will need to come in on the button, as it were.

14:57

**The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Keith Brown):** The debate comes at an important time in Scotland's economic recovery. Growth returned to the economy at the end of 2009, but economic conditions remain fragile and considerable challenges are to be faced if we are to consolidate the recovery.

It is clear that skills are vital to recovery in all sectors of the economy. A key function of the Government is to create the right conditions for economic success, and skills policy is one of the strongest levers at our disposal. We held a constructive debate on skills in January, which sought to develop a consensus on the way forward at a time not just of significant challenge but of opportunity.

On Tuesday, I launched the refreshed skills strategy, "Skills for Scotland: Accelerating Recovery and Increasing Sustainable Economic Growth", which makes clear the Scottish Government's commitment to training and skills as we seek to accelerate recovery. I hope that members have had the opportunity to read and digest the strategy.

The consensus in Parliament was that more flexibility is needed in the skills system to reflect economic change. The Government is now setting out a flexible package of skills support. We all agree on the importance of modern apprenticeships. It is vital that the programme continues to provide people with the opportunity to gain the skills, training and experience that are needed to find sustained employment. It must also continue to provide businesses with the expertise that will help to drive future success.

Last year, more than 20,000 people started modern apprenticeships in Scotland—that is up by more than 90 per cent on starts in the previous year. The proportion of female starts also increased significantly, but work has still to be done to increase women's participation and achievement in a number of sectors, including information and communications technology. People in the ICT industry and in the banking industry have told me that they are keen for far more female graduates with an ICT background to come to them.

We will continue to promote accessibility and diversity in the modern apprenticeships programme and throughout other learning environments. This year, Skills Development Scotland has been set the target of delivering 20,000 modern apprenticeship starts and more than 40,000 training places in total. That figure includes 14,500 training places to help to support the unemployed to enter the labour market.

This year, SDS is also providing 5,000 flexible training opportunities that are designed to meet small employers' skills needs. During my visit to Gems Engineering Ltd in Glasgow on Tuesday, I saw at first hand the benefits of that flexible scheme, which is helping employers to enhance the skills of their staff and to bring real benefits to their businesses through improved productivity and a stronger and more confident workforce. As we move forward, we will continually seek to develop innovative models of skills support to encourage greater employer investment in skills.

The strategy also recognises the need for a flexible and responsive skills approach to new and emerging economic opportunities, including those in the low-carbon economy. The start of a new wind turbine modern apprenticeship framework at Carnegie College is an example of that.

In January, we agreed that the skills strategy should provide the support and opportunity for young people, including those who are traditionally the hardest to reach, to be successful. The threats from rising youth unemployment are clear. Since the start of the downturn, the Government has guarded against those threats.

In June, I announced a substantial programme of support for the large number of summer leavers from schools and colleges. It included a minimum of 800 targeted pathways opportunities; a new SDS one-stop shop providing guidance to employers on offering young people a chance to get started in the labour market; and a £1,000 incentive for employers recruiting a young apprentice who faces additional barriers that restrict their ability to participate. Those opportunities will be available throughout this financial year and will complement other support for young people, including the universal delivery of 16-plus learning choices and record investment in universities and colleges to provide more and better learning opportunities.

Since the summer, we have been working hard to help school leavers to secure a place in learning or training. We have also tasked ProjectScotland with working with SDS and partners in the voluntary sector to target volunteering opportunities at the summer leavers who are yet to secure positive destinations. Many young people have successfully taken up places in college or

training; it is the right time to target volunteering places at those who are still in need.

I flag up the importance of the curriculum for excellence. We often talk about wanting our young people to be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. We will achieve that by ensuring that they can develop skills for learning and skills for life, as well as the skills that they need for work. We recognise that those skills can be taken forward across the curriculum and in all of the different environments in which a young person learns.

The strategy recognises the increasing number of unpaid adult carers and young carers in Scotland, who gain invaluable skills in carrying out their caring tasks. Many carers and older young carers—if I may call them that—also want to be supported to remain in employment, to access employment and to learn and gain new skills. The skills strategy and the carers and young carers strategies set out how we can help them to achieve that.

We wish to focus on employer need. This week we set out the ambition for a skills system that is driven by what the labour market most needs, rather than by what the skills system can most easily deliver. The commitments in the strategy will help to achieve that by placing greater focus on working together with employers better to understand and to assess the skills that they need to be successful, and by ensuring that the supply of skills can be responsive to those needs.

In January, we spoke about the need for an annual skills and training summit.

**Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con):** I agree entirely that the system needs to be more demand led, rather than supply led. What specific measures has the Government taken to ensure that employers are engaged and listened to?

**Keith Brown:** There are a number of specific measures. I mentioned the summer leavers package, which we made a one-stop shop for employers. Instead of being bounced around a number of agencies, employers could access the available opportunities through a sole telephone line. The person on the other end of the phone was able to direct them to those opportunities without having to put them on to a different organisation, which made things easier.

Similarly, we have directed many of our new initiatives at small businesses. We recognise that it is more difficult to engage with a large number of employers. Although the strategy sets out the way in which we intend to do that, that work is not finished and there will be new measures to take it even further.

A partnership approach is vital. Annual summits offer a great opportunity to make ideas a reality. Last year, those ideas included the adopt and safeguard an apprentice schemes and the innovate with an apprentice two-for-one incentive for the life sciences sector. This year's summit helped to inform the structure and content of the strategy that we are debating today. I particularly welcome the support that was received at the summits from John Park, who is not in the chamber, and David Whitton, who is. We will continue to support that collaborative approach.

I turn to the subject of simplification. As I have just said in response to Gavin Brown, I am aware that some employers have experienced difficulties in the past when trying to engage with the skills system, which is why simplification is a priority theme of the strategy. Through it, we set out a range of initiatives that will help to ensure that the system is more coherent and accessible both for individuals and for employers.

It is a national strategy, but we recognise that local challenges are faced around the country. We would all agree that the best people to make decisions at local level are those who work at local level. The strategy sets out our intention to ensure better alignment between national agencies, community planning partnerships and local employability and economic groups. In doing that, we can ensure that services are properly targeted to match the different needs of residents and employers in local areas.

The United Kingdom Government looks set to reduce funding to the sector skills councils significantly, as part of its wider reforms to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. Even before cuts and reform begin, there have been impacts on Scotland. Skillsmart Retail has already reduced its presence in Scotland, and Cogent and SEMTA—the sector skills council for science, engineering and manufacturing technologies—have switched responsibility for life sciences in Scotland. Both of those moves were made with no prior consultation of Scottish stakeholders. That is unacceptable, as has been made clear to the chief executive officers of the SSCs concerned.

Against the backdrop of severe funding cuts, we still expect UKCES and the SSCs to retain some responsibility for functions that are critically important for Scotland, and we will ensure that Scotland's needs and expectations are clearly articulated around delivery of those functions. If other SSCs reduce their presence in Scotland, we will not hesitate to take radical and practical steps to ensure that the voice of our employers is heard across the Scottish skills system.

The refreshed strategy is published at a time of significant challenge for the public sector. We will know more about future budgets next month, but

our priority for skills will continue to be around providing individuals with the support that they need to find sustainable and productive employment.

There is no doubt that skills and training are a point of shared commitment across the Parliament. We are all determined to get it right for the benefit of our young people as they move into the labour market for the first time, for the benefit of those who are already in the labour market and who seek to upskill and stay in work, and for the benefit of employers who are seeking to take advantage of new opportunities and to increase profits.

Today's debate offers an opportunity to reach across political boundaries and achieve consensus on the right way forward for skills at a time not just of significant challenge but of opportunity.

Members from across the Parliament have made a strong contribution to the skills debate. The Government has listened, and we have now responded. Indeed, most of the points that were made by Opposition members during the previous skills debate have been addressed in the skills strategy.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the refreshed Skills for Scotland skills strategy and agrees that the principles of flexibility, responsiveness and partnership working are critical to meeting Scotland's skills needs and accelerating economic recovery.

15:08

**David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)**

**(Lab):** I am delighted to take part in this debate and to speak to the amendment in my name. I welcome the publication of the refreshed skills strategy—at last—and I thank the minister for having taken the time to discuss the contents with me previously.

The subject of skills—the lack of them in some quarters and the provision of them in others—and the continuing debate on how to finance provision of training are among the most pressing issues facing Scotland today. As I have said in previous debates, I do not believe that skills should be a political football, so I welcome the reannouncement on volunteering. If memory serves, we heard all about the 1,000 places in the summer. As we are now in October, it would be useful if the minister could tell us, when he winds up the debate, how many places have been taken up.

We are heading into challenging financial waters, when every budget line will come under scrutiny. Our number 1 focus should remain the growth of the Scottish economy.

Only yesterday I read in *The Herald* that vacancies in engineering, science and manufacturing companies are costing Scotland £10 million a year in lost productivity, according to the sector skills council, SEMTA. Elsewhere in the newspaper was a prediction that Scotland could have a jobs bonanza from £19 billion of work to decommission oil rigs, which would present thousands of opportunities. The bulk of that work is anticipated to come in the decade 2017 to 2027, so youngsters who are currently at school who are thinking about what career they might follow could become the well-trained workforce to take advantage of those opportunities. We should not forget that.

On reading through the document it is heartening to see that many of the skills and skills training issues that Labour has raised in the past have been recognised, so instead of dwelling on the fact that two previous attempts to devise a skills strategy were rejected by Parliament, I will celebrate a case of third time lucky. I accept that there has been progress.

Support for employers and simplifying the skills system are steps in the right direction. Scotland's skills base has improved considerably, but that has still not translated into higher productivity and economic growth. Increasing the skill levels of the labour force at all levels is the way to do that.

If we want to achieve a smart, successful Scotland, we must face facts: we need to change, do things differently and be ready to listen to what employers are saying. As I said earlier, there is a lot of potential, despite the current economic situation. As the world looks beyond fossil fuels to meet its power generation needs, Scotland could and should be at the forefront of that transformation. Given Scotland's incredible natural resources, its long tradition of technological excellence and its supportive business environment, the country's renewables sector is ripe for investment.

We already have a successful oil and gas sector, and the emerging benefits from a low-carbon economy could change our economic landscape, but do we have the skills to take it forward? The answer is that we have some of them but, as SEMTA has identified, we need a lot more of them, and we need to be much clearer in highlighting to jobseekers of all ages where the best opportunities for a lasting career lie.

Only this morning, I attended a conference with the minister on partnership action for continuing employment, at which I heard about a programme that was organised through Forth Valley College that upskilled a number of unemployed engineers, many in their 40s, to work in the oil and gas sector. A 41-year-old ex-Army heavy goods vehicle mechanic was a successful graduate of

that course, as a result of which he felt that he had a job for life. The key from the college's point of view was that it looked for areas in which it knew there were job opportunities.

If we are to grow employment in the low-carbon economy over the next 10 years, we need schools, colleges and universities to focus on delivering people who have the qualifications to develop the skills that that new industry requires. There is a constant cry for more school pupils to study maths and the sciences to the highest levels. Knowledge of those subjects is the key to a good career in the green jobs of the future, and pupils need to know and be enthused about that.

We also need to think differently and to listen to what employers have to say. Recently, I met Aberdeen house builder Stewart Milne, whose company has created the UK's first zero-carbon home. Mr Milne believes in training—after all, he was an apprentice—but in his expert opinion, the traditional view of construction skills is changing. He believes that for the future, instead of concentrating on single skills, we should multiskill our apprentices to take account of changing construction methods. He is not alone in thinking that.

SELECT, Scotland's trade association for the electrical, electronics and communications systems industry, is taking a significant stake in the future with the establishment of the Scottish environmental technologies training centre just outside Edinburgh. It, too, believes that upskilling can be just as important as new jobs. The training environment, which has been facilitated by heating business Vaillant and Skills Development Scotland, will bring electricians, heating engineers and plumbers up to date with the latest developments in energy-saving technology.

Last week, I met representatives of the Adam Smith College in Fife and toured its new extension at the Stenton campus, which offers world-class training facilities in construction, renewables and the energy sector, among others—and it was self-funded. Together with other partners such as Carnegie College in Rosyth, it is creating a renewables cluster to make Fife the leading centre for training in new industries such as wind and wave turbine construction and associated technologies.

**Keith Brown:** I am sure that Mr Whitton would want to recognise that although that facility was largely self-funded, the Scottish Government made a contribution to it. Does he agree that its defining feature is the flexibility that it offers with regard to the skills that could be developed in that environment? As he said, multiskilling will be essential, and that unit has been designed specifically to allow such training to take place.

**David Whitton:** I fully agree. As we toured round, I was extremely impressed as it was explained to me how that can be achieved.

I have now met representatives of quite a few colleges—as, I am sure, the minister has—all of whom have made the same comment about a certain lack of flexibility on the part of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council. Matching funding with priorities and reducing costs by encouraging closer collaboration between higher and further education institutions and employers will bring benefits, but in many cases the Scottish funding council is slow to react.

In its manifesto for Scotland, the Confederation of British Industry takes it all back to basics. For it, the literacy and numeracy standards of new employees remain a concern for Scotland's employers, who look to Government for solutions. Should not it be a given that good standards of literacy and numeracy permeate all aspects of education? How can young people spend hours on Facebook and work new mobile phones within minutes of getting them, but cannot hold a proper conversation or, in some cases, read and write? For sectors such as the retail, travel and tourism sectors and even the financial services sector, it is vital that our young people develop what are known as the soft skills—the ability to communicate, turn up to work on time and show confidence by looking people in the eye when they talk to them, for example. Too many youngsters leave school without those basic skills.

In my constituency, the construction and engineering firm Carillion sponsors a programme called Tigers Ltd—training initiatives generating effective results Scotland—which puts youngsters on a 26-week get ready for work scheme. That scheme gives them a taster of all the construction trades. The prize for those who complete the course is a guaranteed apprenticeship with Carillion or one of its subcontractors. We need more big employers to engage in that way.

Scotland's wealth as a nation and our ability to create a more inclusive society in which poverty and deprivation are tackled depend on economic growth and on improving our productivity and employment. In difficult times, public funding must be prioritised to deal with employability, basic skills and those who face severe disadvantages in the labour market. We also need to provide rather than take away support to businesses that give young people jobs, apprenticeships or internships. There must be tailored training for a wide range of sectors to help people to get a foot on the career ladder. Such training will mean that employer demands can be met across a wide range of sectors. Large and small employers need to be central to the skills agenda, and systems need to

be aligned to labour market needs, such as in the Forth valley example.

We must accept that Scotland is facing demographic changes that will impact on our labour market. More than 20 per cent of the working population are between 16 and 25 years old, compared with 29 per cent who are between 50 and 64 years old. Some 24 per cent of 16 to 19-year-olds are unemployed. It is vital that we improve the school leavers who enter employment rate through better targeted training and careers advice. Although higher education is important, it should not be considered to be the only route to a successful career; the vocational route can also reap rewards.

