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Thursday 8 March 2012

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 8 March 2012

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

Curriculum for Excellence

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-02242, in the name of Hugh Henry, on curriculum for excellence.

09:15

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I put on record Scottish Labour's support for curriculum for excellence. We want it to work, and to work well. We think that, once it is embedded, it will make a significant contribution to putting 21st century Scottish education right up there with the best in the world. It is because we want it to be a success that we are speaking up for the thousands of teachers and parents across Scotland who are expressing fears and concerns.

I know that this is an unusual thing for a politician to say, but I hope that I am wrong. I hope that I am wrong about the state of readiness for curriculum for excellence, and I hope that Mike Russell is right when he says that the state of preparedness is good. For the sake of all Scotland's pupils, I genuinely hope that the cabinet secretary will be able to demonstrate that my fears and concerns are misplaced.

I support the cabinet secretary when he says that more support will be made available to the teachers and schools that need it, and I would welcome details of exactly what additional support has been given to specific schools. An audit is long overdue, and I welcome the cabinet secretary's decision this week to conduct one, but I cannot understand why it has taken until now. I took from his comments to the Education and Culture Committee that a delay might be considered if all other efforts had failed at the end of a process of support, but the problem is that we are nearing the end of that process. At the end of April, teachers will be expected to absorb the new details and, in many schools, to start teaching the new courses at the beginning of June.

Now is the time, therefore, to listen to the professionals who will have to deliver the new exam courses and, if we truly believe that parents have a role to play in educating their children, we should listen also to the concerns of anxious parents. We need to listen to parents who cannot get answers to reasonable questions put to teachers. We cannot afford to gamble with our

children's future. Teachers across Scotland are saying that they and the materials are not ready so, today, why do we not let the voices of teachers and parents tell the story? Politicians should be listening to them.

When teachers say that they are nowhere near ready for implementation, are they wrong? What about the teacher who says,

"In my school, at least half of the teachers have had their concerns rejected out of hand by the local authority, who insist that there is no alternative",

or the one who says,

"At a meeting of our school, several staff asked to be allowed to continue to offer intermediate courses in the best interests of our pupils. We were told that we must deliver the National 4 and National 5 courses. If only our authority had the courage of East Renfrewshire?"

What about the teacher who says

"I am a history teacher and I can say with confidence that none of my colleagues have any confidence in the new system",

or the one who says,

"I work in a high school. We are nowhere near ready for implementation. We have had no guidelines on how we are going to assess. It will be a complete disaster"?

Other teachers say,

"I am just concerned that there is not a proper course in place. Mr Russell talks about this additional support. I've looked online. I don't know where it is",

and,

"Ask Mike Russell this: can departments be expected to deliver three courses ... for August (or even May if the timetable is changed earlier) if the final versions are only being published in April? Is it good planning to have a four-week window to write these three, two-year courses?"

Another has said:

"As a teacher, I find the workload of Curriculum for Excellence overwhelming. Unfortunately no one will speak out because, as a teacher, you are in a no win situation. If the Curriculum succeeds then it will be the Government and Education Scotland who get the credit, not the teachers who have made themselves ill to try to make it work. On the other hand, if it fails then it will be the fault of teachers for not implementing it properly. So teachers cannot speak out."

It is not just secondary teachers who are expressing concerns. A relatively new primary teacher said:

"I was very excited to start teaching Curriculum for Excellence. After all, it is hard not to like ideas such as collaborative group work, formative assessment and making our kids responsible citizens.

We have no new materials and mostly use exactly the same 5-14 material that was in place or resources scavenged from the internet.

The National Assessment Resource is a joke—materials have been scanned from old 5-14 resources or look as

though they have come from student teachers. No use to man or beast.

I am fundamentally committed to Curriculum for Excellence but I now feel that its implementation has been a disaster which really does have the possibility of wrecking the education of our kids."

Those are her words, not mine. Another said:

"It is like the Emperor's new clothes. There is no detail, but everyone is afraid to say so."

It is not just teachers. Why do we not listen to parents such as the one who said:

"I have been hitting brick wall after brick wall despite writing several letters to his school. I have now attended Parents' evening at my son's school, and am more concerned than ever about my son's educational future. At parents' evening, teachers were unable to answer specific questions about the syllabus or assessments. Several teachers told me off the record that Curriculum for Excellence is in shambles, but that they are not allowed to speak out about it.

I am afraid that children like my son will be the losers if it is allowed to go ahead this year?"

What about the couple who were worried that their son and his classmates were—to use their words, not mine—"guinea pigs" for a change that was unclear to them and, indeed, to teachers? They said:

"We are worried that teachers themselves are unsure".

One parent said:

"Right now, I have no idea when my son will make his subject choices or if he will be offered the breadth of qualifications needed to enter University. Teachers were unable to tell me much about the qualifications."

I do not underestimate the gravity of the situation or the dilemma that the cabinet secretary faces. The motion was lodged not to try to divide support for curriculum for excellence; rather, it was lodged for a very practical reason. Too many teachers and parents remain unpersuaded that everything is on track, as the cabinet secretary has suggested, and all the teaching unions are reporting concerns from members that delivery cannot be achieved in a consistent manner across Scotland within the current timetable. Indeed, the Educational Institute of Scotland today published a survey of its members in secondary schools that showed that fewer than 5 per cent of the respondents were very confident that their department will be able to deliver the exams on time, and 82 per cent said that the quality and the level of support from the Scottish Government is unsatisfactory. Teachers are saying that they need more time as well as more resources.

Why is it acceptable to grant a delay to an authority with an outstanding record of delivery in education, but wrong to do the same for other teachers who say that they are not ready? We cannot afford to have even a small minority of

pupils disadvantaged. That could live with them for a long time.

Now is the time to examine why there are complaints. Today, we must show that the Parliament is ready to do what is best for our children. We should say that we support the cabinet secretary's offer of more support where that is required but, equally, we should listen when teachers say that they are not ready and that they need more time. Even at this late stage, I appeal to the cabinet secretary to develop a political consensus to work with teachers and parents to do the right thing. A managed delay is better than disorganised chaos.

This is not about politicians; it is not even about parents and teachers. This is about Scotland's pupils. We should not gamble with their future.

I move,

That the Parliament reaffirms its support for the Curriculum for Excellence, which it believes can make a significant contribution to Scottish education; notes however the widespread and persistent concerns being expressed by teachers and parents across Scotland about the readiness of preparation for the new examinations associated with the Curriculum for Excellence; further notes that, despite the reassurances offered by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, these concerns have not been allayed; believes that no pupils in Scotland should be disadvantaged if teachers in any school feel ill-equipped to prepare pupils for the new exams; further believes that the current timetable does not give teachers sufficient time to familiarise themselves with the details, and believes that calls for a delay should be heeded and urgent action taken to secure consistent implementation across Scotland of all aspects of the Curriculum for Excellence.

09:24

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): I am always pleased to have the opportunity in the Parliament to reinforce our long-standing vision for curriculum for excellence, and to congratulate our teachers and everyone who is committed to Scotland's education system on the successful implementation of the curriculum for excellence.

I would be happy to receive from Mr Henry the details of every single individual whom he quoted, and I would be happy to offer additional help and support for every single individual whom he quoted and any others whom he wishes to quote, because my job is to ensure that we support every single teacher and inform every single parent. That is what we will do. If Mr Henry provides those details to me after the debate, we will take supportive action.

However, our shared purpose in the Parliament goes further: we have to ensure that our education system is the best that it can be, and we have to

prepare our young people for an uncertain and challenging world.

As I said to the Education and Culture Committee on Tuesday, the timing of this Labour Party debate is not constructive. There can be only one interpretation of a decision to hold a debate during a period in which it is known that we are in the middle of negotiations with the EIS. That interpretation is that some people may wish to prevent an agreement from being reached between the Government and the EIS on all the support and help that must be made available to teachers at every stage of the programme. Providing that support is precisely what we will do. I am pleased to tell the Parliament that discussions and negotiations are going well. I am optimistic that we will be able to announce more details over the next week or so, which will address the concerns of teachers that have been expressed in the EIS survey and elsewhere.

I am also grateful to the EIS general secretary-elect for another thing: Larry Flanagan has offered to support and facilitate a restoration of the cross-party consensus on curriculum for excellence—a consensus that we need. Larry's strong record in building and developing curriculum for excellence makes him ideally placed to do that. I said to him yesterday that I would want him to take that forward and I told him that he would have my full support. I hope that he will also get the full support of the other education spokespeople in the chamber, so that we can get back to the cross-party consensus that was essential in this process of major change.

Hugh Henry: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Michael Russell: No, I would like to make some progress before I take an intervention.

I am grateful to members of the Education and Culture Committee, whose motives have been in contrast to the motives behind today's debate. Members of the committee have taken the time to question and inquire into the issues that face the programme. Let me put the current criticisms in context. From 2004, the building blocks for curriculum for excellence were laid down in documents establishing the key principles. As Peter Peacock said in 2004, curriculum for excellence would be

"the key liberator ... opening up choice and flexibility in learning for the first time".

Since 2007, we have focused on key implementation issues, and detailed guidance for the curriculum from three to 18 was issued in 2009.

Hugh Henry: The cabinet secretary should not misinterpret expressions of concern over the state

of readiness as a lack of support for curriculum for excellence. There is still cross-party consensus; we do not need Larry Flanagan or anyone else to try to re-establish it. The consensus is still there; the concerns are over the state of readiness.

Michael Russell: I regret that Mr Henry appears unwilling to take part in the discussions with Mr Flanagan. I hope that other spokespeople will not be as unwilling to re-establish the consensus.

The programme that has been rolled out in secondary school since 2010 includes a raft of measures to support schools and teachers. It has included Education Scotland inspectors working in partnership with the Scottish Qualifications Authority and local authorities to provide direct support for capacity building in schools. More than 360 support activities took place during the 2010-11 school year alone. I set up 18 excellence groups to stimulate debate and discussion about the place of subjects. Those groups reported in May 2011. I have given particular priority to information engagement with parents and the production of written fact files, web-based information, and DVDs for parent nights.

I estimate that more than 1,500 professionals from schools, colleges and universities—plus parents, employers, stakeholders and other partners—have engaged with the SQA in the development of the new qualifications. Since I became cabinet secretary in December 2009, I have delivered on all our commitments—including new investment of £3.76 million a year to support teachers' development of assessment. Furthermore, not one target date for the introduction of the new qualifications has been missed on my watch. In the past year alone, the full suite of draft documents for the new national qualifications—from national 1 through to higher—has been published online, to allow all teachers to feed into their development. In addition, a series of SQA and Education Scotland curriculum events, attended by more than 1,000 practitioners, was held over November and December. The final documents will be published, on schedule, in April. That will allow—and I think that I should stress this point, Presiding Officer—16 months for teachers to plan for implementation in secondary 4 in 2013-14.

Calls have been made for delay, and I treat those calls seriously. I treat seriously EIS's survey today. It had a response rate of under 10 per cent of secondary school teachers, but I treat it seriously. However, we have to put some other things into the balance. First, the chamber should fit into the balance the 54,000 young people in the current S2 cohort. Those young people have been in the vanguard for curriculum for excellence since they were in primary school. They are the pupils we should be thinking of. To let them down, and to

desert their aspirations and their education, would be wrong.

Let us also put into the balance the 31 directors of education who confirmed with their headteachers that our 360 secondary schools are on track. Let us also turn to the National Parent Forum of Scotland, which represents every parent council in Scotland, whose chair, Iain Ellis, wrote to me and all our parliamentary spokespersons on 2 March to say:

“Our view is that delay is actually unworkable”.

Last week, the head of the SQA, Janet Brown, warned the Education and Culture Committee that continuing to offer standard grades—so-called triple running—is not tenable. She said:

“the additional risk to our ability to deliver a successful diet would be over the top. The option of triple running is simply not viable.”—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 28 February 2012; c 811.]

We need to listen to those compelling voices.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Michael Russell: No. I want to make progress and I do not have much time.

Although those voices are indeed compelling, I am listening to every single voice. Education Scotland continues to work with local authorities and a new support package will be put in place. We will do everything we can, but we should do it within the context of ensuring that the people who need additional help and support get it. I do not believe that any teacher in Scotland who has the right support, the right help and the right leadership—which will come from the Government, from Education Scotland, from their local authority and from within their school—cannot rise to the challenge and deliver the conclusion of a programme that has been eight years in the making.

Curriculum for excellence is the most important educational reform programme in our generation. It is not a revolution but a wide-ranging process of transformational change that will make our education system fit for the 21st century and improve our children’s achievements, attainment and life chances. We are preparing young people to take on jobs and start up new businesses using technologies that have yet to be invented and brought to market; we are preparing children for an unknown world and we need to have the courage to go ahead with this long-lasting programme.

In conclusion, I quote Rod Grant, the head of Clifton Hall school in Edinburgh, who in today’s *Scotsman* has said:

“the time has come to stop prevaricating and instead to be getting on with the business in hand. A further delay in

CfE’s introduction serves no useful purpose but simply cements current uncertainties and worries and does nothing to improve secondary education in Scotland.”

Let us finish the job that we are doing.

I move amendment S4M-02242.3, to leave out from “however” to end and insert:

“the widespread support for Curriculum for Excellence from teachers, parents and learners, including the hundreds of teachers and other professionals involved in the development of these qualifications; recognises the risks to learners that could result from a wholesale delay in implementation; further welcomes the unprecedented levels of support that are already provided by national agencies and local authorities to ensure that teachers are confident in delivering Curriculum for Excellence; recognises that additional support has been and will continue to be offered on a school by school basis as required, and remains true to the vision of empowering teachers and working with parents and learners to deliver the right education for every child in Scotland.”

The Presiding Officer: I call Liz Smith to speak to and move amendment S4M-02242.1. Ms Smith, you have five minutes. [*Interruption.*] It would be helpful if members did not speak across the chamber.

Ms Smith, you now have silence.

09:32

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank Hugh Henry for bringing this timely debate to Parliament and for his suggestion that there are practical reasons for lodging the motion.

No matter whether we are talking about pupils, parents, teachers, education officers or politicians, there can be no doubt in anyone’s mind about the huge significance of the changes that are happening in our schools and the essential need for everyone who is involved to feel comfortable with them. Much is at stake, but I hope that none of us will forget that the ultimate criteria by which we should judge this issue are what is in the best educational interests of individual pupils and how we support their teachers and parents in meeting that objective.

We must also remember that this is not a debate about the merits or otherwise of curriculum for excellence or about building consensus—I believe that we have that already. We have had those debates and time has moved on. Nor is this a debate about whether it was wise to have such a long gap between publishing many of the course development materials and setting out the details of the exams—we have had that debate as well. We are not here to make out that our classrooms are in crisis, because they are not.

However, we need to deal with the reality in those classrooms, whether it is that as exposed in the EIS survey or by the many other teachers who are in different unions or none. Curriculum for

excellence is happening and we must now ensure that schools can provide as smooth a passage as possible between the new courses and the new exams in an appropriate timescale.

As I understand it, the main message from the majority of schools—and indeed parents and pupils—is that there is no fundamental objection to the main principles of curriculum for excellence or the new exams that will accompany them. Debates are quite properly going on about whether there is enough academic rigour in curriculum for excellence, whether the articulation between schools and colleges or universities is right and about the wisdom of renaming some subjects, but the basic philosophy is not in dispute.

Let us remember why we are making these changes: we are seeking to make learning more meaningful for every pupil, to instil in them an understanding of not just what they are learning but why they are learning and to develop in them skills that are cross-curricular and more relevant to the very fast-changing world in which we live.

Cut away all the unhelpful jargon and the unwelcome political correctness, and curriculum for excellence asks all schools to think more deeply about what makes a rounded, well-educated human being who is both adaptable and responsible in modern society. Crucially, it allows schools to be more flexible, and it is on that point that I believe the Scottish Government has shown its greatest weakness.

Last week, the Education and Culture Committee was emphatically told by the director of education in East Renfrewshire that its headteachers unanimously wanted to delay implementation on account of the reports that they had received that teachers—and therefore their pupils—wanted additional security. He was not trying to score points off anybody or trying to score media points. He was merely acting in the best interests of his schools. We heard from the EIS—and it produced more evidence yesterday—that it, too, believes that many schools are not ready and that it would be better in such instances to leave things for another year.

Alternatively, we heard from the SQA and Education Scotland that many schools are ready to proceed, and they told us about the dangers of any widespread delay—aspects on which I think we can all agree. I hope that we also all agree that it is right for those schools to proceed, for reasons that I note are given in the letter from the headmaster of Clifton Hall school, which the cabinet secretary quoted. It would be ridiculous to argue otherwise. However, it is also ridiculous to argue that all schools must adhere to the same timescale, especially when the cabinet secretary has told some of them that they have special circumstances.

Frankly, I do not understand why we should be surprised about the different signals that are coming out from our schools. Curriculum for excellence is a major change. Different schools and departments are starting from different points. They have different pupil numbers and they offer different subject choices across different curriculum structures. Some are ready and some are not. It is by no means the first time that that has been the case in Scottish education. We have coped before and we will cope again without doing any damage to pupils' education.

On top of that, parents and teachers are confused by the cabinet secretary's public utterances. He offered the view that East Renfrewshire could be treated as a special case because it is not doing standard grades, but it turns out that that is not the whole picture.

Michael Russell: The member knows this and I suspect that she was expecting me to say it, but I want to repeat it. The letter from the East Renfrewshire headteachers in the *Times Educational Supplement Scotland* of 24 February contains the phrase, at the end of the comments on the request for the delay:

"This is only possible because of our unique position."

If the headteachers recognise that, the member should recognise it, too. They are asking for this because of their unique position. It is not possible for others.

Liz Smith: The cabinet secretary told me that at committee as well, but the director of education said that there are two specific reasons. The second is that he feels that his schools are not ready.

I return to where I started. We must ensure that what we are doing is in the best interests of all pupils. I do not believe that any of us knows exactly what is happening on the ground in our schools. However, I believe that the schools themselves know that and, for that reason alone, they should be the ones who decide.

I move amendment S4M-02242.1, to leave out from "that, despite" to end and insert:

"the substantial concerns expressed by some teachers and professional bodies that specific schools or departments in some schools are not yet fully ready to introduce the new exams; regrets the confused messages issued by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning about this whole issue, and calls on the Cabinet Secretary to make clear that a decision about whether or not the one year delay is in the best interests of pupils is entirely a matter for an individual school rather than for the Scottish Government."

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I remind members that the time for speeches is four minutes.

09:38

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): I begin by thanking Liz Smith. I did not necessarily agree with everything that she said, but her speech was a reasonable and reasoned argument of her point of view. I have to disagree with her opening remarks, though, about the timing of the debate. I share the cabinet secretary's concern that the likely outcome is to stoke more anxiety among parents, pupils and teachers rather than to provide more information and reassurance. The proper place for the debate was the Education and Culture Committee. That is why I invited the various stakeholders to the committee, and I believe that that was the right thing to do.

Like Hugh Henry, let me give some quotes—I feel that it is going to be a morning of quotes, Presiding Officer. Let me start with:

“School staff at all levels are being demoralised by continual pressure for enormous change, unrealistic change, and change which is not being resourced ... There is no longer any belief among headteachers that what is demanded of schools can be achieved at any level of personal effort”.

I could go on, as I have much more in the same vein. That is not about the curriculum for excellence, though. It is about the introduction of the five-to-14 curriculum.

As we have seen over many years, every time there is change, particularly in education, there are genuine anxieties and fears at the point of change, so it is not unusual to see that this time. In fact, it would be unusual not to see anxiety and hear such comments at this time. However, let us not believe that those comments are different from what we would have heard during previous changes in the education system.

I am concerned that the motion mentions “widespread and persistent concerns”. I am not sure whether Hugh Henry has paid attention to what has happened in the Education and Culture Committee during the past two weeks, but the motion in no way reflects the reality of the oral and written evidence that the committee received. For Hugh Henry's information, I will quote some of those who appeared.

Neil Findlay: I am sure that Stewart Maxwell recalls that the general secretary of the EIS, who gave evidence to the committee, reflected such concerns.

Stewart Maxwell: Let me quote what was said by the National Parent Forum, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, the EIS and the SQA, which also gave evidence to the committee. Mr Lanagan from ADES said:

“There is no doubt that such decisions have led the media and some political commentators to make criticisms of the system that I do not think are justified or reflect views

that are as widely held as people seem to believe that they are.”

Mr Maxwell, from the EIS, said:

“a delay would mean a huge loss of momentum for the programme and, as Janet Brown has outlined, it would have a great opportunity cost in terms of not getting the benefits of curriculum for excellence for young people in Scotland.”

Dr Janet Brown, from the SQA, said:

“It is important for our young people that we implement it as soon as possible, because it will make them and Scotland successful. Any delay will also delay that success, which is a crucial point for us to remember.”—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 28 February 2012; c 786, 809.]

It is vital that we hear from the experts and from all sources, but it is particularly important that we hear from parents. The National Parent Forum has said:

“In the light of recent suggestions from some quarters that delivery of National qualifications should be delayed, we are writing to express our concern. Our view is that delay in actually unworkable ... It makes no sense to us.”

It is clear that there is a huge amount of support for curriculum for excellence among members, which is why I regret that the Labour Party has tried to cause fog and confusion in the area.

I will conclude my short four minutes by talking about the timeline. Labour members have suggested that some sort of big bang will occur with curriculum for excellence in April and May this year, and that teachers will have but a few short weeks to go from nothing to everything and provide examinations. That is not the case. It is a false premise and it is rather disgraceful of Labour to perpetuate such a myth. There will be no big bang. I could quote extensively from the SQA. Many draft documents are already online and we should commend the work that has been done to ensure, as far as possible, a smooth transition to the new qualifications. A delay would result in a patchwork education system across the country and that would be in no one's interests.

09:43

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Labour did not bring forward the debate today because we disagree with curriculum for excellence. The opposite is true; it is because we support curriculum for excellence and the important part that it can play in improving education for all our pupils that we raise concerns on behalf of teachers and parents today. It is vital that teachers and parents are confident in the planned changes and that they feel that they are fully prepared to securely implement the new national qualifications.

Teachers are caring professionals who want to provide the best possible education for our children and we must give them the required support and time so that they can do their job to the best of their ability. We must therefore listen to what teachers and parents are saying. They are undoubtedly concerned about the lack of support that they have received to date to securely implement the new qualifications. According to one of the biggest surveys of its members that the EIS has ever conducted, 82 per cent of teachers feel that the support that has been received to date from the Scottish Government is unsatisfactory.

I acknowledge that a full Education Scotland audit of schools' preparedness for the introduction of the new qualifications is important, but it is worrying that members of Parliament do not know right now how many schools are prepared and how many are not. I welcome the cabinet secretary's commitment to giving schools and teachers whatever support is necessary, but the truth is that many feel that they might need more time and breathing space to securely implement the new qualifications 4 and 5.

Teachers tell us that it is all very well saying that draft materials have been published, but there is a lack of sufficient knowledge about the exams to deliver courses. Although the exams will not be until 2014, schools that have the two-plus-two structure are giving second-year pupils their choices now and will begin to deliver courses in June this year. That is what teachers tell us. Many teachers feel that four weeks is not long enough for them to read the materials, consider the implications for practice and learning, discuss with colleagues and develop teaching courses, content and materials.

We should know what evaluation has been done to identify the emerging norms across the country, given that the schools and education authorities have been deciding their own structures for curriculum for excellence. That information should be known by now—in fact, it should have been known before now.

Michael Russell: Will the member give way?

Neil Bibby: I am sorry, but I do not have enough time. I hope that the cabinet secretary will listen to what we have to say.

With the summer fast approaching, we worry that time is running out. I sincerely hope that the audit and subsequent support will not be too little, too late. The cabinet secretary quoted the SQA's comment that it is not viable to run the new national qualifications, intermediates and standard grades at the same time because the body does not have enough resources. To ensure that all children in Scotland have the same safeguards for

their education and life chances, what solution will the cabinet secretary consider if a delay is necessary?

As we have heard, East Renfrewshire Council is delaying implementation. It is the best-performing education authority in Scotland, so it would be careless not to take into account what it says. Although East Renfrewshire is unique in delaying, it reached its decision because teachers and headteachers unanimously agreed that, if the new qualifications could not be securely implemented, implementation would not be in the best interests of young people in the area. East Renfrewshire is in a unique position, but if other schools or authorities cannot securely implement the new national qualifications, the cabinet secretary needs to come up with a solution to that problem.

We need to listen to what teachers and parents say. As I said, Labour brought the debate to Parliament to raise with the cabinet secretary the serious concerns of teachers and parents. We welcome his commitment to listening to those concerns, but he must now provide the necessary solutions to deal with the problems as soon as possible.

09:47

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): We have talked a lot about the reasons for introducing curriculum for excellence, which is underpinned by the four principles of producing successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. However, have we forgotten why the curriculum for excellence was necessary? We have not talked about the problems with the existing system. Too much of the teaching material skates over the surface of issues; children are passive in their lessons; lessons are fragmented; and pupils are not rewarded for practical achievements such as the Duke of Edinburgh awards.

I should declare an interest in that I am a councillor in North Lanarkshire and I am married to a National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers representative.

The Opposition has offered anecdotal evidence, which is not the basis for good policy, but I point out that my son is just going through his standard grade English, and he is sitting it in third year, not fifth year. I mention that lest we forget that there are a variety of ways of implementing standard grade across Scotland. In fourth, fifth and sixth year, which is when pupils normally present for standard grade, there are problems with people spending too much time doing unit tests, preliminaries, coursework and exams and too little time learning new things. I have seen that in my child's case in relation to folios. I know from living

with an English teacher for many years, and from other anecdotal evidence, about the pressures in schools at folio time. The standard grade system is not ideal, so it is necessary to change it.

I am not an educationist, although I know that many of the members taking part in the debate are, but I am a mathematics and statistics graduate. Although 70 per cent of teachers saying that they are not ready for curriculum for excellence is a good headline, actually 73 per cent of EIS members did not respond to the survey asking whether they had problems with their workload or with readiness for curriculum for excellence. So 73 per cent of teachers did not feel it necessary to respond.

I am not at all complacent about those who have raised concerns, but—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Mr Findlay and Mr Russell, please let the member speak.

Clare Adamson: The cabinet secretary could not have been clearer in his commitment to provide support for any individual teacher, department or school that experiences problems. In fact, Hanzala Malik raised the issue—he drilled down into it—during this week's Education and Culture Committee meeting and received an assurance from Education Scotland and the cabinet secretary that individual teachers could self-refer if they had a problem.

Although I am not an educationist, I have considerable experience of project management, so I know that delay means cost. There will be cost attached to the capacity issues in those organisations that have to cope with the delay. Where will we find markers if we end up with a triple-running nightmare scenario? How will schools' timetabling arrangements be affected if three different projects are run at once? How will that help us advance educationally? East Renfrewshire is unique. There is no impact on capacity, the SQA or timetabling arrangements, because the council does not do standard grade. To delay, even in part, and end up with a triple-running nightmare scenario in Scotland would be the worst possible outcome for our young people.

I recently visited the Scottish Poetry Library and the Scottish Book Trust, which are working incredibly hard to deliver excellent online programmes for curriculum for excellence. The whole of civic Scotland is behind curriculum for excellence and today we in this Parliament should get behind it, too.

09:51

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): As Stewart Maxwell has said, this debate follows on from two detailed Education and Culture

Committee meetings in the past fortnight with the cabinet secretary and a wide range of expert witnesses. That illustrates the importance that everyone in the chamber attaches to the issue.

At Tuesday's committee meeting, Michael Russell set the scene by highlighting, quite properly, the long-standing cross-party support for curriculum for excellence, which was initiated by the previous Executive and developed—for the reasons ably outlined by Clare Adamson—by the current Administration.

I have a quibble with Michael Russell's selective memory of the political architects of curriculum for excellence, notably his omission of my colleague Nicol Stephen's central role in the early days. I recognise, however, that, by quoting Messrs Peacock and Macintosh, Mr Russell was more interested in making a point to Labour members.

I agreed with a great deal of the cabinet secretary's remarks on Tuesday and this morning, not least his views on the contribution that curriculum for excellence can make to enhancing the education of all our children and young people, and on the phenomenal amount of work put in by teachers in schools throughout Scotland, supported by Education Scotland, the SQA, councils and others.

However, one of the cabinet secretary's comments stood out. It was not his remarkable assertion that, since becoming cabinet secretary,

"I have delivered on every commitment that I have made",

which I am fairly certain would have prompted quite a bit of coffee to hit the walls of staff rooms throughout the country, not to mention walls in the homes of newly qualified teachers who would dearly love to be sitting in staff rooms somewhere in Scotland. Neither was it the education secretary's commendable self-effacement in declaring that

"this is not about me".—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 6 March 2012; c 823.]

Rather, it was his statement—and he was absolutely right about this—that this is about the young people in our schools. That is what motivated the Education and Culture Committee to take evidence on the issue, just as it is the absolute priority of everyone in the chamber for this debate. Whatever our view on whether a particular school or department should be allowed to delay proceeding with the new exams, it is entirely wrong for any of us to claim a monopoly on concern for the welfare of our young people.

In the limited time available, I want to signpost elements of what I have found to be informative evidence sessions in committee over the past two weeks. The evidence has reinforced my belief that a general wholesale delay in implementing the

new exams is neither necessary nor desirable—a point which, as other members have noted, the National Parent Forum has also made. The evidence has also confirmed my sense that problems remain that cannot be ignored.

I am not suggesting that Mr Russell is ignoring the problems. I welcome the audit that was announced earlier this week and the additional support being made available through Education Scotland to teachers and schools that feel that they are struggling, which mirrors a similar exercise earlier in the process. However, the fact remains that with each passing week we are getting closer to the point when individual schools will need to decide whether they are sufficiently confident in their ability to deliver the new exams to proceed.

There are risks in delay, as the SQA and the cabinet secretary have emphasised, but I do not believe that any school or department would go down that route without extensive discussions with pupils, parents, local authorities and Education Scotland. Such a decision must be based only on sound and demonstrable reasons.

I am not suggesting anything that Mr Russell himself has not already accepted. On Tuesday, despite earlier pronouncements about the need for all schools to press ahead regardless, he finally conceded that, if there is any need to delay,

“the decision will ultimately be one that schools will want to make in the best interests of their pupils and their entire school community.”—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 6 March 2012; c 825.]

Precisely.

Although I welcome that belated acknowledgement—as I welcome the extra support that is being provided for those who need it—I am concerned about Mr Russell’s view that any final decision on a school’s preparedness to present pupils for the new exams can be taken only in the summer. That may be appropriate for some schools, but it could be too late for others that feel that they need to start making alternative arrangements sooner, not least to allow course choices to be made.

When Scotland’s best-performing education authority makes it plain that every one of its secondary headteachers lacks confidence in proceeding with the new exams and that a decision to delay must be made in good time to allow alternatives to be put in place, it is unsurprising that teachers with concerns elsewhere in the country have taken note. The circumstances are different in East Renfrewshire, but it is not credible to argue that the concerns that are being expressed by headteachers there are unique, nor that a decision to delay needs to be taken early in East Renfrewshire but can be

postponed until the summer in every other part of the country.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats remain entirely committed to curriculum for excellence. We believe that its roll-out in our secondary schools can have and is having a hugely positive impact in enriching the education that we provide to our young people. However, different schools and departments are at different stages of preparedness for the new exams. It would be a mistake to force teachers to proceed this year against their better judgment, as it would be to prevent people from taking sufficient time to make alternative plans.

09:56

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Members will gather that I am not speaking in my normal voice today because of a cold—I hope that I will be able to last for four minutes.

It is gratifying to hear that there is consensus in the chamber on curriculum for excellence, that all members are supportive of it and that it is right for our pupils and young people of the future. However, it is disconcerting that we have heard only negative comments from Hugh Henry and Neil Bibby about the concerns and anxieties that exist among parents and teachers. It is not all parents and teachers, but some parents and teachers who share those anxieties and concerns, which I believe are being fuelled by Hugh Henry and the Labour Party. He said that he hopes that he is wrong; I believe that he is wrong. The majority of teachers and parents are comfortable with the programme that has been set out. The draft guidance was available in the autumn, and we are told that we will have the final guidance in April. In the interim, teachers have been able to sign up to any changes through the guidance procedure.

I understand that it is great to get up at party conferences and grandstand in front of one’s own supporters and party members, but I do not think that it was helpful of Mr Henry to accuse the cabinet secretary of being “arrogant and bull-headed”. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will be able to defend himself against those accusations; I am more concerned about Mr Henry’s subsequent comment that the cabinet secretary does not listen. The cabinet secretary has often said in the chamber that he is listening. He is willing to listen, he does listen and he takes things on board. He wants to work in co-operation with not just the teachers and parents of children in Scotland, but the parties in the chamber to proceed with a positive agenda on the important issue of our children’s future.

I agree with virtually everything that was said by Liz Smith, who made some valid comments. My friend and colleague Stewart Maxwell put the issues into context. Neil Bibby's concerns were addressed by Bill Maxwell at the Education and Culture Committee on 6 March, when his questions were answered in detail. I hope that Labour takes cognisance of what was said at that meeting. I hope that Labour will also take some guidance from Labour member Hanzala Malik, whose approach is consensual. He seems to be more comfortable with what the cabinet secretary has said and with the answers that were given at the committee meeting.

My plea to Hugh Henry and the Labour Party is that they listen to Hanzala Malik, who has a good point. If we can move forward, that will benefit our young people, Scotland and curriculum for excellence in the future.

10:00

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): We have made it clear today that Scottish Labour supports the curriculum for excellence and wants it to work for our schools, teachers and children. We want it to be implemented in the smoothest manner possible. If it is implemented correctly, it will have the opportunity to deliver benefits for pupils and to offer them a more comprehensive and more broadly based education. Contrary to what the cabinet secretary seems to think, we have nothing against change.

The curriculum for excellence is our children's future, which is why it needs to be done right—not railroaded through when schools and parents have genuine concerns about its implementation. When unions, teachers, headteachers, parents and councils are asking the Scottish National Party Government to stop and listen, the Government needs to do that. If parents and teachers do not feel confident in the new system, it will not work. If the SNP continues to refuse to listen to their growing concerns, we cannot blame them for losing trust in the SNP on the education portfolio.

The Government needs to look at the evidence across Scotland, because we can ill afford to gamble with our young people's future. A previous EIS survey found that more than half of classroom practitioners

"do not feel confident in their own personal state of readiness".

The results of the latest EIS survey are even more worrying—70 per cent of respondents were "barely confident" or "not confident at all" about their department's readiness to deliver the new qualifications on the current timescale, while less than 5 per cent of respondents were confident that their department could deliver the exams on time.

Those figures are hugely significant and the Government needs to listen to the concerns that our teachers have expressed.

Ann Ballinger, the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association's general secretary, said that teachers were "in some distress" about the changes and that they were

"hugely concerned that things are not going to be ready in time".

She repeated that concern on Tuesday night's "Newsnight Scotland". I am afraid that, rather than reassuring me and watching parents, the response to her from Terry Lanagan of the Association of Directors of Education served only to make me even more concerned.

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): Will the member give way?

Margaret McDougall: I am sorry—I am very short of time.

Parents are making the same comments and are—rightly—concerned for their children's future. On BBC Radio Scotland's "Call Kaye" programme, they branded the situation farcical, a shambles, a mess and a disaster. One parent who is also a teacher said:

"My child is in S1 and I'm terrified about it. Colleagues there don't even have the exam content yet. Farcical".

