



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 29 September 2011

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.scottish.parliament.uk or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Thursday 29 September 2011

CONTENTS

	Col.
CANCER DRUGS	2255
<i>Motion moved—[Murdo Fraser].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Nicola Sturgeon].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Alison McInnes].</i>	
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	2255
The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon)	2258
Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD)	2261
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	2263
Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)	2265
Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)	2266
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)	2268
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)	2269
Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)	2270
Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)	2271
Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP)	2272
Alison McInnes	2274
Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	2275
Nicola Sturgeon	2276
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	2278
SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES	2281
<i>Motion moved—[Liz Smith].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Michael Russell].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Ken Macintosh].</i>	
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	2281
The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell)	2285
Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)	2288
Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP)	2291
Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)	2292
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	2294
Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	2296
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)	2297
Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)	2299
Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)	2301
Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	2302
Michael Russell	2304
David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con)	2307
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE QUESTION TIME	2310
GENERAL QUESTIONS	2310
NHS Lothian (Meetings)	2310
Advertising Budget (Allocation)	2311
Modern Apprenticeships	2312
Community Councils	2313
Mechanical Engineering Graduates (Career Destinations)	2314
Public Procurement Procedures	2315
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	2318
Engagements	2318
Prime Minister (Meetings)	2321
Cabinet (Meetings)	2323
Crown Estate (Minerals)	2325
Nurses	2325
University Mergers	2327
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE QUESTION TIME	2330
RURAL AFFAIRS AND THE ENVIRONMENT	2330

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority (Meetings)	2330
Scotland Rural Development Programme (Application Process)	2331
Cereal Farmers (Wet Weather Assistance)	2332
Scottish Environment Protection Agency (European Bathing Water Directive)	2333
Bracken Control (Support for Farmers and Crofters)	2334
Forestry Commission Scotland (Leased Farmland)	2335
Distillery By-products (Biofriendly Renewable Energy)	2336
Glasgow City Council (Environmental Improvement)	2336
Diffuse Pollution (South Scotland)	2337
JUSTICE AND LAW OFFICERS	2338
Court Cases (Closed Session)	2338
Offences Aggravated by Religious Prejudice (Convictions)	2339
No Knives, Better Lives Initiative	2340
National Police Force (Accountability)	2341
Police and Fire Service Accountability (Dumfries and Galloway)	2343
Prisons (Transfer of Medical Nursing and Pharmacy Services)	2344
Single Police Force (Allocation of Resources)	2345
Scottish Sentencing Council	2345
SCOTTISH STUDIES	2347
<i>Motion moved—[Dr Alasdair Allan].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Claire Baker].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Liz Smith].</i>	
The Minister for Learning and Skills (Dr Alasdair Allan)	2347
Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	2351
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	2355
Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)	2358
Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab)	2360
Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)	2363
Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	2366
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)	2368
Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)	2370
John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	2373
Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab)	2375
Paul Wheelhouse (South Scotland) (SNP)	2376
Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)	2380
David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con)	2383
Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)	2386
The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell)	2389
DECISION TIME	2394
LIGHTBURN HOSPITAL	2409
<i>Motion debated—[Paul Martin].</i>	
Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)	2409
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)	2411
Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab)	2413
Humza Yousaf (Glasgow) (SNP)	2414
James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab)	2416
Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP)	2417
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	2419
James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)	2421
The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson)	2423

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 29 September 2011

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

Cancer Drugs

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-00956, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on cancer drugs and their availability in Scotland. I call on Murdo Fraser to move the motion and speak; he has 10 minutes.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): We have all seen newspaper headlines such as “Scots ‘worst’ for cancer survival”, “Lung cancer survival among the lowest in Europe” and Scotland “has the lowest breast cancer survival rate”. The sad truth is that report after report tells us that Scotland lags behind a plethora of developed countries in survival rates for cancer. Norway, Sweden, the US, Canada and France are but a few examples of countries that boast better five-year survival rates than Scotland across a range of cancers.

I accept that, in recent years, there has been an improvement in the figures for survival rates in Scotland, but I wish to highlight that Scots also lag behind a significant proportion of Europe for access to new cancer medicines, even though successive price cuts and exchange rate movements have meant that United Kingdom prices are currently among the lowest in Europe.

It is our job as parliamentarians and as compassionate members of our society to ensure that, when a person is diagnosed with a terrible illness such as cancer, they have the best possible fighting chance of beating it, or—in the most extreme cases—of being able at least to extend for as long as possible the time that they can spend with loved ones.

Sadly, in June this year, one of my constituents, Gillian Bauld from Dunblane, died after being diagnosed with advanced metastatic breast cancer. Her husband had contacted me prior to her death to raise concerns about the difficulty his wife was having accessing lapatinib—a drug that is not approved by the Scottish Medicines Consortium, but which would have presented the best way of controlling the disease’s progression after her chemotherapy came to an end.

The Baulds made two separate exceptional prescribing requests, by two different consultants, and were rejected both times. As the drug was not approved by the SMC and because the exceptional prescribing route had been closed

down to them, Gillian’s consultant advised that the only option would be to pay for the treatment themselves, at a cost of £10,000 for a 12-week course. That was unaffordable for that family, as it would be for many families across Scotland. It was a crushing blow at what was already a difficult and distressing time for the family.

The really devastating fact for Gillian was that, had she been living in England, she would have met the specific criteria that are laid down for access to lapatinib through the interim cancer drugs fund. As her husband wrote in *The Scotsman*:

“The ICDF is intended to help people like my wife. If we lived in England, then she would fully meet the criteria for funding, whereas in Scotland she isn’t considered worthy of further help.”

There are many cases all across Scotland like my constituent Gillian Bauld and I am sure members have dealt with, or are dealing with, similar cases.

According to a report that has been published by the Rarer Cancers Foundation, there are now 23 cancer treatments that are not routinely available in Scotland but which can be funded through the interim cancer drugs fund that has been set up by the Conservative-led coalition in England. The cabinet secretary will dispute the figure of 23 cancer treatment drugs. I have read the correspondence that she sent to my colleague David McLetchie yesterday, and I have seen the vigorous rebuttal from the Rarer Cancers Foundation that was sent to the health services research unit on 8 September.

I am not here to get into a dispute about whether the figure is 23 or some lower figure. I acknowledge that the cabinet secretary believes it is not 23 and may be as low as 12. It seems that that is not really the point; even the cabinet secretary will accept that cancer medicines that are available in England are not available in Scotland. If we cannot agree on the number, the principle is established.

The interim cancer drugs fund totals £600 million over three years, which is in addition to an initial £50 million. It has helped 5,000 patients in England to access the cancer medicines that they need. Such facts convince me that the Rarer Cancers Foundation is right to argue that about 14 treatment requests per million population are being approved in Scotland, in comparison with almost 48 such requests in England. Lapatinib—the drug that my constituent required for her breast cancer—has an approval rating in England that is nine times greater than that in Scotland.

If Scotland set up its own fund and achieved the same approval rate as England has for a host of drugs, the number of cancer patients in Scotland

who could gain access to life-enhancing and life-extending treatment would increase by 235 per cent. We need to remember that we are dealing with many people who are reaching the end of their lives. Often, such drugs will not save their lives, but will prolong them and give them better quality of life when they need extra help.

I acknowledge that the fund south of the border is an interim measure, as such a fund in Scotland would be. The fund in England will run until 2014, when the Department of Health intends to replace the current pharmaceutical price regulatory system with a value-based pricing system for drugs which, I hope, the cabinet secretary will support for Scotland. That change will link the price of a drug to cost-effectiveness on the basis of clinical evidence. It is hoped that the new system will lead to more innovation and investment being focused on patient needs. However, until that time, morally we cannot accept a system in which Scottish patients—simply because of where they are domiciled—are being denied access to cancer drugs that are available to other United Kingdom citizens.

When the cabinet secretary gets to her feet, I am sure that she will extol the virtues of the individual patient treatment request arrangements, which form the Scottish Government's default position when it is challenged on the availability of cancer medicines. However, as my constituent Gillian Bauld found out, even with that system, access to cancer drugs is still being denied, while such vital drugs are available in England.

The report "Nations divided? An assessment of variations in access to cancer treatments for patients in England, Scotland and Wales", from the Rarer Cancers Foundation, highlights the fact that patients do not access the group of medicines that the SMC has declined through the IPTR route, which is why patients in Scotland are three times less likely to gain access to a cancer drug that is not routinely available than are patients in England. One clinician told me that bevacizumab—I hope that I pronounced it correctly—is a very good example of such a medicine. The drug has no SMC approval and no successful IPTR appeals, despite being the gold standard of treatment of advanced colorectal cancer in the western world and now in England, with the introduction of the cancer drugs fund. Again, a drug is being made available to patients in England and Wales but not to patients in Scotland.

Cancer Research UK welcomed the English drugs fund and said:

"This cancer drugs fund could make a real difference for some cancer patients, allowing them to get the treatments they need."

I know that other cancer charities take a different view, and it is clear that opinion is divided, but patients in England are undoubtedly benefiting from the fund. That is why cancer sufferers, many clinicians and many experts can see the evidence of the £600 million cancer drugs fund working for cancer patients.

The Rarer Cancers Foundation has estimated that achieving a comparable level of access in Scotland would cost the Scottish Government £5 million. That amount is insignificant in the context of the health budget. In our manifesto for the Scottish election earlier this year, we identified where that money could be found from. It would be money well spent.

I, and we, do not believe that cancer sufferers in Scotland should be treated less well than those elsewhere in the United Kingdom. It is time for the Scottish Government to think again on the issue. I have pleasure in moving the motion in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with concern the findings of the Rarer Cancers Foundation (RCF) report, *Nations divided? An assessment of variations in access to cancer treatments for patients in England, Scotland and Wales*, which states that there are now 23 cancer medicines not routinely available in Scotland that may be available in England through the Cancer Drugs Fund; recognises that patients in Scotland are now three times less likely than patients in England to gain access to a cancer medicine that is not routinely available; further notes the comments of the RCF that the Scottish Government has displayed a concerning degree of complacency over access to cancer treatments, and calls on the Scottish Government to set up a Scottish cancer drugs fund to be reviewed once the current pharmaceutical price regulation scheme expires.

09:24

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): I welcome the debate. As all of us in the chamber will recognise, the issues are complex, emotive, sensitive and often very challenging. Because of that, however, there is an obligation on us all to debate the issues rationally, responsibly and accurately at all times.

First of all, comparisons between Scotland and England are not always valid; indeed, they are often extremely misleading. The simple fact is that lists of medicines do not tell the whole story of improvements in cancer care. One cannot simply say that, at any one time, a single fixed list of cancer medicines is being provided in England but not in Scotland.

I have studied the Rarer Cancers Foundation report; it is helpful in many respects. Furthermore, I respect the organisation's work. Nevertheless, the report contains errors, and some of the claims that have been made and the basis on which the conclusions have been reached are open to

serious challenge. For example, some of the medicines that have been listed as being not available in Scotland are, in fact, available. There has been double counting, and some of the “not recommended” decisions were made because the pharmaceutical company in question had not made a submission to the SMC. I will discuss those issues with the Rarer Cancers Foundation in due course.

There are, and will continue to be, differences between Scotland and England. There are drugs available in Scotland that are not available in England. The position changes rapidly because of the number of new medicines that become available. We should also remember that although the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence in England reviews only a selection of new drugs, the Scottish Medicines Consortium quickly reviews all new drugs that get a licence.

Of course, making such comparisons suggests that there is a uniform position across England. That is not the case. From what we can see from published policies on the interim cancer drugs fund, it appears that English regions are adopting different approaches to its application.

The key point is that the Scottish Government has been anything but complacent on the issue. We have worked collaboratively to put in place continuously improving and robust arrangements for assessment and introduction of new medicines. Indeed, that was demonstrated in the substantial amount of work that was carried out with the Public Petitions Committee. It is instructive that, in closing the petition in question, the committee highlighted improvements that have been made in the national health service in Scotland.

I say again—and will continue to say—what I have said previously: I am and always will be open-minded about what more can be done and I will always consider any ways in which we can further improve access to clinically evidenced and cost-effective medicines that improve patients’ outcomes. We are keeping the existing arrangements under review and will make changes where necessary.

We are also looking to the future. The position continues to evolve with, for example, the UK Government’s plans to introduce value-based pricing. I have written to the Secretary of State for Health and we are working with the Department of Health in England to ensure that our interests are fully recognised and that we can consider the wider implications for Scotland.

Our fundamental efforts remain focused on three principles: first, our having robust and independent national and local arrangements for timely assessment of new medicines to ensure that they are clinically evidenced and cost

effective; secondly, our having consistent arrangements for consideration of individual cases where a particular medicine has not been recommended by the Scottish Medicines Consortium—I note that a vast majority of individual treatment requests are granted; and thirdly, there must be a clear focus on equity.

Although I absolutely understand the prominence that is given to cancer drugs and although I can, at first glance, see the attraction of a cancer drugs fund, my concern about equity leads me to agree with Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Macmillan Cancer Support and Myeloma UK. In a briefing for this debate—a briefing, I should point out, that recognises and welcomes the extent of the improvements that have been made and acknowledges the need for them to bed in—those respected cancer charities have said that, in their opinion, a cancer drugs fund is not a necessary policy for Scotland.

I have two key concerns about equity. First, I am concerned about the risk of a cancer drugs fund creating inequity between those who suffer from cancer and those who suffer from other serious conditions, such as Alzheimer’s and heart disease. We should continue to improve access to drugs; however, in my view, that should mean access to all drugs—not just to cancer drugs.

Murdo Fraser: I entirely understand the cabinet secretary’s point about equity. However, at the heart of that very question is the fact that we are where we are in relation to decisions that have been made by the Department of Health in England and Wales. As a result of those decisions, patients in England and Wales are getting access to cancer drugs that are not available in Scotland. Surely in the interests of equity that question must be addressed.

Nicola Sturgeon: I have already challenged that proposition and am happy to do so in greater detail in discussion with Murdo Fraser.

The second key equity issue is the risk of inequity within cancer care. Drugs are an important weapon in the battle against cancer, but they are not the only weapon. Radiotherapy and surgery are increasingly the treatments of choice. We need to invest in them too, and we need to do more to prevent cancer in the first place.

Murdo Fraser quoted Cancer Research UK, but he did not quote its opinion that the cancer drugs fund

“has been criticised for funding non-cost-effective chemotherapy treatments, rather than other, possibly more effective, interventions such as drives for earlier diagnosis or more advanced radiotherapy.”

That is a key, fundamental point. Our broader and more comprehensive approach has involved our investing £22 million in new radiotherapy

equipment. For those reasons, we are committed to improving cancer survival rates through earlier detection of cancer. Our detect cancer early plan is backed up by investment of £30 million.

In short, we are committed to, and we will continue to be committed to, tackling cancer on all fronts, and we are seeing major improvements in the quality of care and outcomes for cancer patients. We will continue to prioritise further improvements through a consistent, evidence-based approach to the introduction of new medicines, treatments and support, alongside our crucial commitment to detecting cancer early. In looking to the future we will, of course, ensure that our interests are fully represented in the development of value-based pricing arrangements.

I look forward to the debate.

I move amendment S4M-00956.2, to leave out from “notes with concern” to end and insert:

“notes the Scottish Government’s significant and proactive developments in policy for the introduction and uptake of new medicines and the positive endorsement of these by the Public Petitions Committee; agrees that Scotland has robust arrangements for the introduction of newly licensed clinically and cost effective medicines, including cancer drugs, through the Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC) and Healthcare Improvement Scotland, which operate independently from the Scottish Government; notes that, in certain circumstances, there are opportunities for local clinically led consideration of SMC “not recommended” medicines for individual patients; notes that Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Myeloma UK and Macmillan Cancer Support do not agree that the Cancer Drugs Fund is a necessary policy measure in Scotland; notes that the Scottish Government is working with the UK Department of Health with regard to the introduction of value-based pricing, and welcomes the intention to improve cancer survival rates through the detect cancer early implementation plan, backed up by the investment of £30 million.”

09:31

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):

Back in 2009, in response to the Public Petitions Committee inquiry, the cabinet secretary outlined three steps that her Government would take to improve access to medicines on the NHS, and we welcomed that approach. She said at the end of that debate:

“My objective is to ensure that we have a system in place that is, from end to end, robust, fair and well understood. Such a system should ensure that, when a patient can derive demonstrable benefit from a drug, it is available on the NHS through either SMC approval or exceptional prescribing.”—[*Official Report*, 25 March 2009; c 16130-31.]

The situation in Scotland that Murdo Fraser has outlined is that

“patients in Scotland are now three times less likely than patients in England to gain access to a cancer medicine that is not routinely available”.

There are geographical variations in the rate of exceptional prescribing applications as well as variations in patients’ chances of making a successful application. Those variations are not acceptable. Relying on the exceptional prescribing process can, of course, also be stressful and time consuming.

The Rarer Cancers Foundation report entitled “The Scottish Exception? An audit of the progress made in improving access to treatment for people with rarer cancers” says that an increasing number of Scots have to rely on exceptional prescribing applications, that nearly a third of NHS boards have no written policy governing exceptional prescribing applications, and that NHS boards use variable criteria to assess exceptional prescribing applications. It is therefore clear that more work is needed to ensure that a transparent system is in place that is

“from end to end, robust, fair and well understood.”

Expenditure on drugs amounts to almost 10 per cent of the NHS budget in Scotland. I understand that tough decisions will always need to be made in the area. Weighing up effectiveness against resources is an extremely difficult task, and it must be done in a rigorous and scrupulously objective way. It may well be that the criteria that are used to make those decisions need to be examined to see whether they disadvantage drugs that are designed to treat rare diseases, but the Scottish Liberal Democrats do not agree with the argument that we should bypass the Scottish Medicines Consortium for cancer drugs. That argument is intellectually unsound, unsustainable and unfair for people who suffer from other conditions. Politicians should not second guess the SMC.

Like Macmillan Cancer Support, Breakthrough Breast Cancer and Myeloma UK, we do not support the creation of a separate cancer drugs fund. The SMC’s role is to make objective decisions about individual drugs, and recent initiatives should be given a chance to demonstrate their efficacy. Cancer Research UK has admitted that the bigger prize is the achievement of a decent settlement in negotiations about value-based pricing. I urge the Scottish Government to engage with the UK Government to ensure that the new scheme meets the needs of patients in Scotland.

The evidence that we have seen is that record keeping in NHS boards is still poor. Nearly two thirds of NHS boards do not hold information about the costs associated with funding exceptional prescribing applications. I would like to see that change. In order to help to make progress, the Government must increase

transparency throughout the system and should consider commissioning research into what factors contribute to situations in which drugs are seen to be safe and effective but not cost effective and clinically evidenced.

One step that the cabinet secretary outlined in 2009 was the introduction of a set of modifiers that the SMC can apply when considering new medicines. Has an assessment been made of the impact that that more flexible approach is having on access? Have, as a result of the modifiers, any drugs been approved that would not have been approved under the standard methodology?

We seek a much greater contribution from the pharmaceutical industry, which should work with the Scottish Government to encourage patient access schemes and risk-sharing approaches. In our manifesto, we focused on improving early detection rates to increase survival and we set out plans for a new target on urgent referral for cancer diagnosis: every patient should expect to see a specialist within two weeks. We must focus on increasing early detection in order to tackle the unacceptably high number of cancer cases that are detected for the first time only during emergency admission to hospital. The subject is emotive, but it benefits from the calm and impartial consideration that the SMC can bring.

I move amendment S4M-00956.1, to leave out from “through” to end and insert:

“and that patients in Scotland are now three times less likely than patients in England to gain access to a cancer medicine that is not routinely available; notes that the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy made a statement to the Parliament on 25 March 2009, outlining three steps being taken to improve access to new medicines, during which she said “All the developments that I have announced today will, individually and collectively, improve patients’ access to medicines on the NHS”; recognises that an earlier RCF report, *The Scottish Exception? An audit of the progress made in improving access to treatment for people with rarer cancers*, published in March 2011, found that increasing numbers of Scots are having to rely on exceptional case applications, that nearly a third of NHS boards have no written policy governing exceptional case applications in place and that NHS boards use variable criteria to assess exceptional case applications; believes that more work is needed to ensure that there is a system in place that is, from end to end, robust, fair and well understood, and calls on the Scottish Government to outline its response to the findings in the RCF reports, work with the Scottish Medicines Consortium and NHS boards to increase transparency around decision making and work constructively with the UK Government to ensure that the new value-based pricing scheme meets the needs of patients in Scotland.”

09:36

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I, too, thank the Conservatives for bringing the debate on access to cancer drugs to the chamber, because it gives us all an opportunity to consider how well or

otherwise the system is working in Scotland and what changes might be necessary. However, we do not support the development of a cancer drugs fund in Scotland. We know that treatment is changing—more and more cancer patients are diagnosed early and use of surgical intervention and use of radiotherapy are increasing. The real prize will be gained by investment in early diagnosis and treatment, which we know lead to better outcomes for patients.

Our lack of support for a cancer drugs fund does not mean that we believe that the current system is functioning as well as we all wish it to. The recent changes that the Scottish Government made, following a petition to the Parliament, are welcome and have made substantial improvements to the system. A process has been introduced whereby a clinician can initiate an individual patient treatment request. Let us look at that in a little more detail.

We are all aware of the role of the Scottish Medicines Consortium in making decisions about which drugs are licensed for use, based on clinical evidence and cost effectiveness. However, we then have 14 separate area drug therapeutic committees—one for each health board. Given that the same guidance applies to all health boards, it is difficult to understand why NHS boards take such different lengths of time to decide on cancer drug use. I will illustrate that with one example. A cancer drug that the SMC deemed to be okay to use in April 2009 was agreed by two out of the 14 health boards within a month, but it took a further 16 months before the drug was agreed for use across Scotland. We still have a postcode lottery.

A second issue that I want to raise concerns the system of individual patient treatment requests. We absolutely approve of that innovation to improve our system, because it enables clinicians to make judgments in the interests of their patients and was supposed to be our equivalent to the cancer drugs fund in England. When the process works effectively, it should support clinicians to make medicines available to those who will benefit most, regardless of cost. However, there is a growing body of anecdotal evidence to the effect that the process is being undermined in several ways: by local rules that prevent initiation of individual patient treatment requests; by routine rejection of requests; by refusal even to consider requests in the first place; and by the considerable administrative burden that is placed on clinicians, which poses an added difficulty in getting into the system. Frankly, it is hard to determine whether that perception is correct, because the Scottish Government has no mechanism that I am aware of to compare the number of requests with the number of approvals.

Nicola Sturgeon: This is a point of information rather than a question, but Jackie Baillie will be aware—if she is not, she will be soon—that as part of the improvements that began through the Public Petitions Committee, we are gathering data on requests and approvals so that we can assess the situation across the country.

Jackie Baillie: That will be helpful. I hope that we can access the information soon.

I encourage the Scottish Government to make further improvements. I pose the question whether we need 14 area drug committees. Perhaps we do, but they seem to act as a block in the system, in that they duplicate the work of the SMC and delay availability of drugs. If we are monitoring and collecting data, can we apply that to ensure that the individual patient treatment request system works effectively in every health board?

We value the work that is being done on value-based pricing of medicine, and we support any approach that leads to early detection and treatment of cancer, but we should not be proud of the fact that cancer patients in Scotland are perhaps three times less likely than cancer patients in England to have access to treatments. We need to make a difference by ensuring that our system enables access to cancer drugs.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I remind members that speeches should be of four minutes. Time is really tight.

09:40

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): The debate is an emotive one. I thank Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Macmillan Cancer Support and Myeloma UK for their briefing.

Murdo Fraser used the word “morally” in the context of deciding whether we should have a cancer drugs fund in Scotland, but my challenge to him would be that I think it slightly immoral to challenge the competency of the SMC in the work that it does.

The cabinet secretary mentioned fairness and equity. If a cancer drugs fund were set up in Scotland, I believe that it would not be too long before other groups would make submissions to Parliament about the fact that they did not have a particular fund. I refer to problems such as diabetes, stroke, heart disease, asthma and chronic bronchitis.

It is worth trying to ensure early detection and prevention, and the work that the Government has done in providing £30 million for early detection and prevention is a route to ensuring that patients are given the best possible care at the best possible time. I respect the work of clinicians and their judgment, and I approve of virtually all the

points that Jackie Baillie made about the work that is being done to make progress. Treatment is up to clinicians; if they feel that a patient warrants a particular drug, the mechanism exists for them to make an individual patient treatment request for that drug. I welcome the information from the cabinet secretary that such requests are being monitored and that measurement is in place, so we should get that evidence eventually.

Of the devolved countries, England is the only one that is moving forward with an interim cancer drugs fund—Wales does not seem to be moving forward with such a fund and Northern Ireland has no intention of setting one up. I believe that there is no need for one in Scotland.

The debate will probably raise many issues, but I return to equality. I believe that every person who has an illness requires the best possible treatment at any given time. To ensure that that happens, we must not set up individual funds for specific conditions.

09:43

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I very much welcome the debate, which highlights dilemmas that we face now, and which will become far more acute in the near future.

On a recent visit to the labs at the Edinburgh cancer research centre, I heard David Cameron—the very highly regarded David Cameron, who is the new professor of oncology at the University of Edinburgh—describing how new cancer treatments are targeting specific subtypes of cancer, which means that the already expensive cancer drugs are likely to become far more expensive in the future because they will be used on smaller subgroups of patients rather than on everyone who has a particular type of tumour. He highlighted what difficult choices we would have to make as the drugs budget increases exponentially in the next decade.

My second general point is one that the cabinet secretary made: drugs are not the only weapon against cancer. In a recent talk, Professor Alan Rodger, who was director of the Beatson oncology centre until quite recently, gave figures on the contribution that different treatments make to curing of cancer. For surgery, the figure was 68 per cent; for radiotherapy, it was 28 per cent; and for chemotherapy, it was 4 per cent. That is not to downgrade or to devalue in any way the role of chemotherapy, but we need to see cancer treatment in that broader context.

We can justifiably be proud of the Scottish Medicines Consortium, which is the foundation of our system for cancer drugs. I remind members that the director of Cancer Research UK said at

the Public Petitions Committee on 29 April 2008 that

“the SMC is the envy of clinicians who work in England”,

and that it is

“a model of good practice”.—[*Official Report, Public Petitions Committee*, 29 April 2008; c 709.]

We can justifiably be proud of it—without being complacent.

Some years ago, guidance on the Scottish Medicines Consortium was issued that, I think, said that NHS boards should ensure that recommended medicines are made available to meet clinical need. I am concerned that there still seem to be issues with NHS boards’ implementation of SMC decisions. The briefings from Cancer Research UK and from Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Macmillan Cancer Support and Myeloma UK highlight the need for more transparency not only on decisions but on boards’ implementation of them. I am sure that everybody would like that to happen.

The briefing by Breakthrough and others also makes the key point that they want recent initiatives to have the chance to bed in. The cabinet secretary should be commended on the announcements that she made in 2009 on exceptional prescribing becoming more transparent. She talked about

“greater transparency in the flexibility that can be used by the SMC”

and

“a national framework for assessing ... patient access schemes”.—[*Official Report*, 25 March 2009; c 16129-30.]

That was all good but, in the interest of transparency, it would also be good if the developments on those policies could be explained to MSPs and the wider public—the cabinet secretary will probably not have enough time in her closing speech to address that point. For example, I am told that guidance on exceptional prescribing was issued in March 2011, but most people probably do not know the contents of that guidance or how it is operating. If there was more confidence in exceptional prescribing, there might be less demand for the drugs fund.

In many ways, I sympathise with what Murdo Fraser said and can see exactly where he is coming from. However, as Cancer Research UK reminds us, we should remember that a cancer drugs fund could exacerbate regional inequalities and may be doing that in England. Therefore, guidance on exceptional prescribing may be a more equitable way to deal with the problem.

09:47

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

For a country that is reputedly obsessed with sport, Scotland’s health record is not good and we all know it. For much of the time that the Parliament has existed, its key effort has been to improve Scotland’s health. Our record on heart disease and cancer exemplifies the problems that we face. We know that our poor health has industrial causes, we have seen improvements in relation to smoking, and we are trying to work on alcohol. The good work that has been done proves that success is possible.

Our problem now is that statistics appear to indicate that patients are less likely to survive cancer in Scotland—they are less likely to have a prolonged life here than they are in much of North America or comparable countries in Europe. I will address that concern.

Nicola Sturgeon *rose—*

Alex Johnstone: I will not take an intervention because I have only four minutes and need to get one key principle across.

Some years ago, I visited a research unit at the University of Dundee and spoke to a senior researcher, who looked into the future and suggested that he could see a time when there would be a cure for every cancer. The problem was that every cancer would have an individual cure and he could imagine the economic problems that would arise in funding such health provision.

New medicines are becoming available, and we all know of cases, such as the one that my colleague Murdo Fraser highlighted eloquently, of individuals who believe that a particular drug treatment would be effective for them but cannot have it funded through the Scottish system, although they would have it funded through the system in England.

We are dealing with a principle that must lie at the heart of our national health service: that it must provide for everyone and be seen to do so. However, an opposite argument has been put in the debate, and I will explain why it is an opposite argument.

When the minister and others, including Jackie Baillie, talk about the principle of equity and needing to ensure that resources are allocated equally across the board, they articulate a fundamental principle of collectivisation. When we hear the major organisations that have submitted briefings for today’s debate saying that there is no need for a cancer drugs fund in Scotland, I suggest that that collectivisation of opinion is not benefiting us in the argument.

The fundamental principle that lies at the heart of my political point of view is that the rights of the

few must, at times, outweigh the needs of the many. The minister has made the opposite argument today, saying that resource cannot be made available in individual cases because it could so effectively be used in other areas. While there are individual cases in which people who could benefit from the treatments are not receiving them because of the principle that the needs of the many outweigh the rights of the few, our system has a fundamental weakness.

The only party in the Parliament that has proposed a means by which we can deal with that weakness in the short term is the Conservative Party, and I therefore support Murdo Fraser's motion.

09:51

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I know that my time is limited so I will try to be brief. This debate is on another emotive subject and I take on board the story of Murdo Fraser's constituent Gillian Bauld and her family, and what they have suffered.

I come at the issue from a different angle. I can add to Dennis Robertson's list of diseases: as the cabinet secretary knows, my wife Stacey Adam suffers from multiple sclerosis. Scotland has a higher number of people per head of population who suffer from that condition than anywhere else in the world. The list of people who think that they should have a certain drug could go on and on. A cancer drugs fund would divert resources from other conditions such as multiple sclerosis. We need to work with and help as many people as possible.

I am not aware of the Tory manifesto: it was not required reading in Paisley during the election. I do not therefore know where the £10 million would come from. If Mr Fraser wants to tell me, I would be happy to hear it.

Murdo Fraser: If the member had read our fully costed manifesto he would have seen that, among other things, we do not think that it is right to be giving free prescriptions to people such as him and me, who can well afford to pay for them. That money would be better spent on other things.

George Adam: I am glad I did not read the manifesto. The people of Paisley have an entirely different idea. They do not want to have to decide to pay either for their messages or for their medication. When it comes to people who are dealing with long-term conditions, we have a completely different argument.

As the cabinet secretary rightly said, early detection is definitely the way forward. In relation to some cancers, preventative care can help. We should not kid ourselves: we are talking about

lifestyle changes. As Alex Johnstone said, we have to deal with alcohol and smoking at an early stage so that we can help people.

We have to look at Scotland as a whole and at the vast number of people who suffer from long-term conditions. The Scottish Government and the cabinet secretary have considered the issues within the limitations of the resources that they have.

09:53

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Everyone has said that the debate is very emotive, and it is. There is probably no one in the chamber or watching the debate who has not been touched by cancer in some way, whether directly or through family or friends. I am in the chamber today having been selected for the Aberdeen Central seat at the last minute because the lady who was originally selected was diagnosed with cancer. Everyone has been touched by the disease.

However, the solution is not a separate drugs fund. Colleagues have touched on the issue already but the argument is worth repeating. If we created a separate drugs fund for cancer, what other drugs funds would we have to create? That is the key question for me in this debate. There are huge numbers of other diseases, some of which are terminal, for which it could be argued that patients would benefit from a separate drugs fund. Where would it end?

Alison McInnes summed up the issue in her speech. She quoted her colleague Ross Finnie, who criticised the Tory plans for a cancer drugs fund, saying:

"The Conservative plan for a Cancer Drug Fund is unfair. The Scottish Medicines Consortium is the independent body designed to recommend the cost effectiveness of drugs. Politicians shouldn't be second guessing the SMC."

I agree with those comments. I think that members from all sides of the chamber, apart from the Tory side, would agree with them, and we should take cognisance of that.

Alex Johnstone: Would the member concede that, although it is not the job of politicians to decide what drugs should be available, it is certainly the job of politicians to ensure that the rights of individuals are protected in relation to a policy that may take resource away from them to benefit other activities?

Kevin Stewart: I listened to yesterday's debate on mental health in which there seemed to be agreement that it was up to clinicians to decide what to prescribe. For the situation that we are debating, physicians can submit individual patient requests. That is the way to do it. I do not see a

problem with that at all. As politicians, we should not second-guess those who are experts in their field.

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

Kevin Stewart: I have given way once and I have only four minutes.

I wish the debate was more about prevention than about setting up a separate drugs fund. We have heard about the early detection fund, and I certainly welcome the moneys that have been put into that, as I am sure members across the chamber do. However, sometimes we do not deal with prevention very well. MSPs often have the opportunity to meet folk in the Parliament who are involved in various health organisations, such as Melanoma Action & Support Scotland, whose representatives Ken Macintosh invited to the Parliament the other week. Mary Fee attended that event as well. We could have simple solutions to deal with some problems. Melanoma is on the increase, but we charge VAT on sunblock and sunscreen. That makes no sense to me whatsoever.

The Presiding Officer: The member really needs to wind up.

Kevin Stewart: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

We should think about prevention rather than necessarily having to deal with cures all the time.

09:58

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in such a sensitive but crucial debate. The Scottish Conservatives are right to bring the issue to the chamber today.

I support any initiative to improve the treatment of cancer patients, but I do not believe that a cancer drugs fund is the answer. A drugs fund would not solve the problem of the drug approval system but would simply bypass it. The Conservatives' proposals do not address the root causes of why patients might be denied access to some treatments—a view shared by Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Myeloma UK and Macmillan Cancer Support.

Murdo Fraser's motion is right to point out the findings of the Rarer Cancers Foundation, but it does not address why there are treatments in England that are not given north of the border. The drug approval systems in both countries are very complex, and we must improve transparency around the Scottish Medicines Consortium, its decisions and their implementation. I back calls by Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Myeloma UK and Macmillan Cancer Support for an investigation into the factors that contribute to the SMC rejecting

drugs on the basis of cost and clinical effectiveness, and how we can address such situations.

I find it worrying that the Conservatives would pay for a cancer drugs fund by bringing back prescription fees. To me, that is a tax on certain illnesses to pay for others. The money that would be used in a drugs fund should instead be used to improve the early detection of cancers and reduce the waiting times that patients experience, as the Labour manifesto pledged to do.

It is wrong that someone with suspected cancer should wait four weeks to see a specialist. As much as we need to improve and extend the life of a cancer patient, a drugs fund does not go far enough. More early detection and prevention of cancers are needed.