The refreshed skills strategy outlines the way forward, but it will need to be kept under close scrutiny and be ready to respond to changes in demand.

I move amendment S3M-7164.1, to insert at end:

“, and calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that there is sustained investment in skills training to meet the recognised demand for a well skilled, well trained workforce.”

15:17

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

**(Con):** Earlier this week, I received a telephone message from my education researcher to check that I had noticed one of that morning's main headlines. That headline said “Browne to unveil the most radical blueprint for a generation”. My researcher alerted me to the fact that he had been so impressed by that that the information was on my desk. I hurried in to work only to find that the Browne to whom he had been referring was the one from Madingley with the additional letter, or indeed letters, after his name. Instead, I would have to content myself with “Skills for Scotland: Accelerating the Recovery and Increasing Sustainable Economic Growth”. Compared with the 2007 document, that document has lost its gloss, but it is obviously destined for a much wider readership, as we are told that it is now available in eight languages. I will not presume to tell members which language it is best in. Was that document to be the most radical blueprint for a generation? Be ready to stand by for empowerment, support, simplification and strength.

To be fair, the Scottish Government is right when it says that levels of employment and productivity are clearly the benchmarks by which we can most easily measure the success and growth of an economy. We must all recognise the estimate of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, which says that a 1 per cent increase in

productivity equates to a growth in the economy of almost £1 billion. Facts like those should be keeping the minister and his colleagues awake at night. We should consider that Scotland's productivity rate is almost 5 per cent lower than the UK average. That, combined with the fact that the Scottish unemployment rate is rising three times faster than the rate in England, demonstrates how vital it is to have a skills agenda. That is why the Scottish Conservatives believe, as our amendment states, that a great deal more has to be done to ensure that the supply of skills matches what employers demand.

That task is not easy. Given the pace of technological development, we have little idea of what jobs will be available 15 or 20 years down the line. However, the task is not helped if we cannot embrace a more imaginative approach. Nora Senior, vice chair of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, said recently:

“There needs to be a whole-scale change to the way we talk about vocational and academic qualifications”

and—as Mr Whitton has just indicated—to how we prepare our young people for the world of work. That view chimes with many other people in business and academia, and with what the Scottish Conservatives have been saying for some time.

On pages 15 to 20 of the skills strategy, the Scottish Government says what it has achieved since 2007. Yes, there has been a little progress, but I see little sign so far of a fundamental change in our thinking. It is not enough to have initiatives here and there and to tinker around the edges. There has to be a radical overhaul of skills development, just as we are planning a radical overhaul of higher education.

Let me set out what needs to be done and let me again tackle the elephant in the room, which is the question whether too many young people feel pressured to go to university because there are insufficient opportunities for a non-university based education. I appreciate that the skills strategy outlines 15,000 modern apprenticeship starts—that is good, but there is a strong case to be made that many of those opportunities are coming too late in life.

On this side of the chamber, we are firmly of the view that there needs to be more diversity of opportunity from the age of 14 onwards and that, in terms of the curriculum, comprehensive education is not appropriate beyond secondary 2. In other words, there should be a clearly defined two-route system from age 14 onwards, in which young people are able to choose the form and type of education that they would like to continue with, be it largely skills focused or more weighted in favour of academic pursuits. That is a system

that has proven to be incredibly successful in countries such as Denmark, Germany and Finland. Germany, for example, is experiencing an export-led economic recovery, where the Bundesbank—

**Keith Brown:** Does Elizabeth Smith recognise the extent to which schools are already providing opportunities for vocational learning at 14, 15 and 16? I appreciate that not every school and not every local authority is doing it. However, is she saying that we should direct schools to do it, or that schools should choose to do it?

**Elizabeth Smith:** Schools should be able to choose. For example, at Kirkcudbright academy in Dumfriesshire there is a highly imaginative programme of curricular change. At the moment, though, the whole system is a comprehensive system, although obviously it is going through a review in terms of the Scottish Qualifications Authority. We need to diversify that system—it is instrumental in getting the skills right. There has been progress, but there has not been sufficient joined-up thinking about ensuring that schools, colleges, universities and the world of work can work together.

Angela Knight, who is chief executive of the British Bankers Association, rightly recommends that we need to improve the quality of the careers advice that we give to S1 and S2 pupils, notwithstanding the excellent advice that is already around in our schools. In too many cases, teenagers are not given sufficient access to all the information that they need to make an informed choice—a choice that can, after all, make or break a career.

While I am on the theme of getting it right at the earliest stage, I urge the Government—yet again—to provide leadership when it comes to literacy and numeracy. I know that we expect a statement on 27 October, but please let that include measures to address the inadequacies of basic skills in primary school and of trainee teachers, who have identified gaps in their own ability to teach those skills.

If the overriding objective is to provide an economy that is fit for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—an economy with high levels of employment and the highest levels of productivity—we must not ignore the demands of business or the concerns of employers.

I move amendment S3M-7164.2, to insert at end:

“ and calls on the Scottish Government to fully engage employers in the process of ensuring that the system is more demand-led and that publicly funded training matches far more closely the needs of employers.”

15:24

**Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD):** I am pleased that Parliament has another opportunity to discuss a most important matter.

In 2007, the Liberal Democrats did not support the skills strategy that had been laid before Parliament. There were many reasons for that: there were no real targets, no clear ways of monitoring progress and no real accountability. It has taken the Government another three years to come forward with this refreshed strategy, largely because of a call from Parliament in January.

In the debate in January, we condemned the on-going confusion, bureaucracy and expense that had been brought about by Skills Development Scotland. We raised concerns about the Scottish Government's removal of funding specifically for skills for work courses, and about uncertainty about future funding of the determined to succeed programme.

We on the Liberal Democrat benches are serious about skills and about providing a future for Scotland and its workforce. I know that that aspiration is shared across the chamber: we are all serious about ensuring that access to skills support and training are available to the fullest range of Scots including, as the minister said, carers—young carers in particular—disabled Scots and others who have historically been marginalised from such services.

As we emerge from recession we will need an able and skilled workforce that is ready for the new industries and challenges of the future. We are critical of the skills strategy refresh because we still have many of our original concerns. Where are the measurable targets or outcomes? The strategy claims to establish high-level targets for Skills Development Scotland on its national training programmes, yet the targets are not new but are targets that the Government had already set. That is disappointing, especially as it is so obvious that a clear, concise and cost-effective strategy is needed. A report earlier this year by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills concluded:

“Current employment and skills systems in Scotland are neither fully integrated and consistent, nor always sufficiently aligned to labour market needs.”

The Government needs to recognise—with action rather than words—that Scotland is still facing very difficult times and real uncertainty. Businesses are still experiencing difficulties and people are still losing their jobs. Last month's labour market statistics showed that unemployment in Scotland has risen to 8.9 per cent, which is well above the UK average of 7.8 per cent. Right now, we need to work to maximise and improve the skills of our workforce so that the

economy can not only recover but support sustainable growth in the future.

Skills are needed across the board, from basic literacy and numeracy to degree level. David Whitton was right to focus on the need for soft skills. I might not have put it in exactly the terms that he did in talking about our young people, because all of us will come into contact with young people who are ready and willing to take on the opportunities and challenges of the job market, but we are all struggling to turn the tide after Labour's mismanagement of the economy.

The Government must realise that real training for real people is what is important. We have already heard, rightly, that flexible on-the-ground action is what matters to individuals who lose their jobs and need to gain new skills. That is what matters to a generation of young people who are struggling to gain college places, and it is what matters to our apprentices and businesses. Expensive quangos, excessive red tape and cuts to skills programmes that actually work are the actions so far of the Government.

Ministers found the funding to establish Skills Development Scotland and they found the cash to increase its budget to a total of £202 million. It is interesting to note that in 2009-10 SDS spent £1,484,000 on marketing—£200,000 more than it spent in 2008-09—but it removed the specific funding for skills for work courses and the school and college partnerships.

We all agree that many young people are better suited to, and more interested in, vocational education. We need to ensure that their needs and aspirations are met, so we welcome the review of all vocational education and training. I speak not only as a member of this Parliament but as the mother of two new graduates who are trying to find work, taking on unpaid internships and keen to find the opportunities that many of us took for granted when we left university and school.

As I have said before, it is young people who have been hit hardest by the shrinking jobs market. Graduates and school leavers, as well as those who are most at risk of falling behind in skills terms, are unable to find jobs, and young people are generally the first to be made redundant from companies on a last-in, first-out approach.

Our young people are bearing too much of the burden of the recession, with the number of 18 to 24-year-olds unemployed for more than 12 months having increased fivefold in the past two years. We cannot allow that to continue. I would be very interested in hearing what progress has been made to meet the needs of the summer leavers. The minister was right to talk about the inputs, which we welcome. It might be too early, but it

would be very helpful if we could get some idea of how successful they have been.

The Scottish Government news release on the refreshed strategy boasts about the new wind turbine modern apprenticeships scheme at Carnegie College—the minister also mentioned that today. That is the scheme that Tavish Scott highlighted at First Minister's question time last month when he questioned the First Minister about the fact that, to secure its apprenticeships, Siemens was made to traipse around Skills Development Scotland, the Scottish Government skills department, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and the SQA. Most of us would agree that that is not conducive to meeting the needs of business. Given the economic reality that we face, we must look at whether the skills quangos and organisations that we have in place are fit for purpose and fit for business. We need to spend a shrinking budget as wisely and as smartly as possible.

A few months ago, I undertook a business survey, the results of which I shared with Jim Mather. It was clear that many of the businesses that I surveyed did not feel that the skills organisations were listening to them and engaging with them properly; they felt that there were barriers in place and that the process was not one with which they would immediately think about engaging. A lot more work must be done to ensure that it is as easy as possible for businesses to do that.

We must work to ensure that, as Scotland comes through the recession and business and enterprise gain strength, we have a workforce with the necessary skills to ensure that Scotland not only remains competitive but excels in the future.

I move amendment S3M-7164.3, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"notes the publication of the refreshed Skills for Scotland skills strategy, three years after the original strategy was rejected by the Parliament; regrets the confusion and bureaucracy in the Scottish Government's approach to the skills system and meeting the needs of the key economic sectors and industries of the future, and believes that the priority given by the Scottish Government to the new centralised skills quango, Skills Development Scotland, which has £22 million of administrative expenses, has not added any clarity to the Scottish Government's skills agenda."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** I remind members that they have a very tight six minutes in which to speak and that, if they do not stick to their time, I will cut them off. If I do not do so, I will have to drop Linda Fabiani.

15:30

**Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP):** In that case, I shall be brief. First, I apologise that I will

have to miss some of the debate due to a meeting that I must have on behalf of some constituents who have been in touch with me about a pressing local issue. I intend, however, to be back for the closing speeches.

The refreshed skills strategy is, first and foremost, a recognition of reality. The original 2007 strategy is useful and wide-ranging. Needless to say, however, the economic climate has changed so dramatically since then that it would be remiss not to return to it in light of the circumstances. We have a pressing responsibility to ensure that Scotland's real and present skills needs are met. As the report says, the purpose of the strategy has not changed in the past three years, but the scale of the challenge has increased as a result of the economic depression.

In any case, there could scarcely be a more important subject for us to revisit than this. The strategy is about accelerating economic recovery in Scotland. More to the point, it is about improving the life chances of thousands of individual Scots.

The commitment to 20,000 modern apprenticeships and a total of 40,000 training opportunities this year is impressive. As well as 15,000 modern apprenticeship starts there will be, among other opportunities, 5,000 all-age modern apprenticeships. That will be particularly appreciated in my part of Scotland, among many others, because in those areas it is often people in a slightly older age group in the workforce who need new skills, rather than those who are in the age groups that are covered by more traditional apprenticeships.

In marked contrast to all that stands the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of Labour's record in government on apprenticeships. Between 2004-05 and 2007-08, Labour presided over a year-on-year reduction in the number of new apprenticeship starts, which declined from 21,349 to 15,772 over that period.

The Scottish Government is now, however, devoting real attention to upskilling the Scottish workforce, recognising that the only way for Scotland to make a speedy exit from the economic downturn is for us to be globally competitive. That is reflected in the fact that, despite the pressure on Scotland's budget, the Government has devoted an extra £75.5 million to lifelong learning in this year's budget.

That investment is paying off. By anybody's measure, Scotland's skills position has strengthened since 2007. Just as the percentage of the population with a degree has increased, so has the percentage with mid-level qualifications. Perhaps even more significant, the percentage of the population with no qualifications has decreased. That trend will have to continue if we

are serious about changing the kind of economy that Scotland is, even within the limitations of the fairly short economic levers that presently are at Scotland's disposal.

It is likely that ours will increasingly be an economy in which it will not be easy to get a job without qualifications of some kind. People who have become unemployed in, perhaps, semi-skilled work will struggle to find such work available to them in future. The needs of people in that situation, whatever their age, must not be overlooked. That means that there is a constant need to provide training, skills and qualifications.

To achieve that continuous improvement, the strategy places an emphasis on four areas: empowering people, to ensure that they have the opportunity to access the right advice, support and opportunities; supporting employers, by better understanding and assessing the skills that they need for future success, and ensuring that the supply of skills, training and qualifications can be responsive to that; simplifying the skills system, to ensure that it is more coherent and easy to understand; and strengthening partnerships and collective responsibility between the public, private and third sectors.

Broad though those headings sound in themselves, it is clear that the strategy points to specific measures that are, in turn, aligned towards addressing a problem that Scotland has not yet solved: translating the increase in the skills base into higher productivity and economic growth. If that tells us anything, it is that, despite progress, we still have a long way to go. Scotland will be looking closely at the UK Government's 2010 spending review for many reasons, one of which is that Scotland needs to know what impact decisions that are made at Westminster will have in the longer term on what Scotland has to spend on skills and training. The false economy of cutting too deep and too quickly would be illustrated if the Westminster Government created more pressure on the budgets that we allocate to the very activities—the provision of skills and training—that are most likely to bring our economy out of recession.

The Scottish Government has produced a reinvigorated skills strategy that is designed to take account of Scotland's changed economic circumstances. It is a blueprint for proactive Government action. It deserves the support of this Parliament.

15:35

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I am pleased to take part in this debate. We are now in a very different world to that which we lived in when the skills strategy was first published in



2007. As the Liberal amendment reminds us, at that time, there were concerns that the strategy would not measure up to the task. We have welcomed the efforts to refresh and refocus the strategy. The economic challenges that Scotland now faces, and which it will face over the coming years, are greater than in 2007. If the skills strategy is to deliver everything that we need it to deliver, increased focus, greater effort and sustained investment will be demanded of it.

From reading the refreshed strategy, it is clear that we have a lot to do. There are advantages to offering a wide range of services and providers, but it can also lead to confusion, particularly for employers and employees, those returning to the workplace and those leaving formal education. I very much agree that the principles of flexibility, responsiveness and partnership working that the Government has outlined are key to making the strategy work, but I have concerns that those principles are not being met as they could be. We still have some way to go before we have a coherent, simplified and unified approach to qualifications in particular, and to engagement with the learner and provider.