Another person said:

"I don't think that the teachers would be complaining like that if they didn't have reason. There's no smoke without fire."

These are real fears and concerns from real people, who need assurances that the system will be implemented properly and not rushed.

We have spoken about East Renfrewshire, so I will not comment on that.

The Scottish Secondary Teachers Association found that 45 per cent of respondents to a survey said that pupils in their schools were still making their subject choices at the end of second year, while 46 per cent were making their choices at the end of third year. There is no consistency, which is creating confusion. If a pupil moved from a local authority area that had delayed implementation to an area that had not delayed it, how would that affect that child's education?

We welcome the announcement of an Education Scotland audit and the extra support that will be offered to schools that need it. I urge the Government to act on the audit's findings, to consider the evidence that is at hand, to listen to the concerns of parents and teachers and not to gamble with our young people's future by railroading through the policy when schools are not ready for it.

10:05

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): “Mr Mainwaring, we’re doomed.” Yet again, that is the subtext—well, that is what my notes say, but, come to think of it, it is more like the text itself.

I have often remarked that Labour Party front-bench members seem to live in a different world when it comes to their analyses. Today, I am glad that that is the case, because that world is a very bleak place indeed. Across Scotland, there are young people in second year and their parents who are hearing nothing but messages of fear and exaggeration, which are being spread—to be blunt—for the purpose of scoring political points. However, we must remember the aim: curriculum for excellence is a reform of education that is to bring about generational change—

Neil Findlay: Will the member give way?

Marco Biagi: I am 45 seconds in; I cannot have said anything that Mr Findlay particularly dislikes yet. He should sit down.

Curriculum for excellence is a wholesale change of direction and methodology. Ronnie Summers, the headteacher of Musselburgh grammar school, said:

“We are in the middle of a seven-year development programme and while any change programme is demanding, a delay is not in the interest of the current S2 group. We are not hearing a clamour for delay from school staff or parents.”

We could trade quotes for the four minutes of my speech—or the two minutes and 40 seconds that I have left—and Mr Henry certainly quoted a number of teachers. He also left 50,000 more unquoted. As the cabinet secretary said, where cases of the sort that Mr Henry mentioned arise, Education Scotland and local authorities should engage them in support. As far as we can tell, that is what is happening. No department or teacher should be afraid of asking for help. Just as support was offered before, it will be offered again. As a member of the Education and Culture Committee, I look forward to finding out more details of the support that is on offer, as I am sure that that is an issue that we will continue to examine. I also welcome the deep audit that is being run by Education Scotland, which will help to identify the support needs.

What matters are the 54,000 pupils in secondary 2. They and all the cohorts that follow them deserve the chance to be assessed using the same methodologies and philosophies of curriculum for excellence through which they have been taught. What matters now is getting it right. We cannot get it right by putting it off. We are past the point when standard grades could have been extended for one last gasp, and there was never a point when it would have been reasonable to

make the entire country’s schools decant to intermediates for only one year before decanting again to nationals. If we had done that, I am sure that the EIS would be getting more than a 10 per cent response rate to their survey on the issue. Doing that would have let down pupils and created even more of an administrative obstacle for teachers. Of course, that is assuming that, if there were to be such a wholesale delay, moving to nationals would still be the aim—I hope that it is the aim of everyone in this chamber who supports curriculum for excellence.

One of the core changes in curriculum for excellence is the move away from the frenetic focus on repeated assessment. The pressure that Scotland puts on its young people is intense and unnecessarily duplicating. That is why nationals are one-year courses rather than the two-year standard grade courses and why we are introducing the three plus three model.

We should not underestimate the concerns that have been expressed. They are real, but they are best responded to by support, which is in place and is moving further into place with every passing week. We should also not underestimate the prize that is on offer. Secure implementation is important, but wholesale delay is impossible. Rather than unproductive speeches, such as the one that Hugh Henry gave at the Labour conference, we should hear about the ways in which we can continue to support schools so that, together, we can provide confidence to pupils and parents and ensure the successful delivery of curriculum for excellence.

10:09

Liz Smith: This has been a very good debate in which the different points have reflected the differences in our schools, which is quite natural. I am grateful to Dennis Robertson for putting his finger on one of the crucial points, which is that the cabinet secretary is a bully and arrogant. Where could Mr Robertson ever have got that impression from?

I do not believe that schools should ever have been put in this predicament in the first place. I have no doubt whatever that the professionals who have been involved for the past eight years, whether SQA, Education Scotland or directors of education in our local authorities, have been working extremely hard, along with our teachers, to ensure that curriculum for excellence goes as smoothly as possible. However, with hindsight I think that the Scottish Government was ill advised to allow quite such a long time to elapse between course development and the publication of the exam details.

I understand Janet Brown's important point that exams should not dictate everything—she is absolutely right in that—and her point that exams should reflect the course work rather than the other way round. However, I also understand the natural anxiety of parents, pupils and, of course, teachers, because pupils want to ensure that they have the widest possible knowledge available as they make their subject choices, which, whether we like it or not, are the defining element in a child's school career and what they decide to go on to in later life.

I worry that there is a cohort of teachers out there, even if we do not know its true size or the quotes that they might give us in private, who for one reason or another feel that they do not quite have enough information on which to build their course development. I may be wrong, but I do not think that many of those teachers are scaremongering; rather, they are anxious about what will happen to them if they cannot deliver on time and if they speak out.

We have all had their e-mails, which are articulate, coherent, informed and which plead with us to help them. I have one here from a teacher in a school that the cabinet secretary visited recently—I will not embarrass him by reading it out—who said that he was utterly astonished to hear that his school was supposedly on track to deliver the new exams, when that is clearly not the case. Moreover, I understand from my good colleague Jamie McGrigor that the cabinet secretary was confronted yesterday on that very point by a teacher from Campbeltown, who said that his school was not yet ready.

Michael Russell: May I clarify that point? Perhaps Mr McGrigor will want to reflect on whether he should have recounted a private conversation that took place during a school visit but, that aside, I hope that Mr McGrigor will also relate to the member the conversation that I had with the teacher, in which I indicated the ways in which additional support and help could, I hoped, be provided to him. Mr McGrigor's quoting of that conversation is extremely unhelpful, given that the individual concerned might now be identified. However, I am happy to say that help will be provided to the entire school. We look for a mechanism to encourage teachers to come forward and get the help that they need, which is not helped by the type of action that the member has just taken by reporting a private conversation.

Liz Smith: Mr McGrigor is also on record as saying that the cabinet secretary did deal with the question, but it was in a report of a public meeting of Parliament.

Michael Russell: It was a private conversation.

Liz Smith: No, it was not. The cabinet secretary will forgive me for saying so, but many other teachers have said exactly the same thing as the teacher concerned and there is nothing wrong in doing that, nor is there anything wrong in our reporting that.

Neil Findlay: A very serious concern is raised if when someone raises an issue, the cabinet secretary has to try to allay their fears and say that there will be some sort of protection if they approach someone in authority—their boss or whoever.

Liz Smith: That is entirely a matter for the cabinet secretary to address.

As I said in my opening speech, the scale of the change and the fact that schools do not and should not all offer the same examination diet is why we need to accept that the pace will be different in different schools. Of course, such differences are entirely in line with the basic principles of curriculum for excellence. We have had staged changes before and no doubt we will have them again. I do not see anything wrong in that, providing that there are sound educational reasons for doing it.

We must judge the whole debate on sound educational reasons. Those are the crucial factor. Nothing else matters.

10:14

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): I am pleased to close for the Government in this debate on curriculum for excellence. I certainly welcome the curriculum's successful implementation across Scotland. We must not underestimate how important it is for our young people and for Scotland's future, which is what we should all be concerned about today. I am sure that we are, despite—I regret to say—the occasional evidence of my ears to the contrary from some quarters this morning.

I welcome the reaffirmed support for curriculum for excellence that has been expressed today. Local authorities, nurseries, schools, colleges and their dedicated staff throughout Scotland have all made good progress in implementing curriculum for excellence, particularly in the past two years. Every time that I visit schools—a regular part of my job—I see that the new curriculum is already making a real improvement to learning and teaching.

As Ken Macintosh rightly stated in Parliament in March 2008,

“there has been broad political agreement on the aims and agenda of the curriculum for excellence—a move away from the dominance of exams and teaching to the test; a

decluttering of the overcrowded curriculum; more room for teachers to teach".—[*Official Report*, 19 March 2008; c 7063.]

We must not forget those aims.

Although formal assessment for the qualifications is not intended to begin prior to fourth year, learning during the broad general education—up to the end of S3—will contribute to learning for the qualifications in S4 and beyond. Therefore, the implementation of the new qualifications for pupils who will be in S4 in 2013-14 is a key milestone in the implementation process.

Let me be clear: we cannot countenance wholesale delay of these qualifications. To do so would undermine the learning that our young people who are currently in S2 have followed since they were in primary school—a point that Marco Biagi made.

Hugh Henry said that we should not gamble with the future of our young people and nor should we. Delay would represent such a gamble. We should not underestimate the risks to learners that are associated with asking them to change a course that they have been on since 2009. The intermediates will not build on the curriculum for excellence-based learning that pupils should have experienced in S1 to S3, and those who call for a delay must remember that.

I feel the need to reiterate the point that we cannot run three examination systems simultaneously in Scotland, which, as the SQA has pointed out, is the implication of wholesale delay. Liz Smith and Liam McArthur made reasoned and measured contributions on the whole but, in their comments about East Renfrewshire Council, they overlooked the fact that it, uniquely, would not find itself in that position and, therefore, does not have much to teach us about the national situation.

The Government is committed to providing additional support to teachers or schools over and above the unprecedented levels of support that are already being provided where it is felt that that is needed to ensure that they are prepared for the new qualifications. To respond to Neil Bibby on that point, 300 such events are planned around Scotland to help to achieve that, together with a deep audit that will involve speaking to all Scotland's schools.

As Stewart Maxwell and Clare Adamson pointed out, we have heard, and continue to hear, many calls against any delay from parents, teachers, headteachers, directors of education and others.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Is it not also the case that the former Labour Minister for Education and Young People, Peter Peacock, believes that there should

be no delay in implementing curriculum for excellence? Is it not also the case that, in 2006, when Mr Peacock unfortunately had to give up being minister because of illness, there was a delay of six months and the incoming SNP Government had to go hell for leather to get curriculum for excellence back on track? During those six months, the education minister was none other than Hugh Henry. He may have fine words now about jeopardising curriculum for excellence, but his actions speak louder than those words.

Dr Allan: I am always happy to hear support from wherever it may come.

I have phoned parent council chairs in Scottish schools over recent weeks and have yet to speak to one who wants the Government to take the advice that Mr Henry offers us on delay.

I must also say that, when Margaret McDougall wondered in her speech what would happen if a child moved from an authority that had delayed to one that had not, she rather undermined the case for allowing local authorities to delay.

Hanzala Malik offered a much more measured opinion in committee this week—other members have alluded to it—when he said:

"There are still grey areas on the mechanism for support",

but

"once those become clear ... many of the concerns will evaporate quickly."—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 6 March 2012; c 840.]

When dealing with the future of our young people, all members have a duty not to feel compelled to fuel headlines that have a less-than-simple relationship with the facts.

Liam McArthur: Will the minister give way?

Dr Allan: I am afraid that I must close shortly.

We have the opportunity today to send another powerful signal to teachers, parents, employers and learners that the Scottish Parliament appreciates and continues to back all their excellent efforts to make curriculum for excellence the success that we want and need it to be. We have a chance to give young Scots an even better education and to improve their life chances.

We have a chance to make it clear that the package of support that we have developed means that schools throughout Scotland should be in a position to do what we need them to do—that is, to get on with the introduction of the new qualifications that our young people expect us to deliver.

I trust that the Parliament will endorse what has been achieved across Scotland and look forward to the next stage in the journey. I hope that the

Parliament will take that chance now and without delay.

10:20

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I make it clear that curriculum for excellence was a Labour initiative, which should—and I am sure will—deliver benefits for our young people, as Hugh Henry said. It will give schools and teachers greater professional autonomy to develop exciting and innovative lessons, using a variety of new and traditional teaching methods that are tailored to meet the needs of individual pupils. It will also give pupils greater flexibility and control over their learning, so that they can study the topics that most interest them. All that is welcome and will build on the excellent work that goes on in our schools. I know about that work, because I have worked in primary and secondary schools across the central belt, many of which are grappling with the new curriculum.

I hope that we will get to the desired stage at which we will judge our schools and pupils not on crude measures of the number of highers that are achieved but on how secure and confident young people are in the broad education that they receive. However, the reality is that in secondary schools exams are, and are likely to remain, a major part of the currency. That is what is partly feeding into teachers' concern.

It is regrettable that Mr Maxwell accused Labour of claiming that there is a big bang approach. If he reads the *Official Report* of the Education and Culture Committee, which he chairs, he will find that it was the general secretary of the EIS who said that.

Stewart Maxwell rose—

Neil Findlay: I will allow Mr Maxwell to intervene, so that he can apologise to Labour members.

Stewart Maxwell: Much as it might surprise Mr Findlay, I am not about to apologise to Labour members, because it is Labour members who have continually said, in and outwith the committee, that the first information will come in April or May and schools will have only four, six or eight weeks to implement curriculum for excellence. It is Mr Findlay and his colleagues who have been saying that and who should apologise to the teachers, parents and educationists who have been working on curriculum for excellence for many years.

Neil Findlay: It is teachers who are saying that, not Labour members.

I enjoyed—as I think all members did—Dennis Robertson's cabaret turn in defence of the cabinet secretary's obvious and well-known humility.

We should not have needed this debate. We should have been celebrating moving into the final implementation and exam phase of curriculum for excellence, almost a decade after introduction. Instead, there is growing concern, confusion and anxiety among parents, teachers and the wider school community. Those feelings have not been forced on people as a result of some dastardly plan that has been cooked up by the Labour Party, teaching unions or militant parents. There is no conspiracy to undermine the very curriculum that Labour is proud to have kicked off. The motion reiterates our support for the new curriculum.

However, there are many ifs and buts and there is much contradiction. Schools were initially told that they must introduce the new exams in 2014, except for single departments in "exceptional circumstances". We then had the East Renfrewshire case, to which Liz Smith and Neil Bibby referred. The best-performing education authority in the country decided to defer implementation for a year. The head of the authority's education department said that he had applied a three-stage test before he made his decision. He consulted parents, who agreed. He consulted teachers and heads, who agreed. He then took the decision, based on the best interests of his pupils. Those seem to me to be sound, education-based reasons for advocating a delay.

Michael Russell: I make a quick point, which is that one of the parents—who chairs the Education and Culture Committee—said that he had not been consulted, so there are many question marks. I refer again to the letter from headteachers, which I quoted to Liz Smith. They said that delay was possible in East Renfrewshire only because of the unique circumstances there. I advise the member to read the letter, because that is what it says.

Neil Findlay: We have demonstrated that Mr Maxwell has a selective memory, so I think that he might have forgotten that he was consulted.

Stewart Maxwell: Will the member give way?

Neil Findlay: No, sorry—I want to move on.

Stewart Maxwell rose—

Neil Findlay: I have already allowed the member to intervene, so I ask him to please sit down.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Mr Maxwell, Mr Findlay is not taking an intervention.

Neil Findlay: Mr Bibby referred to the models in schools. We were told that schools had to move to a three plus three model of education and that those that did not would be

"supported out of that position."

There are schools up and down the country that are not implementing the three plus three model. I have had numerous representations from people across Scotland, with some telling me that pupils will select subjects in S2, while others tell me that pupils will do so in S3. In some schools in my area, subjects are being chosen in S2, while in others a few miles away that is happening in S3, even though the schools are in the same authority area. Such cases are not, as has been claimed, isolated to East Renfrewshire.

Clare Adamson: Will the member take an intervention?

Neil Findlay: No, I have to make some progress.

The recent SSTA survey estimated that in 45 per cent of schools pupils are still selecting subjects in S2—in other words, those schools are ignoring the advice that has been given. It is not difficult to see why parents are confused and worried. How many examinable subjects will pupils select? Members can pick any number they want between five and nine. Again, the position varies from school to school.

Liam McArthur mentioned the fact that Bill Maxwell, who is the head of Education Scotland, and the cabinet secretary said that there would be a deep audit of schools to gauge their readiness for the new exam. Although that is welcome—if late—I hope that they will also take account of the survey that many members have mentioned that was carried out by the EIS, which represents teachers at the chalkface. They include those whom Mr Henry referred to, who spoke out loudly, and those who were on Radio Scotland last week, who told the cabinet secretary about their concerns.

The survey received 2,700 responses, which is the biggest response that the union has ever had. In it, teachers said loud and clear, “We are not ready.” Seventy per cent of respondents said that they were “barely confident” in their department’s readiness for curriculum for excellence. An astonishing 80 per cent said that the Government’s support was “unsatisfactory”. That is extremely serious.

Michael Russell: For the record, I point out that, of the 2,700 respondents, 648 did not fill in an answer to a single question and 58 per cent of them lacked confidence in an organisation that no longer exists. There are many questions that need to be asked about the survey. I am taking seriously the general information and am acting on it, and I ask the member to please acknowledge that.

Neil Findlay: There are many questions to be asked about a great many things. Unfortunately,

we have not had the answers to them this morning.

I will raise the issues that the survey has raised when I meet Larry Flanagan, the general secretary of my union, this afternoon. I look forward to that meeting.

If support is to be given to help those who are not ready, how can Education Scotland provide it, given that such a large number of teachers are “barely confident” in their readiness for curriculum for excellence? In addition, I have real worries about what will be offered and how it will be offered. How will teachers be given the freedom and confidence to say without fear or managerial pressure that they, their department or their school needs help? Can the cabinet secretary—if he will listen for a second—guarantee that any teacher, department or headteacher who does not feel ready will be fully supported; that if they feel pressure from management, a system is in place that will protect them; and that the issues that they raise will be addressed? Can he make sure that any support that is offered goes directly to those who need it and is not filtered through, and potentially diluted by, their local authority?

We should remember that curriculum for excellence is being implemented against the backdrop of education cuts, decreasing opportunities for young teachers and a pensions dispute. It seems to me that teachers, new and old alike, are having to contend with various concerns all at once. Such conditions do not seem to be the best starting point for the new direction in Scottish education.

I hope that the cabinet secretary and everyone who is working in Scotland’s education system can have confidence in the new curriculum. It represents a great opportunity for our young people and we all want it to succeed, but we cannot and must not gamble with our future. If delay is the safety net, so be it. It is better to delay than to rush ahead and risk the future wellbeing of our young people. The cabinet secretary must listen to Scotland’s teachers and parents. It is rather sad that, today, he and his back benchers have repeatedly brought party politics into the debate.

Aberdeen City Council (Union Terrace Gardens)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-02246, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on Aberdeen City Council.

10:30

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I have lodged the motion because the referendums that have been run in Aberdeen have national implications. The referendums have been on what is, at heart, a local planning issue, but it is appropriate that we debate the wider context.

The first important question to debate is about when and how referendums should be used to inform public policy choices. This is the third test of public opinion on the matter in Aberdeen. Some 14,000 people responded to the original consultation in 2010 and their views were ignored. Thousands more expressed a view on the six shortlisted designs only a few months ago, and their views were ignored too. This time, a majority of postal voters were against the scheme, and even after online and telephone votes were included, 48 per cent of people said no to the proposal. The claim that the vote reflects public opinion lacks credibility and discredits the whole referendum process.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

If the vote had gone in the other direction, would Sarah Boyack still have brought the debate to the chamber today?

Sarah Boyack: Absolutely, because the context is that the people of Scotland are due to cast, sometime soon—date to be decided—their biggest-ever vote, so we need to ensure that the rules on referendums are fair, transparent and consistent. The matter goes to the heart of the Parliament.

I find it interesting that the Scottish National Party wants to delete from the motion the phrase “opinion remains divided”, because opinion indeed remains divided.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will the member give way on that point?

Sarah Boyack: No, I think that we will just get on, thank you very much.

The referendum was held without the agreement of all the parties in the council, and there were no effective controls on spending on the campaign. We have profound concerns about how the proposals were communicated and how the referendum was conducted. The decision on the shape of development in Union Terrace

gardens should be taken by those who were elected to run the city—its councillors—with the Scottish Government being involved as appropriate, in accordance with our planning system. I will come back to that point.

Whoever leads the city council after the elections in May will have to take responsibility for major decisions, including whether the council should borrow £92 million to take forward the scheme, and they will not be able to hide behind the votes that were cast last week if they get it wrong. Press comments from SNP councillors in Aberdeen suggest that they want to close down the debate. Voters are entitled to know what decisions councillors are likely to make if they are successful in May, whichever party those councillors represent.

There is, of course, no statutory framework for local referendums—I suspect that that is one thing on which we in this chamber can all agree. In recent years other referendums have been held, notably by Strathclyde Regional Council and the City of Edinburgh Council. In both cases, a proposition was outlined and a clear system of voting was agreed in advance. I believe that there are sufficient concerns about the robustness of the process conducted in Aberdeen to warrant all parties giving some thought to how agreement can be reached on local referendums and to establish clear principles to be followed in all cases.

In making that call, I make it absolutely clear that I do not attach blame to the independent counting officer, who has produced clear and useful recommendations regarding the lessons that need to be learned from the process. He stated:

“I had to establish the rules myself”,

and he called on the Scottish Government to establish a framework. Let us be clear: he did the best that he could, but there was no framework that he could use. Will the minister now take up that issue, and conduct a review of how referendums should operate?

There is a wider issue here, which we should all consider. The counting officer said that he

“did not have the legal clout”

that he would have had in an election, in particular to ensure that money was spent influencing voters only by those who had registered to be part of the referendum campaign.

In addition, insufficient provision was made to regulate the campaigns that were run for and against the proposals, and no effective limit was placed on spending to support either side. What registered campaign groups could spend was limited, but it is clear that money was also spent by non-registered persons, and there was

absolutely nothing that the counting officer could do about that. That crucial point is why we have brought the issue to the chamber, and it must be addressed in the interests of fairness and transparency.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): If the issue is crucial and central to the debate, why is it not addressed in the member's motion?

Sarah Boyack: Actually, it is in our motion. Our concerns are central to the motion, and we are clear that we want the minister to consider taking the matter forward.

The referendum was novel in other ways. Online and telephone voting were permitted, and they produced an outcome that was different from that of the postal ballot. The methods were not secure. Anyone who opened an envelope that contained a voter's ballot number would obtain the unique identifying number, which was all that was needed to record a vote. In a city with hundreds of tenement blocks and thousands of students in student residences, the potential for electoral fraud was clear. The police were called in to investigate on more than one occasion, although apparently no one has been charged so far. Ballot papers were also sent to everyone on the relevant electoral register, regardless of age, so that most 17-year-olds and some 16-year-olds were offered a vote, but some 17-year-olds and most 16-year-olds were not.

Mark McDonald: Does the member have any evidence whatsoever that the vote was not secure or solid, or is she just engaging in idle speculation and scaremongering?

Sarah Boyack: All that I need to report is that complaints have been made. Surely that is enough. That is why we need an investigation.

I thought that the member wanted to intervene on the point that I was making about 16 and 17-year-olds and the robustness of that process. It is funny that he did not want to intervene on that, particularly given the Electoral Commission's comments this morning.

It was argued that the scheme would not require the council to spend money on it because of the nature of tax increment financing, but that approach is predicated on using £92 million of the council's prudential borrowing capacity. It is ironic that the council dropped the original proposals, which were to transform Union Terrace gardens with the building of a contemporary arts centre, because Peacock Visual Arts did not have the whole financial package in place when the alternative scheme came along. The money that was required then was around £4 million, which is a drop in the ocean compared with the cost of the current set of proposals.

Kevin Stewart: The member is right to point out that Peacock Visual Arts did not have the entire package in place at that point, but that is not the reason why it does not feature now. It decided to remove itself from the process at that point because it would not talk to anyone else.

Sarah Boyack: I am sure that the member will have time to comment on that later in the debate, but my understanding is that the council did not want to progress that scheme, and that is why it is sitting—[*Interruption.*] The member will no doubt want to talk to us in great detail about that issue later.

There is not only the £92 million; there is also the £20 million assumed funding support for Aberdeen art gallery. Then there are the opportunity costs. As my colleague Sandra Macdonald made clear at the weekend, there are also the costs of managing such a major project, with council staff running the procurement process. Time and resources must be spent on the project rather than on other council priorities, including education. That is even before the unanswered question of how the revenue costs of managing the proposed new facilities at Union Terrace gardens are to be met and by whom is addressed.

Our other concern is about the nature of the TIF scheme that is being proposed. We are fully supportive of the principles of TIF where schemes are credible and where they meet the relevant criteria. Will the minister confirm that the Scottish Futures Trust did not recommend that the TIF bid be supported? Will he confirm that it was ministers who wanted the project to be taken forward as part of the TIF programme? That is hardly appropriate, as the Scottish Government is potentially the final arbiter in planning decisions. We simply cannot see how the project stacks up financially. Audit Scotland has also expressed concern about the risk that is attached to the project.

It appears that driving the Scottish Government's decision making in the case has been the idea to approve it regardless. The First Minister has already said this week that the TIF proposal will be looked on favourably. How will the Scottish Government be able to be objective if there is any planning challenge to the project? Given that it is the final arbiter for planning decisions where there is a direct council interest, surely the project will end up on the minister's desk.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must begin to conclude, Ms Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: I have 10 minutes.

The last time that a project in the north-east was given the same treatment, similar questions were asked. As we all know, that project has now

stalled, because Donald Trump thinks that he has a veto over the Scottish Government's energy proposals.

The referendum on the Union Terrace gardens proposal will not be the end of the story.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Your 10 minutes are up, Ms Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: I hope that members will vote for our motion.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that a local referendum held by Aberdeen City Council to test public opinion on a proposal for development at Union Terrace Gardens confirmed that opinion remains divided; notes the concerns that have been raised regarding the basis on which this poll was held; considers that decisions on local development proposals are for local elected members and, where appropriate, Scottish ministers to make, in line with the statutory requirements of the land use planning system, and recognises that the decision on whether to proceed with the proposal in question is properly one for the elected members of Aberdeen City Council to make, following the local government elections in May.

10:40

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): I think that the motion is one that should have been moved in Aberdeen City Council chambers rather than in the Scottish Parliament.

The Labour Party's record on referendums is not one of which it can be proud. Unfortunately, I am old enough to remember the 1979 referendum, when the Labour Party and Labour Party MPs proposed the 40 per cent rule, denying the Scottish people the assembly that they voted for by a majority. It is the Labour Party, along with its Tory bedfellows, that in the run up to 2014 is trying to undermine by various means the referendum on independence.

This is a soor grapes motion from the Labour Party because it lost the referendum in Aberdeen. The facts are that 165,830 voting packs were sent out to Aberdeen residents and 86,568 votes were cast, which is far more than voted Labour in Aberdeen last year. The turnout of 52 per cent far exceeded both expectations and turnout in many other elections. It seems that the Labour Party accepts a result if it wins and denies that the process was right if it loses. As Adlai Stevenson said in 1952, "The people have spoken". I will not add what he said after that, but it perhaps reflects the attitude of the Labour Party to the result of this referendum.

A total of 28,702 votes were cast online, 9,154 by phone and 48,629 by postal ballot.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Mark McDonald: Will the minister give way?

Alex Neil: I will give way shortly.

The counting officer was Crawford Langley, a long-standing counting officer of great reputation and independence. If he had any concerns about the legitimacy of the process, I am sure that he would have raised them.

Lewis Macdonald: Does the minister recall that the project sponsors held their own consultation on the matter two years ago? That produced a vote of 55 per cent against the project going forward to 45 per cent for. The sponsors said at that time that such an important decision could not possibly be taken based on such a small majority.

Alex Neil: I will answer that question, but to be fair I will now take the other Mr McDonald.

Mark McDonald: I will change what I was going to say and ask whether the cabinet secretary agrees that, in the vote to which Lewis Macdonald refers, a very small number of people voted in an insecure consultation process? That should be compared with the secure referendum that was backed by the independent returning officer.

Alex Neil: I agree with the intervention from Mr McDonald number 2 and disagree with the intervention from Mr Macdonald number 1.

The reality is that 45,301 people voted for the city garden project design and 41,175 voted for retaining Union Terrace gardens. Even on the basis of Labour Party mathematics, there is still a majority of 4,126 in favour of the project.

The Labour motion refers to opinion being divided. That is the whole idea of democracy. That is why we have elections: to find out what the division of opinion is and who is in the majority. In a democratic society, we should not say, "Because we lost, and because opinion was divided, we will challenge the legitimacy of the decision."

In last year's election, opinion was divided between Mr Macdonald and Mr Stewart but Mr Stewart had the majority opinion. Did Mr Macdonald challenge Mr Stewart's legitimacy to be here as the first-past-the-post candidate? Perhaps he did; indeed, it has become a way of life for the Labour Party to challenge democratic decisions.

Sarah Boyack: Our point is not about the people's vote but about the voting process itself. The people's views are entirely up to them; the issue is the system's robustness. There are no questions about the process in last year's elections. We regret what happened but it was the people's choice. We accept that and have moved on.

Alex Neil: The Labour Party has just made a major concession: people are now entitled to their

views and are not entitled to be told their position by Labour. The reality is that the Labour Party has ruled Scotland for far too long. Those on the Labour benches still think that they have a divine right to rule in Aberdeen and every other part of Scotland, but the political geography has changed dramatically and for ever.

This was a legitimate referendum with a legitimate result and it is perfectly legitimate for the city council and the project's organisers to proceed with planning and the business case for the TIF scheme. Obviously, it would be entirely inappropriate for me to comment on the planning process but, as far as TIF is concerned, I make absolutely clear what we have always said: in considering the business case for the project, we would need proof that the majority of people in Aberdeen approved of it. The Scottish Government is taking the referendum result as a resounding endorsement of the project, but the project itself is still subject to the TIF process. In other words, Aberdeen City Council and the sponsors have to submit a business case that will be duly considered under the TIF process; only then will the Scottish Government make a final decision as to whether the project can proceed with TIF. Everything now depends on the business case.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask the cabinet secretary to conclude.

Alex Neil: As far as the Scottish Government is concerned, the first hurdle has been overcome. We look forward to receiving a robust business case and giving it due consideration. We should all be proper democrats and accept the majority decision.

I move amendment S4M-02246.1, to leave out from "confirmed" to end and insert:

"resulted in a majority vote in favour of the City Garden Project; notes that ministers now look forward to considering the tax incremental financing (TIF) business case for the council's city centre development proposals, including the City Garden Project, which will be brought forward by the elected members of Aberdeen City Council when this has been finalised through work with the Scottish Futures Trust, and recognises that decisions on local development proposals are for local elected members and, where appropriate, Scottish ministers to make, in line with the statutory requirements of the land use planning system."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Nanette Milne. You have a strict five minutes.

10:47

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): First of all, I declare that I was a councillor on Aberdeen City Council for 11 years and that my husband is currently a member of the same council.

I could hardly believe my eyes when I opened the Aberdeen edition of Tuesday's *Press and Journal* and saw Lewis Macdonald declare that, if Labour won the council elections in May, it would not proceed with the city garden project that had been approved by the citizens of Aberdeen in a referendum just a few days before. What has happened to democracy? As Alex Neil pointed out, had Lewis Macdonald or Sarah Boyack achieved a majority of more than 4,000 on a 52 per cent turnout of their electorate, would they have turned their back on the result and queried the voting system? I think not.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the member give way?

Nanette Milne: I am taking no interventions—I am having my say on this matter.

I am sorry to say that Labour's motion appears to have little to do with the future of Aberdeen city and everything to do with Labour's own future—if there is one—on Aberdeen City Council. Its attempt to win council election votes from those who voted against the city garden project is despicable and indeed could well backfire, given that by no means do all those people support the Labour Party politically.

In 2002, under a front-page headline saying "Boot Them Out", Aberdeen's *Evening Express* called on Aberdeen's voters to punish the Labour Party for making the kind of mess of the city's finances that its political masters made in national Government. Labour was indeed booted out in 2003 and, just like the party's members in this place, Labour members in Aberdeen have behaved like spoiled brats ever since, unable to come to terms with being in opposition.

For a start, Labour has consistently opposed measures to improve the city. In my 11 years as a councillor, I voted three times for a third crossing over the River Don; Labour hotly opposed the proposal until its opposition was finally overcome just last year. Even then, it blames others for the horrendous traffic delays at the Haudagain roundabout. It also fought the Marischal college redevelopment to the bitter end. That project, which has restored the building to its former glory and turned it into an iconic tourist attraction, was completed ahead of time and well under budget, with the added advantage of saving the taxpayer money because it is so energy efficient. If I had time, I could give many more examples of a dinosaur party trying to stifle progress in Aberdeen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Dr Milne, I would be grateful if you would use your time to consider the motion.

Nanette Milne: I am doing that, Presiding Officer.

Labour continues to criticise, but it has had no alternative budget proposals to put forward in the past five years. Now it is trying to block a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to regenerate the entire city centre, not just Union Terrace gardens. It has rejected the wonderful philanthropic gesture of Sir Ian Wood, who is a true son of the city, and it is prepared to turn down the possibility of securing TIF funding for the project—funding that is almost certain to be repaid in good time by the long-awaited industrial developments at Dyce, let alone by the new businesses that are likely to be attracted to the city centre.

Critics say that money would be better spent on Union Street. I wish that they would realise that the city garden project will be a catalyst for that to happen. With a new, vibrant focal point in the city centre, there will be an incentive for the absentee landlords of Union Street and Bridge Street to restore the upper floors of their properties, many of which, I hope, will become well-appointed flats. That will take cars off the roads and deal with the drunken behaviour that is witnessed in the area at weekends, because people living there will simply not put up with it.

So many exciting opportunities for the city could be unlocked by the city garden project. Now that Aberdonians have approved it, it simply must go ahead. Of course, due process must be followed to secure the proposed city centre development—that is not in dispute. However, instead of carping about the referendum result, let us get on with it.

I have lived in Aberdeen for nigh on 70 years. I have seen a once magnificent and flourishing city centre—a far-sighted vision given to us by past city fathers—decline into the sad state that it is in today. I have always been fiercely proud of my city, and I sincerely hope that I live long enough to see it restored to its former glory, and secure in its future.

I will fight the SNP tooth and nail over its proposals to separate us from the rest of the United Kingdom, but on this issue, I am solidly with it, and I will certainly vote for its amendment this evening.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We turn to the open debate. We are tight for time, so speeches should be of a strict four minutes.

10:52

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I congratulate Nanette Milne on her excellent speech. She spoiled it in her final sentence, but nevertheless, it was excellent.

There is a maxim that, if someone is in a hole, they should stop digging. That is clearly a message that the Labour Party does not

understand. Otherwise, it would not have brought the motion to the chamber for debate. The first indication that I received on my BlackBerry was that the Labour Party was to debate economic growth. The motion is the antithesis of economic growth.

I first stood for elected office in Aberdeen in 1979. At that election, I said that Aberdeen should not be an oil capital with no legacy to show for it. Other cities throughout the world have Getty museums and art galleries, but Aberdeen did not have any significant investment from the oil companies that were based in the city and which benefited from its facilities. Do not get me wrong. Oil companies sponsor individual events, but there has been no long-term investment by those companies in the city.