Even the Society and College of Radiographers has criticised the cancer drugs fund in England—the system that the Scottish Conservatives have based their plans on. Audrey Paterson, director of professional policy at the Society and College of Radiographers, said:

“it would only take a fraction of the £200 million budget to deliver cutting edge radiotherapy services across the country and the impact would be immense.”

That is an example of how the professionals feel about the fund in England. Miss Paterson is correct to say that more money should be invested in more effective treatment services.

I understand that some patients might be beyond the stage at which radiotherapy would help with their cancer, and that is where I feel that the heart of this debate must lead. Should we be providing drugs that improve the life chances of the cancer sufferer or drugs that simply extend their life? I would hope that any drug approved by the NHS, the SMC or any Government would do both.

As I said, this is a very sensitive debate, and party politics should play no part in it. We need more investment in early diagnosis and successful treatment and we need to rid each health board of the postcode lottery.

10:00

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): Like many in the chamber and in wider society, I have experience of losing a family member to cancer. It is worth noting that none of us in the chamber is immune to the situations that people across Scotland face in that regard. That said, we must always try to avoid becoming too emotional during debates on this issue; we must be rational as well as emotional when we discuss cancer and, in particular, cancer treatment.

It is fair to say that the cancer drugs fund has not met with the universal acclaim that one might have assumed it received if one had listened to the speeches from Conservative members. Indeed, a recent article in the oncology commission journal of *The Lancet* stated of the fund:

“because these decisions are regional, it reintroduces the postcode lottery”—

thereby leading to disparities in England, as the cabinet secretary outlined.

Mary Fee referred to an article in *The Daily Telegraph*, which pointed out that the Society and College of Radiographers had stated clearly that the fund was diverting money away from treatment and areas such as radiotherapy services. There is clear evidence that the cancer drugs fund is not all that it is cracked up to be, so we should exercise a degree of caution about it.

It is entirely appropriate that we focus our efforts on prevention and preventative spending, which the Government is seeking to drive forward. The Government is extremely keen on early detection, which is an approach that I support because the earlier a cancer is detected, the greater the patient's chances of survival. We should focus our efforts on early detection, rather than diverting money towards end-of-life treatments for cancer patients. I fully accept that this is an emotive issue, but we must always take into account the fact that in many cases prolonging life does not increase quality of life. The key consideration for any health professional looking at life-prolonging treatments, must be the quality of life for the individual, not necessarily longevity.

In that regard, we must ensure that there is expenditure on end-of-life and palliative care. I am concerned that if we were to focus our efforts simply on directing money towards the treatment of cancer, as well as neglecting early detection we could neglect appropriate end-of-life care for individuals who no longer respond to treatment or who require simply to be made comfortable towards the end of their life.

The oncology commission journal of *The Lancet* states:

“Today, early detection and cancer-specific treatment advances have resulted in increased cancer survival”

rates. I support the Government's focus on early detection, because it increases cancer survival rates—it is where we should be targeting our efforts.

This is a worthwhile debate, but the establishment of a cancer drugs fund would be a distraction. Other organisations that deal with terminal conditions would ask us, “If cancer drugs are a priority, why not drugs for heart disease or

Alzheimer's?” We must ensure that, at all times, the health of the nation in general is the priority for this Parliament. Yes, there will undoubtedly be individual cases that need to be dealt with—there always are—but the appropriate way to deal with them is as individual cases, as the cabinet secretary said.

Where there are local difficulties, it is entirely appropriate that they are highlighted to Government so that it can see whether it can make changes to the mindset at a local level, but dealing with local difficulties on a national basis is using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Mr McDonald, will you conclude?

Mark McDonald: I will conclude with one final quotation from the oncology commission journal of *The Lancet*:

“prevention is also essential and this too demands political will, ample funding, and a substantial change in mindset”.

This Government has demonstrated the political will, provided the funding and made the change in mindset required to ensure that prevention is at the heart of what we do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We turn to closing speeches. I call Alison McInnes, who has kindly offered to take less than her allocated time.

10:05

Alison McInnes: I listened carefully to the cabinet secretary's speech this morning and found it illuminating. The situation is not as clear-cut as the Conservatives have suggested, and her point that comparisons are not always valid was telling.

Most of us have acknowledged that a great deal of work has been done here in Scotland since the Public Petitions Committee inquiry. We know that the SMC is actually quite responsive. The cabinet secretary reminded us that the SMC reviews all new drugs, while NICE reviews only a selection. It is easier for the system to be more responsive in such a small country, but Jackie Baillie rightly questioned the geographical variations in the approach of area drug and therapeutics committees and whether they are putting a brake on the system. I support her request for a review of that, which seems a sensible suggestion.

I re-emphasise the need to invest in early detection. Alex Johnstone referred the fact that our outcomes are poorer when compared with those in the rest of Europe, but I agree with the comments of most other members on the need to focus on early detection. That is the way to drive down that problem. At the moment, too many cancers are detected only during unplanned admissions.

The truth is that at the heart of the debate is a question of fairness. I do not mean to sound harsh—I understand the suffering caused by these dreadful illnesses—but I really do not understand why medicines for one particular set of illnesses should be exempted from the process of balancing clinical effectiveness with health economics. Dennis Robertson among many others echoed that point, drawing attention to the needs of stroke patients, heart patients and those with MS.

Pharmaceutical companies could do much more to bring drugs into the mainstream more quickly, and the value-based pricing approach that is being developed in Westminster should open up access to more drugs more quickly by factoring in more considerations. There are questions about how the new scheme would interact with the existing arrangements and with the work of the SMC, so again I urge the Scottish Government to work with its colleagues in Westminster to ensure that the new proposals serve the needs of Scotland.

10:07

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife (Lab)): I welcome the fact that the Conservative Party has raised what is an important issue. Although it could have been an emotive debate, it has been conducted in a sober manner. That is only as it should be.

As the cabinet secretary, Jackie Baillie, Mary Fee and Mark McDonald have all said, and as others have alluded to, early diagnosis and treatment must be our priority. We have agreed that, and the funding has been put in place. We may slightly disagree on how that funding is being applied, but nevertheless that is the priority, which is very important.

As with everything, we must start with the needs of the patient. New medicines for cancer are in the pipeline—possibly eight more this year, and many more to come—but new medicines for other conditions will also be in the pipeline.

The Scottish Medicines Consortium has served us extremely well. As Alison McInnes and Malcolm Chisholm indicated, it has been highly praised and internationally accepted for its speedy work. The industry has also been happy with the SMC and the interactive approach that it has adopted, apart from some problems around orphan and ultra-orphan drugs.

We cannot ignore the fact that, unlike the equivalent situation in England, SMC approval does not mean automatic availability. In Scotland, we have the additional hurdle of 14 area drug and therapeutics committees, which can make different decisions on licensed and approved drugs. As my colleague Jackie Baillie said, it can take between one and—in at least one instance—16 months to

introduce an approved drug. That variation is unacceptable, and it is questionable as to whether the system is fit for purpose.

Why is that relevant? If not approved by the Scottish Medicines Consortium, a medicine enters what was known as the exceptional needs system. If the area drug and therapeutics committee does not approve a medicine that is licensed and approved by the SMC, it also enters that system.

The approach in England of a transitional fund followed by value-based pricing is wrong. The fund will almost certainly be inadequate. The number of drugs in the pipeline will outstrip demand and England will be faced yet again with the same problems that we face.

A further reason why the fund is inadequate is that, as many members have said, it discriminates between cancer and other conditions. New drugs will be developed for many non-cancer conditions. Will they, too, be given specific funds? Discrimination, as opposed to some form of clinical rationing, will not be tolerated for long. As George Adam and Kevin Stewart indicated, discrimination could be a major problem.

England has not eliminated the regional variation. The equity to which Alex Johnstone referred is not occurring in the cancer drugs fund in England. We need to look at that.

Is there a problem? Yes—there is a problem, if Scots are obtaining substantially fewer cancer drugs than people elsewhere. A petition led to chief executive letter 17 in 2010. The new system of individual patient treatment requests, or IPTR, came into effect only in April. I have a number of questions for the Government about the IPTR system. Is it in place across all 14 health boards? Is the whole process, and not just rejection and acceptance, transparent to the public and individuals? Is it fair to the individual patient, their family and their clinician? Is it uniform and consistent both within individual boards and across Scotland, or is it yet another postcode lottery? To whom is the system accountable in the community? Is it accountable to Parliament? Do the 14 health boards have the capacity to consider the complex issues involved? Is the membership of the panels broadly similar? Is the community represented? Is the cost-sharing mechanism adequate?

I hope that those questions will be answered openly and transparently.

10:12

Nicola Sturgeon: Like others, I think that this has been a good debate. It has been a calm, rational and high-quality debate. Kevin Stewart helpfully reminded us—if we needed reminding—

that this is not an abstract debate. All of us, at some point in our lives, will be touched by cancer. It is important to keep that in mind.

Although I do not agree with the motion, I thought that Murdo Fraser and Alex Johnstone made good points. Our cancer survival rates are not as good as they should be and not as good as I would want them to be. I think Parliament recognises that. However, I challenge the proposition that that is entirely down to access to drugs. In my view, it is largely down to co-morbidities and late diagnosis. Those are what we need to tackle effectively if we are to make significant improvements to cancer survival rates. That is what this Government has committed to, backed by resources.

Alison McInnes, in a good speech, reflected on the improvements that have been made, and the need to monitor them and ensure that they have the desired effect. She specifically asked whether any drugs had been approved as a result of the new SMC modifiers. The quick answer to her question is that, so far during 2011, the SMC has approved three cancer medicines in relation to which modifiers could be applied.

Jackie Baillie rightly said, as did others, that we should always look critically at how the system is operating, not just in principle but in practice. I am happy to give further consideration to the points about area drug and therapeutic committees. Points were made by Jackie Baillie, Richard Simpson and others about individual patient treatment requests. As I said to Jackie Baillie in an intervention, we have asked all health boards to provide us with information on the number of requests, the number of approvals, the number of appeals, and the drugs and the indications concerned. That will be important information to inform our judgment as to how the system is operating.

Members will be interested to know that information made available in January this year as a result of freedom of information requests showed that over the past three years, 92 per cent of such individual patient requests had been approved by boards.

Malcolm Chisholm and others rightly pointed out—and I echo and endorse this point—that the Scottish Medicines Consortium is respected not only in Scotland but throughout the UK and the world. That does not mean that its decisions should be set in stone and that it should never look to improve how it does its work, but it is a respected organisation that applies respected methodology.

Malcolm Chisholm used the key word in the debate: transparency. Transparency is crucial in determining how fairly and flexibly the system is

working. I could not agree with his point more strongly. We have been seeking transparency and will continue to seek to bring it to the whole process. I say in response to Malcolm Chisholm that I am happy to issue the guidance and other information to MSPs—or at least to those who are interested in receiving it.

Although a number of considered speeches have been made, I cannot respond to all the points that were raised by Mark McDonald, Mary Fee—who made a particularly considered speech—and other members.

I will make two key points. I hope that the first is a point of agreement rather than a point of contention: we should be working continuously to improve access to drugs. For me, that part of the debate is not in contention. I believe that we should be working to improve access to all drugs, not just some drugs, in a way that is fair and consistent. George Adam very powerfully summed up the importance of that.

I get letters from cancer patients who passionately believe that a particular drug can benefit them. Such situations are heartbreaking, but I get similar letters from patients with Alzheimer's, MS or heart disease, who also believe that a particular drug could have benefits. I therefore believe that fairness, consistency and equity are very important in this debate.

The second key point is that we must tackle cancer in every way that is at our disposal. A couple of weeks ago I visited the Western general cancer centre to see new state-of-the-art radiotherapy equipment. The Western general is one of only a handful of cancer sites in the whole of Europe that has such equipment, which will transform how radiotherapy and surgical procedures are delivered.

Members also highlighted the need for earlier detection. As I said, our relatively poorer cancer survival rates are down to the fact that, for a variety of reasons, we present later with symptoms and we are diagnosed later. Therefore, no matter how short our waiting times are, and often no matter how good our drugs or other treatments are, the chances of survival are reduced because the disease has progressed too far.

There are big challenges. I do not underestimate them and I am committed to doing everything that we need to do, but let us do it comprehensively, fairly and consistently.

10:18

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I welcome the debate and also the tone of all members' speeches. We note the cabinet secretary's commitment to look further into many

of the issues that have been raised in the debate. We might disagree on many things, but many members raised concerns about transparency and so on.

There is no doubt that huge progress has been made in cancer treatments and recovery rates. Discussions around cancer are now generally about treatment, hair falling out, Maggie's Centre and getting back to work. No longer do we say, "How long has he got?"

Although I acknowledge the progress that has been made on so many of the common cancers, there is undoubtedly still much more to be done on cancers such as pancreatic cancer, melanoma—which Kevin Stewart raised; I was also at the dinner that he mentioned—and cancer of the oesophagus, to name but three.

As Murdo Fraser said, 14 treatment requests per million population in Scotland are approved under the individual patient treatment scheme. In comparison, 48 per million population are approved in England under the current system.

I commend the work done by the Rarer Cancers Foundation to highlight the needs of people with more exceptional cancers. It was always going to be the case that drugs for the treatment of such cancers would be more expensive, given the lack of economies of scale in production and the smaller patient group for purchasing. The foundation said in its briefing for the debate that it has been contacted by patients in Scotland who have been unable to access treatments that their clinicians wanted to prescribe, which are available through the cancer drugs fund to patients who live in England. Therefore, it is right and proper that we have this debate to flesh out the differences between the two jurisdictions and ensure that patients in Scotland are treated equally and fairly.

As the cabinet secretary said, the UK falls behind most European countries on the number of cancer drugs that are prescribed and on the amount of money that is spent on the drugs, according to a report from Cancer Research UK today. We should not just compare ourselves with England.

As members said, even if a drug is approved by the Scottish Medicines Consortium, it might not be routinely available in NHS Scotland. As Richard Simpson said, the opinions of local drug and therapeutic committees can vary between the 14 health boards. The Liberal Democrat motion, in Alison McInnes's name, makes a good point in saying:

"nearly a third of NHS boards have no written policy governing exceptional case applications in place and ... NHS boards use variable criteria to assess exceptional case applications".

I am pleased that the cabinet secretary will look further into the matter. The Rarer Cancers Foundation's reports, "The Scottish Exception? An audit of the progress made in improving access to treatment for people with rarer cancers" and "Exceptional Scotland? An audit of the policies and processes used by NHS boards to determine exceptional prescribing requests for cancer treatment", showed that a number of treatments that had been applied for via exceptional case requests in Scotland were SMC approved.

One or two members said that the individual patient treatment requests system is subject to serious and considerable delay. That is time that cancer patients often do not have.

Malcolm Chisholm, Richard Simpson and Mary Fee talked about the need for greater transparency and clearer communication on the rationale for SMC decisions so that patients and clinicians fully understand why certain drugs are not approved for use by the NHS in Scotland. We have a nation of patients who are much better informed, through online information, and who clearly understand why drugs that are recommended in one country are not recommended in another. However, when a drug that the SMC has approved is refused by the local health board drug and therapeutic committee, it is natural that the patient feels that they have been denied something. It is also obvious that these difficult financial times could lead to postcode prescribing in Scotland.

For all those reasons, the Conservatives support a £10 million national cancer drugs fund for Scotland. I understand that the cancer drugs fund in England has helped more than 5,000 patients. Mark McDonald made a good point about patients' quality of life, which is precisely what cancer drugs bring. I remind members that Mike Gray, from Buckie, who lodged a petition on cetuximab, worked until three weeks before his death.

On value-based pricing, I note that the Scottish Government is working with the UK Government to ensure that the scheme that is due to be implemented in 2014 will meet the needs of patients in Scotland.

I thank all members who spoke in the debate. It is right that we highlight the progress that has been made, but much more can be done and is being done to diagnose and treat cancer. It is right that we continue to examine how we can improve treatment for all people with cancer in Scotland. I support the motion in Murdo Fraser's name.

Scotland's Colleges

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-00955, in the name of Liz Smith, on Scotland's colleges.

10:25

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

If there is a sector in Scottish education that has made the most substantial progress in recent years, it is the college sector. Its institutions have delivered excellence in many aspects, have transformed the quality of college courses and have widened access to many students, of all ages, who in previous times would not have been able to take advantage of further education.

Since colleges were granted their independence by the Conservative Government in 1992, they have enjoyed much greater autonomy and much greater flexibility, which has allowed them to adapt to the demands of their local regions, to build much better links with other educational institutions and to develop courses around the different needs of individual students. The Parliament pays tribute to that work and to the enthusiastic manner in which colleges have set about dealing with the current challenges that face them. In the vast majority of cases, they have an outstanding record. That is why they are, quite rightly, puzzled and upset that, despite those achievements, they are being asked to accept the brunt of the education spending cuts in this year's spending review—cuts that come hard and fast on the back of an average 10 per cent reduction in budgets last year.

Last week, John Spencer, the convener of Scotland's Colleges, said that it was inconceivable that colleges would be able to absorb more cuts without harm being done to student places, to staffing or to the quality of courses. Over the period 2011 to 2015, those cuts could amount to more than 20 per cent in real terms, assuming that student support is maintained at a flat cash level. That view is echoed by Mike Dibsall, the principal of Telford College, who has said:

"To think that the sector could operate or indeed maintain provision after having our budgets slashed by 10 per cent last year was challenging, but to have them reduced again by 14.3 per cent spread over the next three years is just baffling. This is an incredibly difficult feat and I dread to think of what the sector will look like in a few years time when these new cuts are felt."

He is referring to the fact that the further education sector is likely to be asked to cope with having its funding cut in real terms from £544 million to £435 million in 2011-15 while it watches the higher education sector get an increase from £926 million to £982 million.

Why has the Scottish Government chosen to punish the colleges so hard, particularly when they will be integral to the new Scottish Government flagship policy of offering opportunities to all 16 to 19-year-olds, when unemployment among young people is high and when businesses across Scotland have heaped praise on the college sector for its ability to train more students and apprentices in the new skills required for today's fast-changing world? Surely, there is not much logic to the Government's position.

I can suggest one reason why the Scottish Government has taken this action. It is because of its persistent refusal to bring in additional sources of private income to higher education, thereby putting additional strain on the whole education budget.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP):

I assume that the member's inference is that her colleagues down south have levered in private finance to further education and have not, therefore, passed on a cut to the further education sector. Why is it, then, that cuts to further education budgets south of the border are twice as much as they are in Scotland?

Liz Smith: For the simple reason that the Scottish National Party Government will not accept the fact that it cannot just say that it does not approve of the principle of asking anyone to pay to learn. It cannot say that to students from the rest of the United Kingdom, who face the exact same problem because they are being asked to pay in Scotland. That does not affect the argument that the member has just raised.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): Does the member want further education students to pay in Scotland?

Liz Smith: There are many FE students who might have higher education places in colleges and, if they come from the rest of the UK, they will surely be paying.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I say to Mr Doris that interventions should be made officially.

Liz Smith: Along with many in the university sector and many public figures such as Lord Sutherland and Sir Andrew Cubie, the Scottish Conservatives have persistently argued that free higher education is unsustainable. We maintain that position, notwithstanding the claims from the Scottish Government that it will plug the funding gap for the next three years. At what price to our colleges? The Scottish Government cannot get away from the fact that 1,000 staff have been shed in the FE sector so far this year, the school college partnership work has been significantly reduced and, despite claims to the contrary, the number of learners has decreased.

The Scottish Government can no longer claim that there cannot be greater flexibility in its budget decisions about HE and FE. Until budget year 2010-11, the Scottish Government had separate budget lines for capital expenditure for the two sectors but for budget years beyond that the Scottish funding council has one pot for both sectors, so the Scottish Government can no longer claim that its hands are so tied. There is new scope for flexibility and therefore there should be much greater scope for a more equitable share between the two sectors.

I do not for a minute take issue with the desire of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council to examine whether HE and FE are delivering best value for money. I do not doubt for a minute that some rationalisation is necessary—even some mergers in the future—but let us hope that the handling of that is not condensed into a six-week period like it was in the disgraceful situation at Abertay and Dundee, tellingly described by Lord Sutherland at the Education and Culture Committee on Tuesday as a “merger by fax”. Reform is essential, but so is the continuing autonomy of the sector and so is colleges’ desire to play an equal part in any tripartite discussions that must take place between the Scottish Government, the Scottish funding council and the colleges themselves. Discussions about the future structure of our colleges and universities will be extremely important and they must include the fullest possible consultation with all parties.

I will now concentrate on the priorities of the Scottish Government. It has made it very plain that there is to be a much greater focus on the provision of opportunities for 16 to 24-year-olds and especially those in the 16 to 19 age group. It is a laudable ambition; but why then cut colleges’ resources? By definition, they will be expected to play a key role in this initiative, which will make additional demands on the college sector. As I understand the Scottish Government’s proposals, regionalisation is at the heart of the post-16 programme and it is predicted that there will be some savings as a result. However, I cannot see how any of those savings can possibly occur in a sufficiently short timescale to avoid serious pressures on colleges as they try to develop post-16 arrangements. Indeed, if possible mergers were to be part of restructuring, it is possible that costs could increase rather than decrease in the short term. The Scottish Government should be aware that there is a lack of evidence to suggest that significant savings can be made in the short term.

Let us not forget that there are many other student groups at college: part-time students, mature students and a minority of apprentices, who are all an essential part of the work of

colleges and essential to ensuring that we have a mobile and flexible workforce across the economy. How will they fare if more demands to help with prioritising the 16 to 19 reform are laid on colleges at the same time as crippling budget cuts? What will happen to the provision of HE places—28 per cent of the total HE provision—especially for students from disadvantaged areas? Does that really sit well with the principles that underpin this Government’s priorities? I do not think so.

The Scottish Government’s economic strategy commits to maintaining bursary support to help young people to remain engaged in college and training. It is right to ask the Government whether it can confirm that student support in colleges will be maintained in real terms over the course of the spending review period. Bursary support is crucial to many students who would not otherwise be able to access further or higher education and it is also crucial to maintain a diverse student intake. We need a cast-iron assurance that bursary support will be maintained and that there will be no prospect of increasing inequality between the level of support for FE and for HE students.

I return to where I began by praising the outstanding work that has been undertaken by the college sector over recent years. Colleges have coped admirably with the challenges put upon them and they are undoubtedly a hugely important part of the improvements in post-school education. They should be congratulated rather than punished by the Government, which has muddled its priorities and ended up with a total lack of coherence in FE and HE policy.

It is incumbent on us all to heed the warnings in formal communications from Scotland’s Colleges about what could happen as a result of the spending review. The organisation fears further cuts. In the worst case that some predict, which is a cut by a fifth in the total for colleges, colleges fear cuts in student places or—if places can be maintained—cuts in teaching time. The colleges are also fearful about whether they will be able to maintain the college estate.

As I said, the college sector has made outstanding progress in recent years, but there is considerable doubt about whether it will emerge as anything other than weaker. That would be hugely detrimental to Scotland and to our economic potential.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the profound concern expressed by Scotland’s Colleges that last week’s Spending Review has severely damaged the ability of colleges to maintain student places and staffing levels, and their ability to deliver quality education across all areas of the further education sector; notes that the core funding cuts to colleges of 13.5% could result in a real-terms cut of over 20% if student support is maintained at a flat-cash

level; believes that this is a direct consequence of the Scottish Government's refusal to allow additional private sources of finance in the higher education sector thereby putting additional financial strain on every other area of education spending, and calls on the Scottish Government to explain why, in light of the findings of the post-16 review, it has severely cut back on the highly successful school/college partnerships that provide enhanced vocational opportunities for young people.

10:35

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): In my statement to the chamber two weeks ago, I made clear the breadth and depth of Scotland's post-16 education system. I also made clear the value that the Government places on the various parts of that system, in which we as a Scottish people make an enormous investment of about £2 billion a year—£50 million every week. Many hundreds of thousands of people the length and breadth of Scotland have benefited from that system and they will continue to do so.

Two weeks ago, I made clear the considerable contribution that colleges—overwhelmingly our most significant providers of vocational education—make to the Government's overall purpose. I am happy to reflect that again and to pay tribute to their work.

I will name one example from many. Since the onset of the recession, our colleges have provided a valuable buffer from unemployment for tens of thousands of our young people. Let no one doubt the support that we have provided to allow them to do so. In the past three years, we have provided funding of £60 million on top of the £2.6 billion core investment in the college sector during the Government's first term.

Here is a fact that needs to be borne in mind throughout the debate: the investment that we have made in the sector represents a higher proportion of the Scottish departmental expenditure limit than any Government has invested since devolution. That is a measure of our support for the college sector.

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

Michael Russell: No—I will make progress.

The college sector's structure has lain largely untouched for many years. Now we have an opportunity and a pressing need for positive reform. The opportunity is to ensure that the sector delivers to every learner in Scotland; the pressing need is financial.

I do not comment on the irony of the Tories lecturing the Scottish Government on cuts, given what they are doing to the Scottish budget. However, they should reflect on the following

phrases in a letter to me today from Paul Little, who is the City of Glasgow College's principal and chief executive officer, because they give the complete lie to the claim about a lack of evidence for finding savings. He reports on the first year of his merger and refers to

"remarkable progress ... a new fit for purpose management structure, harmonised lecturers salaries ... promoting a clear learning and teaching strategy"

and

"realising over £4 million a year of financial efficiencies".

Efficiencies of £4 million a year are being made, but it is alleged that no evidence exists.

Liz Smith: Notwithstanding the cabinet secretary's comment about cuts, why does the college sector—relative to the higher education sector—have to bear the brunt of cuts?

Michael Russell: That is because we are focused on positive reform that builds on the fundamental changes to school education that are under way through curriculum for excellence. That positive reform takes account of our success in developing a sustainable solution for higher education and takes place against a backdrop of continued investment of more than £2 billion between now and 2014. We have made that investment available despite the cut of £3.3 billion in Scotland's block grant and the decision south of the border to increase tuition fees dramatically.

I do not duck the fact that the unprecedented pressures that we face have meant a tough settlement, particularly for colleges. However, the convener of Scotland's Colleges, John Spencer, told me on Tuesday that Scotland's Colleges

"is fully committed to working constructively with the Scottish Government on its reform agenda."

I congratulate colleges in Scotland on that positive step forward. They have £2 billion of investment to work with, and much can be done.

My priority is to give learners, especially our young learners on whom Scotland's future depends, a better deal. That is why we will ensure that every 16 to 19-year-old has a place in learning. No Government has made such a commitment before in Scotland. We will also prioritise college places for 20 to 24-year-olds. In addition, we will tackle inefficiencies in the sector, including excessive drop-out rates, and we simply cannot ignore the fact that the number of young people in the core cohort of college learners—the 16 to 24-year-olds—is going to fall over the period of our reforms.

Here, though, is something that we will not do—we will not charge young people for their education. We do not want that and the election showed that Scotland does not want it either. I find

it deeply ironic that someone who proposes to abolish the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party and establish a new party would want to take their failed electoral baggage with them. The reality is that we will not charge students. Indeed, we will certainly not do what the Tories intend and move that approach into the college sector.

Let me give members a fact: many others in Europe do not want to do so either. Finland, Sweden and Denmark refuse to charge fees and in the past few weeks Hamburg has chosen to abolish fees, which means that only two of Germany's 16 federal states now charge students. The Scottish Tories are not swimming against the tide of history—they are drowning in it.

Ken Macintosh: Will the cabinet secretary clarify his remark that students will not have to pay fees? Does he not actually mean Scottish students? After all, he has introduced in Scotland the most expensive fees in the whole of the UK.

Michael Russell: I have frequently said that I wish that that had not been the case. I wish that the Labour Party had not so enthusiastically backed student fees south of the border and had not voted for them. Now it is proposing to raise fees for Scottish students—even in Scotland, it looks like—to £6,000 a year. I will take no lessons from Labour on fees.

In the time left, I will tell the chamber what we are going to do. To realise our ambitions, we cannot avoid taking a hard look at delivery structures, which must work for learners and employers and must be sustainable. I want regional groupings, greater collaboration and mergers where such a move makes educational and financial sense. In case anyone might be tempted to misinterpret that last point, I will make my position clearer still. I have talked about mergers. We are not and never will be in the business of closures. We have terrific examples of the benefits of college mergers—indeed, I have already mentioned Glasgow—and various rural colleges are getting together. In Edinburgh, Brian Lister, the principal of Stevenson College, has told me how they are positively working with Jewel & Esk College on a merger.

Of course, this is not just happening in Scotland. Members should stop being so isolationist and look around at what is happening. In Northern Ireland, 16 colleges have been reduced to six; in Wales, there are plans to move from 25 to 15; and in England, from 1993 to 2008, there has been a reduction of 72 colleges. Collaborations between colleges and universities are taking place in Scotland, including, for example, between Aberdeen College and Robert Gordon University. The message is clear: mergers of and collaborations between post-16 institutions are far

from uncommon and where they benefit learners they should take place by negotiation.

In the past week, I have been contacted by many principals. They told me four things, the first of which is that, unfortunately, they did not approve Scotland's Colleges first letter. Let that pass. They made three other interesting points. First, they believe that the Government is focusing on the right things: the needs of learners, of employers and of the wider economy. Secondly, notwithstanding the challenges, there is genuine appetite for reform. Thirdly, ambition and leadership are absolutely crucial, as is deeper collaboration between Government and the college sector.

I will let Sue Pinder, principal of James Watt College, speak for them all. She wrote to me, saying:

"I believe that such fundamental and far-reaching change can only successfully come about by joint working between the leaders of the service, the Government and the funding council."

I agree entirely. I want to help the sector adapt to that change and get it off to a flying start. Why do I want that? I want it for the benefit of Scotland's learners and Scotland's economy, which seem to have been forgotten by the Opposition parties.

I move amendment S4M-00955.2, to leave out from first "notes" to end and insert:

"commends the valuable work of the nation's colleges; welcomes the commitment from Scotland's Colleges to work constructively with the Scottish Government to deliver learner-centred reform of post-16 education; supports the Opportunities for All programme that will provide a suitable place in learning or training for all 16 to 19-year-olds not already in work or education; notes the value to the people of Scotland of maintaining free access to higher education, and completely rejects the introduction of tuition fees for Scotland-domiciled students."

10:44

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Last week, *The Herald* contained a disturbing headline, indicating that 1,000 further education jobs have been lost in a year. Although that does not tell the whole story of what is happening in Scotland's colleges, it gives a little glimpse into what happens when the Scottish National Party cuts 10 per cent from their budget. One thousand jobs have been lost at a time when the country is struggling to get out of recession and when unemployment is at unacceptably high levels; when this Government is supposedly implementing a no compulsory redundancy policy; and in the very area that has most to offer in making our young people more employable. The Scottish Government greeted the news with a decision to cut a further 20 per cent from the colleges' budget over the next three years.

The impact of last year's cuts—let alone this year's cuts—has been felt across the sector by students as well as by those who teach them. Colleges are funded to deliver 21 hours of classroom time per student each week, but the only way in which colleges have been able to keep within their budgets and still keep up their numbers has been by cutting the hours on offer to each student from 21 to 16. Is the cabinet secretary aware that colleges are offering their students less classroom time? If he is, did he approve that decision? If he is not aware of it, what does he intend to do about it? Perhaps he thinks that such a cut will have no effect on the quality of teaching and learning.

The college closure—I am sorry; the college merger—agenda may look good to the SNP on paper, but I am not convinced that it has thought it through. We are not against mergers where they are necessary, but one of the main reasons why colleges offer similar courses in various parts of the country is that the locality matters to many students. It is all very well telling South Lanarkshire College to close its course offering—Margaret McCulloch spoke about that in the chamber last week—and telling students to go to Glasgow instead, but most students cannot afford that round trip and for some that will mean the difference between staying the distance and dropping out before they receive their qualification.

It is not just the students and the communities that they live in that will lose out. The worry is that the vast new impersonal regional groupings could also lose the ability to respond to the local needs and demands of businesses and employers. They could lose the very flexibility that the Scottish Government praised just last year.

There is support for public sector reform—colleges themselves have long embraced reform and the Labour Party has championed and supported reform in and out of office—but the SNP is deliberately confusing and conflating reform with cuts. The new term “positive reform” that Mike Russell has coined appears to be another term for huge cuts.

It is even more worrying that the cabinet secretary appears to be taking a pretty elitist approach to further and higher education. The ancients—the old, established universities—are protected as much as possible and the newer, more accessible red-brick institutions are given thinly veiled threats to merge or else. Liz Smith referred to Lord Sutherland's reference to “merger by fax” earlier this week. The poor colleges are treated like below-stairs staff. Mr Russell appears to be auditioning for “Downton Abbey”.

Bob Doris: I am confused. Mr Macintosh mentioned the “merger by fax” comment, but I understand that, last week, he asked the cabinet

secretary to tell us which universities and colleges face merging. If the cabinet secretary did that, he would negate his own consultation process, which does not end until 23 December. What is it to be? Does Mr Macintosh want merger by fax or to buy into the positive consultation that is taking place?

Ken Macintosh: That is a pretty convoluted point, but I think that Mr Doris has just admitted that the University of Abertay Dundee will be closed. I think that that was what he was trying to say. Unfortunately, the First Minister certainly would not own up to that.

For the past decade, the Labour Party has been committed not just to expanding, but to improving access to further and higher education. We have worked hard to break down the false divide between academic and vocational options and to build real equity into the Scottish tertiary education system. We have pushed apprenticeships and promoted the skills agenda as being equally worthy of public support as are degrees. I thought that the SNP supported us on that journey, but the decisions and policy announcements that have been made by the Administration over the past few months have rather given the game away. Research funding and a new market in fees for rest of UK students will entrench the position of the older universities while the institutions that are most accessible to their communities will lose another fifth of their funding.

Michael Russell: I am very interested that Ken Macintosh wants to see more vocational education. I presume that he therefore endorses a point of view that was put forward last week. There was an article on the BBC website entitled “Labour conference: Call to axe half of universities” that said:

“Closing half of Britain's universities is among the radical ideas being considered by Labour leader Ed Miliband, his policy adviser says.”

It is clear that somebody who wishes to be the leader of Labour in Scotland will endorse that, as Ken Macintosh is clearly doing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Macintosh, you are now slightly over your time, but I will give you some leeway because of the interventions that you have taken.

Ken Macintosh: I am delighted that Mike Russell pays such close attention to Labour Party policy and its conference. The SNP has already adopted the sensible Labour Party policy of guaranteeing a place for 16 to 19-year-olds. However, when the SNP adopts our policy, it does not put in place any funding, so all that happens is that older learners are displaced by new ones. What happened to lifelong learning, Mr Russell?

I will end with a quote from a lecturer who is a constituent of my esteemed colleague Johann Lamont MSP. They stated:

"The proposed cuts will ... significantly affect the education and training opportunities in my community where such provision is crucial in these times of economic hardship.

Nicola Sturgeon had the nerve to turn up at Cardonald College on Wednesday morning to open our healthcare training facility and claim positive media coverage from others' efforts ... in the full knowledge that later that day she would be party to sticking the financial knife into those who were there."

I ask the SNP Government to think again about its cuts to colleges before they damage the life chances of a whole new generation of Scots.

I move amendment S4M-00955.3, to leave out from "believes" to end and insert:

"is concerned that these cuts are being implemented at a time when Scotland is once more experiencing unacceptable levels of unemployment, with youth unemployment in particular having risen by 89% over the last four years, and calls on the Scottish Government to explain how cuts to colleges will improve the life chances for this and succeeding generations."