The refreshed strategy presents a complicated landscape. I welcome the section on simplifying the skills system, but I would like that to become a central focus for Skills Development Scotland. Unfortunately, there has been slow progress in addressing that, the reasons for which need to be identified. If there are barriers to greater partnership working, they must be addressed. The aims of improving accessibility and providing better information, advice and guidance are all crucial to making the skills agenda real and achievable for the learner.

**Keith Brown:** Does Claire Baker acknowledge that some of the confusion that she rightly mentions is due to the respective roles of Jobcentre Plus and Skills Development Scotland? Is she aware that there is now a lot more joint working than used to be the case? Would she support the further integration of the two bodies, even to the point that one assimilates the other, such that the functions of Jobcentre Plus are taken over by a Scottish-led consortium?

**Claire Baker:** The minister mentions one example where he believes that there could be simplification; my concern is the plethora of different providers and agencies. We need to take a much more strategic look at how we can improve the overall system.

Although the strategy is welcome, I found it hugely frustrating, and at times impenetrable. There is a menu of skills providers. If we had started with a clean slate, I am sure that provision would not look like it does at present. Everything has developed at different rates, responded to

different needs and got different levels of funding. The recognition that lifelong learning is integral to modern industry is fairly recent. Surely it cannot be beyond the wit of partners to simplify and streamline the service. Doing so would ultimately be of benefit to the learner. Providers cannot be protectionist; they must work together better if we are to be successful.

Our skills base in Scotland has improved. The trade unions have been at the forefront of pushing the agenda. They know that skills development promotes employment and growth and that we continue to have significant gaps in the workforce that cost us contracts and development. In its report "Towards Ambition 2020: skills, jobs, growth for Scotland", the UK Commission for Employment and Skills said:

"By global standards, Scotland has too large a group of low skilled and unskilled people, alongside a relatively strong proportion of people with high level skills, with a very narrow 'waist' of Intermediate Skills"—

the skills that are vital if we are to attract and retain new sectors and investment.

The college sector plays a critical role in closing that gap, but are we really making best use of opportunities? For many learners, there is no seamless path from the workplace to further education or higher education. There also needs to be greater commitment to articulation paths. There are some good examples, but there is also too much resistance to the recognition of some qualifications. I know that there is a strong need to protect excellence, but there is also a need to recognise that excellence resides not just in one place or institution.

There must also be greater coherence around some of the key growth sectors and upcoming economic opportunities. There are some good examples of that. In Fife, we have recently seen the opening of Adam Smith College's new future skills centre in Glenrothes, which will focus on engineering, construction, renewables and science. I am pleased that that ambitious and forward-thinking centre has been recognised by members throughout the chamber. A new Forth crossing is also being planned, and we want to ensure that Fife and Scotland are able to take full advantage of the opportunities and start planning. The reality, however, is that we must deliver now for those upcoming opportunities.

We all continue to make the case for the aircraft carriers at Rosyth. Rosyth provides a good example of how highly skilled people can work together with employers to secure contracts and present an unrivalled workforce. That has been achieved through trade unions, employers, colleges, training providers and Government all working together to ensure that those people have

the right set of skills in the right place at the right time.

We need to be clear that the additional investment in modern apprenticeships and training places is targeted and strategic. I have welcomed the additional places that have been provided for colleges over the past few years, which have tried to meet the increasing demand and to offer opportunities for those who face unemployment. However, that investment has often been delivered on fairly short timescales. It would be good to have some evaluation of that funding; it cannot just be about addressing a short-term problem. Those places must deliver for the future demands of our economy.

Like Margaret Smith, I make a more general plea for effective evaluation and measuring of targets. The refreshed strategy certainly says a lot, but it contains only two paragraphs on monitoring and evaluation. As it says,

"There is a collective responsibility for implementing this strategy",

but we need to be confident about demonstrating that it is delivering.

We face difficult financial times, and we all agree on the importance of skills. The challenge in the coming months and years will be to secure all partners to the commitment that, although the skills agenda is not necessarily the cheap option, it is the right one and the smart one.

15:42

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

I welcome the refresh of the skills strategy and the new focus on delivering across the board. I like the fact that Scotland's economic recovery is reinforcing the strategy, and creating more opportunities for Scotland to flourish is paramount to that recovery.

I was pleased to hear the news that there is to be a review of post-16 education and vocational training, which is due to report by March next year. The value of employer-linked vocational education cannot be overestimated. As a former vocational training officer, I am very interested in it. There is an issue that Willy Roe might look at, which could help us to address the skills shortages in some areas.

It may sound a little off-key for the debate, and a bit separate from what we are discussing, but I think that there may be some gender issues to be addressed in the provision of training. There is a traditional view of which jobs should be done by women and which by men, which is, to a great extent, cemented in place by social pressures. It shines through in the gender balance of trainees. Recent statistics from Skills Development

Scotland show a definite divide between the genders in the national training programmes. Agriculture and horticulture are overwhelmingly male dominated, as are construction and engineering. Business administration, health and social care are dominated by female trainees, as are dental nursing and hairdressing.

I do not imagine nor pretend to believe that even the current Government can change that situation overnight, but it needs to be changed as quickly as possible. Perhaps it would be appropriate for the review to examine the gender issue. I hope that it will, as equality, flexibility and the distribution of skills throughout the population will help to close the skills gaps. We should look at the stereotypical picture of the boys being builders and the girls being hairdressers. It would be nice to see more female engineers and good to see a few more male dental nurses. When we stop thinking of certain jobs being men's jobs or women's jobs, we will perhaps be a fair and balanced economy and nation. That would help us to go a bit further towards seeing all jobs as equal and all workers as having equal validity.

The briefing that we received from Scotland's Colleges highlights an important point that bears repeating. Scotland is fairly well served with people who have high skill levels and has too large a number of people with no or low skill levels, which leaves too small a number of people with intermediate skills. We must tackle that problem as quickly and cost-effectively as possible. We need high-quality training in those intermediate skills. We must pay up to ensure that the training is high quality, but the public purse does not extend to infinity, so the training must be delivered within the tight and tightening budgets that we face.

I am glad that we have made a start on that. As Alasdair Allan said, the number of apprenticeships has been rising since 2007, following a decline in the preceding years. The number reduced from more than 21,000 in 2004 to fewer than 16,000 in 2006-07. The number is on its way back up, but we should never be complacent and we should continue to strive to provide as many training places, apprenticeships and other places as possible. Much of our success or otherwise in that will, of course, depend on what money Mr Swinney has for doling out. I am sure that he will divulge the amounts in the fullness of time, as any Government would.

While the cabinet secretary is considering that and while the review of post-16 education is doing its job, we should consider whether the modern apprenticeships that are on offer are the ones that are needed to fit the skills gaps now and whether they will provide the necessary skills in the workforce for future years. Perhaps we can call on

Skills Development Scotland to report to Parliament on that. If courses that are being offered at public expense are not delivering the skills sets that we will need, perhaps we can change and update them and provide others that are more appropriate. We must be ready when the recession ends. We must not fall into the trap that we fell into in the 1980s and 1990s, when we were not ready and lost business and investment as a result.

While that is being done, we should consider how training providers are policed and how we can ensure that they deliver appropriate training to those in their schemes, particularly when the trainees are youngsters. We should also consider how we can ensure that we get value for public money and that trainees are learning skills that will benefit them personally and society generally.

There is still a long way to go, but I believe that we are walking down the right road. We will see what the fiscal tightening and the review bring us. I hope that, as soon as we get the report of that review, we are prepared to begin looking straight away for the next way of improving the skills sets of Scotland's population.

15:46

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate and the publication of the refreshed skills strategy, although it has been a long time coming. However, I find the continued use of the political rhetoric that is splattered through the document to be a little inappropriate. As much as I might agree with statements attacking the United Kingdom Government, they are surely more suited to today's debate than to a Scottish Government document that seeks to promote and advance skills. In addition, the document is rather repetitive, and at times seems more descriptive than strategic. That said, I agree with the broad thrust of the strategy and with many of the Government initiatives that seek to develop and enhance skills in Scotland.

Given the current economic and employment environment, the need for ensuring that our workforce is properly skilled has never been greater. If we are to rebuild the Scottish economy, we must ensure that our workforce has a set of skills that match and respond to the requirements of Scottish businesses and the public sector. We must also ensure that the workforce is equipped with skills that are transferable and flexible. The new curriculum for excellence, if properly implemented, will provide a sound basis for the development of such a workforce over the long term. It will develop not only skills and knowledge, but more confident and adaptable learners. I welcome the strategy's focus on developing skills

that will allow Scotland to take a leading role in the new renewable energy industry. We must grasp that real opportunity.

David Whitton mentioned the frustration that many colleges feel in relation to the Scottish funding council. I know that my local colleges—Coatbridge College and Motherwell College—feel that there is a need to review the way in which FE funding is distributed. I support their call for a greater share of that funding to come to Lanarkshire. Colleagues will not be surprised to hear me repeat a key fact in relation to the funding of Lanarkshire colleges, which is that, at present, for every £5 that is spent in Glasgow on further education, only £2 is spent in Lanarkshire, which has a similar size of population and faces similar difficult social problems.

The refreshed skills strategy highlights the importance of simplifying the skills system and strengthening partnerships. I fully agree with those priorities. There must be greater partnership working between our schools, colleges and employers. As I have mentioned in previous debates, one of my local schools, Caldervale high school, has proven how that approach can work in practice by forging strong links with Coatbridge College and Motherwell College. Coatbridge College offers higher psychology within the school and provides training in child care, motor mechanics, hairdressing, and beauty and make-up. That kind of flexibility and partnership working needs to be replicated in schools and colleges throughout Scotland.

I highlight to the minister the work that North Lanarkshire Council is doing to develop the skills of 16 and 17-year-olds. The extra pair of hands project, which is run and funded by the council and partners, follows the model used in the future jobs fund, which is of course for people aged 18 and over. The project has enabled 200 young people to have six-month job placements, most of them in the private sector. The skills strategy recognises the need to engage with that age group, so I commend that approach to the minister.

I want to say a few words about the important role that the trade unions can play in supporting workplace learning and developing skills. Through the Scottish union learning fund, trade union learning officers are given the training and support that they require to begin the process of engaging with their colleagues and identifying education and training opportunities.

It is often a challenge to find the resources that are needed to provide the education and training that workers require, at a time and in a venue that suits them. That is where the partnership between the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, Unite, Stow College and employers has been a tremendous success. Through

genuine working partnerships between those bodies, Scottish workers have been provided with educational opportunities that are both shift friendly and accessible at work.

Employers are playing their part by providing space and facilities for educational development. A good example is the establishment of seven rail union learning centres through a partnership with First ScotRail. Last year, I had the privilege of opening the new union learning centre at Waverly station. With Stow College as the provider, workers are offered courses including basic literacy and numeracy, modern languages and computing. Those courses are provided free to trade union members at a time that is convenient for them.

**Keith Brown:** Karen Whitefield has mentioned employers and trade unions. Does she recognise that this Government has increased the amount that is given to trade union learning, and has also increased the amount that is available through European funding, which has increased the pot?

**Karen Whitefield:** I welcome what the Government has done to date. However, it is not good enough that we continue to rely on European funding. That system will shortly collapse, so we need a real commitment from the Scottish Government to sustain the model that the trade unions that I mentioned have rolled out across the country. I hope that the minister can give us such a commitment.

Improving the skills of the Scottish workforce and making them flexible and relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an ambition to which I am sure we can all subscribe. I hope that on this important issue we can all work in partnership to ensure that Scotland has a thriving and dynamic economy in the years to come.

15:53

**Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP):** I am pleased to be speaking in this debate, because it gives me an opportunity to welcome the publication of the refreshed skills strategy and highlight the work that is being carried out in Adam Smith College in Glenrothes and Leven, and to which David Whitton and Claire Baker have referred.

It is worth pointing out again the Government's commitment and investment of the record sum of £1.77 billion in further and higher education, with 40,000 training opportunities, 20,000 modern apprenticeships and 14,500 training places to support unemployed people. That represents a considerable investment. Through the skills strategy, there is an opportunity for the Scottish funding council and Skills Development Scotland to ensure not only that we are investing in the right

kind of skills but that the investment is targeted to where those skills are needed most, such as in the renewable energy industry, and in the areas that would benefit most.

Christina McKelvie made particularly good points about the need to identify the skill sets of the future. Our problem is that in identifying those skill sets, we need also to recognise that there are skill sets that are needed here and now to enable us to attract investment in, for example, the Fife energy park and to enable people to work on the new Forth bridge and the aircraft carriers. While we must consider which skill sets will be needed in the future, there is a much greater immediate need to ensure that Fife in particular is skilled up to be able to take advantage of the exciting new developments.

In my area—central Fife—which covers Glenrothes and Levenmouth, many jobs are coming in the renewable energy sector. If we lose the opportunity to ensure that local people—particularly those from Levenmouth and Methil, which is one of the areas of greatest deprivation—have the skill sets to enable them to take advantage of those jobs, we, as a Parliament and a Government, will have failed.

The Scottish funding council and Skills Development Scotland are sometimes behind the curve with regard to the skill sets that are needed. We must ensure that the bureaucracy that surrounds the partnerships does not get in the way of efficient delivery.

That brings me on to the work that is done by Adam Smith College in my constituency. On Monday, I visited the Leven campus and saw the work that Sandra Paterson and others undertake in supporting people who are improving their computer skills or learning them for the first time. I met many of the students, some of whom are now going into employment having learned the skills and confidence that are needed in the employment market.

I had the pleasure last month of visiting the future skills centre on the Adam Smith Glenrothes campus. The new centre brings together the engineering, construction, renewables and science facilities under one roof. David Whitton, Christopher Harvie and I had a very good dinner last Friday night with the senior staff of Adam Smith College to discuss all of these issues.

The new centre is designed to meet the needs of the Fife economy now and in the future. Its close proximity to Methil energy park is a positive plus in attracting companies to the park, and it is essential for the economic development of Glenrothes and Levenmouth. It has added nearly 10,000ft<sup>2</sup> to the existing campus and contains 31 specialist workshops with three purpose-built

laboratories. There is a renewable energy suite for wind, hydro and solar studies, and the centre has the best non-destructive testing centre in any location from the east coast of Scotland down to Hartlepool in England.

The future skills centre will work across the disciplines to produce multidisciplinary graduates, and I have no doubt that it is one of the best such centres in Scotland, if not the United Kingdom. I extend an invitation to the minister to visit so that he can see for himself just what an exemplar it is and what it can bring to the area, and I look forward to seeing him in Glenrothes in the near future.

15:58

**Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD):** It has taken some time for the Government to publish its skills strategy refresh, especially when one considers that the predecessor 2007 skills strategy was published before the economic downturn, which rendered it unfit for purpose.