Now, nearly five decades later, Aberdeen is in the almost unique position of having a promise of £50 million from a local man who has only ever had the best interests of his native city at heart. He proposes to plough in his own money to regenerate the heart of the city of Aberdeen, hauling it into the 21st century so that more companies will locate in Aberdeen. That will ensure that those who do not need to be there any more will stay, and that Aberdeen remains fit to be the energy capital of Europe for many years to come.

Given that the local Labour Party tried to make the development a party-political issue and, I have no doubt, was basing its local election campaign on the subject, it is now in panic mode. Holding a referendum was the right thing to do. Friends of Union Terrace Gardens supported a referendum, and it supported the question that was asked.

Now, the Labour Party is questioning the validity of the referendum. I have known Crawford Langley for many years and there is not another person in whom I would have more trust to conduct a referendum. The words of Sarah Boyack are absolutely disgraceful. Yes, there were police investigations, but they proved invalid. There was no double voting. The counting officer was absolutely scrupulous. If Crawford Langley had had any questions about the validity of the referendum or the costs that were ploughed into it by either side, I have no doubt that he would have raised them.

Sarah Boyack: Have you read the statement that Crawford Langley gave subsequent to the referendum? What are your comments on the concerns that he has raised having gone through the experience? This is not a criticism of Crawford Langley; I was absolutely clear about that in my opening speech. Let us pick up on the lessons learnt that he has laid out for us to consider.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to speak through the chair.

Maureen Watt: I take Crawford Langley's statement on board. Guidelines should be laid down for local referenda, but that is not what we are debating today. The people of Aberdeen have spoken. I thank Sir Ian Wood for his generosity and I welcome further contributions to the city garden project. We all need to get behind the project and make it all that it can be. I recognise that the project still has to go through the planning process.

As I said, the Labour Party finds itself in a big hole. It is flailing around and failing to get out of it. I am confident that the people of Aberdeen will leave it there at the council elections in May.

10:56

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): When Sir Ian Wood launched his proposals for Union Terrace gardens in November 2008, he said that he would proceed only if the project had strong support from the people of Aberdeen. In the past three years, the project has rather divided opinion in the city, and the consensus that Ian Wood hoped for at the outset has not been achieved.

Throughout the process, Sir Ian has been as courteous as he is generous, but that does not absolve SNP or Tory councillors from their responsibility to make decisions on the city's future if they are elected to office. Nor does holding a referendum allow councillors to shrug off responsibility, especially when the poll is not based on agreement among all the parties that are represented on the city council.

Democracy is about the vote itself, but it also requires consent across parties, effective limits on campaign spending, and properly tested safeguards against fraud. None of those things was in place for last week's ballot. Many thousands of glossy leaflets went through people's doors from organisations that had not registered to take part in the campaign. It is also a matter of record that the majority of those who voted by post said no to the city garden scheme.

Ministers are planning their own referendum and it is surely in all our interests that the conduct of that vote should be fair, its legal basis should be clear, and its result should be beyond challenge. The Electoral Commission has raised concerns about, for example, how 16 and 17-year-olds might be given the vote. Crawford Langley said at the count in Aberdeen last week that most 17-year-olds and some 16-year-olds could vote, but clearly some 17-year-olds and most 16-year-olds could not. That is what can happen if there is no

agreement on process, and that is also a lesson for the Scottish Government.

The referendum was the third time that public opinion had been canvassed, but the first time that the project achieved any kind of majority. Far from showing strong support, the result confirmed what we knew from the consultation and from every opinion poll that the local press had carried out: public opinion in the city is divided, so the buck stops with those who are elected to the council to take decisions.

Kevin Stewart: Does Mr Macdonald not recognise that there is a difference between an opinion poll that has no rules and regulations in place and which canvasses the opinions of only a small percentage of the city's population and, in some cases, those from outwith the city, and a referendum in which more than 52 per cent of the city's citizens voted?

Lewis Macdonald: I am quite happy if councillors choose to base their decision in part on the referendum, but they cannot base it on that alone. If SNP councillors lead Aberdeen City Council after 3 May, presumably we can expect them to seek consent in the way that we have heard, but they would be failing in their duty if they judged that the scheme would not work and gave it the go-ahead anyway. That is why I believe that a Labour-led council would not seek consent to borrow for the scheme as it stands. The weakness of the business case is fundamental, as is the lack of any proposal for meeting future revenue costs.

The risk that the council's consultants and Audit Scotland identified—that there will be millions of pounds of unpaid debt at the end of the process—is still there. The city council does not have sufficient financial strength to take that risk. Of course, another scheme might be a different story. If ministers were prepared to let the council keep business rates income to fund essential infrastructure projects in the city, a Labour-led council would have no difficulty in identifying projects to support economic development. The difference is that those projects would have the support of the vast majority of people in Aberdeen and would allow the city to move forward together.

11:00

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): How appropriate that McDonald number 2 follows Macdonald number 1, although I am not sure that I appreciate being referred to as a number 2, but there we go.

I found the referendum in Aberdeen to be helpful for two reasons. First, it helped to give an indication of public support for the project, which the Government stipulated as necessary in its recommendations on how Aberdeen could secure

tax increment financing funding. Secondly, the process has given the Labour Party welcome practice at being on the losing side in a referendum, which I am sure will come in handy for it in 2014.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the member give way?

Mark McDonald: No—don't be silly.

I will address some of the concerns—I will be generous and call them that—that Lewis Macdonald and Sarah Boyack have raised by reading some quotations. The first is from Crawford Langley, the independent counting officer, in whom I have a great deal of trust and faith, as I have worked alongside him at a number of elections and seen his work. He said:

“The decision to run a postal ballot was largely taken before I was appointed as Counting Officer, but, as a professional electoral administrator with close on 40 years experience, I would not have accepted the appointment had I been asked to conduct it on any other basis. Make no mistake: any other form of ballot would have been substantially open to fraud.”

The Labour Party's insinuation that the process was somehow not secure flies in the face of Crawford Langley's comments.

Sarah Boyack suggested that we all need to read Mr Langley's statement—I have read it and I agree that consideration needs to be given to what happens with local referenda in the future. However, the Labour Party motion makes not one reference to that concept. We could have had an interesting debate on the concept of local referenda and how to perhaps put in place a framework for them. Instead, we have a motion that Lewis Macdonald has helpfully brought to the Parliament to try to assist his colleagues in Aberdeen City Council in their attempts to win the council election in May. It is unfortunate that parliamentary time is being used for that purpose when the issue rightly belongs in the chamber of Aberdeen City Council and on the doorsteps of the city of Aberdeen.

I have a couple more quotations that might lead to sober reflection among the Labour Party. One states:

“The people of our historic city have voted in a democratic referendum. It is now time for Sir Ian Wood, ACSEF and the city council to return the trust shown in them. I implore all those involved with the City Garden to deliver on their promise of an on budget, sympathetic transformational project. I wish all those involved well.”

That was Jimmy Milne, chairman of the Balmoral Group, in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* on 7 March 2012. That is significant because Jimmy Milne opposed the city garden project, but he recognises the result of the referendum and the will of the people of Aberdeen to move forward

with the project. It is a great pity that Lewis Macdonald cannot recognise the will of the people.

A final quotation is from Scott Begbie, a columnist in the *Evening Express*. Again, he was an opponent of the project in advance of the referendum, but he said:

“The campaign was hard fought by both sides, the people voted as they saw fit and the die is cast. What happens now is the real test of Aberdeen as a city. A grown-up, mature society would agree to disagree and accept the majority opinion.”

It is clear that the Labour Party in the city of Aberdeen is not grown up or mature—it says no to the city garden project despite the public support; it said no to the Marischal college project, despite the fact that the scheme was delivered £22 million under budget by an SNP administration; it said no to the third Don crossing, which would solve congestion in the city; and it said no to the community stadium, which would help with the regeneration of our city. In May, the citizens of Aberdeen will be perfectly entitled to say no to the dinosaurs of the Labour Party.

11:04

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):

The Union Terrace gardens debate started badly and has, at times, been bitter. It is a pity that what should have been a positive and lively debate on alternative futures for Aberdeen city centre has become so polarised. One of the reasons why that has happened is that the Labour Party chose—for narrow, party-political aims—to fuel the negativity, and it continues to do so.

There is no doubt that the city centre has lost its vibrancy. Its decline is due, at least in part, to the absence of a master plan for the area. That, of course, has now been corrected, thanks to a change in the city council governance. If a region is to remain competitive, its city centre must compare well with other major European cities. Aberdeen would certainly benefit from a more vibrant city centre, which research has demonstrated is a key component of competitive regions.

Some poor planning decisions over the years have changed the way in which the city centre is used: the shopping areas are now disconnected; the main thoroughfare of Union Street is in decline; and, unlike most cities, Aberdeen has very little pedestrianisation. Although the gardens provide green space in the city centre, they are woefully underused and inaccessible to many.

For all those reasons, I supported the initial consultation and encouraged everyone to take part. A public debate on what might be done to improve the heart of our city was long overdue. Like many, I was disappointed that Peacock's

well-developed proposals were scuppered by the sudden intervention of the offer of funding by Sir Ian Wood. I argued strongly that, however generous, that must not become the main consideration. It was wholly wrong that it was portrayed as a take-it-or-leave-it deal.

I accept that Aberdeen City Council took the decision to progress to the design stage. In fact, the design competition advanced the debate and opened people's eyes to the possibilities. The exhibition of the shortlisted designs was attended by many people and there was a real buzz around the city.

The decision to hold a referendum reassured people that everyone's views would be properly taken into account.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the member give way?

Alison McInnes: I am sorry, but I do not have much time.

This has been the most thoroughly debated urban regeneration project that I am aware of. Sarah Boyack said that there were concerns about how the proposals were communicated, but the council, Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Future, local groups and the chamber of commerce set out clearly the issues to be considered. *The Press and Journal* is also to be commended for its coverage of both sides of the argument—the newspaper gave over many pages to explore the ideas over a number of weeks.

Last week, as we have heard, 86,000 people voted in the referendum. The number of those in favour was 45,301 and 41,175 were against. The turnout was 52 per cent, which was better than that for our elections last year. The Labour Party says that that is not decisive enough and suggests that the referendum was not conducted properly, but it has not provided any evidence for that. It is a bit rich of the Labour Party to talk about the result not being clear. Lewis Macdonald's majority in the 2007 election for Aberdeen Central was 382 on a 51 per cent turnout, but I do not recall him worrying about that not being decisive enough.

Now that the vote has been taken, the onus is on the elected members of Aberdeen City Council to respect the outcome. I remain concerned that a project of this scale will struggle to find sufficient funding and that it could end up being trimmed back and thereby not providing the city with the world-class design for which the citizens voted. That would be a betrayal of the hope that the people have shown. There is a duty on the council to work to determine whether the scheme's funding package truly stacks up. It must be forensic in its analysis and include the kinds of costs that were mentioned by Sarah Boyack. I imagine that that will take many months and

involve both the current council and the new council, which will be elected in May.

The wonderful refurbishment of Marischal college has shown what can be done when our councillors are determined. I hope that that is just the start of our city's renaissance. The Labour Party can either play its part in that or continue to be negative. If it chooses the latter, it will become utterly irrelevant in the city.

11:08

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):

As a former citizen of Aberdeen—I lived there when all this started—I am delighted that we have reached the point at which the city council now has a mandate to get on with an undoubtedly world-class project. However, I am disappointed with the nature of this parliamentary debate, principally because the motion bears little resemblance to what Labour Party members are now trying to say about it, having realised that what they proposed in the first place was probably not too bright.

Let me return to the subject at hand. When this process started, I lived in Aberdeen—in AB24 5DE—and I remember when Sir Ian Wood first briefed MSPs on the subject. I had just returned from a visit to family in New Zealand, during which I went to the botanical gardens in Wellington and saw the open-air theatre. I recognise that the weather in Wellington is slightly different from ours, but we get some good weather and possibly less wind. I thought how wonderful it would be if that kind of environment could be created in Aberdeen, where I lived and which I know and love. Along came Sir Ian Wood, saying, "Why don't we?" and, "Furthermore, I'll pay for it." Well done, Sir Ian. Thank you.

I admit that the initial consultation did not get off to a very good start, as Alison McInnes mentioned. Frankly, there was an unhelpful drawing and the original consultation probably was not as wide as it should have been. The net result was that not a very large number of people expressed an opinion. I am glad that a very, very large number of people have now expressed an opinion and that they clearly knew what they were voting on—there can be no doubt about that. The vote might have been won by a relatively small margin, but Alison McInnes made the point well about the way in which elections have operated; some members here know about that.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the member take an intervention?

Nigel Don: Forgive me, but I want to make another point.

In the debate, I have been surprised not by the Labour Party's negativity, which I have got used to, but by the fact that it now wants to change the subject to referenda, although it will ensure that the press release is about Aberdeen.

In my last minute, I will consider what the project will look like for someone who lives between Aberdeen and Dundee, as I do. Dundee, where I lived for a long time, has seen a vision of something being done to regenerate the city. If members are not aware of the waterfront project, they should be. That project, which will reach its pinnacle when we get the Victoria and Albert museum there, will transform Dundee completely as a place to do business, as a visitor centre and, therefore, as a place to live. Dundee has shown what can be done, and I do not think that it is entirely coincidental that there was a change in the make-up of the council.

Aberdeen has an opportunity to catch up, but it sounds as though one of the political parties that might have something to do with the council after 5 May does not want that to happen. The message from today's debate seems simply to be about whom Aberdonians should not vote for. Frankly, if they want to see some vision for and development of their city, they will have to turn to the other parties.

11:12

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank Nigel Don for his considered comments on the Dundee waterfront; however, I respectfully remind him that the plans for that project were laid before the SNP took control of the council in Dundee. It was a Labour council that pushed those plans forward.

For those who live in Dyce, Kincorth and everywhere in between, the debate surrounding Union Terrace gardens has been the single most talked-about issue in Aberdeen. Although the genuine concern this week has been about what is clearly a flawed referendum, I will talk about the true cost of the project. The figures just do not add up.

Although the SNP-led council claims that the bulk of the £92 million that is being spent on the project will be returned in the future through business rates, the council's TIF business team recognises that, if there is just a small increase in the cost of borrowing or a small shortfall in the projected income from business rates, Aberdeen City Council will be left with millions of pounds of additional debt but no contingency fund from which to repay it. It also seems that the council's finance staff do not have high hopes that the city's revenues will increase. In September, a

spokesperson from Aberdeen City Council predicted

"a forecast £127 million reduction in income along with extra cost pressures between now and 2015/16".

It is not just the council's own staff who are telling the SNP that the project is financially unviable; it is Audit Scotland, too. In the report that was released this week, Audit Scotland stated that the project represents a

"long-term risk for the council",

which is unable to fund any shortfall in the new business rates.

Mark McDonald: Will the member take an intervention?

Jenny Marra: No, thank you.

Aberdeen City Council is currently £560 million in debt and predicts a further £127 million reduction in income over the next four years. It is incredible that the SNP's answer to that is to take on more debt now, in the hope that that will be paid off in the future but with no guarantee that that will happen and no way of coping if it does not. That is an extraordinary risk to the people of Aberdeen, who are already suffering as a result of school closures, job losses and pay freezes.

The SNP administration in Aberdeen, endorsed by Alex Salmond, has reduced the education budget by a staggering £28 million. Schools have closed: Victoria Road primary, St Machar primary and Causewayend school have all shut their doors under the SNP. Pupil support assistants across the city have lost their jobs and essential social care providers such as Choices have gone.

Labour will continue to speak out against the administration's reckless decisions and to stand up in the best interests of everybody in Aberdeen—not just those who have the deepest pockets.

11:15

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I declare an interest as a member of Aberdeen City Council. I will begin with Jenny Marra's speech. When one prepares a speech for the chamber, one should use up-to-date figures. She used figures from the five-year business plan that are rather out of date, thanks to the fact that the SNP Government provided the council with more finance.

Once again, we have the negativity but not the positivity. Ms Marra talked about the closure of some schools, but she did not talk about the 10 new schools that have been built in Aberdeen in recent times and were delivered by the SNP-led administration. That is interesting, but not entirely surprising.

There is absolutely no doubt that the debate about Union Terrace gardens has polarised the city. One reason why I called for the referendum and moved a motion at the council, which was passed, is that there was only one way to deal with the matter and that was to let Aberdonians decide what the situation should be. Last week, 52 per cent of Aberdonians voted in favour of the city garden project. I voted yes, as did many others.

I will give members a few numbers: 51.1 per cent versus 48.9 per cent. The figure of 51.1 per cent is the share of votes that Anas Sarwar received to become the Labour Party's deputy leader; 48.9 per cent of folk voted agin. Does Labour dispute that he should be the deputy leader? Lewis Macdonald probably does, but he received only 15.62 per cent.

The usual local government election campaign has started and Labour has nothing whatever to say that is positive. It has of late punted out a leaflet called "Aberdeen Leader"—I think not—the headline of which is, "Your City, Your Say". Labour then gives citizens an instruction:

"Vote to Retain Union Terrace Gardens".

I am a little bit of a cynic, but I think that Labour has printed a huge number of those leaflets, canna see them go to waste and winna have them pulped, which is why we are having the debate.

It is no surprise to me or my colleagues that the Labour Party is holding up the development of our city. Ms Boyack said that we were discussing "a local planning issue". It is not a local planning issue yet, although I am sure that it will be. The Labour Party has voted en bloc to turn down every major planning proposal of late. That applies to the third Don crossing, as has been said, and to the community stadium, Marischal college and so on.

The Labour Party has been in trouble before over possible whipping on planning issues—we saw the demise of one of its councillors not so long ago over the Kingswells stadium bid. Some time real soon, somebody will probably look at Labour's voting records and at the fact that politics is coming into play in planning issues.

Ms Boyack said in the *Evening Express* this week that Labour would paint the Town house red. That is a matter for the people of Aberdeen, but I do not see that coming, because the Labour Party has gone down and down in recent times. If she wants to paint the Town house red, she will have to visit B&Q to get a few tins of paint and some brushes, and I am sure that she will have an argument with Historic Scotland about that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the open part of the debate. We now move to closing speeches.

11:20

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I genuinely thank the Labour Party for having brought this matter to the chamber, as it gives us an opportunity to unite the Parliament in a way that it has not been united in a long time. It is always nice when we have something to chase. I thank Labour, also, for giving my colleague Nanette Milne the opportunity to speak on this subject. She is well known as a mild-mannered member of the Parliament, who uses reason to make her arguments and peppers her speeches with statistics. Today, however, we saw her getting her teeth into something that she really enjoyed, and that will be a memory that I will hold for some time.

Today, we are talking about the Union Terrace gardens and the city garden project—at least, I am. There is much that is novel about the city garden project. That is perhaps the one justification for us to be talking about it today, because, when novel processes are adopted and we try something new, it is up to us politicians to debate them, consider the opportunities and take the matter forward in as informed a way as possible. However, the Labour Party has chosen to focus on the referendum. Like many others in this debate, I am amazed at the idea that one of the parties in this chamber, which turned out to be on the wrong side in that debate, should now question the validity of that referendum.

Kevin Stewart: Does Alex Johnstone agree that the Labour Party should have done the same as the other parties in the council and given its members a free vote on the issue?

Alex Johnstone: I believe that it would have been wise of it to have done so.

I will make a few comments about the referendum that are, perhaps, slightly different from others that have been made. What do I take from the division in the results and the fact that those who voted by post appeared to vote one way and those who used alternatives means of voting—by phone or online—appeared to vote another way? I could suggest that those who voted by phone or online were more likely to be the younger participants in the ballot, and the result might therefore indicate that those who see their future in Aberdeen in the long term, who want greater employment and who want success and wealth to be created in the city are those who chose to vote for the project. That is as valid a claim as any that has been made by the Labour Party.

There have been previous consultations on the issue, in the form of opinion polls and an online ballot. The online ballot sparked a worldwide debate, with people with particular points of view

intervening from the far corners of the earth. The online ballot opposed the project, but it was not limited to the people of Aberdeen. The referendum was, though—so much so that I, who live in Stonehaven, and many other people in Aberdeenshire, were disappointed that we did not get the chance to show our vociferous support. Within Aberdeen it was held and within Aberdeen it produced a majority. The minister quite rightly talked about that majority in terms that referred to the 1979 ballot on Scottish devolution, in which the majority that supported the proposition did not reach the 40 per cent mark that had been stipulated in the legislation. The irony is that it is the same Labour Party that supported that requirement that is now griping about the narrowness of the majority.

The vote was legitimate. It was, perhaps, experimental in some ways, but it produced a result that was, in my view, wide enough to be decisive.

There are other things that are novel in the project that have been criticised today, such as tax increment financing, which will, we hope, provide the project with £92 million. The business case is critical to the issue, and it is essential that we understand that TIF is a new funding method for Scotland and that the projects that pioneer its use will have to withstand scrutiny—their business cases will have to be sound. If we are to make the system work, we will have to progress the initiative. I believe that the amendment that the Government has lodged indicates that it will scrutinise that process, as is its responsibility.

I support the amendment in Alex Neil's name.

11:25

Alex Neil: Like Nanette Milne, I am a mild-mannered member of the Parliament. My speech will focus on three particular issues but, first, I declare that I have no particular interest in the local election campaign in Aberdeen. I am not standing in Aberdeen or, indeed, anywhere in the local elections.

It behoves political parties to be very careful about challenging a democratic process, particularly when a party is on the losing side and particularly when the turnout for the referendum was higher than the 50.2 per cent turnout for the Aberdeen City Council elections in 2007. If we look at the by-elections that have been held in Aberdeen, the turnout in every case was under 30 per cent. In terms of turnout, the result of the referendum is as legitimate as that for the by-elections and elections to which I referred. Indeed, the result is arguably more legitimate because of the higher turnout, which produced a majority.

Lewis Macdonald: Does the minister accept that, given the efforts that were made at the outset to build a consensus in favour of change and given the concerns that we have heard from his own benches about how the debate became polarised, holding a referendum in that format accentuated the polarisation and that, far from building a consensus, it means that, whatever the result, it is one that half the population of Aberdeen did not want?

Alex Neil: I would have thought that building consensus or unanimity on the issue would have been extremely difficult, to say the least. We have elections and referenda so that where there is a division of opinion or a choice of points of view, we can settle the matter according to the majority vote. I say to the Labour Party that the water is under the bridge and it is time to get on with trying to build a new future for Aberdeen, and Aberdeen city centre in particular.

As Mark McDonald said, there is a legitimate debate to be had about whether we should have a referendum act to set out the rules and regulations to govern the administration of locally organised referenda in Scotland. Had the motion been on those lines, I am sure that the chamber might have been able to reach unanimity on that point. However, today's motion is not one of high principle in relation to future rules and regulations for local referenda but one of low principle—in fact, of no principle other than, “We lost the referendum and we are complaining that we lost the referendum.” That is not a legitimate point of view.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I was not intending to intervene, because I have no knowledge of Aberdeen, but I am interested in tax increment financing. Having listened to the debate, I am concerned that TIF may be being brought into disrepute. Will the cabinet secretary agree to look objectively at the TIF proposal and judge it only in accordance with the strict criteria for approving such proposals?

Alex Neil: I will have more to say about TIF, but I can categorically assure the member that the Aberdeen proposal, like every other TIF proposal, will be considered within the regulations and the process that we have set down and that there will have to be a successful business case before it receives approval from the Scottish Government. Sir Ian Wood and Aberdeen City Council and its officers are all fully aware of the fact that planning and approval of the business case are the next steps in ensuring that the project goes ahead. We will approve it only if the business case is sustainable, and I now expect a robust business case to be put forward.

Kevin Stewart: I agree that that is the way that the process should be carried out and I would not expect anything other.

Will the cabinet secretary join me in calling on private money holders to put their hands a little bit further into their pockets so that the amount that we need in TIF can be reduced even more? I am sure that other benefactors may wish to contribute to the amazing project.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, you are in your last minute and I can give you only a few seconds back.

Alex Neil: The leverage from the private sector is one of the considerations in deciding on the robustness of any TIF business case.

My final point is another warning to the Labour Party. It is a dangerous precedent for even a shadow spokesman to say that, if his party is in the majority in a city council, it will not give a proposal planning permission when it comes before the council. That is a complete contravention of the wording and spirit of our planning laws, and I hope that Lewis Macdonald will retract his promise not to give the project planning permission if his party is in a position to reject it.

11:31

Sarah Boyack: I will pick up on that last point. The Labour Party has not made a commitment either way on planning permission. We are nowhere near the planning stage of the project, but a decision has been taken on the TIF and a proposal was put to people without full knowledge of the planning case.

As someone who has been interested in and passionate about planning for decades, I must say that there is a due process to be gone through once we get to deciding on an application and I am concerned that people's hands have been tied by the process to date. We have seen that happen before and it is of great regret.

Mark McDonald: Will Sarah Boyack give way?

Sarah Boyack: No. I took a large number of interventions earlier. I was fairer than I should have been.

We make several points in our motion: we note the referendum that was held; we note that opinion remains divided; and we note that there are concerns about the poll. Most of our time this morning has been spent debating those concerns and our request for the minister to examine the poll.

I am glad that SNP back benchers and the minister have stated that it would be good if common rules and guidelines could be used for

future referenda. That is one of the things that we are absolutely determined must come out of the experience in Aberdeen. There need to be clear rules so that no counting officer is put in the position of having to report a series of major concerns about the process of a referendum after the poll. The counting officer in Aberdeen worked hard and did his best. His integrity is not being criticised, but the process, the lack of clarity and the lack of clear, accepted ground rules are. Those must concern us all.

That covers the first two points of our motion and cuts to the heart of the matter.

Why can we not talk about the 48 per cent of voters who did not give their consent to the project? I accept the discussion that we have had today. Independent people counted the vote, but that does not mean that we have no concerns about the process, which must be examined.

Division remains in the city. If members think that the referendum was controversial, they should wait until we get to the planning process. Members should think of the challenges of putting together such a project. We cannot silence people simply because they have not given their consent.

There is a requirement on both sides of the debate to move forward with a proper and honest discussion about what will happen next. I agree that the 48 per cent who did not support the project were not all Labour supporters. We know that. The debate is not simply about us speaking for Labour voters.

Mark McDonald: Will Sarah Boyack give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, I will not.

We are making legitimate points in our national Parliament about the concerns that remain. There is nothing wrong with doing that and I do not see why we should be gagged and prevented from doing it. We are making the point that there were concerns about the process. Those concerns need to be brought to the chamber so that they can be learned from for the future.

When we add together the complexities of the finance that underpins TIF and the future complexities of the planning process, we see that the overall process is intensely complicated. I put it to members that we have seen major complexities in previous planning applications and Government ministers should be careful about what they say. At the end of the day, it is inevitable that an issue that involves a council decision and a council's financial interest will revert to the Scottish ministers, who will have to take an unbiased decision. However, ministers are pushing the process, through TIF. My colleague Lewis Macdonald has written several letters to Alex Neil and asked several questions in the Parliament,

and it is absolutely clear that the Scottish Government has been determined that there should be an Aberdeen TIF project and that it should be the Union Terrace gardens TIF project. That is regrettable.

We do not oppose economic development in Aberdeen, although our support for economic development in the past has not been mentioned in the debate—I am not surprised at that, because members of other parties do not want to give the Labour Party a fair hearing on the issue. We have consistently supported economic improvements to Aberdeen city.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: I will not, because Kevin Stewart cannot speak for the Labour Party on the matter; he has an opposing interest.

We are committed to the future of Aberdeen. That is why the issue is so important and why we are so passionate about it. Huge amounts of money are at stake. Prudential borrowing of £92 million will tie up a huge amount of the council's money for the next few years, when the council could be spending the money on other things. Jenny Marra made a powerful speech about the need for investment in education in the city.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way on that point?

Sarah Boyack: I absolutely will not. I could not have taken more interventions during my opening speech, when I gave way to the extent that I lost nearly three minutes of speaking time. I want to make comments that I was not able to make then.

The motion raises issues to do with the conduct of the ballot and the ground rules for the referendum. Referenda need to be agreed in advance by all parties, so that they can be fair and be seen to be fair, and so that people can agree with the outcome and move on.

The motion raises issues to do with the planning process for the project. I agreed with some of what Alison McInnes said in that regard. If, in future, someone says to the people, "You know, we won't be able to go with the proposals as we put them to you—really sorry about that. There will be financial and planning implications, but we got your say-so, so we are just going to move on," what will happen? What will happen if there are significant changes to the scheme?

What will happen if there are cost overruns? The main railway line is part of the site. I cannot think of a railway project that has gone through without major financial challenges arising in relation to the initial proposals. For examples of that, we need only look down the road to the Waverley station and Haymarket station projects, which are nowhere near the initial expectations.

The details of projects matter, and the details of the Union Terrace gardens proposals have not been worked through.

How will the Scottish Government make an objective decision? It rightly wants every part of Scotland to be able to benefit from TIF proposals. Why is the Government tying itself to such a complex and controversial major project, when if it sat down with and talked to the other parties it would find that there is a different attitude to some elements of the TIF proposal?

There is a real issue to do with objective decision making when the Government is so tied to a particular project, which is regrettable. I will not apologise for Labour standing up to speak for not just our voters in Aberdeen but all voters who had a strong view on the proposal and who remain unhappy and deeply concerned about Aberdeen City Council's financial future.

There is debate about the nature of the referendum in Aberdeen, and there is debate about the forthcoming referendum on the constitution. The recent experience in Aberdeen demonstrates the importance of fairness in all referenda. Surely we can all agree on that. Our motion simply records the concerns about the basis on which the poll was held. Those concerns need to be listened to; they must not be dismissed by the minister.

The Union Terrace gardens project will not be any less controversial as a result of last week's vote. The irony is that all the difficult stuff is still to come; the process will not be straightforward. It is absolutely right that we make that point. It is for local councillors to scrutinise the details on the financial and planning aspects of the proposal—accountability will be vital—and it is for the people in Aberdeen to take the matter forward.

It is important that the Scottish Government produces a clear framework to guide local authorities, to ensure fairness in future decisions. When it comes to voting in elections and in the national referendum, we need to ensure that we have all the details and that issues of fairness have been pinned down in advance. Clear lessons must be learned from the Aberdeen experience, because the referendum was not a straightforward process and the project will not be a straightforward process.

We reserve our right, at national and at local level, to ask the awkward questions that our voters put us here to ask. That is the job of a responsible Opposition, and we will continue to do that job.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

Partnership Action for Continuing Employment

1. Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it plans to review the membership and functions of partnership action for continuing employment. (S4O-00759)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): There are 21 local PACE partnerships across Scotland. We established the national organisation in June 2009, in response to the economic downturn. It brings together 18 organisations and the Scottish Government to oversee a continuous improvement programme to enhance the operation of PACE. We therefore continually review all aspects of PACE, including membership and functions.

Michael McMahon: The cabinet secretary will be aware that I recently had discussions with Fergus Ewing about the involvement of PACE following the closure of WJ Harte of Bothwell in my constituency, as a result of which more than 500 employees lost their jobs. However, he may not be aware that only about one in 10 of the former employees attended the PACE event that was held subsequent to the closure, whereas almost one in five attended an event that I and Thompsons Solicitors hosted on the employment and redundancy rights of individual members of the workforce. That appeared to show that there was a gap in the service that PACE provides.

Does the cabinet secretary have a view on whether the PACE service should be expanded to include the provision of advice on individual employee rights and redundancy rights, as well as advice on training, skills and employability?

John Swinney: Individuals who face redundancy will want to take a range of advice. I imagine that the advice that Mr McMahon and Thompsons Solicitors offered will have been of assistance in relation to some of the circumstances that the individuals in question face.

The focus of PACE is to encourage people who face redundancy to seek positive destinations and alternative employment. My view is that encouraging people to stay in the labour market and to move forward should remain the strongest focus of PACE, although that is in no way to

question the value or the wisdom of the employment rights advice that Mr McMahon and Thompsons Solicitors provided.

I will continue to monitor the situation, and if Mr McMahon or other members have any observations to add, I would be happy to hear them and to determine whether PACE needs to broaden its focus beyond its training and employment support activities.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): David Torrance has withdrawn question 2, but he has provided me with a satisfactory explanation for doing so.

NHS Ayrshire and Arran (Administrative and Hotel Services Staff)

3. Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many administrative and hotel services staff were employed by NHS Ayrshire and Arran in 2007 compared with 2012. (S4O-00761)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): Data for 2012 are not yet available. The latest statistics, which ISD Scotland published on 28 February, show that there were 1,561.9 whole-time equivalent administrative staff in NHS Ayrshire and Arran in September 2007 and 1,468.8 in December 2011. For hotel services staff, the figures are 616.9 and 602.9 over the same period.

Margaret McDougall: As the minister will know, the working tax credit changes that will come into force in April 2012 will mean that those who work for less than 24 hours a week will lose out on that much-needed benefit. Under agenda for change, in-house staff in the national health service should receive at least the living wage, but that is not always the case for contracted staff.

I appreciate that working tax credit changes are not in the minister's remit, but NHS pay and conditions are. What assurance can she give me that contracted staff who work in the NHS will receive decent pay and conditions? Does she agree that NHS boards should look to ensure that, regardless of whether they are contracted, all staff who work in the NHS receive at least the living wage?

Nicola Sturgeon: Margaret McDougall rightly points out that working tax credits are not within my remit. I wish they were devolved to this Parliament. If Scotland becomes independent, we will have control over all such issues, and we will be able to ensure that there are no anomalies.

Agenda for change provides fair pay and conditions for NHS staff. I remind the member—she was not in Parliament at the time—that that

pay and conditions system was introduced in 2004, under the previous Administration. One of the changes that we have made is to ensure that everyone who works for the NHS receives the living wage, and I hope that members across the chamber welcome that.

Another of the Government's policies is to ensure that, as far as possible, NHS services are provided by the NHS, but I encourage all those who provide contracted staff to pay them a fair and decent wage, and to apply agenda for change conditions. We are doing a great deal, and we will continue to ensure that NHS staff are treated fairly—they deserve it. As always on such occasions, I put on record my huge thanks to all those who work so hard within our national health service.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): What proportion of backlog maintenance of the NHS Ayrshire and Arran estate is assessed to be of high or significant risk, and how might that affect staff, particularly those in administration and hotel services, and the provision of services in general?

Nicola Sturgeon: As John Scott knows, the Government published its "State of the NHSScotland Estate 2011" report just a couple of weeks ago. The report was the first exercise to give a true picture of the state of the estate, as the previous Administration did not bother to carry out any such exercise. We now know the challenge that we face and, even in these times of constrained capital financing, we are maximising the capital resources that are available to NHS boards to enable them to carry out essential backlog maintenance and to continue to modernise the NHS estate. That is important for patients, and John Scott is right to link it to staff as well, because we must ensure that staff have a safe working environment in which to continue to provide excellent services for patients. We will continue to work with all NHS boards on that.

The Presiding Officer: I request that questions and supplementaries, and answers, are a bit shorter. That is necessary if we are to make progress.

Private Sector Tenants

4. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to defend and extend the rights of private sector tenants in Edinburgh. (S4O-00762)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): The rights of private sector tenants across Scotland are protected by a robust regulatory framework. This year, the Scottish Government will improve the effectiveness of regulation in the private rented sector by producing a new strategy for the sector for the

next decade, introducing one or more tenancy deposit safeguarding schemes, and launching a consultation at the end of the month that will help to clarify the law on premium charges that are levied on tenants by letting agents.