10:51

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the debate, but I am astounded by the claim from the Conservatives and Liz Smith that, in the one week since the spending review announcement, they have discerned that the colleges have already been severely damaged and will have difficulty maintaining student places and staff levels. They cannot be serious. As PJ O'Rourke said, that kind of seriousness is stupidity gone to college.

In the past two months, I have met the principals of colleges in Ayr, Dumfries, Glasgow, East Lothian, West Lothian and Edinburgh. In our discussions, they were clear that the operation, offerings and administration of colleges would have to continue to change. The professionals recognise the current economic situation and realise that, in a progressive country, change is inevitable.

Liz Smith: Will the member give way?

Chic Brodie: No. I am sorry, but I have only four minutes.

The professionals also recognise that, in a progressive country, change is a constant. As the cabinet secretary mentioned, other principals, such as those at Stevenson College Edinburgh and Jewel & Esk College, recognise that in a progressive country where existing individual colleges provide strong and superb educational training opportunities, they will be even stronger and better by collaborating.

The motion contains echoes from the London Tory Government—their London Tory Government—with the resonance of the policy of tuition fees to secure what in their minds would be better higher education. However, as was pointed out in an intervention, the motion makes no mention of the Tory cuts from London of 25 per cent and the severe damage from that.

Where is the hard evidence that there has been a severe cut in successful partnerships, as the Conservative motion claims? Certainly, our economic performance is better than that down south. The Conservatives always consider revenues—that is always their shibboleth—rather than costs, change and efficiency. The principals are willing to embrace efficiencies and partnerships. They are being consulted on post-16 reforms, not dragged into mergers.

Did the Conservatives sleepwalk through the legislative programme statement last month, in which we reiterated our commitment to young people? Did they read and understand the paper "Putting Learners at the Centre: Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education", which confirmed our program for 16 to 19-year-olds? That underpins the policy that every 16 to 19-year-old will be guaranteed a learning and training opportunity, which is a top priority for our colleges.

Liz Smith: Will the member give way?

Chic Brodie: No, sorry.

Will the Conservatives accept that the reforms will result in even greater consultation and collaboration to produce greater partnerships that will create better operational structures and a collective of college campuses that will drive Scotland forward? I believe that the colleges will continue to be positive in the consultation and will demonstrate aspiration, ambition and innovation. They will not languish in a pool of negativity. The motion should be reflected on the Tories' college report card, which should simply read, "Can do better."

10:54

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): When the cabinet secretary reported to us what the principals had been saying, he failed to report what they are saying about the cuts. The truth is that the principals will not have enough money to deliver on the SNP's manifesto promises. Earlier this year, the SNP promised that there would be no compulsory redundancies in further education. As the cabinet secretary knows, I have raised the issue with him many times, but I would like him to tell us today how he plans to keep that manifesto promise, given the stringent cuts that have been imposed on the colleges in the budget this year and, indeed, last year.

There is another of the SNP Government's commitments that I would like to know whether the colleges will be able to deliver under the settlement—the commitment to guarantee the number of student places. Perhaps the minister will be able to tell us what the principals are saying about that when he sums up.

Our colleges were expecting a flat-rate settlement. They did not have high expectations, because last year they soaked up a 10.4 per cent cut in their budget, which squeezed staff and courses. They did not have high hopes, but they could not see how they could continue to operate with further cuts to their budget.

This Government has made its choices, but let us not pretend that they were all prescribed by Westminster. Yes, Westminster sent up a reduced budget, but it did not send up a list of choices.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jenny Marra: No, thank you.

The SNP has made its choices in line with its own priorities. Those choices will curtail the choices of many other people; often, they will curtail those of the most vulnerable. The cabinet secretary may laugh, but the issue is about more than the 13 per cent budget cut that many colleges have calculated to mean a 25 per cent real-terms reduction over four years, and which the Educational Institute of Scotland has calculated will amount to a 29 per cent real-terms reduction over four years; it is also about the choices about where the cuts will fall.

The cabinet secretary was kind enough to send the colleges some guidance on the budget cut in an accompanying letter to the college principals. He told them to concentrate on the economically active and on the courses that lead to national qualifications, and to try to maintain other courses. "Try"—that is fine, but in the face of a 25 per cent cut, is it realistic or workable?

What are the courses that do not lead to national qualifications that are likely to go? They are special programmes for young people with particular needs and learning difficulties, who do not have many options at all. The colleges provide a fantastic route for skill development. They give training in life skills, independent living, communications and much else. Some of those students progress to find work; some of them do not. The benefits are innumerable—I know because I met some such students at Dundee College last week—but they are not always quantifiable.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jenny Marra: No, thank you.

Is it fair to cut provision for those students because we cannot quantify the benefits?

What else do the colleges do that does not lead to the national qualifications that the cabinet secretary wants to protect? Colleges provide great education for students who have struggled with the school system. I am talking about hard-to-reach kids and those who have a poor attendance record at school. Many such students progress into qualifications. The colleges set up those courses to respond to local need. They offer the second chance that so many of us need at different points in life, but which children from deprived backgrounds need much more.

The colleges have strong articulation agreements with local universities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): I would be grateful if you would close now.

Jenny Marra: Those agreements are often with the post-92 universities. When students are not readily accepted on to courses, the college will back them up and give them the voice and determination that they need to get there.

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

Jenny Marra: I will just finish.

Yes, cabinet secretary, we must focus resources to get people into work, and the settlement is tough, but the Government has made choices, and these people do not have as many choices—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are closing now. Thank you very much.

10:59

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I should declare an interest as someone who was a lecturer in economics at the University of Abertay Dundee and Inverness College UHI before I entered the Parliament. I refer to my declaration of interests.

I find it difficult to think of schools, colleges and universities as separate entities. I use the example of Inverness College, where I lectured at higher national certificate, higher national diploma and degree level before coming to the Parliament. It has more than 400 people taking highers, 250 of whom are full time and more than 150 of whom are part time. Many highers that are needed for entrance to university are not available in schools but can be done online with a monthly get-together at Inverness College. Pupils from 19 schools from all over the Highlands do highers in that way, so cuts to FE also affect school education.

The vocational pathways and skills for work programmes have been up and running at Inverness College for many years. Hundreds of school pupils attend the college for a day every week to try out and receive skills and training in hairdressing, beauty therapy and a range of construction and information technology skills. That, too, is a highly successful partnership with schools to the advantage of pupils.

Inverness College teaches many courses to degree level and has PhD research students in many academic spheres, such as rural, marine and environmental studies and tidal energy. It is one of 13 colleges that is not only an FE college but part of the University of the Highlands and Islands, so when we talk about cuts—or, I should say, positive reforms—to further education in Scotland, we are talking about cuts to school education and university education such as masters degrees and doctorates.

Michael Russell: I would be interested in the evidence that Mary Scanlon has for cuts to masters degrees and doctorates. I am unaware of any such evidence, but if she has it and brings it to me I will be interested to see it.

Mary Scanlon: The evidence is that the cabinet secretary's positive reforms—also known as cuts—to colleges such as Inverness College and the other 12 colleges in the University of the Highlands and Islands mean cuts to colleges that offer doctorates. If the money is cut there—

Michael Russell: Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: One intervention is enough. The point is that the Government's funding plans affect schools, universities, our skills base and our ability to help people to get back to work.

Jenny Marra mentioned unmeasurable benefits. I found that mature students often came to Inverness College with no confidence and no hope of a career but left with something unmeasurable: a touch of confidence and wellbeing. Colleges provide an opportunity for many individuals to empower themselves, gain skills and get themselves back to work. Their biggest success is often the mature students, who missed out at school and find that college brings out their talents and gives them the opportunities that they did not have.

According to a briefing from Scotland's Colleges, last year colleges turned away 35,000 potential part-time and full-time students because courses were full. That surely highlights the need for more funding and more opportunities. We welcome the Government's commitment to giving all young people a training or education place but, having turned away 35,000 people last year, how can colleges provide those places with no additional funding—only a significant cut? I ask the

cabinet secretary to review that cut. Our colleges will rise to every challenge that the Government sets and are ready to embrace the reform agenda, but they cannot work miracles on a reducing budget.

11:03

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The last major reform of further education was undertaken by the previous UK Tory Government in 1992-93. Our Tory friends in Scotland would like us to forget that era, but the iron lady and her successor have left rusty stains on Scotland's soul that will not be forgotten until we remove their various legacies. Our Tory friends in Scotland will never be able to rebrand themselves successfully until we remove those legacies, so they should support, and thank us for, the further education reforms.

Mary Scanlon *rose—*

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

Mike MacKenzie: No, I have only four minutes.

The Tories turned our colleges into businesses competing with each other to replicate courses not in any genuine market, but in one in which the competition was and is for public subsidy. That is not business and it is certainly not the free market that our Tory friends profess to worship.

Education is not and should not be about business. It is one of our higher callings: to discover and nurture the talents of our younger generation. The aims of education are incompatible with the business-centred approach.

Scotland is now under the hammer of another couple of young Tory Turks, overdosing on testosterone and imposing cuts that are too fast and too deep and that run the risk of tipping us back into recession. Under those circumstances, we are forced to seek better value in education as in other areas. With careful pruning, the tree can become stronger. In order to safeguard the precious asset of our young people's education, we must eliminate replication and competition where it is destructive and replace it with co-operation and collaboration, which is constructive.

I trained a number of apprentices over the years and experienced at first hand the destructive effects of competition in further education when some of our colleges did well and others did not. Our apprentices went to a college in the central belt that did not do well under that system. I remember first-year joinery apprentices occasionally teaching lecturers how to do things. I remember being pressurised by the college to sign off apprentices as competent at tasks when they had not yet achieved competence. I remember the

college explaining that if I did not do so, it would not receive its funding. Its concern was about money and not much about education and training.

I therefore welcome the cabinet secretary's proposals. They are long overdue. I welcome his firm commitment that not one college will close and his commitment to flexibility, so that colleges will be free to collaborate in ways that minimise difficulty. I especially welcome the cabinet secretary's and First Minister's commitment that higher education will remain free in Scotland until

"the rocks melt wi' the sun".

I have an affectionate message for Liz Smith. I will support that commitment, as will my colleagues on the SNP back benches, to free higher education in Scotland,

"Till a' the seas gang dry, my Dear."

11:08

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I welcome the debate and congratulate Liz Smith on her motion even if I do not support it.

The debate is timely as, facing the prospect of swingeing budget cuts and the imposition of wholesale mergers, our colleges feel as if they are under siege. In the current political climate, when many organisations find it difficult, if not impossible, to voice publicly their concerns about what this majority Government is doing, it is striking that Scottish college leaders have felt moved to be so outspoken. In their open letter to the education secretary, John Spencer and Graham Johnstone pulled no punches at all. They talked of a "bleak" future for Scotland's college sector, adding:

"The impact on the quality of provision, the availability of student support services, and the loss to expertise, capacity and morale present in the sector through losing staff cannot be overstated."

On the process of top-down merger, as the cabinet secretary said, Mr Spencer is on record as saying

"we will embrace reform that can benefit learners",

but he goes on to say:

"reform should not come at the expense of the quality or breadth of provision for college students."

That is a strong, unambiguous message and we should all heed it, but we would do well to detect any level of concern from reading the Government's amendment this morning. So although I support many of the sentiments in Mr Russell's text, it would be wholly inappropriate for the Parliament to do anything other than acknowledge the deep disquiet in Scotland's college sector. That is why, in the absence of my

own amendment, I urge members to support the amendment in the name of Ken Macintosh.

As all have recognised in the debate, our colleges make an invaluable contribution, not least in delivering opportunities for genuine lifelong learning, yet there has been a smash-and-grab raid on their budget. The 20 per cent positive reforms that are to take place over the next three years follow the 10 per cent positive reforms of last year.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Liam McArthur: No. I have only four minutes.

College leaders have confirmed that the SNP's pledge to retain student numbers at colleges over the lifetime of this Parliament cannot be delivered. Delivery of Mr Russell's commitment on 16 to 19-year-olds will be "seriously compromised" and compulsory redundancies, as Jenny Marra pointed out, cannot be ruled out.

Add to that a merger process about which witnesses to the Education and Culture Committee earlier this week expressed grave concerns and we have a potentially toxic medicine. Mark Batho conceded that the cost of mergers could be significant in the initial years, when budgets are tightest. Indeed, other witnesses testified that no allowance had been made for those costs in HE, far less FE, allocations.

Meanwhile, Lord Sutherland was outspoken in his criticism, not of mergers per se—

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Liam McArthur: Sit down. The member took no interventions.

Lord Sutherland rightly said that mergers can deliver considerable benefits, but was critical of the way in which ministers are going about it. The process is not being institution-led or academically driven and Lord Sutherland was in no doubt that what the University of Abertay Dundee and the University of Dundee were being put through would send a chill down the spines of universities and colleges across Scotland that are fearful for their futures.

Ministers will seek to blame everyone else for this state of affairs. The truth, though, is that it is the result of political choices that the Government has made. Alternative options were and are still available. I do not support Liz Smith's proposition but, by clinging doggedly to some of their costly promises while ruling out even looking at other possible savings, ministers have made the bed in which colleges are being forced to lie.

Let me cite one example. Ministers have set their face against any consideration of ways in

which significant savings could be made through moving Scottish Water to a public trust. Such a move could release savings to the Scottish budget of around £1.5 billion, money that would make a real difference to our colleges as well as enabling a concerted effort to be made on early years and a range of other worthwhile initiatives.

Other examples exist, but that will do to illustrate the dire situation facing our colleges and, by extension, learners, staff and, indeed, the local communities in which the institutions are based, which is the result of political choices made by the majority SNP Government.

I welcome the debate, but question whether the subject might not have presented a more appropriate use of the Parliament's debating time this afternoon, rather than being shoe-horned into an Opposition slot. Ministers may wish to reflect on the message that that sends to a vital sector that is desperately looking for signs from the SNP Government that it is valued and not simply the politically expendable part of the learner journey.

Stewart Maxwell: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance on what opportunities or avenues are open to members to correct a member's misrepresentation of evidence to a parliamentary committee. It is quite clear that Liam McArthur's statement is not an accurate representation of the evidence that was supplied to the Education and Culture Committee on Tuesday morning.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order; it is a matter for the member. Nonetheless, you have your point on the record.

11:12

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I share the sentiments that Liz Smith expressed and I concur with her view that Scotland's colleges have an outstanding record. It is, therefore, not to put too fine a point on it, a disaster that they are being asked to bear the brunt of spending cuts. I regret that she allowed the focus of the debate to shift away from Scotland's colleges and on to issues that can be addressed at other times. The debate should focus on the contribution that Scotland's colleges can make to education in Scotland.

Their contribution is more flexible and more effective in many regards than that of any other institutions in this country. In my area in Renfrewshire, I see Reid Kerr College's contribution to communities such as Barrhead, Neilston, Johnstone and Linwood and to many young people who would otherwise be alienated and disengaged from the education process. The colleges are a lifeline for such young people and they provide imagination and innovation.

I accept what Mike Russell said about college principals being up for reform; nevertheless it was incumbent upon him to articulate the concerns that Liam McArthur and others indicated that the colleges have. As Jenny Marra said, colleges committed last year to avoid compulsory redundancies and maintain the same level of activity. However, they are clearly saying that that cannot be repeated this year if they must absorb further cuts to their core funding.

We know the social improvements that good colleges can make. It is not just about education. For example, in the east end of Glasgow we have seen an 84 per cent reduction in criminality and youth disorder over the past three years, which is a result of joint efforts by the local authority, the police and colleges, such as John Wheatley College, which manage to give many young people a positive aspect to their life.

John Mason: Will the member give way?

Hugh Henry: No, thank you.

Are we prepared to pay for the other costs that will come when young people are denied opportunities at colleges?

Liam McArthur is right to say that it is a shame that this subject has been shoe-horned into a short Opposition debate, because there are issues that are worthy of further exploration. I agree with some of what the cabinet secretary said about having to think outside the box.

We must ask ourselves why it is that in places such as Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and, I think, Aberdeen, we probably have more universities than colleges. Why do we not start to look at a model that goes back to the old polytechnics? In Glasgow, Forth Valley, Dundee, Fife and Aberdeen, such polytechnics could build on the good work that the colleges are doing in relation to HNCs and HNDs and provide a more effective, efficient and cost-effective way of delivering degrees. Why is it that some of the elitist institutions that Ken Macintosh mentioned are refusing to accept the HNDs and HNCs as progression towards degrees? I say to the cabinet secretary that he should use his influence to challenge that elitism and that attitude, which is fundamentally wasting money in this country.

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

Hugh Henry: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Finally, we should challenge whether we need four-year degrees. We should look at the contribution that sandwich courses make. Above all, we should not underestimate the contribution that Scotland's colleges can make to the wellbeing of this country.

11:17

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): We have now heard it said twice that the ancient institutions—the ancient universities—in this country are elitist organisations. As an alumnus of the University of Glasgow, I have to say that this is the first time that I have ever been accused of being part of any elite, so I thank the Labour Party for that news.

I welcome the debate. I thank the Conservatives for their choice of subject matter, but I disagree with the terms of their motion for two reasons. First, it totally and utterly fails to acknowledge the budgetary circumstances of the time. It is quite clear that the Scottish Government has been passed a very challenging budget settlement from Westminster and it is trying to do the best that it can with it. I heard the groans from the Tory members when the cabinet secretary made that point, but their groans cannot mask the fact that the cuts that the Scottish Government is facing are a consequence of decisions being taken by their party at Westminster. It was interesting to hear Mary Scanlon say that colleges cannot work miracles with cuts; I wonder whether she will follow that statement through to its logical conclusion.

Liz Smith: Does the member agree that it is up to the Scottish Government to decide the spending levels in HE and FE?

Jamie Hepburn: I was just about to come to that point—I hear the Labour Party members applauding. Others have said that this is a matter of choice. Of course there is still choice to be exercised by the Scottish Government—I absolutely accept that. However, what we have not heard in any of the debates about public spending by the Scottish Government is the choice that other parties would exercise. What areas of the budget would they seek to cut? From which other areas of the budget would they lever funds to give to areas such as further education?

The second reason why I disagree with the Tory motion is that it raises once more the spectre of tuition fees. The motion refers to a

“consequence of the Scottish Government’s refusal to allow additional private sources of finance in the higher education sector”.

That is quite clearly a reference to tuition fees, so we know that the Conservatives still want to see the imposition of tuition fees here in Scotland. It is not just me who believes that; the National Union of Students said:

“We fully reject the Scottish Conservatives’ motion which once again calls for, in effect, tuition fees”.

I would like the Scottish Conservatives to let go of the idea that we need tuition fees in higher education. It is clear that members on these

benches—and I hope others, although we have heard in recent days that the Labour Party seems to support tuition fees of £6,000 in England—believe that education should be based on the ability to succeed and learn and not on the ability to pay.

We are seeing that commitment in further education as well as in higher education. The education maintenance allowance has been protected, despite the attacks on it south of the border. That clearly benefits further education students because a significant proportion of those who are in receipt of the EMA are further education students. Again, we have seen the NUS welcome that decision.

I had hoped to go more into the background of the sector and the debate more generally, but I must close by referring to Cumbernauld College, which is the only tertiary education institution in my constituency. I thank the Minister for Learning and Skills for visiting the college with me on Tuesday, and I am sure that he agrees that, although it is one of the smaller colleges, it is an excellent institution with good reports from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education. The college told us that there are challenges ahead for tertiary education and the further education sector, but they are challenges that the colleges are embracing. The colleges want to ensure that the sector moves forward strongly in the future.

I close with one last reference. I know that there are plans to regionalise the structure of colleges, and I imagine that there is a temptation to use local authority boundaries as the logical way to do that. I hope that that can be revisited. The constituency of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth does not sit easily or readily in the North Lanarkshire area for a number of reasons—historical, cultural and linked to public transport. I hope that that will be considered, and I will take it up in future with the cabinet secretary.

11:21

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank the Conservatives for using their parliamentary time to debate the issue of colleges. The Government’s debate on Scottish studies this afternoon is certainly valuable, but it is unfortunate that this morning’s debate has to be so brief, because it is clear that college cuts are of key concern to many members and their local colleges.

In last week’s debate on the spending review, I gave my initial reaction to the cuts. As Jenny Marra outlined, a flat-cash deal was the best that colleges could hope for from this year’s budget, and they were prepared to absorb the inflation increases. However, the 13.5 per cent cut in cash

terms—at least 20 per cent in real terms—over the spending review period has left the sector alarmed and very concerned. It is not uncommon to hear language such as “shell shocked” from principals. Indeed, Scotland’s Colleges said that the spending review presented a “bleak future” for the college sector.

We all know the challenges that the Government faced in the spending review. Whoever was in government was going to face tough decisions. As Liam McArthur said, however, it is a choice of the Government to make such a deep cut. It is difficult to accept such a cut to a sector that plays such a critical role in growing our economy and tackling unemployment.

We are facing a crisis of youth unemployment. I acknowledge the Government’s commitment to 16 to 19-year-olds—indeed, it was Labour policy—but there is a concern that, although the Government may deliver on that pledge, the positive reform that it is undertaking means the closing of opportunities for many people outwith that group. As Jenny Marra described, there is a danger of some important non-accredited courses being hit as well as the quality of teaching being threatened.

In difficult economic times, colleges have been quick to react. They have worked hard to turn no one away, and they have moved to provide options for those facing redundancy as well as school leavers. They are making it clear that that level of activity will be impossible to maintain with the planned cuts.

As well as delivering high-quality skills and excellence, colleges play a vital role in extending opportunity to communities that can be difficult to reach. We know that more than 30 per cent of college students come from the most deprived areas of Scotland and Hugh Henry spoke about the vital social value of colleges in our communities. Slashing budgets by more than 20 per cent over the three-year period will jeopardise colleges’ ability to deliver for their communities.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Claire Baker: No, thank you. I have only four minutes.

To make matters worse, half of the funding cuts will fall in the first year, compounding the problems created for the sector by last year’s 10 per cent cut.

Last year’s cut was a difficult one to absorb. Mary Scanlon raised concerns about the future of school partnerships, and the cut also resulted in a reduction in courses, student-teacher contact time, and student guidance and counselling services—the very services that many of our more vulnerable students need.

We know that redundancies in the sector have been significant. More than 1,000 jobs have been cut in the past year—a 7 per cent decline in the sector, which is more than any other area of the public sector. Colleges have questioned their ability to avoid compulsory redundancies with the new settlement.

Last year, though, colleges accepted the 10 per cent cut, while promising to maintain places and, in many cases, increase places in response to the local unemployment challenges. However, they made it clear that that kind of cut was unsustainable in the long term. They have made it clear that their ability to meet the Government’s places pledge is seriously compromised by the budget proposals. The big money-saving idea is mergers, but it is clear that, in the short term, mergers will not deliver the level of efficiencies needed to meet the funding gap that the cuts create.

Last week’s open letter from Scotland’s Colleges was pretty direct in its concerns and its criticism of the spending review. Although its statement this week states that it will work on a reform agenda, that does not negate the financial alarm bells that it rang last week. Colleges have always been a reforming sector, open to change in the best interests of their learners, so I do not doubt that they will work constructively with the Government on reform. However, to drive through this level of reform while drastically reducing budgets gives rise to a serious danger of compromising colleges’ ability to deliver for Scotland’s communities.

11:25

Michael Russell: I start with something that the whole chamber agrees on, which is rather hard to find these days, although I always try to be positive. We all agree that a high-performing education and skills system is vital to creating the type of Scotland that we want. It is vital to building our workforce, improving individual life chances and maintaining our competitiveness at home and abroad. Those are the very reasons why reform is more important than ever and they are a test against which the success of a reform programme has to be judged. Not only is that the right thing to do; this is the right time to be doing it. That is not just my belief—interestingly, it is the belief of many in the college sector, who agree that it is time to make those changes and acknowledge that, although the financial difficulties are severe, they can be coped with.

I quote another letter I have had this week, from Russel Griggs, the chair of the board of management at Dumfries and Galloway College:

“there is an understandable concern that the scale of funding cuts ... coupled with the potential timetable for

change ... could ... impact on learners and communities unless this is achieved through effective joint working between the sector, the government and the Scottish Funding Council."

That is precisely what I am committed to, and it is being done jointly and with substantial resource.

Hugh Henry: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Michael Russell: No. I want to make some progress. I have a word or two for Mr Henry in just a moment.

I made the point in my opening speech that we have spent £2.6 billion in our first term in government. In the next three years, we will invest £2 billion. There is substantial resource to take this forward. A substantial investment is important in a sector that is good but can be better. No Opposition member has even tried to refute the fact that the savings in the City of Glasgow College in the first year of the merger have been £4 million. That shows that it can be done. According to the college's principal, the service is better than ever.

Ken Macintosh: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Michael Russell: No. I want to sum up and I have only a few minutes.

The problem with the debate is that it has been characterised by assertion, assumption and error from the Opposition, with a liberal dose of scaremongering. Mary Scanlon asserted that there was damage to masters degrees and doctorates. There is no evidence of that. She said that the colleges had turned away a certain number of potential students, but she did not say that those figures include multiple applications, so the figure is totally erroneous.

Jenny Marra talked about protecting access courses. Those courses are specifically protected under the instructions that I have given to the funding council.

Mary Scanlon: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Michael Russell: No. I am sorry—I am going to finish my point. There has been far too much misleading information. In addition to that, colleges are not the only provider for deprived young people. For example, the Skills Development Scotland get ready for work programme, the activity agreement roll-out, the community learning and development fund and the Inspiring Scotland 14:19 fund all exist and are all making a difference.

Ken Macintosh called on me to direct colleges to do certain things but did not tell Parliament that the power of direction for the minister was

removed by one Allan Wilson when he was Labour minister for colleges. Ken Macintosh was asking me to do something that he should have known was impossible.

David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con): Bring him back!

Michael Russell: David McLetchie suggests that we bring back Allan Wilson. It is possible, given the Labour leadership contest. Of course, Mr Macintosh has had a difficult day because, when Ed Miliband was asked to name the potential leaders of Scottish Labour this morning, he got Harris and Lamont but forgot Mr Macintosh. It has been a hard day for him. To add to that disappointment, there was a fatal flaw in the argument from the member sitting behind him. Despite Mr Henry's penchant for hyperbole in describing the disasters that he talked about, there was just a hint that, as a former education minister, he realised that progress needs to be made on this agenda—that there needs to be rationalisation and an agenda that delivers better.

Jenny Marra: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Michael Russell: No, I am not going to give way, as I have much ground to cover.

Liz Smith keeps arguing for fees. In June 2007, Professor Tim O'Shea, the acting convener of Universities Scotland, said:

"can I reaffirm Universities Scotland's entire acceptance that in the post-election environment any further discussion of graduate contribution options is irrelevant."

I am afraid that that defines Liz Smith's position: she is making an irrelevant point and proposing an irrelevant policy that has damaged her own party and will damage whatever new party is brought into existence. Two Conservative parties, both with disastrous policies—surely they have learned something.

The lesson of today's debate is even more interesting. We have seen the reality of modern Scotland. The SNP has been arguing for positive, constructive reform, but what we have heard from the Tories, Labour and the Liberals is an opposition to reform. That is the true definition of conservatism, so they are all conservatives now—all unionists are conservatives. The Tories scoff at the very idea of reform and Labour laughs with them, while the Tory and Liberal parties slash the funding for Scotland. Mr McArthur asked for an idea for change. I will give him an idea—independence, when Scotland's resources can be applied to the issues that concern Scotland.

The lesson today is this: let us be straightforward and look at the evidence. Let us consider the example of what took place in Glasgow. Let us consider the needs of learners

and how we can take Scottish education forward for learners. Then we will embrace with enthusiasm a reform agenda that the Conservatives and the unionists still reject.

11:32

David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con): Aneurin Bevan said that

“The language of priorities is the religion of Socialism”,

but the choice of priorities is a feature of any political ideology or party of government because, as we all know, resources are not infinite and choices must be made. One of the tasks of Opposition parties is to make explicit the priorities that have been adopted by the governing party and the consequences of the decisions that it has made. I agree with Jamie Hepburn that some Opposition parties, while keen to criticise the Government, are far from enthusiastic about making their own priorities and choices clear, but that is not a charge that can be laid at the door of the Scottish Conservatives, with our fully costed programme. Nonetheless, it is the Government's programme, which is in the course of implementation, that we must address first and foremost.

It is interesting to reflect on the changing SNP priorities in education. Some of us still remember—even if most SNP members would love to forget—that the educational priority back in 2007 was the reduction of class sizes to a maximum of 18 in primary 1 to 3. Michael Russell, the architect of that policy, confidently proclaimed that it could be achieved within five years. Like many of Mr Russell's extravagant assertions, that was manifest nonsense. However, it fell not to him but to the hapless Fiona Hyslop to try to implement the policy. Not surprisingly, she failed to do so and, in an ironic and cruel twist of fate, the beneficiary of her dismissal was the same Michael Russell who dreamed up the daft idea in the first place.

Michael Russell: As ever, I thank the member for his kindness towards me. Mr McLetchie and I are old friends. I remind him that his own record of prediction and assertion is not unblemished. In 1999, when he was Conservative leader, he stated:

“we're determined to abolish tuition fees for Scots students going on to university.”

Ha, ha—“we're determined”.

David McLetchie: We were absolutely determined to do that, at that particular time and in the circumstances before the financial disaster and crisis that was visited upon this country by a Labour Government—a financial disaster and

crisis of which the SNP Government failed to take proper cognisance.

We all know that the class size policy has been indecently interred and abandoned. Instead, the overriding policy and priority is to maintain free higher education in Scotland for Scots, and for the French, the Germans, the Poles, the Swedes, the Lithuanians, the Italians, the Spaniards, and the Portuguese—not to mention the Greeks, the poor souls—at any cost, which of course is why some university principals went into raptures last week when the budget was announced.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

David McLetchie: No, thank you.

What is the cost of allocating the education budget in such a manner, as a deliberate act of SNP policy and priority? As Jenny Marra and Liam McArthur rightly reminded us, the choice is the SNP's and the SNP's alone, because it knew perfectly well before the recent Scottish Parliament election and the budget announcement exactly how much money it would have at its disposal over the spending review period.

Scotland's colleges are the SNP's whipping boys for Scotland's universities. Last year, the colleges budget was cut by more than 10 per cent, which resulted in a reduction in staff of 1,000—how much harder evidence than that does Mr Brodie need? It also resulted in a reduction in the number of learners and a cut in school-college partnership programmes. As we heard, during the three-year spending review period, the sector will experience cuts of a further 13 per cent, totalling some £74 million, with the bulk of the reduction coming next year.

Often overlooked in the debate about higher education is the fact that colleges delivered 20 per cent of higher education provision in Scotland last year. The upshot of the SNP's approach is that we have financial protection for the providers of 80 per cent of our higher education, that is, universities, but budgets are slashed for the providers of the rest of our higher education programme, that is, the colleges.

In politics, we are all used to people crying wolf. It happens every time a grant is reduced. All manner of dire consequences are claimed as inevitable. However, the letter to Mr Russell from Scotland's Colleges made clear that the Government is not only cutting budgets substantially in absolute and real terms but, at the same time, demanding that colleges do more to help with training opportunities for 16 to 19-year-olds and demanding improvements in retention, support services and course content. It is breathtaking that a sector that had to reduce staff numbers by 1,000 to cope with the previous round of cuts is piously demanded by the bold Mr

Russell to avoid compulsory redundancies. That is yet another superficial SNP policy that makes for a good soundbite and a good headline but does not make good sense when employers' budgets are being slashed—some people would say that that is the height of hypocrisy.

Something has to give, and the casualties will be the prospective students who fail to gain college places and the staff who used to teach the courses that are no longer offered. In the letter of 22 September from Scotland's Colleges to Mr Russell, which was written by Mr John Spencer, whom Mr Russell was keen to quote when it suited his purposes, the position was made clear. Mr Spencer wrote:

"The SNP's manifesto commitment to retain student numbers at colleges over the lifetime of this Parliament ... cannot be delivered in this proposed Budget."

The rocks will be melting in the sun on that one.

The debate is not just about core funding levels and priorities. It is about accountability, the structure of the sector, the forced merger process that is being decreed by Mr Russell from the centre and Mr Russell's dictatorial approach to the governance of Scotland's colleges—a sector that has flourished since the Conservatives cut it loose from the dead hand of council control and gave it a mandate, in partnership with schools and businesses, to meet local training and education needs. It is ironic that the party that likes to talk about independence is less keen on the concept when it means independence from interference by an SNP Government.

Scotland's colleges are accountable to the funding council and to the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government, but most of all they are accountable to their students for the quality of education and training that they deliver. They have been passing that test of accountability with flying colours ever since 1993.

Different parties have different perspectives on the debate, as is clear from the motion and amendments. No doubt the Government will prevail at decision time. However, the fact is that the SNP Government is short-changing Scotland's colleges and generating a host of problems for itself over the next five years. Back-bench SNP members throughout the country will come to rue the day when their Government's lop-sided priorities were determined.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

NHS Lothian (Meetings)

1. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met NHS Lothian to discuss the new Royal hospital for sick children incorporating the department for clinical neurosciences in Edinburgh. (S4O-00204)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): NHS Lothian officials attended the Scottish Government's infrastructure investment board meeting on 26 September to update members on the current status of the project.

Sarah Boyack: I thank the cabinet secretary for her response and for the other responses that she has made to parliamentary questions on the matter.

Concerns have been raised with me, through the press and directly, about the potential for a talent drain from Edinburgh to Glasgow as a result of the new Glasgow children's hospital, which will open in 2015, before the Edinburgh sick kids hospital opens. Can the cabinet secretary provide assurances that earlier completion of the new hospital in Glasgow will not affect specialist skills and children's services in Edinburgh and that Edinburgh's sick kids hospital will be a world-class facility in its own right, rather than a satellite service for Glasgow? What will the cabinet secretary do to ensure that there is no talent drain from Edinburgh's sick kids hospital?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Sarah Boyack for her interest. I want to respond constructively; I have said before in the chamber and I say again that the Scottish Government is absolutely committed to delivery of the new sick kids hospital in Edinburgh. My job, which I will seek to do, is to ensure that that commitment, which is shared by NHS Lothian, is translated into practice.

Sarah Boyack will know from the detailed answers that have been given to parliamentary questions that the target date—which continues to be scrutinised—for the new sick kids hospital to become operational in Edinburgh is 2016. I appreciate and agree that it is absolutely vital, for the sake of providing young patients with the best possible care, that we have state-of-the-art sick kids hospitals in Glasgow and in Edinburgh. The

Government is committed to that, and I am happy to continue to update members as appropriate.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that there are many benefits for patients in having neo-natal, paediatric and adult care all in one campus which will, by maintaining strong links with the University of Edinburgh, combine pioneering research with care by the bedside? What assurances can the cabinet secretary give that the Scottish Government will work with the Scottish Futures Trust and NHS Lothian to ensure that the project is delivered as quickly as possible, so that the people of Edinburgh can rightly benefit from world-class facilities and treatment?

Nicola Sturgeon: I also thank Jim Eadie for his close interest in the matter and would repeat the assurances that I have just given to Sarah Boyack.