Less than two weeks ago, we held a Scottish Government debate in the chamber on Scotland's move towards a low-carbon economy. In my contribution, I argued that Scottish pupils need the skills, training and education to be able to move Scotland towards a decarbonised future. I was interested, therefore, to see that the subsequent Government press release announcing the publication of the strategy mentioned the new wind turbine modern apprenticeship framework at Carnegie College in Dunfermline, to which Keith Brown has also referred today. It is clear that the Government has noticed the continuous pressure from me and my colleagues Jim Tolson, who is the local MSP, and Tavish Scott.

The experience at Carnegie College must serve as a warning of how important it is that companies such as Siemens are not confronted by hurdle after hurdle of red tape. Courses such as those that are offered by Siemens in conjunction with Carnegie College will play an important part in equipping our population with the necessary skills for our future economy.

**Keith Brown:** I reassure Jim Hume that we took up with Siemens the points that Tavish Scott made at First Minister's question time, and I can tell him that Siemens is very happy with the support that it received from the Scottish Government and with the advice that it got.

**Jim Hume:** I thank the minister for that intervention and am glad that he therefore agrees that never again should we expect companies to trudge between quangos to bring such qualifications to fruition, as it was clearly stated that that was the problem there.

In the summer, the Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning said:

"We need the public, private and voluntary sectors to step forward and help us to help young people become the future workforce and economic success we know they can be."

The voluntary sector has an important part to play in improving the employability of our young people, but I am afraid that the Government has a rather sorry past in that regard. Members will recall that it removed all Government funding from the national volunteering charity ProjectScotland. In 2007, ProjectScotland's funding was £5 million; in 2009, it was zero. ProjectScotland's work existed to provide volunteering opportunities in a range of sectors for young people aged 16 to 25. The volunteers were provided with experience, skills and confidence to help to make them more employable. It is worth reminding ourselves of what the refreshed skills strategy says:

"Collectively, these commitments are aimed at improving the skills and employability of individuals".

ProjectScotland already delivered those aims. When the decision was made to remove the funding from ProjectScotland, I thought that it was foolhardy; it now seems that it was downright reckless. In February this year, there were 42,450 Scots between the age of 18 and 24 claiming jobseekers allowance. Instead of collecting their dole money, many could be doing rewarding volunteering work with the support of an allowance, as young Paul Hamilton from Stranraer did. He volunteered with the Forestry Commission and overcame literacy problems and low confidence to gain employment following his placement. That is only one success story among many.

ProjectScotland recently had to make staff redundant. It is having to turn people away and it is limiting its operations to only 400 volunteers a year. The Scottish Government's school leavers task force initiative provides volunteer placements to those who have recently left school. Although that funding represents a fraction of what the charity needs to realise its potential, my colleagues and I welcome that very public admission from the Government that it got its position wrong. I can hear the crunching of the reverse gear resounding across the chamber this afternoon.

**Christina McKelvie:** No one else can.

**Jim Hume:** I can.

In the South of Scotland, uncertainty surrounds the provision of skills to the textile industry following the closure of Skillfast. The minister will be only too well aware of the strength and quality of the industry in the Borders following his meeting with me, Michael Moore MP, who is now the

Secretary of State for Scotland, several textile companies, and Borders College—we also worked with Jeremy Purvis—at which we impressed on him the need for a focus on skills development for the textile and fashion industry so that it remains competitive globally.

Members may recall the ties and scarves that they were given last month to commemorate the papal visit, all of which were woven in Selkirk, which is in Jeremy Purvis's constituency and, of course, my region.

The industry needs direct support from the Scottish Government to ensure that there is an easily accessible pool of skilled workers from which the industry can draw. I urge the minister to look again at the issue and explore what support it can offer the industry. Moving forward, I would like the minister to liaise with his United Kingdom counterparts to achieve a consensus on action to assist a very valuable industry.

It is vital that we take action now to avoid another lost generation of young people who lack the necessary skills and experience to get ahead in a competitive job market. Only by providing appropriate and flexible access to opportunities for skills development will that be avoided.

16:04

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** The skills strategy refresh is welcome and necessary in the current economic climate. On my initial reading of the document, the part that I found most welcome was the intended further simplification of the skills system, to which other members have referred. As with so much within our society's constructs, I hear time and again about duplication of function and regulation and about the bureaucratic brick wall that well-intentioned employers and potential employees often slam into. I take on board the minister's point that one reason for that is the difficulty of working across agencies and indeed across borders. The strategy mentions promoting leadership development in Scottish businesses. Of course, we should all be doing whatever we can to help and promote Scottish businesses, thus allowing further training and employment and a contribution to Scotland's economic future.

Again, however, there are issues. The public sector procurement portal was a welcome development. It was planned that the portal would lead to simplification of systems and ease of use and access. I understand that it is being monitored, as any new system should be, but I ask the Government to do all that it can within the constraints of Scots law and European procurement legislation to ensure that opportunities for employment in Scotland are

maximised and that recognition is given to the value of local procurement and its ability to help to regenerate communities. That is surely a sensible way in which to support efforts to retain and grow the skills base.

Some sectors also face the burden of professional indemnity fees in relation to public sector contracting. I am told that that is a growing problem throughout the country. Again, in such times, I stress the necessity for all who are involved in public procurement to make sure that no disadvantage is inadvertently created for small and medium-sized enterprises.

As well as supporting our businesses to allow them to support potential employees, the Government has given much to support Scotland's colleges, and they, in turn, pass on that support. For example, South Lanarkshire College in East Kilbride hosted skillbuild last year and its students won medals in that competition. This year, again, students at the college won construction medals when the competition was held in Wales. Students in our colleges are trained to a high standard and both South Lanarkshire College and the students should be applauded for their efforts and congratulated.

South Lanarkshire College recently retrained 400 former Freescale Semiconductor employees in East Kilbride through the partnership action for continuing employment programme, renewing a current workforce with new skills to take advantage of new opportunities. When we talk about skills and training, we sometimes focus on young people and fall into the trap of forgetting about retraining. Lifelong learning is important. It is only a few months ago, too, that I held a members' business debate about the Aurora house, which has been developed by Dawn Homes and South Lanarkshire College. The need for homes and skills for the future is recognised by the Government's refreshed skills strategy.

The briefing paper from Scotland's Colleges states that colleges are at the heart of their local communities and play a major role in social inclusion. That is true. Folks from all walks of life attend our colleges, which have an innate understanding of the needs and requirements of their local areas. The building of community builds towards economic and social success, and the colleges in Lanarkshire collectively work towards that. We should encourage our colleges, but we should never be complacent when it comes to good practice. We should always look at what others do, contrasting and comparing, and we should never be shy of investigating what works elsewhere.

I have a particular interest in our built heritage and therefore in design and construction skills. One element of that is our traditional building

trades. There has been a fairly recent resurgence of interest in such trades because of the recognition, for example, that sensitive rehabilitation of older housing stock is both cost effective and sustainable. Research demonstrates that older buildings can perform well in energy terms—for example, because they have natural insulation—and rehabilitation can be a natural way of recycling building materials. Whether it is our castles, our tenement housing or our dry-stane dykes, specialised traditional skills are required to preserve our heritage, so we must preserve those skills.

Some other European nations hold their traditional skills, and therefore their traditional skills practitioners, in great esteem. That does not apply only to construction trades, of course. I am grateful to Mr James Simpson, heritage architect, for pointing out to me the *compagnons du devoir* system in France, under which young apprentices and journeyfolk train in French traditional skills. It is a rigorous system that takes a minimum of seven years. It involves a lot of off-the-job training, mentoring, the systematic use of older and retired workers, and the management of movement and change through a network of colleges. Perhaps we can learn something from that. Scotland still has lots of active trades guilds, for example, with a massive reservoir of skills and experience in those workers who are slightly more developed in years. Those skills and that experience are ready to be tapped for the benefit of young apprentices and trainees and the on-going benefit of Scotland. Can we look towards making that link and using that talent and experience?

We have opportunities in the short, medium and long term to tool up our country for the coming years. We should take full advantage of those opportunities and, as so many others have said today, ensure that Scotland is indeed ready to face the future.

16:10

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** The debate started badly with the prospect that Linda Fabiani might not have an opportunity to speak. [*Laughter.*] I meant that, actually. Although it is a minor failing of Linda Fabiani that she does not always agree with me, this afternoon I agreed with every second of her speech, much of which we could all agree on. Of course, there are some areas where we divide, but that is largely a matter of the Opposition parties doing their job in holding the Scottish Government to account. It is the Scottish Government's strategy that is being refreshed and it is right for us to consider whether it is the most robust policy to see us through this extremely difficult situation and

to address a second decade of devolution in Scotland that will be very different from the first.

In its skills strategy that was published three years ago, the Government stated in its call to action that it would simplify

"structures to make it easier for people to access the learning, training and development they need, including formal and informal learning by merging a number of bodies into one, focussed on skills."

That was the policy that the Government implemented and, £16 million later, we have what it described. Therefore, it is concerning to read on page 48 of the refreshed document that

"Too many employers, particularly SMEs, are frustrated by the complexity they encounter in accessing the right information about skills at the right time in the right format. It can be difficult for employers to know where to start looking for information without a prior detailed knowledge of the institutional landscape."

Those are the Scottish Government's words, not mine or those of the Conservatives or the Labour Party. After £16 million and nearly three years of work, it is fair to ask what Skills Development Scotland and the Government are doing.

We heard in the minister's speech today that SDS will become more localised. That was one of the action points in the appendix to the refreshed document, which goes some way to addressing some of the initial concerns about the original skills strategy. However, one of the actions is

"Renewed focus from SDS on improving local service provision".

I remind the minister that, three years ago, before the Government took its new approach, Scottish Enterprise Borders was a one-stop shop for business support, advice, skills and training. Now, schools in my Borders constituency have their careers guidance co-ordinated from an agency in Paisley and skills are set on the basis of a Lothian and Borders area that is not coterminous with the Scottish Borders Council area or the operating area of Scottish Enterprise. I simply ask the minister to think hard about whether the changes that were made in 2007 have been successful when, in the refreshed document, there is the clear language of frustration with complexity and lack of information for those without prior detailed knowledge.

The need to have local skills delivery has been mentioned. I have recently observed in my area the progress to work initiative. Some 300 of the hardest-to-reach young people have been helped into jobs. Many of them have been in prison and most have had a drug habit. When we are looking at financial reductions, the concern is that the hardest-to-reach category might be the easiest one from which to drop services. I do not think that any party in the chamber would want that to

happen. It is important to highlight that concern for the hardest-to-reach young people who will be the first to be deposited on the scrapheap.

Another aspect on which we are failing collectively and on which I would love to have seen much more robust work in the Government's strategy relates to children and young people who leave our education system without the skills and attainment that they require and, in particular, those from looked-after backgrounds or the most deprived backgrounds.

The figures are stark. The most recent Government figures show that 47.3 per cent of all school leavers have a higher or an advanced higher. In the least deprived 10 per cent of families, that figure is 77 per cent but, in the most deprived families, it is 22 per cent. Attainment on leaving school differs by more than 50 percentage points according to family background. However, the figure for children from a looked-after background is not 77 per cent or 47 per cent but 2.1 per cent. That is a national scandal that all of us in the Parliament should feel collective shame about and should address, because looked-after young people have the richest parent of all—the state. We must address that situation.

Scotland has 600,000 children who are under 10. After they complete their formal education in the state system, they will enter the labour market. We are in a difficult time for the budget and the economy, but this is the time to make the choices to equip our economy and our young people in the next decade with the benefits that they need to accrue. If we make mistakes in the coming year, we will pay for them in the coming decade.

16:16

**Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con):** My difficulty with the Scottish Government's skills strategy is the difference between the rhetoric and the reality. When the refreshed document was published on 5 October, the Scottish Government issued it with the headline "Scotland gets skilled" and with a press release that set out the strategy's aims. The first aim was

"to simplify the skills system".

As the minister suggested, I read and digested the strategy, but I am not 100 per cent sure whether I understood many of its aims and objectives. I challenge anybody to argue that the document genuinely simplifies the skills system.

I challenge anybody to say that the document empowers individuals

"to access help and support more effectively",

which was aim number 2, and to prove that it empowers

"employers to access help and support more effectively",

which was aim number 3. I also challenge anybody to say that it better meets

"the needs of the key economic sectors and industries of the future."

There are many positives in what the Scottish Government has done with skills and I have no doubt that the document contains positives, but I feel that we are not quite getting it right. As my colleague Elizabeth Smith said, there is a big prize for getting it right. A 1 per cent increase in productivity across the country would add £1 billion to the economy's value. Achieving a 1 per cent improvement should not be a difficult job with a spend of between £2 billion and £3 billion. There are big prizes for getting it right, but big dangers in getting it wrong.

We all know that the outcome of the comprehensive spending review will be announced on 20 October. We do not know the results, but we know the direction of travel—not as much money will be available to spend on skills next year and for the spending review period. If the independent budget review is correct, we will not have the same amount of money in real terms for about 15 years.

We must consider the skills strategy critically, to ensure that we extract all possible value from the public pound that is spent on skills. My biggest concern and gripe, which our amendment reflects, is that the skills system is not demand led. That was a complaint 20 years ago, 10 years ago and five years ago and it has been a complaint every time we have discussed skills in the chamber. It remains a complaint today.

During the minister's opening speech, I asked him to give us examples of where the Government had genuinely engaged with employers. He gave one or two. However, although having a summer leavers package and a telephone line as a one-stop shop for employers in relation to that is a positive step, the examples that the minister gave come nowhere near the type of engagement that we need to have with employers.

Jeremy Purvis referred to page 48 of the document, which admits that the information and guidance that are available are not understood and are too complex and that people are frustrated. Page 21 of the document states:

"It is evident that individuals and businesses ... still perceive the skills system in Scotland to be complex and difficult to access."

The Government knows and accepts that, as its document makes clear.

On page 48, the document offers a solution to the difficulty. It states:



"The SDS Corporate Plan for the three-year period to 2012 contains the goal to 'make skills work for employers' ... SDS will identify industry needs for skills and use this to improve the skills and learning system".

That is not good enough or strong enough. There is a complete lack of engagement with employers, whether they be from the private sector, the public sector or the third sector.

When we last debated skills in the chamber, I gave the specific example of tourism. The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, of which I am a member, had examined tourism and spent some time looking at skills in the industry. All members of the committee concluded that there was a complete disconnect between those who were providing the services and those who wanted to employ people in tourism businesses when they came out at the other end. The then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning set up a group to review the issue, which concluded that there was no problem and that things ought to carry on as normal. However, only two of the group's 16 members were involved in the industry. An article published in a national newspaper just this week reports:

"College training young people for Scotland's multi-billion-pound tourism ... trade have been criticised as ineffective and presiding over declining standards."

That was a criticism not by Opposition politicians but by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education.

It is not good enough to say that we want the system to be demand led and that we will take action. The system must become demand led if we are to have any chance of improving the outcomes for our learners and, ultimately, our economy.