Kezia Dugdale: I have been contacted by a number of constituents in financial difficulty who are trying to move house and find themselves legally being charged hundreds of pounds in admin fees. The Private Rented Housing (Scotland) Act 2011 gave the minister the power to do something about that. Is he prepared to use that power?

Keith Brown: I have just said that we will launch a consultation at the end of the month that will help to clarify the law on premium charges that are levied on tenants by letting agents. It will address the problem that Kezia Dugdale identifies and, in particular, it will look at charges that tenants have no reason to expect. Nothing should be charged outside the rent and the tenancy deposit, which will be covered by the tenancy deposit scheme, but it is right that we consult first, and we will do so at the end of the month.

Inward Investment (High-quality Jobs)

5. John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what mechanisms are in place to ensure that inward investors promote high-quality employment opportunities. (S4O-00763)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Scottish Development International's policy is to focus on the attraction of high-value, high-quality jobs to Scotland through inward investment. In the year to the end of March 2011, SDI attracted a total of 2,046 high-value jobs, which is within its target range for that year of 1,600 to 2,400 such jobs.

John Park: The cabinet secretary might be aware that constituents in Mid Scotland and Fife have raised concerns about an overreliance on agency workers at Amazon in Dunfermline. Is he prepared to publish any employment targets that have been agreed with Amazon? What mechanisms exist to claw back public funds should those targets not be met?

John Swinney: It is clear that, if companies enter into agreements with Scottish Development International that give rise to regional selective assistance or any other financial support, there will be stringent monitoring of all the commitments that have been undertaken to determine whether all the conditions have been met. The Government will continue to do that, and if it is necessary for any action to be taken, the Government will take it.

Fuel Poverty

6. Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when the fuel poverty forum will publish a report on its review. (S4O-00764)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): I expect to receive a copy of the Scottish fuel poverty forum's interim report in April. I met the chairman of the forum, Professor David Sigsworth, this morning, and we had a constructive discussion about how we can take forward a number of new approaches to tackling the problem of fuel poverty.

Aileen McLeod: The latest Scottish house condition survey, which is from 2009, shows that 41 per cent of households in Dumfries and Galloway are in fuel poverty compared with 28 per cent in Scotland as a whole. The region has the third-highest level of fuel poverty of all the Scottish local authority areas. What steps will the cabinet secretary encourage local authorities to take in order to ensure that information is forthcoming to all residents about what they can do to reduce fuel poverty?

Alex Neil: Last week, I announced a further £2 million for the Scottish Government's boiler scrappage scheme and the universal home insulation scheme, which brings the total funding this year for fuel poverty and energy efficiency to over £57 million. I urge local authorities to tell households that are concerned about the cost of keeping their home warm to phone the home energy Scotland hotline—the number is 0800 512012—and free and impartial advice will be provided. Further, localised promotions are delivered through the five regional energy saving Scotland advice centres. That ensures that local authorities and voluntary organisations are fully briefed on the help that is available to their clients.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome the resources to which the cabinet secretary referred. He will be aware that the number of households that are experiencing fuel poverty is rising. In light of that, does he believe that the 2016 target to eradicate fuel poverty is achievable? If so, what additional action will be needed to reach it, given that the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee recently reported that the financial resources fall some way short of what is required?

Alex Neil: This morning, I wrote to the convener of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee with my response to its very good report. We will be glad to endorse a number of the committee's recommendations.

In the current spending review period, over the next three years, the Scottish Government and the energy companies will invest a significant amount—our share will total around £0.25 billion—

in tackling fuel poverty in Scotland. That compares with a budget that has been cut to ribbons south of the border under the previous Labour Administration and the current Tory-led coalition.

Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route

7. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive when it expects construction work to commence on the Aberdeen western peripheral route. (S4O-00765)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): It is hoped that the small number of objectors who are opposed to the AWPR will be willing to accept the recent Court of Session judgment so that we can get on and build the road. Subject to no further appeal being lodged against the judgment, we will continue to work with our project partners to ensure that that vital project can move forward to construction as soon as possible.

Alison McInnes: I seek an assurance that the Scottish Government is doing everything necessary to ensure that construction can start as soon as the legal shackles are lifted. The partners in the project—that is, the two councils—need a clear answer on the proposed funding arrangement, and they need up-to-date costings. Will the minister undertake to provide that clarity at the proposed meeting between Transport Scotland and the councils on 11 April?

Keith Brown: We have had a number of conversations with the councils concerned, and they have been kept fully up to date on the progress that has been made. We have to take legal advice on what we can do during the current period, in which the legal process has not been exhausted, but we also have to go through the various design, procurement and construction processes. We will do that as fast as we can, as we want to be the Government that delivers the project, unlike previous Governments.

Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and Haudagain Junction

8. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it expects work to begin on the Aberdeen western peripheral route and the A90/A96 Haudagain junction. (S4O-00766)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): As the answer to the previous question dealt with the AWPR, in this answer I will concentrate on Haudagain. We have repeatedly given a clear commitment that we will progress the Haudagain improvements on the completion of the AWPR. That commitment remains firmly in place.

Lewis Macdonald: Does the minister acknowledge that work on the Haudagain could

begin immediately, and that any further delay in its commencement would be a matter of great regret? It is now some years since the work was approved. Will the minister give us a commitment today—given his recent announcement of funding for design work on the Haudagain—to take the work forward this year, regardless of any change to the schedule for the AWPR?

Keith Brown: The nature of the commitment that I am willing to give was in the answer that I have just given. We will start the Haudagain improvements on the completion of the AWPR—for the best of planning reasons, and because of expert advice that we have received.

However, as the member suggests, there are things that we can do in the meantime. We have started on them, and we will continue prudently so that, immediately the AWPR is completed, we can crack on with the Haudagain roundabout.

Waiting Times (NHS Lothian)

9. David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will provide an update on the progress made in response to its request to NHS Lothian to carry out an internal audit of the application of its waiting time practices and management. (S4O-00767)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): In early January, NHS Lothian was asked to commission its internal auditors to carry out a special audit of waiting times management practice. NHS Lothian decided to commission the waiting times audit from external auditors, and it subsequently appointed PricewaterhouseCoopers to carry out the audit. After further consideration of the matter, I advised the chair of NHS Lothian on 25 February that, in the interests of appropriate corporate governance, my officials would now instruct the auditors, and that the report from the auditors would come to the Scottish Government in the first instance. On completion, the findings will be shared with NHS Lothian and, indeed, will be made available to this Parliament. I will expect the board to take forward any recommendations that arise from the report.

David McLetchie: Perhaps the cabinet secretary could explain to us why

“the interests of appropriate corporate governance”

were not an issue when she signalled her contentment with NHS Lothian’s proposal for an independent external audit in a letter of 24 January. Is not the truth of the matter that a large part of the problem lies in the confusing and ambiguous guidance on waiting times, for which the Government is responsible? Will the cabinet secretary give an assurance that her audit will be completed within the timescale that was originally

envisaged by NHS Lothian, and that it will focus on the terms of the guidance and decide whether NHS Lothian took a reasonable approach in its interpretation and implementation of the guidance?

Nicola Sturgeon: I would hope that David McLetchie and other members would welcome the fact that I consider the adherence of NHS Lothian and all health boards to the waiting times guidance—and some of the issues relating to NHS Lothian—to be so important. The carrying out of an audit that complies with strict standards of corporate governance and is seen to be completely independent of NHS Lothian should be welcomed.

I do not accept that there is ambiguity in the waiting times guidance that would excuse any board from adhering to it. I want to ensure that people have confidence in Lothian and in every part of Scotland. Patients expect and deserve that the rules that we set out to ensure speedy access to treatment should be complied with.

As I have said, the audit will be fully published. I have asked for it to be completed as quickly as possible, and any lessons that require to be learned will be learned by NHS Lothian.

Tax Increment Funding (Aberdeen)

10. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in securing a tax increment funding pilot for Aberdeen. (S4O-00768)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): In November 2011, Aberdeen City Council was invited to work with the Scottish Futures Trust to develop a tax increment financing business case for the city centre regeneration plans, including the redevelopment of the Union Terrace gardens. At that time, it was emphasised that Aberdeen City Council’s plan to use TIF for the Union Terrace gardens project would be progressed for ministers’ consideration only if public support for the project could be demonstrated. The recent referendum in Aberdeen demonstrated that public support, and we look forward to receiving the final TIF business case.

Kevin Stewart: I feel a bit bad about asking these questions as we have already had a debate on the subject this morning. In the light of last week’s referendum, does the cabinet secretary intend to meet Aberdeen City Council to discuss the business case? The city garden project is not the only project, as we also have the St Nicholas house redevelopment, the city art gallery redevelopment, improvements to the city realm and the north Denburn valley redevelopment.

Alex Neil: Presiding Officer, I hope that we are not going to have a tiff about TIF. I have no plans to meet Aberdeen City Council to discuss its bid for a TIF pilot. I expect finalisation of the TIF business case to be taken forward by the Scottish Futures Trust and the council, and I look forward to considering the business case in due course.

The Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, we might have a tiff if you keep making jokes like that.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of this international women's day. (S4F-00528)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): With your permission, Presiding Officer, I want to say a few words about Paul McBride, who tragically died last weekend. Paul was an outstanding advocate and a substantial public figure in Scotland. His reservoir of talent was great indeed, and I believe that he had a great deal more to contribute both to the law and to the great debate on Scotland's future. He will be sorely missed and I am sure that the whole chamber will wish to convey our condolences as a Parliament to Paul's partner, Gary, his parents and his many friends and colleagues.

As has been said, today is international women's day. It is a day when the world celebrates the achievements and contributions of women past and present. I want to acknowledge women's tremendous contribution to Scottish society, so this is a fitting opportunity to announce that the Scottish Government has committed to fund the Scottish resource centre for women in science, engineering and technology at Edinburgh Napier University. Because funding for the United Kingdom parent body had been removed by Westminster, the facility was facing closure, but we have acted to ensure that the centre, which supports the success of women in fields of endeavour in which they are significantly underrepresented, remains open to continue its vital work. *[Applause.]*

Johann Lamont: On behalf of Labour members, I support the First Minister's comments about Paul McBride and express our sympathy with regard to the very sad and tragic loss both to Mr McBride's family and to critical debates in Scotland. As the First Minister said, he will be sadly missed.

This week, Joan McAlpine, the First Minister's parliamentary aide, likened Scotland's place in the United Kingdom to that of a woman in an abusive marriage. Does the First Minister agree?

The First Minister: Joan McAlpine did not do that. Despite feeling the need to misrepresent, the Labour Party really should not treat hugely important issues in such a fashion. In her column, Joan McAlpine talked about the abuse of power; there are abuses of power by the Westminster Government over Scotland. The Labour Party

should try to treat the hugely important issue of abuse against women with the importance that it deserves, instead of feeling the desperate need to misrepresent what other people say.

Johann Lamont: The First Minister should be very careful about suggesting that people on this side of the chamber wish to diminish the issues of domestic abuse and violence in the home. The reality is that there has been commitment and co-operation across the Parliament to address those problems, which is precisely why the First Minister should reflect on what his aide said. How the First Minister handles his aide is entirely a matter for him, but I do not know many people who, on coming out of an abusive marriage, have then entered a social union and kept the same bank account, which is what the First Minister has suggested for a separate Scotland.

The First Minister needs to deal with the fact that his aide's analogies are as offensive to women as his policies are damaging. As a result of those policies, 400 women are being put out of work every day. It is not, as his aide alleges, being part of the UK that is holding women back; rather, Tory cuts have been compounded by the First Minister's inaction. That is why female unemployment is higher in Scotland than it is in the rest of the UK. When is the First Minister going to start doing something to help women back to work? Is it the case that, like everything else, we are going to have to wait his 1,000 days for a referendum before he lifts a finger?

The First Minister: As I have pointed out to Johann Lamont, a hugely important issue should not be demeaned by taking someone's remarks totally out of context and distorting them. There are plenty of abuses of power by Westminster over Scotland; today, for example, I regard the Remploy employees as suffering from such an abuse of power, I regard the cuts to the disability living allowance in Scotland as a huge abuse of power, and I regard the plans to replace the Trident missiles on the Clyde as an enormous abuse of power that should be sorted out in Scotland.

As for how we as a Parliament have challenged that serious issue, I am sure that Johann Lamont would be the first to acknowledge that, against the extraordinarily difficult circumstances of Westminster cuts—cuts that Alistair Darling told us would be “deeper and tougher” than those of Margaret Thatcher—the fact that investment in key areas in Scotland has not only been maintained but increased is a huge tribute to the commitment of our Government and our Parliament.

For example, funding to tackle violence against women, including domestic abuse, has doubled. It has increased from £21 million over three years to £55 million in the four years from 2008 to 2012.

Against the background of the cuts imposed from Westminster, those figures surely indicate this Government's endeavour—our joint endeavour—to give those hugely important issues the priority that they deserve.

Johann Lamont: I have acknowledged the commitment across the Parliament on domestic abuse, and I recognise the funding that exists for that.

I hear from the First Minister a critique of what the Tories in Westminster have done—they are a problem because they are Tories, not because they are English—but I hear nothing about his responsibilities. I was making the point that the unemployment rate for women is higher in Scotland than it is in the rest of the United Kingdom, and that that is the First Minister's responsibility.

The Deputy First Minister has also been making grand promises this week. Apparently, only in an independent Scotland can we have policies that do not offend our sense of decency. However, on her Government's watch, the fuel poverty rate is double that in England, and she does nothing. Childcare costs are higher than in the United Kingdom and one in four children lives in poverty, but she does nothing.

Is this not the mañana Government? It is doing nothing for people who are in difficulty today, but is promising them the world tomorrow—a tomorrow that is at least a thousand days away.

The First Minister: The reason why a Tory Government rules over key areas of Scottish life is precisely that the Labour Party accepted the position of Westminster control over vital areas of Scotland.

There is, at present, a huge difficulty with unemployment in various sectors of society that is affecting women and young people. However, Johann Lamont should at least acknowledge the employment rate: that is, the number of people who are in jobs. There are 10,000 more women employed in Scotland than there were just over a year ago. [*Alex Salmond has corrected this contribution. See end of report.*] The number of women in jobs is the highest across these islands: the employment rate for women in Scotland is higher than it is in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. That should be acknowledged.

I have already stressed to Johann Lamont the importance that I place on the figures for modern apprenticeships—the apprenticeships that the Labour Party voted against, we must remember, in the budget debate. The figure for women who are participating in modern apprenticeships has moved from 27 per cent at the disgracefully low level of 15,000 or 16,000, to 45 per cent at the much-increased level of 25,000. I hope that we

can unite as a Parliament to look at that figure of 25,000 modern apprenticeships not only in relation to this year, but stretching through the next five years, and see the percentage of young women who learn trades and skills ever increasing. That will contribute to our acknowledgement as a Parliament of women's critical role in work and in Scottish society.

Johann Lamont: If the First Minister was talking to women, he would know that his figures on women's employment mask something much more serious. We have lost more than 100,000 full-time jobs to temporary and part-time jobs. Women in local government—which he has targeted for cuts—and in the voluntary sector are having their hours cut. The figures mask the fact that women are suffering disproportionately from unemployment and underemployment.

The gap between the words and the reality grows as we speak. Last week, the First Minister told us that the only thing that Rupert Murdoch got when he visited him was

“a cup of tea and a ... caramel wafer”.—[*Official Report*, 1 March 2012 ; c 6828.]

We have now found out that he also offered Murdoch a multimillion-pound tax cut.

There is a pattern here. All that a working person—[*Interruption*.]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Order. We will hear the member, please.

Johann Lamont: All that a working person who needs help gets from the First Minister is warm words about what might happen in 1,000 days, but Fred Goodwin gets all the backing that the First Minister can muster, Donald Trump gets direct access to the chief planning officer, and Rupert Murdoch gets offers of multimillion-pound tax cuts in exchange for headlines. Some people might say that Scotland is being bought and sold for Murdoch gold. Is it not about time that we heard less, that women heard less, and that families across this country heard less about the First Minister's fantasies for tomorrow and more about how he will deal with the realities of today?

The First Minister: That lot indicates that Johann Lamont would do better to focus on one subject at a time during question time. Let us look at the substantive issues. [*Interruption*.]

The Presiding Officer: Order. We will hear the First Minister.

The First Minister: Johann Lamont is better at asking questions badly on one subject than she is at asking them badly on six subjects, in my opinion. Let me give her the statistics. I accept that unemployment is far too high, but 10,000 more women are in work than were in work just over a

year ago. [*Alex Salmond has corrected this contribution. See end of report.*] The figure for employment—people who are actually in jobs—which is a very important figure, is 66.8 per cent in Scotland as opposed to 65.3 per cent in England.

The amount of young women who are just starting modern apprenticeships is at 45 per cent, and the training for work figure has gone up from 28 per cent three years ago to 35 per cent now. There is still more work to do but, again, the figures indicate that young women are taking their rightful place in the workforce.

The figure for young women who are leaving school and going on to the positive destinations of full-time education, employment or training is now at 90.4 per cent—an increase from 87.8 per cent in 2006-07.

The Government's commitment to no compulsory redundancies in our controlled public sector and the health service is vital for all workers, but it is particularly vital for women, given their importance in the public sector workforce.

Finally, of course, there is the Government's delivery of—not a commitment to, or a promise of—something that the Labour Government never did, which is the living wage at £7.23 an hour across our controlled public sector. That is why last year, when it came to the test, it was not just a vast majority of Scottish men, but also a substantial majority of Scottish women who gave this Government their endorsement and placed their hopes in this Government for improving the lot of women and Scottish society by getting control of the towering heights of this economy, so that we can mould a better future free of Tory government.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): I thank the First Minister for his warm words about Paul McBride. Paul made a huge contribution to Scottish public life and he had many friends in the chamber. The thoughts of the Conservative Party are with his partner and family at this time.

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S4F-00513)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the Prime Minister in the immediate future.

Ruth Davidson: Today, the Scottish Conservatives announced plans to support the Government's Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill in return for concessions that will help industry, such as voluntary notification to Europe and a vital sunset clause so that, although we hope that the measure works to reduce problem drinking across Scotland, Scottish

industry will not be penalised in perpetuity should the legislation prove to be not effective.

Yesterday, the Scottish Conservatives tried to help employers by blocking the retail levy, which is a Scotland-only tax that is designed to be a £95 million cash grab to allow the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth to plug holes in his budget, aided and abetted by Labour. This punitive tax, unheralded in the SNP manifesto, and with no assessment of its impact on Scottish retailers, will result in Scottish retailers having the highest business poundage for more than 20 years. Asda has already said that this uncompetitive tax will add significant costs to its business in Scotland, and has warned that future projects might now be scrapped.

Can the First Minister tell me how many young people are employed by the retail sector in Scotland right now?

The First Minister: I welcome the change in the Conservative Party's position on minimum pricing. The matter was touched on in my recent discussions on the constitution with the Prime Minister. Since the election, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives have seen the importance and crucial nature of Scotland confronting its difficulties with alcohol and have recognised that the proposed legislation is worth trying to see whether we can combat that scourge on society. I welcome the movement by the Liberal Democrats and now the Conservatives to try, as a Parliament, to make the measure a success.

I do not agree with Ruth Davidson on the impact that she feels the retail levy will have. She mentioned Asda, which announced plans for three new stores and a replacement depot in Scotland on 23 January, in full knowledge of the Government's plans for the retail levy. If Ruth Davidson wants to say that we do not need to make that move to fund crucial public spending—incidentally, she called for additional public spending on those areas, oblivious to the fact that the pressure on our budget comes from her colleagues at Westminster—perhaps she will detail for us here and now what she would cut or where she would raise the money, rather than have a completely proportionate levy that will allow a vital contribution to health education and the general confronting of the problems with alcohol.

I am not going to say, "Better one sinner who repenteth,"—

David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con): You have said it.

The First Minister: I point out to Mr McLetchie that I was only sayin it so as I didnae say it. I will withdraw it, if that helps.

I want us to treat this vital matter of taking the initiative and having the courage to introduce minimum pricing as part of an overall and general approach to confronting the scourge and evil of Scotland's problem with alcohol.

Ruth Davidson: The retail levy has no preventative properties in terms of health. It does not target retailers that sell alcohol and tobacco; it merely targets the largest and it is not a proportional cost based on the amount of alcohol or tobacco that is sold. Frankly, to call it a "health levy" is a fig leaf to cover the embarrassment of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, whose numbers did not add up.

The First Minister did not answer my question on youth employment, so I will answer it for him. More than a third of all Scots who work in retail are under the age of 25. The sector supports 80,000 young people directly and is a gateway to employment in other industries for thousands more. Sixty-two per cent of all retail jobs are done by women. The Confederation of British Industry Scotland, the Scottish Property Federation, the Scottish Retail Consortium, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, the Wine and Spirit Trade Association and the British Council of Shopping Centres all condemn the tax as being damaging to Scotland.

The First Minister says that he wants to be trusted with all Scotland's taxes. We now see what he would do with them: he would put them up and damage the very companies that are preventing Scotland's youth unemployment figures from rising above the already scandalous figure of 102,000 young people on the dole. It is not too late for the First Minister. Will he now scrap this cynical and anti-competitive £95 million tax that will endanger jobs and investment in Scotland?

The First Minister: As gently as I can, I remind Ruth Davidson that the application of a 2.5 per cent increase in VAT had 10 times the impact that the retail levy will have. Not only that, but the VAT increase applied to goods and services and companies across the board. The public health supplement—the title contains the clue to what will be done with the revenue—applies to 0.1 per cent of retail outlets in Scotland. Their business rates, which currently account for 2 per cent of their turnover, will with the supplement increase to an estimated 2.3 per cent of turnover. The party that swept the VAT increase into the Scottish economy a year ago is now oblivious to the public health levy's minor impact on a small number of very large retailers, which will help to finance critical areas of preventative spend in Scotland.

After publication of “Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland 2010-11” yesterday, I point out to Ruth Davidson that, if we had access to the £2.6 billion that was lost to the Westminster Treasury in last year’s accounts—£509 for every man, woman and child in Scotland—we would have a range of choices open to us that are not open under Tory rule from Westminster.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of the UK Government’s decision to close four Rempoy factories in Scotland, including one in Springburn. I am sure that he will share my concern about how the announcement was made and the situation in which the workers have been placed.

What actions will the Government take to support Rempoy workers in Scotland? Will the First Minister encourage the increased use of section 19 provisions in Government procurement? Did the Government respond formally to the consultation on the Sayce report? If not, what action did it take to influence its outcome?

The First Minister: We have been in discussions on that very matter, which made it all the more disappointing that we received our first notification about the decision on Rempoy only yesterday afternoon, when Maria Miller told Fergus Ewing about the announcement. The decision and the way in which it was communicated are matters of great disappointment, given the number of discussions we had about the general issue.

Patricia Ferguson touched on the important issue of section 19. In October 2010, the public contracts Scotland portal developed a re-registration process to identify supported businesses for buyers. That work is on-going, but it has already had a substantial effect. Since October 2010, a total of nine framework agreements have been awarded to supported businesses, to the value of £13.7 million. The latest financial data for this key area confirm that £24 million was spent on Scotland-based supported business by the Scottish public sector in the past financial year.

I share Patricia Ferguson’s great disappointment and concern. The announcement was, at best, ill-timed and insensitive. The necessary preparations do not seem to have been made to guide the 104 disabled people—Rempoy employed 111 people in Scotland—into productive employment. Discussions must start as quickly as possible and the UK Government must accept its responsibility for the situation in which it has placed so many vulnerable people.

Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP): Following the Royal Bank of Scotland’s announcement that 120 jobs are to be cut in my constituency, what action is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that employees who are made redundant are supported into new employment? Does the First Minister agree that, at a time when RBS requires solid political leadership, Vince Cable’s recent statements demonstrate why Scotland should be in charge of its own banking regulations?

The First Minister: Vince Cable’s comments were made in a leaked letter, rather than a statement, but if the Royal Bank of Scotland was broken up, that would have substantial implications for the headquarters workforce in Scotland. I regret that Vince Cable’s memo to the Prime Minister did not acknowledge that important issue.

I share Colin Keir’s concern about the job losses that have been announced by RBS, and about the impact on the employees affected and their families. Fergus Ewing has already provided full details of the support that is being provided through PACE—partnership action for continuing employment—and the finance sector jobs task force.

The task force operates under the auspices of FiSAB—the Financial Services Advisory Board—and the agreement between the financial sector and the Scottish Government, and has had substantial success in allowing people who have been released by the clearing banks to find other financial sector employment. That has been a substantial success over the past few years.

I hope that that goes some way to assuring Colin Keir of what we are doing. We will do everything possible to minimise the time that individuals who are made redundant spend out of work.

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-00517)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: In the first edition of *The Scottish Sun on Sunday*, the First Minister played down the role of *The Sun*, the *News of the World* and News International in the phone hacking scandal. By using the defence, “It wasn’t just them—others did it, too,” the First Minister lent his support to Rupert Murdoch, yet was silent on the victims of phone hacking. Does the First Minister believe that hundreds of phone hacking victims and their

families will be satisfied with his failure to stand up to News International?

The First Minister: I do not know whether Willie Rennie managed to attend First Minister's question time last week, when I reiterated and made absolutely clear my full support for the police investigations south and north of the border and my full support for the Leveson inquiry. Since the then Government did absolutely nothing about it, he should take on board the findings of operation Motorman. I promised last week that the document would be placed in the Scottish Parliament information centre, in case the identification by the information commissioner of potential criminality in respect of data protection had not been fully understood by members. I advise Willie Rennie to read the list, which extends across the London press—there are very few Scottish examples in the analysis. Every part of that document should be analysed, and we should support the police inquiries into phone hacking and the Leveson inquiry to the hilt.

I hope that, now that that has been explained to Willie Rennie, he accepts our total commitment to seeing the law upheld.

Willie Rennie: The First Minister prefers to cosy up rather than stand up to Rupert Murdoch. Earlier this week, he was caught bragging about Rupert Murdoch's support for Scottish independence. We have discovered that Rupert Murdoch wants to break up Britain in revenge for the Leveson phone hacking inquiry, and our First Minister is only too happy to leap on that and ignore the victims. That was the trade: "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine." The problem is not the column in *The Scottish Sun on Sunday*, the fireside chats with Rupert Murdoch or even the free tickets to the golf. The problem is that, rather than stand up to Rupert Murdoch, the First Minister has defended him and put his interest above the interests of the victims. Is the First Minister not ashamed of this grubby deal?

The First Minister: Willie Rennie would do well to read what I said last week and at least hear my answer to his first question before reading out his second question.

It is reasonable to make the point that the Government is totally committed to upholding the police investigations in England and Scotland, upholding the Leveson inquiry and asking for the law to be enforced and upheld, which clearly has not been done in recent years. I suggest that Willie Rennie has a good look at the findings of operation Motorman to see the extent of potential criminality across the Fleet Street press and the number of titles that were named by the information commissioner in that report.

I was going to talk about Michael Brown, Liberal Democrat donors and how the Liberal Democrats are in no position to lecture anyone about their associates. Liberal Democrats have always wanted to adopt a holier-than-thou position in politics—the party that put the moan into "sanctimony".

Economy

4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the implications are of the findings in the Scottish Government's recently published "State of the Economy" report. (S4F-00530)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The "State of the Economy" report highlighted the challenge facing the global economy and the economic outlook for the months ahead. The Scottish Government has taken and continues to take decisive action to promote growth and to create jobs, helping Scotland to face the recession, so that—although still extremely serious—it is both shorter and shallower than the recession in the United Kingdom as a whole. That fact is confirmed by the report, as are the extraordinary challenges that will face public spending for years to come if we remain under the thumb and under the control of the London Treasury.

Kenneth Gibson: Does the First Minister share my concern that UK Government cuts and revised inflation forecasts will cause the Scottish Government's spending power to fall in real terms by 18 per cent over seven years, meaning that the cumulative loss to the Scottish budget over the period could be £51 billion—£10,000 for every man, woman and child in Scotland? Does he agree that, as figures in the report "Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland 2010-11" revealed yesterday, an independent Scotland would be in a stronger fiscal position than the UK as a whole, with a lower per capita debt, and would therefore be better able to stimulate investment, generate growth, create jobs, raise living standards and improve the quality of life of everyone living in Scotland?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree. The figures that were published yesterday with the official kitemark showed a difference of £2.6 billion, which is equivalent to £510 for every man, woman and child in Scotland. Facts are chieftains that winna ding. The figures speak for themselves and the anti-independence parties in the chamber had better get used to hearing about it, because they are going to hear a lot more of it.

Public Entertainment Licensing

5. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will issue

guidance on the new public entertainment licensing regime. (S4F-00515)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Cabinet Secretary for Justice wrote to assist licensing authorities this week by setting out the powers that they have to decide what they wish to license and not to license. The amendment to the law was introduced to allow local authorities to control and ensure safety at large-scale free-to-enter events, such as raves and fireworks displays.

When local authorities take licensing decisions, we expect them to take account of the impact on cultural activity and small-scale events in their areas, to continue to support the fantastic individual, grass-roots and community-based artistic talent in Scotland. That is the case at any time but is particularly important in the year of creative Scotland.

As Malcolm Chisholm asked the question, I am pleased to note that the City of Edinburgh Council has indicated that no free cultural events for audiences of less than 200 people will be affected.

Malcolm Chisholm: I thank the First Minister for the letter, which was at long last issued yesterday, so soon after my question appeared in the *Business Bulletin*. Last week, I spoke at a constituency meeting of more than 200 people who were very concerned about the threat to grass-roots culture and very annoyed about the new licensing legislation and the absence of any guidance about it. Given that the Scottish Government did not understand the immediate implications of its proposed legislation when questioned about it at stage 1, will it now take every action possible to promote and support our vibrant grass-roots culture in this year of creative Scotland?

The First Minister: I congratulate Malcolm Chisholm on his question and on eliciting the response that I am about to give him. I gently point out that the problem cannot really have been legislative; if it had been, a letter of guidance could not have sorted it. As he is well aware, local authorities have discretion under the legislation, which they are now using. I hope that he welcomes the excellent letter of guidance that has gone out to local authorities from Kenny MacAskill.

Incidentally, I would be the last person to say that independent-minded members of the Parliament cannot have a key role in asking key questions on issues that are of public concern. I congratulate Malcolm Chisholm on doing that.

Agriculture (Subsidies)

6. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what action is being taken to prevent those not actively farming

from being able to claim agricultural subsidies. (S4F-00518)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): It is totally unacceptable that speculators are using a loophole in the legislation to claim single farm payments while doing nothing in return. We are ensuring that that loophole is closed in the common agricultural policy reform negotiations that are under way, through the so-called Scottish clause.

The position is not as simple as using the existing legislation to define an active farmer. Independent analysis identified that if we tried to use the current legislation, we would end up not just closing the loophole but depriving a range of very active farmers—particularly crofters—of key parts of their livelihood.

Murdo Fraser: According to the BBC documentary “The Money Farmers”, which was broadcast earlier this week, millions are being spent every year on subsidies to individuals who do not farm in Scotland. On that programme, the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development said that the Scottish Government had the power to close the loophole two years ago but did not do so. Will the Scottish Government now act with urgency and work, if necessary with the United Kingdom Government and the European Commission, to change the current unacceptable position without further delay?

The First Minister: I thought that I had explained the situation. The problem with using the active farmer definition, as the European commissioner suggested, is that that would almost certainly penalise many crofting interests in Scottish circumstances. I am sure that Murdo Fraser's support for farmers in Scotland extends from large farmers right down to small farmers and crofters, who have always been such a preoccupation of the Conservative Party over the years, and that he would not want us in closing a loophole in the existing legislation to end up disadvantaging and having an impact on a vital and traditional form of farming and land tenure in rural Scotland.

The crofting situation might not be immediately familiar to many people across the European continent, but it should be familiar to people in the Parliament. The loophole will be closed under new European guidelines. The so-called Scottish clause—for which we have argued, with the support of the UK Government, which faces a similar circumstance south of the border but not of the same proportion—will allow the loophole to be closed without disadvantaging Scotland's crofting community. When that happens—it cannot happen soon enough for us—Murdo Fraser, I and the rest of the Parliament will be able to unite on closing

the loophole without putting crofters at a disadvantage.

14:15

On resuming—

12:35

Meeting suspended.

Scottish Executive Question Time

Education and Lifelong Learning

Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education

1. Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when the commission on the delivery of rural education will report its findings to ministers. (S4O-00769)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The commission on the delivery of rural education is expected to report to the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in August 2012.

Mark McDonald: The cabinet secretary will be aware that Aberdeenshire Council is in the process of consulting widely on the future of its school estate. Does he anticipate that the commission will publish interim findings, which might provide a helpful indication to policy makers, practitioners and parents of its likely final recommendations?

Michael Russell: In establishing the commission, the Government and COSLA were conscious that the process was complex. We were also aware that it needed to be done in a reasonable timeframe. I would advise local authorities to bear in mind that the commission will report, and that they should therefore wait for its conclusions. The public meetings that the commission has held have been very successful. Indeed there was a meeting in Lochgilphead on Tuesday with the council, which indicated that parents and others are having a strong say.

There should be an anticipation of interesting findings from the commission, but we should not anticipate an interim report. The commission wants the space to do the job and do it well.

Young Unemployed People

2. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether young unemployed people are at risk of exploitation. (S4O-00770)

The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance): I discussed the work experience element of the United Kingdom Government's youth contract during the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee meeting on 29 February. I do not think that all unpaid work experience is bad or

negative, but I am clear that young people should not be exploited.

Work experience must be meaningful for young people so that they want to do it and are able to benefit from it. The Scottish Government has an interest in ensuring that all aspects of the youth contract work well in Scotland. If there are issues that we need to articulate to the UK Government, whether they are about what young people or employers say to us, we must represent them and get improvements in the system.

In that regard, I welcome Chris Grayling's decision last week to withdraw the threat of benefits sanctions for young people leaving work experience placements early.

Patrick Harvie: Clearly, the details of those schemes originate with the UK Government and not the Scottish Government, but I was a little disturbed at the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee the other week by the minister's reluctance to condemn some aspects of the schemes.

Once again, I invite the minister to say that it is not obscure or bizarre to suggest that young people who are expected to work a full-time week for months on end should be paid the minimum wage. Does she agree with that principle?

Angela Constance: I think that Mr Harvie has misunderstood my contribution to the debate last week. Mr Harvie asked me to duplicate or replicate the scheme that the UK has on offer through the work experience programme part of the youth contract, to which I replied that it would be living in la-la land to expect me as a minister in a devolved Government to do so.

I am not prepared to say categorically that all unpaid work experience is bad. The schemes that the Government supports through the Centre for Scottish Public Policy and TalentScotland are paid internship schemes. That is to be valued.

On our commitment to young people on get ready for work training schemes, for example, they are paid a training allowance.

The fundamental issue is that if welfare benefits and tax had been devolved to this Parliament, we would most certainly have a system in which all our young people would want to participate, and we would also have a system in which we could ensure that work most certainly pays.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): It would be helpful if the minister defined what she means by work experience. In particular, at what point does she think that work experience becomes an unpaid job?

Angela Constance: Another point that I made very clearly at the Economy, Energy and Tourism

Committee meeting last week was that the Government's position is that employers should not in any circumstances take young people on work experience at the expense of recruiting young people. I could not have been clearer about that. That is one of the reasons why I said at the meeting that it would certainly be in the interests of the United Kingdom Government and young people in Scotland if the UK Government had fruitful dialogue with employers and trade unions to ensure that there is no displacement in the labour market.