I agree very much with the premise of his question, which concerns the benefits to patients of having neo-natal, paediatric and adult care on one campus—the so-called gold standard. That is the model that is being pursued in the new south Glasgow hospital, and those benefits are equally applicable in Edinburgh.

I assure Jim Eadie, as I assured Sarah Boyack, that I will continue to ensure that I am closely apprised of developments in the project and I will continue to update MSPs as appropriate.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Question 2 has not been lodged by Colin Keir.

Advertising Budget (Allocation)

3. Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it determines the allocation of its advertising budget. (S4O-00206)

The Cabinet Secretary for Parliamentary Business and Government Strategy (Bruce Crawford): The Government's purpose to create sustainable economic growth, and the five strategic objectives that set out ministerial priorities, are the determining factors for allocating the advertising budget.

Hugh Henry: I know that Scottish Government ministers are generally supportive of community radio stations, such as Celtic Music Radio. Can the minister tell me why such stations receive no advertising from the Scottish Government? Will he consider placing advertisements with Celtic Music Radio and other community radio stations? Will he agree to meet me and representatives of Celtic Music Radio to discuss the matter?

Bruce Crawford: I appreciate and understand the way in which Hugh Henry has put that question and we will consider anything in that regard. In general, public information and social

advertising campaigns are only used where there is strong evidence of an imperative to drive up services to meet the Government's statutory or legislative responsibilities, or to support preventative spend on pressures on front-line services such as for flu, organ donation registration or drink-driving. I might as well let the Parliament know that from 2010-11 to 2011-12, the Government has reduced by 57 per cent, against the capped levels that were inherited by this Administration, what is spent on advertising campaigns. I am happy to meet Mr Henry to discuss the issue and to take it forward constructively.

The Presiding Officer: Question 4 has not been lodged by Anne McTaggart.

Modern Apprenticeships

5. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many of the modern apprenticeships delivered in 2010-11 went to existing employees. (S4O-00208)

The Minister for Learning and Skills (Dr Alasdair Allan): All apprentices in Scotland must be employed prior to commencing their apprenticeship. The modern apprenticeship programme gives us the opportunity to support young people and others into work in order to support workforce development.

Information provided by Skills Development Scotland shows that in 2010-11 there was a total of 21,561 modern apprenticeship starts. Of these, 12,827 were 16 to 19-year-olds making the transition into the labour market. The remaining places were focused on upskilling individuals across a range of important economic sectors.

Mark Griffin: A local business owner informed me that he was offered a number of modern apprenticeship places last year. He immediately agreed to take on those places and informed the agency that it would take a number of months to advertise, interview and recruit. He was told that there was no time for that and that if he simply gave the names of existing employees, he would receive funding. Colleagues have told me that that scenario has been repeated across the country. In the current climate of pressure on public spending and a fast-increasing youth unemployment rate—

The Presiding Officer: Will the member get to the question?

Mark Griffin: Does the minister agree that that was a shocking misuse of public funds, in an area that is desperately needing attention, in order just to hit Government targets? Will the minister commit to investigating in order to ensure that it is not repeated in the next round of modern apprenticeship awards?

Dr Allan: I cannot comment on a case I am not familiar with, but I am happy to speak to the member about it. When the Government sets ambitious targets for the number of modern apprenticeships, we are also clear about the quality of apprenticeships. For that reason, I am looking at a range of things, including technical and graduate apprenticeships, to ensure we maintain the gold standard of apprenticeships.

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Will the minister provide details of where modern apprenticeships have been created in each of the past two financial years?

Dr Allan: I cannot provide the numbers for each local authority off the top of my head, but we have committed to major targets, which we are meeting. In the most recent financial year, we have more than met our targets. Across local authority areas, an increasing number of apprentices have achieved their apprenticeships—the figure has now risen to 71 per cent. I am happy to write to the member on both counts and to provide figures on a local authority basis.

Community Councils

6. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what support it provides to community councils. (S4O-00209)

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Aileen Campbell): At national level, since 2007 the Scottish Government has worked constructively with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Association of Scottish Community Councils to raise the profile and capacity of community councils. At local level, local authorities are responsible for supporting community councils practically and financially and for determining how best to do so.

The ASCC has recently announced its intention to cease its work and, while we are disappointed by its decision, we respect it. The Scottish Government continues to engage with the ASCC, while recognising the importance of providing future support to community councils. I am talking directly to community councils and others involved in supporting the sector about how best to do that.

Lewis Macdonald: I am sure the minister understands that the reason why the ASCC has decided to cease to operate is the failure of the Government to provide adequate funding for it to carry out its role of increasing the profile and capacity of Scotland's community councils. Will she reconsider her decision or, alternatively, meet me and the ASCC to discuss the Government's alternative proposals to allow the job of raising the profile and capacity of community councils to be taken forward?

Aileen Campbell: I appreciate Lewis Macdonald's interest in community councils. I met the Association of Scottish Community Councils a couple of weeks ago, when I made it clear that although I respect its decision to cease its work, we will continue to work constructively on how to develop community councils.

I am willing to meet Lewis Macdonald to give him the opportunity to highlight any constituency interest that he has. The association was offered funding that was comparable to that in previous years, but it demanded an increase of more than 100 per cent on its past funding. We have provided funding and have supported the association to develop community councils. I will continue to engage regularly with community councils and other stakeholders.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): I declare an interest, in that my wife is a member of Dyce and Stoneywood community council in Aberdeen. Does the minister feel that more could be done to ensure that community councils are more representative of the wider community, particularly by involving more young people, who often do not see community councils as being relevant to them?

Aileen Campbell: I absolutely share the concern that Mark McDonald raises, as do community councils, which understand that they have a role to play in attracting new younger members and members from different communities, in the engagement process.

Community councils have an important statutory role in our country's governance and they share the desire for community councils to be much more representative. I am happy to meet Mark McDonald to discuss any proposals or interest from community councils in his area about how we can develop that.

The Presiding Officer: Gavin Brown has withdrawn question 7 and has provided me with a perfectly understandable reason for that.

Mechanical Engineering Graduates (Career Destinations)

8. Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the career destinations are of mechanical engineering graduates from Scottish universities. (S4O-00211)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Data that can be accessed via the Higher Education Statistics Agency website shows the destinations of qualifiers from Scottish universities six months after graduation.

I understand from data that is taken from the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory

Services Scotland's "What do Graduates do? Scotland" website, which is supported by the HESA, that mechanical engineering graduates from Scottish universities fare very well in the jobs market. In 2009, more than 66 per cent entered employment and a further 21 per cent were in further study or a combination of work and study. That compares favourably with figures for the United Kingdom as a whole in 2009, which show that 65 per cent of mechanical engineering graduates were in work and that 18.5 per cent were in further study or a combination of work and further study.

Margaret McCulloch: Anxiety is felt in the engineering sector about the apparent shortage of job-ready mechanical engineering graduates and about the number of graduates who decide not to pursue a career in the industry. I learned of those difficulties at first hand when Scottish Enterprise arranged for me to visit Clansman Dynamics Ltd, which is a superb engineering firm that is based in Lanarkshire. That company has grown, but its managers are concerned about the pipeline of engineering talent in Scotland. Does the Scottish Government agree that many such problems could be addressed if better links existed between universities and employers? If so, how will it help to foster such partnerships, which are important to the sector?

Michael Russell: I agree profoundly with Margaret McCulloch. I am glad to say that I anticipated her question, because we published a paper about post-16 education two weeks ago. In that, we addressed the issue of job-ready graduates and how graduates can be produced in colleges and universities. The articulation of students from colleges through to universities, particularly in science and engineering, is important to us.

I assure Margaret McCulloch not only that I accept her point, which she and her local employer make well, but that we are acting on it. I am sure that she will go back to that employer to point out how thoughtful the Scottish Government is being and to say how strongly she supports our initiative.

The Presiding Officer: Alex Johnstone has not lodged question 9.

Public Procurement Procedures

10. Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve public procurement procedures. (S4O-00213)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): As well as developing savings of nearly £1.2 billion across the public sector since 2006, the Scottish

Government's procurement reform programme also aims to improve public procurement from a business perspective. We are improving the efficiency of procurement processes and making it easier for businesses to compete for contracts. For example, over 55,000 businesses are now registered on the Government's public contracts Scotland advertising portal, which is making it simpler than ever before to find public sector work.

Annabelle Ewing: I am very pleased to hear about the Scottish Government's actions to improve public procurement procedures and I am sure that the business community in Scotland will be, as well.

How is the community benefit clause working in practice? How is the Scottish Government's lobbying of the European Commission progressing with regard to the need to take into account local economic impact?

Alex Neil: Every major contract that is issued by the public sector will have a community benefit clause, and high on our agenda for such benefits will be apprenticeships, training and recruitment of unemployed people.

With regard to the Commission, two months ago, I had a very productive meeting with the relevant commissioner in Brussels and we have asked that, in deciding the outcome of public sector contracts, we be allowed to consider local economic impact. After all, the cost of such impacts can amount to more than the savings made in the contract. The commissioner listened sympathetically and we have some support from other member states. However, I regret to say that the point was not supported by the United Kingdom Government.

The other major aspect of European Union reform is increasing the threshold at which a contract has to be advertised in the *Official Journal of the European Union*. I can fairly predict that, when the reforms are announced, that particular reform will feature.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): How is the Government using the procurement process to deliver the Scottish Government's 42 per cent carbon reduction target? Is it monitoring the reduction of carbon emissions through the use of public procurement contracts? Finally, will it be able to report back to Parliament on its year-on-year targets?

Alex Neil: We are very conscious of the need to use public procurement to drive down our carbon emissions as well as to achieve other objectives. We are still engaged in our reform programme and are looking at how we can achieve that objective more effectively, and how we can encourage and facilitate the ability of more small to medium-sized enterprises to obtain public sector work in

Scotland. People should be aware that there is £10 billion-worth of work from public sector procurement in Scotland and we are determined to make the system work better for the people of Scotland in order to promote the growth of the Scottish economy.

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): I support the implicit criticism of the Government's record in Annabelle Ewing's question. Despite the minister's assurances, why do many small to medium-sized businesses feel that the process has let them down?

Alex Neil: First of all, I congratulate Jackson Carlaw on his straw-poll showing in Aberdeen at the weekend. I believe that he got 57 per cent of the vote.

We are working very closely with all six major business organisations on our procurement reform programme. I chair the public sector procurement reform board and we are actively involving the SME sector in, for example, refashioning the pre-qualification questionnaire procedure and contents. I repeat that the sector will be actively involved before we finalise the detail.

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary consider an urgent review of PQQs? My discussions with businesses in my constituency suggest that they are overly bureaucratic and inhibit the ability of SMEs to win contracts.

Alex Neil: Not only will I consider it, but we are—as I said in my previous reply—doing it.

There are three major problems with the PQQ process, the first of which is the ridiculous situation in which companies have to submit a full PQQ every time they bid for work. Instead of reinventing the wheel every time, they should have only to update the PQQ. Secondly, the PQQ should be SME-friendly, which it is not at the moment. Thirdly, we want to simplify and streamline the PQQ to ensure that it is much easier for every business to understand. I am sure that the member will follow progress closely and I will be delighted to keep him abreast of the Government's progress.

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. (S4F-00164)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have a range of engagements that will carry forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Iain Gray: How disappointingly mundane. On Tuesday, the First Minister told a conference that he was leading the greatest step forward for civilisation since the hunter-gatherers put down roots 10,000 years ago. I thought that, this afternoon, he might at least be ushering in an epoch of world peace or perhaps personally parting the North Sea for the interconnector to Norway. Perhaps he could just try to keep his promise to protect the national health service budget in real terms. Why is he cutting Scotland's NHS budget by £300 million?

The First Minister: The budget to health boards—the revenue budget of the NHS—has been protected in real terms by the Government. Of course, that is unlike what would have happened if the great misfortune had occurred—which would almost be approximate to parting the North Sea and just about as likely, incidentally—and the Labour Party had come to office. I know that Iain Gray has spent a lot of time this week reprising the election campaign and I do not want to add to his agony, but does he not remember saying on "Newsnight Scotland" a year ago:

"We wouldn't ring fence the health budget"?

We know that Labour did not mean to pass on the consequential because the Labour Party in government in Wales has not passed on the consequential to the health service. One thing of which we can be absolutely certain is that, if that great North Sea misfortune had befallen the people of Scotland and Iain Gray had triumphantly led the Labour Party into government, less money would have been spent on the national health service than will be spent in this spending review period.

Iain Gray: See what the First Minister did there? I asked him a question about NHS budgets and he gave me an answer about Labour's manifesto, the Welsh Labour Party and NHS board budgets. That was not the promise that he made. He promised that a Scottish National Party Government would protect the health budget, but it has not done that. Since the First Minister was re-elected in May, we have had fewer doctors, midwives and nurses. He

has got rid of 1,700 nurses since 2009. Does he still have the brass neck to say that he is protecting our NHS?

The First Minister: All the commitments that we made to the national health service are being met, and we will protect the NHS budget. Table 7.02 on page 64 of the “Scottish Spending Review 2011 and Draft Budget 2012-13” shows how the NHS budget is being protected. We pledged to pass on the consequential, which Iain Gray would not commit to do during the election campaign. We have done that; he will find that on page 58 of that document. We promised to protect the national health service and ensure shorter waiting times and treatment that continues to improve. That means extra investment of £1 billion over the next four years. He will see that in table 8.03 of the document. The SNP Government has met—indeed, more than met—each and every commitment that we gave the national health service.

I know that it is a long time ago, but Iain Gray should remember that, when he was the deputy health minister at a time when there was not a Tory Government imposing massive cuts from Westminster, nursing numbers in Scotland—guess what?—fell during his period of office, and there were 5,000 fewer nurses in the national health service than there are now under this Government.

Iain Gray: Table 1.06 in a financial scrutiny unit document on the draft budget shows that the change over four years in the total health spend is -£319 million. That is a cut. If the First Minister cared to examine nurse and midwife numbers, he would find that there are fewer nurses and midwives in our NHS now than there were in 2007 when he became First Minister. However, members do not have to take my word for it; let us ask the people who really know. The Royal College of Nursing states:

“Our nursing workforce is at breaking point”.

General practitioners tell us that “panic measures” to compensate for SNP cuts will compromise the NHS. Who should we trust on the NHS: the First Minister, who made the choices in his budget, or the doctors, nurses and patients, who have no choice except to live with the consequences? Who is telling the truth: Alex Salmond or the doctors and nurses?

The First Minister: In May, people had the opportunity to judge between Alex Salmond and Iain Gray and, fairly resoundingly, they decided on the Scottish National Party Administration. I named the three key tables in the spending plans, but Iain Gray chose not to reference them; instead, he glided across to the budget including capital spending, presumably oblivious to the fact

that the Conservative Party is cutting capital spending in Scotland by 36 per cent over a four-year period. That is the dreadful Conservative Party, but it adopted the plans that were left to it by the Labour Administration.

What did we do to try to counter that? Did we say, as Iain Gray did last year, that we would not even pass on the consequential? No; the Government, through the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth and the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy, introduced a non-profit distribution programme that will add £750 million to expenditure in the national health service in the next few years.

I have quoted the three tables, cited Iain Gray's deplorable record and explained how we are getting another £750 million investment in the national health service. Perhaps Iain Gray will have the grace to acknowledge that, if he comes along to ask questions on the NHS, neither on his record, performance nor understanding of statistics is he on safe ground.

Iain Gray: No matter where the First Minister goes in his budget, it unravels. Last week, he promised that the Government would invest in capital infrastructure. Then the Centre for Public Policy for Regions examined the figures and we discovered that the Government is cutting capital investment even faster than George Osborne and the Tories are. The First Minister promised to protect businesses, but then we discovered that he is taking an extra £850 million off them. Last Thursday, he promised to protect universities, but on Friday he gave the University of Abertay Dundee five weeks to merge into the University of Dundee. To paraphrase Al Gore, is not the truth just an inconvenience for the First Minister?

The First Minister: Last week, I wondered why Iain Gray kept asking about closures, since there will be no closures of colleges or universities in Scotland. Then, as Mike Russell mentioned in the education debate earlier, we found out that one of Ed Miliband's advisers is advocating the closure of half of England's universities. It is no wonder that Iain Gray was obsessed by closure.

I turn to the figures that were produced on capital departmental expenditure limits by the CPPR, an institute that seems to engage in treble counting. The last time that we had treble counting in the United Kingdom was when Gordon Brown was the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1997 to 1999; coincidentally, that was exactly the same period in which John McLaren was a Labour Party special adviser. It seems that old habits die hard.

The capital DEL is only part of the capital spending story. It is because of the near 40 per cent cut that the Tories introduced, and which was

planned by the Labour Party, that Mr Swinney has engaged in the non-profit distribution programme and the transfer from resource to capital in the budget. That is why the capital budget is increasing in Scotland, which is the only place in the United Kingdom where it is increasing. I heard that same mistake repeated by Ed Miliband on the radio this morning. I can only imagine that he got his information from Iain Gray. As that interview wended on, as the BBC news site tells us, Ed Miliband was unable to name all the Scottish Labour leadership candidates. He got two out of three, which is two more than the rest of the population.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S4F-00153)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): A meeting with the Prime Minister is not planned in the near future, but no doubt we will get round to it.

Annabel Goldie: The First Minister knows that I share his serious concern about sectarian behaviour in Scotland. Indeed, I have already raised the issue with him twice this year at First Minister's question time. I do not doubt his commitment to tackling it.

However, the First Minister will be aware of growing concern about his proposed legislation. We know that the consultation period has highlighted evidence that existing law, if it was enforced more robustly, may be adequate and that new law may not be required. In recent days, we have had impressive evidence of existing law being used to good effect. What does the First Minister consider is not covered by the existing law?

The First Minister: As I am sure that Annabel Goldie knows, the Lord Advocate explained that in full detail to the Justice Committee, which is studying the proposed legislation. All members should look at that evidence from the Lord Advocate because he went through, in precise detail, a number of cases in which behaviour that most reasonable people would consider to be an offence had not been covered by the breach of the peace legislation. He gave the example of racist offences. Some courts have decided that breach of the peace must be seen in the context of the effect on others in the situation. Someone could make remarks that are totally unacceptable but which, in the context of their effect on others, are not covered by the breach of the peace legislation. The Lord Advocate spent a great deal of time explaining to the committee why that is a deficiency in the current range of legislation. I hope that Annabel Goldie and the rest of the chamber will look at that evidence.

If we see gaps in the current legislation, given Annabel Goldie's clarion call for action earlier this year, it is our public duty to ensure that our police, our prosecution service and our Crown Office are equipped with the range of legislative instruments that they believe they require to face down and tackle evils in society. Sectarianism and sectarian displays are unacceptable across Scottish society, and they should not be allowed to attach themselves to our beautiful game of football.

Annabel Goldie: The First Minister and I know that all of us in the chamber are united in condemning sectarian behaviour wherever it occurs. That is precisely why we must not do a disservice to the public by making bad law just for the sake of making law.

Will the First Minister confirm that he will keep an open mind on legislating and that he will be swayed by the evidence that is presented to the Parliament rather than by an understandable, but perhaps misplaced, desire to create new law just because he can?

The First Minister: I recommend that Annabel Goldie read the explanation that the Lord Advocate gave the Justice Committee on 22 June 2011. It is a detailed explanation. When I read it, I thought that it made the case for legislative change beyond any peradventure. I am not certain whether Annabel Goldie has had the opportunity to study it in careful detail, but I commend it to her and, indeed, to the rest of the chamber. It is an excellent exposition of the gaps that exist in the breach of the peace legislation and why, over time, the interpretation of breach of the peace has changed and left those gaps. I am sure that when Annabel Goldie reads that explanation, she will understand that, if we are to act decisively, we must ensure that we give the people who are charged with enforcing our law—the police and others—the tools that they require to do the job that we expect them to do.

Lastly, I would like to say something else about the issue that will be important. As a Parliament, we must be able to get into a state of thinking in which we recognise that there are some things that we must tackle jointly as a society. Earlier this year, Annabel Goldie and others said that they wished to have more time to consider the proposed legislation. I gladly agreed to that, not because I did not think that our bill would get majority support, but because I wanted to take the entire chamber with us. We have to take the entire Parliament with us, but that is the responsibility of Opposition as well as Government. The Opposition parties must rise above the quick trick and the point that is easy to make, and must acknowledge the statements that the Lord Advocate made.

Unless we face down what has happened in and around our football grounds and have the courage and integrity to tackle it as a Parliament, we will not have a football game left in Scotland. The European authorities find what they have seen in Scotland unacceptable, and they would take action. Surely, as a Parliament, we can find it in ourselves—as we should as a society—to face down sectarianism and give the police, and those who are responsible for the law, the instruments that they have asked us for so that they can do the job that we expect them to do.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): The First Minister will appreciate the public concern about yesterday's appeal court decision on Robert Foye's conviction for a heinous crime that was committed in my constituency. What assurances can the First Minister provide for my constituents and the general public throughout Scotland that a mechanism is built into the justice system to ensure that, if Robert Foye is still regarded as a danger to the public, he will spend the entirety of his sentence behind bars?

The First Minister: I can give two reassurances. First, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice will introduce the required and considered changes in the legal framework for which Lord Hamilton called at the time of the initial judgment in March. They will enable us to close what seems to be a complex but nonetheless distinct loophole in the law.

Secondly, on how the punishment and other parts of sentences are imposed, no one has been released in Scotland over the past few years unless and until they were judged no longer to be a danger to the public.

We recognise the gap in the law and are grateful for the support that Victim Support Scotland expressed today for the actions that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice is taking. Before the year is out, the Parliament will have the opportunity to consider the changes in the law that are necessary fully to protect Scottish society.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-00162)

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

Willie Rennie: This morning, I met the latest recruit to the Liberal Democrats: Councillor Mike Dillon from Paisley who, after a brief flirtation with the Scottish National Party, has returned to the Liberal fold. That is good news. However, it is not such good news that there are an estimated

830,000 victims of crime in Scotland every year. What will the Scottish Government do to support victims?

The First Minister: Let us start with the real issue first: the victims of crime. I am sure that Willie Rennie acknowledges that crime in Scotland is now at a 33-year low. That is the result of many of the policies that this Government has advanced, in particular the policy of putting 1,000 extra police officers on Scotland's streets and in its communities. That policy was widely supported in the Parliament, although the Liberal Democrats were not among the advocates for it.

The people of Scotland have the security that crime has been driven to a 33-year low.

On Councillor Dillon, I will quote what he said on 3 July:

"Members and supporters of the LibDems do not understand why their party leadership in Scotland have become the cheerleaders to Tory policy and Tory beliefs ... Michael Moore and Willie Rennie sound more Tory than the Tories, and enough is enough."

Willie Rennie: I say to the First Minister that Mike Dillon is back with us. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Order.

Willie Rennie: The serious issue is that the First Minister has relegated his victims' rights bill out of this year's legislative programme. Will he agree to change his mind and introduce it this year?

Will the First Minister also increase the amount of work and training that takes place in prisons and start to use some of the proceeds from prisoners' earnings to help victims? Steps are being taken elsewhere in the UK to help to make that happen. Would not such a move assure crime victims that their interests are being taken seriously?

The First Minister: Victim Support Scotland is working closely with the Government on a range of issues. If Willie Rennie has specific proposals such as the one that he has just mentioned, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice will certainly consider them. That, indeed, is a serious issue.

He will come to regard it as a mistake, but Willie Rennie has chosen to develop that serious issue alongside Councillor Dillon's incredible endorsement of the Liberal Democrats. Given what he has said, if Willie Rennie thinks that Councillor Dillon is one of his foremost supporters, I can only think that there might soon be another candidate for the leadership of the Liberal Democrats in Scotland.

Crown Estate (Minerals)

4. Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what recent discussions the Scottish Government has had with the Crown Estate regarding the ownership and benefits that might flow from minerals mined in Scotland. (S4F-00157)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Whether it is mineral wealth, the value of a shoreline or the opportunities that are offered by renewables, Scotland's future economic growth and the strength of our communities rest on having control of our assets. For that reason, the Government has long argued for control of the Crown estates to return democratically to Scotland. The current Scotland Bill provides an excellent opportunity to do that and, given that the Parliament supported the proposal by a large majority, I hope that the Secretary of State for Scotland might consider that proposals that were resoundingly endorsed by Scotland's communities in the election and by a clear parliamentary majority should be included in the Scotland Bill.

Chic Brodie: The time is right for the archaic legislation governing the Crown estate to be brought into line with the realities of devolution in a modern Scotland, to make it accountable to the Scottish Parliament and people, and to deliver direct benefits to our communities. Will the First Minister continue to make the case to the United Kingdom Government that the Crown estate should be devolved to Parliament as soon as possible?

The First Minister: I met the chief executive of the Crown Estate and the Scottish commissioner last week. On 22 June, we submitted a detailed paper to the UK Government that set out the case for change. The Crown estate in Scotland should be administered in Scotland and accountable to the Scottish Parliament. The revenue should directly benefit Scotland and its communities. In the year to March 2011, the Crown Estate generated a surplus £9.9 million. Those resources were raised in Scotland and the Scottish Government ought to be able to democratically direct them to the benefit of Scotland and its coastal communities.

That democratic process of accountability would be somewhat better than having some sort of lottery, which was the most recent extraordinary proposal from the UK Government, and which has been roundly criticised by our coastal communities.

Nurses

5. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on reported concerns by the Royal

College of Nursing that nurses are at breaking point due to fears over workloads, job security and falling care standards. (S4F-00165)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We are maintaining our policy of no compulsory redundancies to increase job and economic security, and we are passing the health Barnett consequential of £1.106 billion in full to NHS Scotland.

Jackie Baillie: There is no doubt that nurses' morale is plummeting. They are desperately worried about falling care standards and they are uncertain about the future. As the SNP and the First Minister are fond of reminding us, they promised to protect all the health budget, not just health boards or part of the budget, and yet there has been a real-terms reduction of £320 million of revenue alone. That is a fact.

Will the First Minister give me a simple answer? If the SNP is protecting the NHS, why this year are there fewer doctors and consultants, fewer allied health professionals, and fewer nurses and midwives in the NHS than there have been at any point since 2005?

The First Minister: More people are working in the health service in Scotland now than there were in 2007.

No one would argue that the NHS is not under the same budgetary pressure as every other public service in Scotland. That budgetary pressure comes from the cut to Scotland from the UK Government. Incidentally, that cut was not just the work of the Conservative Party; two thirds of it was planned by the Labour Party.

The person who was the Labour chancellor at the time now tells us that he wanted to go further than the cuts that he described at the time as being further and deeper than those of Margaret Thatcher. Given that we know that the Labour Party would not have protected the national health service as this Government has protected it, how on earth can Jackie Baillie—or any other leadership candidate known or unknown to Ed Miliband—come to this chamber and claim that they have any credibility regarding a service that they refused even to protect with the Barnett consequential?

Just last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth announced that our no compulsory redundancy policy, which is unique across these islands, is to be extended for a further year precisely to address the question of job security.

Apart from our workers in the health service, who do excellent, fantastic work, there is another category of people whom we should consider: the patients, and what they feel about the NHS. The

most recent survey in August found that 86.4 per cent of the people of Scotland were very or fairly satisfied with the national health service in 2010; that was up from 81 per cent in 2007. So, it is not just that members should recognise the work of our national health service; we should also be aware that the people of Scotland recognise and support the excellent work that it does.

University Mergers

6. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister who has responsibility for decisions regarding university mergers. (S4F-00166)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council is the body responsible and it can make proposals, but ultimately it is for the universities themselves to decide.

Liz Smith: On Tuesday, Lord Sutherland described the consultation process regarding the possible merger between the University of Abertay Dundee and the University of Dundee as a “merger by fax”. Does the First Minister believe that it is acceptable for those universities to have just six weeks to respond to the Scottish funding council’s request that a possible merger be considered?

The First Minister: The Scottish funding council makes proposals, but just as there will be no closure of any college or university in Scotland, there will be no forced merger of any institution either, which contrasts with the situation elsewhere. The Scottish funding council is entitled to make proposals and it was entitled to do so in the case in question because—as Liz Smith should be well aware—there were concerns about governance issues that involved the suspension and then retiral of the then principal of the University of Abertay. There were also concerns about the costs that such matters may well have to the public purse—the Scottish funding council, of course, supplies the bulk of the funds in that regard.

We as a Government are not going to force any merger between unwilling parties, and it is not for me to advise university courts. However, perhaps in the current circumstances—of excellent university funding, incidentally; I am glad that Liz Smith by her silence seems to recognise that—*[Interruption.]* I merely say that Liz Smith has told us for over a year that the funding settlement for Scottish universities would not be adequate, but now that every university thinks that it is superb she says nothing about it.

Universities could do a lot worse than to look to the city of Aberdeen, where there will be a meeting tomorrow between the principals of Robert Gordon

University and the University of Aberdeen. They will look again at how the further sharing of facilities in that great city can enable those two distinct, independent institutions to gain economies, increase the services that are available to their students and run their universities in an even more efficient manner. It seems to me that there might be a light in the north that many institutions could have a look at.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Lord Sutherland also said that he could not imagine a worse way of undertaking a merger. Does the First Minister agree with him that the message of the experience of the University of Abertay Dundee and the University of Dundee will send a chill down the spines of colleges and universities across Scotland?

The First Minister: Perhaps the member should catch up with the consequences of the agreed merger between the three Glasgow colleges. I do not know whether he has seen the evidence this week and the strong endorsement of the impact of that merger. I note that there was a saving of £4 million in financial efficiencies from a measure that has established a great new college in the city of Glasgow. Incidentally, there were 69 mergers of colleges in the period of the previous Labour Government in England. Let us not have the idea that a merger between institutions is anything new, or other than something that could benefit the institutions themselves.

Let me repeat that as far as this Government is concerned, there will be no closure of any college or any university in Scotland over the period of this Government and there will be no forced merger either. However, our education configuration in Scotland is not set in stone. As has been demonstrated by the three colleges in Glasgow, there can be occasions when a great deal can be gained, both for the colleges and for the public purse, in having a merger that achieves such an excellent result as that.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): In light of the First Minister’s answer to Liz Smith that there will be no forced mergers between institutions, will he confirm that the merger talks between the University of Dundee and the University of Abertay Dundee will come to a halt at the end of October as the Scottish funding council set out in its letter?

The First Minister: It is for the universities to respond to the Scottish funding council’s proposals—and I am sure that they will. I will give the member a serious answer, given that last week she was able to ask a serious question, unlike her party leader, who was talking about closures.

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): You just can't help yourself, can you?

The First Minister: I think that most people who were here last week would say that what I just said was a reasonable estimation of the position.

It is for the funding council to make proposals and it is for the university courts to respond to them. Given the circumstances of the past year or so affecting Abertay and its governance, it is entirely reasonable for the funding council to have concerns. That is reasonable, given that the amount of money that is devoted to these things can have severe implications for the amount of money that is available for staff and students.

I hope and believe that the response of both universities—and of Abertay university court—will be such that they will come back and demonstrate that they have a plan that will achieve proper efficiencies and value for the public purse in a way that they find compatible with their future.

Let me repeat that just as there will be no closures of institutions under this Government, there will be no forced mergers either.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Have you had time to reflect on the point of order that I raised with you two weeks ago in respect of the length of time that it takes the First Minister to answer questions? Can you update Parliament on your reflections?

The Presiding Officer: I say to the member and to the chamber that every member, with the exception of one, who wanted a supplementary question this week got one. I also ensured that question time ran on for just a bit extra because of the importance of the debate about the university sector. I am satisfied that all members are being fairly represented in the chamber, but I will continue to reflect on what the member says.

12:33

Meeting suspended.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Rural Affairs and the Environment

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Question 1 has not been lodged.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority (Meetings)

2. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met representatives of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority and what issues were discussed. (S4O-00215)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Scottish Government has regular meetings and discussions with representatives of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority on issues regarding its operations.

Jackie Baillie: I am delighted to hear that. The minister will therefore be well aware of the concerns raised by the community in Luss regarding the use of the visitor centre for commercial purposes. He will be aware that the national park authority dealt with that property, but has now leased it out. That is having a detrimental impact on the future viability of other local businesses, which I am sure the minister regrets.

Will the minister suggest to the national park authority that it takes action quickly to resolve the matter before any local businesses close?

Stewart Stevenson: I understand that the business to which the lease has been attributed is based inside the park area, so it is at least contributing to the local economy. There is a meeting on 28 October—which will involve the chief executive—to discuss some of the concerns that have been raised on the subject. I encourage all those who have issues with the lease to engage in that process.

Without commenting specifically on the Luss visitor centre and other centres, I point out that the programme has been a successful initiative by the park authority to raise further money, which has been reinvested in communities such as Luss. There are benefits to it, albeit that there are remaining concerns that must be resolved at the October meeting.

Scotland Rural Development Programme (Application Process)

3. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to speed up the application process for the Scotland rural development programme. (S4O-00216)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Following the recommendations of the Scotland rural development programme first-stage review by Peter Cook in 2009, we have taken a number of actions to improve the application processes. Those include an option to bypass the first stage of the two-stage rural priorities application process; the transfer of support for community services and facilities applications from central control to the more locally based LEADER—links between activities developing the rural economy—scheme; and the introduction of an on-going approval process for woodland creation and for agri-environment grants on designated sites.

Mike MacKenzie: Will the cabinet secretary confirm the financial allocation that is to be awarded by the Argyll regional project assessment committee for the remainder of the seven-year programme?

Richard Lochhead: As Mike MacKenzie can imagine, I have been carefully examining the implications of the recent spending review and I will announce a future agri-environment round. We are also consulting our stakeholders before announcing arrangements for other RPAC rounds. As the end of the programme gets closer, there is less funding available and the spending review has had an impact on the amount of resource available to the Scottish Government, especially in capital grants, but I assure members that there will be further rounds.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take steps not just to speed up the process but to simplify it, so that it becomes more accessible for smaller farmers who find it difficult to afford the fees that professional agents ask for? Will he also take steps to make the process easier for people who are not computer literate to apply, so they may do so not necessarily online? Those two problems are often flagged up with me.

Richard Lochhead: Alex Fergusson raises valid concerns and issues that many applicants throughout Scotland have raised. I feel confident that we have addressed a number of those concerns in the past couple of years, and the system is much simpler than it was before, but I accept that it is perhaps still not simple enough.

There are many administrative European Union regulatory checks—including a 5 per cent

inspection requirement—that must be carried out before any claims can be paid. As members can imagine, that often slows up the process. There are lessons to learn about how we administer the scheme in Scotland, but we must also ensure that Scotland's voice is heard in Brussels so that the next rural development programme is simpler, as the member calls for and as I would certainly support.

The Presiding Officer: I call Margaret McDougall to ask question 5—[*Interruption.*] I apologise—I have missed out question 4.

Cereal Farmers (Wet Weather Assistance)

4. Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it can do to aid cereal farmers whose crops are in jeopardy as a result of unusually wet weather. (S4O-00217)

That was the weather before this week.

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I thought that I was going to get off lightly.

The 2011 harvest has been difficult for farmers because of unfavourable weather conditions. The Scottish Government has stayed in regular touch with the industry throughout these challenging weeks. It is fortunate that crop maturity has been relatively late this year, so crops were not ready to harvest until later than usual. Conditions in the past few days have allowed farmers at least to make progress. The Government is collating data on crop yields, which we will publish next month.

