



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 4 October 2012

Session 4

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[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 11:40*]

Scottish Government Question Time

General Questions

Budget 2013-14

1. James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what the priorities of the 2013-14 draft budget are. (S4O-01356)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The priority of the 2013-14 draft budget is to support economic recovery by providing further investment in construction, skills and the green economy.

James Kelly: On the ground in my constituency, the on-going challenges to and implications of the budget are families living in overcrowded houses and languishing on ever-lengthening waiting lists, and pensioners receiving cuts to their care packages, with a background of £3.3 billion of further cuts coming down the line.

What has the cabinet secretary done to examine the work of Campbell Christie and Crawford Beveridge and when will he take those works out of his drawer to inform his on-going budgeting process?

John Swinney: If Mr Kelly had been engaged in any way in the parliamentary and discussion processes around the budget for the past two to three years, he would have seen that the Government has given full consideration to the issues raised by the independent budget review and by the Christie commission.

In my summation of the debate last night, I made clear the areas of the independent budget review report—whether they are about the capital programme, pay, or the efficiency and rationalisation of public bodies—in which the Government has taken significant and controversial steps to ensure the sustainability of the public finances. The Government gave a full response to the Christie commission as part of the budget process last year and increased the emphasis on preventative spend and on the integration of local services, which is why we are bringing forward proposals on adult health and social care integration.

Far from those reports being in the drawer, they are actively pursued by the Government and integrated into our budgeting processes, which has resulted in this Administration presiding over a balanced budget since 2007-08.

Mr Kelly has an opportunity to make his own contribution to the debate. In the course of the next few weeks, I look forward to hearing from Mr Kelly and his colleagues—I have sent the invitation by letter to Mr Macintosh—on how they want to change the budget to realise the new pro-Tory agenda of the Labour Party in Scotland.

Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009

2. Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the discharge by local authorities of their obligations under the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009. (S4O-01357)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): The Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 sets out a challenging timescale for the preparation of flood risk management plans by December 2015.

In conjunction with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, the Scottish Government is providing support to local authorities and other responsible stakeholders to develop those plans, which will help to protect communities across Scotland.

Annabelle Ewing: The minister will be aware of the recent flooding in Comrie—the overarching priority for the village is to get to the bottom of the problem and then to ensure that it is resolved. Can the minister take up this issue directly with the chief executive of Perth and Kinross Council to ensure that all steps that need to be taken are taken as a matter of urgency?

Paul Wheelhouse: I understand the member's concerns and I will be speaking to Bernadette Malone, the chief executive of Perth and Kinross Council, this afternoon to discuss the best way forward for managing and responding to flood risk in the Comrie area.

Energy Academy

3. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making in establishing an energy academy. (S4O-01358)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The Scottish Government announced plans to develop a Scottish energy skills academy within the budget statement on 20 September. We are currently working with relevant stakeholders—including

those from industry, colleges, universities, skills bodies and the enterprise agencies—to develop the new academy.

Richard Baker: The investment in the energy academy is welcome, but I ask the minister for further details. How many more people will receive training in skills for the energy industry as a result of the funding? How will it be allocated between the four institutions that have been announced as being involved? How will the academy be funded beyond next year?

Fergus Ewing: I am pleased that the Labour Party welcomes the academy. I am grateful for that, because it is a really important venture for Scotland.

The additional funding has been £3.25 million. The sensible course, which is how we plan to proceed, is to have detailed discussions with all the relevant stakeholders from industry, colleges, universities and the enterprise agencies about how the project is taken forward.

To respond directly to Richard Baker's point about additional numbers, however, I point out that we have already ring fenced 500 of our 25,000 modern apprenticeship starts for energy every year, and fairly recently we committed a further £2 million—that is, prior to the skills academy—to support an additional 1,000 flexible training places from the new energy skills challenge fund. Finally, we have provided funding of £1.9 million for the academic year to support an additional 300 funded university places in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics—STEM—topics.

Those three actions prior to the announcement about the skills academy show that we are seeking to rise to the challenge of the second major oil opportunity for this country.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I know that the minister has a good working relationship with energy companies. What discussions has the Government had with the private sector regarding the energy skills academy? What input will there be from energy firms?

Fergus Ewing: I have had a great many discussions with the majority of the leading and many of the small and medium-sized enterprise players in the oil and gas sector that are delivering such enormous success in the city of Aberdeen and furth of Aberdeen. Those discussions will continue and we will work closely with, for example, OPITO and Oil & Gas UK. The main thing as we take forward this exciting new initiative is to ensure that we proceed with the maximum buy-in, the maximum support and the maximum deliberation and consideration about how best we can meet not just the enormous challenge but the gigantic opportunities that face this country, given

the oil opportunity that is ahead of us, and particularly the opportunities that it will bring for young people.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I very much welcome the minister's responses so far. Given that there are 15 fewer women working offshore in the North Sea than there were five years ago, will the minister commit to doing everything possible to ensure that the energy skills academy offers the same career opportunities to women as it does to men?

Fergus Ewing: I am delighted that Mary Scanlon has raised that point, which is absolutely apposite. I know that Maureen Watt has championed the issue on many occasions as well, and she continues to do so.

There is massive scope for the oil industry to employ more of the female half of the population. Companies such as Shell have already taken a number of steps to encourage females to enter the oil and gas industry. I also point out that, compared with Scotland's first oil opportunity in the 1970s, a far greater proportion of jobs in the oil and gas sector are not offshore but on land, in an office. They involve top-quality, world-beating design work in relation to subsea development, and females are already playing a major part in that. We want more women in the oil and gas industry in Scotland.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): I welcome much of what the minister has said. I am sure that he is aware of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report the other week that said that for Aberdeen to achieve its potential as a world energy centre will require 120,000 additional skilled workers over the next 10 years. Will he confirm today that the academy proposals that the Government has brought forward will support and build on the proposals from the universities and colleges in Aberdeen and Banff and Buchan in order to begin to address that enormous demand for skilled labour?

Fergus Ewing: Lewis Macdonald raises an apposite point. The PricewaterhouseCoopers report identified that 120,000 jobs will be required to be filled in the next 10 years. I point out that that figure includes the replacement of people who will retire, which takes us up to nearly 100,000. Broadly speaking, the number of additional jobs is 20,000. We need to study the report further; that is not a criticism—it would be sensible to do that.

I am just delighted that the Labour Party in Scotland realises the huge opportunity that we have in this country to harness the huge wealth and opportunities that will flow from our massive oil and gas resources. I am delighted that it supports the work that we are doing thereanent.

General Practitioner Services (Out-of-hours Provision)

4. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made through the extended hours initiative to widen public access to out-of-hours GP services. (S4O-01359)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): We are investing more than £12 million to increase the opening hours of GP practices across Scotland and ensure that patients get more flexible access to healthcare. The extended hours enhanced service was introduced in 2008, and we said in April that we wanted to increase the participation rate from 72 per cent.

Following the steps that we took this year to relax some of the restrictions that were in place, our two largest health boards report that more than 80 per cent of their practices are now participating in the extended hours scheme. I am sure that the member will agree that that is a positive outcome that will ensure that patients continue to get more flexible access to healthcare.

Jim Eadie: In extending the opening hours of GP practices to widen access to healthcare for patients across Scotland, what more can be done to encourage health boards to prioritise and incentivise wider access to extended hours in all areas of the country? Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is a matter of deep regret that the Labour Party in Scotland, unlike its counterpart in Wales, seems determined to abandon the founding principle of the national health service—that healthcare should be free at the point of delivery?

Alex Neil: I agree absolutely with Jim Eadie's last point. People such as Nye Bevan would have been astounded to hear Johann Lamont sell out on the national health service's basic principle.

I expect all health boards to encourage and monitor the uptake of the extended hours initiative in their areas. Access is one of the priorities that we will consider with the Scottish general practitioners committee as we develop a more Scottish general medical services contract.

Schools (Outdoor Activity)

5. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that school outdoor environments promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles. (S4O-01360)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): The 2009 school estate strategy set out a joint commitment between national and local

government to create a school estate—school buildings and grounds—that allows everyone to experience the full range of experiences and outcomes in the curriculum for excellence. Architecture and Design Scotland's schools programme provides advice and guidance to authorities and schools to help put children and young people at the heart of design and so deliver well-designed spaces inside and outside the school building.

We recognise the importance of school grounds in promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyles. That is why we launched in January this year the £1 million school play project, which is led by grounds for learning. The project will develop exciting outdoor landscapes in 31 schools and support a further 20 to develop their outdoor play provision by 2015.

Alison Johnstone: I thank the minister for the steps that have been taken and the investment that has been made so far. The link between access to natural play environments and a child's physical and cognitive wellbeing is well demonstrated—the Government's guidance on outdoor learning refers to much of that. However, it is often down to parents or enthusiastic teachers to fundraise in order to transform the tarmac deserts that many old school playgrounds are into stimulating green spaces. I very much welcome that individual action and community involvement.

What is the minister doing to help members of the community to volunteer their enthusiasm, time and skills to improve school grounds? What action is the Government taking to ensure that, in time, all schoolchildren will have access to equally inspirational outdoor space?

Dr Allan: I very much welcome the member's commitment to parents' involvement. Part of my work is to phone round parent councils. An emerging theme is that parents are willing to become involved in the work that the member describes.

We have a youth sports strategy that touches on those points, but the issue partly comes down to our attitude to outdoor education. I do not want to suggest that we should celebrate Scotland's weather, but it is increasingly understood that we should understand play to involve outside play in a wider variety of weathers.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Question 6, from John Wilson, has not been lodged. The member has provided an explanation.

Speeding (Trunk Roads)

7. Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans the Cabinet Secretary for

Justice has to reduce the number of speeding offences on trunk roads. (S4O-01362)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The management of speed is a primary consideration for road authorities, police forces and safety camera partnerships.

We will continue to fund the Scottish safety camera programme, which brings together police, Transport Scotland and other partners to influence driver behaviour positively and reduce the number of speeding offences.

Dave Thompson: The cabinet secretary will be aware that speeding is a real problem on the A9. I have recently noticed long queues of vehicles behind convoys of lorries that are doing 40 mph on single carriageways. That leads to frustration, and to motorists taking chances in order to pass.

Does the cabinet secretary think that increasing the speed limit for lorries would improve that situation? Can anything be done to prevent lorries from bunching together?

Kenny MacAskill: Road safety is our first priority. All vehicles should continue to keep a safe distance from the vehicle in front, irrespective of speed limits. Enforcement will be a matter for the police in any instances in which drivers act irresponsibly and break the law.

Although we have new powers to control speed limits in Scotland, we have no current plans to increase the 70mph and 60mph limits or the speed limits for different classes of vehicle. Speed limit increases would be considered only when there is clear, unambiguous and comprehensive evidence in favour of such a change.

However, I am aware of the points that Dave Thompson and others such as the Road Haulage Association have made, and matters will be kept under review.

Minimum Alcohol Pricing (Economic Benefits)

8. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when the economic benefits of minimum pricing of alcohol will be evident. (S4O-01363)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Excessive alcohol consumption is estimated to cost Scots £3.6 billion each year, which equates to £900 for every adult in Scotland. That estimate includes approximately £870 million in lost productivity, £730 million in crime costs and £270 million to the national health service.

Alcohol misuse not only burdens our health service and police, but has a terrible knock-on effect on our economic potential and on the

families that are devastated by death and illness caused by alcohol.

As Colin Beattie will know, the modelling that the University of Sheffield carried out shows substantial benefits after one year of the policy, and even more after 10 years. The sooner minimum pricing is implemented, the sooner we will start to see those benefits in the form of a reduction in poor health, crime and social harms.

Colin Beattie: Last year, nearly £5 million was spent in Midlothian alone on social care as a result of alcohol-related harm. Does the cabinet secretary agree that minimum pricing—while essential—is only the beginning in tackling the binge-drinking pandemic in this country?

Alex Neil: I agree that minimum pricing is only one measure—albeit a key measure—in tackling alcohol abuse in Scotland. We have a framework with more than 40 measures that seek to reduce consumption, support families and communities, encourage more positive attitudes and positive choices, and improve treatment and support services.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is disappointing that, in the first full year after the ban on discounting that was introduced by the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Act 2010—which the entire Parliament supported—the reduction in consumption in Scotland is only 1 per cent more than in England rather than the 3.8 per cent that the Sheffield model predicted? Will he invite the University of Sheffield team to help us in determining why its predictions are not being fulfilled and what more can be done?

Alex Neil: As Richard Simpson should know, the ban on discounting was intended to work along with minimum pricing, and by definition we will not get the benefits that he has highlighted until we get minimum pricing. I am sure that he already knows that.

First Minister's Question Time

11:59

Engagements

1. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-00891)

I welcome the First Minister back to his place. I am sure that he and others will want to join me in congratulating Paul Lawrie and the whole European team on their stunning victory in the Ryder cup. *[Applause.]*

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): For the rest of the day, I will deal with issues on taking forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

The victory in the Ryder cup was an exceptional achievement for the European team. Everyone in the chamber looks forward ever more to being in Gleneagles in two years' time to see that victory repeated. *[Applause.]*

Johann Lamont: Absolutely.

How is the First Minister going to make the almost £3 billion of cuts that are to come without anyone noticing?

The First Minister: The Government has set out its plans in the budget, as we have done for the past five years. Despite the enormous pressure from the Westminster Government, which Johann Lamont correctly identifies, we have managed to balance that budget, secure Scottish public services and, in particular, introduce vital social gains such as free education in Scotland. When I left for America, I thought that those things were largely agreed across the chamber. When I left for America, Johann Lamont was just appearing on the same platform as Ruth Davidson; now I am having to adjust to the fact that Johann Lamont is leading her party to become the Conservative Party of Scotland.

Johann Lamont: The problem with the First Minister is not just that he is surprised when he leaves for America, but that, when he is in Scotland, he is in denial about what is happening in the real Scotland outside this chamber. He talks about securing public services and says that we have free everything, but he has already brought in £2.7 billion of cuts, and the poor, the vulnerable and the hard-working families in this country have noticed. They have noticed the pensioner who needs help to wash, to dress and to feed themselves suffering the indignity of having just 15 minutes of care visits in a day; the family paying more for childcare than for their mortgage; the 18,000 Scots who are being denied a place at

college; and the thousands of working-class students who have had their bursaries cut by £900 a year. They see his cuts; they do not see his Scotland where everything is free and everything is fantastic.

Who is going to pay when he delivers the next £3 billion of cuts?

The First Minister: Johann Lamont is correct to say that the Scottish budget is under severe attack from Westminster—that is true. Incidentally, it was under attack from the previous Labour Government as well. However, the solution to that surely cannot be to abandon concessionary fares, free prescriptions and free personal care, to reintroduce tuition fees or to abandon the council tax freeze. How would the working families of Scotland benefit from our adopting the policies that the Tory party has adopted south of the border? Johann Lamont was deeply wrong to talk about a something-for-nothing society. That is exactly the language of the Tory party of 20 years ago.

Yes, the cuts that are being imposed on Scotland are severe—there is no doubt about that—but they were set out in the comprehensive spending review. There is no difference in those things than when we fought the election last year and fought the local elections this year. When the Labour Party fought the election last year and fought the local elections this year, it was in favour of retaining concessionary fares, free prescriptions, free personal care and free education, and it was in favour of the council tax freeze. Indeed, it was trying to outbid the Scottish National Party on those vital aspects of social progress. So, the question that Johann Lamont must answer is: how, all of a sudden, has she been converted to sweeping away not just the gains introduced by this Government, but the gains of having a Parliament for Scotland?

Johann Lamont: I do not think that the First Minister listened to what I said about what is happening to people throughout the country. He says that nothing changes, but the question that we should be asking is: who is paying the price for the benefits that we all get from his spending choices?

The First Minister says that we tried to outbid the SNP. One lesson that we have learned is that it is impossible to outbid the SNP on recklessness. Instead, we will demand a serious Government that makes the hard decisions so that people do not pay the price.

It is no wonder that the First Minister thinks that he needs to spend £1 million on spin doctors to try to spin his way out of this. That tells us all we need to know about him. Care workers are losing their

jobs or getting their wages cut, but more SNP spinners are hired.

The cuts must be brought in by 2016. Already, John Swinney has delayed half the cuts that he must make. Will we know more before the referendum in 2014 about where that £3 billion-worth of cuts will be made or will the Government continue to try to con the people of Scotland and treat us all as fools?

The First Minister: Johann Lamont called for a quality debate, so let us see whether we can give her one. The argument against means testing—which is her direction of travel—was set out famously in a document almost 20 years ago. It said:

“There is ample evidence that systems with benefits paid to the majority are considerably more popular as well as more efficient than those which reserve benefits solely for the poor.”

That comes from page 249 of the report of the commission on social justice that the late John Smith set up—Johann Lamont was chair of the Scottish Labour Party at the time. I do not understand why Labour has moved away from that fundamental principle.

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): We have not.

The First Minister: I hear the cries from Labour members saying that they have not. If they have not moved away from that principle, why is Johann Lamont making speeches attacking the great gains in free education and free health for the people of Scotland?

I agree that the reintroduction of means testing would not be popular, and I also agree that it would not be efficient. One of the arguments is about holding society together. Certain things are so important—such as free education in Scotland—that we must ensure that the people who are lucky enough to be in a position to make a contribution to them through their taxation can see the social benefit as well. That is how we hold society together.