Green Energy and Climate Change Studies

3. Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the green energy and climate change-related studies offered by colleges and universities and the numbers of students on these. (S4O-00771)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The policy of successive Administrations has been that universities and colleges should be free to take their own decisions about the curriculum that they offer. Where they do so under the terms of grant in aid from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, it of course makes clear its expectations on the quality and efficiency of provision. I have therefore asked the chief executive of the funding council to write to the member with further, full information.

Rob Gibson: I am sure that the cabinet secretary will be glad to note that North Highland College of the University of the Highlands and Islands has an engineering, technology and energy centre and an environmental research institute to train students from apprenticeship to PhD level in green energy and climate change studies. Should we have a national plan to ensure that enough engineers are trained in those relevant skills?

Michael Russell: One of the great benefits of the college reform programme lies in ensuring that there is a closer focus on the outcomes from colleges. As the member said, there should be a regional and national understanding of what is required and how that will equip young people and others for work. The nature of the question illustrates the need for college reform, and college reform will provide the answer to the question.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Given the Scottish Government's admirable commitment to creating 60,000 green jobs by 2020, what assessment have the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government made of the skills gap that currently exists in green industries and technologies? What steps does the cabinet secretary propose to take to ensure that

current and future Scottish students are equipped to take on the green jobs of the future?

Michael Russell: A skills investment plan was published last year. If the member does not have it, I will be happy to ensure that it is provided to her. There are very good examples of how that plan is coming to fruition. I was in Carnegie College just this week. Its activity in that area is an excellent example of how colleges are playing a key role in supporting Scotland's emerging economies.

I repeat: the changes that are taking place in colleges will enable them to focus much more closely on issues that relate to skills needs in their regions and on a national basis. I am pleased that the answer to the member's question is also the college reform process and what it will produce.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Question 4 has not been lodged by Richard Baker.

National Exams

5. Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many schools have indicated a wish to delay the introduction of the new national exams and how it plans to assist these schools. (S4O-00773)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): East Renfrewshire Council has indicated that its seven secondary schools wish to delay the introduction of the new national qualifications. No other local authority has advised us of any school that has requested a delay in the introduction of the new national qualifications.

Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority are providing a wide programme of support for local authorities and schools across all aspects of the curriculum for excellence, including qualifications. Additional assistance will be considered where that is necessary, if the local authority or school requests it. Indeed, I am working on a plan for such assistance in discussion with the Educational Institute of Scotland, as the member would know if he had been present this morning.

Graeme Pearson: Does the cabinet secretary accept that his aggressive attitude towards those who offer concerns about the curriculum for excellence is reducing the current debate to a negative argument that is alienating many teachers, whom we rely on to improve the life chances of our young people? Does he accept that his decision to allow East Renfrewshire education department to take an alternative path complicates matters, given the views that many have expressed, including the general secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association, who wants the examinations to be delayed to

allow the much-needed curriculum for excellence to commence in an effective and meaningful manner?

Michael Russell: The answer to both questions is no. I say gently to the member that if he had been present at this morning's debate—if he had listened to that debate or participated in it—he would have heard much discussion of the matter, much discussion of the fact that there is a tailored programme of support and that progress is being made, and much discussion of the fact that the damage that is being done to curriculum for excellence comes from his party, from his front bench and, perhaps, from the type of question that he has asked.

Apprenticeship Schemes

6. Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what input companies can have in the operation of apprenticeship schemes in their areas. (S4O-00774)

The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance): In Scotland, all apprentices must be employed, which means that apprenticeship opportunities are directly linked to employers and to the labour market.

In order to support that demand-led approach, employers can feed into the development of modern apprenticeship frameworks through sector skills councils; they can have direct responsibility for the selection and recruitment of their apprentices; they can determine that an appropriate and relevant training provider trains their apprentices; they can choose specific training enhancements for their employees; and they can deliver the on-the-job entitlement of their apprentices' training.

Linda Fabiani: Following representations from employers in East Kilbride, can the minister assure me that, in the interests of potential apprentices and employers, the views and experiences of companies that employ apprentices will be taken into account in the operation of the Government's apprenticeship schemes?

Angela Constance: As part of the process to approve frameworks for apprenticeships, the modern apprenticeship group is working to ensure that the sector skills councils improve the number and range of employers that they consult as part of the apprenticeship framework development process. My view is that it is vital that the apprenticeship frameworks are relevant to employers, regardless of their size. That priority can be reaffirmed to the modern apprenticeship group.

If Ms Fabiani writes to me giving specific examples of difficulties with companies in her

area, I would be delighted to look at the matter. I extend that offer to any member.

Supply Teachers

7. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment it has made of the availability of supply teachers across the country. (S4O-00775)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The Scottish negotiating committee for teachers is monitoring the impact of the changes to the terms and conditions of short-term supply teachers. We will play our part in the tripartite discussions and the tripartite group will take action if there is concrete evidence that a real problem is emerging.

Malcolm Chisholm: Is the cabinet secretary aware that in Edinburgh there have been 1,494 requests for short-term cover in the current academic year, of which 10.6 per cent have not been filled, and 200 requests for long-term supply cover, of which 24.5 per cent have not been filled?

Does the cabinet secretary realise that those figures mask another reality, which is that a large number of experienced supply teachers have dropped out of the system altogether? One such supply teacher who wrote to me stated:

"If the Government fully recognises our contribution, then why do we, who have worked our way to Point 6, get paid virtually half our usual salary for a day's work?"

What action will the Government take to deal with the situation, which in certain schools is clearly causing a massive problem for students?

Michael Russell: The member must recognise that the terms and conditions for short-term supply cover were agreed by the SNCT, which is a tripartite arrangement, so they were agreed by the trade union side, the Government and local authorities. It would require the agreement of all three to examine the arrangements and see whether they need to be altered.

The member's figures are very interesting. The approach to short-term supply cover does not apply to long-term supply cover, yet the figures that he has given indicate that there is a more severe problem in long-term supply cover, although it is not constricted in any way by the arrangement and is not paid at point 1 on the scale. I think that the member's information is confused.

I repeat my original answer: we are monitoring, along with our partners in the tripartite arrangement, the impact of the changes and we will continue to keep the situation under review. I am concerned that we get it right, but the tripartite agreement was among all parties, so all parties would have to take part in any change.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary confirm whether the tripartite group is discussing the inflexibility of hours, as a result of which some supply teachers can be kept in school beyond the time period when they might well be able to get another job?

Michael Russell: There should be no such inflexibility. If the member wants to indicate to me instances when that guidance has not been observed, I will look at them very seriously but I have to say that we have ensured that there is clear guidance on this issue.

I repeat that I think that the evidence is not yet wholly convincing. For instance, the evidence that the Labour Party produced from the response to its freedom of information request included some authorities that had not implemented the change. If the blame for the problem lies with a change within the tripartite agreement, how can it affect authorities that have not implemented it? We need to be sure of the circumstances but, as I have said, if the guidelines are not being observed I am very happy to hear that evidence and ensure that we act on it promptly.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): The cabinet secretary uses the word "if"; however, problems are emerging just now. In my local authority, West Lothian Council, the failure rate for short-term supply has peaked at an astonishing 94 per cent. What help can the cabinet secretary give the local authority to ensure that the pupils in our schools have supply cover?

Michael Russell: I am always concerned if problems emerge. If the local authority has been to the Scottish Government and the union—and of course as a local authority employer it is part of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities arrangement—and has tabled the issue for discussion and consideration, it will be considered. However, I say to Mr Findlay that publishing a response to an FOI request containing inconsistencies and inaccuracies is not helping the matter at all.

Curriculum for Excellence (Careers in Business)

8. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it considers that the curriculum for excellence places sufficient emphasis on preparing young people for a career in business. (S4O-00776)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The importance of developing enterprise skills and entrepreneurial behaviour is recognised in curriculum for excellence as beginning at an early age, through primary school and into secondary

school and further and higher education establishments. Indeed, curriculum for excellence is delivering that with the incorporation of determined to succeed, our strategy for enterprise in education.

Curriculum for excellence also recognises the importance of business skills, which is why the issue features in many of the curricular areas. In particular, the social studies guidance clearly states that children and young people will

“engage in activities which encourage enterprising attitudes”

and

“develop an understanding of concepts that encourage enterprise and”

challenge

“business”.

Colin Beattie: It has become evident in the Midlothian part of my constituency that schools are reducing the teaching of business-related subjects. That must affect employability and, ultimately, our economic competitiveness. Will the cabinet secretary consider whether it would be appropriate to introduce guidelines to preserve important core subjects?

Michael Russell: Business education and economic issues were considered by an excellence group. Indeed, I hope that every local authority is considering the reports of those excellence groups, which have been very productive.

We have a distributed system of education with considerable power at local authority and school level to vary the curriculum and choose local priorities. I do not want to threaten that, but I hope that every local authority is considering employability as a key element of education, which will include ensuring that young people are skilled up for enterprise and business.

Colleges (Boards of Management)

9. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the claim by the Educational Institute of Scotland that

“many College Boards of Management have become emasculated by powerful College Executive Groups led by powerful Principals.” (S4O-00777)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): That opinion is expressed in EIS’s official response to the Griggs review of further education governance, and I have read it with interest. In that context, it is one of many views that I am considering closely alongside Professor Griggs’s proposals. I will not form a final position on any issue until that process of careful consideration is complete; in fact, I have

taken forward the process this week in further conversations with colleges and others.

Graeme Dey: The Griggs review, to which, as the cabinet secretary has acknowledged, the EIS made that assertion, suggests that the new FE regional boards should not exceed 12 members and should contain within that number a member of staff and the elected president of the student association. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, where there is collaboration between two colleges in a region, each college should have a staff and student representative on the board to ensure that differing interests of staff and students in individual colleges are properly protected and their voices heard?

Michael Russell: I am considering the composition of regional boards and will certainly take that point seriously. There is a correspondence between the von Prondzynski and Griggs reviews with regard to the participation of students and staff. I very strongly support that in both cases and will ensure that whatever the composition of regional boards—and, indeed, whatever the composition of university courts—there is an adherence to those principles, which I think have been agreed across the board. I hope that, as we take forward these reforms, everyone in the chamber will support that element of accountability, which I think is essential.

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): In a region where two colleges have not merged but there is nevertheless to be a regional board, what will the effect be on the activities and responsibilities of the college boards that presumably will remain?

Michael Russell: That is a key element of discussion with the colleges and with others. I think that it is fair to say that the overall view, to which I adhere, is that the regional boards will have a financial role, as the fundable bodies, and a governance role. We do not want to duplicate provision in such circumstances, so the role of college boards will be one of delivery.

The regional boards will be important. They will need to draw in representation from across the region, to ensure that the localism elements are preserved and that a regional strategic view is taken. They will be required to have governance and financial responsibilities, with college boards slimmed down, I think, and more likely to be delivery boards. In some circumstances, of course, there will be only one structure in the region, as we are already seeing, and that makes matters simpler still.

National Exams

10. James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had

with local authorities regarding the implementation of the new exams linked to the curriculum for excellence. (S4O-00778)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The Association of Directors of Education is a member of the curriculum for excellence management board and the newly formed curriculum for excellence implementation group. It has been fully involved in the implementation and delivery of curriculum for excellence, including the new qualifications. Through various networks and support events, there are regular meetings at all levels between local authorities, ministers, Scottish Government officials, Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

James Kelly: Does the cabinet secretary accept that, with the delay in East Renfrewshire, we have throughout Scotland an inconsistent approach to implementation? Would not he be better to give priority to the serious concerns that have been expressed by teaching professionals, pupils and parents, and to build a consistent and consensual approach by listening to those voices instead of the voices of the civil servants in St Andrew's House?

Michael Russell: I can only say to Mr Kelly what I said earlier—although if he had been part of the discussion this morning and had learnt from the debate he would not have asked that question. *[Laughter.]*

I do not know why Mr Findlay finds that amusing.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): It is because Mr Kelly was there.

Michael Russell: As I said, if Mr Kelly had listened he would not have asked the question. He was clearly present corporeally, but perhaps in no other way, because he does not seem to have absorbed anything of this morning's discussion. The debate indicated absolutely clearly what the situation is, and it demonstrated the work that is being done with the Educational Institute of Scotland and others to take forward the issues.

The job that needs to be done is to ensure that there is confidence in the process, that support is given to all schools and individuals that require it, and that we do not undermine the importance of the programme. One of the most distinguishing things that Mr Kelly might have heard in the debate, and which I shall drive home to him now, is that every Labour speaker had to preface their words with, "Of course, I support curriculum for excellence". In the light of that debate and the questions so far, I have to say: by their works shall ye know them.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I was present at this morning's debate corporeally and in every other sense. May I therefore remind the cabinet secretary that I remain opposed to wholesale delay in implementation of the new exams? I have acknowledged the additional support and the audit preparedness that he announced at the Education and Culture Committee's meeting on Tuesday. Nevertheless, the cabinet secretary himself has acknowledged that many teachers remain concerned about the implications of pressing ahead this year, and that schools, in conjunction with parents, local authorities and Education Scotland, must decide whether to proceed. In that context, is he prepared to discuss with local authorities the timeframe within which the decisions will be taken, on a school-by-school basis?

Michael Russell: Yes. That discussion takes place regularly; it has formed part of the discussions that I have had with the Educational Institute of Scotland and others.

I congratulate Liam McArthur on his impeccably Liberal Democrat approach to this morning's debate; he agreed with me and he agreed with everyone else.

In the circumstances, we need an utterly clear commitment to helping and supporting Scottish education, and to ensuring that every teacher, every school and every department that says that it needs additional help or a boost to confidence gets that help or boost to confidence. I cannot say more than that. I do not want to be even more helpful than I am being now because that is not possible.

We will do everything we can to ensure that curriculum for excellence works. If all members do that, the programme that we all apparently support—the Tories and the Liberals have been very clear about that—will be done in a way that helps Scotland's young people, including, in particular, the 54,000 young people who are in secondary 2 waiting to take exams, and who deserve our priority attention.

Curriculum for Excellence (Support for Schools)

11. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many schools in Clackmannanshire, Stirlingshire and Perthshire have asked for further support in implementing the curriculum for excellence. (S4O-00779)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The directors of education in those areas have confirmed that their schools are on track to deliver the new qualifications. We have not received any

requests for additional help from those areas, but Education Scotland stands ready to help any school that asks for or is identified as needing it.

Dr Simpson: I thank the cabinet secretary for the constant reassurance, but can he indicate a little more clearly the sort of support he envisages? I know that he has done something of that already, but he could do a little more.

I was not at this morning's debate, but I received reports of it, and I understand that the cabinet secretary was somewhat critical of the Educational Institute of Scotland survey, with its reports of a considerable lack of confidence, although the survey was limited. What is he doing to ensure that every teacher is asked individually whether they are confident of being able to deliver the national qualifications within the proposed timescale?

Michael Russell: I am glad that reports of the debate were taken hotfoot to Richard Simpson to inform his question. I commend that approach to other Labour members.

The detail of how support will be provided was gone into in detail at the Education and Culture Committee on Tuesday. There is the *Official Report* of that meeting: if, having read it, Richard Simpson requires more information, I will be happy to give it to him. I am also happy to arrange for Bill Maxwell, the head of Education Scotland, to explain the support to him. The discussion contained considerable detail.

I am keen that we continue to ensure cross-party consensus on curriculum for excellence. As I said in the debate this morning, the general secretary elect of the EIS will be well positioned to re-establish that consensus, and he has volunteered to do so. It is important that we express our determination to offer support in every way possible—in all the ways that I mentioned on Tuesday and in other ways—and to make sure that that support goes into schools.

If schools or individual teachers in Perthshire or Stirlingshire require support, there will be mechanisms for them to secure it. One of the questions that we need to discuss—and are discussing—is how they can do that with confidence.

We had the same situation two years ago. Members might remember a debate in which Labour was, I seem to remember, still on the side of delay. That debate was about how we should take curriculum for excellence forward, and I said then that no stigma would attach to anyone seeking help because the curriculum is focused on helping young people. I repeat that loudly and clearly this afternoon.

Scottish Studies

12. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its plan to introduce Scottish studies in schools is progressing. (S4O-00780)

The Presiding Officer: Minister, you have been waiting patiently.

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): We welcome and are taking forward the conclusions and recommendations of the Scottish studies working group, which were published on 1 March. The group recommended that learning about Scotland be embedded across the curriculum to promote coherence and progression and to ensure that such learning is not marginalised. The Scottish Qualifications Authority is investigating options for an award in Scottish studies and additional guidance, resources and support will be launched later this month to strengthen the place of learning about Scotland.

George Adam: Does the minister agree that, to understand our nation's place in the world, and our own, it is important that we understand our own history—good and bad?

Dr Allan: I strongly agree with that, and I hope that everyone agrees—although I sometimes wonder from the initial debate that we had about Scottish studies—that the best way of engaging young people's minds to understand about the wider world is to engage them in the history, culture and activities of their communities and country.

Liz Lochhead, Scotland's makar, touched on that point. She is very much in favour of teaching Scottish literature and history that are, in her words, in no way "chauvinistic or uncritical" in their view of Scottish society. We are all about Scotland getting a chance to be criticised as long as people get a chance to learn about Scotland. Not everyone has had that chance in the past.

The Presiding Officer: Question number 13, from Bill Walker, has been withdrawn.

Knowledge Transfer/Exchange Strategy

14. Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made with the development of its knowledge transfer/exchange strategy. (S4O-00782)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The pre-legislative paper "Putting Learners at the Centre—Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education" sets out the strategy for maximising the contribution of university research to increasing sustainable economic growth. A range of proposals will contribute to achieving that,

including a single knowledge exchange office for Scotland, new innovation centres in our key sectors, and improved support for knowledge exchange. Good progress has been made on all those proposals. In particular, I welcome the establishment of a new working group that includes university and business interests to explore what a single knowledge exchange office might look like.

Chic Brodie: A key element of the strategy is the value and impact of enterprise and innovation as an output from academic research. In Stanford University in California, the research and academic community accepts that there will be pursuit of equity investment in successful research products and services. A support and mentoring structure secures the foundation of the go-to-market philosophy. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that research bodies, particularly in universities, understand and embrace a similar approach and thereby guarantee future income streams for their research facilities?

Michael Russell: There are already good practices in Scotland in a range of universities, including the University of Dundee and the University of Edinburgh. I want to ensure that the experience and knowledge that exist are rolled out across the sector and to universities that have perhaps done less of such work. Many Scottish universities have learned from experiences overseas and applied that to their situations. Chic Brodie's point is well made. The work that is being done to ensure a unified Scottish approach is important and I am certain that it will continue to bear fruit.

Early Childhood Education and Care

15. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what action is being taken to ensure that, following the end of parental maternity leave, there is equitable access to early childhood education and care for all children. (S4O-00783)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish Government recognises that all parents should have the choice of a range of high-quality and flexible early learning and childcare provision that meets their needs and those of their children. That is why we are committed to expanding the range, capacity and flexibility of early learning and childcare provision. We are scoping the steps that we need to take to make early learning and childcare accessible and affordable for all.

Alison Johnstone: We agree that implementing the early years framework is important. There is no statutory Scottish Government funding for childcare for children under the age of three, although local authorities

provide discretionary free or subsidised services that help to provide equitable access for low-paid families. Those non-statutory services are most at risk from budget cuts. Will the minister commit to working with local authorities to ensure that low-paid families will still be able to access childcare for children under three?

Aileen Campbell: I thank Alison Johnstone for raising that point. We will, of course, work with anyone who wants accessible, affordable and flexible high-quality childcare everywhere in Scotland. I would welcome any thoughts that the member has on the issue, and I extend to her an invitation to meet to discuss the matter further.

We have the early years task force, which is co-chaired by Pat Watters of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. In addition to the work that we are doing collaboratively through that task force, we have made other progress on the issue. Last year, I announced an additional £4.5 million to provide early learning and childcare for all looked-after two-year-olds. That is one step towards making much wider access to childcare a possibility throughout Scotland.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): In relation to the kind of childcare services that Alison Johnstone described, will the minister follow the example of her predecessor, Angela Constance, and beat a path to North Edinburgh Childcare in my constituency, which is the finest childcare centre in Scotland, not only because of the quality of services, but because it has always had an understanding that childcare is an essential part of regeneration and anti-poverty strategies as well as more general early years policies?

Aileen Campbell: I welcome Malcolm Chisholm's input to the debate and to the early years task force. Of course I would be delighted to meet him and visit that childcare centre. I know that my predecessor thoroughly enjoyed her two visits there.

Children with Autism (Communication with Parents)

16. Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to improve communication between mainstream schools educating children with autism and their parents. (S4O-00784)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, as amended, requires education authorities to provide children and young people with the support that they need to overcome any barrier that they might face to accessing learning. The act also provides parents

or carers with the right to be involved in decision making in relation to any additional support for their child. The Scottish Government funds organisations such as Enquire and the Govan Law Centre and funds the take note advocacy service to support parents who exercise their rights under the act. The accompanying code of practice outlines what education authorities can do to encourage good communication with parents.

In order to provide better guidance to everyone who is involved in delivering education to autistic pupils in mainstream schools, the Scottish Government published the autism toolbox in April 2009, which contains specific advice on how to support parents and families of pupils with autism effectively.

Helen Eadie: I thank the minister for that answer and for his response to my query regarding a constituent of mine who has an autism-related problem. How does the minister monitor the effect of all the policies and support that he has put in place for children with special needs? Is he satisfied that the policies are truly delivering for children at Inverkeithing primary school, where there are particular problems and where the parents, despite having made formal complaints to the education authority and to the minister himself, have still not received responses?

Dr Allan: I cannot comment on a situation in a particular school, and some of the issues are for local authorities to address. I remain happy to correspond with Helen Eadie about any specific concerns that she may have.

The autism toolbox, which the Government has pioneered, does many things to give parents an increased and strengthened role. We are in the process of considering ways of improving the toolbox, so I would be happy to hear Helen Eadie's views on how best to achieve that.

Student Loans (Diploma in Professional Legal Practice Students)

17. Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with law students regarding the removal of student loan support for those studying for the diploma in professional legal practice. (S4O-00785)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): We have held no discussions with law students regarding the removal of student loan support for those studying for the diploma in legal practice, because that is not being proposed.

From the 2012-13 academic year, we will introduce a new loan scheme—the post-graduate tuition fee loan—to replace the existing postgraduate student allowances scheme. It will

be available to all eligible Scotland-domiciled and European Union students undertaking eligible courses, including those studying for the diploma in legal practice.

Gavin Brown: I thank the cabinet secretary for his answer. The diploma is compulsory for anybody who wants to practise law in Scotland, so there is great concern among law students throughout Scotland. Given what the cabinet secretary has just said, will he agree to meet representatives of the University of Edinburgh law students council to discuss matters in more detail?

Michael Russell: I would be happy to provide information to them in the first instance because—as I have made clear—the basis on which Gavin Brown's question was asked is untrue. We are not removing student loan support for those who study for the diploma in legal practice—that is not being proposed. In such circumstances, a meeting based on a false premise would not be sensible. However, if there is a reason for a meeting, I would be happy to ensure that my officials speak to those involved and, if it would be useful thereafter, of course I will meet them. Let us deal with facts, rather than things that are simply not true.

University of the Highlands and Islands

18. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what support it provides to the University of the Highlands and Islands. (S4O-00786)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): This Government provides a wide range of support to the University of the Highlands and Islands.

Jamie McGrigor: Is the cabinet secretary aware that last night UHI held a discussion entitled "Beyond Creativity"? It was designed to give students an insight into the work of the Highlands and Islands' music industry's entrepreneurs, including Steve Robertson and Joe Gibbs, who is the founder of the Belladrum Tartan Heart festival. Does the cabinet minister agree that UHI is to be commended for recognising the economic importance of the live music sector in the Highlands and Islands?

Michael Russell: I do. Only this week I visited Perth College, where I saw the tremendous work that is being done not just in music courses, but in sound engineering courses and even in the music business course. Moreover, Perth College will begin shortly to take on the applied music course that used to be provided by the University of Strathclyde. That is a very good example of how a sensible map of provision shows that, if something stops happening, it might be good for it to happen elsewhere.

I am happy to work with Jamie McGrigor and all other members, particularly those in the Highlands and Islands, to ensure that UHI's good work in this and other areas is promoted vigorously, and that word about it is spread throughout the country, even to areas outside the Highlands and Islands.

Historic Events (Education)

19. John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to promote the teaching of major Scottish historical events that have significant anniversaries in 2013 and 2014 in schools. (S4O-00787)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): There are a number of significant anniversaries of historic events during 2013 and 2014. The Scottish Government, its agencies and partners will promote learning opportunities around those that enable a broad understanding of Scotland and of our place in the world.

For example, we are collaborating with the National Trust for Scotland on plans for the 200th anniversary of the birth of David Livingstone in 2013. Being a native of Selkirk, I am also aware that 2013 is the 500th anniversary of the battle of Flodden. The year 2014 marks the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the first world war, the 1,450th anniversary of Columba landing on Iona and the 700th anniversary of the battle of Bannockburn. An innovative new visitor centre at Bannockburn will help to make it world-class site for learners and visitors.

John Lamont: I am pleased that the minister is aware of the significance of the battle of Flodden to the Borders and to my constituents. Significant plans are already under way to mark its 500th anniversary. Does the Scottish Government have any specific plans to promote that event in schools in the Borders and throughout Scotland?

Dr Allan: As I said, the anniversary of the battle of Flodden is among the events that are in the Government's mind. It is commemorated every year in Selkirk, at the common riding, and I am sure that significant events will be planned there and elsewhere, which the Government will be happy to be involved in.

Tourism

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-02245, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the future of tourism in Scotland. I call Fergus Ewing to speak to and move the motion.

14:57

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): I am delighted to secure this debate on tourism in Scotland. The Scottish Government very much welcomes the decision to locate the headquarters of the green investment bank in Edinburgh. That is a tribute to the campaign that was run by all those involved, including Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce and the financial sector in Edinburgh, as well as to the cross-party, united and informed campaign that was run by Scotland's elected representatives—from every party. The decision will bring good news for the tourism sector, not least in attracting even more top-level conferences to the city, perhaps on the range of interests in finance and the green economy. Given the terms of Rhoda Grant's amendment—which we are happy to accept—I am sure that she will comment on that news as well.

I welcome the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's report on issues affecting Scottish tourism, which was published last week. Tourism is one of the priority sectors in the Scottish Government's economic strategy. It contributes more than £4,000 million every year to the Scottish economy, and the other benefits from tourism are immense. It supports other high-yield sectors including food and drink, transport, agriculture and retail. Over and above its economic contribution, tourism showcases our manifold attractions to the world, boosting our exports, enhancing our reputation and attracting inward investment.

The benefits of tourism are spread widely across the whole of Scotland, from our cities in the central belt to some of the most remote and fragile communities. Everywhere, tourism sustains vital local services such as post offices and petrol stations.

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Does the minister agree that the Highlands and Islands tourism awards, which are the Oscars for our area, are a model for each area to show how our industry is developing to attract more visitors?

Fergus Ewing: Yes—I do. I say that with the experience of having attended such events, as have other members. I have discussed the matter with Marina Huggett in the past two days, along

with the many other MSPs who partook of the hospitality at the reception in the Scottish Parliament this week.

Tourism in Scotland continues to grow, despite the worldwide recession. The latest statistics show that, in the first nine months of 2011, the number of visitors to Scotland rose by 8 per cent and visitor spend increased by 11 per cent. Those increases are pretty respectable in difficult economic times.

The United Kingdom market is driving growth, with increases of 10 per cent in visitors and 21 per cent in spend in the first three quarters of 2011. Mainly because of challenges in European markets, the number of international visitors in the same nine-month period fell by 4 per cent. However, the North American market is beginning to recover, with an 18 per cent rise in visitors to Scotland.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

The minister will have seen the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's concerns about the target of 50 per cent growth in tourism by 2015, which we now seem far from being close to achieving. Is it sensible to adhere strictly to that target, given that meeting it would require very substantial growth? Will the Scottish Government reflect on whether the target needs to be revised?

Fergus Ewing: We are considering the committee's report carefully. I think that the committee did not express a particular view; rather, it drew attention to evidence that had been given to it. For my part, I am an optimist, and there is lots to be optimistic about, which I will come on to.

We are in competition with many other countries that have a great deal to offer, but we are determined to make the most of Scotland's fantastic assets and to take full advantage of opportunities to drive up visitor numbers and visitor spend.

A number of significant events will take place on our doorstep this year and in the years ahead. In 2012, we have the year of creative Scotland, and I am advised that great success is already being achieved. The new Disney Pixar film "Brave", which is set in Scotland and which showcases our landscape and heritage, will be released this year, when we will also see the London Olympics and Paralympics, for which we wish all competitors well. The Queen's diamond jubilee will also occur; a number of events throughout the country will pay tribute to Her Majesty's 60 years at the helm. In 2013, we will have the year of natural Scotland, when we will invite Scots to discover their own country, as well as the Open championship at Muirfield and the music of black origin—MOBO—awards in Glasgow. In 2014, we will have the

Ryder cup, the Commonwealth games and the year of homecoming.

We have provided funding to develop and market top-quality event programmes to maximise visitor spend. Support for the year of creative Scotland includes £400,000 for activities from the Scottish Government; Creative Scotland's £6.5 million of support from the national lottery fund for events and activities; VisitScotland's television advert, which is expected to reach 20 million viewers; and £1.14 million for our cultural infrastructure, which was announced in the debate on 1 February on the year of creative Scotland. VisitScotland is maximising benefits from the Olympic games with tactical Scotland promotions to target the getaway market and other markets. It is also investing about £1 million a year in golf events in Scotland as part of the preparations for the Ryder cup.

Business tourism represents a huge opportunity for Scotland. At this moment, the Glasgow meeting of Diabetes UK is taking place, at which 2,750 delegates are expected, bringing more than £3 million in economic benefit to the city. Business tourism already contributes more than £800 million a year to the Scottish economy, but we want more than that. We are responding to requests directly from the industry, and I have today launched a new conference bid fund to make available £2 million over three years to support bids for major conferences that relate to Scotland's key sectors. The fund will secure Scotland's future competitiveness in business tourism.

Competitiveness is also the focus of the tourism leadership group, which is refreshing the tourism strategy for Scotland. It will set out where the long-term opportunities for future growth lie and what needs to be done to secure that growth. It is talking to industry representatives in every walk of tourism life, and is looking carefully at the markets of the future and our assets. The revised strategy will be published in the summer. Our agencies are supporting the group in developing the revised strategy, and will work closely with the industry to deliver it.

The Scottish Government will respond to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee report in due course. I particularly welcome the wide range of issues that the committee has touched on in its conclusions and recommendations.

There is no doubt that tourism faces challenges. The worldwide recession has had an impact, and there are reserved matters that constrain the competitiveness of our industry. The 20 per cent VAT for hospitality businesses is the second highest in the European Union—some 26 countries in Europe have a reduced VAT rate for hotels. The air passenger duty that is imposed by the UK Government has taken the UK to fourth

lowest in the world competitiveness ranking in terms of ticket taxes and airport charges in the World Economic Forum's "Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2011".

However, in spite of those challenges—and in spite of cuts in our budget from Westminster—the Scottish Government recognises the contribution and potential of tourism. We therefore continue to support VisitScotland to deliver effective marketing campaigns. VisitScotland's European touring campaign generated nearly £97 million of additional expenditure in 2010. EventScotland, VisitScotland's events directorate, invested £3.7 million in Scotland's events industry last year, generating £57.5 million in additional revenue for Scotland's economy. A return of that order must be praised and recognised.

The Scottish Government provides extensive support to tourism through a wide range of activity. Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise support businesses, destinations and product areas with high growth potential, such as golf, mountain-biking, sailing and business tourism. Historic Scotland is the largest provider of visitor attractions in Scotland, with 345 properties, of which 78 are paid attractions. The national parks in Loch Lomond and the Cairngorms welcome 3.6 million visitors a year. Scottish Natural Heritage manages and promotes 47 national nature reserves that attract more than 1 million visitors each year. Forestry Commission Scotland manages 650,000 hectares of national forest estate that includes more than 2,500km of way-marked paths and trails—indeed, in my younger, fitter and thinner days, I used to run through some of those forests. I see that I have taken some members entirely by surprise—or perhaps I have woken them up; I do not know.

The Scottish Government is involved in further activity that supports tourism. Skills Development Scotland funded 2,500 modern apprenticeships in the sector last year, and is on course to increase that number this year. Creative Scotland supports and develops the cultural product that our visitors enjoy. Scottish Enterprise has invested £22 million in the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre's Scottish Hydro arena and £16 million in the Edinburgh International Conference Centre development, both of which will make a significant contribution to increasing business tourism in this country. Scottish Enterprise has also contributed more than £600,000 to support the developments at Abbotsford. Highlands and Islands Enterprise is investing £1.12 million towards the Kintyre resort development and £1.8 million to support the revitalisation of John o'Groats, whence I travel next Monday.

Among Scottish Development International's contributions are the securing of a new Malmaison

in Dundee and an exclusive world-class hotel and golf resort at Taymouth castle

I am keen to facilitate further investment in tourism. I have asked VisitScotland to develop a more strategic and proactive role in the planning process. Initially, VisitScotland will lead joint work with developers, planners and economic development agencies to prepare an evidence-based national investment plan. That will provide a clear steer for developers and planners on what tourism developments are needed and should be supported in different parts of Scotland.

The Scottish Government is determined to build the competitiveness of Scottish tourism. Our agencies are working more closely than ever with the industry. We are creating opportunities for the benefit of businesses throughout Scotland so that tourism contributes to sustainable growth for the people of Scotland.

It is a pleasure and a privilege to work with so many excellent people who work in Scotland's tourism sector. Many of us met a number of those people, who work with a whole range of attractions, at the reception that was held in the Parliament earlier this week. I pay particular tribute to Mike Cantlay and Malcolm Roughead of VisitScotland, who are here today and who provide the strongest leadership that the organisation has ever enjoyed, and to Stephen Leckie of the Scottish Tourism Alliance—formerly the Scottish Tourism Forum—who is leading the private sector and with whom we are happy to work.

I commend the motion and look forward to the debate.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the important contribution that tourism makes across many sectors and all geographical areas of Scotland and commends the industry on its continuing growth in spite of harsh economic circumstances; recognises the importance of domestic tourism and the important roles played by businesses of all sizes in achieving this; acknowledges the importance of the work currently being undertaken by the industry-led Tourism Leadership Group to develop a refreshed strategy for tourism in Scotland, and commends the core work of agencies in promoting Scotland and its key assets, in particular Scotland's cultural and natural heritage, to visitors, supporting businesses and destinations and investing in key facilities, skills development and a programme of sporting and cultural events across Scotland to ensure that Scotland maximises the opportunities available from the globally important events of the next three years, including the Olympics 2012, the Year of Creative Scotland 2012, the Year of Natural Scotland 2013, the Ryder Cup 2014, the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and Homecoming 2014.

15:10

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I share the minister's delight at the announcement that the green investment bank will be headquartered in Edinburgh. It shows that the cross-party campaign in this Parliament was heard loud and clear in the UK Parliament. I put on record my thanks to the UK Parliament for recognising Edinburgh's potential as a site for the bank. I hope that the development will bring investment and jobs to Edinburgh and to the rest of Scotland.