Rob Gibson: I look forward to finding out what the harvest has been. There are fewer baled straw crops for the future and the high price of winter feed is likely to increase.

Can the Scottish Government help farmers and crofters to install small renewable equipment to reduce the cost of drying malting barley during future wet-weather episodes?

Richard Lochhead: Rob Gibson describes some reasons why the bad weather in recent months has adversely affected harvesting. He is right to highlight the example of damage to straw and straw bales. The higher costs of drying crops that farmers will have to pay will also be a difficulty.

I am interested in considering the issue that Rob Gibson raises—the help that can be made available to farmers around Scotland to put in place the equipment to mitigate such situations in the future. That is on our agenda, and I will write to him with an update.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): On aid for cereal farmers, the recent spending review cut by

19.3 per cent in real terms the payments and inspections administration budget. Will the cabinet secretary explain how that shortfall will be plugged and assure our producers that the costs will not be passed on to them?

Richard Lochhead: Jim Hume will have noticed that the agricultural sector's comment last week in response to the spending review was positive in comparison with what it might otherwise have been. We have done our best to protect most of the agricultural budgets, which has been warmly welcomed. I am sure that the member warmly welcomes that, too.

On the budget cut to which Jim Hume refers, we are trying to subsume many such budget cuts within our portfolios through internal administration costs. The Parliament would agree, I think, that that is a better route than cutting front-line services. That approach will be our focus.

The budget is difficult and times are difficult, but I am confident that the effect on Mr Hume's constituents will not be too adverse.

The Presiding Officer: We now have question 5.

Scottish Environment Protection Agency (European Bathing Water Directive)

5. Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to meet the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to discuss the European bathing water directive. (S4O-00218)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Scottish Government officials are in regular contact with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and other stakeholders on the protection of Scotland's bathing waters.

Margaret McDougall: As I am sure the minister is aware, some beaches are granted abnormal weather waivers if they fail water-quality tests following heavy rain. Those waivers are given predominantly to east-coast beaches, rather than west-coast beaches, because of the reliance on rainfall data, which is difficult to obtain for some local areas. Does the minister agree that more transparency is needed about how waivers are granted and about the data that is used in considering whether to grant a waiver?

Stewart Stevenson: Margaret McDougall is perhaps aware of my previous difficulties with weather forecasting, which is certainly an imperfect science. She makes an interesting point, to which I confess I have not given great consideration before. I will talk to my officials about it.

It might be worth saying that I have sought to discuss with officials whether our approach to monitoring our beaches, which involves a uniform number of inspections of each beach, is appropriate. I have asked whether we should move to a risk-based system in which we inspect beaches that have a history of intermittent or regular failures.

I have discussed the subject with my officials. What Margaret McDougall said will add something of value to future discussions.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Given the challenges of diffuse pollution facing Ayrshire beaches, will the minister guarantee that by 2012, in the most difficult circumstances, all the public authorities—SEPA, local authorities, public health boards, Scottish Water and Scottish ministers—will be working together during such short-term pollution events?

Stewart Stevenson: Diffuse pollution is recognised as a substantial contributor to bathing water quality failure. SEPA officials have been walking up some of the watercourses that feed into beaches and in many cases quite simple steps to deal with the situation have been identified, including, for example, moving cattle feeding troughs further away from watercourses, to ensure that they are less contaminated by diffuse pollution. I believe that our various agencies and officials are working well together; I look forward to Scotland's beaches and bathing waters performing better in subsequent years; and I hope that I have given the member the necessary reassurance.

Bracken Control (Support for Farmers and Crofters)

6. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to support farmers and crofters in controlling bracken. (S4O-00219)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I was deeply disappointed at the European Commission's recent decision to withdraw from the market asulam, the main herbicide for controlling bracken, despite the fact that Scottish and United Kingdom Government ministers had provided scientific evidence of its safety. Farmers and crofters will cease to be able to use asulam from the end of 2012. The Scottish Government is now keen to work with the agricultural sector on the options available to it to continue to control bracken, which could include emergency authorisations of asulam.

Jamie McGrigor: There was a lot of warning that this was going to happen. Nevertheless, does the cabinet secretary agree that crofters and

farmers in the Highlands and Islands depend on asulox or asulam to tackle the spread of bracken, which is a growing problem because of climate change and, in particular, the loss of stock on the hills? Will he ensure that he makes the strongest possible representations to the European Union on this matter and that, if that approach fails, he will, as he has indicated, press the UK Government to issue national emergency authorisations of the herbicide so that it can at least be used for three months a year?

Richard Lochhead: I point out to members that in 2010 there were 134 applications in the UK for aerial spraying of asulam, 74 of which were from Scotland. Clearly a number of producers were taking advantage of the pesticide. Although I take on board the member's comments and assure him that we will work closely with the industry on the issue, I have to tell him that we fought very hard against the delisting of asulam and that we had the UK Government's support for our efforts. We will continue to make representations to the UK Government and the European Commission to ensure that we can get emergency authorisations when required.

Forestry Commission Scotland (Leased Farmland)

7. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how much farmland is leased to Forestry Commission Scotland. (S4O-00220)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Forestry Commission Scotland manages a total of 11,306 hectares of leased land, including 320 hectares of land at Loch Katrine that continues to be used for agricultural purposes. In 2010, FCS launched a land-leasing scheme aimed at creating productive woodland in partnership with farmers. Although a number of applications have been received and are being progressed, none has reached final agreement.

The Presiding Officer: I call Roderick Campbell. *[Interruption.]* One moment, please. The member's microphone is not on. *[Interruption.]* Maybe you could just shout, Mr Campbell.

Roderick Campbell: How far does the minister believe that land leased to Forestry Commission Scotland will go towards meeting the planting target of 10,000 hectares a year?

The Presiding Officer: I hope that you got that, minister.

Stewart Stevenson: Yes, Presiding Officer, I got the essence of that quite clearly. After all, someone who is engaged in the courts will be used to projecting their voice.

It is clear that leasing can play an important role. The cost of afforesting a hectare of ground under leasing arrangements is about 50 to 55 per cent of the cost of purchasing and then afforesting that land. Therefore, it is a useful supplement to the other efforts that Forestry Commission Scotland is making to meet our target of moving from 17.5 per cent of our country being afforested to 25 per cent.

Distillery By-products (Biofriendly Renewable Energy)

8. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment has had with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth regarding using distillery by-products for biofriendly renewable energy. (S4O-00221)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): There are many instances in which using such by-products for biofriendly renewable energy should be welcomed, but we are aware of the concerns that farmers have expressed that there are not enough of the by-products to meet farmers' and the renewable energy sector's needs. We are currently considering our response to a letter that has been received from the industry that asks the Scottish Government to ensure that supplies to local farmers are maintained.

Mary Scanlon: Given that the European Union is only 40 per cent self-sufficient in protein animal feeds, will the cabinet secretary confirm that the Scottish Government has commissioned work to assess the energy efficiency of using distillation by-products such as draff as alternative energy sources? Can he quantify their value as a protein source for the livestock industry?

Richard Lochhead: Those are exactly the issues that I am keen to look at, which is why I said that we are considering how to respond to the concerns that the agricultural sector has expressed. At the moment, there is a surplus of those by-products in Scotland, but I accept that a number of bioenergy plants have been built. We must commend the Scotch whisky industry, as the issue is for distillers who are trying to lower the carbon footprint. I am sure that all members support that. However, we must consider the wider impact, which is why I am keen to investigate the issue on behalf of the agricultural sector. I will keep members updated in due course.

Glasgow City Council (Environmental Improvement)

9. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions it has had with Glasgow

City Council concerning environmental improvement initiatives. (S4O-00222)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Recent discussions with Glasgow City Council on environmental improvement initiatives have focused on delivering an excellent green legacy from the Commonwealth games, sustainable transport, and supporting forestry and community projects.

Patricia Ferguson: Is the minister aware that, where land can be shown to be contaminated, a local authority has a duty to identify potential hazards and, where necessary, to remediate the land in question? That is particularly important where there are houses on the land. It is intended that the cost of such work should be recouped from the polluter. Can the minister advise my constituents and Glasgow City Council who should pay for such remediation if the polluter is a company that went out of business almost 100 years ago?

Stewart Stevenson: To be candid, the honest answer to that question is that I am not sure, but I will seek to get an answer to the member. I would not wish to mislead her and say that I can identify the inheritors of the debts of a company that went out of business 100 years ago.

Diffuse Pollution (South Scotland)

10. Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive, in light of the four recent negative Scottish Environment Protection Agency beach monitoring reports in South Scotland, what financial support it will provide specifically to help farmers tackle diffuse pollution. (S4O-00223)

Actually, there were two recent negative Scottish Environment Protection Agency beach monitoring reports in South Scotland and four in the whole of Scotland. I apologise for that.

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Scottish Environment Protection Agency is working closely with stakeholders and land managers across Scotland on measures to control diffuse pollution in catchments, with funding available through Scotland rural development programme rural priorities.

Claudia Beamish: I highlight just six farms in my region of South Scotland that are within a 3-mile radius of a farm at Broad Field on the Clyde, which have heavily invested in storage capacity to mitigate the effects of diffuse pollution. They have indeed had the support of SRDP grants. I seek reassurance on behalf of my constituents there and elsewhere that that support can be maintained, as there are now also pressures given

the cost of spreading machinery and the issue about fencing that the minister mentioned in answer to a previous question. There is also a concern for tourism—

The Presiding Officer: Will you get to the question, please?

Claudia Beamish: Will the minister please reassure the farming community and tourism sector on the issue?

Stewart Stevenson: We continue to place a high priority on this issue. In addition to providing financial support through the SRDP, we are engaging with people who can make what are in some cases fairly simple changes to activities or who can relocate activities in a way that contributes to a significant reduction in diffuse pollution in catchment areas.

Justice and Law Officers

Court Cases (Closed Session)

1. Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it is considering changes to the law governing the holding of court cases in closed session. (S4O-00224)

The Solicitor General for Scotland (Lesley Thomson): The decision to hold all or part of a hearing in a closed court is a matter for the presiding judge. There are no proposals to change the law in this area. The existing statutory provisions, supplemented by common-law powers, ensure that the judicial process is held in public unless there are compelling reasons for the court to be closed and the evidence to be heard in private.

Sandra White: I am interested in the term “compelling reasons”. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and the Solicitor General will be aware of a recent case in Inverness that resulted in criticisms from many in the legal profession. In that case, the media were permanently banned from reporting any details of the trial. The ban could have been contested, but only at a cost of several thousand pounds. Does the Solicitor General agree that the use of such super-injunction powers sets a dangerous precedent and that, in the case in Inverness, the process was not used for the purposes for which it was intended, which she mentioned?

The Solicitor General for Scotland: I am aware of that case. The member raises an important issue. I completely agree that court proceedings should be in public so that justice is transparent and is seen to be done, and so that there is confidence in the judicial process. However, there are circumstances in which it is

proper to exclude the public. That is done regularly in relation to victims of rape and other sexual offences and in relation to child witnesses, for which there are statutory provisions. The presiding judge also has a common-law power to exclude the public, including the media, and the decision on that is always for the presiding judge. A decision to exclude the media is rare and arises only in exceptional circumstances. I advise the member that the circumstances in the case to which she refers were exceptional.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I share Sandra White's concerns, which were highlighted to me two weeks ago by *The Inverness Courier* after Inverness sheriff court was cleared of all press and media during the disposal of one case. Does the Solicitor General share my view that coverage of court cases is an essential element of transparency in justice and that the press should be removed from a courtroom only in the most unique and unusual cases?

The Solicitor General for Scotland: To repeat, I completely agree that court proceedings should be in public so that justice is transparent and is seen to be done and so that the public have confidence in the judicial process. Under the common law, the presiding judge can decide, having heard submissions in relation to exceptional circumstances, to exclude the public and the media. That is done very rarely and in exceptional circumstances. I advise the member that, in the case to which he refers, the circumstances were exceptional.

Offences Aggravated by Religious Prejudice (Convictions)

2. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many people have been convicted under section 74 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act (2003). (S4O-00225)

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham): Up to the end of March 2010, 1,514 people had been convicted of religiously aggravated offences. The figure shows why it is vital that the police and courts have an appropriate range of powers available to them to tackle offensive behaviour. The Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill, which I introduced earlier this year, will send a clear and powerful signal to football fans and the public more generally that such behaviour is simply unacceptable.

Neil Bibby: The statistics are a stark reminder of the scale of the problem that we face. We must ensure that sectarian attitudes are challenged wherever they are found. I understand that the Government has funded Nil by Mouth to develop a sectarian awareness package for workplaces

across Scotland, which is due to go live in the next few weeks. Will the Government consider making the package available to its staff?

Roseanna Cunningham: The Government has already indicated that it wants to ensure that workers in all areas of employment throughout Scotland, including our own staff in the civil service and parliamentary staff, have recourse to that package, so I very much welcome Mr Bibby's intervention in that respect. It is vital that we in the Government lead on this matter, and we will do so.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I thank the minister for her answers on the challenge that lies ahead. Does she agree that one of the ways to tackle sectarianism is to ensure that there is legislation that will root out and deal with all forms of sectarian behaviour, wherever and however it occurs?

Roseanna Cunningham: Indeed. Robust legislation must underpin the work that we do to tackle sectarianism in Scotland, which is why we introduced the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill in response to some of the ugly scenes that were witnessed earlier this year.

Introducing the bill was the right action to take. Ninety-one per cent of Scottish people believe that we need to take tougher action to tackle sectarianism and offensive behaviour at football, but sectarianism is, of course, not just a football problem. We are looking at a number of actions to tackle sectarianism across Scottish society, which is why we support groups such as Nil by Mouth and the Iona Community in all the work that they are undertaking in that area. The issue is about more than just legislation; it is also about the work that is done in society as a whole.

The Presiding Officer: Question 3 has not been lodged by Jenny Marra.

No Knives, Better Lives Initiative

4. Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its plans are for rolling out the no knives, better lives initiative across the country. (S4O-00227)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): In February, I announced a doubling of funding for 2011-12 to roll out that innovative youth campaign, which has seen a 35 per cent reduction in knife carrying in the pilot area of Inverclyde and a 29 per cent reduction in Renfrewshire.

After a successful pilot in Inverclyde, no knives, better lives was rolled out to north Edinburgh, Glasgow, Clackmannanshire, West Dunbartonshire and Renfrewshire throughout 2010-11. The initiative has continued in those

areas, and we have been in discussion with a number of local authorities about the possibility of extending it. I will announce the new areas next month.

Stewart Maxwell: In July last year, the justice secretary joined members of Renfrewshire Youth Voice for the launch of the no knives, better lives scheme in Renfrewshire at a street football tournament at St Mirren Park. That followed the success of the pilot scheme in Inverclyde, which, as the justice secretary mentioned, resulted in a 35 per cent reduction in knife carrying.

It is welcome news that the initiative is being rolled out, but will violence reduction initiatives in Renfrewshire continue to be supported to ensure that recent progress in reducing serious violent crime in the local community can be built on?

Kenny MacAskill: Yes. I enjoyed that visit and I thought that Renfrewshire Youth Voice was an outstanding organisation. I was grateful for the support that was provided by St Mirren Football Club and others, which demonstrated the partnership working that no knives, better lives and other violence reduction programmes seek to build on. The substantial 29 per cent reduction in knife carrying in Renfrewshire is significant and has probably saved lives. I assure the member that we will continue in that direction of travel.

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): The cabinet secretary is well aware of the tragic consequences of knife crime in my constituency, following the murders of George Mathieson and Reamonn Gormley. I have been in correspondence with the cabinet secretary on the rolling out of no knives, better lives in the South Lanarkshire area. Will he lay out a precise timetable that gives dates for the scheme's implementation in that area?

Kenny MacAskill: Discussions are continuing between Government officials and local partner agencies. I have said that I will make an announcement next month, at which stage timescales will be set out. It would be inappropriate for me to pre-empt next month's announcement on the matter.

National Police Force (Accountability)

5. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what national and local accountability mechanisms there will be to prevent the politicisation of the proposed national police force. (S4O-00228)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Government's consultation on reform of the police service sets out proposals for ensuring the proper governance and accountability of a single Scottish police service.

We propose to establish a Scottish police authority that will govern the service and hold the chief constable to account. That will ensure a clear separation between Scottish ministers and the chief constable. The Scottish Government will not be able to give instructions to the chief constable of the service. The chief constable will be responsible for managing and leading the service. The Lord Advocate will continue to have sole responsibility for the independent direction and control of criminal investigations, and the chief constable will continue to be accountable to the Lord Advocate on those matters.

At local level, reform will strengthen the connection between services and communities by establishing a new, formal relationship between each of Scotland's 32 councils and a designated local commander, which will result in many more local elected members being involved in the democratic oversight of policing in their area.

Patrick Harvie: Over recent years, there have been serious issues of national concern: peaceful protesters have been treated as though they were organised criminals, with attempts being made to bribe and intimidate them; and police have pushed for clearly political changes, such as a move to fully Taser-armed forces. There have also been incidents such as the outrageous arrest of the documentary film-maker Anthony Baxter in Aberdeenshire while he was going about the perfectly lawful business of making a documentary.

Is it not clear that, as well stronger local accountability on operational issues, a mechanism is needed for strong national accountability when such issues arise? What models from around the world is the Government considering, and what role does the cabinet secretary envisage the Parliament having in holding a national police force to account on such national issues?

Kenny MacAskill: We have been considering a variety of models. I visited Northern Ireland recently and we have had input from the Garda Síochána in the Republic of Ireland. We also held an international policing conference, which included representatives from, for example, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

At the end of the day, we need to do what is right and appropriate for Scotland. The member mentioned a number of matters. We must ensure local and national accountability. We must also factor in the separation of powers and the Lord Advocate's appropriate role in investigations. It is also appropriate that the Parliament has a role.

We have not set out to follow any particular model from any other jurisdiction. Good practice exists around the world, and we want to engage in

considering how to get the best method of accountability and governance for the Scottish police service, which has served us well and will continue to serve us outstandingly. That is why we are having the consultation.

Police and Fire Service Accountability (Dumfries and Galloway)

6. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how police and fire service reform will enhance the services' accountability in Dumfries and Galloway. (S4O-00229)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Reform will strengthen the connection between the services and communities by creating a new formal relationship between each of Scotland's 32 councils and a designated local senior officer, with significant delegated authority for services in the area. Each council will be able to shape and influence a local police plan and a local fire and rescue plan and will be able to monitor and scrutinise performance against those plans. Councils will also be able to seek reports, answers and explanations from the senior officer.

The creation of a single Scottish police service and a single fire and rescue service will also give all communities, urban and rural, more equal access to specialist support and national capacity—such as murder investigation teams, firearms teams and fire investigations teams—where and when they are needed.

Joan McAlpine: Does the cabinet secretary believe that we will be able to enhance accountability to local communities? He will be aware that Dumfries and Galloway is a very large area—Dumfries is 70 miles from Stranraer. Will he expand a little on how we may improve the service to smaller, rural communities?

Kenny MacAskill: There are legitimate concerns about governance and accountability—both of which Patrick Harvie mentioned—and about centralisation under the change in structures. We are adamant that the change will ensure that all areas benefit from the expertise that must be provided.

For example, Dumfries and Galloway has only one whole-time fire station. Retained officers do an outstanding job and we are extremely grateful to them, but the challenges that we face—flooding, chemicals and an array of other matters—mean that we need to prepare for every eventuality. Although retained officers do an outstanding job protecting their communities and dealing with exceptional circumstances, we require a greater level of expertise that can be spread around the country.

We look to maintain wherever we can the front-line services that are necessary. We will maintain the numbers of officers—particularly police officers—that we put into our communities. We will ensure that the expertise that is necessary for every eventuality is provided for, because we know that eventualities can strike not only urban areas but rural areas. I also assure the member that we will ensure accountability to the local community, which goes back to the points that I made to Mr Harvie.

Prisons (Transfer of Medical Nursing and Pharmacy Services)

7. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether negotiations have been concluded and a date set for the transfer of medical nursing and pharmacy services from the Scottish Prison Service to the national health service. (S4O-00230)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Planning has been concluded for the transfer of healthcare services from the Scottish Prison Service to NHS Scotland. The transfer will take place on 1 November 2011.

Dr Simpson: Is the cabinet secretary prepared to publish the details of the funding arrangements and the precise services that are being transferred to the NHS for each health board area? Subsequent to the transfer, will the Scottish Prison Service have a general memorandum of understanding with the NHS, and will each prison have a local service level agreement with the NHS to ensure that the new service provides effective services to offenders, particularly those with mental health problems, learning disabilities, personality disorders and drug and alcohol problems?

Kenny MacAskill: I am aware of Dr Simpson's particular interest in the subject and I am grateful for the manner in which he has put his question. A national memorandum of understanding is being set up; it will be published on the SPS website once it has been finalised. Further, local implementation groups have been set up in each health board area to ensure joint planning approaches to the transfer of services. There will be no immediate direct change in services for prisoners.

As I understand it, there will be no memorandum of understanding at the local level. There is the national agreement and obviously matters are on-going at the local level, but I confirm to Dr Simpson that officials will be more than happy to provide any further information that he wishes to have, and I will be more than happy to hold discussions with him if he wishes.

Single Police Force (Allocation of Resources)

8. Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the creation of a single police force will benefit the allocation of police resources throughout Scotland. (S4O-00231)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The creation of a single police service will protect and improve local policing across Scotland by removing the inherent duplication across the current eight forces. A single service will also provide more equal access throughout Scotland to specialist policing support and national capacity, such as murder investigation teams and firearms teams, where and when they are needed.

Dennis Robertson: The cabinet secretary is probably aware that Balmoral is in my constituency. Will the funding of policing for royal visits to Balmoral come from the national resource, and will police be deployed to Balmoral from other areas?

Kenny MacAskill: The lead force for protection during royal visits is the Metropolitan Police, although at Balmoral they are assisted by Grampian Police. In future, the chief constable of the Scottish police service will determine how his or her resources are deployed across Scotland, but that will include working with the Metropolitan Police to support royal protection at Balmoral or elsewhere.

Scottish Sentencing Council

9. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made toward creating a Scottish sentencing council. (S4O-00232)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): We are taking forward work to establish a Scottish sentencing council. Options and costs for the creation of a Scottish sentencing council are currently under consideration and a decision will be made in due course.

David Torrance: In the minister's opinion, what measures will the Scottish sentencing council consider in due course to promote greater public understanding of sentencing practice in Scottish courts?

Kenny MacAskill: It is for the sentencing council to decide how best to meet its objectives, including how to promote greater understanding of sentencing practice in our courts. During the passage of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill during the previous parliamentary session, there was discussion that the council might wish to do that through raising awareness of how sentencers make their decisions, including the factors that they take into account. It is likely

that the sentencing council will also wish to use its powers to submit sentencing guidelines on particular issues. Once approved for use by the appeal court, the intention is that the guidelines will be used to help improve consistency and transparency in sentencing decisions, thus helping to increase public understanding and confidence in our sentencing system.

The Presiding Officer: Question 10 has been withdrawn, but Margo MacDonald has offered me an explanation.

Scottish Studies

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-00959, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on Scottish studies.

14:54

The Minister for Learning and Skills (Dr Alasdair Allan): In opening the debate for the Government I will admit a rare thing in politics, which is that I care fairly deeply about whether the Parliament intends to accept the premise that I put forward today. It would be fairly uncontentious anywhere else on earth, and it is this: that it is reasonable for anyone in any country to expect that school will give them access to and knowledge of their country's culture.

I believe that premise—and I declare an interest, which my register of interests will show—as someone who is involved in various cultural organisations. I also believe it as someone who, for all the many good things about my experience of school, somehow managed to grow up in the same place as did both Sir Walter Scott and James Hogg without hearing either of their names mentioned in secondary school.

The Government's commitment to Scottish studies in schools has sparked some intemperate language in the political arena. *[Interruption.]* I hear some from parts of the chamber already. Things have been said about this that I earnestly hope some politicians are suitably embarrassed about now. I note that the words "indoctrination" and "brainwashing", for instance, are absent from the Opposition amendments—that much at least is to be welcomed.

Be in no doubt: the public has warmly welcomed the commitment to Scottish studies, with recent research showing a 90 per cent level of support. That is because the vast majority of people recognise that learning about Scotland's history, languages, literature and culture should be an integral and natural part of a young person's experiences. So we will strengthen the place of Scotland in learning through the curriculum, ensuring that all and not just some children and young people can access a distinct strand of learning about Scotland and Scottish culture.

Young people have an entitlement to a broad general education as part of curriculum for excellence. That must include enabling them to develop a knowledge and understanding of Scotland and its place in the world. Understanding Scottish culture and connecting with Scotland as a place through our landscape and natural heritage are an important part of developing a sense of worth, confidence and wellbeing—all the things

that enable people to flourish in learning, life and work.

During the debate on the Scottish Government's legislative programme on 8 September, Johann Lamont highlighted her experience from school as evidence that we need take no further action on Scottish studies. If Ms Lamont's experience of the classroom, both as a pupil and as a teacher, was one where Scottish history and literature were taught, I warmly commend that. I do not doubt that over the years some young people have benefitted from first-class learning about Scotland, including Scottish literature, history and poetry. However—believe me—that simply is not the experience of everyone. The real point, which the Opposition amendments regrettably seem unwilling to accept, is that we have a duty to ensure that learning about Scotland and its culture is not a fortunate accident for some, but an expectation for all.

As to other objections that Ms Lamont raised in her remarkable contribution on 8 September, most notable was the claim that the Scottish National Party is hell-bent on trying to tell children that no bad landlord has ever been Scottish or that we want to write women out of Scottish history—I hardly know where to begin on that. Let me instead leave rebuttal to Dr Wilson McLeod, a senior lecturer in Celtic and Scottish studies, who said recently about Scottish studies:

"Far from giving a biased and nationalistic view of Scotland's past, it could also pierce 'romantic history' about the likes of Culloden and the Clearances".

During the 2009 year of homecoming, we saw some wonderful examples of pupils learning about their country and its contribution to the world, including the winner of the homecoming Scottish education award: lochdar primary school in my constituency. I hasten to add that it got that award before I became the Minister for Learning and Skills. At the end of it, young people in schools that had entered the competition for the homecoming award were asking why they could not have the opportunity to learn about Scotland every year. Well, we intend to ensure that such opportunities become embedded across the curriculum.

There is a strong sense of necessity here. Coherence, relevance, progression and depth are key principles in the new curriculum, and providing greater structure to learn about Scotland will be enabled by Scottish studies. We know from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education reports that since 2007 schools have been developing approaches to planning the Scottish dimension in history that are more coherent. We consider it vital that that continues to be developed, not only in terms of history but across the curriculum. Proposals will therefore be developed and implemented in a way that strengthens curriculum

for excellence, providing a more relevant and connected learning experience that raises ambition and attainment for all.

Earlier this month, I chaired the first meeting of the Scottish studies working group. The group has an excellent blend of experience and insight from the fields of academia, the Scots and Gaelic languages, literature, culture and, most important, teaching. We are privileged to have the Scots makar, Liz Lochhead, join the group, as well as the musician Phil Cunningham and Scottish literary authority Professor Douglas Gifford. There is a strong appreciation within the group of the value of ensuring that pupils can access learning about Scotland while avoiding any risk of marginalising Scottish subjects.

In taking this work forward, it is important to appreciate that we are not starting with a blank canvas. The place of Scotland in learning has been significantly strengthened through curriculum for excellence. There are many opportunities to develop relevant and engaging learning about Scotland and Scottish culture in curricular areas including social studies, through Scottish history, geography and modern studies; expressive arts; languages; and health and wellbeing.

Outdoor learning also provides an exciting opportunity to engage and inspire young people in a wide range of environments. This is not, as some commentators seem to have imagined, all about history.

Schools such as Carleton primary in Glenrothes are leading the way. Scottish culture at Carleton is organised thematically with each primary following a programme. I was also impressed by the cross-curricular approach being taken in Dunfermline high, which I visited earlier this month.

Let me stress one other thing: it is vital that Scottish studies underpins an international perspective as young people develop as responsible global citizens with the skills, knowledge, understanding and values to succeed in a fast-changing world.

The place of learning about Scottish history has been greatly strengthened in recent years through online resources and the introduction of the mandatory Scottish history unit in higher history.

During the last academic year, more than 20,000 young people throughout Scotland benefited from the heritage education travel subsidy scheme, which has opened up access to heritage education at sites including the new Robert Burns birthplace museum, New Lanark world heritage site, Bannockburn and Edinburgh and Stirling castles. I am looking to see whether Murdo Fraser is in the chamber. He objected to the scheme at the time. It gives me great pleasure to announce that the Scottish Government will

continue its support for the heritage education travel subsidy scheme for 2012-13. Clearly, it is appreciated by teachers and young people alike.

Among many other aspects of Scotland's culture, Gaelic is a vital part of what we are trying to do. Gaelic is one of our national languages and we have a collective responsibility to ensure that it flourishes. The recent survey of public attitudes to Gaelic made clear the overwhelming support for Scottish studies and showed that 81 per cent of the Scottish public feel that it is important that Scotland does not lose its Gaelic language traditions.

We should also recognise and value the place of Scots literature and language in Scottish culture and ensure that it has a firm place in learning. Practical steps include working with local authorities, national bodies and groups such as the Scots Language Centre, Scottish Language Dictionaries and the Robert Burns museum to support progress.

We will also look at how we can take forward the recommendations of the Scots language working group and are planning to establish a network of Scots co-ordinators in schools.

Clearly, the scope and range of Scottish studies is enormous throughout the journey through primary and secondary school. We therefore also expect there to be opportunities for learners to continue their studies within a Scottish context in the senior phase. That will include recognition of such learning within qualifications that incentivise progression and attainment.

There is a significant number of national courses that have opportunities and aspects that can be studied and assessed within a Scottish context. Those opportunities will be strengthened within the new curriculum for excellence national qualifications, which will be implemented from 2013-14.

We are also exploring the potential for a specific qualification in Scottish studies. Let me be clear—this is something that has caused much slightly ill-informed debate in the press—that the working party is keen to investigate a range of models. A qualification could, for instance, include recognising the study that young people undertake on Scottish themes across a range of subject areas and at different levels, but, as yet, the group has reached no conclusions.

All young people deserve the opportunity to learn about their country, and nowhere else but here would that be questioned. Those who still do might perhaps wish to consider taking a deep breath and turning away from their own constitutional obsessions for one moment. *[Interruption.]* Those people obviously recognise the problem that they have. They would see that

Scottish studies is healthy, normal and supported by people across the political spectrum and across the world of education—it is also supported by parents.

There are good examples of embedding Scottish subjects into the curriculum in schools, but that is not being done everywhere across the country and we want all—not just some—young people to have a clearer understanding of Scotland and the world.

One of the wisest comments made in the press following some of the more hysterical political reactions to my initial announcement about Scottish studies came from a Mr Hugh Reilly. In his article in *The Scotsman*, Mr Reilly said that, for whatever it was worth, he viewed himself as a traditional Labour voter. He also said:

“I’m speculating here, but Scotland must be the only country in the world where teaching children the history of their own nation is perceived to be treason. The idea that introducing Scottish Studies to the national curriculum is brainwashing our children is farcical beyond belief.”

Indeed.

Let us start being serious about the issue. Let today’s debate be the start of a positive recognition by the Parliament as a whole that every young Scot has a right to learn about their country and, through that knowledge, to learn about the many other peoples of the world. Believe me: there is a world out there that regards all this stuff as pretty normal and, in Scotland’s case, long overdue.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the 90% level of support for Scottish Studies in a recent survey; agrees that it is essential that all young people should have the opportunity to learn and be better informed about their country and its place in the world, including its historical, literary, linguistic and cultural inheritance as well as its landscape and natural heritage, and that such learning provides a more relevant and connected learning experience that raises ambition and attainment for all, and supports the Scottish Government’s desire to develop a distinct strand of learning around Scottish Studies for all pupils in the context of the Curriculum for Excellence, providing greater coherence without marginalisation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

We have some time in hand for the debate. I call Claire Baker to speak to and move amendment S4M-00959.2. Ms Baker, you have a generous nine minutes, and I can give some time for interventions if you wish to take them.

15:06

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

Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I welcome the opportunity to open this afternoon’s debate for Labour. There has been

much commentary on proposals for Scottish studies, but today’s debate gives us the opportunity to explore the proposals, deconstruct some of the myths, and critically question and interrogate the reality and perceived reality—all analytical skills that we would expect students to develop when entering the world of Scottish studies.

Dr Alasdair Alison—sorry, I will start again. Dr Allan—sorry! [*Laughter.*] Dr Alasdair Allan—my apologies—is rightly proud of his academic title, but it is less well known that I too have a doctorate.

Members: Oh!

Claire Baker: Thank you. It is in English literature, more specifically Sylvia Plath. Although the field is known as English literature, I came to it through the study of American literature in my undergraduate degree and doctorate and, although it was a long time ago now, through Scottish literature in my higher English, for which I studied “Sunset Song” and “The Cone-Gatherers”. I also taught “Caleb Williams” and “The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner” to undergraduates at the University of Glasgow, alongside the poetry of the very English Stevie Smith and the very American Walt Whitman.

We should all start by recognising the depth of the understanding and integration of Scottish studies across academia—in this case in English literature, but I believe it is common across other disciplines. It is important that, in any decision to move towards a new subject in the school curriculum, we do not marginalise Scottish studies, but recognise that there is great value in embedding Scottish literature or history, or any other discipline, in a broader context.

There is little to disagree with in the Government motion, although there are perhaps some questions to ask about how much we can conclude from a survey that was based on the Gaelic language. However, there are many questions to be answered before we can fully subscribe to the Government’s desire.

At this stage, we have little detail about the Government’s intentions for the proposed addition to the curriculum, which is why our amendment draws attention to the considerations of the working group and highlights some of the challenges that it has to address. So far, the working group has been set up with the remit to discuss the implementation of the SNP’s manifesto commitment to create a distinct strand of learning in primary and secondary schools, but I suspect that we are currently some way off the creation or delivery of a new subject as an addition to the curriculum.

It is important that the working group brings transparency and rational thinking to the debate. There are many strands in the current curriculum that provide an opportunity for engagement with Scottish studies—as the minister acknowledged—and we have advantages in the current curriculum from the fact that it enables teachers to play to their strengths, which benefits pupils.

It is important that the working group recognises the excellent work that is already undertaken in our schools. We have perhaps all made unfortunate comments in the lead-up to this debate, but it is unfortunate that Alasdair Allan made the claim that teachers fail to offer basic information about their own country, thus forcing the Government's hand.

Dr Allan: I thank the member for giving way and I welcome the tone of everything that she has said, at least up until that point. She clearly welcomes the idea of literature being an international phenomenon and agrees that people should be exposed to all sorts of literature from around the world. Does she not also acknowledge that not all children and young people in Scotland have the opportunity to study Scottish literature? The experience is not universal.

Claire Baker: That is an important point, which the working group needs to look at. As I will go on to explain, many of us have experience—personal experience or experience in our constituencies—of a good level of engagement with Scottish literature and culture in schools. We will wait to see whether the working group identifies any gaps. Any MSP who engages with the Parliament's education service will know that primary and secondary schools throughout Scotland are engaging with our modern history and democracy, so I do not feel that the minister's speech reflected the reality in our classrooms, but that is an area that the working group needs to investigate.