16:22

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** I draw the chamber's attention to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a member of the board of the Wise Group, an organisation that specialises in getting people who face serious barriers to obtaining and holding down employment ready for work and helping them to find jobs.

Until Jeremiah Brown made his speech, I thought that we were having a positive debate. There have been many good contributions. There was no disagreement with the principles of flexibility, responsiveness and partnership working that are set out in the document. Members highlighted evidence of good practice and work about which they feel positive; I note the contributions of Trish Marwick and Karen Whitefield, in relation to Lanarkshire. However, there was an undercurrent that suggested that we are not quite getting it right and that there are

serious issues that we need to address to improve Scotland's skills profile. Although I do not necessarily agree with Gavin Brown's tone, we need to pause for thought and to question what the document is doing.

It is a principle that there is an inverse relationship between the length of a document and its incisiveness. Although this document is not hugely longer than the previous version, it has fewer pictures and is a compendious analysis of sectors, activities and processes that are taking place. I would have found a skills audit more convincing—something that was informed by numbers and that described how we are getting on with developing skills in different areas. That is not necessarily an easy thing to do, however.

David Whitton pointed out that one of the skills issues that we really need to get a fix on is soft skills—getting people to get to work in the morning, to look others in the eye and to achieve the basic competences that are required to hold down a job. There are people in situations where they require that sort of support.

There are people who have those skills but who might need support with the navigation—David Whitton also mentioned help for jobseekers and school students in ascertaining where future job opportunities might lie and the kinds of skills that it might be appropriate for them to develop to improve their chances of getting jobs in new areas. Mention has been made of renewables and the decommissioning of oil platforms, and there are other potential growth sectors in the economy. We need to point people in the right direction so that they can acquire the skills to get those jobs.

We need to recognise that single sets of skills, which might have been adequate in the past, are increasingly being replaced by multiskilled apprenticeships, and that point has been well made in the debate. That is certainly true in the construction sector. People will need to be able to do more than one trade in order to operate successfully.

We should not just focus on initiatives and processes; we should focus much more on what is being delivered, how it is being delivered and whether it is actually getting to the people we seek to target.

Elizabeth Smith made some interesting points about how the education system needs to move forward in providing different kinds of opportunities. I absolutely agree with her about the need for more diversity in secondary education. I am not sure that that is incompatible with the comprehensive system. One of the issues that we need to deal with in the curriculum for excellence, which I support, is the idea that it allows for different approaches from teachers in relation to

different groups of students. We can have diversity within the comprehensive system, not just within schools but through partnerships between schools and colleges, and between schools and colleges on the one hand and workplace learning providers on the other. We need to be much more innovative in providing people with opportunities before the age of 16. It should be a matter of starting at 14 or 15 and seeing what we can do to help people.

Much was made in the debate—Claire Baker made this point—about the need for simplification—“Simplifying the skills system” is one of the headings in the document. Simplification is indeed important, and we must ensure that what is being done is understood by everybody—the skillseeker, the skill provider, the employer and others. I am not sure that we have actually delivered on that. It is one thing to state that simplification is a priority, but it is a different matter actually to deliver that.

Christina McKelvie spoke about gender divisions and gender segregation in skills acquisition, and that is certainly something on which we need to focus attention.

International comparisons are a bit lacking in the document. I am constantly reminded by colleagues about the success of the German economy being founded on the generation of very high levels of skills. The success and competitiveness of the electronic and engineering industries in Germany, which have driven that country's recovery from the economic dislocation of the banking crisis, are founded on flexibility and very high levels of skills in those sectors, and that has allowed the Germans to adapt and compete at high levels in the market, where they are clear of low-wage competition from east Asia and elsewhere. Scotland has to move in that direction. We have to generate not just basic skills—the soft skills to which I referred earlier—but the high-level, applied skills, and we need to protect those skills appropriately.

I highlight the word “Accelerating” in the title of the document. “Accelerating the Recovery” is the sub-heading that the Government has chosen. It is not entirely clear to me, however, how the strategy actually accelerates the recovery.

What is it in the document that delivers the acceleration that is referred to in the title? I think that the refreshed strategy provides a highly compendious view of what is going on in the world of skills, but it does not provide enough incisiveness or direction to allow us to work out where that acceleration is coming from or how it will be delivered.

In conclusion, it is one thing to have a strategy, but it is a different thing to have effective delivery. I think that we need a proper audit and a focus on

the extent to which what is being delivered is working and how it is being effective. There is nothing wrong with accelerating the recovery—that is what we should be doing—but we need to ensure that in taking forward the skills strategy, that is, in fact, how public money is being deployed.

16:30

**Keith Brown:** I will take up the bulk of my time by responding to some of the points that have been made. That in itself should underline the fact that, on the strategy, we have tried extremely hard to engage with others, including members of the other parties in the Parliament.

Liz Smith's points about careers advice are worthy of a response. We are committed to redesigning the delivery of the careers services to help people, particularly young people, to make better informed career choices. Very shortly, we will publish a new careers information and advice strategy, which will include a commitment to more intensive careers support for those who need it most.

**Elizabeth Smith:** I am pleased to hear that. I refer the minister to a remark made by Nora Senior, the vice-chairman of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, a couple of weeks ago. She said that Skills Development Scotland and Careers Scotland were

“virtually anonymous to the business world.”

She hopes that the Government can involve those two organisations in that process.

**Keith Brown:** I do not think that I agree with that statement, but the point that I was making was that we recognise that there is a need for change, partly because of what we expect to come from Westminster and partly because of what we require from the careers service. That issue has been taken on board and announcements on it will be made shortly.

I want to respond to Margaret Smith's point about the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. In its report, as others have mentioned, UKCES recommended the better integration of employment and skills services. In August, we completed a national roll-out of integrated employment and skills services, which has made it easier for people to access training, careers and employment services, thereby helping them to get back into work more quickly.

David Whitton made a point about volunteering, which was mentioned as part of the summer leavers skills strategy that was launched recently—yesterday, I think—with ProjectScotland, which was discussed by Jim Hume. It is too early

to give figures on that, but we will produce such figures.

More generally, Margaret Smith asked about the outcomes from the summer leavers package. It is a bit too early to provide meaningful figures on that. We are getting some information through, mainly from schools and colleges, but we are in a position to make progress in collecting those data, and we will provide that information as soon as we have it. It is fair to say from what we have seen already that work in some areas has been more effective than work in others, as is to be expected. We must look extremely hard at how we can make progress with looked-after children—to which I will return shortly, when I respond to Jeremy Purvis's point—which is an extremely difficult area. I point out that the figures that he mentioned have been bad for a very long time. That is not because Governments have not tried to do something about the issue; it is something to do with the nature of the problem, which we are trying hard to address.

Christina McKelvie raised gender issues. I accept that we still seem to have a cultural apartheid, with girls doing hairdressing and boys doing motor vehicle training. Although that still seems to exist, huge progress has been made in the last year or so as regards the number of women who are taking up apprenticeships. There has been a huge shift. Unfortunately, the process still seems to run along particular tramlines, as Christina McKelvie mentioned. We have impressed on our partners the need to address the issue and have had discussions with the trade unions, which are also extremely concerned about it.

We can use marketing initiatives and any other tools that we have to get across the idea that in some industries into which we cannot get women to go, particularly the industries involving construction skills, we must try to effect a culture change. That will not happen quickly. In addition, I was told last week by a representative of JP Morgan that in Glasgow, for example, it is extremely difficult to get women coming through as computer engineers from university IT courses and that the industry is crying out for people. Again, that requires changes right through the late stages of schooling, in colleges and in universities to try to effect change. I recognise that we have more to do—I think that Linda Fabiani also made that point—but huge progress has been made, and I think that the trade unions and others recognise that.

On trade union learning, Karen Whitefield made a point about European social fund funding. I responded by saying that the Government has contributed substantially more to trade union learning than previous Governments. She asked

whether that is sustainable. I mention the European funding because the extra money that we have given to trade unions to encourage more trade union-based learning has allowed them to access additional moneys from the ESF. Even if all the ESF moneys were taken away, there would still be more money going towards that. We must look at the budgets that are coming up soon before we can make further commitments, but we are engaged in discussions with the trade unions on the matter.

Tricia Marwick and other members spoke about trying to anticipate the skills that we need for the future and recognising the immediate need for skills. I would not want to underplay the difficulty of anticipating the skills that will be required. I discussed that matter earlier with David Whitton. The renewables industry, for example, will need many traditional skills and it takes a fair bit of thought to anticipate what skillset we will need and to develop courses that will provide the proper mix of skills. I agree with Tricia Marwick. People who have trained in traditional industries such as plumbing and electrical engineering or have trained to become electricians may not have a job at the moment, but they may be retrained more easily than others in multiskilled positions. That would help us with the expected high demand for their skills in the renewables boom that is coming our way.

**Jeremy Purvis:** I whole-heartedly agree with the minister, but will he consider that the same may apply to manufacturing? Many modern manufacturing businesses require labour to move within the business, from dispatch to the shop floor. Flexibility is a key factor in meeting manufacturing needs.

**Keith Brown:** I agree. I was lucky to be at Owens-Illinois in my constituency yesterday—it used to be United Glass or Pilkington. It has a huge manufacturing operation. The company made the point that, while employees need flexible skills, management must take a more enlightened approach to empowering employees and giving them more say in how they go through their careers, with learning opportunities that are relevant to their jobs.

I was disappointed by Gavin Brown's speech. He asked for a couple of examples of Government engagement with employers, which I gave him. I was unable to give him an exhaustive list of how we engage with employers, because we do that in many ways and it would take me a long time to go through the whole list.

One example that I gave was of the summer leavers package. To make sure that that hotline was established by employers we engaged all the employers organisations, including the small business organisations. In relation to tourism, the

800 targeted pathways opportunities that were identified were developed with the British Hospitality Association, which is an umbrella body for many tourism organisations in Scotland.

We regularly have skills summits at which we engage with employers, so I do not accept that we do not engage with employers, and it was wrong of Gavin Brown to suggest that. Perhaps he is unaware of some of the things that are happening. I am more than happy to come back to the issue.

I have no problem with the Labour amendment. The amendment, and the way in which David Whitton in particular has engaged on the matter, show an understanding of the gravity of the situation that we face. When there is such engagement, there is influence. I readily recognise that the skills strategy has been influenced by some of David Whitton's thinking and previous budget discussions that we have had.

I can accept the Conservative amendment. I accept that Liz Smith has differences with some of our suggestions, but she proposed positive measures to try to improve things, although I do not necessarily agree with them.

Unfortunately, I cannot say the same about the Liberal Democrat amendment, which is carping, pointless and negative. The Liberal Democrats' approach is consistent with the approach that they took the last time we had a skills strategy debate. Margaret Smith's amendment should be contrasted with the comments of, for example, Alison Hay, who is a Convention of Scottish Local Authorities Liberal Democrat. She fully supports the skills strategy and thinks that it will be an important addition to how we deal with skills in Scotland. If the Lib Dems want to be part of the solution instead of just carping from the sidelines, they must rethink how they go about things.

I commend the motion that is before members.

## Climate Change (Annual Targets) (Scotland) Order 2010

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-7154, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the Climate Change (Annual Targets) (Scotland) Order 2010.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Climate Change (Annual Targets) (Scotland) Order 2010 be approved.—  
[Bruce Crawford.]

16:40

**The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson):** Members will likely be aware that the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee voted on Tuesday for the new annual targets order. The committee's consideration of the order followed the deliberations of the working group that I established to consider the issues around the setting of the annual targets. The contributions from members of the working group were constructive and I thank everyone who participated. I believe that the forum could be a model for the facilitation of certain kinds of policy development.

The targets contained in the draft instrument are much more stretching than the targets in the previous order and require all of our current climate change policies to be delivered in full. The new draft annual targets order proposes targets for the years 2010 to 2012 that are approximately 2 megatonnes CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent lower each year than those in the previous version of the order. Over the period 2010 to 2022, the proposed new annual targets cumulatively would save 14 megatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent.

The new targets follow advice from the United Kingdom Committee on Climate Change on the shape of the trajectory. The committee's original advice has been supplemented by further analysis outlining a potentially larger impact of the recession on Scottish emissions, which justifies setting more stretching targets than the committee's original analysis suggested.

The challenges that we face are considerable, not least because of the tight fiscal situation in which we find ourselves, and will become clearer in the coming months. Everyone in Scotland will need to play their part in helping to ensure that Scotland takes a lead in developing a low-carbon economy. A vital part of a low-carbon economy will be the efficient use of resources. The Scottish Government's energy efficiency action plan, published yesterday, sets out a clear plan of action

to deliver energy-demand reduction and resource-efficiency measures throughout the domestic, business and public sectors in Scotland. The plan includes a headline target to reduce total energy consumption by 12 per cent by 2020. Local councils are to be given £10 million in grants to offer free insulation measures and provide energy saving advice to up to 100,000 households.

Together with existing commitments, including the target to generate 80 per cent of Scottish electricity consumption levels from renewable energy within the next decade, the energy efficiency target will be key to delivering Scotland's world-leading carbon reduction target of a 42 per cent cut in CO<sub>2</sub> by 2020.

By improving household energy efficiency, Scots could save an estimated £2 billion by 2020 from smaller energy bills, while investment in energy efficiency over that period could directly support around 10,000 jobs in Scotland.

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Stewart Stevenson:** I am so short of time that I cannot.

I highlight the Scottish Government's Scottish green bus fund. It has been slightly oversubscribed and we are still waiting for one company to bring forward proposals—we have agreed to accept them late—but it is definitely successful. Launched in July this year, the fund has been developed to incentivise the purchase of low-carbon vehicles by funding up to 100 per cent of the price difference between an LCV and its diesel equivalent. We expect it to deliver more than 50 low-carbon vehicles. We are pleased with the mix of bids, which have been submitted by large and small bus operators in Scotland.

It is vital that we now focus on delivery. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 requires that we set out a report on proposals and policies for achieving the annual targets after the targets are set. We have committed to publishing a draft report on proposals and policies for parliamentary consideration in November. Work on that is being aligned with preparatory work on the draft budget, which is due after the UK Government concludes its comprehensive spending review.

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, passed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament, has rightly been the subject of widespread praise in Scotland and internationally for the level of ambition it sets out. It is important that we remain united behind Scotland's climate change ambition. Scotland is the only country that can say, year by year through very stretching annual targets, how we will drive emissions down to our 2020 target of a 42 per cent cut.

I am pleased to support the motion moved by my colleague.

16:45

**Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):**

This is the fifth set of targets to be put forward by the Scottish Government. Criticism of the first set led to changes, making the targets for 2011 and 2012 slightly more ambitious than next to nothing, but leaving those for 2013 onwards unchanged. After that was rejected by the Parliament, the working group was set up. I add my thanks to those of the minister to the members of that group. The work that they have done over the summer has been helpful in making the process more transparent in terms of the options that we have for the future.