The debate is timely, because the winning years strategy will provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build Scottish tourism. We need to make a success of such opportunities so that they act as a springboard for the industry in the future. The report on tourism published by the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee informs the debate.

Scotland has much of which to boast: scenery, natural and cultural heritage and—I believe—one of the warmest welcomes that one can get anywhere in the world. Scotland's unique natural heritage led us to lodge our amendment. I believe that we have the ability to grow green and eco-tourism, on which we have not yet fully capitalised. The year of natural Scotland provides an ideal opportunity to do so.

The minister has identified business tourism as a growth area, and I welcome the funding that he announced today. That funding, together with the green investment bank, will help to grow business tourism in Scotland.

Despite Scotland's reputation as a tourist attraction, people do not see going into the hospitality industry as a particularly good career move. That has led to poor workforce retention, poor motivation and poor skills development. Much of the problem is caused by the seasonality of the industry. Despite improvements, we still have a long way to go to create a year-round industry. We need permanent jobs that allow people to build a career, keeping skills and knowledge within the industry.

The industry has a low-pay culture, and although the minimum wage has helped, it is not an attractive career choice to aspire only to the minimum wage. The committee heard worrying evidence that staff who worked more than 48 hours a week sometimes opted out of the minimum wage. The minimum wage is not optional: it is a legal requirement. We must strengthen protection for the staff in that situation. The old saying "Pay peanuts, get monkeys" comes to mind. Until the hospitality industry gets its act together, we will not increase standards.

The committee also heard concerns about skills development in the industry.

Murdo Fraser: I appreciate that everyone wishes to see better pay and conditions in the hospitality sector. However, that will come about only if the consumers are prepared to pay higher prices for their meals and accommodation. The member needs to reflect on that issue.

Rhoda Grant: I take Murdo Fraser's point that people need to pay more, but they must pay for the service that they receive. The hospitality industry has come a long way in recent years in driving down costs and making hotels less labour intensive so that people who work in them get higher levels of pay. However, huge numbers of people are working long hours for very small amounts of money. If we really are going to make hospitality a career, we must pay properly and focus on career development as one of our priorities.

Skills development goes hand in hand with career development. The system works best when the industry works in collaboration with further education to offer classroom training and job training that complement each other. That best practice needs to be turned into high-quality apprenticeships for the industry, perhaps through traditional job pairings with one employer or with a group of small or more specialised businesses. I was surprised to hear last night that there is a shortage of skilled chefs in the industry. We must address that to move the industry forward.

VisitScotland is the lead marketing authority for tourism, and its campaigns are shown to be highly effective. However, many other area organisations are equally effective. Last summer, I had the pleasure of spending a day with the Cairngorms Business Partnership, which is made up of the Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce, Cairngorms hotels and a destination management organisation.

The Cairngorms Business Partnership works under the banner of the Cairngorms national park but has freedom to develop its own offer. What really impressed me is the wide range of businesses that work together to manage and market their industry. They were highly aware of their interdependence.

For instance, the top-range hotel understood that the bunkhouse also needed to provide excellent quality of service. It recognised that, if a child had a good experience, they would come back to the campsite as a young adult, to the bunkhouse with their family and to the budget hotel with their teenage children. Indeed, when they had money and freedom and were on their own, they could then come back to the top-range hotel.

Those businesses know that they are interdependent, so they work closely together. Their tourism offer covers a range of activities from high-intensity sport, through wildlife tourism to leisurely breaks—indeed, something for all the family.

Some of the operators to whom I spoke were a wee bit concerned that VisitScotland tended to market the Cairngorms as an outdoor, high-activity sporting centre when they felt that they had much more to offer. VisitScotland must try to work more closely with the businesses that it serves so that it can market them as they see fit and in a way that brings back the same return that VisitScotland's marketing promotions obviously bring back.

The Cairngorms Business Partnership also includes the retail sector. We often forget about retail being part of the visitor offer but, to be frank, it is crucial to tourism.

Another challenge that we face is moving visitors from London, Edinburgh and other big centres to more rural areas. Our ability to do that will determine the success of the winning years strategy. Although our cities have done well in recent years, that has hidden a fall in tourism in our more remote, rural areas. Tourism is often the economic backbone of many of those rural communities, so we must try to redress the balance. I am keen to hear what the minister plans to do to encourage visitors to see more of Scotland.

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): Does Rhoda Grant agree that not just rural areas but urban areas outside the cities play an important part in tourism?

Rhoda Grant: Yes, I agree with that. The point that I am trying to make is that our cities, such as London and Edinburgh, do well, as do some of the small towns, which have a great deal to offer. Our remote and rural areas also have something to offer, so we need to consider the balance.

Our amendment points to green and eco-tourism and the potential to use that sector to increase visitor numbers in our more remote areas and, indeed, areas outwith our large cities. However, many tourism businesses outside our cities cite infrastructure as a barrier to increasing visitor numbers. Connectivity is a huge issue. The lack of flights to more far-flung areas and the associated high costs are barriers to moving tourists out of our cities. Slow trains and poor roads also play their part.

We need to find ways of encouraging visitors out of the cities. Our rural areas are not only for the more intrepid travellers; they should be an enjoyable experience for all. Other countries do it well—the plane meets the train meets the bus—

but we need to go hunting around to find connecting public transport in Scotland.

Edinburgh is our capital city and probably has the best connections to public transport. From the airport, we have a regular bus service to the railway station—although it should go to the bus station. Indeed, there should be better connectivity to the rest of Scotland. We need to achieve that to increase numbers of tourists from outwith Scotland.

I have an awful lot more to say, but I am running out of time. I welcome the debate. As we embark on the winning years, it is time to plan to optimise their impact. We will support the Government in its preparations, but it must put Scotland before party interests if it is to market Scotland and reap the legacy of forthcoming events.

I move amendment S4M-02245.1, to insert at end:

“and further commends tourist industry partners for working together to develop green and eco-tourism.”

15:20

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I am pleased to speak in this debate on tourism. I support the Government's motion and the amendment—we are in for a consensual debate.

I am delighted to see Stephen Leckie, from Crieff Hydro, in the public gallery. I had not heard the name or seen the man until this week, but I heard him give a speech on Tuesday night and again last night. Now it is his turn to listen to me. I cannot promise that my speech will be anything like as colourful as his were.

Scottish Conservatives welcome the £2 million that will be available over three years to support bids for major conferences that relate to business tourism in Scotland's key sectors—I trust that that includes the food and drink sector as well as commerce, science and medicine, given our wonderful, high-quality products in Scotland, including our whisky. Aviemore has built a reputation for excellence as a world-class conference centre, which brings many visitors to the area for the first time. Many of those visitors decide to come back with their families, so I hope that Aviemore and Strathspey will benefit from the investment.

I am a Highlands and Islands MSP, so I acknowledge the investment in John o'Groats, which is well overdue but nonetheless very welcome.

As the co-convener of the Parliament's cross-party group on Scotch whisky, I want to highlight how much whisky contributes to tourism in Scotland. In 2010, about 1.3 million visitors visited the 52 Scotch whisky visitor centres. Some 87 per

cent of those visitors came from outside Scotland. Spend was £27 million, and 91 per cent of the operating expenditure of the visitor centres is spent with Scottish suppliers.

I recently visited the Strathisla distillery in Keith, which I was told is the oldest distillery in the Highlands. I saw round the distillery, the shop and the excellent rooms that can be hired for conferences. As well as offering the traditional distillery tour, many distilleries provide tasting sessions, corporate facilities, wedding venues and high-quality coffee shops and restaurants. Our whisky industry has fully embraced opportunities in tourism and has invested to enhance the tourist experience. Given that China is one of the fastest-growing markets for Scotch whisky, I hope that we can look forward to welcoming many visitors from that country to our distilleries in Scotland.

We give a huge welcome to the United Kingdom Government's decision to base the corporate headquarters of the UK green investment bank in Edinburgh. As the minister said, that is fitting, given that the Labour amendment

"commends tourist industry partners for working together to develop green and eco-tourism."

It also proves what can be achieved through good working relationships between the United Kingdom Government and our Scottish ministers.

The tourism sector in Scotland directly employs more than 220,000 people. In the context of private sector employment, that is second only to the retail sector. Tourism accounts for about 9 per cent of jobs, but, most important, in parts of the Highlands it accounts for about 20 per cent of jobs.

In preparation for the debate I read the briefing that the Scottish Parliament information centre produced last year and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's report on issues affecting Scottish tourism. Both publications highlighted the target for a 50 per cent increase in revenue, which was set out in the 2006 publication "Scottish Tourism: The Next Decade—A Tourism Framework for Change". I found it difficult to track any increase, although it is worth noting the wide variation in figures when attempts are made to define and measure tourism's contribution to the Scottish economy.

Figures in the SPICe briefing suggest that spend in monetary and real terms decreased between 2005 and 2009. The spend by visitors from within Scotland was down, as well as the spend by visitors from the rest of the United Kingdom, but there was a small increase in the spend by overseas visitors. All in all, tourism's contribution to the economy is probably flatlining.

I found it surprising that whereas Malcolm Roughead, the chief executive of VisitScotland, has said that it is realistic to say that the 50 per cent target will not be achieved, John Swinney has said that Governments should not run around changing their targets at the first sign of trouble. In paragraph 47 of its report on issues affecting tourism, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee states:

"We are concerned that the Cabinet Secretary and the Chief Executive of our main tourism agency for Scotland have differing views on the achievability of the 50% growth target."

Nevertheless, there is much to welcome in Scotland and we should all be tourism ambassadors for our country. I welcome what the minister said about the Disney film promoting our own Billy Connolly, Robbie Coltrane and many others. The Castle Stuart golf course near Inverness is a prime example of the excellent increase in quality standards and professionalism, with its staff showing sheer determination in continuing a golf tournament despite heavy rain and even landslides on the course.

My time is running out fast. I briefly mention Alan Taylor's article in *The Herald*, in which he spoke about being stranded in Ullapool but finding a warm welcome at Jean Urquhart's Ceilidh Place. I hope that more people who live in Scotland will holiday in Scotland and get to know their own country.

15:26

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I declare an interest, as someone who has been involved in tourism for 40 years.

During that time, tourism has become an industry. There was a time when to call tourism an industry was tantamount to insulting shipbuilding, mining, manufacturing or the other big industries that were considered to be real industries. Working in the service industry often equated with failure—it was a workplace for the great unskilled. Why would anyone want those unsociable hours, the low pay, the disrespect and the lack of a career path?

What about Scotland itself? The Scottish Tourist Board, as it was then, was restricted to promoting Scotland only in Scotland, and it suffered many of the ills of the industry that it hoped to serve.

However, time changes everything, with the exception of perception, and that is what we must change. These are changed days and no mistake, but there is still work to do and some way to go. We cannot be complacent, as there is much that we can improve. *[Interruption.]* If members have not heard any of what I have said so far, they have missed the best bit. *[Laughter.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

We did hear it. You are doing wonderfully well—do carry on.

Jean Urquhart: Employment is the single biggest issue that should exercise everyone's mind, and in that regard the tourism industry offers significant opportunities. Let us stop talking about unskilled labour, because nothing could be further from the truth, as anyone who has been served badly at an airport, a restaurant, a bar or an information centre will testify. Dealing with the public and with visitors from the UK or across the globe can be challenging and demanding. If it is done well, it requires great skill. We should all agree that these are skilled jobs.

We need help to get that message out, not only to potential employees, but to employers. Earlier this afternoon, Patrick Harvie mentioned his concern about any scheme that abuses young people's labour. We must take that on board, as well as addressing the black market in labour, which needs to be rooted out. Through a year's work experience in any aspect of tourism, with good management, people can develop their communication skills, their general knowledge, their physical ability, their sense of respect and other practical skills such as the ability to think and act responsively in any given situation. That is not unskilled labour. Such skills are transferable—they are required of a good employee in any job. Catering can often be a gateway for young people into other areas of work.

Tourism is not something set apart, but is integral to every aspect of life in Scotland. How we regard ourselves is how we will be regarded by others.

As an employer, I have long been aware of the status of the waiter, chef or visitor centre employee in other nations. Students from around the world who come to Scotland for a gap year and, more recently, economic migrants, often working in hospitality at some point, have high expectations. They work hard and accept that they do important work. That is a culture that we somehow have to instil in our industry.

We have an opportunity to use tourism to best advantage. I suggest that we involve the unions, Skills Development Scotland, VisitScotland, the Scottish Tourism Alliance and agencies and business organisations in the challenge of not only taking on young people, but ensuring that their experience is positive, with skills that are transferable to any position and in any country. We have tended to pay lip service to the importance of the industry without recognising the importance of the workforce.

Scotland is still growing its tourism industry, although perhaps not at the rate predicted in 2005.

We should keep that target, however, because there have been seismic shifts since 2005 and there may be more. Take VisitScotland, for example—changed days there, too. It is now a smarter, more outward-looking organisation, with the core activity of marketing our country everywhere. It is working better than it has for a long time and earning deserved respect within the industry.

Growth of 5 per cent a year could happen in the industry. The 20 per cent rate of VAT was a knock-back. We should accept that that is a disincentive that has restricted growth.

For years, it has been our ambition to extend the season. This could be our chance. Scotland, if not open all night, is open all year.

The fact that tourism is labour intensive should be welcomed. We fight against the hotel that becomes mechanically intensive and does not employ people. Tourism is a people industry. That is what we should be proud of and it is what we can support. It could be an even bigger and better employer. It can act as a springboard to other work, and build confidence, knowledge and life experience—all attributes of the skilled workforce that Scotland needs.

I support the motion. We really need to make the part of it about skills investment work. We can offer young people a real opportunity. Let us do that.

15:33

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab):

We all know that Scotland is blessed with some of the most spectacular scenery in the world. From the southern uplands to the Ochils, the Trossachs and the Cairngorms, it has landscapes both inspiring and dramatic.

We are also a country with a rich artistic, historical and cultural heritage. Everyone has heard of Burns, Bruce, and Robert Louis Stevenson, while the character of Sherlock Holmes continues to invite imaginative reinterpretation in television and film. If all that fails to draw the crowds, there is always the whisky.

Although all those things are rightly celebrated, Scotland's tourism scene is far more diverse and disparate than is generally recognised. We must be careful to avoid becoming known, as my colleague Elaine Smith once memorably put it, as the country of "haggis, heather and highland flings". Scotland has a lot more to offer tourists from home and abroad. I will draw attention to some of the tourist attractions in my region, Central Scotland.

Some years ago, before Margaret Thatcher, North Lanarkshire was a hotbed of industry, home

to an abundance of mines and iron and steelworks. For almost three centuries, heavy industry shaped the contours of our economic and social landscape, not only bringing jobs and prosperity, but providing a genuine sense of community and cohesion. Without wishing to romanticise what could be a brutal business, the loss of that sense of community and cohesion was perhaps the greatest tragedy of deindustrialisation.

Although those times are gone, those who wish to explore North Lanarkshire's industrial heritage can do so at the Summerlee museum in Coatbridge, a town once known as the industrial heartland of Scotland. The museum, which opened in 1987, is set in 22 acres and is based around the site of the 19th century Summerlee ironworks. It is undoubtedly the noisiest museum in Scotland: it features working machinery and a recreated draft mine. Visitors can take a guided tour of the mine and the miners' cottages, which have renovated interiors that date from the 1840s to the 1960s. The tour gives visitors a flavour of industrial life at work and at home. The museum also boasts Scotland's only operational tramway—it looks as though it will retain that claim indefinitely. It is sustained by continued investment from North Lanarkshire Council and Friends of Summerlee Heritage Trust, and admission to the site is free.

To allow people to take maximum advantage of that, we should look at extending the opening hours. It is essential that Scotland's tourism scene adapts to suit the changing needs of the modern working family. Parents who wish to take their children to museums and tourist attractions on weekday evenings should have the opportunity to do so. We already have a designated evening for late-night shopping. Why should the tourism industry not have something similar?

Coatbridge's annual St Patrick's day festival, which began on 2 March, features an array of musical, sporting, artistic and cultural events. Some of those events are held during the day, some are held in the evening, and some are held at weekends. Such flexibility and choice give everybody the opportunity to sample the world's eighth-largest St Patrick's day festival. As an additional enticement, this year's festival lecture affords a

"rare opportunity to listen to celebrated politician, author, journalist and broadcaster, George Galloway present his view and experiences of Irishness in Scotland".

I am sure that all members would relish the opportunity to hear gorgeous George hold sway on Irishness. The tickets are only £3.

It is important to remember that Scotland's scenic attractions are not reserved to the Highlands and Islands. Drumpellier country park in North Lanarkshire is set in 500 acres of beautiful

countryside and encompasses two lochs and an abundance of wildlife, and the artificial loch in Strathclyde country park, which spans the border of North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire, is a major centre for water sports. Strathclyde country park was a venue for last year's international children's games and is an official venue for the 2014 Commonwealth games. The park is also home to M&Ds, which is Scotland's biggest and best theme park.

Lanarkshire also has many historical attractions. Chatelherault country park in Hamilton, which was designed in 1732 and was once the summer residence of the Duke of Hamilton, has been rated by VisitScotland as a five-star tourist attraction. Visitors to the park can revel in the elaborate splendours of the banquet hall or get lost in the expansive gardens. Low Parks museum, which is also rated as a five-star attraction, offers a fascinating insight into the many towns and villages in that part of the Clyde valley. It has entertaining and informative displays on the history of South Lanarkshire.

Hamilton mausoleum, which was once the resting place of the dukes of Hamilton, offers tours of its ornate interiors for as little as £1.15 for adults and 70p for children. Bothwell castle, which dates from the 13th century, has been described by Dr Douglas Simpson, formerly of the University of Aberdeen, as

"the grandest piece of secular architecture that the Middle Ages has bequeathed to us in Scotland".

No inventory of Central Scotland's tourist attractions would be complete without mentioning the Falkirk wheel, which is now celebrating its 10th anniversary. It was completed in 2002 as part of the millennium link project to restore Scotland's historic waterways, and it is the world's first and only rotating boat lift. As well as being one of Scotland's most popular tourism sites, it is listed as one of the top 10 works of engineering genius by Lonely Planet.

I finish by stressing that, although there is no doubt that Scotland has much to offer in respect of tourism, we must strive to ensure that all those sites—whether scenic, historic, recreational or cultural—are as accessible as possible. We must ensure that our public transport infrastructure can support those who do not own cars—that could be enveloped with a wider drive to make Scotland more accessible and competitive. The more we do to help to publicise the many attractions across Scotland, to make them more visible and more accessible, the more people will visit.

It is essential that we remove barriers wherever possible and do not block legitimate attempts to enhance commercial opportunities. For example, I recently wrote to Transport Scotland on behalf of

the Dakota hotel to request brown signage to make that hotel more visible to motorists. Unfortunately, Transport Scotland turned down that request. Increasing visibility will increase demand, which in turn will create additional jobs and greater prosperity, and lead to more money being spent and invested in local and national economies. The Scottish Government's policy should be focused on increasing investment, enhancing infrastructure, and improving accessibility to give our tourism industry the best possible chance of success.

15:39

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in this debate on the future of tourism in Scotland.

I say to Siobhan McMahon that I have family in Coatbridge. She reminded me that I used to visit Summerlee regularly when my children were younger. Having listened to her speech, I will definitely pay it another visit. It is a fine visitor attraction. Industrial heritage has huge tourism potential.

The tourism sector is critical to the future of our country and it is imperative that we give it all the support that we can. According to the Scottish Tourism Alliance, the sector is worth more than £4.2 billion to our economy, which is equivalent to £850 for every person living in Scotland. There have been a variety of estimates today of the number of people who are employed in the industry. Those have ranged from 215,000 to 220,000, although Deloitte estimates the figure as being even higher at 270,000. The figure of between 215,000 and 220,000 represents about 8 per cent of the total number of people in work and it is more than twice as many people as work in our financial services industry.

As members will be aware, long-term tourism trends in Scotland are encouraging and we are working towards global growth targets of achieving a 50 per cent real-terms increase by 2015. That target was set in 2006 and since then we, like other countries, have been caught in a severe worldwide depression. There is concern that, because of that, the target may no longer be achievable, although there are plenty of encouraging signs in terms of numbers and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth believes that we should strive to meet the challenge that the target presents.

I agree with the cabinet secretary. There is cause to be optimistic. Although there is still room for improvement on matters such as staffing, wages and getting the right transport and communications infrastructure in place, in other areas we are playing to pronounced strengths. We

are blessed with unsurpassed natural tourism resources: the beauty and diversity of our landscapes, our unique historical and cultural heritage and the warmth and hospitality of our people.

Beyond those strengths, there are improved relationships between the public and private sectors and some imaginative industry training programmes. We can capitalise on some tremendous event-driven opportunities: our year of creative Scotland this year; natural Scotland next year; the Commonwealth games; the Ryder cup; and homecoming Scotland. We must continue to be innovative and to seek out and exploit every opportunity for developing our tourism base.

I am lucky enough to represent South Scotland, which is one of the most diverse, attractive and welcoming parts of our country. I like to describe it as the beautiful south. The rich heritage and gentle landscapes of Dumfriesshire, the rolling hills and seascapes of East Lothian, the great abbeys and houses of the Borders and the hills and coastal villages of Galloway all have their distinct magic.

Beyond those natural assets, there is huge potential for themed tourism. I am delighted that so many talented people in the region have seen its potential and are working extremely hard to develop compelling propositions, which will further increase the tourist footprint.

In January, the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs launched the year of creative Scotland in Dumfries. At the same time a new festival, Dumfries's big Burns supper, took place. More than 2,000 performers—many of them local young people—celebrated our national bard's life and heritage. I am confident that the festival will continue to grow in the years ahead and become a major event for tourists, particularly those travelling up from England, for whom Dumfries will be the first port of call on a Burns heritage tourism trail.

Other arts-based initiatives in the area will help to boost tourism spending. For example, the Stove, newly opened on Dumfries High Street, is set to become an exciting and imaginative cultural venue. Spring fling, which I was privileged to open last week, is the biggest open studio event for artists in Scotland. It celebrates its 10th birthday this year and there is a taster event at the Gracefield arts centre in Dumfries, where people can pick up original artwork at a bargain price. Such examples highlight how important cultural tourism is throughout Scotland and it is fantastic that that premier cultural tourism event takes place in South Scotland.

Elsewhere, a new world rugby centre will open in Hawick and astronomers can enjoy Galloway

forest park's benefits as the first dark sky park in the United Kingdom.

We face strong global competition in tourism and hospitality. We must ensure that our offering is as strong and inviting as it can be. That means building on our strengths, being as innovative as we can be and ensuring that at every level we provide value for money. I hope that the enthusiasm and innovation seen in South Scotland and elsewhere help to inspire others across the country and that we can build and grow a national tourism industry that encourages millions to enjoy our unique assets and history. I am sure that we will succeed.

15:44

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Whatever the future direction of Scottish tourism—and I am sure that under this Government it will be positive—one thing is certain: it must involve utilising every tool at our disposal to entice visitors to our country, as the minister said. That opportunity, in my constituency, at least, has still to be fully grasped.

I make no apology for taking a parochial approach to today's debate and getting in ahead of my colleague George Adam—although not, I have to say, Siobhan McMahon and Joan McAlpine—in extolling the virtues of the part of the country that I am privileged to represent. The case for putting Angus at the heart of our tourism marketing, at least in relation to the United States marketplace, is surely beyond challenge.

It is reckoned that last year our present marketing campaigns generated a little over £20 million from American visitors, whose numbers, as the minister pointed out, went up 18 per cent in the first nine months of 2011. Although that upward trend in visitors is clearly encouraging, one can imagine the numbers that we could be posting if we employed more fully every resource at our disposal. I suggest that Arbroath abbey is one such underemployed resource.

We have heard how the arrival of the V&A in Dundee will draw visitors in their thousands from the UK and beyond, and that Angus will enjoy spin-off benefits from that, which it will. However, Angus already has much to offer and right across the county we can and must play our part in realising the full potential of the V&A project for Tayside as a whole.

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I recognise that the member for Angus South is concerned about his part of the world. However, as the member representing the bit just north of that, I wonder whether he accepts that we are not so good at joined-up tourism. Visitors who can be persuaded to go from Dundee to Arbroath can

easily be persuaded to go to the north of Angus and beyond. The fact is that we tend to market things within boundaries when in fact the boundaries are largely artificial. They might as well come up to Dunnottar castle, which is just about to appear on the Royal Bank of Scotland's ultimate rewards current account card.

Graeme Dey: The member makes a reasonable point. Of course, this is all about enticing visitors to the country and being confident in the belief that, once in Scotland, they will find their way around and sample the many great things that we have to offer. The on-going enhancement of hotel provision in Dundee can be only good news for both our constituencies, as it will provide tourists with a much-needed east Tayside base.

Returning to specifically parochial issues in Angus South, I note that great efforts are being made to enhance the attractiveness of Glamis castle to visitors. The area also boasts among its attractions Barrie's birthplace, the camera obscura, the RSPB reserve, the open championship venue that is Carnoustie and a small part of the Cairngorms national park.

In the midst of all that lies a largely underexploited means of luring tourists to the area in the shape of Arbroath abbey. It is great that sizeable numbers of Scots and English visitors are vacationing and staycationing in Scotland, but the fact that foreign visitors represent 16 per cent of total tourism numbers surely indicates that we should be looking to do better in this area. Unless we become more efficient and effective in telling our story to that particular audience we will not get that improvement.

What is so special about Arbroath abbey and why should we give it much greater prominence in the promotion of Scotland as a tourism destination? I am not for a moment suggesting that we should base our entire efforts in this regard around Arbroath. However, most of us in the chamber will be aware of the incredibly strong links between Arbroath abbey and the USA. The signing of the declaration of Arbroath at the abbey and the American declaration of independence might be separated by more than 450 years, but the connection between those documents and therefore our two nations is beyond challenge. It is accepted that through the influence of William Small on its principal author, Thomas Jefferson, the US version was heavily based on the document that set Scotland on the road to freedom in 1320.

William Small was born in Carmyllie, just outside Arbroath, and, after moving to the US, was in 1758 appointed professor of mathematics and natural philosophy at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. Among his pupils was Thomas Jefferson who, 18 years later, chaired the

committee commissioned to draft a declaration of independence. After being tweaked by Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, that document was signed on 4 July 1776. Jefferson, who went on to become the third president of the USA—and who it is claimed was a descendant of one of the signatories of the declaration of Arbroath, Thomas Randolph—never hid his admiration for Small, admitting that meeting the Angus-born academic had

“probably fixed the destinies of my life.”

Many years later, in 1998, the US Senate moved to mark the links between the declaration of Arbroath and America’s own declaration by unanimously backing Senator Trent Lott’s resolution to fix 6 April as the day on which Americans would acknowledge the contribution of Scots to the development of their country. In the preamble to the resolution, Lott stated:

“April 6 has a special significance for all Americans and especially ... Americans of Scottish descent”

because

“on April 6, 1320, the Declaration of Arbroath, the Scottish Declaration of Independence, was signed; and ... the American Declaration of Independence was modeled on this inspirational document”.

Why do we not make more of that connection in marketing Scotland to America as a tourism destination, or indeed the fact that nine Scots and two Americans of Scots descent, including Jefferson, are believed to have signed the document that freed the USA from British control?

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): The member talked about some of the people who signed the declaration of independence. Does he agree that one of them was the Rev Witherspoon, who was a preacher from Paisley? As members know, Paisley is the centre of the universe.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Twenty seconds, please, Mr Dey.

Graeme Dey: In common with other members, I am sure, I knew what was coming there.

We are told that half of all visitors to Scotland visit historic sights and 63 per cent of non-domestic visitors have links to this country. It is reckoned that 6 million people in North America claim Scottish ancestry. What greater historic sight do we have, in terms of influence beyond these shores, than the abbey? We need to make it all that it can be, but also to ensure that our promotion of it to a surely ready overseas market is all that it should be.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you would draw to a close, please.

Graeme Dey: I ask the minister to encourage those who are responsible for promoting our

country to turn their gaze to Angus. Let us see VisitScotland and Event Scotland specifically target visitors and attempt to entice them to Arbroath.

In summing up, I believe that it is imperative for the good of both Angus and Scottish tourism that we put the abbey at the heart of our efforts to attract US visitors to our shores, and that we do so quickly. After all—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You really must stop.

Graeme Dey: There is every possibility that, come the latter part of 2014, Arbroath and its abbey will no longer be able to claim exclusivity when it comes to Scottish declarations of independence.

15:51

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): On Tuesday evening, I attended the tourism reception that was held in the garden lobby. I was struck by the enthusiasm and passion that all the speakers had for the industry and that was echoed by guest after guest during the evening, not forgetting in the strong contribution from Murdo Fraser, who is perhaps one of the best known ex-members of the IRA, by which I mean, of course, Inverness Royal academy.

Not for the first or last time, I will concentrate my remarks on the Highlands and Islands. Members need no lectures from me on the fact that the Highlands and Islands have a world-class product with outstanding natural beauty from the Cuillins to the Cairngorms national park; lochs, hills and castles; eco-tourism; the stunning Eden Court theatre in Inverness; film tourism; the Royal National Mòd; and the world mountain bike championships in Fort William.

The area can produce iconic wildlife images. Visitors can watch the flight of the graceful osprey and the whooper swans wintering at the RSPB’s Insh marshes reserve. Those natural assets provide a fantastic base for the most important industry in the Highlands and Islands.

Vital jobs are provided throughout the Highlands and Islands in bed and breakfasts, guest houses, hotels and visitor attractions such as the Landmark visitor centre in Carrbridge and the outstanding Culloden battlefield visitor centre.

However, as any fresh-faced MBA student would tell us, business has to address the five Ps of product, price, place, promotion and position. They are vital for the tourism industry. I agree with the comment that Peter Lederer, the previous chief executive of VisitScotland, made when he said that, to fulfil our potential,

"we must always look at ourselves from the visitor's perspective."

I endorse his view.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

Does the member agree that, if we look at ourselves as others look at us, we will realise that they value the Gaelic language in the Highlands? Does he agree that that should be actively promoted?

David Stewart: I strongly agree with the member's comment.

We must develop the five drivers for the industry. We must extend attraction hours, increase the length of the season, accelerate marketing, promote high-value quality goods and persuade businesses to promote others' goods.

One fascinating statistic is that, if 10 per cent of visitors spent the same amount as the average visitor to Switzerland, that would be worth half a billion pounds to the Scottish tourism industry.

New investment is vital, and I welcome the extra £30 million that VisitScotland will spend over the next three years to capitalise on the winning years, which many members have mentioned. From the Olympics to the Commonwealth games, there is a rich potential harvest for the Scottish tourism industry.

I take members back in time to last year's Scottish open, which was held at the superb, state-of-the-art Castle Stuart golf course near Inverness, which is a long par five from my home. There was so much demand from tourists for accommodation that a party of Americans stayed in Perth and travelled to Castle Stuart every day—a round trip of more than 200 miles.

We must have the right balance between inward investment and support for indigenous industry.

Most businesses have hard choices to make. They have to differentiate their product by price or quality, but not usually by both. From the humblest one-room bed and breakfast in Corpach to Culloden House Hotel, where Bonnie Prince Charlie allegedly once stayed—although I suspect that that was not an online booking—quality must be the watchword and there should be no more, "You'll have had your tea."

Tourists have to get to the area. From the industry and this week's conference, we know that we need road and rail improvements, and stronger incentives in the form of a new air route development fund to get tourists from the superhubs of Amsterdam, Paris and Heathrow to Scotland.

We need to build on our strengths in the creative industries. I welcome the £7 million campaign to help tourism to capitalise on the

Disney Pixar film "Brave", which is set in the Highlands. I saw a brief clip on Tuesday, although I was a bit concerned that one of the lead characters is called King Fergus. I do not know whether there is any connection with the minister, although I know that Fergus Ewing is always a king, at least in his own eyes. Does the minister have any plans to develop film studios, particularly in Lochaber and Inverness? That would allow film crews that are doing location shots for films like the Harry Potter films, "Braveheart" and "Highlander" to not just film and go, but extend their stay and use the backup technology that is available.

The BBC series "Monarch of the Glen" was filmed in Badenoch and Strathspey. At its height, it had 9 million UK viewers and 50 million viewers around the world. I must declare an interest because once upon a time, I was an extra in that show, so I must have the most famous right foot of any member. The Badenoch and Strathspey area was very successful in promoting itself as "Monarch of the Glen" country and I strongly support that. Location tourism is vital.

We must also fight the curse of seasonality. Last year, I met the chairman of Nevis Range Mountain Resort and we talked about the great development in mountain bike course racing, which is absolutely excellent.

I see that my time is coming to an end. Tourism is a crucial driver of Scotland's economic success in general, and of the Highlands and Islands in particular. The pathways to success are quality, skills and training, marketing, infrastructure improvement, and big bang events, such as the Olympics. We know the route to the next stage in the development of tourism but, to paraphrase Sir Walter Scott, what we need now is the will to do and the soul to dare.

15:57

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Today's debate is important and I welcome the minister's announcement of the conference fund; I am sure that it will add to everyone's support for the tourism industry.

The debate is important not just because it is taking place during Scottish tourism week but because it highlights how seriously we take this major income sector in the Scottish economy. The debate is also part of a process that allows us to challenge structures and focus, and eschew any perception of complacency about this valuable industry. People should make no mistake: we are very serious about the tourism sector.

By any standards, Scottish tourism is a huge business, making a total contribution of £11.1 billion and employing 270,000 people. In

2006, the Scottish Government launched its tourism framework for change, which outlined the ambition to grow Scotland's tourism by 50 per cent by 2015. That ambition was predicated on the World Tourism Organization's expectation of global tourism growth of 4 per cent to 5 per cent per year.

Since then, we have seen a major economic downturn that could have set aspiration against realism. I say to Ms Scanlon that those are not contradictory. Personally, I would settle for aspiration and set about meeting the challenge. Like the minister, I am an optimist. The portents are good and the opportunities are there; the numbers that have been mentioned in today's debate show that. The numbers are up.

The most important aspect of the debate is not the statistics, to which I will return in a minute, but the change of attitude and the can-do leadership of VisitScotland and in other pockets of the tourism industry. That attitude was exemplified by Scott Taylor of Glasgow City Marketing Bureau, who said in evidence to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee:

"A 50 per cent increase is still our ambition. We should not shy away from that target".—[*Official Report, Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee*, 23 November 2011; c 575.]

Scott Taylor indicated that there was a challenge in understanding the volume and value of tourism in Scotland. However, I believe that VisitScotland will embark on not just a study but the practical establishment of a widely accessible quality-based data collection and centralised database system, which will detect trends and movements and so validate the security of that targeted growth.

Mary Scanlon: I do not understand why Chic Brodie criticised my speech because, as he is a member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism committee, he obviously signed up to its report, which states:

"We are concerned that the Cabinet Secretary and the Chief Executive of our main tourism agency ... have differing views".

Chic Brodie: I am not sure that that is a valid intervention. If the member had listened, she would know that I said that I believe that they are not contradictory. I had the benefit of being there.

Further growth will be secured by ensuring that we improve quality of service and continue to develop a culture in which tourism, hospitality and event management are not repositories for low pay, long hours and a job rather than a career. Our ambitions and aspirations should and will be much higher. I applaud the relationships that some in the industry have already developed with their local colleges and universities. I particularly welcome the proposal that is being discussed in

East Lothian to develop an effective serial programme and curriculum on hospitality and tourism. The programme will take 15 and 16-year-olds through school, college and university to become hospitality and tourism experts. The ultimate desire and objective is for the industry to thrive on the back of a trained and relevantly skilled workforce that deploys high-quality customer service.