The introduction of sweeping means testing across those valuable areas of society would introduce inefficiency and social division. The Labour Party recognised and, by and large, stayed faithful to that point for many years but now is deserting totally to the Tory ground not only of Ruth Davidson but of Peter Lilley, who first introduced the phrase “a something-for-nothing society”.

Johann Lamont: The First Minister loves having straw men to cut down. The reality is that a much more serious debate is going on. He says that we should have a debate and then insults every family in the country that is worrying about

its children in school, its young people in college and the care of its older people.

He talks about debate but forces his Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to come to the chamber and recant a position that he held five years ago. We want to have a debate and test the evidence on where the balance, which the First Minister knows is needed, should lie.

I understand why the First Minister thinks that everything is free: he is on £130,000 a year, spends almost £2,000 a week on hospitality and then gets taxpayers to spend £1,300 a year for a television package to enable him to watch the films and sports events that he then gets them to pay for him to attend.

The First Minister does not live in the real world. He lives in a world in which it is fine to spend £400,000 to rent a gentlemen’s club in Pall Mall, but not to worry about the care worker who has had their wages cut by £4,000 a year. He is not an economist—he is a fantasist. No wonder that, from Hampden Park to the Ryder cup and from George Square to the Edinburgh tattoo, he is roundly booed wherever he goes.

The First Minister: So much for the quality debate that Johann Lamont wants.

I will make three points to Johann Lamont. The argument that we put forward was not only put forward in our election manifesto, on which we were elected; it was enunciated when we set out our programme for government. I set out the social wage argument in the chamber on 26 May 2011, when I said:

“Free university education, no tolls, no tax on ill health and one bill—the council tax—that will not soar: that is the concept of the social wage. For the sacrifices that all of us are and should be making, there is a reward in the form of a society that is geared to our values. We do things differently here, not because we can but because we want to, and we should be proud of that.”

Iain Gray was the leader of the Labour Party then. His response was:

“I agree that Scotland’s path should be different from that pursued by the Tory-Lib Dem coalition in Westminster. There is a fairer, better way, and we will hold the First Minister to his promises on the social wage, as he has characterised it: on free personal care, concessionary travel, free prescriptions and free education.”—[*Official Report*, 26 May 2011; c 69 and 78.]

In the space of a year, the Labour Party has been transformed from demanding that the Scottish National Party holds to these policies on the social wage to being hand in glove with the Tory party in attacking those gains for the Scottish people.

Johann Lamont should be worried not just about the SNP’s reaction to her; let us talk about other reaction to her speeches. On the LabourHame blog site, for example, Alex Gallagher said:

"The phrase 'something for nothing' is badly chosen. It's a Tory shibboleth".

George Anders said:

"What are we doing?

Did we learn nothing from the 'New Labour' nonsense."

David Wells said:

"Labour used to endorse policies like: free prescriptions, free tuition fees and the council tax freeze."

As the Labour Party becomes the new Tory party of Scotland, its support, which is already diminished, will vanish like snow off a dyke.

Secretary of State for Scotland

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S4F-00888)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to do so in the near future.

Ruth Davidson: Last year, the principal of the University of Glasgow, Anton Muscatelli, warned that the funding gap for the First Minister's policies would cause long-term damage to Scottish universities. Alex Salmond not only refused to listen to him; he quite publicly slapped him down. We are starting to see the full effects of the Scottish Government's higher education policy. All but one of Scotland's top universities are slipping down the world rankings, and one has tumbled out of the top 200 altogether. University principals such as Professor Muscatelli were right all along. Will the First Minister now admit that his policies are creating a deepening crisis in Scottish education?

The First Minister: I think that there is general acknowledgment, including among all the university principals in Scotland, that the universities in Scotland are currently the best funded by far in these islands. Indeed, the Labour Party's attack has been that we are overfunding university education in Scotland. As Ruth Davidson should know, in comparison with the 25,000 reduction in university students from England who are going to English universities, record numbers of Scottish, English and overseas students are going to Scottish universities this year.

I would beware of quoting the report that Ruth Davidson has just cited, which describes the situation in England as a "perfect storm" of underfunding. Every university principal in England would gladly change places with Scotland's university principals, who are properly funded and can look forward with confidence to an excellent future.

Ruth Davidson: Classic SNP playbook: attack the messenger, ignore the message, do not

acknowledge responsibility and, for goodness' sake, do not even think about answering the question.

Perhaps the First Minister has spent too much time lolling on the greens in America to pay any attention to schools. Let me take the First Minister on a journey through Scotland's education system: one child in every five leaves primary school unable to read and write properly; our teachers are confused about what they are supposed to do in the classroom because, as Professor Lindsay Paterson pointed out, there is no

"clear leadership and focus in the implementation of curriculum for excellence";

70,000 people are now denied a place at a further education college after tens of millions of pounds-worth of cuts to the budgets; and, shamefully, Scotland's poorest and most disadvantaged students have seen vital bursaries cut by 34 per cent.

From primary 1 to postgraduate, that is a catalogue of failure. Will the First Minister now do what his Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning did and stand in the chamber and just admit that he was wrong?

The First Minister: At some stage, the Conservative Party will have to get over the contradiction between its constant calling for additional expenditure on things that it wants additional expenditure on and its Government in Westminster scything the Scottish budget and the spending in departments.

We have managed to maintain public services in comparison with what is happening in England and Wales. The position of colleges in Scotland is infinitely superior to that of colleges south of the border. We are maintaining student numbers and full-time equivalents, as evidence to the Education and Culture Committee demonstrated this week.

I really think that the attack on curriculum for excellence should stop, because curriculum for excellence has been greeted with huge enthusiasm by both the teachers and the parents of Scotland and is a fundamental, well-needed reform in Scottish education.

I have been looking at some of the quotes coming in on the position of Scotland's universities. I was delighted to see, just a few seconds ago, a quote from Robin Parker, who talks about

"the huge investment the Scottish Government is making in our universities over this parliament from this new academic year ... In fact in Europe, Scotland is one of only a few countries that are investing in higher education."

Unfortunately for people south of the border, one of the countries that are not doing that is England, where Ruth Davidson's Conservative Party is

unfortunately visiting its policies on the people of that country.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Today we learn that the former NHS Lothian chief executive James Barbour has been given a £100,000 golden goodbye on top of a very generous package that was awarded when he left office following the waiting times and bullying scandals in Lothian. What action will the First Minister take to end the blatant milking of public money by highly paid professionals who leave office following scandal, or who retire and are then re-engaged?

The First Minister: Professor Barbour received his normal pension benefits in line with contractual entitlements that are standard for all national health service employees. The member should consider what would have happened to the Scottish Government if we had decided to break that contract. The member should also consider that those contracts were entered into when the Labour Party was in government in Scotland.

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-00890)

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

Willie Rennie: Good. Last week, I was pleased that the Deputy First Minister committed to do more for vulnerable young children. She talked positively, I have to say, about building a consensus. I was therefore disappointed to see, the very next day, a statement from the Government that it would not even be piloting an extension of free early learning for deprived two-year-olds.

I need the First Minister to clear this matter up. It is important, because Nobel laureate Professor James Heckman has worked out that the highest rate of return in education comes from investment before a child is three. He is one of many experts who support that view. Will the First Minister clear the matter up and commit to following the United Kingdom Government by extending early education to 40 per cent of two-year-olds—the ones who need it most—rather than sticking to the 1 per cent who are in his current plans?

The First Minister: As Willie Rennie knows, the plan to move three and four-year-olds to 600 hours of early years education and childcare is superior not just to the 412 hours that we inherited but to the plans in England, which are for less than that. The plans also include looked-after two-year-olds.

I watched the exchange between Willie Rennie and the Deputy First Minister last week and I repeat that we are willing to consider all plans for the future, as she said. However, Willie Rennie should look carefully at the exciting developments with family centres in Scotland—and the mention that has been made of them—and at the fact that in the budget, thankfully, we have decided to direct money into early years and early intervention as a part of policy. He should acknowledge that there are a number of ways in which we can effect our shared aims, even against the dramatic budget pressure that has been introduced by his Government at Westminster.

Willie Rennie: I accept that the work in relation to three and four-year-olds and the other work that the First Minister mentioned represent good progress. However, the best investment is made before a child is three. The First Minister is doing some of that, but £1 invested before a child is three can save £11 later.

I want to join in the consensus. A parliamentary motion has been lodged that calls for more provision for two-year-olds; the motion has been signed by members of all five parties in the Parliament, including members of the First Minister's party. I welcome that and I want us to work together, but we need a bit more commitment on the matter. If a two-year-old misses out now, they miss out for ever. If the First Minister will not commit to help 40 per cent of two-year-olds, as the UK Government has done, will he at least agree to open up the budget and look for a radical change, so that we can do more for young children?

The First Minister: Perhaps at some stage we will get the acknowledgement that what we are proposing for three and four-year-olds is substantially above what the UK Government is proposing. Perhaps there will also be an understanding that there are a variety of ways to bring about the desirable aims, such as through the family-nurse partnerships and family centres.

As the member should know, this Government set up an early years task force, which includes a substantial number of experts in the field as well as members of the Parliament, to make recommendations on how to bring about the improvement that we all want to see.

One of the first things to do is to allocate money in the budget for early intervention for preventative spending, which the Government has done. That has been an enormously difficult task, given the budget pressures that are upon us, but Mr Swinney has done it. That has given us the basis for a debate and action on how we can effect improvements in the early years.

I agree that the early years are of enormous and profound significance in the context of the future development of our children and our society—hence the move to intervention in the budget. However, if we come to the debate saying that everything that takes place south of the border must automatically be matched in Scotland, we tend to overlook a variety of benefits and incentives, as well as the platform of education and health that is provided in Scotland, which of course is being denied to people in England.

Ryder Cup 2014

4. Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the benefits will be of Scotland staging the Ryder cup at Gleneagles in 2014. (S4F-00895) [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Order.

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Ryder cup is one of the biggest sporting events in the world. Scotland is the next host nation and the Scottish economy is expected to benefit by up to £100 million over the week of the event. In addition to the 45,000 spectators who are expected to attend each day at Gleneagles, television coverage is expected to reach more than 500 million homes worldwide. That will provide a unique opportunity to promote Scotland on the world stage and to reinforce Scotland's place as the home of golf.

Annabelle Ewing: As the local MSP, I am looking forward to the tournament coming to Gleneagles and to the economic benefits that it will bring. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that young Scots are given the opportunity to participate in golf and, who knows, perhaps to compete in a future Ryder cup?

The First Minister: The member raises a hugely substantial point. A key component of the Ryder cup host nation agreement is that the Scottish Government is committed to continue funding the club golf initiative through to 2018, to deliver a post-event legacy beyond 2014. I am supportive of that fantastic initiative—since its inception, more than 260,000 children have been introduced to golf at school. We are the home of golf; we are the history of golf. Initiatives such as club golf will ensure that Scotland is the future of golf, too.

Police Staffing

5. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether police officers will have to perform more administrative duties to cover proposed reductions in police staff. (S4F-00903)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We expect the Scottish police authority and the police service

of Scotland to ensure that officers and staff are deployed in roles that utilise their expertise and experience effectively and efficiently.

We have given a commitment to there being no compulsory redundancies among police support staff. The reform of the police service, which was supported by the Labour Party, offers the unique opportunity to improve services. The new police service of Scotland will eliminate duplication by working more effectively, and will bring 10 national police organisations into one organisation.

Jenny Marra: That commitment is interesting, given Stephen House's revelations last week. The First Minister has repeatedly told the Scottish people that 1,000 extra police officers are on their streets today. He has denied our reports that police officers are sitting in police stations across Scotland filling back-office duties, but a leaked document from the Cabinet Secretary for Justice's police reform sub-group reveals a plan to release hundreds of police staff that will be delivered through

"police officers performing basic administrative duties themselves."

Is it good economics to have police officers who earn a third more than police staff doing the police staff jobs? Will the First Minister admit that he has not put 1,000 extra police officers on our streets, but that he has given Scotland 1,000 backroom bobbies?

The First Minister: What total nonsense. The position is clear and is as outlined by Chief Constable Kevin Smith to the Justice Committee earlier this year, who said, in response to a question that was asked by one of Jenny Marra's colleagues, that

"as a general policy, police officers would not be put in such roles. I am confident that, as a matter of policy, cops would not backfill posts. That would not be a good operational use of the resource, and making someone redundant then filling their post with a cop would be challengeable."—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 28 February 2012; c 984.]

Jenny Marra is on unsafe ground in challenging the commitment to 1,000 additional police officers. After all, that commitment was questioned in Johann Lamont's speech only last week. As a policy change, it lasted a matter of minutes: after the Scottish Police Federation tweeted that it would be a tragedy if Scots politicians became "as out of touch" as politicians are in England and Wales, it was reassured by one of the Labour Party's spin doctors that that was not Labour policy and, about 20 minutes later, it was able to say that Johann Lamont's questioning of the 1,000 extra police officers had lasted a mere 30 minutes. If the challenge to our commitment on 1,000 police officers lasts a mere 30 minutes, how long will

Labour's attempt to remove free education and health for the people of Scotland last?

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Does the First Minister agree that Labour's cuts commission, for which everything is on the table, could lead to a massive decrease in bobbies on the beat and other police staff, which could mean that our crime levels, which are at a 37-year low, rise again?

The First Minister: There should be some acknowledgement that the commitment to deliver 1,000 extra police officers on the streets and communities of Scotland was, of course, met—despite the pessimism of the Labour Party, which said that it would take 13 years to fulfil. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Miss Boyack, that is enough.

The First Minister: I, along with the new police chief constable, believe that that initiative bears a large part of the responsibility for the reduction in recorded crime to a 37-year low. Given how society has benefited, what kind of party challenges the effective use of 1,000 police officers?

Free Prescriptions

6. Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will fulfil its commitment to deliver free prescriptions. (S4F-00906)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Yes.

Mark McDonald: The First Minister will have noted that, earlier this week, his counterpart in Wales, the Labour First Minister, said:

"We believe it's important that we have an NHS that's free at the point of delivery. We are not going to change the policy on free prescriptions."

Nye Bevan, the founder of the national health service, resigned from Government over the introduction of prescription charges; does the First Minister agree that free prescriptions are an integral part of the NHS, and that Labour in Scotland, in suggesting the reintroduction of prescription charges, has lost its social democratic principles by simply aping Tory policies?

The First Minister: It is the case that, only one day before Johann Lamont reinforced her cuts commission speech to the Labour Party conference, Carwyn Jones extolled the benefits of free health for the people of Wales. The question that the Labour Party must answer is twofold. First, if free prescriptions and free healthcare are good policies for the Labour Party to pursue in Wales, why are they not good policies for the

Scottish National Party to pursue for the people of Scotland?

Secondly, there is the issue of electoral credibility. It is only a few months since the Labour Party extolled its commitment to free healthcare in Scotland. It also extolled its commitment to free education. I have Labour's manifesto with me. Next to a photo of Johann Lamont, it says:

"No price tag on education".

The way the Labour Party is going, it will make Nick Clegg look like a model of consistency.

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): The free prescriptions policy has consequences. Some 15,000 cancer sufferers in England have now benefited from life-extending drugs that are not available to cancer sufferers in Scotland. The First Minister wrote to pharmaceutical development companies to invite them to come and establish new bioscience facilities in Scotland, but they are asking why they would come to develop medicines in Scotland that cannot be prescribed in Scotland and why they would work with clinicians in Scotland whose experience of modern medicines is falling behind that of clinicians in England.

The objections that the First Minister raised to the cancer drug fund in England 13 months ago have now been overcome. Is it not time to offer cancer sufferers in Scotland the same hope and the same opportunity for their future as cancer sufferers in England have?

The First Minister: I have outlined the complaints about the special funding arrangements in England, which include complaints from Conservative members of Parliament, among others.

Jackson Carlaw asks why pharmaceutical companies would come to Scotland. Is he not aware that last Thursday, in Chicago, Sigma-Aldrich announced another significant investment in pharmaceuticals and life sciences in Scotland—the third major investment in that industry in this year alone?

The suggestion that Scotland is somehow not seen as a location for pharmaceutical development and life sciences is belied by the facts. If the Conservatives are to make wide sweeping comments against the Scottish economy, they should really catch up with the announcements that are being made.

The Presiding Officer: Very briefly—Jackie Baillie.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The First Minister may be happy to talk about free prescriptions. Does he recognise that there are consequences to his policy choices? Does he recognise that nursing levels are at their lowest

since 2005, and that—as told by the Edinburgh *Evening News*—nurses are working seven days a week for months at a time to fix NHS Lothian's waiting-list scandal? Is not that the reality of the SNP's choices in government?

The First Minister: The reality of the SNP's choices in government is that we have protected the revenue budget of the NHS in real terms, which is one of the commitments that the Labour Party would not make in the election.

Jackie Baillie says that I am happy to talk about the SNP policy of free prescriptions. That is correct. There was a time when Jackie Baillie was pleased to talk about the Labour Party's policy of free prescriptions, but that has all changed now.

The election commitments that Labour made last year and this year have to be dumped. Labour is in headlong flight to join the Conservative Party and follow the road of means-tested benefits. It has betrayed the generations-old tradition of the Labour Party. Why Jackie Baillie thinks that a new Conservative party in Scotland will do any better than the old Conservative Party in Scotland will be a mystery to the Scottish people. Let us talk about the policy of free prescriptions in the knowledge that it is supported by the overwhelming majority of people in Scotland.