The new set of targets reflect the expectation that targets could be lowered because of the recession. When the Scottish figures were published in September, the targets were lowered further because the starting point was much lower than the Scottish Government had anticipated—so much lower that, if we had gone with the targets initially put to the Scottish Parliament in June, we would already have reached the 2012 target and be well on the way to 2013. Therefore, although the lowering of the targets mostly reflects a lower starting point rather than a significant increase in ambition, it means that we have less distance to travel to the 2020 target of a 42 per cent reduction against 1990 levels.

Indeed, we are halfway there because of the recession. That is not a point for celebration, and it leaves for us all a sting in the tail: in future years, as the country comes out of recession and there is economic growth, it must be sustainable and low. That is why the figures are so challenging. We cannot sit back; if anything, we have to work harder in future years. We cannot just restore emissions that have been cut due to recession.

What will we do when the economy speeds up? That is the key issue in how the cuts will be implemented. The minister will no doubt bring forward many ideas. Our view is that we have had a waste of three years. As the minister has acknowledged today, we finally have the energy efficiency action plan. The challenge will remain early action, and we believe that tackling fuel poverty along with reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions must be the way to drive down our emissions in Scotland, so that people on lower incomes do not suffer disproportionately. They need to be protected.

We are still waiting for the final sign-off on the public duties guidance. That is all taking far too long and we are worried. We know that the minister is looking to pilot programmes to show us

the way forward, but we are worried that pilots cannot give us certainty because we cannot have definitive figures. We remain particularly concerned that the biggest reduction in the years to come relies on European Union action and the emissions trading scheme.

There is a lot of hope in the targets; there is less definitive action. That is our key criticism. The recession has given us a breathing space on greenhouse emissions, but we need political will and new policies to deliver on the targets. Setting targets is normally the easy part, but even that has not been straightforward.

The Labour Party will abstain today. We will not vote against the targets or attempt to bring them down, because we need targets in place, but by abstaining we register our unhappiness at the lack of concrete proposals to deliver on them.

16:48

**Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con):** Colleagues will not be disappointed to realise that I have lost my voice, so I shall not take up much of their time.

We support the Government's proposals and the order. Indeed, we supported the previous order—it is an unfortunate fact that not all of my colleagues pressed the right button on that afternoon, so we are where we are. We had the working group during the summer, which productively discussed the issues in more detail. Not only did it do that but, if there was any doubt prior to that about the scale of the challenge that we face, the working group came to terms with it.

In many respects, the working group recognised that it will be difficult for this Parliament and this country unilaterally to take action to move significantly towards the achievement of the targets that we have set. I think back to Harold Macmillan's words, "Events, dear boy, events", because, to an extent, it appears that we are relying on technological advances that will make a material contribution to the output of emissions from many of the major industries.

Having said all that, I think that the working group did a productive job, and we will support the proposals this afternoon. I acknowledge what the minister has said in relation to the publication of the report in November. My party feels that it is important to recognise that there is a public anxiety to see an early and sustained economic recovery, and all of the actions have to work in parallel with that.

16:50

**Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):** Four months ago, we rejected the Government's

first set of annual targets for being too unambitious. The Liberal Democrats decided to vote against them not for party-political reasons but because, through every step of the climate change legislation process, we have been led first and foremost by the science.

During the debate in June, I called on the minister to set up an open-book cross-party working group to allow us all to consider the targets and ensure that they fully took account of the impacts of the recession on emissions and to discuss what improvements could be made. I am pleased that the minister took that advice, and I, too, thank everyone on the group. I think that we all worked well and constructively with the minister and his team throughout the summer, and we now have a set of annual targets that is improved to the tune of 14 million tonnes less CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent emissions over the next 10 years, which is an amount that is broadly similar to that which would be achieved by taking all the cars in Scotland off the road for two years. That figure alone should serve as a vindication of our decision to vote no to the original statutory instrument.

Some claim that the annual percentage targets in the new Scottish statutory instrument are still disappointing. Taken out of context, perhaps they seem so. However, although annual reduction percentages are useful as indicators of progress, it is the cumulative emissions that tell the whole story. In that regard, the SSI is a real improvement.

It is important to remember that the revised short-term annual targets will be by no means easy to achieve, as Sarah Boyack pointed out. By altering the 2010 baseline target to take into account the decrease in emissions resulting from the economic downturn, we are making it slightly harder to make reductions in subsequent years. That is because, as well as finding cuts to make, we must take into account the need to manage the fact that emissions will start to increase as our economy recovers to pre-recession levels of activity.

Indeed, in many ways, the important part of our work on climate change has not yet started. With the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, we got our framework. With this SSI, we will get our targets. However, the real challenge will come in setting out the policies that will allow us to meet those targets. The Government must soon set out its proposals and policies for reducing emissions in Scotland. Getting to this stage has been a struggle, but I hope that the minister is under no illusions that, once he has passed the annual targets—with our support—our scrutiny of his climate change policies might let up. That will not be the case.

The policies that the minister brings forward will have an impact that will be felt for the next decade and more. They must be ambitious, far-reaching and comprehensive. Once the policies are published, we will continue to hold the Government to account for its shortcomings and we will continue to work constructively to make improvements. Getting the policies right will be a mammoth challenge, but we on these benches are committed to playing our part in meeting that challenge.

16:53

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** When the Government brought its previous proposal to Parliament, I was, of course, deeply disappointed with it, as it featured flat-line targets for the early years and deferred all serious reductions in Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions to halfway through the next session; even then, it pinned its hopes on changes to the emissions trading scheme. What a difference that order was from the SNP's original proposal for annual 3 per cent cuts—the SNP indicated that that would be a policy target from day 1, even before it became a legislative target.

The Opposition parties had to make a difficult judgment. What was the right thing to do with the order? Would it advance the case to reject the order and demand that the Government came back to Parliament with something better? The decision was finely balanced. However, as others have indicated, the 14 million tonnes of additional CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent reductions that will be achieved over the course of the targets justify Parliament's decision to reject the original order. Let us be clear: the 14 million tonnes represent not more cars off the road, more homes insulated or more waste reduction in our system, but the effect of calculating in the recession. That is overwhelmingly the case; it is not the effect of new policy. That said, we must live with the targets, regardless of future economic growth. The improvement is therefore a good one.

What is frustrating, particularly from a Government that is nearing the end of its first full term in office, is the continued lack of early action in the first few years, 2010 to 2012. The order that the Parliament rejected had a reduction of around 836,000 tonnes in those first three years. The order that we are debating today has a reduction of about half that, or 426,000 tonnes. The minister is shaking his head, but that is the case. On Tuesday, at the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, I asked the minister why the Government had halved its earlier ambition in a space of less than five months. The minister was unable to answer. I ask him again: what does he expect will happen in those first few

years that is different from what he expected five months ago? Five months ago, he predicted recovery during those years; now he predicts the same, but with a degree of uncertainty.

The new order does not represent new policy. The working group—which was, of course, worth while to take part in—saw a succession of new policies floated and new ideas proposed and yet the Government has committed to implementing virtually none of them. I abstained at the committee this week. If I am not to vote against the order tonight, I offer the minister one last chance to answer the question: what will happen differently in these first few years that will result in half the carbon dioxide reduction that he proposed five months ago?

16:56

**Stewart Stevenson:** I thank all members for their contributions, from which it is clear that the Parliament retains high ambitions on climate change. All members who spoke in this short debate spoke of the value of the working group. I single out the chair, Mike Robinson, for his efforts in keeping us on track—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. The minister is winding up the debate. I, for one, would like to hear him.

**Stewart Stevenson:** Mike Robinson kept us on track and provided the external objectivity that was of value to the group. I thank him very much indeed. I hope that it is seen that we have responded positively in bringing forward this new order.

Sarah Boyack said that pilots cannot give certainty. I agree absolutely with the point. That said, pilots can give greater understanding of the options that are in front of us. Not all pilots have positive outcomes. When a pilot has a negative outcome—as may well happen in some cases—it stops us from pursuing something that does not work. I hope that pilots continue to be an important part of the way in which we look at things right up to 2050.

I believe that Jackson Carlaw's wife cannot wait to get him home tonight—

**Members:** Whoah!

**Stewart Stevenson:** Laryngitis is an opportunity she has long looked for.

As I said in my opening speech, we must now focus on delivery. Since the Parliament last considered the order, we have seen examples including the zero waste plan, the Scottish green bus fund and the energy efficiency action plan, which I highlighted earlier. Each of those examples contains significant actions that will

deliver emissions reductions in Scotland. Of course, in the report on proposals and policies that we will produce in November, we will set out how we intend to meet our emissions targets.

Let us absolutely accept that reducing the initial targets by 2 million tonnes in the first year in the new order by comparison with the previous order and having set a trajectory that is much more challenging to 2022, we have set a very challenging way forward for all of us. It is important that we continue to keep focused on the objective of the 42 per cent reduction by 2020. It is also important that we continue to engage with people across Europe and that we get the European Union to step up to our ambitions and support us by increasing its target to 30 per cent. We face a huge challenge, but we are in a position to move forward to the delivery phase. The targets before us are the ones that we should pass tonight. I commend them to the chamber.

## Decision Time

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):**

There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S3M-7157.2, in the name of Jim Mather, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7157, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on the future of Scotland's supported employment workplaces, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that amendment S3M-7157.1, in the name of Gavin Brown, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7157, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on the future of Scotland's supported employment workplaces, as amended, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that motion S3M-7157, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on the future of Scotland's supported employment workplaces, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the Scottish Government's policy that every public body should aim to have at least one contract with a supported factory or business, as set out in its *Social Issues in Public Procurement* guidance document in October 2007 and reiterated as part of the *Scottish Sustainable Procurement Action Plan* in October 2009; welcomes this approach as the most effective means of public policy support for the sector; regrets the lack of evidence that this policy has been effectively pursued over the last three years, and calls on the Scottish Government to set a timetable for every public body in Scotland for which it is responsible to have at least one contract with a supported factory or business; notes the recognition given to sustainability in the procurement reform programme and in particular the progress on community benefit clauses, and, in so doing, take account of the fact that there may be a small minority of public bodies that will face practical difficulties in achieving this aim, and, in addition, believes that main contractors should be actively encouraged, on a voluntary basis, to use supported employment organisations as subcontractors on public sector contracts.

**The Presiding Officer:** The fourth question is, that amendment S3M-7164.1, in the name of David Whitton, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7164, in the name of Keith Brown, on the refresh of the skills strategy, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The fifth question is, that amendment S3M-7164.2, in the name of Elizabeth Smith, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7164, in the name of Keith Brown, as amended, be agreed to.



*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The sixth question is, that amendment S3M-7164.3, in the name of Margaret Smith, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7164, in the name of Keith Brown, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

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

**Against**

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)  
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)  
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)  
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 14, Against 102, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The seventh question is, that motion S3M-7164, in the name of Keith Brown, on the refresh of the skills strategy, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the refreshed Skills for Scotland skills strategy and agrees that the principles of flexibility, responsiveness and partnership working are critical to meeting Scotland's skills needs and accelerating economic recovery; calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that there is sustained investment in skills training to meet the recognised demand for a well skilled, well trained workforce, and further calls on the Scottish Government to fully engage employers in the process of ensuring that the system is more demand-led and that publicly funded training matches far more closely the needs of employers.

**The Presiding Officer:** The eighth question is, that motion S3M-7154, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the Climate Change (Annual Targets) (Scotland) Order 2010, 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)  
 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)  
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (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)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)

**Against**

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)

**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)  
 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)  
 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)  
 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 72, Against 3, Abstentions 41.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Climate Change (Annual Targets) (Scotland) Order 2010 be approved.

## Sport

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-6498, in the name of James Kelly, on support for sport in Scotland's communities.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the positive impact that sport can have on people right across Scotland's communities and the physical and mental wellbeing that it promotes; considers that the advent of the 2014 Commonwealth Games represents an excellent opportunity through sport to improve public health, contribute to Scotland's economy and help build strong communities; notes the contribution made to this process by the Scottish Sports Alliance, and welcomes the opportunity that such benefits have to grassroots sports organisations in communities such as Rutherglen and Cambuslang, which involve people of all ages in sport and encourage the values of team spirit and tolerance.

17:04

**James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):** It is with great pleasure that I open this evening's members' business debate on supporting sport in Scotland's communities. I thank all the members who signed the motion and those who supported the reception at lunch time today. I pay tribute to the Scottish sports alliance and to Kim Atkinson and David McColgan for the amount of work that they put in to promote that successful reception and a worthwhile subject. I pay tribute to the alliance for the work that it has done to promote its vote for sport campaign, which I commend to members. It will focus minds in the run-in to the 2011 elections. Many MSPs have already signed up to it and I am sure that many prospective candidates will do likewise. The campaign will give the issues to do with sport priority and will provide a good focus in the run-in to the elections. That is absolutely key.

There is no doubt that sport is an inspiration to many people in Scotland. We can all think back to our favourite sporting memories, such as Archie Gemmill's famous goal in the 1978 world cup, Liz McColgan winning the world championships and the Scottish rugby team delivering the grand slam in 1990.

**Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab):** Stevie Chalmers's winning goal.

**James Kelly:** Members are suggesting memories of their own from a sedentary position. I am too young to remember that, although I have seen the black and white photographs.

In more recent times—this week in fact—a Scot, Colin Montgomerie, led the European Ryder cup team to victory over the USA in a nail-biting contest. To date, we have six medallists in the

Commonwealth games, including Robbie Renwick, who has won a gold medal in the 200m freestyle swimming. With silvers, we have the women's cycling sprint team and the 4x200m freestyle swimming team. On bronze, we have David Carry in 400m freestyle swimming, Lauren Smith in synchronised swimming and Jennifer McIntosh and Kay Copland for the 50m rifle shooting. I am sure that I speak for Parliament in congratulating all the medallists to date and in wishing all the competitors all the best in future events. Let us hope that they can bring home a strong haul of medals for Scotland from the games.

Those medallists will no doubt give heart to the many people who participate in sport throughout our communities and the 900,000 members of sports clubs who participate vigorously and who are supported by volunteers, all the way from Cambuslang to Carnoustie and from Dumfries to Dundee. I pay tribute to the many coaches. In my time as a member of Cambuslang Harriers, I was ably coached by people including Jim Cunningham and Robert Anderson, who gave willingly of their free time. I compliment the many members of the Rutherglen and Cambuslang sports council, who do so much to promote sport in my constituency.

In the coming years there will be big events and opportunities for Scotland in the Ryder cup and the 2014 Commonwealth games. From an economic point of view, the recent open golf championship was worth £80 million to Scotland and it is reckoned that the Ryder cup in 2014 will be worth £100 million. It is also reckoned that, in the three years after the 2014 Commonwealth games, tourism will increase by 4 per cent, which will obviously bring much-needed revenue to the country. Key to the build-up to the Commonwealth games is the hope that participation in sport will increase, as that affects some of the other issues that we discuss in the Parliament.