We must develop partnerships at local and Scotland level. In the past two weeks, I have attended meetings and conferences with ABBA—not the Swedish group, but the Ayrshire Bed and Breakfast Association—and the Ayrshire business forum, and in Dumfries and Galloway. Those areas have, in their own ways, developed organisations that focus on local expertise and products. However, I suggest that, under the umbrella of VisitScotland, they must start to talk to one another. Whether that means Dumfries and Galloway talking with Ayrshire or South Lanarkshire, the bodies must start talking to one another under the marketing umbrella and strategy of VisitScotland.

I believe that our tourism industry is on the up and that it is in good hands. However, continued development can be guaranteed only on the back of superior quality and connectivity of the transport infrastructure. We have had welcome announcements on the A9 upgrade and the pursuit of a high-speed rail link with the south-east of England. However, on air and airports, to support VisitScotland's strategy and our tourism hopes, the devolution of air passenger duty, as has happened in Northern Ireland, is essential, as are direct flights and more appropriately located visa centres and processes.

VisitScotland should approach the winning years with relish, as should we all. At the Dumfries and Galloway conference last week, a marketing guru said:

"Brands that have stories have meaning, brands that have meaning have impact and resonance".

Scotland the brand has a unique and authentic story to tell. Let us support the tourism industry and give it a global impact and resonance.

16:03

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the future of tourism in Scotland, given the importance of the sector to the Scottish economy. The future of large and small businesses and of a range of attractions and services in other sectors depends on the resilience and success of Scottish tourism.

As a member who represents communities in North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire and Falkirk,

I am only too happy to remind Parliament of what is on offer in my region. As I have said before, according to VisitScotland, four out of the top five tourist destinations in the Glasgow and Clyde valley area are based in Lanarkshire: Strathclyde, Drumpellier, Calderglen and Chatelherault country parks. The national museum of rural life, which is the home of one of Scotland's oldest farms, is based in my home town of East Kilbride. Of course, visitors to Central Scotland can see that iconic symbol of modern Scotland, the Falkirk wheel, and experience our woodlands and canals. We have a lot to offer, not just to visitors from abroad but to people from elsewhere in the United Kingdom and Scotland.

One consequence of the world's recent economic turmoil has been the rise of the staycation, which is a lifeline for the tourism industry. However, although that is a welcome development in the short term, our ambition in the long run must be to market Scotland as a world-class international destination. We all have a duty to do that and to go that extra mile. Whether we be flight attendants, bus conductors, taxi drivers or shop workers, we all shape the tourist's impression of our nation.

Every one of our enterprise agencies should be geared towards promoting Scotland. Every one of our local authorities should have a duty to promote economic growth, including tourism and eco-tourism. Every one of us should realise that we have a responsibility to talk up our country to visitors from all over the world.

We held a constructive debate recently on the year of creative Scotland. Many members spoke about the importance of skills to the success of tourism, culture and hospitality. We must give visitors the best welcome to Scotland that we can, if we are to project a strong image of the country and secure repeat tourism. That means ensuring that those who deal with tourists have good soft skills and that we develop customer service skills in our visitor attractions and the hospitality industry.

There is a responsibility to customer care throughout the service sector, but many of our international competitors have a much more professional approach to services aimed at tourists. We must give those who work in that field in Scotland the status and recognition that they deserve.

In our previous debate on this issue, I spoke about the work of VisitLanarkshire in bringing together the accommodation sector and visitor attractions as part of a collaborative effort to promote Lanarkshire as a tourist destination. The British Hospitality Association has helpfully provided members with a wealth of information, which clearly shows that hospitality enhances

growth in tourism and the wider economy. Indeed, the hospitality industry contributes almost £4 billion a year to the Scottish economy in wages and profits, and it directly employs 220,000 workers, large numbers of whom are employed in both North and South Lanarkshire.

VisitLanarkshire has been a great success because of the partnerships that it has forged across sectors, which have led to a better, all-round experience for tourists in the area. The Lanarkshire model could be used elsewhere to help attract visitors and retain income derived from tourism in different parts of Scotland.

As a key growth industry, tourism is given a great deal of weight in the Scottish Government's economic strategy, and Scottish Enterprise is one of the agencies tasked with supporting the sector. Scottish Enterprise is committed to ensuring regional equity in economic development, because differences in growth, family incomes and participation between the different regions of Scotland can lead to a drag in economic performance. Periods of low growth and economic instability, such as that being experienced by the country at present, can aggravate those differences. Rural communities tend to experience low levels of productivity and lower wages than those in Scotland as a whole, while Glasgow and the west experience higher unemployment and fewer business start-ups.

We can rise to the familiar challenges that we face in each part of the country by promoting innovation and investment, and by using Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to secure growth that is better dispersed, more balanced and, ultimately, sustainable. The growth of tourism in every part of Scotland would reduce inequalities among regions by adding value to the economy in rural communities and Scotland's cities, and by opening up new possibilities in places such as Lanarkshire and the Forth valley.

Finally, I know that members of all parties share a genuine ambition to promote Scotland as a world-class tourist destination. It is in that spirit of consensus and co-operation that I hope the minister will respond to the points raised during this debate.

16:09

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I, like the minister, am an optimist. We have so much to offer the world and there is so much that we can do in our communities to bring people in. We need to shout from the rooftops about how important Scotland is in the world.

I welcome the £2 million conference fund. Back in Paisley and Renfrewshire, the town centre managers will probably look at the minister's offer

and have ideas of some events and conferences that could be held in Paisley and Renfrewshire. It is the sort of thing that can make a difference and regenerate our town centres.

In Paisley, our town centre manager, Amanda Moulson, working for Renfrewshire Council, has secured more and more events in the town, which has encouraged more footfall in Paisley town centre. We have had a couple of conferences along the way, as well, and her work is much appreciated. Through Paisley vision board, she is currently running a poll in which 87 per cent of respondents are saying that they want more events in the town of Paisley. That shows the kind of things that can make a difference in the area.

Two thousand and twelve is the year of creative Scotland, whose four main objectives are promotion, celebration, participation and collaboration. Those are the things that we must all ensure when we talk about events. In our earlier discussion, we talked about the fact that we tend to stick to specific areas and do not promote Scotland in its entirety. That is something that we must do. What is the point of bringing someone to Glasgow if they do not see the great history of Paisley or my colleague Stuart McMillan's beloved Greenock? What is the point of not making sure that people go there as well? We must look into that.

In Paisley, next year, we will have the Gaelic Mod for the first time. This year, from 25 to 28 October, we will have a Spiegeltent in County Square for the Paisley fringe festival, which is one of only four new festivals that Creative Scotland has allowed for this year. Renfrewshire Council received a £10,000 grant for that event. That will give us a chance to get on with some of the ideas that we have talked about for the Mod next year, which should be exciting and different. I have often heard it called the whisky Olympics. I have never been to the Mod, but when it is in Paisley, people will drink to help the town's economy—but always responsibly.

Mary Scanlon mentioned the film "Brave" from Pixar/Disney, which has a nearly fully Scots cast, although a number of the actors—Julie Walters, John Ratzenberger and Emma Thompson—are not Scots. I will forgive Julie Walters because she is, as my father said, a feisty woman like my granny; John Ratzenberger is seemingly a lucky mascot for Pixar, as he has been in every Pixar movie; and who can forget Emma Thompson's very good Scottish accent in "Tutti Frutti", in 1987? That series was written by Paisley's own John Byrne, of course, and it shows the difference that film and television can make to a community that we are still talking about the programme all these years later. Glasgow recently experienced that with the filming of the Brad Pitt movie "World War

Z". The movie brought £2 million for Glasgow, and it will be interesting when tourists come to Glasgow to see where the scenes that are set in Philadelphia were filmed. Incidentally, Philadelphia was where the declaration of independence was signed—I mention that in passing.

There is so much that we can do as things move on. I recently asked the minister a parliamentary question about the Olympic games. I asked what we were doing to promote Scotland and to move people away from the hustle and bustle of London. Everybody assumed that I was talking about Paisley but, if members look at the *Official Report*, they will see that I never mentioned Paisley although the minister mentioned Paisley in his answer. That just shows that people expect me to talk about Paisley all the time.

The national stadium at Hampden Park will benefit from the Olympic games, as we will have football games there. Over the coming years, we will also have the Commonwealth games in Glasgow. In Renfrewshire, we are investing £8.5 million in the Lagoon sport and leisure centre as a hub, to ensure that Renfrewshire is the gateway to the games. As everyone knows, Glasgow airport is, in fact, in Paisley.

When we talk about promotion, celebration and participation, we must—as Siobhan McMahon said—look to our own towns. Glasgow may be the dear green place, but Paisley is, to me, the centre of the universe. Currently, we are running a campaign entitled "Paisley is", to which we add a tagline at the end. "Proud past. Promising future" is an important tagline, as we have to think of our past and move towards the future. "Paisley is happening" when we have major events. I just like to say, "Paisley is my kinda town." Richard Lyle will remember when I sang that song at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities one evening, late on.

We must look at all the events that various towns hold. Locally, we have done an awful lot with the town centre manager, Amanda Moulson, and her team. We have the Paisley fringe festival, which I have mentioned; the Xmas lights ceremony, which 35,000 people attend; and sma shot day, which involves a bit of Paisley history and is one of the oldest events. The weavers fell out with the manufacturers over the sma shot—it was the one bit of cotton that kept the whole shawl together, but the manufacturers would not pay the weavers for it. Ever since that dispute, the first Saturday in July has been a holiday in Paisley.

I could talk about more. Once again, I have had to leave out most of my speech. In the future, I will have to have an edit button in my head.

We can take such ideas and make a big difference. We have had a fantastic debate.

Everyone is proud of their area and of everything that we can do. We must get together, make the project more joined up and move on from there.

16:15

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I start by echoing George Adam—we need a joined-up approach. I will not talk exclusively about my region, but it will certainly come into my speech.

I speak enthusiastically in the debate about the future of tourism in Scotland to support Rhoda Grant's amendment, which would add that the Parliament

"further commends tourist industry partners for working together to develop green and eco-tourism."

I was delighted to hear that the minister will support the amendment.

Tourism worldwide is predicted to be the world's largest industry by 2030 and to account for 14 per cent of world gross domestic product. In the shift to a low-carbon economy, all sectors must be seen in the context of our climate change targets.

The International Ecotourism Society defines eco-tourism as

"responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people".

A poll of 60,000 visitors ranked Scotland top in Europe and ninth in the world as an eco-destination. More broadly, many tourists from home and abroad look for a green experience. According to the UK Energy Saving Trust,

"green tourism is about being an environmentally friendly tourist or providing environmentally friendly tourist services."

Ensuring sustainable travel options to destinations is essential to that for all regions of Scotland. Rail is a brilliant option. There are beautiful journeys such as the one to Mallaig—not in my region—which link with ferry services. We must also be certain to retain the Caledonian sleeper service.

The Campaign for Borders Rail should be commended for its unstinting work along with others to bring the Borders railway back into use for green-minded tourists who go to the Borders. Just this week, the CBR secured the backing of four rail heritage companies to operate charter trains to key Scottish destinations such as Edinburgh and the Highlands. That would mean lengthening the platform at Tweedbank station, and I hope that the Scottish Government will consider the plea to do that.

Links with buses in rural areas are also essential for connectivity. Once people are at their destinations, cycling options are already available in towns such as Innerleithen and many others.

At last night's meeting of the cross-party group on rural policy, the focus was on the low-carbon chance, and we heard that Northumberland national park has electric car points and that hire cars are available in the park. I hope that the minister will comment on the possibility of such measures in Scotland.

Green tourism must avoid tokenism at all costs. The green tourism business scheme—GTBS—is the largest green accreditation scheme in the UK and was founded in partnership with VisitScotland in 1997. Xavier Font of the International Centre for Responsible Tourism endorses it. He says that it

"provides excellent value for money to a ... range of tourism firms with first class environmental advice and auditing."

The minister highlighted business tourism, and many types of tourism have been mentioned. I am not sure whether we could call it political tourism, but a lot of us in the Parliament have been to or will head off to party conferences this spring, and I wonder whether the hotels in which we stay—they are larger hotels that are often members of chains—have clauses in their corporate social responsibility policies that cover matters such as sourcing food locally and the other environmental issues that they should address.

The 84 businesses in South Scotland that have bronze, silver or gold awards in the GTBS are testimony to the range and scale that are involved. They include the St Abb's Head national nature reserve, Dawyck botanic gardens, a youth hostel in Newton Stewart, the Pear cottage self-catering apartment in Melrose and the VisitScotland Borders network office in Selkirk. Just this week, the Whiteleys of the Lamancha business, Bread Matters, received a gold award, and the assessor was

"impressed by the commitment to renewable energy collaboration with local enterprises"

and with the partnerships that had been built up in relation to green tourism. Along with tourism offices, an extraordinary range of visitor attractions and accommodation, including farms that have diversified to provide bed-and-breakfast accommodation, make up the list in South Scotland and beyond.

Jean Urquhart spoke of the wages of people in the industry. The manager of the Buccleuch Arms hotel, Dave Smith, stresses the importance of that factor. Of the green tourism scheme, he said that the essential elements are that it has to be easy for staff to do and that it has to save money. He said that, at that point,

"it becomes possible to use the green issue in marketing."

Members of the cross-party group on whisky, which Mary Scanlon has mentioned, will visit distilleries this summer. As far away as the

University of Waterloo in Ontario, there is an academic study that stresses that

“visitor centres at malt whisky distilleries are a type of industrial tourism attraction”—

Siobhan McMahon mentioned industrial tourism earlier—

“that can claim environmental credibility and thus has a chance to capitalise on the sentiments of a ‘greening’ tourism market.”

The International Ecotourism Society says that eco-tourism is about

“uniting conservation, communities and sustainable travel”.

There is a new initiative in the Borders, action for the Innerleithen mechanical uplift—AIMUp—that is doing work that is essential in this context. How does the Scottish Government aim to support such environmentally friendly projects, which will bring new year-round tourism and spin-off business opportunities to fragile rural communities across Scotland? More generally, how will Scottish tourism benefit from becoming more sustainable?

In the final analysis, in urban, rural, island and mainland areas, the greening of the tourism experience is as essential as the greening of our whole economy. As the Scottish Government motion highlights, 2013 will be the year of natural Scotland. What a great opportunity to prioritise green tourism. Let us go for it.

16:22

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Last night, at the Scottish Tourism Forum dinner, the minister made a good speech, none of which I could disagree with. It was witty, urbane and very Fergus Ewing. He highlighted two or three issues that have been raised today, particularly his point about growth being fuelled not only by optimism, of which the minister recognises that he has plenty—that view would be shared across the chamber—but by other factors that will drive forward the industry, which is so important to the future of Scotland.

Mr Ewing’s speech was second only—and only slightly—to that of Stephen Leckie, who made an excellent speech, which, as the minister will recall, was mostly an attack on those of us who wore dark suits. He had no criticism of the other gender—the fairer sex—but he was harsh on those of us who do not wear tweed. I encourage the minister, at his next outing to the dispatch box, to sport a little Leckie tweed. We shall see.

Last night, I had an entertaining discussion with Shirley Spear, who runs the fantastic Three Chimneys business in Skye. Those who have never been there should go. Not only is the food wonderful, but everything else about it is wonderful as well. It reminded me of the inquiry that was

conducted by the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee—not under Mr Fraser’s convenership, but in the previous session of Parliament—to which Shirley Spear and other able and articulate contributors from the world of industry gave evidence about the particular challenges that they face. Her main point then was to do with the importance of the college sector and how it responded to the needs of the industry. Last night, Shirley Spear said to me that one heck of a lot of progress has been made, but that the minister and his colleagues might want to take further action to ensure that the college network in the Highlands and Islands and across the country recognises the industry’s importance to Scotland’s ability to grow its way out of the current economic situation.

The minister and others have mentioned international sporting and cultural events and spoken about the range of those events that we will enjoy in Scotland and the UK over the coming decade. As a passionate golfer, I believe that the fact that we have not only the open at Muirfield but the Ryder cup is a great challenge for Scotland and a great opportunity to sell ourselves as a country and as a destination.

At the table that I was fortunate enough to join for the forum dinner last night, we discussed the idea of marketing golf in Scotland and Ireland jointly. Many of the Irish golf courses have exactly the same characteristics as the links golf courses for which Scotland is undoubtedly famous. The idea that VisitScotland and VisitIreland could look at that jointly in future is a reasonable one to put to the minister and to VisitScotland. No one would be better for that job than someone such as Tom Watson. He has been five times open champion, is an honorary Scot if ever there was one, and exemplifies all that is good about sport. He also exemplifies why people would wish to come to play golf in Ireland or Scotland.

Such positive approaches can be taken in the Chinese and Indian markets, where many people in the aspiring middle class have more money than was the case previously and can use it to travel worldwide. We must ensure that they come to Scotland.

With regard to VisitScotland, I believe that the current chairman and chief executive deserve considerable credit for some of the work that they have done, particularly around destination marketing organisations. At one time those organisations were not too popular with VisitScotland, but there are now 80 or more of them throughout the country. They are important local initiatives that provide drive, strength and energy in their local tourism markets, and I strongly support VisitScotland’s work in enabling their continuing success.

Murdo Fraser's committee has in its report concentrated on one of the strongest and most important areas of the industry: our connections both within and outwith the UK. The takeover of BMI by British Airways is not good news for the important links to Heathrow. We all wish for more direct business links and other links from Scottish airports to points around the globe, but Heathrow remains an important hub. We need competition on that route, and the takeover does not help in that regard.

I encourage the minister to work closely with the Government on credit card charges, about which he made a good point in his speech. We all pay those charges when we leave Scotland and people pay them when they visit Scotland. Airlines frankly rip off most people through their charges, and I hope that the minister will support the Government in London when it introduces legislation to deal with that and make such charging utterly transparent.

I will finish with my constituency of Shetland. We always have three things in our punchlines—I suppose for Shetland it would be Vikings and voes; I could not think of a third one. The King of Norway will open the Scalloway museum in May. That illustrates the deep Scandinavian links that are common to many parts of Scotland, and to Orkney and Shetland in particular. It also indicates the importance for VisitScotland of marketing our country to Scandinavia as well as to America and other parts of Europe.

The point about cruise ships is perhaps not so relevant to some of us—it is certainly relevant to Greenock, but possibly not to Paisley. This year, 59 cruise ships will call at Lerwick, and 36,000 people will disembark to tour the islands. That is a huge market for Scotland, and it is relevant to Mr Ewing's part of the world. It is an important and growing worldwide market to build on, and I encourage the Government to follow that up.

16:28

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): I think that members will all be surprised that it took George Adam 20 seconds to mention Paisley. We have heard some excellent contributions from members on all sides of the chamber, and the debate has highlighted that we can unite as one from time to time. That does not preclude members from highlighting particular issues in their own area, which is the reason that we are here. As we all know, this is Scottish tourism week, and it is an ideal opportunity to highlight what we have in the areas that we represent.

I will put in a plug for the area that I stay in: Inverclyde. Most—if not all—members in the chamber will have visited Inverclyde last June, and

will have seen how beautiful an area it is. The location is perfect: it is a gateway to Argyll, the airport is just 15 minutes up the road, the largest city in the country is just half an hour up the road and Ayrshire is just down the coast. Inverclyde is truly blessed.

About three years ago, a group called Discover Inverclyde was established to start to market Inverclyde, because so little had been done in the past. The economic situation has helped no one in the country, but if members, people who are in the public gallery or any readers of today's *Official Report* are interested or want to find out more about Inverclyde, they can go online at discoverinverclyde.com.

I will also mention water-based activities. I chair the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on recreational boating and marine tourism and was delighted that the minister mentioned sailing in his opening speech. I urge members to contact me and I will send them a report that the cross-party group in the previous session of the Parliament published 12 months ago when it was being closed prior to the election.

The report highlights many things, but one that members may not be fully aware of is the economic value of marine-based activities to Scotland. In 2008, Sail Scotland published a document that estimated that recreational boating and marine tourism provided an economic benefit in excess of £250 million per annum, supported more than 1,800 full-time equivalent jobs and indirectly supported another 7,900 jobs. Much of that activity will be small businesses in urban and rural settings. That means that the sector is rich, diverse and assists our communities, particularly small communities.

In the previous session of the Parliament, three Government reports were published that provided an indication of how important our coastline is from a tourism and employment perspective.

In July 2009, the Scottish Government published a report entitled "Technical Report: Economic Impact of Recreational Sea Angling in Scotland"—the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network is a member of the cross-party group. The report indicated that sea angling contributes some £140.8 million to the economy and provides 3,148 full-time equivalent jobs, which is estimated to represent some £70 million in wages. Sea angling can, and does, take place across the country. Those who are involved in it travel, sometimes stay overnight and even drink in bars and restaurants. That is not to mention the cost of getting there and of the equipment that they use. Not having sea angling would hamper many smaller communities in the country.

The second report was “The Economic Impact of Wildlife Tourism in Scotland”. It was published by the Government in May 2010 and gives us a flavour of the economic impact. I will give members a few of the key points from it. The net economic impact of wildlife tourism is around £65 million and it supports around 2,760 full-time equivalent jobs. It is estimated that £276 million is spent on the 1.12 million trips that are made each year to, or within, Scotland to view wildlife, with 75 per cent of that money being from tourists from within the UK.

The third and final report is “Sailing Tourism in Scotland”, which was published by Scottish Enterprise and HIE in February 2010. The sector greatly appreciated that report, as it was the first time that official statistics on it had been collated or produced. Some key information from the report is that sailing tourism accounts for £101 million and supports 2,700 full-time equivalent jobs throughout the country. Non-Scottish boat owners contribute a total of £27 million. The sector has grown over the past 15 years, and new marinas are opening. For example, the James Watt dock marina opened last year in Greenock and hosted the Greenock leg of the tall ships race. There is also investment from the MalinWaters programme.

Those reports highlight only part of the massive economic impact that the sector has in Scotland.

The marine-based activities that I have mentioned are not the only ones. There are also subsea activities, canal boating, windsurfing, canoeing, kayaking and waterskiing to name only a few. That is not to mention the huge influx of cruise ships, which Tavish Scott spoke about a few moments ago. He mentioned the 36,500 passengers who dock at Lerwick. That represents £1.3 million to that economy. This year, Greenock expects a 13 per cent increase on last year's cruise ship passenger numbers. So far, 41 ships are booked, with a staggering 65,500 passengers coming to Inverclyde. It is estimated that one third of them will stay in the area; that has a massive impact on that economy.

I will lavish a wee bit of praise on a voluntary group called the Inverclyde tourist group. It has been in existence for 10 years and not one person from the group takes a penny. I organised a round-table event earlier this year with the Scottish Government, VisitScotland, Scottish Enterprise, Historic Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage. If it was not for the Inverclyde tourist group, the folk who come off the cruise liners in Inverclyde would not see the benefits of the area. That group—and others like it throughout the country—deserves massive praise.

16:34

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to speak in the debate and I thank Fergus Ewing for lodging the motion. Tourism is a good news story. The debate has, by general assent, been positive, with a predictable element of unanimity.

As members have said, our diverse Scottish tourism industry makes an important contribution to the Scottish economy. With an estimated total contribution of £11 billion, tourism encompasses numerous sectors and supports more than 240,000 jobs. Visitor spend in Scotland supports sectors such as transport and food and drink, as the minister acknowledged.

VisitScotland has set out its objectives and priorities for the next few years, including tackling the challenge of seasonality, which is important, improving the quality of tourism jobs and making holidays in Scotland available for all. Those are welcome aspirations.

A new phenomenon is emerging, which some members touched on: the staycation. Like so many modern terms, that is a bit jargony for my taste, but staycations are nonetheless important to our Scottish economy. Margaret McCulloch made that point. I hope that VisitScotland is engaging with all relevant Scottish agencies, travel operators, local authorities and accommodation providers to maximise the opportunities in that regard, because Scotland has much to offer the staycationer, be that the day visitor, the long-weekender or the residential holidaymaker.

In my area, the west of Scotland, tourism is not only at the forefront of existing economic activity but offers untapped potential for more economic activity. Six out of the 10 Scottish Parliament constituencies in the west of Scotland are either bounded by the Clyde or include islands, such as Arran and Cumbrae. I wisely left Paisley to be dealt with comprehensively by George Adam.

To see Arran, as I did on Monday, when I was holding a surgery and visiting the local secondary school on a glorious sunny day, is to witness something breathtaking. Arran is understandably called “Scotland in miniature”, but I never cease to be astonished at the number of people, many of them resident in Scotland, who have never visited the island. There is beautiful scenery, abundant wildlife, a wide range of accommodation, walking and climbing—all 874m of Goatfell, although I cannot vouch for that personally—and there are welcoming businesses and friendly locals.

Even so, Arran's economy is fragile. Tourism plays a vital role, and the island is accessible, with inclusive rail and ferry tickets to Brodick, but I ask the minister whether the ferry services are as flexible as they need to be if access to the island is

to be maximised. The extension of the road equivalent tariff to the Ardrossan to Brodick ferry service will be important, but if that leads to more visitors, as we hope that it will do, a re-examination of ferry times could be required. Within the constraints of weather, the ferry service must suit the needs of the public and local businesses. I hope that the minister will confirm his willingness to consider the issues with CalMac ferries.

Another Firth of Clyde gem is the combination of Largs and Cumbrae. Largs has undergone significant town centre regeneration, which is a positive development, and taking the short ferry trip to Cumbrae offers a marvellous day out. Again, both places are readily accessible by car and public transport and have a great deal to offer the day visitor and the residential tourist.

Also crying out to be visited are attractive coastal locations such as Helensburgh and Kilcreggan, the latter being just a short ferry trip from Gourrock, which is well worth a visit in its own right. Gourrock has the unique heated seawater swimming pool, which is currently undergoing refurbishment but will reopen in summer. Who needs the balmy climes of the Med? That could be a delightful day out for the Ewing family.

If one's interest is culture and industrial heritage, which Stuart McMillan talked about so eloquently, Port Glasgow and Greenock have a lot to offer. Greenock has a beautiful esplanade and there is great ice cream at the cafe. If one's taste runs to sandy beaches, West Kilbride, Seamill, Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston offer great choice and variety and are all accessible by public transport. Why would anyone want to go anywhere else?

Those are all ideal staycation destinations, but we need a clearer strategy to recognise and promote the distinctive nature of staycations. I proudly trumpet the attractions of the Firth of Clyde as a tourist destination; other MSPs are equally proud to promote the beauty and attractions of their areas, as Siobhan McMahon and David Stewart did. They, too, will recognise the emerging opportunities of staycations, as Graeme Dey did.

The future of our tourism industry is very important to us all. I think that, as well as focusing on the traditional and natural attraction of our country, it should look at the less obvious opportunities. Stuart McMillan's speech was helpful in that regard. We have cultural tourism, to which the minister referred, wildlife tourism and archive tourism. Scotland is brimming with opportunity on all those fronts.

As we look at the big events from which we will benefit—the Olympics, the Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup in 2014—it is important that we

derive maximum benefit from the opportunities that they present. However, there is still more that we can do, and we must not lose sight of the less glamorous but still vital opportunities of staycations. I hope that the minister will comment specifically on that issue in his winding-up speech.

I acknowledge and congratulate those who work so hard to make the sector vibrant and attractive to tourists. We look forward to Scotland enhancing its existing reputation as a world-class destination. I support the motion and the amendment.

16:40

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): It has been a very consensual and—dare I say it—enjoyable debate. We started with the announcement about the decision to locate the headquarters of the green investment bank in Edinburgh, which all sides welcomed. That will benefit the whole UK, but it will particularly benefit Edinburgh and Scotland. The minister's announcement of the £2 million conference bid fund was also welcomed.

Tavish Scott suggested that in the future the minister should wear a tweed suit. Metaphorically, many of us have been dressed in tartan suits during the debate, as we have walked backwards through our constituencies, highlighting various attractions on our left and right. There have been plugs for Coatbridge, Falkirk, Dumfries, Hawick, Arbroath, Glamis castle, Castle Stuart, Inverclyde, West Kilbride, Seamill and Saltcoats. We heard about the attractions of ABBA in Ayrshire. Another place was mentioned by George Adam, but its name has slipped my mind—the minister might be able to jog my memory later.

It is clear that all parties in the Parliament now recognise the importance of the tourism industry to Scotland. Many speakers mentioned the livelihoods that it supports, its importance to rural and other fragile economies and, most of all, the huge contribution that it makes to our GDP. Estimates vary. It is thought that the industry supports more than 200,000 jobs, although according to some estimates, it supports more than 300,000 jobs.

Despite that, and the fact that the industry could be worth between £4 billion and £11 billion annually, some tourism leaders are concerned that it is still not treated with the seriousness that it deserves. Jean Urquhart mentioned that, in the past, we were not allowed to describe tourism as an industry. Although attitudes have changed, it is still not treated with the same seriousness as other key contributors to Scotland's economy. Therefore, it is important that we in Parliament talk up Scottish tourism. I congratulate the members of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee on

their recent report, which I thought made an important contribution in that regard.

To summarise some of the figures that have been mentioned, it looks as if businesses expect to see growth of 8 per cent this year, which—if we consider the state of the economy—just goes to emphasise the sector's importance. In breaking down the figures further, VisitScotland tells us that there was a 16 per cent increase in the value of tourism visits from UK travellers last year, which went some way towards offsetting the 6 per cent drop in international visitors over the year. The so-called staycation—the term that Annabel Goldie half-heartedly embraced—counterbalanced the effect of the euro zone situation on overall numbers. We still had 12 million visitors to Scotland.

As the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee pointed out, and as Mary Scanlon and Chic Brodie said, there is still a large question about the Government's target of boosting the industry by 50 per cent by 2016. Malcolm Roughhead, the chief executive of VisitScotland has said that he thought that 50 per cent growth is an ambition rather than a target, and that it is realistic to say that it will not be achieved. I will be honest—it is difficult to know what to make of a Government target when the major players say that it is not their key driver. It would be helpful to know how ministers intend to help the tourism industry to meet the 50 per cent target or what their alternative strategy is to be. To that end, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's conclusion was helpful in calling for annual updates on progress towards the 50 per cent target, as well as a plan to deal with any shortfall.

I would welcome further information from the minister on how he intends to monitor how well Scottish tourism is doing. The committee highlighted the difficulty of measuring progress. The hugely varying estimates of the size of the industry that I mentioned are another example. The committee urged the Government to consider setting up a new system for gathering statistics and other performance-related information.

It is clear that there are obstacles to be overcome. The numbers may be up this year, but the profits are being squeezed. As well as being affected by a lack of consumer confidence, tourism is particularly badly affected by the soaring cost of fuel and by hikes in VAT, which makes tourism businesses and services here among the highest VAT rated in Europe—a point that was made by the minister in his opening remarks.

The industry is looking to the UK Government and the Scottish Government to assist. One area in which we can assist is standards and quality; it is difficult to know where we stand on the spectrum of quality compared to others. Some in

the industry still complain that the country has been let down by poor quality services, by rather run-down accommodation and by too many owners who are in the industry because of a lifestyle choice rather than to run a business. It is certainly the case that only a fraction of the 15,000 tourism businesses are signed up to an official trade body. On the other hand, quality has improved dramatically over the years, and it is not the issue that it used to be.

I will put my tartan suit on now, although not to talk about East Renfrewshire. My family is from Skye. Tourism has been the mainstay of the village of Elgol since Sir Walter Scott encouraged all the southerners to take the boat to Coruisk. When my cousins and I were growing up we used to sell painted shells and gouged-out sea urchins to the tourists. I am not too sure about the quality of the experience for visitors—and I do not mean the shells I was selling. At B and Bs, people had to be in their bedrooms by 10 o'clock at night and out by 9 am the next day. It was also a Sabbath-observing community—that is a good thing. However, the food is what I most remember because everything was boiled. Fish, cabbage, root vegetables and ham were all boiled and everything was rather grey. Nowadays, although Elgol is a tiny village—of fewer than 200 people—it has two restaurants or cafes, where I can get a caffè latte that is the equivalent of anything in the west end of Glasgow or Edinburgh.

I am not going to talk him down, but my Uncle Lachie used to run one of the boats. He certainly looked the part—he had the beard. He was a Gaelic speaker, and even when he spoke English most people thought that he was speaking Gaelic, although the visitors would not know, because he never spoke to them. Like most people, he viewed tourists with suspicion. These days, however, one can get tea and shortbread on the boat and a running commentary about the flora and fauna, the wildlife, the scenery, the geography and the geology. It is a fantastic experience. Expectations have changed, but standards have risen to match them. The hospitality and the welcome are better than ever.

We need to keep travelling in that direction and driving up standards. VisitScotland is considering its own voluntary quality assurance scheme. I hope that the minister and Parliament intend to keep an eye on that.

Accessibility is a big issue in Scotland, as Siobhan McMahon in particular pointed out. I was intrigued by Siobhan's description of Lanarkshire—I hope that she gets an award for her devotion to the area. She had me won over to visit Summerlee until she said that the local tourist board asks us to pay £3 to listen to George

Galloway. Most of us would pay £3 not to listen to George Galloway in Lanarkshire.

An important point was made about the difficulties accessing sites outside our major cities because of opening hours and transport infrastructure. There is the issue of connectivity: Rhoda Grant and Tavish Scott talked about the lack of flights, the missing BMI connection to Heathrow—which is still an issue—and slow trains and poor roads.

I do not have enough time to talk about the contribution of eco-tourism, about which Claudia Beamish spoke eloquently. Another important issue is skills, which Margaret McCulloch and Jean Urquhart talked about.

With the winning years coming up, we have lots of opportunity and potential. Today it is clear that the Parliament gives its support to the tourism industry.

16:49

Fergus Ewing: I have thoroughly enjoyed the debate, which has been extremely informative and entertaining. There has been a series of surprising and unexpected revelations, most recently about Ken Macintosh's family. Such revelations are always entertaining. Until the debate, I did not realise that George Galloway is a recognised Scottish tourism attraction or that he works shoulder to shoulder, as one might say, alongside the Duke of Hamilton. The most unlikely alliances are being formed in contemporary Scotland.

Members have rightly contributed information about, and passionate views on, attractions in their own parts of Scotland. That started with Siobhan McMahon, whose speech was so fulsome, informative and passionate that I was tempted to intervene to ask whether she is a tourist guide as well as an MSP. Her speech set the tone for a large number of speeches, and led me to the view that I should go to see the Summerlee museum. I certainly hope to do that some time and to visit Siobhan McMahon's part of Scotland.

I will make an effort to reply to some of the wide-ranging points that have been made. A number of members, starting with Rhoda Grant, mentioned issues relating to skills and tourism. Such issues are plainly important. We want to ensure that we are making it absolutely clear that there are great careers to be had in tourism and that we are increasing the appeal of tourism. Perhaps that has not been done in the past; I think Jean Urquhart alluded to that. We want to ensure that skills are developed and that, above all, there is helpful and friendly service without servility.

I am pleased to say that a great deal of work is being done in, for example, Jewel and Esk

College, Queen Margaret University and Preston Lodge high school in Prestonpans that Skills Development Scotland is supporting. In Gleneagles a couple of weeks ago, I heard about Springboard's work in going into schools to promote opportunities in the industry. I heard about its events in places such as Govan and the Vale of Leven, and in schools. It has shown young people how to cook meals and it gets them to cook their own food, including chocolates. Apparently, in one location, some schoolboys who normally do not spend their afternoons at school were so rapt and persuaded that they did spend the afternoon at school, such was the enthusiasm that the ambassador engendered.