I am sure that the working group will be delighted to engage with schools that are already celebrating Scots poetry, marking important dates in the school calendar, exploring Scottish culture, discussing the huge influence that entrepreneurial Scots have had on trade and industry, discovering Scotland's incredible changing landscape and, in history classes, exploring the complex and turbulent history of our great country. The Government has shown commitment to the broad teaching ethos of the curriculum for excellence, and in developing those proposals the working group must adhere to that ethos. The curriculum for excellence provides more opportunities for schools to be engaged in their local communities and brings subjects to life with experiences that are relevant to pupils. Scottish studies have a valuable role to play in that.

The working group may find that Scotland is a thread that runs through the entire curriculum, but one that is rightly balanced with an international and a local perspective. There is a danger that the working group could be too prescriptive. The curriculum for excellence is all about having a flexible curriculum that puts teachers' professionalism at the heart of its delivery. It is important that the working group reflects on that. If there are gaps in the curriculum, it must produce evidence of that and proposals for enriching the curriculum.

Complementary to the embedding of Scottish studies throughout the curriculum—although, as I have suggested, that is already the case—there is the matter of the creation of a new subject, which would include qualification development. As a graduate who approached the poetry of Sylvia Plath through an understanding of cultural materialism, I recognise the value of cross-disciplinary understanding in a subject. At university level, American studies is well established and Scottish studies is increasingly being offered, although cuts and lack of research investment threaten the viability of some of those courses and there are clear boundaries in the discipline. If the working group is to propose a model for Scottish studies, it needs to be clear about the relevance and interconnectedness of areas of study. Some of the Government's comments about Scottish cookery and horticulture raise issues about the need to have a rigorous Scottish studies subject that could lead to a qualification. Proper guidelines need to be developed on what is appropriate, and that will be an important area of work for the group.

Our amendment also calls for an assessment of the skills and knowledge of the teaching profession, especially if a new qualification is to be introduced. There will have to be discussion of schools' ability to deliver the qualification. There are already concerns over provision in modern languages and history, for example; therefore, the question must be asked whether there is capacity in the sector to deliver in this new area if there is to be a distinct subject. Any addition to the curriculum would need to be supported with good resources and continuing professional development opportunities—areas that are under pressure at the moment because of budget constraints.

The working group will have to determine whether there is an appetite for the course. One question in a Gaelic survey is not conclusive. How will the college and university sector respond to any new qualifications? Is it development of an area that employers would value? The working group will also have to consider whether any additions to an already busy curriculum would marginalise other subjects that we can ill afford to

sideline. We already know the areas that could make a real difference to young people's employability—for example, modern languages—in which Scotland is particularly poor. We must ask whether, if additional resources are to be allocated or additional time is to be created within the curriculum—it is difficult to see how the proposals could be advanced without those—we are confident that this is the best area to develop to give young people the most advantages.

The proposal is now in a transitional period. If it is to succeed, it needs to move from being an attractive, even emotive, hearts-and-minds policy in a party-political manifesto to a fully developed and robust addition to the curriculum that will add value to the school experience and bring advantage to our young people.

I move amendment S4M-00959.2, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“notes the establishment of the Scottish Studies working group and its exploration of Scottish studies as a new subject; acknowledges the excellent practice that is already in place in Scottish schools which is delivering a wide range of Scottish-focused teaching across the curriculum; calls on the working group to audit current practice in primary and secondary schools, including the skills and knowledge of teachers in this area and to determine the way in which a new subject will add to the work that is already being undertaken and to guard against marginalisation of Scottish studies, and looks forward to scrutinising the working group's recommendations.”

15:14

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I hope that I am qualified to participate in the debate, even though I do not have a doctorate. I thank the Scottish Government for at least giving us a little more in the way of detail this afternoon.

When the Scottish Government launched the initiative, those of us who are education spokesmen were contacted by journalists and asked what we made of it. I said that I had to confess that I was a little confused about what the proposal was. I went back and looked at the Scottish National Party manifesto and I still remain a little confused, even though the Scottish Government has given us a few more details this afternoon, because I am not entirely convinced of the logic.

The manifesto states that the SNP wants to “develop the concept of Scottish Studies”, which would create,

“a distinct strand of learning focused on Scotland and incorporating Scottish History, Scottish Literature, the Scots and Gaelic Languages, wider Scottish culture and Scottish current affairs.”

The SNP manifesto goes on to say that

“All pupils will have access to this strand at Primary and Secondary levels.”

I am confused for two reasons. First, I thought that it was plain to most observers that Scottish studies, in their widest sense, were already embedded in the Scottish curriculum and that they will be enhanced in all schools by the curriculum for excellence. I thought that maybe I had got this wrong, so I went off and did quite a lot of research to check whether I had made a mistake.

I found a *Times Educational Supplement Scotland* article from 2008 about developments for the curriculum for excellence, in which there was a very full run down from teachers in schools all across Scotland—in English, mathematics, home economics, history, biology, physics, chemistry and French—who had all explained, in considerable detail, exactly how Scottish themes were present in their subjects. I also found a sizeable Learning and Teaching Scotland document—all 317 pages of it—in which there is a very precise and detailed description of exactly how Scottish studies are embedded in the curriculum. It lists at length how Scottish themes are a core part of pupils' learning. I will quote some of them.

On classical languages, the document states:

“By studying a classical language, young people will become ever more aware of how vital parts of Scotland's culture, the arts, law, political systems and social values are both directly and indirectly linked with the classical world.”

On religious education, it states:

“The experiences and outcomes draw on the rich and diverse context of Scotland's cultural heritage through the use of Scottish stories, images, music and poems.”

On modern languages, it states:

“children and young people can gain access to the literary heritage of humanity and develop their appreciation of the richness and breadth of Scotland's literary heritage.”

That left me with an important question: what else does the SNP think it is necessary to teach children about Scotland? Why has what started out as a concept been transmuted into a strand and then into a subject? What on earth is it that the current curriculum does not have that would make a new case for Scottish studies?

Dr Allan: Does the member agree that one thing that would make a difference—it is certainly a theme that is beginning to emerge from the working group—is for teachers to have confidence about Scottish subjects and Scottish subject matter? An emerging theme is that continuous professional development among the teaching profession to be able to cope with those subjects would be welcome. Does she welcome that?

Liz Smith: Of course I welcome any measures that give teachers more confidence. What I am asking is: why is it that the proposed Scottish studies course gives something extra that is not already in the curriculum? We have hordes of bits of paper that tell us that Scottish studies are already a fundamental part of the Scottish curriculum.

My second reason for being a little confused is related to other curriculum developments. The SNP, of all parties, should know the criticisms that it faces about trying to fit everything else into a crowded curriculum. Who was it that said that they would deliver two hours of quality physical education per week to every pupil? Who persuades us, or at least tries to persuade us, that they are making good progress in this area? Who is it that has received submissions from concerned history teachers about losing discrete time in the social sciences and from language teachers who are concerned that we are not devoting enough time to German, French or Spanish? It is bad enough trying to explain to those teachers why they are being squeezed in the curriculum without a new subject appearing, to add further tensions.

I appreciate that the SNP has decided not to make the subject compulsory—thank goodness for that—but even by being an optional subject, it will have significant implications for the timetable in schools, so the SNP needs to come clean and explain which subjects will be squeezed as a result.

Let us be charitable. If I thought that important aspects of Scottish studies that are essential components of a better education for our pupils were not currently being taught, I might have a little more sympathy with the SNP. However, all the research that I can find seems to offer a wealth of evidence that there is already very considerable and good-quality coverage of Scottish literature, language, politics, culture and history. Indeed, coverage has increased recently, as a result of changes to Scottish Qualifications Authority highers and the introduction of curriculum for excellence.

Therefore, from a logical and an educational perspective, I am struggling to see why the proposed addition to the timetable is necessary and why it will not overlap with existing courses. Is not the proposal also a bit of a kick in the teeth to the people who spent hours devising all the curriculum for excellence materials, only to learn that some of their work might have to be changed?

Perhaps it is not surprising that some people think that there is something a little bit political in the proposal. It is hard not to be cynical, but I will try. I hope that the SNP will be able not only to answer the two questions that I raised, but to

dispel any hint that its proposal is more to do with the SNP's pet themes than with anything else.

Before anyone in the SNP tries their usual tack and says that the Scottish Tories are anti-Scottish, I remind the Parliament and the cabinet secretary that it was the Tories, under Scottish secretaries Malcolm Rifkind and Michael Forsyth, who provided far more money for Gaelic, the £8 million Gaelic television fund and the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985, which financed many projects on Gaelic and Scots. I also remind members that the Tories supported the introduction of a discrete Scottish history paper in higher history. I will take no lessons from—or be indoctrinated by—anyone about the Tories being anti-Scottish.

Of course we support arguments in education that are aimed at ensuring that all pupils understand and appreciate the extraordinary richness of Scotland and its historical, social, cultural and political identity, but I am not persuaded of a need for a new Scottish studies programme. I will not be surprised if that goes for many teachers, too.

I move amendment S4M-00959.1, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“agrees that it is essential that all young people should have the opportunity to learn and be better informed about their country and its place in the world, including its historical, literary, linguistic and cultural inheritance as well as its landscape and natural heritage, and that such learning provides a more relevant and connected learning experience that raises ambition and attainment for all, but believes that these educational opportunities are already extensively and successfully embedded in the curriculum without the need for the addition of discrete Scottish Studies.”

15:22

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Children in Scotland have a right to be taught about their country. Far too many young people leave school with little knowledge of Scotland's history, geography, art or music. The introduction of a form of Scottish studies, to develop a stronger sense of national culture and identity, as part of the curriculum for excellence, sounds like a response to that.

Such a view was perhaps supported by Ken Macintosh when he said, during a debate on Scottish history:

“I believe that, by supporting the study of Scottish history, we will give a whole new generation of pupils access to the sort of liberal education that will enable them to look beyond these shores, to challenge the orthodoxy of received opinion, and, I hope, to build a better world.”—[*Official Report*, 30 January 2008; c 5594.]

The proposal on Scottish studies is an answer to his wish, because a general study of Scottish interests is not narrow and can inform much of the

debate that is taking place about Scotland's relationship with the rest of the world.

As the minister said, we must give teachers as much confidence as possible to teach the local and national story that there is to tell. I have taught history and modern studies, so I know that having the right material and a close knowledge of the local take on a story are important elements in the attempt to engage children in the material.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Like Mr Gibson, I was a modern studies teacher, but I also taught in primary schools until the election. In those schools, I saw a vast range of subjects and cross-curricular topics being taught that were linked very much to our culture and communities, whether the subject was art, religious education, information and communications technology or whatever. Does the member agree that it would be wiser to examine what is already going on in schools rather than lumping something else into an already rammed curriculum? I say that as someone who took Scottish studies as part of his degree.

Rob Gibson: In the past, nobody questioned the higher history module on the history of the Labour Party. That was not seen as brainwashing or an extra addition to the curriculum; it was seen as a natural part of the curriculum. However, many of the aspects of Scottish studies that we are talking about are not a natural part of the studies of children across this country.

Neil Findlay: Can the member give us an example?

Rob Gibson: I can give him plenty of examples from where I have taught. The circumstances are such that we have to consider the attitudes behind this matter.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: Not at the moment.

During the debates in 2010 about the questions in the census, there was a concern that a question about the Scots language, introduced for the first time, would be confusing. When the convener of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, Iain Smith, expressed that view, the minister who was responsible at the time, before the final order was passed, suggested that the demand for the variety of information in Scotland was much more complex than the simpler question that was asked in the census in England and Wales.

That plays very much into my experience, which is that teachers in many parts of Scotland do not value some of the aspects of their local history, which they could be spending more time on and making more of. For example, the report of the ministerial working group on the Scots language says:

"All regional and social dialects of Scots should be recognised as worthy of respect. Central initiatives to support Scots must therefore be designed to take account of how they will operate in strong dialect areas."

That suggests a national framework and a recognition that people must teach in the context of particular dialects. The point is that we have various dialects and, when people in Caithness, who speak a strong dialect, were asked the question about Scots, they had to be reminded that the Caithness dialect is a dialect of Scots.

The first answers in the census might not be up to what we want them to be but the fact is that if, in Scottish studies, there was teaching that related to that particular matter, children would understand a good deal better what is going on in their area and how it relates to other matters.

Liz Smith: I totally accept some of the points that the member is making but would he agree that it is the point of the curriculum for excellence to concentrate on many of the local circumstances and the environment from which learners come?

Rob Gibson: I think that that will be strengthened by the proposals that we are discussing.

The question of esteem is also important in relation to the issue of traditional music. Having saved the national centre of excellence in traditional music at Plockton, and expanded its activities, we can recognise how, at that end of the story, a lot of people can benefit from it. However, far more people will benefit from the fact that they have an opportunity to learn in the schools. That is why the traditional arts working group recommends

"that the traditional arts sector develop courses, classes and other means of increasing popular appreciation of the traditional arts among non-artist/practitioners, and that these are appropriately supported".

That fits well into the idea of Scottish studies. That is why I believe that we must find ways of ensuring that the Scottish studies that we are discussing are all-embracing, relevant to the local area and address the issue that there are a lot of people who left school without a wide knowledge of their circumstances.

I am all for Scottish studies in our schools. The course, in keeping with the curriculum for excellence, can be tailored to meet the local conditions of every part of our multicultural and proudly mongrel nation.

15:29

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. Both my parents are teachers—my dad is an English teacher and my mum is a modern languages

teacher—so throughout my childhood I was always taught the importance of learning, which gave me a great passion for reading. That experience also taught me that the job of schools, as well as teaching core subjects, is to teach people how to learn, and to want to learn, throughout their lives.

That principle is at the heart of the curriculum for excellence, which

“aims to develop four capacities, helping children to become ... Successful learners ... Confident individuals ... Responsible citizens ... Effective contributors”.

That is absolutely right.

The curriculum also emphasises the importance of interdisciplinary learning, which sits somewhat against what the minister has said today about Scottish studies. The way that we teach Scottish studies just now is interwoven with a number of different subjects, including English, modern studies, history and others.

Dr Allan: I thank Kezia Dugdale for making that point. I merely emphasise what I said before about the recognition of a Scottish studies qualification. One of the options that is being considered is an interdisciplinary idea in which recognition could be given to people who are studying Scottish material across a range of subjects. We are not against interdisciplinary working.

Kezia Dugdale: The minister’s intervention is helpful, particularly as he said in his opening remarks that greater structure is necessary to provide Scottish studies, whereas I believe that the curriculum for excellence is about breaking structures down.

Moving on to what is currently taught in Scottish schools, the minister said that there should be an “expectation for all” to learn about Scottish studies. I think that there is at present, so I had a wee look at the detail. As I said, my dad is an English teacher, and I spent some time this morning looking at the set texts for higher English. I soon discovered that there are no set texts in higher English, which was a great surprise to me because my house was always covered with copies of “Sunset Song”, “The Cone Gatherers”, “Macbeth” and books by Norman MacCaig, Edwin Morgan, Liz Lochhead and Robert Burns—that is what my dad taught, and I was surrounded by those books throughout my childhood.

I thought that I should find out what is taught now, so I spoke to Alan Wilson, who is qualifications manager at the Scottish Qualifications Authority. He told me that the basis of the higher English qualification is that

“The study of literature should pervade the Course”, and that

“The system of assessment is designed to allow teachers, lecturers and candidates the freedom to choose the literary texts that will in their view best encourage development and enrichment.”

Those are the qualities that we want in our kids: the ability to develop and enrich their ideas about the world and about what they are learning, and to apply those to the rest of their life.

However, Alan Wilson also points out that candidates should study

“at least one Scottish text”

in higher English, and members need to recognise that.

I had a wee look at last year’s higher English paper, partly to see if I could still do it; I am not sure that the answer to that is positive. I was struck by the fact that the close reading exercise from last year’s paper is an essay by Gerry Hassan, which shows that there are Scottish people talking about Scottish interests at the heart of our education system.

There are set texts for advanced higher English, which include works by Burns, Carol Anne Duffy, Hugh MacDiarmid, Robert Henryson, John Byrne, David Lindsay, Liz Lochhead, Edwin Muir, Janice Galloway and Alasdair Gray—I could go on and on.

Moving on from English, perhaps there is a point about modern studies, but even the modern studies curriculum contains a whole section on “Political Issues in the United Kingdom”, which includes two study themes around Scotland, “Devolved Decision Making in Scotland” and “Political Parties and their Policies (including the Scottish Dimension)”. It is all already here.

Rob Gibson rose—

Kezia Dugdale: I am just coming on to a point that Rob Gibson made about higher history. He said that there was nothing in higher history about Scotland’s history, but I have the curriculum in my hands, and it states under the heading “Scottish History” that candidates will study “The Wars of Independence”, “The Age of the Reformation”, “The Treaty of Union”, “Migration and Empire” and “The Impact of the Great War”. It is all here.

Rob Gibson: As Kezia Dugdale knows, it is up to the teachers to choose which of those sections they will teach. How many people learn about the wars of independence in comparison with the first world war?

Kezia Dugdale: I am afraid that Rob Gibson is incorrect. I am reading from the SQA guidelines on higher history, which state:

“Candidates must respond to one context within each Unit”.

There is an entire unit on Scottish history—it is there, and there is no denying or avoiding it. That is what our teachers are teaching.

Labour is saying today that we need the detail on what the minister is proposing. How will it be taught, and who will teach it? Will it be one teacher, or will English, modern studies and history teachers be brought into the classroom together? What impact will that have on timetabling? We need to see the detail, as that is what concerns us.

In an interesting article for the *Scottish Review*, Andrew Hook, who is a professor of English literature at the University of Glasgow, said:

“The minister, Dr Allan, spoke originally about the need to teach Scottish ‘history, literature, language and culture’. This seems reasonable enough even if what Scottish ‘language’ means is far from clear. But in the end all will depend on the detail of the proposal. Is it really sensible to suggest that Scottish studies should be taught in every year of primary and secondary school? Taught by whom? What will the impact of Scottish studies be on the current teaching of Scottish literature in English courses and Scottish history in history courses? ... Is Irish studies taught in Irish schools? Or Welsh studies in Welsh schools?”

He wants those questions to be explored.

This morning, I put out a request on Twitter for people to feed into my speech this afternoon. I received one response that summed up Labour’s position and how we feel about the debate. David Nicholson said to me:

“Personally I don’t see any problems with Scottish studies so long as the SNP don’t interfere with the course and what’s in it”.

That is very much how Labour feels about the debate. I will leave it there.

15:35

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): Perhaps Jack McConnell’s most useful contribution to Scottish political debate was his introduction of the term “Scottish cringe” into widespread use. Today, there has been a little touch of a cringe and even a little touch of a sneer from some quarters. However, since the initial response to the Scottish studies proposal, a welcome development has taken place in the tone of the debate generally. Rather than being a nationalist plot, Scottish studies is already happening.

Neil Findlay: Will Marco Biagi give way?

Marco Biagi: In previous education debates, I have taken two interventions from Mr Findlay, neither of which was constructive or useful. However, perhaps it will be third time lucky.

Neil Findlay: Is Marco Biagi seriously saying that that was the most positive contribution of Jack

McConnell’s time as First Minister? I hope that Marco Biagi recalls the McCrone agreement, which gave us a settlement in our schools for many years. Surely he is not so bitter that that is the only comment that he can make.

Marco Biagi: From third time lucky to three strikes and you are out. I will continue—that intervention does not even deserve an answer.

Until Mr Findlay intervened, a consensus was developing. We all accept that learning about Scotland’s history, literature and music—the Scottish context—is a good thing, which is a decent starting point. Of course, much of that is happening already; we can agree on that, too. However, there is nothing incompatible in recognising that much great teaching of the Scottish context takes place while recognising that many shortfalls and inconsistencies exist and believing that what is good practice or even common practice must become standard practice.

The principle that is at stake is clear. The entitlement to an education is inseparable from the entitlement to an education about the society in which we live. Curriculum for excellence is strong on that. I do not accept the argument that, because Scottish studies would fit in well with curriculum for excellence’s ethos, it cannot happen. That seems to be an argument in favour of Scottish studies. I am left bemused at the state of a country in which the right to learn about the society in which we live is even contested.

Let us be clear: good practice exists, but gaps remain. That has been most obvious and most talked about in history. The last attempt that I could find to gauge knowledge of Scottish history was a study of 3,000 secondary 4s—it is a little dated and could perhaps do with being revisited—that was peer reviewed and published in *The Curriculum Journal*. It is most worrying that the main reason that was chosen—by 37 per cent—for the act of union was an English military conquest of Scotland. The most popular description of Culloden—chosen by 41 per cent—was a battle between wholly Scottish and wholly English armies. I put it very gently to anyone who is sceptical about Scottish studies that ending those misconceptions would in no way be nationalist brainwashing.

In case anyone thinks that I am singling out the youth of today—although the cohort to which I referred are my contemporaries—a 2004 study of 1,000 people across the United Kingdom on British history by the BBC found that distinctions between ages were minimal. However, 6 per cent of respondents to that study thought that the Spanish armada’s vanquisher was Gandalf from “The Lord of the Rings”, so perhaps the most important finding is a cautionary one about multiple-choice questions.

I am not the only one who thinks that there is a gap here. The Government has very much reflected civic society on the matter. As well as the Scottish studies working group, which has been given credibility by the involvement of figures such as Liz Lochhead, we had, in 2010, the literature working group, which worked with the Government in a cultural rather than educational context. One of the wide-ranging recommendations in its report, which I was drawn to in preparation for this debate, urged the inclusion of a mandatory question on Scottish literature in higher English. I do not know the background, but I suggest that that was the source of the current proposal. The group, which was chaired by *The Herald's* literary editor, included Allan Massie and Andy Nicoll and I am sure that anyone who suggests that it was an agent of tartan parochialism can look forward to a very hearty write-up in *The Sun*.

Given the lack of any research, one cannot help citing personal experience in this debate. If members are going to be anecdotal, I should perhaps add my own anecdote, which, as I pointed out somewhat insensitively to some of my colleagues yesterday, is perhaps a little more contemporary than most.

For me, geography was the exemplar subject. Glaciation was taught with reference to the Clyde coast and Glen Fruin and the starting point for examining urban land use was the town in which we lived. It was a fine example of teaching of universal concepts through a Scottish context. Such an approach meant that learners could more readily access and identify the subject matter. It felt alive and relevant.

I have nothing but the highest praise for music, which ranged with a very even hand across cultures, genres and periods. However, I took English for six years and, aside from one Liz Lochhead poem, the closest it ever came to Scottish literature was "Macbeth"—which does not count. Do not even get me started on history. Two of my nephews now attend the same school and, as far as I can see, little has changed. That kind of patchwork needs to be addressed.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Marco Biagi: I am running out of time, so I think that I will just end there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can take the intervention if you want to, Mr Biagi.

Marco Biagi: Okay then—go for it.

Jenny Marra: Is Marco Biagi not making the argument for the integration of Scottish studies into the curriculum?

Marco Biagi: Yes. In fact, I think that that is what I am here to do. The challenge is to get right

the detail of how Scottish studies will work and integrate with the curriculum. Nevertheless, I think that we all agree that it would be a useful addition. The phrase

"a distinct strand of learning"

in the working group remit sums it up. The subject can be woven very effectively into what exists at the moment to ensure that this universal entitlement comes to pass and I have high hopes that in a few years we will all look back on this and wonder what all the fuss was about.

15:42

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The introduction of Scottish studies into the curriculum for primary and secondary schools is long overdue. That is not to say that much does not already happen—and happen well—in some schools but too much happens by default, not by design. The subject is too important to be left to chance. Giving children the opportunity to discover all aspects of the country in which they live gives them a sense of place and knowledge that will serve them well in whatever their walk of life, whatever their career path and wherever they live thereafter. The members of the working group need to look at the excellent teaching practice that already exists and which has already been highlighted to ensure that current best practice can become common practice.

In the mid 1980s I visited schools in the Soviet Union—or what are now Russia and the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In a primary school in Vilnius, 60 nine and 10-year-olds sang "O my Luve's like a red, red rose" word perfect in Scots. Then they sang it in Lithuanian and Russian. It made me wonder how many Scottish schoolchildren could actually sing it in Scots. Just in case members think that there was a lot of preparation for my visit, I should point out that we were in a communist state and the school did not know that we were coming. Although our history and many aspects of our culture are of interest to other countries, we seem reluctant to share them with our own children.

Of course, Scotland's history is not something that we can always be proud of. Our role in the British empire, in slavery and in land acquisition in other countries are all part of it and need to be learned. We need to learn about our mistakes and although our past can be inglorious, that is no reason not to teach history; indeed, it is a reason why it should be taught well, properly and exactly.

Scottish studies surely represents the best opportunity to share the many cultures in our country and to do more than acknowledge them. It occurs to me that most motions that are lodged by members are to do with celebrating excellence—

often in history, or in the commemorative work of some group or other in their community. We share and pass on such things in the Parliament, but we do not generalise across the nation to recognise their worth.

Scotland has produced and continues to produce creators, innovators, original thinkers and high achievers in philosophy, literature, science, medicine, geology, mathematics, product invention and design, textiles, art, agriculture, poetry, architecture, fashion, sport and many more areas. That knowledge could encourage and inspire our young folk. Indeed, more than that, I believe that it is our duty to deliver information about that and that it is their right to have that.

The Parliament supports a great many organisations and agencies that are trusted with much of the nation's wealth, all of which have—or should have—educational programmes. I am thinking of the national companies, the National Library of Scotland, the orchestras, the Scottish Youth Theatre and others. An impressive brochure from the Scottish Council on Archives, which is one of those organisations, landed in our mailboxes only this week. Sally Magnusson says in that brochure's foreword:

"Our archives are our national memory. They show us the forging of the Scottish nation over the centuries and open a window on its contacts with other peoples and cultures."

Members do not know everything there is to know about Scottish history or about one another's constituencies and regions. How many people have met the Gaelic-speaking Pakistani community in the Western Isles? How many people know that Chinese schoolchildren are teaching other children Mandarin in primary schools in the north-west Highlands? There are extraordinary, extreme and wonderful parts of our education system and extraordinary, extreme and wonderful cultures that our children are aware of and are being taught about, but we need to share that. If we do not know that, how on earth are we to govern?

There are children who will, in 20, 30 or 40 years' time, take our seats in the Parliament. If we have a national curriculum in which national Scottish studies is taught, I suspect that they will be better informed than those of us who are in the chamber today, who have heard of Up-Helly-Aa in Shetland and may have heard of the magnificent book festival in the south-west of Scotland. They will know and understand; better still, they will have studied some of the authors whose names are yet to be discovered.

It is interesting that members have mentioned authors in their keenness to explain that Scottish studies are taught sufficiently and to show how well they did by the education system, as they can

identify MacDiarmid, Lewis Grassie Gibbon and others. However, there are contemporary authors. Scotland's publishers publish nearly 1,000 Scottish literature books a year. We need to have that information in our schools, and people need to know about it. We may not read all of those books and we may not need to know all that, but we need to know what the country is capable of doing and is doing.

Children and young people have the right to know about all those agencies and to take advantage of them, but everything cannot be left to the teachers and other experts in their respective fields. The new study should deliver a message for us all to better understand the different aspects of Scottish life. All of us have much to learn; ignorance is not bliss.

15:49

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I pay tribute to the very high standard of teaching of Scottish history and culture that there already is in our schools. I am aware of that not only through personal experience, but from speaking to parents and teachers throughout my region.

I think we all agree that it is important that pupils learn about Scottish history and culture, and that it is important for our pupils to learn global, European and shared British history and culture so that our young people are encouraged to be outward looking and to develop an informed perspective of the world. We want to see an outward-looking, multinational and multicultural Scotland. All the parties support the one Scotland, many cultures campaign. That ethos has been promoted in schools and should continue to be promoted. The aim should be to provide a balanced education that recognises our heritage and culture and which teaches our children to be outward looking. We need a balanced approach.

I strongly believe that it is important for young people to learn about the distinctive local heritage even within Scotland, such as the industrial history in the west of Scotland. I do not propose the introduction of Renfrewshire studies or west of Scotland studies, although I am sure that they would be extremely interesting. I do not need to propose that, because schools, particularly in Renfrewshire, teach local and Scottish history very well. I remember in my primary school in Kilbarchan learning about the work of weavers in Renfrewshire during the 18th and 19th centuries. As part of that, we visited the weaver's cottage in Kilbarchan, which is run by the National Trust for Scotland. At the cottage, which pupils at Kilbarchan primary school still visit, people can see how weavers lived and worked. It is an excellent site, and I recommend that members and

parents and pupils should visit it if they get the opportunity.

I experienced another good example while at Gryffe high school. In my history class, I was taught about Mary Queen of Scots, Robert the Bruce and William Wallace as well as the industrial revolution and the struggle of the cotton mill workers in Paisley. We also visited New Lanark, which the minister mentioned, to learn about the Welshman Robert Owen and the foundations of the co-operative movement. That was engaging and informative and contributed to a balanced curriculum.

The focus on local history was interesting and stimulating because it was not abstract and was something that pupils could participate in. That type of learning was not directed from the centre, but it is a perfect example of how local history and culture can be delivered at local authority level, as it should continue to be delivered. The curriculum for excellence allows teachers the freedom to take into account local activity. I hope that any introduction of a Scottish studies course across the board would not remove that flexibility. I hope that the working group will take that point into account.

We have several concerns. As members have mentioned, the introduction of Scottish studies should not lead to the sacrifice or limiting of other subjects that are taught in our schools. The unfortunate fact is that the timetable is already overcrowded and leaves little room for manoeuvre. Members have mentioned the importance of modern languages and learning about other cultures. We live in an increasingly interdependent world, so we should seek to maintain the number of foreign languages that are taught in our schools in order to better equip the youth of today for the future. Concerns about that have been raised with me.

Dr Allan: I welcome the member's support for modern languages. Will he, likewise, welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to increasing children's awareness of Scottish languages and to exposing them meaningfully to two modern languages in addition to their own?

Neil Bibby: I will always support the provision of opportunities for young people to learn modern languages. I hope that that will continue. I am sure that all members know that the Chinese economy is fast becoming the biggest economy in the world and that 1 billion people speak Mandarin. There is a compelling economic argument for modern languages.

At last week's meeting of the Public Petitions Committee, we heard concerns about cuts to east European studies and languages at the University of Glasgow. If the cuts are not reversed, those

subjects will not be taught anywhere in the United Kingdom outside London. I accept that that relates to the university sector, but I hope that we can maintain modern languages in schools, too.

We have concerns that introducing Scottish studies would put more pressure on teaching staff, particularly at a time when we have lost thousands of teachers across Scotland.

I am slightly concerned that the proposal to introduce Scottish studies implies a failure by our schools to provide sufficient teaching of Scottish history and culture. Like Claire Baker, I am concerned about the minister's comment that, although Scotland prides itself on its education system, there is an acknowledgement that it has failed to give people basic information about their country. Around 166,000 young people left school between 2007 and 2010, when the SNP was in power. Is the SNP saying that they left school without sufficient knowledge of their country? I do not recognise that. I believe that schools are doing a good job in this area in difficult circumstances.

Perhaps the minister could clarify what basic information is not being taught. As I have described, there are already significant roles for Scottish history in today's history classes, for Scottish geography in geography lessons, for Scottish literature and poetry in English studies, and for Scottish culture across the board. I hope that the Government and the working group will consider those points and take them into account when it looks at the issue of Scottish studies.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have quite a bit of time in hand, so Clare Adamson has a very generous six minutes.

15:55

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I welcome this Scottish Government debate.

Defining Scottish studies is not an easy task. Thankfully, that task falls to the Scottish studies working group as it determines the way forward. That said, I happened upon one definition that encapsulates what I would like to see. Scottish studies should

"promote, preserve and perpetuate through studies in all related areas—the culture, music, language, arts, crafts, customs and traditions of ... Scotland."

If we can include under "traditions" our remarkable scientific achievements, I think that that definition covers just about everything. However, I am being a little bit disingenuous, because that quote does not come from Scotland, a Scottish academic, a Scottish scientist or a Scottish cultural icon. It is the mission statement of the Gaelic College in Nova Scotia in Canada, except that where I have said "traditions of Scotland", it uses the phrase

"traditions of immigrants of the highlands of Scotland."

I find it ironic that we are debating the merits of Scottish studies in Scottish schools when it is evident that the rest of the world and the Scottish diaspora understand fully the importance of such work.

In 2009, the esteemed Scottish historian Tom Devine reviewed the BBC's "A History of Scotland" in an article for *The Journal*. In framing his review, he stated:

"The educational deficit in the teaching of Scottish history in our schools, which has been a scandal for many decades, was now being vigorously debated and plans were put forward for welcome improvements. It was also widely agreed that post-devolution Scotland urgently needed to develop a greater sense of itself and of the nation's place in the world."

I can think of no more compelling argument for the incorporation of Scottish studies in our curriculum. Given that one of the world's leading historians talked, as recently as 2009, of the teaching of Scottish history in our schools as a "scandal", we in the Parliament should surely take note.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Clare Adamson: No, thank you.

Given that one of our leading academics told us, as recently as 2009, that there was a consensus for the development of a greater sense of ourselves and of our nation's place in the world, we should not only take note but take action. The establishment of Scottish studies within our curriculum and exam diet is the action that is needed.

Claire Baker: Clare Adamson has referred to Scottish studies as a qualification subject. Does she agree that it is important that the working group examines the detail of how that could be delivered, given the need to be confident about teacher skills in the area and about the existence of enough space in the curriculum to deliver such a course?

Clare Adamson: Yes, absolutely. I think that I stressed at the beginning of my speech that it is for the working group to determine the way forward.

Scottish studies is a fabric as intricately interwoven as our tartans, in which all the threads that define our history, our invention, our culture, our emigration and immigration, and our scientific advances come together to define us as Scots and our nation as Scotland.

By way of example, I turn to Robert Burns, who is one of our best-known international cultural icons. He wrote that reading Blind Harry's "Wallace"

"poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins which will boil along there till the flood gates of life shut in eternal rest".

He went on to write "Scots, wha hae". There we have Scottish history, in the shape of the wars of independence in the 13th century, inspiring Blind Harry in 1477, and then Blind Harry inspiring Burns in 1792. Those threads of our history and literature are interwoven into our cultural tartan.

Of course, Burns was inspired by more than our history. "To a Mouse" was framed from our agricultural heritage, "Twa Dugs" takes political significance for social satire and, only a few months ago, we heard in the chamber a beautiful rendition of "Westlin Winds", which was inspired by our countryside and natural heritage—I think a lassie might have inspired him on that one too.

I chose Robert Burns because he sits at the heart of the Scottish enlightenment. If we are truly to develop a greater sense of Scotland and its place in the world, it is vital that our children understand the world-changing impact of the Scottish enlightenment. Do they know that modern geology was founded by James Hutton in this country? They need to understand the world-framing ideas that Scotland gave to philosophy, political economy, engineering, architecture, medicine, geology, archaeology, law, agriculture, chemistry and sociology—I hope that I have not missed anything.

However, Scottish studies should not be only about our past; our contemporary contribution to the world should also be recognised and should inspire in our classrooms.