It is often said that sport and politics do not mix, but never could a saying be more untrue than that one in the current times when we face tightening budgets and a difficult financial situation. Rightly, across all budget areas, all the spend has to be justified, but there is a fear that those who think of sport as a leisure activity and a bit of a luxury will believe that it could be an easy area in which to cut spending. That would be short sighted. There are strong arguments that investment in sport is crucial and could bring big dividends in some of the other areas for which the Parliament is responsible.

There is no doubt that a fitter and healthier nation will boost our economy. It is reckoned that if people are healthy, fit and active it improves their work performance by 5 per cent and that they

have 27 per cent fewer sick days. We know from the recent obesity statistics that 1 million adults and 150,000 children in Scotland are categorised as obese. Think about it: there are more people in Scotland who are obese than there are members of sports clubs. If we can get those who are obese to participate in sport and join sports clubs, that will drive down the £6 million that we have to spend in the national health service purely on equipment for obese patients.

Some 25 per cent of all Scots will suffer mental health problems at some time in their life. A lot of the work that the Scottish Association for Mental Health does highlights the benefits of driving that figure down.

In the justice arena, there is an excellent example in Lothian and Borders, where a street rugby programme has driven down the number of calls that are registered with police: the number of calls on a Friday night is now down to the number that there are during the week.

All that shows that if we can get more people to participate in sport, it will help us in the other areas for which we are responsible in this Parliament and will, I hope, help us get more value for money out of our budget.

We should celebrate the successes that we have as a sporting nation. We should praise our communities who participate in sport, but we should also understand the benefits of investment in sport in the hard times ahead. We should not just celebrate the sporting triumphs, but celebrate a country where sport is seen as a contributor to a healthier and economically more successful nation.

17:12

**Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** I congratulate James Kelly on securing time for this important debate, which could not come at a better time, given that we are in the midst of the Commonwealth games in Delhi and that two very important football matches will soon take place.

Although sport has a significant role to play in our society, one of the many challenges that it has faced over recent years—most notably with the creation of the Scottish Parliament—is that it has been difficult to create a unified voice in taking forward a common agenda in sport. At times, people have been at pains to contradict one another when they should have been working in a more unified way to try to impress on politicians in all parties the importance of sport.

I am delighted that after many years of work in trying to create that uniform voice, we now have the vote for sport pledge and the sports manifesto that the Scottish sport alliance has produced. I

congratulate Kim Atkinson and her team on ensuring that that has been achieved. I encourage all members in the chamber and all candidates who are planning to stand at next year's elections to take the opportunity to sign the pledge.

In the present economic climate, to which James Kelly referred, it is extremely important that we do not lose the focus on the value of sport in our society. Given that 80 per cent of funding for sport comes from local authorities, it is important that sports budgets are not seen as being the soft option when it comes to making the cuts.

Sport clearly has an important role to play in making our society more cohesive and healthier, and in improving wellbeing overall. Given the significant health challenges that we as a society face, any undermining of the tools that we need to tackle our unhealthy diet and environment will only weaken our ability to meet those challenges more effectively—indeed, arguably, it could compound those problems yet further.

Although there are benefits from sport for health, wellbeing and social cohesion, we should also be prepared to celebrate sport for sporting purposes. It is important that we recognise that sport can be good fun, enjoyable and challenging, and that it brings a lot of wider benefits. We should be prepared to speak about sport for sport's sake, because it is a good thing in its own right, as the vote for sport initiative acknowledges.

The athletes of team Scotland who are currently representing their nation in the Commonwealth games in Delhi have got there only because of the investment that has been made during the past few decades. It is important, if we want to have a team Scotland of which we can be proud in the Commonwealth games in 2014 and 2018, that we continue that investment here today. I hope that we can, through the vote for sport initiative, continue to maintain the necessary level of investment to ensure that we are successful as a sporting nation.

My message to members is that they should sign the pledge and stand up for sport. I wish team Scotland in Delhi and in Prague good luck.

17:16

**Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab):** Michael Matheson has twice exhorted members to sign the pledge. I come from a background in which signing the pledge had slightly different connotations, but this one is equally significant and important, and I commend James Kelly for giving members the opportunity to put on record the Parliament's understanding of the significance of sport in our society.

A number of people who have been doing a tremendous job, such as Kim Atkinson and her colleagues at the Scottish sports alliance, have already been mentioned tonight. However, I want to pay tribute to the work of Margo MacDonald as the convener of the cross-party group on sport. It is probably one of the most active cross-party groups in the Parliament, and it regularly hosts stimulating speakers and discussions.

It also gives us the opportunity to get but a small glimpse of the variety of sport that is available the length and breadth of Scotland, and the tremendous work that is done by volunteers in their own time. Those people want to make a difference and are in love with the concept of sport as described by Michael Matheson, and they want to do their best for young people throughout the country.

Margo MacDonald, ably supported by her staff, is doing a tremendous job in stimulating a much-needed debate on the subject. I know that the people who participate in that group value the opportunity to come to the Parliament and present their case.

James Kelly and Michael Matheson have outlined the difference that sport can make. It is taken as read that sport can make a huge difference to the health and wellbeing not only of young people, but of everyone in the country.

It sometimes depresses me when I regularly go on holiday to France to see the type of sports facilities that are available in small towns and villages there, and which are often denied to young people in our communities. If we want people to participate in a healthy lifestyle, we must make it easy for them. We seem to be making it hard for people to participate in sport. That is not a political comment on any one Administration; it has been happening for generations. The facilities are not there and the money is not there to support coaching and development. If we are serious, we need—as James Kelly has said—to make the investment.

We also need to appreciate, as Michael Matheson mentioned, the difference that sport can make in reducing antisocial behaviour and crime. When people are engaged in positive activities and a positive lifestyle, they are less likely to turn to nefarious activities that damage themselves and the wider community.

I fundamentally believe—and I feel angry about this as an ex-teacher—that we do not pay sufficient attention to the contribution that sport can make to improving the educational opportunities and achievements of our young people, both in our schools and when they leave school to develop their careers. There is no doubt that those who participate in sporting activities go

on to be better citizens and have a better chance to make something of their lives.

We are not being asked to do a huge amount today in respect of what James Kelly has outlined in the debate and the pledge that we are being asked to sign. That should be taken as a given. The more fundamental issue for all of us who have influence in society is what we can do to encourage everyone, collectively, to take sport more seriously. A relatively small short-term investment will have huge returns if we are prepared to make that commitment.

17:20

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):** I, too, congratulate James Kelly on securing this timely and important debate, and I fully endorse his motion.

As a North East Scotland member of this Parliament, I am extremely proud to acknowledge the sporting success of a number of young competitors from my area. Robbie Renwick and David Carry, who are both double swimming medallists in the Delhi Commonwealth games, live near me on the outskirts of Aberdeen, and world champion Hannah Miley comes from Inverurie, which is just a few miles away. Shooting medallists Jennifer McIntosh and Kay Copland are also from the Aberdeen area, and three Nordic skiers from Huntly—Andrew Musgrave, Andrew Young, and Callum Smith, who was in reserve—were part of our team in the last winter Olympics. All those people deserve our warmest congratulations on their achievements and all can be held up as tremendous role models for the youth of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

World-class sporting events like the Olympic and Commonwealth games and this week's Ryder cup do a great deal to stimulate national pride and patriotism and to bring communities together in support of their local heroes. Not everyone can aspire to being an elite athlete in whatever sporting discipline, but everyone can improve their fitness by taking part in physical activity such as walking, cycling, swimming or by participating in organised sport. There are many on-going initiatives in Scotland to encourage walking to school or walking for pleasure, cycling to work or even getting involved in allotment gardening, which is a pet hobby-horse of mine.

Sport has an enormous impact on the lives of very many people in Scotland. I was amazed to learn from the sports alliance that there are about 12,000 sports clubs across the country, with 20 per cent of the population participating in them. Beyond that, many more of our fellow Scots are involved in sport through gym membership or as active supporters of sports such as football, rugby

and hockey who attend matches all over the country almost every weekend.

Sport is Scotland's missing link, as it bridges the key policy agendas of health, education, communities, the economy, justice and the environment. In the limited time that is available to me, I will focus on the positive impact that sport has on our health—physical and mental—as a nation.

With over a million adults and 150,000 children in Scotland already obese, with obesity levels predicted to reach more than 40 per cent by 2030 and with an estimated 2,500 people dying prematurely in Scotland every year due to physical inactivity, there is an urgent need to encourage people to adopt an active lifestyle at an early age and to maintain physical activity throughout their lives into old age. That will contribute to the prevention and management of many common health problems that cost the national health service a small fortune, including cardiovascular disease and hypertension, diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis and some cancers.

Moreover, the benefits of physical activity are well recognised in preventing and relieving mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. As was said in evidence to the Health and Sport Committee,

"it is very hard to be active, sporty, obese and depressed at the same time."

It is vital that we spread the word across Scotland of the value of physical activity and sport to society. That is why I have signed up to the Scottish sports alliance's pledge for sport and why I, too, encourage all MSPs to do likewise, if they have not done so already.

I asked a teenage class from Dyce academy in Aberdeen who visited the Parliament this afternoon about their involvement in sport. They all said—boys and girls—that they currently play an active part in sporting activity. I found that quite heartening.

I have come nowhere near to dealing with all the many benefits that are to be derived from sport in our communities, but I will sum up by quoting England's former chief medical officer. He stated:

"The potential benefits of physical activity to health are huge. If a medication existed which had a similar effect, it would be regarded as a 'wonder drug' or 'miracle cure'."

Presiding Officer, 2014, when Scotland will host the Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup, is fast approaching, and I cannot imagine a better legacy from those iconic events than to achieve a healthier Scotland.

17:25

**Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD):** I, too, congratulate James Kelly on bringing the debate to the chamber. The timing could not be better. It would be remiss of me not to congratulate team Scotland, as others have done, on its success in Delhi thus far and to wish it all the best for the remainder of the Commonwealth games. I congratulate Robbie Renwick, who has a Borders name but seems to have exported himself up to the north-east, on being the first to secure a gold medal. We hope that there are a few more to come. He showed tremendous bouncebackability—which I am assured is a real word—after his personal disappointment in the 400m event.

James Kelly is correct to highlight the fact that the staging of the 2014 Commonwealth games in Glasgow represents a fantastic opportunity for a variety of reasons. However, the Public Audit Committee's report on the potential final cost of staging the games is a concern. We must all concentrate on ensuring that the games are a success. As Nanette Milne and others said, we must not forget that the Ryder cup is to be held on these shores just a few weeks after the conclusion of the Commonwealth games here in 2014. We have only to note how gripping this week's tense finale of the Ryder cup was to highlight how great and admired an event it is. Indeed, I suspect that some members—not I, of course—achieved little on Monday afternoon as the events at Celtic Manor reached a thrilling conclusion.

Scotland alone may never stage the world cup or the Olympics, so to have two major internationally recognised sporting events in our country in the same year is probably a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and we should seize it. Given the handling of the homecoming 2009, I am wary of the suitability of another homecoming as a means to capitalise on our year of opportunity. Last year's event was a good idea, but in an era of limited public funds it is vital that we ensure that events are properly administered so that we maximise the gains from public investment.

As important as the economic benefits are, the societal benefits, such as the promotion of mass participation in sports and the health benefits that an active lifestyle delivers. The former chief medical officer for England, Sir Liam Donaldson, once stated in regard to participation in sport that

"The potential benefits of physical activity are huge. If a medication existed which had a similar effect it would be regarded as a ... 'miracle cure'."

Tennis courts are full in July and snooker halls are full in April. When sporting events that are staged in the UK are broadcast, people feel compelled to participate, and that is particularly true of young people. We have to take advantage

of the large number of people who might want to take part in boxing, cycling, swimming or gymnastics for the first time. It is estimated that 2,500 people a year die due to physical inactivity, and people who take little exercise are three times more likely to develop some cancers. We have to nip that in the bud.

I would like the Parliament to engage with the national governing bodies of each sport that is featured in the Commonwealth games to ascertain whether they have strategies in place to increase participation in sport in communities throughout the country after July 2014. By having such meetings, we could establish whether we can offer any support or expertise to help them to create strategies for the future. We must remember that many of the governing bodies are small organisations, so we cannot rely on them alone to increase participation in their sports.

Sport can serve as a vehicle for community cohesion and togetherness. To realise that, we have only to look at the way in which junior football clubs such as Auchinleck Talbot and rugby clubs such as Melrose have become such staples of their local communities. Perhaps as a result of the Commonwealth games, local judo and boxing clubs can become the Auchinleck Talbots and Melrose Rugby Football Clubs of the future.

17:29

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** I add my congratulations to James Kelly on securing the debate. In his speech, he omitted to mention one of the most significant events in Scottish football history, which was Kilmarnock winning the league in 1965 by defeating Hearts 2-0 at Tynecastle on the last day of the season. I was there to see it.

I, too, can attest to being a shining example of the positive impact that sport offers, having run a few Glasgow marathons in my day—I managed a best time of 3 hours and 30 minutes or thereabouts. I played school football and, for several years after university, amateur football in Ayrshire. I can say honestly that that was an education that was far beyond what I had imagined was possible. My favourite memory that I must slip into the debate is this: Scotch Corner Thistle 3, Stevenston Dynamos 0. That was a triumph for the skilful Kilmarnock-based team over its lumbering adversaries from Stevenston.

Many of my former teammates still play, well into their 50s. One of them recently invited me back to the Friday night team meeting at the Galleon sports centre in Kilmarnock. I do not have too many opportunities to go to that, but it is fantastic that many keep up their sporting interests well into their middle age.

On a more serious sporting level, the debate takes place against the background of the Commonwealth games. It is great that team Scotland is beginning to make an impact on the medal table, as members have said. Our Scottish weightlifting team includes two representatives from my constituency: Graeme Kane from Crosshouse, who competes today—possibly now—and Peter Kirkbride from Hurlford, who starts his competition on Saturday. Peter is the current British champion at 94kg and is an old hand at the Commonwealth games, as he finished sixth in the Melbourne games of 2006. Graeme is the under-23 champion at 77kg and is making his first appearance at the full Commonwealth games. I wish them both well in their competitions this week.

The appearance of those two athletes at that level of competition is down to the good work that the Kilmarnock weightlifting club and its coach, Charlie Hamilton, have done for many years. As Graeme Kane tells it, he got into the sport simply through reading an advert in his local paper and going along to the club—it was no more complicated than that. That was six years ago, when he was 16. The work that he has done since then has taken him all the way to Delhi and the Scottish squad.

Such stories justify the emphasis in James Kelly's motion on working at the grass roots and ensuring that as many people as possible have access to and take up the opportunities to participate in sports of all kinds. My constituency has several facilities for sport and leisure. Newmilns Snow and Sports Complex offers young and old the opportunity to learn and practise skiing techniques. The Galleon centre is a popular venue that offers a wide range of sports for every taste and ability. From football to rugby and from cycling to bowling, a huge amount of sport takes place in Kilmarnock and Loudoun every week, as I am sure is the case across Scotland.