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would be most grateful if you would look at the exchanges at the beginning of this item of business and compare them with the stated aim of this part of the working day, which is supposed to be for questioning of the Executive by back benchers. So much time is being taken up by ritualistic abuse from the front benches that there is no chance to get back-bench questions in. You did your best today, and we went five minutes over time. This is no criticism of the chair. It is a criticism, though, of how we are allowing this item to stray far too far from the original intention.

The Presiding Officer: This is an opportunity to hold the First Minister to account. Although I always keep it under review, I am quite sure that Margo MacDonald will recognise that back benchers from every party were called today to question the First Minister.

Land Reform (Isle of Gigha)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-04081, in the name of David Stewart, on the Isle of Gigha—10 years of pioneering land reform. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates the community of the Isle of Gigha on the tenth anniversary of what is considered its pioneering community buy-out; acknowledges the efforts of the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust to redevelop the community by introducing development projects in the area; understands that, over the 10 years, the population in the community has risen from 96 to 160; welcomes the inspirational example that it considers those on Gigha have set for other communities; believes that there is much work still to be done throughout Scotland regarding land reform; notes the recommendations of the Land Reform Review Group, and believes that valuable lessons can be learned from Gigha.

12:37

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

As a highlander, I have had an interest in the land reform debate since I was old enough to hold up my first copy of the *West Highland Free Press*. History provides a rich tapestry of experiences: the Highland clearances, the battle of the braes and the Highland Land League. Perhaps lesser known are the seven men of Knoydart, who defied Nazi sympathiser and landlord Lord Brocket to settle the land.

Gigha is an exemplar in the debate—a standard in the toolbox of how it is done. I visited the island in August. As one makes the crossing from Tayinloan to Gigha, the beauty of the natural landscape comes into view, and in the distance it is possible to make out the faint outline of the dancing ladies of Gigha, which point to the transformation of this beautiful place.

The beauty of the landscape is superseded only by the warmth of the people on the island. Once there, one finds a thriving community, a youthful and dynamic population, a number of new business start-ups, a fine housing refurbishment project and a community energy resource, exporting power to the national grid. In short, one finds a community that is going places.

Yet that was not always the case. A dwindling population, poor housing stock and a lack of opportunities led to fears for the future sustainability of the island. Indeed, as recently as 2000, the population was less than 100. Gigha, as with so many other places in Scotland, had been passed from landowner to landowner, with no reference to the community, choking the

entrepreneurial spirit of the residents and stifling development.

The catalyst for this remarkable change is what we are celebrating today. Ten years ago, on 15 March 2002, through the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust the people took possession of the island that they call home. For the first time, those with a stake in the island took ownership of the community, and that changed the outlook of the island in remarkable ways. To give some simple facts, the population has grown by 50 per cent, two thirds of the housing stock has been refurbished and the island has moved towards sustainability by purchasing and constructing its own wind farm.

Of course, challenges still remain. Not least of those are funding problems, which lead to concerns about the completion of the housing refurbishment. I hope that the minister will be able to provide me with some reassurances in that regard today. However, those challenges should not detract from the incredible success of Gigha, which provides an example to other communities of what can be achieved with community ownership of land. Today, I offer my heartfelt congratulations to the people of Gigha in celebrating this milestone in their history.

Gigha is just one of the success stories of community ownership of land. In the communities of Knoydart, Eigg, South Uist, Galston or Harris, there is a new dynamism, new enterprises and a new confidence about the future. That is what comes when private land ownership gives way to community ownership, when a community democratically has control of its land and associated assets and can utilise the land in the cause of securing a more sustainable future. The sort of activity now seen in Gigha has been replicated in those other communities.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I very much appreciate what the member is saying, but does he think that only rural communities can learn from Gigha, or is there the possibility that some urban communities that have a problem with land ownership could also learn from it?

David Stewart: The member makes a very good point. I think that this should extend across Scotland, where there is local community demand.

Some 500,000 acres of Scotland is now owned and managed by local communities but, significant though that is, it represents only a tiny fraction of Scotland's land. There is so much more scope to push further forward with the agenda of community ownership. Doing that will help to bring the benefits that we are seeing in Gigha and elsewhere to many more communities.

Only two weeks ago, we marked the 20th anniversary of the death of John McEwen, who

wrote "Who Owns Scotland?" His book demonstrated just how few people owned the vast bulk of our land. Since it was published in the 1970s, some things have changed for the better but not enough has. The land ownership pattern remains essentially the same, and that simply cannot be right. As we look forward, we cannot imagine a future Scotland where that continues.

I have a confession to make: I am a great admirer of David Cameron—not the Prime Minister but the real one, who is the chairman of Community Land Scotland and who is in the public gallery today. In a recent speech, he called land reform "unfinished business", that is fundamental to greater social justice in Scotland. He said:

"Is it possible for Scots to conceive of a future Scotland that does not, explicitly, have greater social justice at its heart? I think not ... This is not about fighting battles of the past ... land reform remains a cause of the present and the future."

Today, land changes under the feet of the people for some odd reasons. In the same speech, David Cameron highlighted a recent advert for the Gledfield estate in Sutherland, which appeared in the property section of *The Press and Journal*. I quote:

"The estate will appeal to the international super rich ... The asking price for this exceptional property is offers over £8 million, but for that you get a traditional Highland estate with more than 6,000 acres of sporting ground, 2,000 acres of commercial forestry and a spectacular sporting lodge."

Like David Cameron, I cannot see many local people having the more than £8 million that is needed to put in an offer. That is one reason why we need to push on with land reform and build on the work, which I am proud the first Labour Scottish Executive promoted, of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

That is why I welcome the Scottish Government's announcement of the land reform review group. I welcome the members of the group—particularly my friend Professor Jim Hunter—and its terms of reference, which are to secure a greater diversity in land ownership in Scotland. However, this is a matter not just of law but of money. In that regard, I welcome the re-establishment of Labour's Scottish land fund, which will assist communities with buying land. That is a step in the right direction but, at £6 million over three years, the fund will not buy many—or any—Sutherland estates of the type that I mentioned.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I am glad that the member has welcomed the Scottish National Party Government's reinstatement of the land fund this year. Does he regret the fact that the fund was scrapped in 2006 by the previous Labour and Lib Dem Executive?

David Stewart: Mr Thompson has to look at the achievements. Labour introduced the milestone act that set up land reform and we need to continue that work. I hope that there is consensus on that but, judging from his intervention, I think that it is probably unlikely that we will have that from Dave Thompson.

The land reform review group is not due to report until the end of 2013. I hope that the minister will today give me the absolute assurance that the long timescale is not an attempt to take the issue off the public agenda for the next year or more. The community of Gigha testifies to the value of land reform. Further land reform is a cause for good. We need to encourage the land reform review group in its work—in that, it will have the support of Parliament to be radical. A new chapter in land reform is ready to be opened. What we need to succeed is, to quote Sir Walter Scott,

“The will to do, the soul to dare”.

12:45

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): It is entirely appropriate and fitting that the Parliament should note the 10th anniversary of the Gigha buyout and congratulate and commend the community of Gigha for its successes since then. I therefore thank David Stewart for bringing the debate to the chamber. In passing, I should also pay tribute to the elderly statesmen of Gigha, Willie McSporran and John Martin. It is only right that their part in this should be acknowledged.

It is fitting that the debate comes at a time when the community empowerment consultation has recently closed, and soon after the land reform review group has been set up, for there are many lessons to be learned from Gigha and from the islanders' experience over the past 10 years. It is good to look with some satisfaction at how far communities such as Gigha have travelled along the road towards addressing their many challenges and how the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and the Scottish land fund helped to start them on their journeys, but it should also be recognised that the path of Gigha and other such communities is not always easy. Managing the challenges of running an organisation such as the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust would tax the abilities of many a chief executive of a multinational corporation. The political challenges of doing that within the intensely local democratic framework of a community such as Gigha might well challenge the abilities of many professional politicians. Of course, I am not thinking so much of members of this Parliament as I am of our colleagues down in Westminster, who seem to understand little about Scotland and nothing at all about our islands.

There is a need, therefore, to recognise and pay respect to the knowledge, know-how and experience that have been acquired on Gigha—all the more so because that experience has been hard won mainly by volunteers who wrestle with issues that have a profound effect on their futures, those of their families and those of their friends and neighbours. We should recognise, too, that that voluntary work takes place in communities that are acknowledged to be economically fragile, where people have to struggle daily to make a living, as well as attending to the collective needs of their community.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Does Mike MacKenzie agree that one of the problems with buyouts is not so much capital funding—which can be found—but revenue funding, which is needed later on?

Mike MacKenzie: Yes, of course. That is why I am delighted that communities such as Gigha have been able to take advantage of the many opportunities in renewable energy, for example with the dancing ladies of Gigha. I am also delighted that the Scottish Government has established the community and renewable energy scheme, through Community Energy Scotland, which will enable many more communities to take advantage of the revenue funding that is afforded by renewable energy.

Gigha faces continuing and imminent challenges, some of which David Stewart mentioned. There is some way to go before all of its housing is brought up to a decent standard—it is still somewhat below the average standard in Scotland. Gigha also needs its sustainability to be ensured with the realisation of the planned new wind turbine. Further investment in Gigha will be required before the overall investment begins to pay off, as it assuredly will over the generations to come.

With £6 million having recently been put into the re-established Scottish land fund, I hope to see many more communities achieve ownership and control of their own assets and benefit from that local control. Gigha is a microcosm of Scotland. The islanders there suffer from many of the same problems that are writ large across Scotland. Ownership and the ability to harness and control their own resources are significant factors that have allowed the community to take huge steps towards addressing those problems. What is good for Gigha should be good for the rest of Scotland, too.

12:50

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Before I speak about Gigha, I ask the chamber to join me in paying respects to Andrew Riddell, who

died this week. Andrew, a tenant farmer of Peaston farm in East Lothian, made a strong contribution to the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association. He leaves a young family, to whom I am sure we all send our condolences.

Impressions formed on a brief visit to Gigha more than 20 years ago of a beautiful but quite desolate island are in sharp and happy contrast to those created when I arrived on the island with my colleagues on the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee only this May. Both times the weather was fine and the sand below was white when we saw the bottom through the aquamarine water as we docked. However, this time, the visit quickly spoke of a vibrant and forward-looking community running its own future.

The words on the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust website are true. It states that the island is going

“from strength to strength with a growing population that is sustainably developing its local economy.”

Committee members stayed in a welcoming community-owned hotel and had a dram or two. We visited the community-owned gardens at Achamore and saw the dancing ladies, to which other members have referred. We tasted delicious local food and visited the primary school, which has an increasing school roll. We met young families who have come to make their future on Gigha and we also heard of on-going smallholding creation. Other members have spoken of the challenges of the new housing, much of which is affordable and sustainable. The master plan and design guidance process involves the whole community. People who would otherwise not have been able to do so have been able to come from the mainland and stay on Gigha.

It sounds like nirvana but, as Mike MacKenzie highlighted, there are always challenges, whoever owns the land. However, the point of those challenges is that the land is owned by the community. As a result of all the hard work and the hard decisions that have been made, the vision of inspiring others and taking the community with them has become a reality.

It was pointed out by the people on the Gigha trust and by people in the community that when there is an opportunity for a buyout, it can often be the case that islanders—or, indeed, people on the mainland—can be somewhat sceptical. Islanders on Gigha were inspired by a visit to Eigg, where people had already become community owners of their island. They were also strongly supported by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. David Stewart highlighted that funding—both funding at the start and on-going funding—can be a challenge.

Last week, when the committee questioned Professor James Hunter and Dr Alison Elliott, who are members of the land reform review group, I

was eager to hear how the group planned to engage with other communities across Scotland. Professor Hunter highlighted that in Scotland we have

“one of the most concentrated patterns of land ownership in Europe.”—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee*, 26 September 2012; c 1117.]

I was interested to hear the word “release” used. The opportunities for community empowerment are chances all communities should have, whether they are rural, urban, ex-mining or coastal, and no matter where they are—whether they are in the north, in my own region in the south or wherever. I specifically asked the witnesses how young people could be engaged in the process. The answer was through Young Scot. Scots from all backgrounds and all parts of Scotland must be involved in the process.

On Gigha’s website, the children of Gigha have wonderful paintings, which are all sunny and bright. Although I know that the weather is not always bright and sunny on Gigha, the paintings reflect the incredible optimism of the community. I congratulate them on their decade of community ownership.

12:54

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)
(Con): I congratulate David Stewart on securing the debate.

I am also very happy to pay tribute to all of my constituents on Gigha and members and supporters of the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust for the efforts that they have made and are continuing to make to create a sustainable and successful island community. I agree with David Stewart that the success of Gigha is an inspiration to other rural and island communities.

The population on Gigha is rising and the excellent primary school has 13 children, which is a testament to the health of the island and is something that we can all celebrate. Gigha is a beautiful island in a wonderful setting and I encourage my MSP colleagues and others who are listening to visit it to experience Gigha for themselves. They can be sure of a very warm welcome and excellent hospitality, whether at the Gigha hotel or at the various bed and breakfasts or self-catering cottages. The island’s Achamore gardens, golf course and clean sandy beaches are just some of the attractions that are available to the tourists.

Achamore gardens are a testament to the memory of Sir James Horlick. He was a good laird and a founder of the famous malty drink, which had the slogan “The Great Family Nourisher”. Sir James Horlick was a great nourisher and a great philanthropist with a reputation as a good landlord

who used his fortune to promote schemes on the island to help employment there.

I welcome to the public gallery the celebrated Mr Peter Joynson, who for some 20 years was factor for Sir James Horlick on the Isle of Gigha. He has many happy memories of the island, of the people and of his former employer, who I am sure would be happy to see the Gigha community thriving once again and the population increasing.

Renewable energy remains a big and often controversial issue across my region, so the example of Gigha is worth highlighting as one of success. On Gigha, the three Vestas V27 wind turbines—known locally as the dancing ladies—enjoy widespread community support, with the Gigha residents controlling the whole project and the profit being reinvested in the community. It has been so successful that local residents are seeking to erect a fourth turbine to join the current three. No one on Gigha thinks that renewables developments are incompatible with tourism—rather, they complement each other.

Although I agree that valuable lessons can be learned from Gigha, not least in terms of community empowerment, which we all support, and the development of a practical island master plan that has helped to foster economic development, we are cautious about calls for further legislation on land reform and we remain unconvinced that yet more legislation in this field is required or desirable. We should recognise that Gigha has succeeded within existing land reform laws and we should seek ways of improving how those laws operate.

We should also recognise the vital importance of the ferry link between Gigha and Tayinloan, which has come under pressure of late. The islanders deserve a ferry service that encourages tourism and their lifeline activities.

The Gigha buyout was not a hostile buyout—rather, it was encouraged by seller and buyer alike—and I have to pay tribute to previous Argyll and Bute MSP George Lyon, who gave a great deal of his time to the project. It is very seldom—there are no Liberal Democrats in the chamber today—that I praise the work of Lib Dem MSPs, but in this case it would be churlish of me to not recognise the part that he played. While I am talking about politicians, or famous people, I note that David Stewart mentioned Professor Jim Hunter, who got to his feet recently at a meeting in Stornoway after one of the SNP people had spoken and said that he was tempted to vote Conservative, so there we are.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you would come to a conclusion.

Jamie McGrigor: I will conclude by wishing my constituents on Gigha continued success in the

future. They are to be congratulated for proving that determined and dynamic community effort can make even the smallest and remotest island communities sustainable and economically successful.

12:58

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): I realise that it may seem strange for a member who represents a constituency on the east coast of Scotland to seek to make a contribution to the debate. However, having visited Gigha at the end of May on the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's fact-finding trip, which Claudia Beamish referred to, I want to add my congratulations to the islanders on the 10th anniversary of the community buyout. I also congratulate David Stewart on being instrumental in affording all of us this opportunity.

I have two abiding memories from the visit to Gigha—the first is light hearted and the second is more significant, given some of the myths that surround renewable energy.

As Claudia Beamish may recall, one of the guides on our tour of the island was, among many other things, the session clerk at the kirk. As we passed the kirk, I inquired politely about the level of regular turnout for services. I was somewhat impressed to be told, if I recall correctly, that around a third of the population attended. I discovered shortly afterwards, when we pulled over to chat with a resident, how such an impressive attendance is achieved. The session clerk, in a well-practised tone, inquired of the lady, "And why weren't you at the church on Sunday?" I was left with the impression that she would not commit that particular misdemeanour again.

My other lasting memory involved our trip to the dancing ladies. At the time of our visit, faith, hope and charity had been operational for a little over seven years. We learned from the digital information hub at the site that, during that period, the turbines had been responsible for saving 7,936 tonnes of CO₂ and that in the preceding month alone they had generated 111MW of power—enough to power 371 homes—and created an income for the island of £12,680. Just as interestingly, as committee members questioned the locals about the pluses and minuses of their renewable power source, there were no tales to be told of terrible health problems afflicting residents, people leaving the island as they could not stand having the landscape blighted by the turbines, or indeed bird deaths caused by the blades. In fact, we learned that the only incidents of bird fatalities on the island stemmed from collisions with pylon cables—not with the turbines.

As the technology has advanced, the heritage trust, in seeking to replace faith, hope and charity, which were purchased on the second-hand market, is looking to purchase just one turbine, albeit a larger one, thereby reducing the visual impact, although I have to say that I found the visual impact of the dancing ladies, both from a distance and up close, quite positive.