This is not the first time that I have mentioned the work that Matthew Fitt did with students from Airdrie and Hamilton to develop a colloquial Scots dialect brochure for children who took part in the international children's games. The project taught children from my home area to value not only their mither tongue but themselves.

Next week, I will welcome students aged 14 to 17 from the Goethe-Gymnasium in Frankfurt, who are visiting the Parliament as part of their studies of Scottish politics. Those studies include investigating the idea of Scottish independence; our relationship to Great Britain and the European Union; and the immigration policies and political concepts of our Scottish parties. I look forward to welcoming Scottish children deliberating on the same subjects post the introduction of Scottish studies.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is plenty of time for interventions. I call John Finnie, who has a generous six minutes.

16:03

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am heartened that there have clearly been many changes since I was educated in rural north Britain in the 1960s, a part of the world where people were belted for speaking in Gaelic.

I was upbeat until I heard the phrase—I hope that I have noted it correctly—

“at least one Scottish text”

must be taught, and I thought, “Yup, aye.” Indeed, I thought, “Glè mhath.”

What are we trying to achieve with Scottish studies? It must improve our children’s knowledge. I also suggest that it is like the opportunity to clarify, strengthen and consolidate in law reform. That is the route that we are on. No one denies that much work has been done already and that it needs to be built on.

The curriculum for excellence talks about “connected learning experience”. The connection that I would like to be made concerns Scotland’s place in the world—how we connect with the world and, indeed, how we connect within the complex society that is Scotland. Who could take exception to

“developing a sense of identity, confidence and wellbeing”?

Like most nationalists, I am first and foremost an internationalist and I welcome the move to broaden knowledge.

We must recognise the different traditions within Scotland. Rob Gibson, who is unfortunately not in the chamber, touched on the situation in Caithness, where there is a conflict between some people who wish to term themselves Norse and some who wish to term themselves Gaels. We need to recognise the local dimension that learning can have.

We also have the Lowland Scots and the rich mix that later joined to make Scotland: people from elsewhere in these islands, such as the two traditions in Ireland; people from the Indian subcontinent; and, more recently, people from Europe. To my mind, they should all be part of Scottish studies. Scotland has always been a refuge for people fleeing from oppression and, notwithstanding what I consider to be the heavy-handed UK Border Agency, long may that continue to be the case. That is an area worth highlighting.

At lunch time, along with other people, I was part of the celebration of Show Racism the Red Card, which is an excellent example of learning that has a very clear Scottish dimension.

I am delighted that Arthur Cormack, a well-respected musician and Gaelic authority is on the Scottish studies working group. There is clearly an

opportunity to influence what the public thinks should contribute to teaching. A number of members have mentioned Culloden. I would like to see some concentration on Culloden, although not the misty-eyed version that we have heard referred to but the version that highlights the individual greed of aspirant monarchs, the duplicity of clan chiefs and indeed the sacrifice of the indigenous population. Jean Urquhart touched on the aftermath of Culloden; the shameful role played in that by the church and the law as it was at the time needs to be looked at too.

We know that those dispossessed people were part of a positive advancement across the world, but they were also complicit in some brutal treatment of native Americans, aboriginal peoples, Maoris and the like. I wonder whether there will be a place in Scottish studies for Màiri Mhòr and the battle of the braes in Skye. I hope that there will also be mention of the tanks in George Square, but will there be mention of the British ships that were sent to quell the natives of Skye?

It is important that we move away from the tea-towel representation of our citizens, despite all their many achievements, and concentrate on the broader aspects, such as the relationship with the Baltic states and Russia, and the role of mercenaries, traders and academics. We also need to look behind those roles for the shared educational experiences that continue to this day through trading with the European Union and the peace that it has brought through our role then and now.

The minister touched on linguistics. There is well-documented research to show the benefit of bilingualism. It is evident in the Highlands, where there has been a Gaelic renaissance. Perhaps the curriculum could pick up on aspects of that such as the revitalisation of entire communities, particularly in the south end of Skye—the employment opportunities that have been created there; the little-known fact that some of the courses are so popular that they are provided for German speakers only; the internet opportunities; and the fact that one of the most innovative parts of the globe is in the south of Skye.

I was brought up in the Highlands amid all the hydro schemes that were the excellent pioneering work of Tom Johnston, the visionary Labour Secretary of State for Scotland at the end of the second world war, but that was never taught to me. It was thought to be more appropriate that I know about Tudor England and the Romans.

It is important that we all throw our weight behind Scottish studies. I am certain that the concerns about it have been dispelled. I plead that we should not do a disservice to our educational or political structure. Let us dispel the myth that any political party, even one with a majority, could

or would wish to pervert our children's minds. Have faith in the integrity of our teachers and in any revised curriculum, and Scotland will be the richer for it.

16:08

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): I have listened carefully to the arguments that have been made on all sides of the debate, and I thank all members who have contributed so far.

The Government's pronouncements on Scottish studies have thrown up more questions than answers. I was interested to hear the minister's remarks, but a number of points still require some explanation. Perhaps, when he makes his closing speech, he will be able to answer some of my questions and alleviate some of my concerns.

I ask the Scottish Government for clarity about why such a change is necessary, how it will be implemented, and what the end product will be. In Scottish schools, pupils already learn about Scottish history, geography, literature and culture. In primary schools, children learn about our national flag, where it came from and what it represents. They also learn about the poetry of Burns and the Burns tradition, which is alive and well in our schools today. In secondary schools, young people learn about Scotland, too. They learn about Scottish dance, Scottish food and Scottish music. They learn about our natural history, our economic history and our social history. Already, our young people routinely learn about this country. Why does the Scottish Government feel that teaching about Scotland and the study of Scotland are so inadequate?

If the Government feels that more time should be committed to the study of Scotland, which subjects will lose out? I do not need to remind the minister of the pressures on school timetables and on teachers. He will no doubt have received the same letters and e-mails about the McCormac review as I have. I note that we are holding a debate on Scottish studies months before the working group, chaired by the minister, comes to a final view or issues a final report. There are other issues that demand a more immediate response from the Scottish Government and the immediate attention of the Parliament, such as the increase in teachers' pension contributions, the erosion of the McCrone agreement, the gap in attainment between better-off youngsters and those from deprived backgrounds, probationary teachers struggling to find work, the levels of youth unemployment and the scandal of the estimated 13,000 school leavers experiencing difficulty with basic literacy and numeracy. Those must be the minister's priorities for as long as he holds office, as they are far more fundamental to our future.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Will the member give way?

Margaret McCulloch: No, thank you.

Will the minister explain why the Scottish Government has used its time in the chamber for a debate on Scottish studies when his working group has yet to complete its work?

I also ask for clarification about the curriculum. With curriculum for excellence, schools are supposed to be given greater freedom over what they teach and to promote interdisciplinary learning and crossover with other subjects. Some of the most exciting and innovative learning about Scotland has been a product of curriculum for excellence, so I ask for the minister's assurance that that kind of innovation will continue. I also ask the Scottish Government to rule out top-down imposition of changes in the curriculum in order to roll out Scottish studies. These decisions should lie first and foremost with the schools themselves.

I invite the minister to outline in more detail the content of the new Scottish studies course. What exactly will students of Scottish studies learn and how much of the course content will repeat work that is already done in other subjects? After completing a course of Scottish studies, what qualifications are to be gained and where will those qualifications sit in the qualifications framework? How useful will those qualifications be to students? For example, does the minister envisage that a qualification in Scottish studies will help young people in Scotland to get into university?

Dr Allan: Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret McCulloch: No, thank you. I want to continue.

As someone who worked in the training sector—at the University of Strathclyde and as an external verifier for the Scottish Qualifications Authority—I think that those points are crucial.

I have asked questions of the Government that I hope the minister will answer in his summing-up speech. I have set out my priorities for Scottish education, from supporting the teaching profession to raising attainment and from tackling youth unemployment to dealing with illiteracy and innumeracy. Those are the pressing issues for Scottish education and for Scottish society. They are the issues that demand our attention and which I would have preferred the Scottish Government to debate today.

16:14

Paul Wheelhouse (South Scotland) (SNP): As I have said before in the chamber, I am a migrant

to Scotland. I always knew that I had some Scottish ancestry, but my parents did not grow up in Scotland and did not know much about its geography, history and role in developing the modern world or, indeed, issues such as the Scottish enlightenment, so those things were never explained to me as a child.

That is no criticism of my parents—they were educated elsewhere, so they could not be at fault. None of that information could be passed to me by my parents directly; instead, I gained it through my school and, in the main, by studying outside of school, because the curriculum did not cover a lot about Scotland or even my local area. Aside from a brief period on the Roman invasion, medieval Scotland and the wars of independence, most of what I learned at school was about British history and, to a degree, international history such as the French revolution, the Crimean war and other major world events.

My fondest memories of school are of history lessons although, unfortunately, I had to give history up at the end of second year due to a clash in the curriculum. I very much welcome the concept that Scottish studies might be woven through the curriculum in various different areas, so that children will be exposed to Scottish history, culture and literature as they go through their schooling and they will not have to leave it all to the choice of their parents whether they have access to a discrete subject.

I also loved geography. With all the debate about the future of Scotland and renewable energy and some of the dubious claims about wind turbines altering the nature of the landscape, it would do us all some good to reflect on the fact that most of the landscape that we see today is to a degree man-made and influenced by man. Whether that is a result of clearing trees or burning heather, it is very much a man-made creation; there is very little wilderness left in Scotland.

I am sure that we are all familiar with the fact that newspapers regularly report pupils' lack of knowledge of basic information. Marco Biagi cited one example, which might be the same one that I am about to refer to. I was staggered to hear that the *Daily Mail* had reported on 4 November 2009—I point out to my colleagues that I do not read that newspaper regularly—that just 4 per cent of secondary pupils could correctly link the battle of Culloden to the Jacobite uprising in 1745. I found that quite extraordinary.

The population are not stupid. They know that this is not about pseudo-nationalist undertones or indeed brainwashing, as others have suggested. If what has been said is true, the many years of history that I was taught about the British empire must surely have been an attempt to brainwash me into unionism.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

Surely Mr Wheelhouse must realise that, for the vast majority of people in Scotland, the history of their nation is the history of the United Kingdom.

Paul Wheelhouse: That was a brave attempt from Mr Johnstone.

Our people understand that it is only normal to help our children understand not only the world they live in but the country they live in and how it has arrived at its position in the world today—our children have an absolute right to know that. Most people accept that that is only fair and, as the minister stated, some 90 per cent of those surveyed—admittedly, this survey was on the Gaelic language—thought that it was a good idea for Scottish studies to be a key strand of the curriculum.

We should also see this as an investment in our workforce. Scotland is a country that depends to a great degree on tourism. If we give people more than just the basic information—if we give them as much information as we can about their country—how much better will the quality of our tourism offering to those visiting the country be?

Claudia Beamish: I have a concern about the tone and the implication that teaching at the moment is basic. Having been a teacher for 15 years and having worked as a supply teacher as well as a part-time teacher across South Lanarkshire, I know that I was never in a primary school where what we have all talked about today was not embedded right the way across the curriculum. John Finnie's point about localism is important. I am burbling on here—I am sorry—but the suggestion that teachers are not teaching these things across the curriculum, with a local element, is extraordinary. It is happening and kids thrive on it.

Paul Wheelhouse: I hear what the member says, but I have to disagree. We are not just talking about people teaching basic information; I am trying to say that we need to go beyond the basic. People need to go beyond the wars of independence and Robert Burns to understand the nature of events, why they happened and what influence they have today. I do not think that that degree of explanation is provided in the current curriculum.

The teaching of Scottish studies has an important role to play in workforce development for key sectors such as tourism. If we can improve the experience of tourists who visit this country so that they come across people who have an understanding of the areas around them—so that there are 5.2 million people who can give advice about a local attraction—that will be a great enhancement to our offering to the world.

We need to bear it in mind that we are equipping our population to be more confident as well. If people know where they are coming from, they have more confidence in where they are going as individuals and as a country.

The teaching of Scottish studies is about ensuring that a new generation of Scots know more about their country. In the course of their studies, every child growing up in Scotland learns of the many great inventions that we have given to the world. As Clare Adamson mentioned, it would be much easier to inspire children in subjects such as science if they knew about the many people who came from a similar background and made a significant breakthrough in science, medicine or engineering. It is not a question of teaching people just about battles, the treaty of union and various other historic events; it is about teaching them about how society has developed and the influence that Scots have had on that society over the years.

Exploring history can reveal interesting parallels to today. English parliamentary records of 1606 show that, when a project of union between Scotland and England was being debated in the House of Commons in London, the opposing party pointed out:

“If we admit them”—

the Scots—

“into our liberties, we shall be overrun with them ... witness the multiplicities of the Scots in Polonia.”

That was a reference to Poland—my colleague John Finnie alluded to that issue, too. If we educate people about the history of migrations of Scots to the rest of the world, we can perhaps deal with some of the ignorance and prejudice shown towards those migrating to Scotland today. At that point, some 30,000 families were accepted to have settled in Poland—possibly more than 100,000 people if their children were there too. That is confirmed by various texts from the early 20th century.

Thus, many people in Polish towns such as Danzig or Gdańsk perhaps owe their ancestry to those Scots who moved there as mercenaries or merchants in the 16th century. That information can play an important part in equipping our schoolchildren today with knowledge of the nature of Scottish society and how our society has influenced other countries, which will perhaps deal with some of the ignorance that still pervades among the adult population about the nature of migrants to Scotland today.

I will give one last example of why I think that it is important to deal with history. In the south of Scotland, which the Presiding Officer will be familiar with, it is often misunderstood that Scots, or the language of the Angles, was the first

language. There was certainly no Gaelic down there, but there was a Welsh-speaking community many centuries before the Angles invaded from the east and the Scots invaded from the north.

Jackson Carlaw: I am grateful to the member for confirming that there was no Gaelic in the south of Scotland. Does he therefore wonder why ScotRail has been mandated to put Gaelic names on all the stations on the Glasgow to Ayr line, to promote a language that the people never spoke?

Paul Wheelhouse: There are actually a number of Gaelic place names in the Borders. For example, Galashiels is a combination of Angle and Gaelic, and there are places such as the Merse as well.

We should not be too simplistic about this—indeed, I am probably in danger of being simplistic myself. I am trying to say that there are many people in my area who as adults and children have no idea of that period of their history. They have no idea that the south of Scotland had a rich culture before the Romans came and a rich culture after the Romans went and that the languages have changed a number of times. It is a good example of how local history should be taught as well.

Claudia Beamish: Will the member take an intervention?

Paul Wheelhouse: I have just come to an end, unfortunately.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Perhaps you will be able to intervene later, Claudia.

I call Joan McAlpine. You have a very generous six minutes.

16:24

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): The great African novelist Chinua Achebe said:

“No one can teach me who I am.”

He meant that we need to look inside ourselves to be comfortable in our skin, whatever colour our skin happens to be and whatever language we happen to speak. That is especially relevant to the core principles of curriculum for excellence, which is about the creation of confident learners and active citizens—something that cannot be imposed from the outside. It hinges on a sense of self-respect and a sense of self-worth.

I opened with the quote from Achebe not just because his novel “Things Fall Apart” is one of the greatest of the 20th century, but because the debate can benefit Scotland by looking at Scottish studies in an international context. Achebe is from a sizeable minority inside Nigeria called the Igbo, and “Things Fall Apart” looks at how colonialism

and Christianity fracture the social cohesion of a 19th century Igbo village in an incredibly subtle way. Although Achebe celebrates the traditional way of life and the social values of the community, he is also sensitive to its cruelty and occasional superstition. Achebe shies away from moral absolutes in his work, saying:

"I never will take the stand that the Old must win or that the New must win. ... No single man can be correct all the time".

To that, he later added that no single culture can be correct all the time, observing that

"what is good among one people is an abomination with others."

I am aware of the difficulties and potential offensiveness that are inherent in comparing Scotland's experience to that of peoples from former colonies of the British empire. As Jean Urquhart and John Finnie have said, Scots played their part in that empire as soldiers, slave traders, plantation owners and land grabbers. However, we have some things in common. It took Achebe a long time to be published in the English language because most editors at the time did not recognise his experiences as being valid subjects for literature. That was back in the 1950s and relates to racist treatment of him.

Members may think that the situation has changed over the years. However, several decades later, in 1994, there was a row when James Kelman won the Booker prize for "How Late It Was, How Late", which describes the experiences of a Glasgow man who has been struck blind as he tries to deal with the authorities and convince them of the validity of his illness. The book was inspired by Kelman's work with asbestos victims on Clydeside and their struggle to have the disease recognised by the authorities. The Booker judges fell out over the novel, with some, such as Julia Neuberger, saying that it was the work of a "savage". In London, *The Times* columnist Simon Jenkins said that the award of the Booker prize to Kelman

"contrived to insult literature and patronise the savage".

Kelman responded by saying:

"My culture and my language have the right to exist, and no one has the authority to dismiss that right".

He added that

"a fine line can exist between elitism and racism. On matters concerning language and culture the distinction can sometimes cease altogether."

It is interesting that Jenkins has since moved to *The Guardian*, a very different sort of newspaper, in which he recently wrote a column about Scotland under the headline, "It is time for England's first empire to get independence".

Perhaps he has had time to reflect on his views of 17 years ago.

Far from being a savage, Kelman is a thoughtful and intellectual writer whose work is inspired by the linguistic theories of Noam Chomsky. Chomsky found that we all have an innate set of grammatical rules and that all language is valid—bad grammar and bad language do not make a person any less human.

When I interviewed Kelman about his more recent novel, "Kieron Smith, Boy", we spent a long time talking about the language of his characters and how some middle-class Scots are also offended by it. We talked about how our Scots language has changed and is far less rich in vocabulary than it was in the time of Burns. In the 18th century, after the union, elocution classes became all the rage as people struggled to get rid of Scotticisms from their voice. Over time, Scots became considered the language of the crass, the uneducated and the gutter. Scots was not developed in religion or literature for a long time, and it was not used in the classroom, in the courtroom or, latterly, on the television, except perhaps for comedy.

That habit continues to this day at every level of society, and James Kelman talks about it in "Kieron Smith, Boy". He describes Scottish parents' habit of correcting the way in which their kids speak—I am as guilty of that as other people and correct myself for correcting them—telling them that it is "mummy", not "mammy", which is very common in Glasgow. I found out only recently that "mammy" is derived from a Gaelic word—a friend from Barra told me that.

All of that has a corrosive effect on our culture, our self-confidence and even our ability to function as citizens. According to Kelman:

"Children grow up learning they are inferior and their parents are inferior. Right away you disenfranchise entire segments of society."

For Kelman and Chomsky, syntax itself is universal. We are all capable of expression, even if our language has been systematically destroyed both internally and externally. Kelman believes that the syntactical richness of modern Scots as spoken in the street, not in the poetry reading, is intensified as vocabulary decreases. He points out that the great Russian writers, such as Chekhov, worked with the narrowest vocabulary, yet his work is still great. We could say the same for Samuel Beckett, who is considered a genius.

The process that Kelman and Achebe describe is known as inferiorism—when people diminish their culture from the inside. It was originally identified and named by Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist and philosopher from the French colony of Martinique. He noted that cultures that

are dominated by another culture often see that other culture as the bringer of superior ways and universal human values. Political control is asserted by undermining self-belief. It is a form of cringe, in other words, and it extends beyond the way we speak.

We see inferiorism in a lot of the discourse in Scottish society today. We talk about ourselves as being uniquely inarticulate and tongue-tied among the nations of the world. We repeat clichés about Scotland being negative, overly sectarian, overly racist, impoverished, intolerant, lacking in ambition, too sexist and too violent.

We are all those things but so are other societies. We also have much to celebrate, but our children do not get that validation often enough. It is a phenomenon that Chinua Achebe would immediately recognise and one that will be addressed when our children know their own culture well enough to criticise it constructively and celebrate it too.

16:31

David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con): We have had some very thoughtful and well-informed speeches, not only from the academic giants among us who are dripping in doctorates, whom we heard in the opening speeches, but from the mere mortals who have followed.

Of course, the debate has focused on the fundamental question that is at issue in our discussion, which is whether there should be on the one hand a separate subject—or “strand of study”, as it is called—to be known as Scottish studies as part of our school curriculum, or on the other hand, a significant Scottish dimension in subjects such as history, modern studies, geography, language and literature, art and science. As a number of members have pointed out, we have to answer the question in the context of a crowded curriculum in which there is already stiff competition for classroom time. We have to ask ourselves, against that background, whether there is merit and value in developing yet another freestanding subject.

As my colleague Elizabeth Smith pointed out in her learned opening speech, the content of curriculum for excellence expressly stresses, in each of its eight curriculum areas, the importance of the Scottish dimension. She referred to a publication that sets out the content of curriculum for excellence and said that it has 317 pages—I have it here. Perhaps some SNP members in particular might like to study it, look at the Scottish dimension and see how it pervades every single aspect of the subjects that our children are being taught at all levels and ages of development in our schools.

For example, we are told that through the study of a classical language,

“young people become ever more aware of how vital parts of Scotland’s culture, the arts, law, political systems and social values are directly and indirectly linked with the classical world.”

According to the document, our children and young people are to be introduced to the

“languages, dialects and literature of Scotland”

through a

“wide range of texts”

to develop in them

“an appreciation of Scotland’s vibrant literary and linguistic heritage.”

In religious and moral education, the purpose is to

“explore and develop knowledge and understanding of religions across the world, recognising the place of Christianity in the Scottish context.”

Social studies is about using

“Scottish, British, European and wider contexts for learning while maintaining a focus on the historical, social, geographic, economic and political changes that have shaped Scotland.”

Those are just a few examples.

I was astonished when Rob Gibson seemed to object to the teaching of the history of the Labour Party. I speak as the member who quoted Aneurin Bevan in my speech this morning. I do not know a huge amount about the history of the Labour Party, but no one can say that the history of the Labour Party could be taught without there being an enormous Scottish dimension to the subject. Mr Gibson might tell us what he was beefing about.

Rob Gibson: I was pointing out that there are some subjects in the curriculum that are in some ways controversial. I do not object to that at all. I would be interested to learn whether Mr McLetchie knows whether all the strands that he set out are taught in every school at every stage in the curriculum. I do not think that they are, which is why there is a need for Scottish studies.

David McLetchie: The SNP has not established the evidence base. What the member and his fellows come up with again and again is simple assertion. In the face of all the evidence about what is going on in our schools—the theory, which is in the document from which I quoted, and the practical examples that members have provided—we have an assertion that not enough is being done.

Dr Allan: All the eminent members of the working group made that assertion strongly from the outset and it might be that they are right. How does the member react to that?

David McLetchie: It might be that they should do some analysis. Maybe there should be a survey of classroom content in all our schools. Maybe we should get hard evidence to indicate whether the proposal is justified, as opposed to having a hand-picked committee to justify, vindicate and validate the SNP's particular prejudices. That is what this is about.

The examples that I provided all came from our newly-developed curriculum for excellence. Why do we not give curriculum for excellence a shot? Why do we not trust our schools and our teachers in all subjects to ensure that the Scottish dimension has a special and important place in their teaching? Why do we not trust our teachers to ensure that what they teach is put in the context of the country of which we are citizens and whose social, economic, cultural and political history and experience we have shared and shaped for the past 300 years and more? Why do we not trust our teachers to ensure that, in exemplifying the best of our British culture, proper weight is given to studying the contribution of Burns and other great Scottish poets and writers, as well as the contribution of Shakespeare and other great English, Welsh and Irish writers and poets?

Are we so paranoid and precious that we do not trust our teachers to draw on the experiences of the communities and the country in which they and their pupils live, as an integral part of their lessons? Members see that happening in action every day in the Scottish Parliament, in the school classes that come from all over Scotland to meet members and learn about their work and to learn about our democratic political system and our history. I think that Clare Adamson mentioned that.

I trust our teachers to teach the Scottish dimension, but it is clear that the minister and the SNP Government do not. Why else would the Scottish studies working group have been set up to second-guess all the teachers and educationists who worked so hard to draw up curriculum for excellence and its content?

Dr Allan: Will the member give way?

David McLetchie: No. I am sorry, minister.

It is interesting that the minister's working group is expected to meet on a grand total of only three occasions before it reports in January 2012. It does not sound as though much of a comprehensive examination of the evidence base is going on. It strikes me that what we have is not so much a working group as a committee that has been formed to nod through a series of pre-ordained conclusions and provide cover for the Government.

If the minister's working group is not simply to confirm my suspicions, it will need to provide us with a thorough analysis, which compares the

curriculum for excellence route that is already in place, in which we embed the Scottish dimension, with the separate Scottish studies route, which the Government favours. We need to know from the working group how a separate subject will be squeezed into our curriculum and school timetables. The minister might like to tell us whether his working group will undertake any of those tasks. Will we have that analysis? Will we have that comparison? Will we have that costing? Frankly, I do not think that we will. No doubt Mr Russell will prove me wrong. We will wait and see what the response is in the winding-up speech.

The minister began his speech by stating a premise that he hoped that we would all agree with: that our young people should be taught about our history and culture. No one has dissented from that. I entirely agree with it, as other members do. However, that is not at issue; at issue is how we do it. Beyond generalities, there has been no convincing explanation of why the ministers' preferred route is the correct one.

The question is this: do we need to do this? Frankly, we do not. Why is the Scottish Government doing it? It is doing it because it can.

16:41

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): It is a privilege to close this debate for Labour this afternoon. I would like to start by tackling head-on Marco Biagi's assertion that on these benches, and perhaps on others, there is an element of Scottish cringe. I have never experienced the Scottish cringe and I am sure that I speak for my colleagues on the Labour benches and in the Labour Party when I say that none of us has experienced that, and we take exception to being accused of it.

Marco Biagi: Will the member give way?

Jenny Marra: I want to make a wee bit of progress first.

I took the opportunity that was offered to me recently by Michael Russell's office to write an article for a magazine—I am sure that that opportunity was not afforded me in order to divert my time and keep my nose out of Mr Russell's education policies. In the article, I set out Labour's patriotism but stopped short of nationalism. Scottish studies is an important subject and I have benefited immeasurably from Sir John Leng medal competitions, Scottish dancing and literature and have experienced some modest success in Burns recitation competitions. Indeed, I was disappointed not to hear more after the initial e-mail that I received from a cross-party colleague—I cannot remember who it was—about a Burns club in Parliament. I would be keen to join that and I hope

that this speech serves as a friendly request for an invitation to that event.

I was glad to hear Alasdair Allan's commitment to having Scottish studies across the curriculum. As a number of members have said, there is a risk that the Scottish studies element that will be introduced in some form or other—a standard grade, a higher or, with regard to this morning's debate, an HNC or HND, which might bolster our colleges—teachers teaching the mainstream curriculum might choose not to teach the Scottish subjects.

Dr Allan: I hope that Jenny Marra will acknowledge that the working group is considering that matter. I ask her to acknowledge that, as I and others have said, one of the options is for people who are studying Scottish subjects across a range of disciplines to be recognised for it, rather than for there to be another higher that competes with others.

Jenny Marra: We look forward to seeing the working group's exact proposals and to thinking about how they will work to ensure that Scotland is studied properly in the mainstream curriculum.

As Dr Allan said earlier, he recently visited Dunfermline high school. There, he saw work on the Scottish curriculum in real life. He saw senior drama pupils perform excerpts from plays by Scottish playwrights. He listened to an analysis of a Scottish poem by an English class. He observed higher modern studies pupils investigating the Scottish judicial system, including the children's panel. He engaged in debate with the advanced higher history class—who, I understand, spontaneously and unanimously told him that they thought that a separate Scottish studies course was a bad idea, which I am sure he will pass on to the working group. He also joined a home economics class that was making cranachan and shortbread, and applauded a first-year PE class following a display of Scottish country dancing. Those events at Dunfermline high school were all happening anyway, within the curriculum for excellence, which shows that ample capacity exists.

On that point, I am seeking two commitments from the Government: first, that the working group will take mainstreaming of the study of Scotland seriously and bolster its proposals in that regard and, secondly, that Scottish studies in the mainstream curriculum will not fall by the wayside.

There has been talk today of “brainwashing” and “indoctrination”, which is very strong language.

Marco Biagi: On 19 August, Ken Macintosh told the BBC:

“my suspicion is that this is the SNP trying to brainwash children into their political view.”

Does Jenny Marra accept that that may be where my allegations of a slight Scottish cringe came from? Would she distance herself from such language?

Jenny Marra: That is quite strong language, but Ken Macintosh was trying to make a serious point about balance, interpretation and impartiality. The sacred impartiality of our education system must be paramount, and must be preserved at all costs. I know that colleagues in the Government will agree with that point.

We must explore our rich heritage, culture and traditions, which we cherish on all sides of the political spectrum, but we must ensure that the teachers who are appointed to teach Scottish studies are properly trained in the disciplines of history, literature and language that they will teach.

I would like the cabinet secretary to guarantee today that the teachers who teach the new courses or qualifications in Scottish studies will be properly trained, and that the Scottish studies course will not be staffed by the visiting experts for whom the McCormac review makes way, as it is clear to all how that could be manipulated. That last point is particularly important, because the discursive subjects such as English, history and modern studies that will be included in Scottish studies are intrinsically open to interpretation and should be rigorously impartial.

Will the minister ensure that Scottish studies is taught objectively? Can he assure me that proper emphasis will be placed on debates and arguments in Scottish history? Will we shine a light on the dark days of our past, such as the Highland clearances, the Scottish role in empire and our role in slavery, and challenge the cultural premises of sectarianism? Will the minister give a cast-iron guarantee that those things will be impartially taught and will not support a particular point of view?

We expect the working group to report in January, and we on the Labour side of the chamber will scrutinise its proposals with interest. I ask ministers to ensure the political impartiality of the working group, because a cursory glance at its membership shows many SNP supporters—*[Interruption.]*

That is a serious point. I would expect the Scottish National Party to be particularly alive to the sensitivities of the make-up of the group that is working on the content of a Scottish studies programme three years before a referendum.

Dr Allan: Is Jenny Marra suggesting that people such as the national poet, professors of Scottish history and eminent educationists are somehow part of an unspecified plot to corrupt the minds of Scottish youth?

Jenny Marra: No—I am not making any such assertion. I am merely underlining my point that impartiality in our education system is a prize that is worth fighting for at all costs. I would expect the learned minister to agree with me on that point.

Internationalism must be preserved, alongside a full appreciation of our own country. I know that Rob Gibson was not suggesting for a minute that the great war should not be taught in our schools, but it should be taught alongside the wars of independence. I was seriously worried when the SNP Government failed to ring-fence the money that the Holocaust Educational Trust won for children—[*Interruption*—the point is serious. That money was won for children in every school in the UK to visit Auschwitz. However, the SNP went on to ring-fence funding for school trips to Bannockburn.

I ask the Scottish Government to ensure that we start local and think global and that Scottish studies will not become parochial and inward-looking but will be outward-looking and comparative. It should allow us

“to see ourselves as others see us”,

which is a touchstone for many Scots.

16:50

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): It was unworthy of Jenny Marra to make her last remark. On reflection, she will realise that doing so was not sensible. Not only is Dr Allan going on a trip to Auschwitz, but his predecessor went on a trip there, too. The Government has strongly supported the work on national holocaust memorial day and other such interventions. Bringing that issue into the debate was foolish.

The debate has been disappointing. I will start with the things that have not barked. We have heard not a single intervention or speech from the Liberals and we have no Ken Macintosh. Ensuring that Labour's education spokesperson did not take part was probably sensible. As with pictures of commissars in the old Soviet Union, I suspect that somebody has been at work with a razor blade to cut him out of the family photograph. That is probably why Ed Miliband does not remember who Ken Macintosh is—he has been cut out. Ken Macintosh's statement in August was ludicrous—to talk about brainwashing was nonsense.

Of course, today's debate has involved a slight change of tone and thought. That has come from both sides of the usual Conservative-unionist alliance in the Parliament. We have heard an excuse. Those who do not want Scottish studies to happen—it is clear that some members from whom we have heard do not want it to happen—

have realised that they cannot oppose it outright. That is because, as we know, the vast majority of Scottish people—citizens of this country—want Scottish studies to take place.

We now have delay, doubt and dissembling, which we have heard all afternoon. The position of Labour and the Tories has remained unchanged from that of Mr Macintosh—it has just got a bit more subtle. That position is well defined in the Scottish novel “Fergus Lamont” by Robin Jenkins, who is probably the greatest Scottish novelist of the 20th century.

In a scene in that novel, the teacher, John Calderwood, is teaching his class the history of the clearances, in a school where teaching Scottish history is forbidden. Unfortunately, he is found out. The headteacher turns up in the classroom and says to him:

“I must warn you. You are filling these children's minds with poison. You are undermining their confidence in legally constituted authority. It's a mistake to study the history of one's own country. It divides us instead of uniting us. Why bother with stuff so out of date?”

Before John Calderwood has the chance to respond, a child from the slums of Gantock—the town in which the novel is set—speaks up. She says:

“It isnae out of date, Mr Maybole. People are still being put out of their hooes.”

That is the crux of the matter. I am passionate about Scottish studies, because I understand—as Scotland understands—that, to move forward, we need to know who we are and how we came here. That is the topic today. We need to study those matters carefully.

Before I mention some of those things, I will talk about the links and connections that exist in Scotland—about how subject after subject needs to be studied. I will address the spurious point about the experiences and outcomes of curriculum for excellence. The document was published in April 2009. It is the bedrock of curriculum for excellence, but we build on a bedrock. It is a foundation stone. We then ensure that we provide coherence and structure. Scottish studies will provide that coherence and structure to parts of the experiences and outcomes. Those who know anything about education understand that point.

Liz Smith: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Michael Russell: No—I want to make progress. I have heard too much about that issue today. [*Interruption.*] We have heard sounds from Tory back benchers, too. We have had far too much of what one might call saloon-bar conservatism. We heard that in some interventions, which showed deep hostility to thinking and talking about the present, the past and the future of Scotland, which we need to talk about today.

Let me mention one or two contributions before I speak more generally. Joan McAlpine's contribution was particularly strong.

I would like to talk about two things in relation to internationalism in Scotland. One is an Egyptian film called "The Night of Counting the Years", which talks about what it is to relate to tradition. The other came to me from someone who was a great influence on me—Finlay MacLeod, the former assistant director of education in the Western Isles. When I worked for him, he gave me a copy of a novel that was hardly known there but subsequently became a film. The novel was called "The Wife of Martin Guerre", and he said, "If you read that, you'll understand what it is to be alienated within your own community. You'll understand the Gaelic experience."

Scottish studies is about joining things up. It is about making connections. Let us touch on some of the connections that we have heard about today. Let us touch on the Scottish experience of slavery. Yes, it needs to be taught. The role of Scottish slave traders needs to be taught. And so does something that we did not hear about today—the name Joseph Knight. He was a slave who sought freedom in Scotland and who, from the sheriff of Perth in 1669, heard a commitment of Scottish law—that the state of slavery is not recognised by the laws of this Scottish kingdom. Let us teach that. Let us teach the ambition for human rights in Scotland. While we are doing so, let us go to the Burns centre—much criticised because we encourage children to go there and help them to do so. In the Burns centre, we can see on the wall the last supper—a contemporary last supper.

Claudia Beamish: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

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

The picture is challenging and engaging. And who does it feature? Yes, it features Robert Burns, but it also features Elvis, Marilyn Monroe, Che Guevara, Shakespeare, Muhammad Ali and Nelson Mandela. It talks about the universality of the humanitarian approach.