Local clubs, many of which are run entirely by volunteers, are the entry points to sports for the potential Commonwealth games and Olympics stars of the future. They represent an investment in our future, not just for the medals tables at international events, but for the social and physical health of Scots of every age.

I know that dancing has not yet made it on to the competitive stage at Delhi, but I will finish by acknowledging another local participant in the games—Stewarton girl and dance student Joanne Allison, who is off to India to take part in the closing ceremony next Thursday.

I wish the Commonwealth games participants from Kilmarnock and Loudoun and team Scotland a safe and successful visit to Delhi. I look forward

to the title of host city being handed over to Glasgow at the conclusion of this year's event.

17:33

**Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** It gives me great pleasure to speak in support of the motion and to add my congratulations to James Kelly on securing this important debate. I thank the Scottish sports alliance, which has proved to be an excellent source of advice and information since I assumed my shadow sports brief.

I thank colleagues who have joined me in signing the SSA's vote for sport pledge, which calls on every MSP to recognise the unique role, value and potential of sport in Scottish society. I urge colleagues who have not yet signed the pledge to do so. The SSA has also produced a manifesto for sport that contains many practical and sensible ideas and which I am sure will attract considerable cross-party support.

I congratulate our latest Commonwealth games medal winner, Lauren Smith, on an outstanding performance in the synchronised swimming. Her bronze medal is Scotland's first in that sport at any Commonwealth games.

Four years from now, the eyes of the world will be fixed on Scotland, as we play host to the Commonwealth games in Glasgow. We all want to ensure that those games provide not just a grand spectacle but a lasting legacy for every citizen in our country.

The games will provide us with state-of-the-art sporting facilities and new housing, and it will make a massive contribution to the regeneration of Glasgow's east end. However, the success of the Commonwealth games will not be measured in bricks and mortar alone; it will be gauged by the contribution that they make to building a healthier, fitter and more active nation whose citizens enjoy a better quality of life. If we are to grasp that opportunity, it is vital that the Government listens to and learns from the tens of thousands of dedicated people who give freely of their time to coach or officiate a variety of sports in Scotland.

The motion rightly mentions the importance of grass-roots organisations in local communities. In my constituency, I am lucky to have a host of such groups that provide a fantastic range of opportunities for participation in sport and cater for all ages and levels of ability.

I hope that members will recall that, last year, the Parliament celebrated the success of one such group—Drumchapel table tennis club—and its redoubtable leader, Terry McLernon MBE. Through his unique blend of passion and commitment during the past 20 years, Terry has taken a club with two tables and a couple of bats



to a point at which it has become Britain's premier table tennis club. However, titles and trophies testify only to part of the club's success. As the minister's colleague, Shona Robison, will know, having accepted my invitation to visit the club, thousands of members have passed through its doors since 1989. Some have won national or regional titles; others have found a sense of belonging and purpose, forged firm friendships, learned about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, and experienced at first hand the advantages of working together with others in their community. The club's great strength lies in its commitment to catering for players of all ages and abilities, and in ensuring that they get the most out of their participation in sport and membership of the club. Its facilities are available seven nights a week, and no one who walks through its door is left out. It is an example of how sports clubs in communities can thrive and contribute to their area's general wellbeing.

Sport plays a significant part in Scottish society. It can do even more with appropriate support. I am certain that we will all do our best to ensure that the 2014 games are successful, that they act as a catalyst for greater participation and that they leave behind an enduring legacy for all our citizens in communities across Scotland.

17:37

**Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD):** I add my congratulations to James Kelly on bringing such an important debate before us and on his impeccable timing, having landed it in the middle of the Commonwealth games.

Earlier in the debate, I was a little inhibited by sitting so close to the only other person in the room who is qualified to teach physical education—Margo MacDonald—and finding in front of me, assisting Nanette Milne, the only international sportsperson in the room, in the shape of Elizabeth Smith, who played hockey and cricket.

Like many other members, I am speaking because I am keen on sport. I do not claim any particular prowess. I played a lot of rugby football, but also dabbled in cricket, rowing, football and golf—and I like it, which is okay. Because of that, I also like to watch good sport such as the Commonwealth games, the Olympic games and the Ryder cup. I am the sucker who is glued to my television screen until the early hours of the morning.

As Bill Butler said, those major sporting events are hugely important because they stimulate interest and ensure that those who have real talent and ability have a pinnacle to aim for. Nevertheless, we should be cautious. Bill Butler

was absolutely right to say that one of the aims of the 2014 Commonwealth games is to leave a legacy for Scotland. We have to be cautious because the international evidence for countries achieving a substantial sporting legacy is thin indeed.

There is increasing evidence of countries and cities being able to achieve physical legacies that improve them enormously. Barcelona is an extraordinarily good example of that; Manchester is also a good example. Like Bill Butler, I hope that the same will be true of Glasgow. However, the member is right to say that we must also create a legacy that stimulates sporting activity.

We all welcome, praise and need to support our elite athletes, but the real purpose of sport is to stimulate activity in, around and among our communities. Sport, like the arts, can transcend all issues of class and other divisions, so it can make an extraordinary contribution to the social cohesion of our society. We have heard how many people participate at club level, but clubs exist largely because of thousands upon thousands of volunteers who give of their time and effort. Without them, many sporting clubs in a range of sports would not exist, as they do all sorts of things—maintaining equipment, dealing with travelling and giving huge amounts of time and money to ensure that we have that fabric.

The stimulus that we can get from major events is needed, but we must also recognise—as the vote for sport campaign and its manifesto recognise—the need to pay more than just lip service to the contribution that sport can make to a healthier and better society. In signing up today to the pledge to give the maximum number of people opportunities to participate in sport, we must also ensure, on a cross-party basis, that we take policies into and out of the next election that ensure that sport continues to play not just its current role but a bigger role, because it has the capacity to do so for the benefit of communities in Scotland.

17:42

**Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** I put on record my thanks to James Kelly for bringing this debate to the chamber. If he and others care to look back at the previous debate on sport, they will be gratified to find that the sort of thing that Ross Finnie described has come on a bomb. It used just to be about what medals we would win at the games and how we would get on in the Ryder cup, but tonight we have heard about sport and the people who take part in it.

I thank Hugh Henry for his kind and flattering remarks about the cross-party group on sport. I also thank Michael Matheson for saying that it is

about fun. Many folk who are not in the best of health still take part in bowls. There are all sorts of sports in which people can take part even if they are a bit impaired in their physical movements—I should know. It is important to put on record that sport is not all about beating health targets—we must ensure that people enjoy it. That is what I told Christine Grahame when she said that she was put off the idea of sport when she had to run around a cold hockey field with her big blue knickers on. Now she does not need to do that—she can buy a nice wee skirt.

The cross-party group on sport has been able to influence some members; in part, that is what cross-party groups are about. We had the biggest turnout when the biggest hunky rugby players came to a meeting with the Calcutta cup; I think you were there, Presiding Officer. There was not a seat to be had. However, there was also a big turnout when Rangers came to talk not about its glorious history but about what it is doing in the community and the fact that it is reaching educationally the parts that many of our education authorities have not managed to reach. There is a growing programme to knit the affection for and ties to the sports clubs that exist in local communities into ways of coping with many of the social challenges that people face.

We had some cracking meetings when we discussed community sport. I confess that that is where my interest lies. I am of course glad about the people from Scotland who win Olympic medals and I am glad for some of the wee countries that go to the Commonwealth games with two or three athletes. That is great for them and it is good that there is room for them, but my real interest is in community sport and in getting everybody to join in.

I would like the benchmark for success under our sporting policy to be a wee country such as New Zealand. I do not know whether New Zealand has ever hosted a tournament like the Ryder cup—probably not. I do not know whether it has ever hosted the world rugby championships either—probably not. However, just about everybody in New Zealand gets out and plays some sort of sport. The same is true of Finland and Norway. Whoops—I nearly said “arc of prosperity”. It just shows that we do not need money to enjoy sport; countries can still develop a decent sporting policy anyway.

Jim Hume spoke about the importance of the governing bodies. That is where our priority for investment should lie. Sportscotland, the Scottish sports alliance and the people at the Scottish Sports Association can help to professionalise the management and administration of sport at community level. That is what gets kids in—if they can go along to a well-run local facility where there

is good coaching and some local connection that they can identify with, and if it is not too rarefied for them. I was glad that Jim Hume mentioned the governing bodies, and I am glad that we have talked about that at the cross-party group on sport.

I am not meaning to criticise anybody, but spending money on extravagant opening ceremonies sits ill in countries that can hardly afford that sort of thing, where the organisers feel that they have to put on a show at the big sporting occasions. We will have to market Scotland to the world during Glasgow's games, but we should use imagination more than cash if we do not want to run foul of the people who depend on us to make their lives a bit better—we should ensure that the legacy fits in with their needs.

The more people run, jump, throw and kick, the more people will become good at it and the more medal winners we will get. We do not need to work at it all that much, provided that we are all in it together, to quote a phrase. All I ask all members at this debate to do is ensure that our other colleagues sign the pledge for sport.

17:47

**The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Keith Brown):** I, too, congratulate James Kelly on securing the debate, and I echo the point that this is a very good time for it, given that the Commonwealth games in Delhi are in full swing.

The Scottish Government is fully committed to supporting sport in our communities. As Margo MacDonald has just been saying, that is the backbone of sport in Scotland. In the past year, through sportscotland, we have provided significant support for sports clubs across the country, most markedly in South Lanarkshire.

We will wish to recognise the contribution of the sports alliance and its constituent bodies—the Scottish Sports Association, the Scottish Association of Local Sports Councils, and Scottish Universities Sport. The Minister for Public Health and Sport cannot be here today as she is in Delhi, but she meets members of the alliance regularly.

The Scottish Government echoes the sentiments that have been brought out in the motion and in some of the speeches this evening. Sport can make a significant contribution to Scottish society and, as a number of members have said, it can benefit our physical and mental wellbeing.

We recognise that we do not do enough as a nation. It is therefore essential that we increase our levels of physical activity, which in turn will help us to combat a range of illnesses—Nanette Milne mentioned some—and shake off our record of being a nation in poor health.

As Ross Finnie said, we love our sport, but we need to do more than just watch it from the sofa or the terraces. As well as helping us to become healthier, sport can bring significant economic benefit. That is particularly true when it comes to big events—withstanding the points that Margo MacDonald rightly made about the costs. She was also right to suggest that some countries that seek to hold such big events perhaps now feel themselves priced out of them, given the costs that can go with them. However, the Commonwealth games in 2014 will deliver an estimated net economic benefit of about £81 million at the Scottish level, with an estimated 1,200 net jobs, 1,000 of which will be in Glasgow.

The Ryder cup at Gleneagles, which will take place shortly afterwards, is expected to benefit the Scottish economy by £100 million—that is what it says in my notes, but I have recently seen an estimate that puts the figure at around £150 million—in the week of the event alone.

Tackling antisocial behaviour is another area in which sport can play its part, as James Kelly said. We fund that through, among other things, the Government's cashback for communities programme. Funding is being provided from the proceeds of crime fund to a range of sports bodies, such as the Scottish Football Association and Scottish Rugby, to offer our young people the chance to keep fit and try new activities, in the hope that that will change attitudes and behaviours and, in turn, make our communities safer.

We must remember, as several members have said, that sport is meant to be fun. At the top level, athletes earn huge sums, but for the vast majority of people sport should be about having fun and enjoying themselves. Some members mentioned the prospect of cuts and the impact that that might have on sport. It is somewhat ironic that we are discussing that possibility when it is possible for some players at the peak of their sport to collect £200,000 a week for playing football. I am not saying that that is all that they do, but it marks the difference between the scale of private funding and what Governments can expect to spend.

I say to Margo MacDonald that it is true that New Zealand has hosted the rugby world cup at least once, and I think that it is to host the next rugby world cup. In addition, it is interesting to see a small country such as the Falkland Islands competing at the current Commonwealth games. It is taking part in the badminton competition, despite having only one club with 40 members.

By its nature, sport is competitive. As we have seen from the performances, that is at the very heart of sport. Whether it is winning a kick-about with mates or winning a championship final, sporting success makes people feel good about

themselves. I am sure that the whole nation was delighted to see Colin Montgomerie lift the Ryder cup on Monday after leading the European team to victory at Celtic Manor and to watch Robbie Renwick taking gold in the pool on Tuesday. I was lucky enough to get down to one of the days of the Ryder cup—fortunately, it was the day when the scoreboard was almost entirely blue. The day after, we managed to go on to win the cup. It was phenomenal to see the level of interest in the event. Listening to “Flower of Scotland” being played as Robbie Renwick received his gold medal made us all feel extremely proud—it had echoes of Liz Lynch's victories, as was mentioned.

Although sport is competitive, it is about more than winning. It is about what we can bring to individuals and communities alike. Not everyone will have the talent or the belief to win major events, but they should have the opportunity to have that ambition.

It is important to remember that even the physical infrastructure can have a legacy that is not physical. I have lived through two Commonwealth games in Edinburgh, the first of which was when the Royal Commonwealth pool and Meadowbank stadium were built. After the games, it was inspiring for those of us who lived in Edinburgh to be able to use the same pool that the athletes had used. Like Willie Coffey, I had the chance to run the five Edinburgh marathons in the 1980s, each one of which finished on the Tartan track in Meadowbank stadium. Although most of the race involved running around the back streets and the foreshore of Edinburgh, it was highly inspirational to come into the stadium, where the international athletes had been, for the end of the race. The physical infrastructure can have an important legacy.

As has been said, it all starts at the grass roots. It is essential that we have the appropriate infrastructure—I am talking about people as well as buildings—that will allow everyone to develop their basic skills at an early age and have the opportunity to try a wide range of sports and get the right coaching in a facility that is fit for purpose. In that regard, I take Hugh Henry's point. Some of the early public-private partnership buildings were not open to the community at night, and I commend local authorities such as Glasgow City Council, which bought out the contract so that everyone in Glasgow could use all the facilities that were part of the original PPP programme.

Now that the Commonwealth games are under way, many of us have been glued to our seats watching top athletes compete. Such events have the ability to inspire and encourage others to do that little bit extra. We must capture that interest and enthusiasm if we are to have health at the heart of our legacy plan, and our clear aim is to

create an active nation. Ross Finnie's point about the lack of success of countries that have hosted events such as Commonwealth games was well made. To return to the Ryder cup, the club golf programme, which was born out of our bid to host that event, has been extremely successful in introducing thousands of young people to golf and it will have long-term benefits.

It has been mentioned that local grass-roots clubs can be a focal point for bringing communities together. Those clubs need to be supported and helped to thrive, and that support will be provided through the community sports hubs.

We should all enjoy and celebrate the Commonwealth games, but we should also recognise that we should not measure success just by the performances of the few; rather, we should measure it by the efforts of the many. We should use the games as an opportunity for Scotland to become a healthier and fitter nation.

*Meeting closed at 17:55.*

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