Perhaps there is more that we can do. That came across in a number of speeches, such as those by Margaret McCulloch, Siobhan McMahon and Jean Urquhart. Jean Urquhart almost whispered how many years of her life she has spent serving in the tourism sector. I heard what she said but, to spare her blushes, I will not repeat it. She made the interesting point that there have been seismic changes in the tourism sector, which is perceived differently now as an industry; it is perceived as a success story that we are proud of. As Ken Macintosh said, the standard of fare—the food and drink—that we now expect has improved immeasurably. He reminded us of what things could have been like in the old days—30 or 40 years ago, say. Things have certainly improved on that front, and that is to be welcomed.

Tavish Scott made an excellent speech. I will pursue a number of specific points that he was right to raise but which I will not have time to cover today. We are working with Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in a number of ways, and I will give him details about that. He and Stuart McMillan pointed to the contribution that cruise liners make to Scottish tourism. Tens of thousands of people visit Shetland, Greenock, Inverness and other parts of Scotland, but a constraining factor is the availability of tourist guides with appropriate language skills. That is an important factor for cruise liners and those who organise holidays. More work is being done to focus on those matters, and I am keen to work with individual members thereanent.

There are also questions about quality. VisitScotland's experience survey showed that 72 per cent of those who were surveyed were very satisfied with a holiday experience in Scotland, 98 per cent would recommend the experience to their family and friends and 84 per cent would return, which means that 14 per cent would recommend Scotland to their family and friends but would not return. However, leaving that slightly wry reflection aside, it is nonetheless a vote of confidence in Scotland and one that tends to suggest that we are right to be optimistic.

Claudia Beamish referred to the importance of eco-tourism or green tourism in her considered contribution. It is clear that Scotland is succeeding in that area. For example, on Monday I visited Whitelee wind farm—the biggest wind farm in Europe—and found that wind farms are also a massive attraction for schoolchildren, who can actually see in the visitor centre there how a wind turbine works. They do a little experiment in which they construct a wind turbine with plastic blades using a fan heater, which lights a light bulb when it is turned on. Since its opening, the centre has had nearly 200,000 visitors.

On the business tourism contribution from conferences on renewable energy, there have been at least 14 events, which have brought more than 13,000 delegates, in the past two years. Now that we will have the green investment bank, we can expect a new round of business conferences on the theme of the green economy and the opportunities therein.

Chic Brodie was right to raise the importance of air passenger duty. Our APD is now the most expensive aviation duty in Europe, unfortunately. Standard rates vary from £12 for short-haul flights to £85 for long haul. Sadly, I am afraid that that does not help us to bring people to Scotland. David Stewart rightly raised the air route development issue. We expect to meet European Commission officials before May to discuss the progress of their review. We have consistently argued that there is a need for a state-aid-rules compliant mechanism, which would be effective in supporting our aspirations to improve Scotland's international air links.

Broadband has not been mentioned today, nor has the internet. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Excuse me, minister. There is just far too much chatting by members.

Fergus Ewing: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The internet is increasingly important. I understand from speaking to people in the industry that people who are aged under 40, and who are therefore perhaps younger than the average MSP, book not only their holidays but their entertainment online. For example, they will sit in conferences—perhaps some are doing so even today—with an app in their hand deciding where they will get the evening's entertainment. It is critical that we cater for the under-40s, if I may put it thus.

Jean Urquhart and others referred to the importance of VAT to tourism. Sadly, Britain is not one of the 24 of the 27 European Union countries and four non-EU countries that currently offer some form of reduced VAT to the hospitality and tourism sectors. For example, VAT on hotel accommodation, food and admission to

amusement parks is 3 per cent in Luxembourg, 5.5 per cent in France and 9 per cent in Ireland, but it is 20 per cent in the UK. As members know, I am not someone who focuses or dwells on the negative in any way, but I have raised the point about VAT with John Penrose, and my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth has also raised it. I think that we all recognise that VAT is a serious matter on which we would like to see action, with the VAT rate going in the direction that it has gone in other European countries.

I am proud to be the minister for tourism, which is a fantastic job. As I envisage it, it is rather like what being First Minister must be like, but without the stress and responsibility that go with it. It gives me the opportunity to visit various parts of Scotland and to see all the marvellous attractions. It also lets me work with people such as Stephen Leckie, who is in the public gallery and who heads up the Scottish Tourism Alliance. I invite all tourism businesses in Scotland to get involved with the Tourism Alliance to support its activity in what is the most disparate and diverse industry in Scotland. It is extremely important that businesses back that new organisation and that in the work that we do as we go ahead, we have a close relationship with the industry to ensure that we always do the right thing in the right way.

Finally, I thank VisitScotland for the excellent job that it does in marketing our country, which every member who spoke in the debate has recognised. That, surely, is a marvellous and somewhat unusual accolade.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the vote on curriculum for excellence, if the amendment in the name of Michael Russell is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Liz Smith falls.

The first question is that, amendment S4M-02242.3, in the name of Michael Russell, which seeks to amend motion S4M-02242, in the name of Hugh Henry, on curriculum for excellence, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (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, Angus (Falkirk East) (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)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 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)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (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)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 57, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: As a result of that vote, amendment S4M-02242.1, in the name of Liz Smith, falls.

The next question is that, motion S4M-02242, in the name of Hugh Henry, as amended, on curriculum for excellence, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (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, Angus (Falkirk East) (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)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (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)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 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)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (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)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 57, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament reaffirms its support for the Curriculum for Excellence, which it believes can make a significant contribution to Scottish education; notes the widespread support for Curriculum for Excellence from teachers, parents and learners, including the hundreds of teachers and other professionals involved in the development of these qualifications; recognises the risks to learners that could result from a wholesale delay in implementation; further welcomes the unprecedented levels of support that are already provided by national agencies and local authorities to ensure that teachers are confident in delivering Curriculum for Excellence; recognises that additional support has been and will continue to be offered on a school by school basis as required, and remains true to the vision of empowering teachers and working with parents and learners to deliver the right education for every child in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is that, amendment S4M-02246.1, in the name of Alex Neil, which seeks to amend motion S4M-02246, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on Aberdeen City Council, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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, Angus (Falkirk East) (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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 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)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 83, Against 37, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is that motion S4M-02246, in the name of Sarah Boyack, as amended, on Aberdeen City Council, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (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)

Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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, Angus (Falkirk East) (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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 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)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 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)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 83, Against 37, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that a local referendum held by Aberdeen City Council to test public opinion on a proposal for development at Union Terrace Gardens resulted in a majority vote in favour of the City Garden Project; notes that ministers now look forward to considering the tax incremental financing (TIF) business case for the council's city centre development proposals, including the City Garden Project, which will be brought forward by the elected members of Aberdeen City Council when this has been finalised through work with the Scottish Futures Trust, and recognises that decisions on local development proposals are for local elected members and, where appropriate, Scottish ministers to make, in line with the statutory requirements of the land use planning system.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-02245.1, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend motion S4M-02245, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the future of tourism in Scotland, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-02245, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the future of tourism in Scotland, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the important contribution that tourism makes across many sectors and all geographical areas of Scotland and commends the industry on its continuing growth in spite of harsh economic circumstances; recognises the importance of domestic tourism and the important roles played by businesses of all sizes in achieving this; acknowledges the importance of the work currently being undertaken by the industry-led Tourism Leadership Group to develop a refreshed strategy for tourism in Scotland, and commends the core work of agencies in promoting Scotland and its key assets, in particular Scotland's cultural and natural heritage, to visitors, supporting businesses and destinations and investing in key facilities, skills development and a programme of sporting and cultural events across Scotland to ensure that Scotland maximises the opportunities available from the globally important events of the next three years, including the Olympics 2012, the Year of Creative Scotland 2012, the Year of Natural Scotland 2013,

the Ryder Cup 2014, the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and Homecoming 2014, and further commends tourist industry partners for working together to develop green and eco-tourism.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Living Wage

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-01716, in the name of John Park, on the living wage—tackling in-work poverty. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the Campaign to End Child Poverty's report that highlights the worryingly high levels of child poverty across many areas of Scotland; is deeply concerned that in many areas, including parts of Mid Scotland and Fife, child poverty levels are between 30% and 40%; further notes that 59% of poor children live in a household where at least one adult works; recognises the calls from a range of campaigning organisations such as Save the Children that the payment of a living wage can be an effective way of tackling child poverty; welcomes recent steps to introduce a living wage for all directly employed Scottish Government and NHS employees in Scotland; believes that the living wage should be the norm in other sectors of the economy, and supports steps to use procurement to extend the living wage to employees working for organisations delivering public sector contracts.

17:07

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

I welcome the opportunity to open this debate. I am a little disappointed that the Presiding Officer is not in the chair, because we have had two debates on the living wage in the past week, which is similar to the situation with waiting for buses to come along in Fife. I am sure that the Presiding Officer would understand that analogy. We have waited a while to discuss the living wage, but we have an opportunity tonight to make a further case—in addition to the one that we made last week—for the living wage, its importance and the impact that it could have throughout Scotland.

It is fitting that we are having this debate on international women's day, given the disproportionate impact that low pay has on women workers. It is estimated that about 550,000 employees on adult rates in Scotland are paid less than the living wage. That means that 14.6 per cent of men who are in work and a staggering 22.6 per cent of women who are in work are paid less than £7.20 an hour. Overall, two thirds of low-paid workers are female, and 43 per cent of workers who earn less than £7 an hour are women in part-time jobs.

I have welcomed the measures taken by the Scottish Government to introduce a living wage for those who are directly employed by the Scottish Government and the national health service. That will have had a direct impact on women workers and it will undoubtedly have improved their take-home pay, but it is not just low-paid women workers who would benefit from the wider

implementation of the living wage, as their families and the communities that they live in would benefit, too.

In the Mid Scotland and Fife region, child poverty levels are between 30 and 40 per cent. Organisations such as Save the Children tell us that the implementation of the living wage would be an effective way in which to directly tackle child poverty because most single-parent, low-income households are headed by women, and low pay among the female workforce is clearly a major factor in child poverty.

When I take all those factors into account, it is clear to me that the implementation of a living wage could transform the lives of so many people throughout Scotland and reach so much further into our communities than many of the other policies that we debate in the Scottish Parliament.

However, given that we had that debate last week, before I came into the chamber I gave a bit of thought to what I am going to say in tonight's debate. As there are only so many things to say about the living wage, I might go over some of the ground that I went over last week. Having had a look around the chamber, I see quite a lot of members who were not at last week's debate, so I am quite happy to go over that ground because this might be the first time that they have heard what I have to say—or perhaps not.

The phraseology that politicians use to describe the impact of not being paid a living wage is "in-work poverty". However, for people outside the Scottish Parliament and the political bubble, the reality is the struggle to make ends meet week after week. That is a shocking and terrible situation for people to find themselves in, which is why we politicians are duty bound to debate the issue and do something about it. I welcome the Scottish Government's decision to introduce the living wage for employees of the national health service and the Scottish Government, but we need to recognise that there are other mechanisms if we are to ensure that the living wage has a wider impact and reaches into the private sector.

One thing that I would like to do today, which we did not do enough of last week, is to recognise and celebrate the work of the people who have shoved the living wage right up the political agenda. Those people do not sit in Parliament but they have made a huge difference by ensuring that politicians discuss the issue every day. I am talking about individuals such as Eddie Follan from the Scottish living wage campaign, John Dickie from the Poverty Alliance Scotland and Dave Moxham from the Scottish Trades Union Congress. They have pushed the issue with the Scottish Government and Opposition MSPs, and made sure that the wider public understands the

impact that the living wage would have on the people and organisations that MSPs represent.

We also have MSPs such as John Wilson and Kezia Dugdale, who have made a huge impact on the issue. I have been privileged to see and be involved in the work that they have done in Parliament around low pay and poverty. We all recognise that work, and tonight's debate gives us a further opportunity to put that recognition on the record.

We need to focus on how we deliver the living wage across the public and private sectors. During last week's debate, we focused quite a bit on procurement in relation to public bodies and the role that it can play. Alex Neil said that a letter about that has been sent to the European Commission. I have seen a copy of that letter and I know what it contains and, as I said last week, I am not clear that we will get a definitive response to it that will allow us in Parliament to decide what to do around procurement to deliver a living wage. That is why we need the political will to make sure that we can deliver a living wage.

So many times in the Scottish Parliament, such as when we discussed the smoking ban—we have seen this week the impact that that has had—minimum unit pricing, or even the independence referendum, we hear differing legal opinions. It comes down to our political will to take the initiative. That is why I have been working on a bill that I hope to introduce. I am sure that there will be members on my side of the chamber who will be keen to sign up to and support that bill, given the response that we saw in last week's living wage debate, and I know that other members will also be supportive. I hope that members believe that we need to have a detailed debate on the issue and will support my proposals when they are introduced.

The issue was encapsulated for me today when Margaret McDougall asked a question of the Deputy First Minister about whether the living wage could apply to those who are not directly employed by the NHS. The Deputy First Minister replied that it cannot but that we should try to encourage people to pay it. That is great, but it would be better if we legislated to ensure that the living wage could be paid as part of the procurement process. That could have a real impact across our communities, it could make a real difference by ending child poverty, and it could make life better overall for Scots.

17:14

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I thank John Park for raising the issue. I certainly agree with a number of the points in his motion. He mentions Mid Scotland and Fife, which allows

me to mention Glasgow. I thank Save the Children for its briefing for last week's debate and for the figures on Glasgow with which it provided me. Some of them make stark, if not awful, reading. They show that 35 per cent of children in Glasgow are growing up in poverty, compared with the Scotland-wide figure of 20 per cent; that in 15 council wards in the city, more than 30 per cent of children live in poverty and, in two wards, half of all children are in poverty; and that about 17,000 children in Glasgow live in severe poverty, which is 18 per cent of all children in the city, compared with the national average of 9 per cent.

Unemployment and low wages are at the heart of child poverty in Glasgow. There are 32,900 unemployed people in Glasgow, which is 11.3 per cent of the working-age population, and 19.3 per cent of workers in Glasgow earn less than £7 an hour, compared with the Scottish average of 19 per cent. That leads to the fact that 62 per cent of children in Glasgow live in low-income households and almost 80,000 children live in households that are dependent on benefits. Those figures are not acceptable. John Park's motion also mentions that more than half the children who are in poverty

"live in a household where at least one adult works".

All those figures say to me that, to reduce poverty, it is essential to roll out the living wage or, preferably, raise the statutory minimum wage.

I spoke on the subject last week, so I thought that I should do something a little different tonight. I got a fair bit of reaction on Facebook to last week's debate and to some of the comments that I made. I thought that it would be useful to deal with some of those comments. If members want to look at them in more detail, they can check my Facebook page.

Somebody said that working but having to claim tax credits is "such a shame." I totally agree. I welcome the fact that we have tax credits, but in some cases they are in effect a subsidy for profitable employers, who should pay a proper living wage.

The point was made that some smaller employers cannot afford to pay a living wage, and that we need to consider the employer and the employee and the fact that raising wages might mean that fewer staff are taken on. I agree with those comments. One person said:

"When minimum wage went up this past October I did not reduce my staff or cut hours. Instead I cut my own salary. Is this fair? The point I am trying to make is this debate should appreciate both sides, the employee AND employer, and how raising minimum wage affects both sides."

I agree with what that guy says, but I suggest that that is not the case for all employers.

Rather than subsidise all employers with tax credits, my answer is that we should roll out the living wage or raise the minimum wage and in that way save paying tax credits for employers. That money can then be much better used to target businesses that need support, such as smaller businesses and perhaps businesses in rural and poorer areas. That would be similar to what has been done with the small business bonus scheme, which has been welcomed by small businesses.

I do not have time to go through all the points that were made on Facebook, but another was that we should limit top pay as a multiple of the lowest pay. That is a useful suggestion, but it should be done in addition to introducing the living wage. Someone asked whether, having done so, we could compete internationally. I think that we could, because we need to tie in with the on-going fair trade campaign.

It is good that the subject of the living wage has received a fair amount of coverage. It will be on the agenda at the Scottish National Party conference this weekend, and I hope to speak on it again then.

17:18

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I congratulate John Park on securing the debate.

Today is of course international women's day, which for me is a day for celebration and contemplation—a worthy moment to pause and reflect on and mark the progress that we have made towards equality. It is also a day to reaffirm our collective commitment for a better tomorrow, to focus on a more equal and just Scotland and to share our energy, experiences and hopes with sisters around the world for whom the march towards equality is only just beginning.

Those principles of celebration and contemplation are good principles to apply to the living wage debate. We have come far, but there is so much further to go. I speak in that context. As my colleague John Park said, two thirds of low-paid jobs are held by women, so they have the most to gain from a living wage policy. We are talking about cleaners, caterers and carers—the people who quietly get on with the job of keeping the country running.

I was pleased this week to hear the Health and Sport Committee recommend a living wage for all carers, because our elderly deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and that is best achieved by ensuring that those who work with elderly and vulnerable people have the dignity of decent work and of decent employment conditions. The reality is that that is not the case at present.

There is a prevalence of carers in Scotland who work on zero-hour contracts and who literally sit in car parks, waiting for the phone to ring. Such people are juggling two or three jobs just to earn enough money to get by. It is worth remembering that that is how the living wage movement was born—through women trying to work out how they were going to juggle life with their childcare commitments, making ends meet and paying their bills. London citizens came together and worked out that the solution was a living wage, and that is how the campaign that we are talking about today began.

The benefits of a living wage have been well rehearsed, not least in this chamber over the past seven days. It produces happier, healthier and more productive workers. It reduces absenteeism and delivers higher retention rates. One of its less well-recognised benefits is reduced childcare costs. If women work fewer hours to earn the same amount of money, they can get home at the end of the day and read their child a story, make their tea and have the important and valuable social time with their kids and families that will be of benefit to the child's development throughout life. It is worth remembering that the benefit of a living wage is both social and economic.

I was pleased to hear the First Minister talk about the living wage during First Minister's question time today. The fact that he addressed the issue during the prime-time event of our political week tells us just how far the campaign has come. He made a slight mistake, however, when he said that the living wage was £7.23 an hour. Moreover, in his lecture at the London School of Economics a couple of weeks ago, he said that it was £7.30 an hour. The living wage is, of course, £7.20 an hour, so will the minister tell us whether the First Minister's intention was to slip in an early gift for low-paid workers throughout Scotland, or was it a genuine mistake?

Finally, at the end of my speech in last week's debate, I asked the minister whether he could commit his Government to ensuring that the living wage would be uprated for every year of this parliamentary session, but he gently dodged the question. I therefore ask him that question once again and hope that he will answer it in when he closes the debate.

17:22

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate John Park on securing this extremely important debate.

The End Child Poverty report highlights worrying statistics that reveal that the percentage of children in poverty ranges from 6 to 44 per cent in various Scottish parliamentary constituencies. In

the Central Scotland region alone, child poverty levels are between 15 and 24 per cent, and according to last year's Save the Children report on severe child poverty in Scotland, the rate of such poverty in the local authority areas of North and South Lanarkshire and of Falkirk is above the national average of 9 per cent. Moreover, the proportion of children in workless households has risen from 14 to 16 per cent, which is more than in any of the English regions. Clearly, child poverty in Scotland urgently needs to be addressed.

As the motion states, Save the Children and other campaigning organisations are calling for every local authority to implement the living wage for all directly and indirectly employed workers, in order to tackle child poverty. At the same time, they acknowledge that the living wage is not a panacea for child poverty in Scotland. It is important that that fact is recognised, in order to make the right choices about how best to help alleviate and, ultimately, end child poverty.

It is a great pity, therefore, that in last week's debate on the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's report on the living wage in Scotland—it is a balanced and fair report—many members chose to completely ignore, summarily dismiss or condemn outright the concerns that were raised. There is no point in repeating those concerns, which were also voiced by some of the witnesses who gave evidence to the committee, about the potentially adverse consequences of introducing the living wage. Suffice it to say that it would be counter-productive for the payment of the living wage to be mandatory; it must instead be voluntary. If we are to do the best for our children in poverty, the least that they deserve is for us as politicians to be open to listening to views that may differ from our own. That includes being prepared to consider analysis of information that suggests that there may be a better way in which to tackle child poverty than making payment of the living wage a priority. For example, one of the major factors in in-work poverty and, by extension, child poverty is the high cost of childcare provision, which hits household incomes and prevents women, most commonly, from realising their full earning potential. That is a pertinent point to raise on international women's day.

On average, parents in Scotland spend £101.49 per week for 25 hours of care for a child under two; however, the cost can be as high as £233.75 in some areas. Fifteen hours of an after-school club cost, on average, £48.55 a week, which equates to £194 a month. Given that 35 hours of work at the living wage of £7.20 an hour would pay only £252 a week before tax, it is clear that, if local authorities chose to prioritise funding more childcare, that could make a greater difference to tackling both in-work poverty and child poverty.

As the recent joint Daycare Trust and Children in Scotland report highlighted, only a fifth of Scottish local authorities currently report that they have enough childcare for parents who work full time. It is, therefore, important to understand the full implications of calling on local authorities to prioritise the introduction of the living wage. South Lanarkshire Council, for example, has spent £5.5 million in total on introducing the living wage. That money could have been used to increase childcare provision or to offset the potentially damaging consequences of the £6 million real-terms cut in local authority criminal justice social work funding—a cut that could have worrying implications for child protection issues.

This is a timely reminder that child poverty, in its broadest terms, is not necessarily merely a monetary problem.

17:26

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate and congratulate John Park on securing the debate and on the work that he and other members have done on the living wage campaign to secure a tremendous benefit for many families and communities throughout Scotland.

There is no doubt that the living wage makes a practical difference. It helps to address inequality and, as the motion highlights, it helps to tackle child poverty. I highlight the success of South Lanarkshire Council in increasing the living wage and, unlike Margaret Mitchell, I commend the council for taking that bold step. She is correct in saying that that will cost £5.5 million, but it is taking 8,400 employees in South Lanarkshire on to the living wage and above the £21,000 a year mark. Of those employees, 76 per cent—more than 6,000—are women, which highlights the problem of low pay among women workers. As other members have said, on international women's day the action of South Lanarkshire Council is to be commended.

Margaret Mitchell: Does the member have figures to show how many of those people are merely having in-work benefits replaced by the council supplementing their wage, instead of spending the money on services, which means that they are no better off at the end of the day?

James Kelly: The money that has been invested by South Lanarkshire Council is not only helping many families in Cambuslang, Rutherglen and Blantyre, where there are areas of real deprivation and poverty; it is also benefiting the economy, as people will now be paying more taxes and national insurance. In addition, it is giving greater stability to people's lives and helping to tackle child poverty. That stability also

means that there will be less strain on budgets in other areas such as the health service and, potentially, the justice system.

In last week's debate on the living wage, Margaret Mitchell said that the living wage was "an admirable aspiration". As John Park said, a lot of issues are discussed in the Parliament, but the point of politics is to make a difference. The living wage makes a difference to families not only in South Lanarkshire, but throughout Scotland. It lifts them out of poverty and gives them hope and a chance to move forward in life.

It ill befits a Conservative representative to argue against something that benefits families. Margaret Mitchell is at odds with her South Lanarkshire Council colleagues, who voted for the living wage measure in the council's budget.

I congratulate John Park on raising the issue. It is vital to build on the debates tonight and last week, to continue to support the campaign and to speak up for the living wage to be rolled out in more councils throughout Scotland and taken into the private sector. That will fight inequality and boost economic activity.

17:31

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate John Park on bringing the debate to the Parliament. As he said, such debates are like corporation buses, as we would say in Glasgow—two come along at once.

I had prepared a speech to read out, but it does not cover some issues in relation to the living wage that are fundamental to women's employment rights. The Scottish living wage campaign is commendable; we discussed the historical campaigns in the chamber last week. Organisations have raised awareness of the living wage, highlighted the problems with the minimum wage and taken forward the fight—lately, through launching the Scottish living wage campaign. That has put the issue into the minds of all politicians and everybody else in society.

John Park said that "in-work poverty" is a political term that politicians use. I remind him that the phrase was coined about 10 years ago by a number of people who were working to try to eradicate poverty and particularly in-work poverty. We recognised that, despite the introduction of the national minimum wage, people were still being forced into jobs that did not provide enough income to take them out of poverty. UK Governments have pursued the agenda that work is the route out of poverty, so putting people into poverty through work is the wrong move.

Today is international women's day. We must look at other issues that affect in-work poverty,

particularly for women. In some local authorities, the campaign still goes on to ensure that women who are entitled to equal pay receive their entitlement.

There are other employment rights issues. If people go off sick after they enter new employment, they automatically receive statutory sick pay. Figures have been cited for what can be earned under the hourly rates for the minimum wage and the living wage, but when people receive £75 or £76 a week—that is from the second week; the amount in the first week is half that—their in-work poverty is exacerbated. We do not have a system to back up people who are put into employment that does not give them fair and proper conditions that would protect their rights and protect the children living in affected families from poverty that is exacerbated in that way.

We must look at other issues that face women workers in particular, such as short-time working, part-time working and the zero-hours contracts that many people find themselves in. In some respects, Margaret Mitchell was right to raise childcare provision. An issue is what we as a society are doing by forcing women into work but not providing adequate childcare at a cost or free to the women who require it most, but she must take up that issue with her UK colleagues. She must ask them what they are doing to ensure the correct childcare provision for the women and men whom they are forcing into low-paid employment.

As we have all recognised, the minimum wage is in effect low-paid employment. If we are arguing that the living wage should be the norm, then the minimum wage is not the norm. We have to think about what the Parliament can do for the people who are living in those conditions. Hopefully, through John Park's bill, we can take the debate forward and not only extend the living wage to those people who work for local authorities, NHS boards or the sub-contractors who work for those bodies, but ensure that it becomes part of the norm for every worker in Scotland, tied into proper, decent employment rights that protect workers when they take up employment.

I welcome this debate and look forward to future discussions on the living wage and the ways in which we can resolve the issue of poverty as well as in-work poverty.

17:36

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): This has been a bit of a living-wage week for me. My daughter was doing her final submission for her higher English, and the essay was on the living wage, so I have been on the subject for the whole week.

We will not get ourselves out of the desperate economic situation that we find ourselves in by

leaving it to the market—the very market that got us into the current mess in the first place. We can do it only by investing to create sustainable, long-term and permanent jobs that are well paid and get people out of poverty, whether we call it in-work poverty or working poverty. The living wage of £7.20 will not achieve that on its own, but it will be a step in the right direction.

I commend the work of the Poverty Alliance, the STUC and the major churches and charities that have been campaigning for the introduction of the living wage for some time. Indeed, I believe that the latest report of the Church of Scotland, which is based on evidence that was given to its poverty commission, should be essential reading for everyone in the Parliament. If anyone does not have a copy, John Wilson or I will be able to provide them with one. It presents a picture of a very different economy from the one that we have now—one that is based on social justice, dignity and the idea that the economy should serve people, not the markets. It advocates a living wage alongside taxation reform, to make the system fair and redistributive, a Robin Hood tax on speculation on financial transactions and regulation of the financial sector. If those proposals were introduced, they would create a society and an economy that most of us in the chamber could be proud of.

We need legislation to bring in the living wage. We should not allow there to be any ambiguity by talking about a de facto living wage or whatever. We know that we can do it. Glasgow City Council has done it, and I think that the Greater London Authority led the way. I believe that the British Olympic Authority has introduced it as well.

The living wage is a key part of the STUC's better way campaign. As always, trade unions and working people are at the forefront of any fight against social and economic injustice. It is their work on behalf of the low paid, the exploited and, in particular, minorities and women that will, I believe, lead to the living wage being legislated for. The question is whether we do it now or whether we have to wait for some time in the future.

John Wilson is absolutely correct to say that the living wage should not be introduced alone, because we have to have the proper employment rights to go along with it. That is another key argument in the better way campaign.

We should never forget—although Margaret Mitchell might have—that, before we had the national minimum wage, we had cleaners, security guards and carers working for as little as £1.50 or £1 an hour. That was a scandalous situation. In fact, it was Dickensian. I believe that it is only a short distance from that to sending children up chimneys.

Our sense of fairness and justice demands a living wage, so I think that we should make it happen quickly.

17:39

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): I congratulate John Park on securing the debate. In a sense, it is timely that it follows on from the living wage debate that we had last week.

I can confirm that we have not yet had a response to the letter that the cabinet secretary sent to the European Commission regarding the legal issues around whether we could include provisions on the living wage in future procurement legislation, which is what John Park wants to happen, and which the Government will consider in relation to the sustainable procurement bill. In the space of seven days we are no further forward in getting a response from Europe, but we have checked with officials that they are seeking a response. The Government is being proactive in trying to secure a response rather than simply leaving it to the European authorities to get back to us.

John Wilson: Would the minister's officials be willing to speak to the Greater London Authority to find out how it managed to get its contracts—particularly those relating to the Olympics—accepted with regard to procurement legislation? It is clear that moves in that regard are taking place elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and it might be useful for our officials to start speaking to other agencies and authorities—rather than waiting on a response from the European Commission—to find out how they got round the issue of procurement legislation.

Derek Mackay: I assure John Wilson that our officials have been proactive on that subject. They have been making contact with those authorities that have been pursuing the living wage as a policy objective, which has included looking at their procurement policies and the framework within which they operate. We have been testing our position with others and engaging in dialogue with other parts of the UK to see how the policy is being interpreted and potentially implemented.

I have had information on how some of the London authorities have been applying their aspiration to deliver the living wage. Their approach is perhaps not as John Wilson suggests: those authorities, including the Olympic authorities, have been encouraging the living wage as a consideration, but it is not binding. We must be absolutely clear that they cannot make it a condition of contract in the way that some people believe that they can.

Unfortunately, the issue—despite what Neil Findlay says—is at this stage a bit more convoluted. There is ambiguity around how procurement could be challenged if the living wage was made a condition in the tender process.

Kezia Dugdale: We had representatives of the Olympic Delivery Authority at the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, and we asked them the very question that John Wilson asked the minister.

The minister is right to say that the living wage was not a binding condition in those contracts, but as a consequence of the ODA's work on the issue in relation to the tender process, 95 per cent of the contracts for the Olympics included the living wage. That brings us back to the question of political will. Does the minister have the political will to do that?

Derek Mackay: I am being absolutely clear with Parliament that—contrary to some of the views that have been expressed—we do not currently have the legal certainty to build the living wage into the procurement process. The Government will consider the matter, and the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment has said that we will take on board the comments on the living wage as we introduce the sustainable procurement bill.

Government procurement involves a powerful spend: it is £9 billion-worth of spend in Scotland. It would be fair and reasonable for members to continue to pursue the inclusion of the living wage as a condition of procurement. However, we want to get the legalities right in view of the experience in the rest of the UK, and find out what guidance Europe can give us in that regard.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Kezia Dugdale shared with us the information that 95 per cent of contracts for the Olympics included the living wage, and the minister argued that that might not have been achieved through a legal process. Can he give us any examples of contracts in which the Scottish Government has actively encouraged contractors to progress the issue of the living wage?

Derek Mackay: I am happy to supply Drew Smith with more information on what benefits we have been able to secure through Scottish Government spend. There have been social benefits from a range of contracts that the Government has secured, and local government is doing the same at a local level.

That is to be welcomed, and it is in the spirit of what we want to achieve through the sustainable procurement bill. As I have said, we understand that there is an aspiration among almost all members in the chamber to include that issue in the bill.

I may be taking my time to get to the point, but we want to have legal certainty before we make a decision. Otherwise, we would not only be taking a risk as a Government, but passing on that risk to other parts of the public sector in contracts that they may let.

Neil Findlay rose—

Derek Mackay: I have been quite fair in the interventions that I have taken and have not made much progress. However, I understand that there is no time limit, so we could keep going, as this is an important issue.

I can tell by the expression on your face, Presiding Officer, that you want me to make progress.

On the 95 per cent delivery of the living wage in the ODA contracts, the composition and design of contracts have a clear role to play in encouraging the living wage and making our aspirations possible.

Neil Findlay: Will the minister give way?

Derek Mackay: I have taken four or five interventions.

Neil Findlay: Go on.

Derek Mackay: Let me make a bit more progress and I will perhaps consider taking one later.

It is important that our discussions lead us into debate about applying the living wage in the private sector, because we are talking about more than public sector employment. Given the compliance in the public sector, the application of the living wage in Scotland would benefit workers in the private sector even more than those in the public sector.

The subject of the motion is using the living wage as a tool to tackle poverty, but it also recognises a range of other measures that we can take on child poverty and a range of other actions, which members have mentioned. Poverty in Scotland has fallen substantially since 2000. Of course, it is unacceptable that anybody should live in poverty, but that reduction is to be welcomed. Unfortunately, the pace of improvement has slowed and, because of the time lag, we do not fully understand the impact that the recession has had on the Scottish economy.

The Government will shortly present its strategy on poverty. In line with previous commitments, we are delivering the various strategies on the achieving our potential, equally well and early years frameworks, which are part of the child poverty work. There has also been investment in the early years action fund, energy assistance and benefit maximisation. I welcome the support this week from the Labour Party for the public health

supplement, which will contribute to preventative spending; that will also help to make a difference.

I am genuinely not avoiding the question that Kezia Dugdale asked about uprating. I will check the facts and come back to her on it, but my understanding is that we arrived at the figure of £7.20 by a formula and that the figure has already been updated. I suspect that the formula means that, as that figure is reviewed and the universally accepted living wage figure is applied, other figures will fall into line. I am happy to get back to her with more information on that point.

One of the briefings that we received on the living wage suggested that, going into April this year, only 17 of the 32 local authorities would pay the living wage. I will share with members the current information that I have, which demonstrates an improvement even on last week's position. As I understand it, seven councils have introduced the living wage, five have agreed to implement it in 2012-13, four have indicated an intention to introduce it—that includes Stirling Council, which did not achieve its aspiration in its budget—and other councils are coming forward to indicate support for the living wage. That is an improvement on the position as we understood it at the time of last week's debate, when, in response to a question, I listed councils that are delivering the living wage.

I understand that the four councils that have indicated their intention to introduce the living wage are Dundee City Council, Fife Council, Highland Council and Inverclyde Council, which had not previously indicated such an intention. That represents even more progress on where we were last week. A majority of councils in Scotland are either delivering or have indicated that they will deliver the living wage.

The Scottish Government has shown through its own pay policy that it supports the living wage. As the Minister for Local Government and Planning, I continue to evangelise for the living wage in my discussions with local authorities, to encourage as many authorities as possible to sign up to and deliver the living wage. We will consider procurement and any measures that we can take, because we acknowledge the importance of the issue and want to show that there is the political will to tackle child poverty.

Meeting closed at 17:49.

Correction

Alex Salmond has identified an error in his contribution and provided the following correction.

The First Minister (Alex Salmond):

At col 7064, paragraph 7—

Original text—

There are 10,000 more women employed in Scotland than there were just over a year ago.

Corrected text—

There are 6,000 more women employed in Scotland than there were just over a year ago.

At col 7065, paragraph 9—

Original text—

I accept that unemployment is far too high, but 10,000 more women are in work than were in work just over a year ago.

Corrected text—

I accept that unemployment is far too high, but 6,000 more women are in work than were in work just over a year ago.

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