As Claudia Beamish said, while we were on the island we also visited the school, where numbers have gone up from six to 19; the halibut farm; some of the new-build housing; the golf course, which I enjoyed; and, memorably, the gardens at Achamore house. However, our visit was by no means positively spun. We also got to hear of the difficulties and challenges that required to be overcome and which are still being faced. For example, the agreed roll-out of the housing improvements had run into a slight problem at the time we were there. We also learned that the odd decision or two that had been taken along the way might, with the benefit of hindsight, have been different. I think that we all came away from the visit feeling that we had been given a true insight into the buyout and the progress that has been made since what was, at the time, a rather bold—some might say brave—venture.

As the motion states, Gigha is “inspirational” in the example that it sets for other communities. In closing, I associate myself with the concluding lines of David Stewart’s motion, which states that the Parliament

“believes that there is much work still to be done throughout Scotland regarding land reform”

and

“notes the recommendations of the Land Reform Review Group”.

Last week, the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee heard from the group’s chair, Dr Alison Elliot, and vice-chair, James Hunter. It was encouraging to learn—David Stewart will welcome this, although Jamie McGrigor might not—that they intend to heed the First Minister’s call for them to bring forward innovative and radical proposals.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As several members still wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion under rule 8.14.3 to extend the debate for up to 30 minutes.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended for up to 30 minutes.—[David Stewart.]

Motion agreed to.

13:02

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I, too, congratulate David Stewart on securing the debate. It is hard to believe that it was 10 years ago that Gigha was bought out by the community. I had the privilege of being there alongside the community on that historic day. It was a great celebration, the memory of which will remain with me for the rest of my days. It was a time when the island’s population was falling, there were few jobs, housing was poor and the viability of the community was in the balance. The purchase brought hope to the community.

So much has happened in those 10 short years. The population started to increase almost immediately, housing improved, and now the community has its three dancing ladies, which other members have mentioned. The wind turbines generate profit of about £75,000 a year, which provides an income for the community. They attracted 100 per cent support from the community, which shows that such support is possible when a community pulls together.

Today’s debate is also timely given that we are so close to the 20th anniversary of the death of John McEwen. As David Stewart said, he was the first person to catalogue land ownership in Scotland. Indeed, his work still drives the debate forward today. We should also pay tribute to the Assynt crofters, who led the way on community buyouts. They also need to be recognised in the debate. Like other members, I am pleased to welcome David Cameron to the Parliament today. He and Community Land Scotland are pushing the agenda forward, which is very much required in the current situation.

I welcome the review group that the Scottish Government has set up to look at land reform. However, the Government has already missed opportunities to further land reform through legislation that we have passed. A serious concern is that the time that the review group has been given to report will halt progress on land reform for the foreseeable future, and certainly that there might be no progress in this parliamentary session. I urge the minister to produce an interim report and an interim action plan, so that we can keep the process moving forward throughout the session.

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): I will deal with the land reform review group in my speech, but I clarify that we fully expect to have interim findings by April next year, which will allow us to take the low-hanging fruit under current legislation and to see what measures we can take before the full report is issued in April 2014.

Rhoda Grant: I thank the minister for that intervention, which helps us all and gives us the reassurance that we require.

If Gigha and the other communities that have bought out their estates have taught us anything, it is that community ownership leads to growth in communities. Jobs have been created and communities have been revitalised.

The most important part of land reform is that it puts the levers of economic generation into our communities' hands and allows them to take charge of their future and that of generations to come. Many communities want that opportunity, so we must continue to make progress and to look for new ways to empower our communities.

13:06

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I congratulate David Stewart on obtaining the debate and on its wide-ranging nature. We congratulate the people of Gigha—well done. In 10 years, their local economy has bucked the trend of 100 years. No matter what philanthropy took place in the past, a fundamental need is for people across this country who live on and own the land to be in charge.

That leads me to remind members that no political party has a monopoly on support for land reform. The Tory party effected the biggest land reform ever in these islands by turning tenant farmers in Ireland into owners. Never let us forget that, in many cases, other parties have a lot to learn. Long before the *West Highland Free Press* came into existence, a Labour secretary of state let down the people of Knoydart in 1948. That lesson has been learned.

The land reform review group must look at the complexity in the 2003 act that has hampered communities in accessing the ability to buy land and register interests. I believe that that part of the group's work will be in the interim report that we will hear about, as the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee heard last week.

David Stewart: The strength of the debate is that it has been by and large consensual. Does the member recognise that, when Brian Wilson was a minister of state, he led the way on the land buyout at Knoydart?

Rob Gibson: I do not know the exact details, but I would be happy to debate them, and I am happy to welcome the work of all the people who have been involved in helping to make things happen. At the time of the Knoydart land raid, it was the Scottish National Party and the Communist Party that supported the men there.

Last night, I was at a play called "We Have Won the Land", which is a Rural Nations production that played in Balallan three or four weeks ago and has toured around Scotland. The play is about community land ownership and about the difficulties for people who pick up such things. David Cameron and his wife saw the play, along with others. I hope that a lot of other people can see one of the final performances in Glasgow or Luss.

MSPs should have been at the play to see how the people of Gigha, as volunteers, had to face up to the personal and other problems that confront folk who give their time to such activities. One of the greatest messages from the play was that people overcame problems and could create on the fictional island of Murg the buyout that they wanted, with dancing ladies of their own.

Attacks by the right-wing press on community land buyouts, such as that on Eigg—as has been suggested, people from Eigg gave the people on Gigha a lot of advice—are appalling. As James Hunter has pointed out, the price of 600 yards of tramline in Edinburgh would be about the same as all the moneys that the Government has spent on supporting those initiatives. The point is that, over many years, money was not drawn down from public sources to support development in Gigha. It can be drawn down now, and I praise the opportunities that the Labour-Lib Dem and SNP Governments have created to ensure that that happens.

Mike MacKenzie: Does Rob Gibson agree that, when we consider the cost of assisting communities such as Gigha, we should also consider what the monumental cost of not assisting them could be in the future? We would have to continue to provide health and social care services even if the population of Gigha dwindled to a handful of people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask Rob Gibson to start to conclude.

Rob Gibson: Thank you—I thought that, as I have taken interventions, I might get a little more time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am giving you a little more time.

Rob Gibson: Right—okay. That is five seconds of it done.

In our community of Evanton, there has recently been a community buyout by the Evanton Woods Community Company. It is part of a wider group of people who realised that owning one's own land is important. The people of Gigha are being celebrated today, and they deserve that celebration from us. However, we must learn lessons from all the stories that have led us to this

point and ensure that, in future, we turn the land of Scotland over to the people.

13:11

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I thank David Stewart for giving us the opportunity to debate an important subject. In his opening remarks, he said that we have some half a million acres in community ownership. It may be as well to give a sense of perspective on that: 20 per cent of the Westminster constituencies in Scotland exceed that size.

We might have made a great advance from where we were, but there is a heck of a lot still to do. I welcome the formation of the new group that will look at what has been done in the past and seek to build on it.

I was an active and enthusiastic supporter of the 2003 act. Indeed, my greatest achievement was to add the single word “add” to the access provisions, which protected from obliteration the existing access rights and ensured that the new act only added to those rights. It took me a heck of a long time to get that, but there we are.

Jamie McGrigor suggested that there is no need for further legislation. I thought that Rob Gibson was quite uncharacteristically kind to the Tories in his contribution—during the passage of the 2003 act, Bill Aitken consistently described it as leading to a Mugabe land grab. I do not think that any members in the chamber—not even Jamie McGrigor—would suggest that that has happened. On the contrary, progress has perhaps been more glacial than we might have hoped that it would be.

The Isle of Gigha is God’s island—it has that name for good reason. I first visited it at five past 1 on 20 May 1993. Members might ask why that time is so accurate; it is because I flew in, so by looking at my log book I can see exactly when I landed.

I found an island in the feudal grip of a landowner who subsequently had to flee to Switzerland and was pursued by the authorities for money. It was not a happy experience. However, he built the landing strip, which had been open for some six weeks when I landed there.

It caused the islanders of Gigha no great grief when the landowner brought his own plane in—which was registered Golf-India-Golf-Hotel-Alpha because the registrations have five letters—and crashed it, writing it off on his own landing strip. That was no great tragedy whatsoever, as no one was injured.

Enormous changes have happened on Gigha. I read on the island’s website that there are now 13 children there. If only communities of that size around Scotland had that proportion of

youngsters, because they are the foundations for the future of the community and guarantee the future of the school.

The website also says:

“We ... have virtually full employment on Gigha.”

We should move the whole of Scotland to Gigha—maybe that would be the answer.

Gigha has been blessed by nature. I flew into Gigha one February and found the tar melting on the roads and people sunbathing in their swimming costumes on the beach. However, the community—in particular, the McSporrans—has been absolutely key to changing the dynamic of Gigha. At the end of the day it is always about people, and the people of Gigha have risen to the challenge. What we, as politicians, must do is deconstruct the barriers and help them to do what they do best—manage their communities.

13:15

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): I associate myself with Claudia Beamish’s kind words regarding Andrew Riddell from East Lothian. We all share that sentiment.

I thank David Stewart for bringing this important subject for debate today. All the speeches have highlighted the transformational impact that the community ownership of land can have on communities, in this case on the Isle of Gigha. I congratulate the islanders and particularly the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust on their achievements and wish them every future success in their efforts to deliver a sustainable economic future for the island. Let it be an inspiration to all of us.

Gigha provides an excellent example of a community that recognises and grasps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Through determination and vision, it has succeeded in transforming its community. Gigha has developed a vibrant and enterprising community whose confidence in its future is increasing and, crucially, whose people are in control of their destiny. As we have heard, Gigha has an increasing population and “virtually full employment”, as Stewart Stevenson has just mentioned. It also has better housing and living conditions and a full community life in which the community and the people in it are brought together. I could go on.

However, Gigha is not alone. Other communities throughout Scotland have recognised the importance of community ownership for their future development and success, and they have taken steps towards community ownership of land and land assets. Community Land Scotland’s members, many of whom are in the Highlands and Islands, now have—as David Stewart said—some

500,000 acres of land in their ownership. That is 2.6 per cent of all the land in Scotland. Nevertheless, Stewart Stevenson is right to say that the Government would like to see more communities follow that example, and we have provided financial support for that process. To pick up on a point that was well made by John Mason, we want the process to extend to urban areas as well.

Let us remember that community ownership is not only for the Highlands and Islands, where the movement started. There is also a great deal of activity in lowland Scotland, and more than half of all the applications to register a community interest in land under the community right to buy are in the lowlands. They are scattered throughout the area, with some counties such as Perth, Renfrew, East Lothian and Roxburgh each having three or more registered interests. However, some counties—for example, Selkirk, Lanark and Kincardine—have none, and I therefore urge communities in lowland Scotland to consider seriously whether a community buyout would help to transform them, too. There are plenty of examples of communities from which to draw experience and inspiration, but there should be more.

Learning by example is important and was important for Gigha in the early stages of its buyout. As Claudia Beamish stated and other members have repeated, had a couple of residents not visited Eigg, where they were able to see the results of a buyout, Gigha's future might have been quite different. As the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust notes on its website, "they came back inspired". Ensuring that communities across Scotland share that inspiration is, therefore, important.

Community buyouts do not just happen; they take vision, dedicated individuals and teamwork, resilience, community support and resourcefulness. Communities also require support. A wide range of assistance is available to help communities through the process, and Gigha has acknowledged the important role that was played by the public sector, through Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Argyll and Bute Council, in funding the buyout as well as in providing assistance in developing its plans.

David Stewart asked about housing. The correspondence between my colleague Margaret Burgess, the new housing minister, and Mike Russell, the constituency member, indicates total funding from the Scottish Government and Argyll and Bute Council of about £2 million for refurbishing 29 houses. I am also aware of a current application for funding for new build on Gigha.

Support for communities continues to be an important theme that runs through community

buyouts. There are significant resources to help communities through the process, whether from the Scottish Government, Highlands and Islands Enterprise or local authorities.

Claudia Beamish: Does the minister agree that HIE's social remit might be developed in South Scotland, for which he is a member, to give support throughout Scotland?

Paul Wheelhouse: I agree that that could be considered. The business gateway and rural direct also work outside the Highlands and Islands. The land reform review group could, of course, consider support for land reform infrastructure from the enterprise networks, local authorities and others during its consideration of how further land reform can be promoted and secured, but that is for the group to decide. However, I share Claudia Beamish's sentiment.

Let us not forget that we have a new Scottish land fund, which is jointly delivered by the Big Lottery Fund Scotland and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. In that respect, the funding landscape has changed since 2006, when the original land fund ended. The new land fund will deliver £6 million to rural communities throughout Scotland, not just in the Highlands and Islands. I anticipate that the first awards from the fund will be made in November.

David Stewart: To be technical about it, the land fund was mainstreamed into the HIE budget and the Scottish Enterprise budget. It did not disappear.

Paul Wheelhouse: I take David Stewart's point.

Once the first funding announcements are made, I will be particularly interested to hear about the communities involved and will watch how they develop their plans.

Much has already been achieved in the two decades since the crofters of the North Lochinver estate took their land into community ownership. Community land ownership has undergone a radical transformation in that time. Even when the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill was introduced in the Scottish Parliament in 2001, the policy memorandum stated:

"Community ownership is still comparatively rare, though there have been several developments in the past 5 years."

However, much can still be done, and community land ownership has much potential to contribute to the present and future success of Scotland. There is an increasing body of evidence, including work by Sarah Skerratt and others, that shows that community land ownership has an important role to play in the long-term stewardship of, investment in and growth of Scotland's communities. In addition, the opportunity could be extended to urban communities through the

proposed community empowerment and renewal bill. We need to take forward the debate on land reform for the coming generations.

I appreciate that my time is running short, but I want to highlight the fact that I met the land reform review group and the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment this week to discuss the group's work plan.

If we are to make full use of the potential of land reform—including community buyouts of land—it is important that we be radical, and I reassure members that the review is, rightly, intended to be radical. I look forward to hearing the review group's evidence.

I urge anyone who has an interest in land reform to submit evidence to the review and contribute to the debate on land reform. The review group has announced its remit and is publishing details of its work plan. I also hope that, for the benefit of the Parliament, it will shortly publish details of the advisers that it has appointed.

I commend David Stewart's motion and thank him for bringing the issues to the Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes David Stewart's debate on the Isle of Gigha—10 years of pioneering land reform. Before I suspend the meeting, I remind members that we will reconvene at 2.15 pm.

13:23

Meeting suspended.

14:15

On resuming—

West Coast Main Line

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is a statement by Keith Brown on the west coast main line. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement; there should therefore be no interventions or interruptions.

The Minister for Transport and Veteran Affairs (Keith Brown): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a statement on yesterday's decision by the Department for Transport to cancel the award of the intercity west coast franchise. I wanted to provide as much clarity as is possible in the circumstances on the impact on passengers and on the refranchising of rail services in Scotland. My immediate concern is that passengers are not adversely affected by the Department for Transport's decision.

The department's handling of the procurement process has been incompetent and shambolic. Most important, it has caused a great deal of confusion and speculation about arrangements for west coast services after the franchise handover date of 9 December.

Neither the Scottish ministers nor officials were made aware of yesterday's decision in advance of the announcement. I have yet to see the detail of the DFT's contingency plan and it is still not clear who will be operating train services in December. However, after finally managing to speak to the United Kingdom rail minister, I have his assurance that services will run to timetable, using the same trains and staff, and that tickets and bookings will be valid. DFT ministers said yesterday that our Administrations have a common interest in ensuring that there is no break in the service for passengers after 9 December.

In light of the mishandling of the franchise, I can understand that many people might be reluctant to give too much weight to DFT assurances. Although our powers in regard to rail remain limited, I and my officials will monitor the assurances carefully and offer all necessary assistance to ensure that passengers are not disadvantaged. I hope that that offers some reassurance for passengers, especially as we will be approaching the festive and holiday period at that time.

Let us be clear. What has happened represents a huge failure in public procurement. I want to be clear about the anger and frustration that I feel on behalf of passengers who rely on the west coast main line. The Secretary of State for Transport conceded that there were "completely unacceptable mistakes" in evaluating bids for the west coast franchise. The mistakes were so serious that he has been forced to cancel the

current franchising competition. I understand that the flaws were discovered after detailed examination by Department for Transport officials and evidence gathering in preparation for legal proceedings that Virgin Trains brought after the decision to award the franchise to FirstGroup.

The Department for Transport has spoken to the four bidding companies, whose bid costs will be reimbursed. That scandalous waste of public money could have been avoided if the franchise had been awarded properly. A fresh competition will be started as soon as the lessons of the episode are learned.

The secretary of state has announced a review of the handling of the process, which will report at the end of the month, and a review of the DFT's wider franchising programme, which will be led by Richard Brown, chair of Eurostar, and will report by the end of the year. DFT's three live franchise competitions have been suspended.

The decision to cancel the award of the franchise has, of course, direct consequences for Scotland, for rail passengers and for the rail industry. The UK Government offered no discussion or advance notice of a decision that directly affects people who travel to and from Scotland on services that are crucial to the economies of our major cities.

I have been asked a number of times whether the DFT's actions have implications for our rail franchise procurement. Let me be clear. Yesterday's announcement is focused solely on failings and incompetence in the Department for Transport, not in Transport Scotland.