Let us talk about education in Scotland and the commitment that existed in Scotland before it existed in any other country in the world to have compulsory education in schools. Let us talk about emigration from Scotland. In my constituency, there is a place called Canada hill, where the families of emigrants watched people who were being forced out of their own country.

Let us talk about Adam Smith and "The Theory of Moral Sentiments", and about the fact that the Chinese vice-premier, when he visited here earlier this year, had a copy with him, because he carries it everywhere.

Let us talk about the poetry of Pablo Neruda; and let us talk about his reflection on Guernica. And let us talk about the fact that the finest translator of Pablo Neruda is the Scottish poet Alastair Reid.

Claudia Beamish: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Claire Baker: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Michael Russell: Let us talk about the Shirley McKie case and about fingerprinting in Scotland. Let us talk about Dr Henry Faulds—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Will members please settle down a bit?

Michael Russell: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I was getting slightly overexcited at the thought.

Let us talk about Dr Henry Faulds, to whom there is a plaque in the town of Beith, where he was born. He was the man who invented the modern science of fingerprinting.

Claire Baker: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Michael Russell: No. I am telling you things that you need to know.

Let us talk about the city of Edinburgh. We have already heard about Hutton's stone, which we can see from here, out of the window. Let us talk about Rock house, on Calton hill, where the world documentary tradition of photography was founded.

Let us talk about the poet Robert Fergusson and about the fact that, from this very chamber, the Nobel prizewinner, Wole Soyinka, walked with me to the statue. We talked about the influence of Scottish poets on the world.

Let us talk socialism—although I know that that is embarrassing for the Labour Party. Let us talk about the injustice that was perpetrated on John Maclean, the first Soviet consul, who was sent to jail by a Scottish judge for five years for opposing a capitalist war. Let us talk trade unionism. A new biography of Robert Smillie, the miners' champion, was published this very week at the Labour Party conference. Some might think that that was an inappropriate place these days for such a book.

Let us talk about Bonawe, again in my constituency. At the ironworks, there is a monument and a tribute to Nelson and the battle of Trafalgar. Yes, the history of the union is part of the history of this country. That needs to be taught, too.

I could go on for a long time, but I will not.

Members: More!

Michael Russell: Thank you, but I will not.

The Presiding Officer: You have 30 seconds.

Michael Russell: Let us talk about the need to ensure that we understand who we are and where we came from. Let us show enthusiasm for that, and let us have nothing to do with the delay and the dissembling that we have heard from the united forces of conservatism in this chamber today. *[Applause.]*

The Presiding Officer: Settle down, members.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are nine questions to be put as a result of today's business.

I remind members that, in relation to the debate on cancer drugs and their availability in Scotland, if the amendment in the name of Nicola Sturgeon is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Alison McInnes will fall. In relation to the debate on Scotland's colleges, if the amendment in the name of Michael Russell is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Ken Macintosh will fall. In relation to the debate on Scottish studies, if the amendment in the name of Claire Baker is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Liz Smith will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-00956.2, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-00956, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on cancer drugs and their availability in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 102, Against 12, Abstentions 4.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-00956, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on cancer drugs and their availability in Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)

Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 106, Against 12, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Scottish Government's significant and proactive developments in policy for the introduction and uptake of new medicines and the positive endorsement of these by the Public Petitions Committee; agrees that Scotland has robust arrangements for the introduction of newly licensed clinically and cost effective medicines, including cancer drugs, through the Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC) and Healthcare Improvement Scotland, which operate independently from the Scottish Government; notes that, in certain circumstances, there are opportunities for local clinically led consideration of SMC "not recommended" medicines for individual patients; notes that Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Myeloma UK and Macmillan Cancer Support do not agree that the Cancer Drugs Fund is a necessary policy measure in Scotland; notes that the Scottish Government is working with the UK Department of Health with regard to the introduction of value-based pricing, and welcomes the intention to improve cancer survival rates through the detect cancer early implementation plan, backed up by the investment of £30 million.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-00955.2, in the name of Michael Russell, which seeks to amend motion S4M-00955, in the name of Liz Smith, on Scotland's colleges, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)

Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)

Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-00955, in the name of Liz Smith, on Scotland's colleges, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 50, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament commends the valuable work of the nation's colleges; welcomes the commitment from Scotland's Colleges to work constructively with the Scottish Government to deliver learner-centred reform of post-16 education; supports the Opportunities for All programme that will provide a suitable place in learning or training for all 16 to 19-year-olds not already in work or education; notes the value to the people of Scotland of maintaining free access to higher education, and completely rejects the introduction of tuition fees for Scotland-domiciled students.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-00959.2, in the name of Claire Baker, which seeks to amend motion S4M-00959, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on Scottish studies, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 38, Against 80, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-00959.1, in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S4M-00959, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on Scottish studies, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)

McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 16, Against 102, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-00959, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on Scottish studies, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)

Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 68, Against 12, Abstentions 30.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the 90% level of support for Scottish Studies in a recent survey; agrees that it is essential that all young people should have the opportunity to learn and be better informed about their country and its place in the world, including its historical, literary, linguistic and cultural inheritance as well as its landscape and natural heritage, and that such learning provides a more relevant and connected learning experience that raises ambition and attainment for all, and supports the Scottish Government's desire to develop a distinct strand of learning around Scottish Studies for all pupils in the context of the Curriculum for Excellence, providing greater coherence without marginalisation.

Lightburn Hospital

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-00681, in the name of Paul Martin, on stopping the closure of Lightburn hospital. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with deep concern the decision by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to close Lightburn Hospital in the east end of Glasgow and to relocate its services to Glasgow Royal Infirmary and Stobhill Hospital; considers that this proposal will have a devastating effect for many people in the wider east end of Glasgow who rely on this local healthcare facility and believes that this will result in lengthy journeys by often unsuitable public transport; believes that local rehabilitation healthcare facilities are important in ensuring a more effective recovery; recognises the health challenges that face the communities in the east end of Glasgow and considers that the closure will have a devastating effect in their battle to improve health and wellbeing; welcomes the Scottish Government's policy on the presumption against centralisation, and would welcome such a presumption being taken into account when the future of local facilities are being considered.

17:10

Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): I thank those members who have supported my motion and I welcome the save Lightburn hospital campaigners who join us in the public gallery. The debate also gives me an important opportunity to pay tribute to Gerry McCann, who has led the community campaign for Lightburn hospital's future in the east end community.

Those members who are not familiar with the east end of Glasgow where Lightburn hospital is located will have heard on numerous occasions about the horrendous health challenges that the east end of Glasgow faces, which health professionals, academics, the press and the media have often advised us of. For example, 32 per cent of people who live there are more likely to die from heart disease, 36 per cent of them are more likely to have their health classified as not good and 40 per cent of them are more likely to die from lung cancer.

Taking that background into consideration, it seems astonishing that Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board proposes to accelerate the deterioration of those health figures by closing the very health facility that could assist in their improvement. For 65 years, Lightburn has been a lifeline facility for many of its users. Its 75 beds have been used by patients who require intensive support, such as those with Parkinson's. I pay tribute to the valued service that staff at Lightburn have provided over those years.

I do not doubt for a minute that we are all united in our aspiration to improve public health. That should go without saying. I would have expected the same of Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board but, during its consultation on Lightburn's future, it has displayed little concern for those people who will have to spend an additional 90 minutes on bus journeys to visit relatives or to attend day appointments. The board has been unable to deal with the many arguments that have been put to it in connection with public transport, and it has failed to provide evidence that the proposed changes would improve public health, which should be the aspiration of any health board. Its arrogance towards, and lack of concern for, those people who use Lightburn was displayed recently when it evicted the Parkinson's group from the facility that has assisted its members' rehabilitation for many years. That is clearly unacceptable.

It is clear from my dealings with the health board over the years that a trend of running down health facilities that are earmarked for closure has prevailed for many years. It is the job of this elected chamber to stand up to that unacceptable practice of running down services before decisions have been taken by the relevant minister, and it is time that we did so.

In moving forward, I call on the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy—who, it must be noted, has unfortunately not attended the debate; I would welcome an explanation of why that is the case from the Minister for Public Health—to reject the recommendation that the health board has put to her. I do so for a number of reasons, which I included in my submission to the consultation process, but let me specify two of them.

First, the health board has again presided over a flawed consultation process in which, from the outset, it has promoted its own agenda by advising us of its preferred option. The process was so flawed that much of the information that was provided requires further clarification. I will elaborate. The board reports in its transport needs assessment that more than 80 per cent of those who attend the day hospital at Lightburn use an ambulance or patient transport and that less than 20 per cent of them travel by car. I note that the document says that none of them uses bus or train to travel to Lightburn hospital.

To suggest in that document that everyone from the east end has access to a car or patient transport shows clearly how out of touch the health board is with the reality of the local situation. Car ownership in the east end is among the lowest in the United Kingdom. It must be recognised that many of my constituents will have to use public transport—limited as it is, given the

challenges that we face in the bus industry. That is a flaw in the consultation document proposals.

Secondly, and most important of all, I ask the minister to recognise the negative impact that such changes will have on the community and to take into consideration the fact that poor public transport links to the other sites will ensure that the residents of the east end of Glasgow face genuine challenges every day. We need to recognise that east-end residents will simply give up on visiting a relative who needs a visit in hospital, or give up on the much longer journey to an important day patient appointment.

I would think that the minister would have preferred an objective process that allowed for a genuine discussion on the hospital's future, not a carefully crafted consultation document that pointed towards the response that the health board would welcome.

I do not doubt that the decision will be difficult for the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy, Nicola Sturgeon. We acknowledge that she must take the decision based on the facts that are placed before her. However, this case is the first test of the Government's stated presumption against centralisation. It is the first opportunity that the cabinet secretary has had this session to put that policy into action, and I call on her to act on it.

The cabinet secretary will have to consider all the facts. I ask her to reflect on the fact that closing a facility that has been part of the community for 65 years would condemn the east end's residents to more of the health inequalities that we have witnessed over a number of years.

I call on members to support the motion in my name.

17:17

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I am all too aware that we live in difficult times and that difficult decisions must be made. I have some background on the matter because, at the moment, there is a pre-consultation on the closure of ward 15—the paediatric ward—at the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley. The arguments are similar, as is the debate that is going on with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

I say to the minister that my experience is that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has been difficult to work with at times. It has made the situation difficult for parents and national health service staff, but we are working across the parties locally—which can be difficult in radical Renfrewshire—to get the best out of it. It is important that we get a clinical reason to retain ward 15.

It seems that the Labour Party always tries to politicise such debates; I find that difficult. Numerous times, whether in Paisley or Glasgow, Labour hypocritically blames everyone but itself for such decisions. I find myself speaking on a Labour motion to stop the closure of a hospital—Lightburn hospital—that the same party in Glasgow City Council voted to close 10 months ago. That shows the duplicity of Labour in politics from chamber to chamber.

Paul Martin rose—

George Adam: If Mr Martin wishes to explain himself, I am happy for him to do so.

Paul Martin: We should always welcome politicians showing humility. I have here the charter that Gordon Matheson, the leader of Glasgow City Council, signed. He listened to the campaigners and elected members and took the decision that his council would not accept the flawed consultation. Does George Adam accept that that is an example of a politician showing humility and that we should welcome that?

George Adam: I accept that it is the action of the leader of Glasgow City Council as he goes into a difficult council election next year. Those are the politics of expediency, not the politics of humility.

We find ourselves in the same situation that we were in in Holyrood in 2002. I am sure that the individuals who were involved at the time remember that they were instrumental in starting the process of decision making about the hospital. Perhaps I should not be too surprised, given Labour's record on the health service and hospitals in particular.

In 2007, we had a new Administration at Holyrood, and the new health secretary, Nicola Sturgeon, announced that the proposed closures of accident and emergency hospitals in Ayr and Monklands would be reversed. At the time of the cabinet secretary's announcement that we would keep the hospitals open, Andy Kerr said that she had

"abdicated her responsibility to take tough decisions"

and that the announcement would

"cause months of uncertainty, put services at risk, shatter the confidence of clinicians, cause a flight of specialist skills and, most notably—as the evidence demonstrates—put patients' lives at risk".—[*Official Report*, 6 June 2007; c 395-396.]

Once again, the Labour Party's arguments are all over the place.

In the year and a half since Nicola Sturgeon's decision to keep Monklands hospital open, there were 110,782 accident and emergency attendees at Monklands and 69,613 at Ayr.

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

George Adam: I will finish my point.

If Labour had been elected in 2007, how many people would have had elongated journeys for accident and emergency treatment? I am willing to put my faith in the current SNP Government's record and that of the previous Administration. Waiting times have gone down; we have brought in free prescriptions and 1,000 extra cleaners in hospitals; 1 million more Scots are registered with NHS dentists; and £840 million of investment has been made in the new Southern general hospital.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Adam, in your conclusion, perhaps you could come back to Lightburn hospital.

George Adam: I will indeed. In the corridors of Glasgow City Council, Labour has conspired to close a local hospital, while in the public glare of Holyrood, Labour members are ripping their clothes and protesting too much. It is sheer hypocrisy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if members could bear in mind the motion that we are debating.

17:22

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Paul Martin for securing the debate. I also welcome the members of the East Glasgow Parkinson's support group to Parliament this evening along with some of my colleagues from Glasgow City Council.

There is widespread concern at Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board's decision to close Lightburn hospital, as was demonstrated by the recent march and rally calling for the plans to be dropped.

As some members will be aware, the east end of Glasgow has some of the poorest health statistics in Scotland and the United Kingdom. We know that the rates of heart disease, stroke and cancer are extremely high and that life expectancy figures, particularly for men, are at an alarming level. We must therefore question why our local communities, which rely on the vital services that are provided at Lightburn hospital, will be cut off from them and will be given little or no alternative.

The lack of alternative for local people is why the Scottish Government must step up and keep Lightburn hospital open. Rates of car ownership are significantly lower in the east end than they are in Glasgow as a whole, which means that more people in the area rely on public transport. However, the bus services coming out of the east end are limited, particularly in Cranhill, from where

there is no public transport after 7 o'clock. As local people will rely on public transport to get to alternative hospitals, they are left with no alternative. Even if someone meets the criteria and qualifies for patient transport, it finishes at half past 6 in the evening, leaving local people with no alternative. With no direct trains or buses to Stobhill hospital from the wider east end area, local people will again be left with no alternative.

Even if someone is able to get to a different hospital, there is no guarantee that it will be able to take the patients that Lightburn would have been able to take. Stobhill hospital has been selected as one of the hospitals that could shoulder the burden of the closure of the Lightburn hospital, but the acute bed space that would be required at Stobhill is not even in place, so where is the viable alternative for patients?

I heard today that a person from the east end of Glasgow has had to be hospitalised in Edinburgh, which means that he does not have the vital support of his family, who cannot afford to go there on a daily basis.

What all this means for local people is that there is no alternative to Lightburn hospital if it closes. That is why they have campaigned so strongly to keep it open and why the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy must listen to those calls and act to halt the hospital's closure.

17:25

Humza Yousaf (Glasgow) (SNP): I thank Paul Martin for securing this important members' business debate. As Anne McTaggart said, the East Glasgow Parkinson's support group is present in the gallery, so I welcome them and put on the record my thanks for the incredible work that they have done in their campaign, which has been robust and rigorous.

The members' business debates in the evening give us a chance to discuss some of the most important issues in our localities. There can be few issues more important than the potential closure of a hospital. When John Swinney spoke to members in the chamber last week, there was the usual, predictable huffing and puffing from Opposition members about the spending review—I am sure that we probably did the same when the shoe was on the other foot; that is the nature of politics at times. However, as the dust has settled and the analysis continues, no one in the chamber, as George Adam said, is under any illusion that we are living in anything but the most difficult circumstances for at least a generation. No member here doubts that difficult decisions have to be made by the Scottish Government and by every layer of government, including at a local level.

One thing that I am pleased is no longer a strain—although the effects are still very much felt—is the use of expensive private finance initiative contracts to build hospitals and schools. Just this week, the UK Government announced that 60 hospitals are under threat of closure in England due to expensive PFI deals that were negotiated by the previous Government. The burden of that debt will outlive us and transfer on to the shoulders of future generations. It is worth mentioning that this Government has an outstanding record of keeping hospitals open. As has been said, one of its first acts, of course, was to keep open the accident and emergency wards at the Monklands and Vale of Leven hospitals.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Humza Yousaf: I need to crack on but, when I get through some of my points, I will take the member's intervention.

I do not doubt that Paul Martin genuinely believes that Lightburn hospital should be spared from closure. However, there are some questions that must be answered. He is undoubtedly aware that, as has been mentioned, it was his colleagues in Glasgow City Council who voted for the closure of Lightburn hospital. In the committee papers, which are in the public domain, it is clear that the council leader, Gordon Matheson, personally pushed through approval for the closure. The exact minute reads:

"The Council acknowledges the financial and clinical advantages to the Health Board of option 2."

Option 2, of course, was the closure of Lightburn. Not only did the ruling administration of the council pass the bill, it prevented a motion from SNP councillors, one of whom was James Dornan, to delay the decision and extend the consultation.

Paul Martin: Can we now accept that we need to move forward in this debate, given that the council leader has accepted the arguments put to him by the protesters? Will the member now join the campaign?

Humza Yousaf: It is admirable to want to move on, but we have to build on the foundations of where this came from. Clearly, it is a highly politicised debate. I will come back to exactly what Paul Martin said, but he cannot just move on and ignore the decisions that he is now asking the Government to overturn. We need to see where all this stemmed from.

All this was done by the leader of Glasgow City Council, who then had the audacity to turn up to a press call to sign a petition—Paul Martin showed us a copy of it—supporting the campaign to save the very hospital that he had condemned just a few months earlier. The last time I saw such a

volte face was when Nick Clegg ripped up his National Union of Students pledge and jeopardised the future of an entire generation by voting for tuition fees.

Again, I have no doubt that Paul Martin genuinely wishes Lightburn hospital to be kept open if at all possible. I would welcome it if he could say what discussions he had with council colleagues at the time. Did he approach them to vote against the closure when it came before the council? What was the nature of the discussions and why did he not condemn his colleagues for how they voted when the decision was made?

I support an extension to the consultation process so that the widest range of views can be heard. I know from speaking to many in the local area that Lightburn hospital is a valuable community asset, given that 450 elderly people are cared for there every year.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you could come to a conclusion now.

Humza Yousaf: I, too, will be making representations to the cabinet secretary.

Nobody wants to see the closure of a single one of our communities' hospitals. However, what angers people more and puts them completely off engaging in this political process is the hypocrisy and the double standards that are sometimes exhibited by a minority in the process.

17:30

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in this evening's members' business debate, which I congratulate Paul Martin on securing.

As Humza Yousaf said, these debates are important because they allow us to bring local issues to the floor of the Parliament. It is therefore regrettable that some SNP speakers have been diverted into launching political diatribes against the Labour Party, rather than concentrating on the concerns of the campaigners who have come to the Parliament tonight.

As well as being the MSP for the neighbouring constituency to Lightburn hospital, which some of my constituents use, I have family connections in the east end, so I am very familiar with the hospital, which I have visited as a relative on many occasions. I am aware that the hospital has been central to the community in the east end for many years and that it is very much recognised as providing appropriate healthcare.

I congratulate Gerry McCann and the other campaigners on waging such a successful campaign. The fact that the campaign in that locality attracted 14,000 signatures shows the

strength of support for retaining the hospital. The campaigners were successful not only in attracting signatures but in taking the message out into the communities affected by its potential closure.

Paul Martin made two specific points that are very important. One was about transport. I am aware that not everyone in the east end and in my constituency has a car. There is quite a big elderly population, who require public transport to get to hospital. As some other members have pointed out, if the hospital were to close, the length of journey that would be required to get to the alternatives would make things particularly difficult.

The other important point that Paul Martin made was about relatives going to visit patients. What keeps patients, particularly elderly patients, going in hospital is the thought of a relative or a friend coming to visit them. Over the years, many people in the east end have faithfully visited patients who have unfortunately been hospitalised in Lightburn. Moving the resource to another area would have a deeply debilitating effect on visits from families and relatives.

Humza Yousaf: Will the member answer the questions that I asked Paul Martin? When Glasgow City Council made the decision, what discussions did he have with the leader of the council? What was the nature of those discussions and did he express his condemnation at the time?

James Kelly: As Paul Martin has correctly pointed out, Gordon Matheson has recognised the strength of the local campaign that has been waged. Perhaps the SNP members present would achieve more credibility in the eyes of the campaigners if they showed the same humility.

I realise that I am running out of time, so I want to pay tribute to the Parkinson's unit within Lightburn hospital, which I know provides a particular specialist service, which Gerry McCann and other local patients use. It is important to try and retain that service in the local area.

Parliament and the cabinet secretary have an important opportunity to listen to local campaigners and bring about change in the local area. Politics is about making a difference. Paul Martin has brought this issue to the Parliament. Let us make a difference. I urge the cabinet secretary to reject the decision by the health board.

17:35

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): I first remind members that North Lanarkshire went through the same type of sham consultation on the closure of Monklands accident and emergency department a number of years ago. NHS Lanarkshire moved for closure, totally dismissing

all public objections. The local Labour Party came out against the closure, but the Labour Party in this Parliament agreed with the proposal to close it. It took the Scottish National Party and the now Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy to reverse the proposed closure soon after taking power in 2007. Now, when it comes to Lightburn, history repeats itself. The proposed closure of Lightburn hospital is yet another example of one section of Labour voting for the closure of a hospital or service and another section of Labour mounting a campaign against any closure. It is commonly called having your cake and eating it.

On a Scottish Labour Party website, Paul Martin MSP calls for a debate on the proposed closure of Lightburn and suggests that it is time for the SNP Government to live up to its promise on ensuring that there is a presumption against centralisation. Paul Martin states on that website:

"There's a ... strong feeling of support in the East End of Glasgow for ensuring Lightburn Hospital has a future. I hope Nicola Sturgeon joins the community campaign to ensure the future of a hospital that has been an integral part of the community for decades."

Nowhere on the website does the member suggest that the Labour-controlled Glasgow City Council should rescind its decision to support the closure of Lightburn. Nowhere does the member condemn the council's involvement in the closure proposals.

On 25 November 2010, Glasgow City Council executive committee discussed the closure; it was item 7 on the agenda. The committee's recommendations were as follows:

"the Council acknowledges the financial and clinical advantages to the Health Board of option 2, but makes this support conditional on appropriate transport links being established to allow satisfactory visitor access from the East of the city to Stobhill Hospital; and ... the Council's support for option 2 was further conditional on transparent negotiations taking place as a matter of urgency between the Health Board and the Council on the potential impact of these proposals on demand for community-based Social Work Services."

The report went on to list a number of significant issues: it would leave the east end of the city without any acute beds for older people, there were concerns regarding visitor access given the absence of adequate public transport, and there were concerns regarding the rebalancing of beds from rehabilitation to assessment. Even with all those concerns, which should have made the case for retention, Councillor Matheson, the leader of the council, seconded by Councillor Graham—both Scottish Labour councillors—moved that the committee agree with the recommendation.

I further note from the minutes that

"Councillor James Dornan,"—

now an MSP—

“seconded by Councillor Hendry,”—

both SNP councillors—

“moved ... an amendment ... to extend the consultation period.”

Only three members voted for the amendment, while 13 voted for the motion. We now hear that they have changed their minds. It is not hard to guess which party most of the 13 were from.

I agreed with James Dornan when he stated that Labour has an

“appalling track record over hospital closures”

and that Labour has tried to deceive the people of the east end on the issue.

I know Lightburn hospital—my daughter started her nursing career there a number of years ago. I will refer to a recent e-mail from a constituent regarding hospital bed availability in Glasgow—this is where my comments may differ from others. His mother-in-law, Mrs Martha Harris, fell at her front door and was transported to the Western infirmary after being treated at A and E. There was no room at the inn but, thankfully, later that morning a bed was found for the Rev C B Ross’s mother-in-law. His formal complaint is about the number of hospital beds that are available in a major city. The closure of Lightburn hospital would put more pressure on the number of available beds in Glasgow and would add to pressure on other services. There should be further consultation.

I thank Paul Martin for bringing the debate to Parliament, but I must say to him: a politician has to be consistent. There are other places where the member could have pressed the case, such as his local branch—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Lyle, you will have to finish now.

Richard Lyle: I wish Paul Martin well in the campaign, and I thank him for bringing the debate to the Parliament.

17:40

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I join other members in congratulating Paul Martin on securing the debate. I also congratulate and welcome to the public gallery the save Lightburn hospital campaign. I add my tribute to Gerry McCann and the east Glasgow support group, who have been vigorous in their efforts to protect their local services.

We should make no mistake: this is not a parochial response that is simply about retaining a local hospital; it is about recognising an extremely valuable service for older people, people with

Parkinson’s and the wider community. I regret the fact that some members have failed to recognise that. The decision is for the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government—it is for nobody else—and it is proper that we should debate it here.

I agree with George Adam—who made an otherwise disappointing speech—that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is extremely difficult to deal with; I have experience of that. Paul Martin is right to say that it operates with sleight of hand. Its removing services even before the cabinet secretary has had a chance to reflect and make a decision is entirely inappropriate. The health board has also taken a heavy-handed attitude to the Parkinson’s group. Closing down opposition may be something that Governments like to do, but for the health board to do it by throwing people out of its premises is entirely inappropriate, and I hope that all members will condemn such action.

It is not enough—and I do not have sufficient time—to consider the merits of the proposal. I always do two things: I listen to the clinicians and I balance their view against the interests of the local community. There are clinicians who are against the proposed change and it is clear that the local community, with a petition bearing 14,000 signatures, a march through Carntyne and a rally, is also against the change. Therefore, we need to consider the proposal extremely carefully.

We hear that there is no evidence that the change will improve health and wellbeing. The benefit of keeping services local, which we know about, is that it aids recovery. If people have visitors, family and carers around them, that improves their experience in hospital and supports their re-ablement and rehabilitation. We all agree on that. However, for me, this is also about the east end of Glasgow being one of the most deprived areas in Scotland. The proposal would create a health desert, and that is not an appropriate action for anybody in the chamber.

Let me illustrate the reality and the consequence of the proposal with two stories that I got from members of the hospital campaign group. The first involves Anne McCaffery and is about travel. She left her house at 6 am for an appointment at 9.30 am. She arrived at 9.25 am. It had taken her 3 hours and 25 minutes to get from the east end of Glasgow to Stobhill hospital. Anne has had two strokes and has a tumour on the right-hand side of her brain. She took the bus to Baillieston Main Street, from Edinburgh Road to the back of the royal infirmary, from the royal infirmary to Springburn, and from Springburn to the old Marie Curie hospice. Then, she had to walk uphill along a back road with poor lighting for 30 minutes. It took her four bus journeys and a

half-hour walk when she was not feeling well. That is not appropriate.

The second story is about older people, as the closure of Lightburn hospital will see the transfer of beds for the care of the elderly: two wards to the royal infirmary and two wards to Stobhill for reassessment—that is what was promised to the people in the east end. On the face of it, that seems fine, but that is not the reality now. They will not go to the royal and Stobhill—there are no beds there. Older people are currently being sent to the Southern general and the Western, and I even heard of somebody being sent to Wishaw. That is not keeping services local. The SNP went into the 2007 election with a policy of keeping health services local and, given my experience locally, I agreed with that policy.

I am the shadow health minister for Labour, and Labour Party decisions about health policy in Scotland are made in this chamber. It is also the responsibility of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to make a decision on Lightburn hospital—they should not duck that responsibility. I urge the minister to ensure that the cabinet secretary listens to community concerns and, more important, backs them and keeps Lightburn hospital open.

17:44

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I thank Paul Martin for securing the debate. Like other members, I congratulate the campaigners on what has been a magnificent campaign.

Strangely, this is coming across as a pro and anti debate, but that is not what it is at all. I do not think that there is anybody in the chamber who does not support the campaigners and wish them all the best, and who does not see the difficulties that the closure may well cause.

As has been said, the problem is one of finance but also one of politics. I hate to bring it up, but I am the only politician in the chamber who has previously voted to keep the hospital open. When I was on Glasgow City Council the council leader moved a motion to support the health board's move to close Lightburn hospital—with, I accept, a couple of provisos based around transport.

Paul Martin: As the member is so committed to the future of Lightburn hospital, why has he not signed my motion, which is about retaining Lightburn hospital? That is a perfectly legitimate question.

James Dornan: I have not signed Mr Martin's motion because it is completely politically expedient. The closure of the hospital was mooted in 2002. We were not in power in 2002. The Labour Party was in power when the proposal was

first made. The issue went to the Labour-controlled executive in 2010 and it voted to close the hospital.

Paul Martin gives the game away when he says, "I have in my hand a piece of paper that Gordon Matheson signed." As George Adam said, signing the charter was very much a political ploy, given that Gordon Matheson was the guy who possibly helped to ring the death knell for the hospital.

If the council had supported my amendment, we would not be where we are now. For the health board to go ahead at that stage, the council had to support it. We asked for a delay so that further consultation could take place to ensure that people could get their message across to the health board and to Labour politicians. Instead, you waited until the boundaries changed and you needed to start supporting the campaign, because the hospital is in your constituency. This is a very important issue. We support the work that the campaigners have done and we congratulate them on that work, but let us not kid ourselves: this is not a motion on the future of the hospital; this is a motion for some of you over there to save face.

Jackie Baillie: That is outrageous.

James Dornan: It is not outrageous; those are the facts. The facts are that if you had stuck to your principles, we would not be having this debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Dornan, I ask you to speak through the chair.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member care to comment on who, ultimately, will decide on NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's recommendation to close Lightburn hospital?

James Dornan: We know who will take the ultimate decision: the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy. The problem is that she would not have to take that ultimate decision if your party had taken the proper decision last November.

I have faith that the cabinet secretary will take everything into account and will come to the proper conclusion when she gets the evidence in front of her, but please stop trying to evade your responsibilities. You are trying to pretend that you are a champion of these campaigners when your colleagues have led them down this path. Your colleagues should have stood up for these campaigners 10 months ago and before. Your colleagues should not have supported a move that has brought us to where we are now.

As far as I am concerned, we will leave the matter in the hands of the cabinet secretary. I am sure that she will take everything into account and make the proper decision when the time comes.

17:49

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): I thank Paul Martin for securing this debate on an important issue and I welcome the campaigners from various campaign strands who are here this evening.

It is clear from Paul Martin's speech that there is strength of feeling in the local community about the future provision of rehabilitation services for people in the east end of Glasgow and about the future of Lightburn hospital. I am aware that Paul Martin has presented the cabinet secretary with a petition, which I think has been signed by about 12,000 people who oppose the closure of Lightburn hospital.

I am not able to respond in detail to many of the points that have been raised in the debate. As members know, ministers have a formal role in cases of major service change and the cabinet secretary will in due course consider the NHS board's proposals and come to a final view on the recommendations that the board has agreed. For that reason, she is not able to respond to the debate this evening.

I assure members that, in coming to a decision, the cabinet secretary will consider all information that is available to her and take all representations into account, including the formal position of Glasgow City Council. In that respect, the debate is important in that it enables us to hear at first hand members' views, which will inform the cabinet secretary's considerations.

Paul Martin: Will the minister dissociate himself from the views of John Mason, who suggested in a letter to the social work director that Lightburn hospital was a possible site for the relocation of the social work call centre?

Michael Matheson: I will not comment on correspondence that I have not seen. I have made it clear that ministers will not get involved in some of the detail that has been explored in the debate, because of the formal process in which we are involved. I can advise members that the cabinet secretary has accepted an invitation to meet the save Lightburn hospital action group and listen to the group's views, as part of her deliberations.

I can also explain how the cabinet secretary will come to a final view. There are two strands of consideration. First, as with all ministerial decisions that relate to the NHS, our primary concern will be the quality of the service that is offered to patients. Secondly, the cabinet secretary must be satisfied with the adequacy of the public involvement, engagement and consultation process that the board has undertaken.

On quality, it has been made clear to all boards that the benchmark for planning and redesign of all healthcare services is that plans must be fully underpinned by the three clearly-articulated and widely-accepted ambitions of our quality strategy, which are based on what people have told us they want from their national health service: care that is person centred, safe and effective. Achieving those ambitions for every patient must be the starting and finishing points of all service redesign proposals. The cabinet secretary will scrutinise Glasgow's proposals for rehabilitation services against our three ambitions and she will need to be satisfied that patients will receive the quality of care that they deserve and are entitled to.

On the requirement for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to inform, engage and consult local people and other stakeholders when planning and developing health services, NHS boards have a statutory duty to involve patients and the public in the planning and development of health services. Guidance that was issued in February 2010, "Informing, Engaging and Consulting People in Developing Health and Community Care Services", sets out how boards should go about doing that. The cabinet secretary will examine the board's processes for developing the proposals for Lightburn hospital against the requirements that are set out in the guidance.

I assure members that we have made it clear to all boards that we expect the interests of patients to be paramount in the development of services and that we expect patients' views to have been sought from a very early stage of consideration. We expect the reasons for change to be defined clearly, and, where possible, we expect options to be explored and examined in an open way, underpinned with evidence to support the case for change.

We will examine the board's methods of communication with patients and the community that is affected by the proposed changes. The board must be able to demonstrate that potentially affected people and staff have been fully involved at all stages in the process. The board must show that, in coming to a decision, the views of patients, carers, staff, elected representatives and other stakeholders have been listened to, understood and, where appropriate, acted on.

Jackie Baillie: I welcome the minister's comments. Can he give us an indication of the timetable for the cabinet secretary's decision?

Michael Matheson: The cabinet secretary has received the details and intends to engage with the campaign. Following that process, she will be in a position to make a decision. It is important not to set an arbitrary date and rush to a decision on that basis. We must take our time so that we

ensure that we make the right decision in the interests of patients.

To assist us in forming a view on the adequacy of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's processes, we have received a report from the Scottish health council, which was established to ensure that NHS boards meet their patient-focus and public-involvement responsibilities and to support them in doing so. The role of the council in this instance has been to quality assure the process from the early stages right through to the conclusion that has been reached by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and then to produce a report setting out its views on whether the board has involved people in accordance with the Scottish Government guidance that I referred to earlier. That report will form part of the cabinet secretary's considerations.

As I said, it would not be appropriate for me to enter into discussions or make comments about the specific proposals that have been submitted by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to the cabinet secretary. However, I am aware that transport and access issues are a concern for many. Be assured that the cabinet secretary will give careful consideration to all the issues that were raised during the consultation and to the board's responses.

I give members and the public a commitment that the cabinet secretary will not endorse any proposal that does not fit with national policy and guidance or does not guarantee a safe, high-quality and sustainable service for the people of the east of Glasgow.

Meeting closed at 17:56.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.

Members who wish to suggest corrections for the revised e-format edition should e-mail them to official.report@scottish.parliament.uk or send a marked-up printout to the Official Report, Room T2.20.

Available in e-format only. Printed Scottish Parliament documentation is published in Edinburgh by RR Donnelley and is available from:

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

For details of documents available to
order in hard copy format, please contact:
APS Scottish Parliament Publications on 0131 629 9941.

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

e-format first available
ISBN 978-0-85758-814-2

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-0-85758-825-8

Printed in Scotland by APS Group Scotland