We are keen to offer our support for the wider review of franchising. The Deputy First Minister will seek to meet the Secretary of State for Transport as soon as possible, and the First Minister has already spoken to the secretary of state. The reviews and the recommendations that are made will provide lessons for us as well as for the DFT on how risk can be better assessed and on bidding and evaluation processes.

I reassure the Parliament that although lessons will be learned, our franchise procurement process is led by an expert team in Transport Scotland, which is free to draw on external expertise as and when required. That can only be right given the scale of taxpayers' money involved and the importance of passenger rail services to Scotland's economy and its communities. The franchise is the largest single Government procurement exercise that we conduct. No corners are being cut in that process; no false economies are being made.

On our current timetable, we are allowing at least 20 months to conduct the formal competition and, when the consultation that was launched last

November is included, our process will last more than three years in total. In comparison, the DFT originally conducted a consultation in January 2011 in order to let a contract in April 2012, which is less than half the time that we have allowed for our process. It then delayed the process, but it still allowed only seven months from formal invitation to tender to contract award.

We are still awaiting the consultation on the trans-Pennine franchise, including on services to Scotland, despite the fact that that is due to hand over at the same time as the ScotRail franchise, the consultation for which took place last year. That is more than a year behind our timescale. Only last January I wrote to Theresa Villiers, who is no longer at the department, expressing concern over the timescale for the east coast main line franchise, which is also a vital service for Scotland.

As I set out in June, I will announce more details on the specification of our franchises around the turn of the year. Our more realistic timeline allows us to factor in any lessons that are learned as a consequence of the DFT debacle and the recommendations that are made by the independent review commissioned by the DFT.

I am confident of the competence and professionalism of Transport Scotland staff. This Government has an excellent track record on procurement, and recent examples of that are the M74 and the Airdrie to Bathgate rail line. We will, of course, draw on yesterday's events and the forthcoming reviews to maintain our strong record but, without pre-empting the review, I do not think that it is credible to lay all the blame on civil servants. The new Westminster franchising policy has been changed to a preference for 15-year contracts with no break or revenue review clauses. That policy ignores the difficulty of accurately forecasting revenue over 15 years.

When I announced the details of the next ScotRail contract, I made it clear that the 10-year contract would have an option for a break after five years. That will address one of the difficulties that the DFT is experiencing. We will ensure that the sleeper franchise contains appropriate provisions to address the forecast risk and that the Scottish Government shares in the return on its investment.

I urge the Secretary of State for Transport to take the opportunity of the review to address those wider questions, as it would be a missed opportunity to narrow down the reviews simply to issues of technical process. Rather than another patch and mend, a different model is required.

The current legislation—primarily the Railways Act 1993—envisaged a railway that was specified and funded in the public interest, but which was provided by the private sector. The result is a

fragmented and inefficient model. We are doing all that we can in our powers to make that model work as best it can. We are committed to a deep alliance between the operator and Network Rail for the next franchise, and we are proceeding with the franchise process in a timely and competent manner. However, in 2012, the current model is not fit for purpose, and I have repeatedly raised that concern with the UK Government.

Our powers to give Scotland the rail services that it needs are limited by UK legislation. Giving this Parliament competence to have full legislative control for rail would be the simplest and most effective way to ensure that Scottish ministers have the flexibility to consider the full range of options to deliver rail services in Scotland, including public sector models. The UK Government's decision is further evidence of why Scotland needs the powers of an independent Parliament so that it can take full responsibility for its own rail services.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I thank the minister for an early copy of his statement. This is a fiasco of jaw-dropping proportions and begs the question how much David Cameron knew before he reshuffled most of his transport ministers out of their brief.

The west coast main line is a vital artery that transports passengers into Scotland, but enables people who live in places such as Lockerbie in my constituency to access work and leisure opportunities in Glasgow, too. I hope that the minister will represent all passengers, including those who travel within Scotland, in his discussions with the UK Government.

The minister said that he wrote to Theresa Villiers last January about the east coast main line service. Given the concerns about the franchising of the west coast main line and its importance to Scotland, when did he first try to contact UK ministers about that? Did he just wait for UK ministers to get in touch with him?

Will the minister join UK Labour in supporting a Government takeover of the west coast main line, at least while the contract is being retendered? Does he agree that the debacle strengthens the case for our public rail service to be run on a not-for-profit basis?

Keith Brown: The points that Elaine Murray makes about political ramifications at Westminster are important, but what concern me are the interests of passengers in Scotland, which she also mentioned, and the implications for the ScotRail franchise.

Elaine Murray asked what representations we have made. I mentioned the letter to Theresa Villiers. We also wrote to Justine Greening, in May 2012. We asked for additional rail powers, not

least because, as we have said previously, the franchising process is extremely expensive and the level of risk involved means that we cannot get the best return for rail passengers. We have made those points.

We were told that we had no say in and no ability to influence the process for the west coast main line, although we were asked for our comments. The comments that we made were based on improving services to Scotland. Within the limited powers that we have, we have done everything that we are allowed to do to influence the process. If we had been more involved in it, we could have offered the benefit of the experience that people at Transport Scotland have from dealing with the ScotRail franchise, which might have helped to avoid the present situation.

I hope that future Westminster Governments that have any control over Scotland—if there are any such Governments—will listen to what we in Scotland say. The fact that the UK Government did not listen to what we said is exemplified by the fact that the first that all of us heard of its decision was on the airwaves yesterday. It cannot be right that the memorandums of understanding that we have with the UK Government—and the so-called respect agenda that we were told that David Cameron would follow—were thrown out of the window at the first chance. We must be kept informed, not because we are important people, but because the people whom we represent have a right to proper services.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement and congratulate him on the way in which he has managed to spend much of the past 36 hours stirring up unjustified concerns about the continuity of the west coast rail service.

I invite the minister to restate what he said in his statement—that he has now received full assurances that there will be full continuity of service through and beyond the present hiatus. Further, does not the minister feel a bit guilty about the way in which he has criticised the UK Government for not informing him, in his view, quickly enough about the problems? I contrast that position with the minister's recent behaviour in managing—quite deliberately—to forget to tell Parliament about the changes to the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement programme. Instead, he made a press announcement four days after the start of the recess. There is an issue about pots and kettles here.

I turn to the serious process of tendering for such contracts. Is it not a little ironic that the minister should be so critical of the west coast main line process when, only two weeks ago, he announced that there would be a three-year interim contract to deal with the delay in the

awarding of new contracts for the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services? Such foot-dragging and political manipulation leave the minister in a very difficult place, which must, at least, be spoiling his view from the moral high ground.

Keith Brown: The obvious thing to say is: good try, but it is not going to work. I see that we have an uncommonly—almost uniquely—good turnout of Tory back benchers. I wonder why that can be.

Alex Johnstone says that the concerns about the process are unjustified when it is quite clear that people across the country are extremely concerned about it, not least because £40 million of taxpayers' money has been thrown down the drain—and that is just the start of it. The suspension of the other processes may give rise to substantial claims against the taxpayer, not the UK Government. There has been a massive squandering of public resources. When there is the slightest hint of what Alex Johnstone believes to have been misuse of resources in this place, he will shout from the rooftops, but he has nothing to say about what the UK Government has just done. People will be appalled by the lack of concern that the Scottish Conservatives have shown for people here.

I do not know how Alex Johnstone has managed to drag ferries into the proceedings. What he calls the interim contract, we call the new contract. Can he be certain that the UK Government will not go to the European Commission and ask for another contract for Virgin Rail on this service? If that happens, will he criticise the UK Government?

It would have been extremely important for the Scottish Conservatives to have said, "This is wrong. Whatever else is going on here, it is wrong that the Scottish Government was not told. It is wrong that the people of Scotland did not have that level of involvement." It is a real missed opportunity on the part of the Scottish Conservatives that they have not done that.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I share the minister's anger at this shambles and waste of public money. Is the minister concerned that the UK Government's incompetence in its handling of the tender could discourage much-needed investment in infrastructure? How will the Scottish Government ensure that that does not affect Scotland?

Keith Brown: That is an important point, given that the system we have in relation to rail franchising relies on interest from the market. If we treat the market with the contempt that has been shown by the UK Government, and if we do not put in the resources to run the procurement exercise properly, the market will of course take a look at that. The real worry now is what we do if

we are to continue to have, under the current Government, a market-led, franchise-based system for procuring these services. Who would want to get into a contract with a Conservative-Lib Dem coalition when it runs things so shoddily? It is not just me saying that; anyone who was watching the television coverage last night would have heard all sorts of industry experts say it.

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): Virgin had promised investment in new services and station upgrades at Motherwell in my constituency. Naturally, I am keen to ensure that that takes place whatever the outcome of the current debacle. Will the minister ensure that support for that development is prominent in any representations that he makes?

Keith Brown: The key issue in that regard is that the process by which we were to have the stations investment fund, which was the new franchise, is seen to be sound. If the review that has been commissioned by the UK Government comes back in a couple of months' time—when we will have taken the leap into the franchising process here in Scotland—and suggests fundamental changes to the franchising process, that is where the uncertainty lies. That is crucial.

Notwithstanding that, it is my intention that we will run a proper, sound process that has the time and the resources that are necessary to make it go through without risking challenges to it. If that happens, and we have that level of certainty, the stations investment fund—to which I think that John Pentland was referring—should be secure.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): Following on from John Pentland's question, Virgin had also suggested that if it had secured the franchise, it would have run a service to London that would have called at Cumbernauld station in my constituency. That would have been greatly welcomed by my constituents. Whoever ends up securing the franchise, will the Scottish Government work with them on whether such a service can be operated?

Keith Brown: Yes, we will. It is in our interests and the interests of rail passengers to do so. As I have said before, during the process we made a number of representations to the DfT about improved services in Scotland. We do not even know whether those representations were listened to, because we do not get that kind of response under the current process. However, it is my intention to work with whoever operates the service, and indeed with the UK Government, because there is a great deal that it could learn from us. Unfortunately, we are likely to get more co-operation from the UK Government than we are from the Scottish Conservatives.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I thank the minister for sight of the statement. The minister spoke repeatedly about the regrettable waste of taxpayers' money resulting from this episode. He is absolutely right. However, I remind him that last year it was revealed that his officials wasted millions of pounds over a tendering process for the relatively small Borders rail project. With that in mind, what procedures has he ensured are in place to guarantee a smooth and cost-effective bidding process for the vitally important ScotRail franchise in 2014?

Keith Brown: Having heard from Tweedledum, we now hear from Tweedledee. This is a real chance for the coalition parties in this Parliament to say, as Patrick McLoughlin has said, "There has been a major mistake here. We are sorry." Instead, ferry contracts and everything else are being dragged in as they try to distract people from what has happened.

We will work to ensure that the ScotRail franchise proceeds in the way that it should and that there is no lack of certainty for the bidders, because they need that level of certainty that the process that they are entering into has some integrity to it. However, it is not all in our hands. First, we have to run a franchise operation despite the fact that we have major misgivings about that process. Also, the review by the UK Government, which I have mentioned, could fundamentally affect that. If Jim Hume is able to put any pressure on the UK Government and his colleagues in that Government who are responsible for this situation, that would be helpful in ensuring that we get the right services for Scotland.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Has the minister been in touch with FirstGroup, given that it is a major transport company headquartered in Aberdeen that employs thousands of people in Scotland and the rest of the UK and has taken a severe blow on the stock exchange as a result of UK Government incompetence?

Keith Brown: Of course, the Scottish Government, not least because we have not been part of the process, cannot talk about preferred bidders. Also, because we are about to have a new process for that contract, we cannot talk about the particular improvements that might be possible as a result of that. However, yes, I spoke both to Virgin and to FirstGroup not just immediately after the award of the contract, because there are implications for both, but because we had a good working relationship with Virgin previously and we have a working relationship with FirstGroup.

As the member suggests, it is an absolute scandal that because of this issue a prominent Scottish company lost a fifth of its stock market

value in a few hours yesterday. It is right that we continue to work with FirstGroup, not least because it currently runs services here in Scotland.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): The minister said in his statement that we require a different model going forward. Can he give us any indication whether it is likely that in the interim period a non-profit Government-controlled company will run the railway? Will he be seeking powers for Scotland so that we could run railways with a non-profit method in future?

Keith Brown: Richard Baker learned from my lips yesterday that we can accept non-profit bids under the current process, although he had denied that in an interview beforehand. I can confirm to John Mason that it is possible for non-profit organisations to come forward. They have to be able to demonstrate a level of expertise and experience of running rail services and there are people in Scotland who can do that. I cannot go out and invite them to come forward, but they have the ability to do that.

As to what the UK Government will do, I really do not know as we do not have any more information. As things stand, I have received no communication about the reviews other than a letter from the UK minister. I tried to get hold of him all yesterday morning and when he eventually phoned back—I was told that he was phoning in the next three minutes and then in the next five minutes—he said, "I want to talk to you because"; I thought that that was bizarre, given that I had been trying to talk to him. I got no more clarity on the process of the reviews other than the fact that they will be decided fairly soon, so we still do not know what the scope of those reviews will be.

To return to John Mason's point, of course we made representations about the nature of franchising and the ability to open that up. We do not have the power to do that, but the UK Government does—although there are still European criteria requiring the separation of track and train, which is another constraint that we have to observe. However, not-for-profit organisations are perfectly free just now to bid for the ScotRail franchise.

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): In the space of a week, the Government has gone from defending the process to suspending officials over a blunder that has cost £40 million. Does the Scottish Government agree that the only way to rebuild confidence in the Department for Transport and its tendering process is for there now to be complete and total transparency? Should the UK Government disclose all the relevant documentation, will the transport minister here in Scotland do likewise?

Keith Brown: We do not have any documentation relating to this particular bid because we have not been involved in it, but I think that the member's general point about the need for transparency on how the UK Government has ended up in this situation is a good one. Given that the first of the two reviews that have been called for will look at this particular process, we will wait and see what information is put in the public domain.

The member may be aware, as I am, that apparently two of the main problems were the fact that passenger numbers were not properly calculated and, incredibly, that inflation was not factored into the figures. Those seem to me to be basic requirements of a tendering process—especially if as many people as we are told were involved were involved, including not just civil servants but consultants, as well as a great deal of scrutiny by a great number of ministers. I think that it is right that we see as much transparency as possible, not least because we are obliged to follow more or less the same process that they followed and we want to know what mistakes were made so that we can learn from them.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): It is interesting that more humility on the subject seems to have been shown by Patrick McLoughlin MP than by some of his Tory colleagues in this Parliament. Nevertheless, can the minister seek assurances from the United Kingdom Government that whatever inquiry is set up will be robust and independent, given that it will be led by Downing Street and rail industry insiders?

Keith Brown: That is a real concern. As I mentioned, the Deputy First Minister will be meeting the secretary of state and I imagine that one of the items on the agenda will be to ensure that the review processes that have been ordered are robust. We have to do that because there is a real job to rebuild the confidence of the industry, as well as that of the public, that these processes can be conducted properly. That is a very important point. As I said, the First Minister has already spoken to the secretary of state and the Deputy First Minister will have an early meeting with the secretary of state, at which I am sure that point will be raised.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement and I share his dismay at the complacency that is being shown by members on the Conservative and Liberal Democrat benches over this issue. The fiasco of the franchise arrangement is indication—if we needed more indication—that rail lines on the east and west coast should remain in the public sector. With regard to the last part of his statement, will the minister confirm—[*Interruption*].

Members should take the matter seriously. Will the minister confirm whether the Scottish Government intends to remove the legal barrier to public sector train operating companies, if it acquires the powers for this Parliament to do so?

Keith Brown: Patrick Harvie is absolutely right on his first point. It is a very serious issue that involves a huge amount of money, and yet all we have from the Opposition parties are attempts at distraction.

Within an independent Scotland we would acquire powers that would open up a range of different opportunities to all the parties, who could put them to the electorate.

The Presiding Officer: The final question will come from Mark Griffin, who can take his time. The minister can take his time with the answer.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. Unfortunately for your timetable, my question is relatively brief. I will keep it so for the benefit of members.

My questions follow on from John Mason's question. What discussions has the minister had with his officials in Transport Scotland about the possibility of a not-for-profit model of delivery of rail services? Does he have any plans to promote that type of service in Scotland?

Keith Brown: There have been substantial discussions on that in the run-up to the process. It was also canvassed in the consultation process that we carried out well in advance of the procurement exercise that we are about to enter into. The option was canvassed and I spoke about it with officers and others. There were also discussions with the trade unions, who were very interested in that particular aspect.

We have made it clear that legislation allows us to accept a bid from a not-for-profit body, although that body has to be able to demonstrate experience in running a rail services. Not many in Scotland can do that, but members can probably think of one or two. If a body can do that, there is nothing to prevent it from making a bid—there is no barrier. However, I cannot promote a particular bid. The Government cannot do that and it has to be seen to be impartial, but the possibility is there.

I will help out the Presiding Officer by making a final comment about the point at which we were told about this. I see in today's *Daily Mail*—a fine newspaper indeed—that a Downing Street insider spoke about why the announcement was made at one minute past midnight. They said:

"It was unusual"—

I think it was—

"but the Secretary of State decided to act as soon as he was made aware of the facts. It had to be done outside of

financial markets. Calls had to be made and key people alerted.”

I do not know who the key people were, other than perhaps Richard Branson and one or two others, but I think that the people of Scotland should have been among them. That ready contempt for the interests of the people of Scotland is one of the most disturbing aspects of this episode.

The Presiding Officer: John Scott, to the rescue.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): From the discussions so far, are there any immediate lessons to be learned for the Scottish refranchising?

Keith Brown: I know this only from reading the media, of course, but two of the obvious points—I have mentioned them already—are passenger numbers and the calculation of inflation. Those are two things that seem to have caused some trouble and which have made it into the public domain.

As the member can imagine, I have had a number of discussions with Transport Scotland officials and, as I mentioned earlier, with the minister of state. There are some things that industry insiders would say are of concern. The DFT is considering a vast number of franchises. It has changed the franchising process and there are question marks over whether sufficient resource went into managing that process in the DFT—that comes from industry insiders.

Another point concerns the length of time. We had our rail consultation last year, well in advance of the franchising process. We have given ourselves a further 20 months. We are very close to starting that process, although obviously we have to take stock of what has just happened. Of course, we will take on board for our franchise any lessons that can be learned from what has happened in this case.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the minister recall the fact that, in our TV interview yesterday, it was I who reminded him that it was completely within his powers to pursue a not-for-profit model for the railways in Scotland? He cannot promote any one bid for not-for-profit delivery, but he can promote the concept. I ask him actively to promote the concept of a not-for-profit model in Scotland, as I encouraged him to do only yesterday. He seems to have forgotten that.

Keith Brown: The camera does not lie and everyone can see what happened yesterday. Richard Baker was blissfully unaware of the fundamentals of rail franchising, which is quite worrying. I was happy to set him straight then and I am happy to say now that, of course, we welcome bids if they come forward from not-for-

profit organisations, but we cannot promote individual bids. He should also know that a fundamental of public procurement when the exercise is competitive is that we cannot favour one bid over another. We would welcome not-for-profit bids as we would any others.

Employability

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-04365, in the name of Angela Constance, on employability.

It may be helpful if I remind members that most of our debates are follow-on debates, so if a statement or debate finishes early, we get to the next item of business earlier.

14:46

The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance): I am very grateful for the opportunity to open the debate on employability policy.

Let me first provide some context. When workforce plus was launched six years ago, there was a focus on developing capacity in seven areas that faced the greatest employment challenges. Since then, I am pleased to say that local employability partnerships have voluntarily grown up in all 32 local authorities. Those partnerships, which are supported and often led by local authorities, include all the agencies with an interest in improving employability, ranging from Skills Development Scotland and the Department for Work and Pensions to health boards, colleges and, of course, the third sector. As such, they have been well placed to create more joined-up and effective services for people who are out of work.

At the same time, the Scottish Government has done some joining up of its own. For example, we created Skills Development Scotland out of four separate agencies to act as our national skills body. We have also improved the service for unemployed people by making clearer links between the work of Skills Development Scotland and that of the DWP through Jobcentre Plus. Last, but not least, our introduction of single outcome agreements has significantly strengthened the partnership between national and local government in Scotland.

I believe that those changes put us in a strong position to achieve the jobs and sustainable growth for which we aim. A lot has changed since the introduction of the original employability policy in 2006. Austerity cuts and the global economic downturn, combined with sweeping welfare reforms at United Kingdom level, have greatly changed the nature and scale of the challenge that we all face. Those factors emphasise the need for a fresh approach to employability—one in which the continuing challenge of helping people into work is matched by an equal determination to stimulate growth and hence the availability of jobs.

That is exactly the focus of “Working for Growth: A Refresh of the Employability Framework for Scotland”. The document was launched only two weeks ago by my colleague John Swinney, when he addressed the welfare to work convention in Glasgow. As the title suggests, “Working for Growth” has a clear focus on jobs within the context of economic recovery. First and foremost, that means that we must simplify and enhance our offers to employers.

I understand the frustration that employers still often express about the difficulty of navigating our employment and skills system. I spoke to a range of employers at a business breakfast prior to the launch of the document, emphasising our desire to work closely with employers during these difficult times and beyond—in particular to harness the significant talents of our young people. That commitment is far reaching and is underpinned by our on-going development of skills investment plans for the key growth sectors in the economy.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): When the minister gave evidence to the Finance Committee in June, she mentioned an online one-stop stop that SDS was developing, which would be available in September and is an effort to allay some of the fears of employers. Can she update the chamber on that—either now or in her closing speech?

Angela Constance: Yes, absolutely. I was going to come to that point later on. Announcements about our skillsforce are imminent.

It is important that skills investment plans are developed in partnership with the public, private and third sectors. I am pleased that two plans—for energy and hospitality—have already been developed.

As I indicated to Mr Brown, SDS is also developing our skillsforce—a new service that will pull together a range of information related to employers’ workforce needs. Importantly, the service will feature details of national and local offers. To complement that, we will look to employability partnerships to develop and enhance their own collaborative offers to employers.

We have a clear strategic focus on jobs within the context of economic recovery. The next step is to ensure clear and effective leadership in support of those goals. As we highlight in “Working for Growth”, working through the strategic forum and the economy board will be key to embedding employability more deeply into our efforts to revive the economy. The work of the reconstituted Scottish employability forum will also be key—it meets for the first time this month, and it will be chaired jointly by the Scottish and UK

Governments and local government. The revised forum will exert much stronger political leadership than before and as such it will be well placed to set the national direction on employability in the coming years.

As those joint arrangements recognise, collaboration with the UK Government and its providers remains essential if we are to be effective in helping people into work. For example, the introduction of the work programme has been one of the biggest changes to the employment system in recent years and we will continue to monitor closely how that is being implemented in Scotland.

We also recognise that greater flexibility has been afforded to DWP districts recently and we see that as an opportunity for more effective integration of services at a local level. Of course, we are ultimately trying to help people—people who, even at the best of times, may struggle to find and sustain employment. For that reason, a large part of “Working for Growth” focuses on our desire to help as many people as possible to enjoy the benefits of work.

There is only time to highlight some of the things that we are doing, or will be doing, in conjunction with a range of partners. To begin with, as the Minister for Youth Employment, I naturally recognise the disproportionate impact that the downturn has had on our young people. Action for jobs, our youth employment strategy, sets out the range of short, medium and long-term actions that we are taking and will take to ensure a better future for all Scotland’s young people.

We recently announced £15 million for a new employer recruitment incentive for young people and we will use that to leverage in additional funding—members will also recall Alex Neil’s announcement to Parliament on the additional £25 million of European social fund money. That comes on top of the £30 million that we had set aside previously to tackle youth unemployment in the period up to 2015.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I welcome the statement that the minister gave about the creation of 10,000 jobs. I am looking for a little bit more detail about what that will involve. I appreciate that it will not come on stream until next April, but can the minister tell us today whether it will be a job subsidy scheme or will it take a different tack?

Angela Constance: In effect, what we have in mind is a wage subsidy scheme that will be targeted at the smallest employers. We will look to subsidise employment for, say, six months. However, that level of detail is not battened down yet. It is important that I continue my discussions with our partners in local government—because it

is important that the scheme is delivered at a local level—and the Federation of Small Businesses, which I met this morning.

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): That support will obviously help the employee and employer at the time, but will the employee then have an opportunity to move into, say, a modern apprenticeship, or will they be barred from doing that because they have had the support of a wage subsidy?

Angela Constance: There are many potential models. I am certainly familiar with pre-employment training that then links into a wage subsidy programme, whether the subsidy relates to employment or to a modern apprenticeship. One thing that we will have to discuss with our local partners is how to ensure that there is no duplication of resources or services but that there are opportunities to have a pipeline and a progression whereby we maximise opportunities for young people, first and foremost to get them into work or to secure them on a journey towards work.

We will also take forward actions to improve female employment, following the success of the recent women’s employment summit and our helpful debate on the subject earlier this week.

Disability continues to present a challenge, even though it is well documented that minor adjustments in the workplace can, for many people, make all the difference in the world. Figures suggest that the access to work facility is underused in Scotland, and I am keen that we work with the DWP to address that.

Kezia Dugdale: A recent freedom of information request that I made to Skills Development Scotland showed that just 0.02 per cent of modern apprenticeships are going to people with disabilities, and the figure is on a downward trend. I appreciate that it is a difficult task, but has the minister put some thought into how she might increase the opportunities for people with disabilities to access modern apprenticeship programmes?

Angela Constance: Absolutely. There is a range of equality issues that we need to take on board in discussion with our partners and stakeholders. This is work that I have already begun with stakeholders in terms of disability and race. It is not an easy nut to crack in the sense that, with some employers, we are trying to change cultures and attitudes within the workplace, but there is definitely more that we can do. Much will hinge on our raising employers’ awareness of the programmes that the Government offers and making them aware that it is in their interest to have a diverse workforce. There is a positive business case for supporting

diversity, whether in relation to young people, women or people with disabilities.

Mainstream employment is, of course, the ideal, and we will continue to promote the merits of the supported employment approach. However, we recognise that it may not be appropriate for all disabled people, so we recently commissioned a review of Scotland's supported businesses, to be completed by next spring. The review will focus particularly on how the sustainability of such businesses can be improved in a difficult economic climate.

Finally, I highlight the continued importance of skills in helping people from all backgrounds to access and sustain employment. Evidence suggests that the possession of skills and qualifications is increasingly important in achieving employment of any kind. For that reason, we are not just maintaining but increasing our investment in skills during the current session of Parliament.

Those are just some of the ways in which we aim, with the help of our delivery partners, to improve people's chances of gaining and sustaining employment.

Speaking of delivery partners, I confirm that local partnerships remain central to our goal of improving performance. That is why we launched "Working for Growth" in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. For example, we are well aware of the potential positive impact of community benefit causes. Increasingly, they are being used to good effect in public sector contracts to secure training and employment outcomes for local residents. In "Working for Growth", we encourage local partnerships to share and learn from the examples of good practice that are available.

For our part, the Scottish Government will introduce a procurement reform bill, as announced in the legislative programme. Among other things, the bill will set an expectation that community benefit clauses be considered for all major contracts in the Scottish public sector. That is a major step forward.

"Working for Growth" sets out key ways in which we will target our national resources better and includes details of a new approach to employability funding that is better tailored to the needs of people and local labour markets. The new employability fund will from next year bring together our existing employability investments through Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council in a new partnership-led commissioning process. In developing the fund, we will learn from this year's pilot scheme, through which SDS has commissioned job-focused learning from colleges.

There is much work to do, but we are well placed to achieve our goals. Alongside our youth employment strategy, "Working for Growth" is a vehicle through which we can maintain our focus on jobs and growth for Scotland in the coming months and years. I commend the framework to members and look forward to a constructive debate on how we can help more of Scotland's people into work.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that supporting those who are unemployed into work is key to economic recovery and reducing poverty in Scotland; welcomes the publication of *Working for Growth: A Refresh of the Employability Framework for Scotland*, which recognises the importance of linking employability support with actions to support economic growth in Scotland and the value of further developing a more integrated employment and skills offer to both the unemployed and employers; also welcomes the agreement for shared political governance of the Scottish Employability Forum at UK, Scottish and local authority level and the development of an employability fund, which will move away from a limited range of training programmes and enable regional employability partners to work together to identify and respond effectively to gaps in existing pre-employment support; agrees that measures to support young people into work should remain a priority for the Scottish Government, and further welcomes the announcement of an additional £15 million in funding to develop further employment and skills interventions for young people in the draft budget statement of 20 September 2012 in addition to the £30 million already allocated for 2011 to 2014.

15:00

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I thank the minister for bringing forward the debate. As is often the case, I cannot say that I disagree with much that is in the Government's motion. Improving people's employability is not just helpful to individuals but—potentially at least—of wider benefit to business, industry and our productivity as a country. We will therefore support the motion, the Labour amendment and the request in the Conservative amendment.

Unfortunately, as is also often the case, our greatest concern is about what is missing from the motion. The real problem that faces our country and our workforce is not employability but employment—or rather, the lack of it. We should support measures to improve employability, but much of that effort will be wasted if we do not do more to help to create jobs.

A line in the motion talks about

"linking employability support with actions to support economic growth in Scotland",

but where are those actions? We have just had one of the most half-hearted budgets that I can recall in my time in the Parliament. It contains little by way of economic stimulus and it began to fall apart within hours of Mr Swinney's statement.

I will return to the central issue of unemployment and our wider economy later, but I will first discuss something else that is missing. A gap exists between what the motion says about employability and the actions that the Scottish Government has taken, which fail to match the rhetoric.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I hope that Mr Macintosh will set out in a properly costed fashion what the Labour Party would do that was different, as an alternative to the budget proposals that he has just criticised.

Ken Macintosh: As the cabinet secretary knows, all amendments to the budget must be framed so that they are properly costed. I wish that the Government had taken the same approach in producing its budget, instead of having a budget that fell apart under examination by the Scottish Parliament information centre within a couple of hours of being placed in the library.

How does cutting £38 million from the further education budget improve employability? How does reducing the number of students at colleges by 80,000—that is 80,000 fewer people accessing a college education under the Scottish National Party Administration—help unemployed Scots back into the workforce?

Angela Constance: As Mr Macintosh well knows, the Government is committed to maintaining and is maintaining college student numbers at the full-time equivalent of 116,000. That is the most robust figure that is available.

Ken Macintosh: That is the full-time equivalent figure, but the minister did not respond to the point that, under the SNP, 80,000 fewer people are going to college now than went two years ago. That means that 80,000 people have been denied a place at college—80,000 people have been denied the help that they need, and businesses have been denied the trained employees whom they need. Worse than that, 1,000 staff have been laid off at colleges.

Members should not take my word for it. They should look at evidence that the Educational Institute of Scotland has provided and at the evidence to the Education and Culture Committee this week from Mary Goodman of the Federation of Small Businesses, who called for more—not less—flexible provision from Scotland's colleges.

As always with the cuts agenda, the most vulnerable are hurt. Across Scotland, parents of children with special needs feel frustrated and anxious as the few development courses that are available are being restricted, closed or removed altogether. The young adults who are affected are among the furthest from the job market. They want to make an economic contribution and they are desperate to improve their employability and to

find work. They want to be valued for what they are capable of and not to be excluded because of the extent of their disability.

College cuts are an immediate and pressing concern, but they have the potential to cause even greater damage to our society and economy in the longer term. In recent years, one of the most important policy developments—which I thought at one point was generally a cross-party development—has been the drive to reduce the gulf between vocational and academic educational options. People should have a genuine choice about how to make the most of their abilities and how to make themselves more employable, rather than simply being forced down the university route.

For that to mean anything, there should be a move to narrow the funding gap between the two sectors. Instead, we are witnessing the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning's naked elitism. There is a brazen promotion of universities over further education, and colleges are being forced to merge, lay off staff and close their doors to tens of thousands of Scottish students. That is all euphemistically called positive reform in order to disguise the truth of what is happening.

Angela Constance: Does Mr Macintosh accept—as I do—that college education is not just for working-class young people, but for everybody? I certainly resent the implication that college education is second best when we are striving for parity of esteem through a reform programme that meets young people's needs in terms of outcomes.

Ken Macintosh: I am not sure that the minister is aware of what is happening in education on her watch. The funding for colleges is being slashed, and there is no parity of esteem—the drive towards it has been lost.

Colleges certainly are for everyone, as they are about lifelong learning. However, under the current Scottish National Party Administration, they seem to have become solely the preserve of 16 to 19-year-olds, and we are reversing all that we have achieved in the past few years. That is not the way to create a knowledge economy, to promote skills and manufacturing or to improve employability.

I ask the minister why there is such a lack of partnership between the Scottish Government and the Department for Work and Pensions on the work programme. I accept her assurance in the motion that she is keen to promote employability partners. However, as I understand it, anyone who starts on the work programme is automatically ineligible for Scottish Government assistance or any other support such as skills or literacy training.

John Swinney: Will the member give way?

Ken Macintosh: The cabinet secretary is keen to intervene—perhaps he can answer that.

John Swinney: I encourage Mr Macintosh to think carefully about the arguments for ensuring, at a time of enormous constraint in the public finances, that one Government does not duplicate the activities of another Government.

I invite Labour members to speak to United Kingdom Government ministers, whom they would find perfectly prepared to explain that we address our programmes to certain groups of the population for which we have responsibility while the UK Government takes forward its programmes for the population groups for which it has responsibility, thereby avoiding duplication. That is a sensible use of public money.

Ken Macintosh: There is a difference between avoiding duplication and partnership. The key point in that regard is that, if a young person in Scotland who is getting ESF funding for skills and training has to go on a work programme, they automatically stop the training and lose the skills, and are forced on to the programme. That is not a partnership approach.

Angela Constance: Will the member give way?

Ken Macintosh: Before I take an intervention, I suggest to the minister that the Scottish Government has now entirely and effectively pulled out of employability for all the long-term unemployed. She has left the future of the long-term unemployed solely up to the UK Government.

I will take an intervention now.

John Swinney: The work programme is designed by the United Kingdom Government to tackle the issues of long-term unemployment for people who have been out of the labour market for more than nine months. I am sure that the Auditor General for Scotland would have questions for me about why we were putting in place a programme that duplicated one that was available from the United Kingdom Government under its competence. That is a sensible and efficient use of public money—that is why we can balance a budget. That lot have not got a clue how to do it.

Ken Macintosh: Why is it that when the cabinet secretary intervenes yet again, it sounds not like a reason but like an excuse? Young people in Scotland want a joined-up approach from all Government agencies but they do not have that. What they have is the Scottish Government abdicating responsibility and saying, “We will not help young people in this situation”, although long-term youth unemployment is a serious problem that is facing our economy.

Scotland’s unemployment rate is higher than that for the rest of the UK and long-term youth unemployment is now four times greater than it

was just a year ago. There can be nobody in this chamber who has not heard about the long-term scarring effect of a prolonged period of unemployment on a young person’s life, yet the Scottish Government is pulling out of that programme entirely.

We agree that improving the employability of young unemployed adults can help and that there is a need to tackle some of the barriers to unemployment such as transport and the provision of childcare, yet there is a gap between what the Scottish Government says about childcare and what it is doing, which is very little.

Angela Constance: *rose.*

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but the member has no time for more interventions.

Ken Macintosh: Surely, the most important priority for the Government is to boost the economy and reduce unemployment, but that is not happening.

We are yet to hear any detail about the national employment programme, although there is a lot of eagerness to find out what is in it. It matters a lot whether it is a flagship Government programme or whether it has been pulled together hurriedly at the last minute for the budget. It sounds more like the latter than the former. However, it is important that we have a flagship employment programme—a wage subsidy programme—to get young people back into work. Employability helps, but employment is the biggest answer of all.

I move amendment S4M-04365.3 in Kezia Dugdale’s name, to insert at end:

“; supports the need for ambitious employment and employability programmes at both local and national level; is concerned, however, that the Scottish Government’s rhetoric is not matched by the decision to cut £38.2 million from college budgets, nor the £86 million cut to the housing budget in 2011, which coincided with the loss of 12,000 construction jobs; notes that Scotland’s unemployment rate is now higher than that of the UK as a whole, with one in five young people out of work, and that long-term youth unemployment is almost four times greater than a year ago; is concerned that the Scottish Government’s modern apprenticeship programme is failing to produce the necessary skills base for the growth industries of the future, and calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that its final 2013-14 budget is amended to genuinely promote jobs, growth and fairness in order to ensure that actions on employability can translate into actual employment.”

15:11

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): This is an important debate. It is timely that the Scottish Government has put the matter before the Parliament, given the state of the economy not just now but as it is predicted to be for the rest of this year, the next year and possibly beyond.

There is a high level of unemployment in Scotland, the UK, most countries in Europe and the United States, but we have a particularly high level of youth unemployment both here and in the rest of the UK. The figures are pretty stark. The unemployment rate is about 24 per cent for those aged 16 to 24, 7.5 per cent for those aged 25 to 34, and 5.4 per cent for those aged 35 to 49. The stark contrast between the age groups is poignant when we look at the size of the youth unemployment cohort.

Any Government, whether in Scotland, the UK or elsewhere, has a difficult balancing act to achieve in the actions that it takes. All of us want quality and quantity at the same time, but within the finite funds that are available in the budget given to the minister, there is a decision to be made about how much should be invested in quantity—getting as many people as possible out of the dole queue and back into work—while trying to focus on the people whom we have heard about, who are furthest away from the labour market and who have been out of work for months or years. At times such as these, when there is such a high level of youth unemployment, those who are furthest away from the labour market have a real problem and are swept away by the tide of other people moving into unemployment.

I accept the Scottish Government's good intention in appointing the Minister for Youth Employment. I acknowledge the budget and the figures that the minister mentioned in her opening remarks. I also acknowledge that many areas that affect unemployment and youth unemployment in particular are not under the control of the Scottish Government or, indeed, even the UK Government—we are affected by what goes on in Europe and the rest of the world. However, for the purpose of the debate it is worth focusing on where we have powers and the various schemes that have been put forward by the Scottish Government. I will go into a bit of detail on some of those initiatives and pose some questions, not putting criticism out there for the sake of it but looking at how things might be applied in 2013-14 and 2014-15 as opposed to what has happened in this year.

The first part of our amendment calls on the Government to think carefully about the initiatives that it puts forward and the criteria for deciding which initiatives to run with. There will be dozens of potentially good ideas, and if the Government had a budget of £1 billion to focus on the problem it might run with all of them.

If we total everything that Angela Constance mentioned, we are looking at a budget of about £70 million, including the European money. That is not a lot of money with which to try to fix an

enormous problem, which is why we must weigh up carefully what it is spent on.

When Angela Constance appeared before the Finance Committee, I asked her about the decision to give £9 million—which was, I think, about half of the year 1 budget—to six councils. That decision may turn out to have been a good one. Once the money is applied and the results come in, we may look at it with hindsight and decide that it was a great decision and that we should have done more of the same or that we should do more of it in following years.

The difficulty that I have is that the decision was taken to give the money to the councils before any agreement was reached on what would be done. Simply giving money, whether to councils or any other part of society, without working out what we are trying to achieve with that money is not wise policy or practice. I would like to know what else was considered.

Angela Constance: For the record, as I am sure I would have reported to the committee, I was participating in conversations with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. We already have a good grasp of the type and nature of programmes that work. We also have an imperative to get money quickly to the areas that are most acutely affected. I accept that there are always lessons to be learned but, given Mr Swinney's stewardship of public finances, the allocation was not made in a vacuum.

Gavin Brown: I will merely quote from the *Official Report*. It is an important point. When Angela Constance was at the committee with her colleague Hugh McAloon, the response that was given was:

"It was made clear at the time that we would work with them after the announcement on what they are going to do with the money."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 13 June 2012; c 1328.]

To be fair, the record speaks for itself on that.

I will not dwell on that one decision. The point that I am making is that, when we take decisions on how money will be allocated, because of the scarcity of the available money we must be robust about what it will achieve and not make an announcement just for the sake of it.

The second part of our amendment focuses on the evaluation of interventions that are made. Will the evaluation be robust, independent and carefully applied? We have heard various announcements, such as the £15 million that will be made available from April for small and medium-sized enterprises to take on staff. That is of course a welcome announcement, but it is critical that that project be put in place properly, so that there is no duplication with the other existing schemes.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I certainly support evaluation, but does Gavin Brown agree that there is a challenge with it? Earlier, he mentioned that those who are further away from the job market need help. The danger with evaluation is that we will emphasise too much those who get a higher national diploma, degree or other qualification. What about the people who are further away?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I can give you about another minute, Mr Brown.

Gavin Brown: I am grateful for that, Presiding Officer.

Nobody suggests that evaluation is easy, but my critique thus far of the various schemes that have been proposed is that the evaluations that we have seen have been incomplete. In some cases, there has been no evaluation at all. In many cases, the evaluations are carried out by those who fund the initial project and, of course, all basically say that the project was a great idea. Mr Mason sits on the Finance Committee as well, and he will know that the committee has found it hugely frustrating trying to work out what evaluations have taken place or will take place at the end of the various projects.

We must avoid duplication. With the SME scheme in particular, we must ensure that the money for the 10,000 jobs is not simply given for six months to businesses that were going to take on somebody anyway. That is not an easy problem to fix. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth is shaking his head. We agree that it is not easy but, if the money goes to businesses that were going to take on somebody anyway, the end result will be no difference. That is a really important challenge. I do not think for a second that it is easy to get right, but it is critical that we do so.

I move amendment S4M-04365.2, to insert at end:

“, and calls on the Scottish Government to explain in greater detail the reasoning for allocating employability funding in the manner that it has as well as the alternatives that were considered and to outline clearly what evaluation mechanisms are in place to assess the effectiveness of respective interventions.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now turn to the open debate. Speeches should be up to six minutes. I can give a little bit of time for interventions at this stage of the debate.

15:19

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): The Labour Party's position this week has been quite intriguing. Yesterday, it was tax, tax, tax; today, it is spend, spend, spend. Yesterday, Labour talked about taxing learning, health, the elderly and the

disabled; today, it is talking about spending commitments after spending commitments.

Let us consider Labour's amendment. It can only be assumed that Labour wants to commit further spending of £124 million for next year's budget. I will take that as read unless there is an intervention.

Ken Macintosh: Yesterday we heard a series of invented figures, and today started with further fantasy. Where does Bruce Crawford get the figure of £124 million from?

Bruce Crawford: If Ken Macintosh adds up the two figures in Labour's amendment, he will find that figure very easily. It is very easily found: it is a bit like the gap in Labour's budget. The gap in Labour's knowledge of its amendments is pretty obvious. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Bruce Crawford: Ken Macintosh talked about gaps. The single biggest gap in Labour's rhetoric is the fact that we never get a single concrete suggestion about where the money to finance its commitments will come from. The commitments in its amendment come on top of a plethora of other commitments, of course. I have a list of them with me, and if any Labour member wants to intervene I will say what they all are.

Let us deal with the facts about colleges. We have heard a lot of nonsense from Ken Macintosh. Between 2007 and 2014-15, we will have invested £5 billion in colleges. That is 45 per cent more in cash terms than was invested under the two previous Liberal-Labour coalitions in the Parliament. Since 2006-07, the Scottish National Party has increased baseline college student support by 25 per cent, from £67.3 million to £84.2 million.

Ken Macintosh: If there is so much money in our colleges, why is Mr Crawford suggesting that the £38.2 million cut that I have identified is correct? Is there a £38.2 million cut or is there not?

Bruce Crawford: Whatever is done and however the matter is dressed up, there is one irrefutable fact as far as college places are concerned. The bottom line is how we get value for money, and it is a fact that there will be 116,000 full-time-equivalent students, which is the same number as there is in this financial year.

Kezia Dugdale: Will the member take an intervention?

Bruce Crawford: Let me make a wee bit of progress first.

At least Gavin Brown approached his position in a more measured tone. It is depressing that, as is usual from Labour, there is not a single innovative

idea in its amendment about how to do things differently. The Parliament was brought about to be a hotbed for generating ideas, not a moanfest for negative people who lack positive ideas of their own. It would be a refreshing change to have innovative ideas emanating from Labour.

Last week or the week before at a Finance Committee meeting, we heard from a witness that—God forbid—the current downturn might last for around 20 years. Gavin Brown and perhaps other members who are in the chamber were at that meeting. If Kezia Dugdale, who lodged the Labour amendment, remains elected to the Parliament and we are still in the economic downturn over the predicted period, I hope that her party will contribute much more positively to debates. Otherwise, Labour's tone will mean that it is consigned to opposition for another 20 years.

Kezia Dugdale: Does the member recognise that we are representing the views of constituents who are currently finding it hard to get into college or find jobs in the construction sector? That is what we are here to do. Is the member seriously telling us that no one in his constituency is awaiting a college place?

Bruce Crawford: The college sector in my constituency has led the way in reorganisation in the past and is robust and strong. Just a couple of weeks ago, I attended the opening of a fantastic new £29 million college in my constituency of Stirling. The Scottish Government is making that investment in the Stirling area.

If I have got things right, Kezia Dugdale will be over 50 by the time her party becomes electable again in 20 years. I know that I will not be around in the Parliament to see that, but that will be the situation if Labour continues the way that it is going.

Joking aside, I want to get on to a more positive agenda and speak about what we can do about employability.

I very much welcome the debate and the additional £15 million of funding to which the minister's motion refers. I welcomed the announcement last week about the Government's third sector and social enterprise challenge fund to be spread across 24 organisations nationally. That means that more than 2,000 young people will be given a chance to improve their employability.

That fund forms part of the Scottish Government's guarantee, unique in these islands, that all 16 to 19-year-olds will be offered a place in training or education. I am pleased that the Government has funded that range of projects, all of which have the aim of helping Scotland's young people into jobs.

I was particularly pleased with the award of over £58,000 to Recyke-a-bike in my constituency. I congratulate Recyke-a-bike, which is an innovative social enterprise that does excellent work in reducing the number of bikes going to landfill while at the same time creating employment and training opportunities in the Stirling area. It is a success story that shows how innovative and out-of-the-box thinking can be used to create and maintain employment, and it is something that Labour can perhaps begin to learn from. I hope that Stirling's Recyke-a-bike will inspire others to establish innovative schemes in order to provide training and employment opportunities. Other innovative approaches can also make a significant and positive impact on employability.

Let me move on to the issue of apprenticeships, which is referred to in the motion. Frankly, Labour is all over the place on apprenticeships. In her cuts commission speech last week, Johann Lamont said that apprenticeships should be cut. She said that

"apprenticeships should be as highly regarded as university education ... if this means fewer, but better quality apprenticeships, we need to be honest about this."

That would be okay if it stood on its own, but Labour is all over the place in that regard. For example, despite the fact that the 2011 budget included provision for an additional 1,500 apprenticeships, which Labour had asked for, Labour voted against the budget. Now, during the deepest recession in years, when the SNP Government is delivering a record 26,427 modern apprenticeships, Labour is calling for cuts to the programme—it is simply incredible.

I commend the motion to members.

15:26

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): The timing of this debate is fortunate as the Finance Committee had local workshops just last week as part of our employability inquiry. One of the workshops took place in Dumfries, and I was therefore able to listen to the views of the public, private and third sectors in Dumfries and Galloway and, very importantly, the views of local people regarding their own experiences of the obstacles in getting into employment.

One participant, who I think was from the private sector, referred to what they called the employability industry. There is a suspicion that there may be too many people creating work for themselves and sitting on committees talking about employability rather than creating work for people who are unemployed. If we have a look at the Scottish Government's publication "Working for Growth: a Refresh of the Employability Framework for Scotland", we will find mention of

BASES—better alignment of Scotland's employability services—skills investment plans, the strategic forum, the economy board, the Scottish employability forum, the national delivery group, the third sector employability forum, local employability partnerships and so on. It makes the reader wonder how all those organisations interact with one another and whether they avoid duplication.

Last Friday in Dumfries we heard about the Dumfries and Galloway local employability partnership's action plan.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): The member talks about duplication. I would like her to explain which of those groups and their help to get folk into employment she would abolish. We also heard a proposal for duplication earlier from Mr Macintosh around the work programme. Does the member agree with his view?

Elaine Murray: I will ignore that intervention, because I have an argument to make and the member has made a spurious point.

The local experience that we heard about was that public sector partners had set themselves targets and launched an employer offer, tailoring services in recruitment, training and staff retention to organisations' needs. I was impressed when I heard that, but in the next session, which we held with the private sector, we heard that unfortunately the private sector did not seem to have been involved in the discussions. In fact, the businesses felt quite threatened by the employer offer initiative, which they felt was treading somewhat on their toes. I felt that the public sector organisations may be working better together, but our impression is that they are sometimes not working quite so well with the private and third sectors, which they need to be able to do.

An issue that was raised in all four sessions was the number of training schemes and funding streams, which causes confusion. People said that it can be difficult to keep track of all the announcements of pockets of funding, and that sometimes it is unclear whether what has been announced is new or a refresh of previously announced funding. I commend the intention in "Working for Growth" to develop a single employability fund, which I understand is intended to make more effective use of public sector resources. I give credit where it is due.

People who are unemployed, particularly those who are experiencing long-term employment or who are young and have never experienced employment, might require employability support to develop the skills that employers expect. However, the focus should not be only on the supply side. Friday's session in Dumfries with people who are experiencing unemployment

highlighted the barriers that are faced by people who seek to work in rural areas. A constituent of mine from Kelloholm said that he had succeeded in being offered a job in Annan, some 45 miles away. He could get there in 50 minutes by train, but it would cost him £12.30 per day, which meant that, given the loss of benefits, he would have been working for £8 a week. It is understandable that he did not take the job.

Another participant, who works in a hotel in Dumfries but lives in Dalbeattie, explained that when she works shifts she has to hang around until 11 o'clock at night to get her bus home, whatever time her shift ends. Other participants reported difficulties in accessing and travelling to work. Childcare is also a barrier, particularly if a job requires shift or weekend working. It appears that some employers are still asking women about their childcare arrangements, which I thought was illegal.

On the Labour amendment, of course we will support initiatives to improve employability. We recognise the importance to the local economy of getting people into employment, but we need to look at the issue in the round. I am particularly concerned about housing. During yesterday's debate, I tried to intervene on the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, but he took an intervention from Gavin Brown instead. We talk a lot about completions, and the statistics on completions of social rented homes look reasonably good. However, I have had a look at housing starts in the social rented sector, which fell from 6,997 in 2009-10 to 6,099 in 2010-11 and then to 2,948 in 2011-12. It worries me that houses are not coming through the pipeline. At the same time, there is a real-terms decrease of about 47 per cent in the housing supply budget, which I do not think is a coincidence.

The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has submitted evidence that it does not think that it will be able to meet targets. SNP members say that we are always asking for more money but, if the Government cannot give SFHA more money, will it discuss with SFHA the possibility of increasing the subsidy? There is not much point in having a pocket of money if housing associations can no longer access it because they cannot get the rest of the financing package as a result of banks putting up interest rates and concerns about welfare reform.

I ask ministers to discuss the issue, because housing is so important. The issue is not just the construction industry's importance to the economy but the fact that it is the people who live in poor housing and deprived areas who find it most difficult to secure employment. If we help to solve the housing crisis, we will help to solve

employability issues, too—that is an example of preventative spend. I ask ministers to consider how such issues might be tackled.

15:33

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Youth unemployment in Scotland is running at 24.3 per cent, which is clearly far too high a level. It is little comfort that we are doing better than some of our European neighbours, such as Spain, where under-24 unemployment is running at a painful 53.27 per cent.

The recession that is the primary cause of unacceptable employment levels represents a threat and an opportunity. There is an opportunity, because the recession forces us to align our training so that what we do produces the outcomes that are anticipated—the key outcome being a productive job.

The Government says in “Working for Growth” that the employability partnerships that were created in 2006 have advanced hugely and are a key element in efforts to develop employability. The approach has been strengthened through the use of single outcome agreements, sustainable procurement and community benefit clauses.

More use could be made of community benefit clauses in public sector contracts to secure local training and employment. Since 2008, when the Scottish Government introduced those clauses, great progress has been made but, from my experience as a councillor, I do not think that some local councils are sufficiently confident about the details to make full use of the opportunity.

The UK’s Government’s austerity budget is working against Scotland. With full fiscal powers we could increase capital investment, which would boost job availability, and the Scottish Government has repeatedly called on the UK Government to increase capital investment to grow the economy. That view is supported by a growing list of eminent economists, who are also calling for capital investment. I cannot understand why the UK Government lacks basic economic competence in that respect.

There has never been a recession in which a country has budget-cut its way back to prosperity. That approach failed in the early 1930s and it is failing again. We need to introduce capital projects and help our economy back on to a firm footing.

Kezia Dugdale: The First Minister said that there has never been a recovery without a recovery in the construction sector, so what does Colin Beattie think about the housing programme cuts?

Colin Beattie: The cuts that we are suffering in Scotland are instigated by the Westminster Government. As I clearly said, no country that has had its budget cut has been able to grow its way back into prosperity. We need capital projects that put us back on a proper footing and enable us to expand our economy. We need to grow our way back into prosperity.

The finance secretary’s draft budget has made provision for £180 million of investment in construction, skills and the green economy, with an additional £18 million for skills training support for 10,000 opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises and £17 million for college education.

There has clearly been some success in the Scottish Government’s strategy: in 2010/11, a record 87.2 per cent of pupils leaving school achieved positive destinations, compared with 85.2 per cent the previous year. Modern apprenticeships are also at a record high, with 26,427 delivered at a cost of £72 million, against a target of 25,000 for each year of this parliamentary session. The Scottish Government’s opportunities for all initiative guarantees training or education opportunities for all young people between the ages of 16 and 19, should they need one.

A key way to achieve the necessary outcomes is the involvement of business, both local and national, in designing and implementing training and educational courses. With that approach, we can be confident that our young people will receive appropriate training and education that is meaningful to getting a job. There are encouraging signs that the partnership between businesses and those delivering training and education is increasingly productive and successful although, as always, more needs to be done.

Scotland’s economy benefits from improving productivity growth through innovation. There is a strong culture of collaboration and knowledge exchange between universities, colleges, and businesses. I am excited at the prospect of innovation centres being extended across Scotland. I recently had the pleasure of attending the launch of such a centre at Queen Margaret University, where the university has worked in partnership with East Lothian business gateway to set up the centre. I look forward to watching the centre’s progress in the months to come.

It is clear that there is no one road to successfully achieving employability. Much depends on the individual and their personal goals and abilities, and on the market. However, it not just young people who need support to improve their employability; there is a major job to be done in helping women into work. Childcare plays a major part in that and the Scottish Government is committed to transforming childcare. The children

and young people bill will increase the amount of free nursery education from 475 to 600 hours for three and four-year-olds and looked-after two-year-olds. That is the best free nursery package in the UK, but it should by no means be the final aspiration. We must seek nursery provision of a Scandinavian quality; unfortunately, we are unlikely to reach that level without having control over our own affairs or the management of our own economy.

Female employment figures are encouraging: between May and July the number of employed women increased by 12,000; that coincides with a 7,000 fall in female unemployment.

There are many strands to employability: there is provision for training and education, which the Government can achieve; there are delivery mechanisms, which universities, colleges, schools and a variety of training facilities can achieve; there are partnership and co-operation initiatives, which business can achieve; there is flexibility and a willingness to succeed, which the prospective employee can achieve; and, most important, there are shovel-ready projects totalling £300 million, which the UK Government can and must agree to, so that we can make real progress on all fronts.

15:40

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak about employability, an issue that is close to my heart and one that I focused on in my first speech in the Scottish Parliament, which was five years ago, although it does not feel like it.

I want to talk first about the nature of employment in Scotland, the calibre of employers that we have and the role of the public sector as an exemplary employer. We have some excellent employers and some high-skill jobs. Conversely, we also have many low-paid, low-skill jobs. The challenge that we face is finding people who want to go into work and finding them suitable employment routes that allow them to stay in work and to develop themselves as individuals and as employees. That is a huge challenge for us.

Another big issue that we are struggling with is the lack of availability of high-quality part-time employment. The women's employment summit that was held a few weeks ago, which we debated earlier this week, looked at such issues. I know from Alison Johnstone, a constituent of mine whom the minister invited along to that event, that there is real concern about the opportunities that are available for people such as her. Although she has a clearly defined career path, is well qualified and has been in a high-skill job, she does not have the opportunity to go into a part-time, well-paid, high-skill job and balance work with the other

pressures that she has in her family life. It is not necessarily Government's role to influence such things directly, but Government and the public sector have a wider role to play in saying that we need to see more such opportunities being created in the workplace. If that does not happen, we will miss out on a whole potential workforce.

A rather worrying aspect of that issue, particularly for women who are trying to go back into employment, is that a job share might be seen as some sort of alternative career path rather than as high-quality part-time employment that is a normal part of someone's career path, given the other pressures that we all face, particularly people with young families.

Another issue that is extremely important at the moment is how we develop the skills of people who are in low-paid jobs and develop a culture among employers of promoting skills development among their staff. In my first speech in the Parliament, I said that 70 per cent of the people who are in work at the moment will still be in work in 20 years' time. The figure now is broadly the same. The workplace has changed a great deal over the past 20 years. Given the present pace of change and the likelihood that the workplace will change just as much, if not more, over the next 20 years, the Government faces a huge conundrum. It is down to private sector, voluntary sector and public sector employers to start doing something about the people that they have in work to ensure that they have the skills that they require and can move through the pipeline, so that people who are outside the labour market get the opportunity to move into work and then continue to be movement through the pipeline.

A big part of that is ensuring that we develop the leadership and management skills in our existing workplaces. How we better utilise skills in the workplace is an issue that was discussed at this afternoon's meeting of the cross-party group on skills. To do that more effectively, we need leadership and effective management. In addition, we need to recognise that we must develop our leaders and managers to make that happen. That is a big challenge. That brings me back to the points that Ken Macintosh and Kezia Dugdale made in their interventions. Colleges and other learning providers are key in developing such vocational training opportunities, and we cannot lose sight of them in the current climate.

There is an issue about how joined up on skills the DWP and the Scottish Government agencies are. I have a constituent who was unfortunately made redundant because his employer went into liquidation. He got support from partnership action for continuing employment but, although that support was excellent in the first instance, it was reactive, not proactive. When he was trying to find

an appropriate course, support was there for him from SDS, but he was unable to source a course locally and found himself in the work programme. There is a real challenge there. This is someone who worked in the same place for 25 years and never had to look for employment or think about the skills that he needed to develop his employment opportunities. Just when he needed a little bit of intervention at the right time, the system let him down. As parliamentarians we must bring examples such as that to the chamber in the hope that we can improve the system for people who are engaged in it. If we do not do that, much further down the road others will find themselves in the same situation as my constituent from Cowdenbeath.

I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment on procurement. I hope that there is compulsion on employers to train apprentices, through community benefit clauses and other measures. As part of that, we need to look at the issue raised earlier by Kezia Dugdale about disabled workers and workers who are underrepresented in the workplace. If we can find measures through procurement to ensure that those groups get opportunities and if we use Government spend to provide opportunities for them, we will be doing our job properly. If we do not do that, we will not maximise the potential of our workforce. If we do not do that properly, Scotland will be a far poorer place. As parliamentarians, we are in the best position to make that happen now.

15:46

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Aberdeenshire West is a diverse constituency. We have farming, tourism, hospitality and of course the energy sector. Unemployment in Aberdeenshire is down as low as 1.3 per cent; in parts of my constituency, it is 0.6 per cent. That may not reflect what is happening elsewhere in Scotland.

I would like to look at the link between education and employment. In my constituency, an excellent model is being taught in schools. Called your future in energy, it gives young people the opportunity to take a broad view of entering the employment market. It moves away from the stereotype. In the project, young girls can think about wearing a hard hat and overalls and going into the offshore market. We have got young people looking at the various sciences and what they can do within their school curriculum for a future in the broad area of energy. We have to move that culture forward to ensure that our young people have the appropriate opportunities.

I am delighted to say that positive initiatives have been taken. Universities and colleges in

Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire have set up a centre for excellence to look at the broad energy market. They are looking at the feed-in from schools and what the skills sector requires, and applying the courses that young people need to get into employment. Employers in the energy sector say that there is a skills shortage, and indeed there is. However, that problem is being addressed because it is so important to our overall economy in Scotland and the UK and globally. It is unfortunate that much of the return from that energy sector does not come direct to Scotland. It goes to the coffers down at Westminster and our return is very small indeed.

We are providing opportunities for our young people. The Government has taken a positive step by appointing the Minister for Youth Employment to look at the link between education and youth employment.

The minister mentioned access to work. One of the UK's best-kept secrets is access to work. Who is it available for? What are the criteria? It keeps changing. I do not know whether access to work is available for young disabled people for apprenticeships or when they are trying to learn new skills, but I do not think that it is. Yet that is when support is most needed, during early training when people are learning new skills. It is there to help our young people achieve work. As has been mentioned, it is a challenge for our young disabled, and for all disabled people, in the employment market, so we must try to ensure that every opportunity is made available for them.

I am delighted that the cabinet secretary within his budget has managed to secure funding for social enterprises. That funding is there to enable and to give positive messages to the people of Scotland, not the negative rhetoric that we have heard from those on the Labour benches this afternoon. Bruce Crawford said that he may not be here in 20 years' time. I say to Bruce Crawford that he will be 76 and will probably be most welcome here because he would have a more positive message than we have heard today from Labour members.

Let me end by saying that the models within Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, led by Aberdeen city and shire economic future, are models that could be replicated throughout Scotland. I commend the motion to the Parliament.

15:51

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I, too, welcome this afternoon's debate and the publication of "Working for Growth". We will have no difficulty in supporting the Government's motion at decision time.

The motion highlights a number of funding commitments, but there appears to be at least some confusion surrounding the way in which the funding is being committed. That frustration is felt to a greater or lesser extent by colleagues on the Education and Culture Committee—a point that I will return to later if I have time—so Gavin Brown's call for greater clarity on the allocation of funding is perhaps sensible. Likewise, while Kezia Dugdale's amendment is perhaps more strident in tone and certainly unduly critical of the modern apprenticeships scheme, she highlights a number of areas where the Government is not yet adequately walking the talk. For that reason, the Scottish Liberal Democrats will also support the Labour amendment this evening.

In general terms, this is an area of policy where genuine cross-party agreement exists. No one seriously disputes the challenge that we face, particularly though not exclusively in improving the skills and employability of our young people, not least given the stark statistics that Gavin Brown quoted. There is even little dispute among the parties over what the policy response to these challenges should be, which is perhaps reflected in the fact that none of the Opposition parties sought to amend the text of the minister's motion—they seek merely to add to it.

In that vein, as I am sure that we will return to this and related issues many times in the months ahead, let me make a plea to the minister. Although she rightly highlighted the constructive partnerships that have emerged in all 32 council areas, she still seemed a little coy in acknowledging the role that the £1 billion youth contract initiative announced by the UK Government last year can play in enhancing the employability of young people in Scotland. As she knows, under that programme UK ministers committed to fund incentives to companies that take on young people and to provide extra support through Jobcentre Plus for unemployed 18 to 24-year-olds, so that there is an offer of work experience or a sector-based work academy place for every 18 to 24-year-old who wants one. I acknowledge that that may be reflected in the wage subsidies to which Ms Constance referred, but I hope that she will agree that, in future debates and motions, the importance of those contract initiatives could be exemplified.

On the modern apprenticeships scheme, as I said, I think that Kezia Dugdale may be overly harsh in her criticism, but I accept that there are concerns around some of the detail of what the Government is doing. The promise to create 25,000 modern apprenticeships each year is undoubtedly ambitious, but the minister has been worryingly vague so far on how that is to be achieved. What proportion of the overall number of apprenticeships will be taken up in the public or,

indeed, the third sector? What demand is there in different parts of the private sector and among businesses of different sizes? The impression is that ministers have arrived at an eye-catching target but are less sure of how that target is to be met and where the demand is to come from. The risk is that the target will become the primary focus.

Bruce Crawford: Does Liam McArthur accept that the Government not only achieved the 25,000 target but went over that and got to 26,000-plus?

Liam McArthur: I accept what Bruce Crawford is saying, but the point is whether the 25,000 target gives the correct make-up for growing the economy. Are we achieving the target for the sake of achieving the target, or are we putting the interventions where they are most needed? The target will not ensure that resources are invested in the most appropriate place or that ministers' policy intentions are actually delivered. Indeed, the Education and Culture Committee heard hints to that effect in evidence earlier this week.

Angela Constance: Will the member take an intervention?

Liam McArthur: I need to make a little progress. How much time do I have, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you some time back for taking an intervention.

Angela Constance: Does Mr McArthur acknowledge that the great strength of the modern apprenticeships programme in Scotland is its employed status? It is the part of the skills system that I believe responds best to employers' needs, because employers inform the framework. He is looking at this from the wrong angle.

Liam McArthur: I do not accept that at all. Angela Constance will recall the exchanges that we had in the Education and Culture Committee when she was not able to set out in any detail the make-up of the apprenticeships between the public and private sector, which suggests that the target is being elevated above all else.

Changes in the funding arrangements for modern apprenticeships also appear to be creating some practical difficulties. Understandably, much of the attention has been on meeting the needs of 16 to 19-year-olds, although it is disturbing to note that long-term youth unemployment appears to be four times greater than it was a year ago. Many young people are into their 20s before they decide that they want to undertake an apprenticeship, yet changes to the funding rules that took place earlier this year appear to have reduced the level of support for 20 to 24-year-olds to half that available for 16 to 19-year-olds. It has been pointed out to

me by a number of major employers in Scotland that encouraging more of those in the older age group to take up apprenticeships—and so progress—will free up opportunities for 16 to 19-year-olds. The minister may wish to consider whether further refinement of the scheme is needed.

In the time remaining to me, I will focus on the situation faced by Scotland's college sector. In evidence this week, the Education and Culture Committee heard from a range of business organisations, all of whom acknowledged the critical role that our colleges play in providing the skills that our country and its economy need to emerge stronger from the current downturn. The consensus around the vital contribution made by Scotland's colleges is matched only by the general confusion about funding in this area, as I indicated earlier. Professor Jim Gallagher referred to the problem as "biscuit-tin funding", whereby bits and pieces of money were found to plug gaps or to respond to specific issues. He said that as well as making it difficult to see where and how funding was being directed, and for what purpose, that approach risks impeding delivery of broader objectives.

So far, the more the committee has delved into the issue of college and related funding, the more opaque the situation has become. What is clear is that the pressure on colleges is significant. As Scottish Colleges confirmed this week,

"the strong downward trend for teaching funds is a concern in terms of retaining student numbers, breadth of curriculum and quality of teaching."

I acknowledge and welcome the funding that John Swinney announced last month, and the funding that, by all accounts, Michael Russell announced in front of colleges earlier this week. Nevertheless, as with last year, I believe that further work needs to be done.

Let us not forget that this is all happening at a time when colleges are going through enormous upheaval, with mergers and so on, while also being required to deliver a range of commitments.

The minister, along with her colleagues, needs to pay particular attention to the discrepancy between funding of higher education courses in our colleges and in our universities. As well as leaving our colleges short-changed, it sends a message to potential employers that is not helpful. It suggests that ministers attach less value to college courses and that they are somehow inferior. That perception risks undermining attempts to improve articulation from college to university and compromises our collective commitment to widening access.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McArthur, you need to stop.

Liam McArthur: I hope that the minister will agree to look again at the issue. As ever, there are many issues that I have not been able to cover, but I welcome the fact that Parliament has had this opportunity to debate ways in which we can improve skills and employability. It remains a commitment shared across the chamber and one on which I believe that we can and must continue to make progress.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I ask members who want to conduct conversations—they know who they are—to please leave the chamber to do so.

15:58

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I hope that by outlining the concerns echoed by agencies, employers, the third sector and prospective employees in my constituency, and some of the ideas that they offered to tackle the issue of employability, some consensus can be reached on action to ensure that people on the margins increase their chances of getting a job, staying in that job and further progressing in employment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry to interrupt you Mr Gibson, but could you please move your microphone so that we can hear you?

Kenneth Gibson: I apologise, Presiding Officer.

John Mason: He is usually easy to hear.

Kenneth Gibson: I am sorry. I am being heckled by the deputy convener of the Finance Committee—not for the first time.

This year, the Finance Committee has held a series of oral evidence sessions on the necessity of enriching employability prospects for those on the margins of employment, which culminated in one-day workshops last Friday in three regions with high levels of unemployment, including Ardrossan in my constituency of Cunninghame North. The central objective of the workshops was to engage with representatives of the public, private and third sectors and individuals who have been through the system to gain a better understanding of the employability landscape. I believe that it is worth exploring the evidence.

One of the main challenges is the lack of cohesion between employers and public sector agencies in relation to getting the type of person that employers need, although there was a general feeling that engagement with employers is better now than it was in the past.

Chief among the concerns were arguably the complex employability landscape and the competition between bodies at UK, Scottish and local government level.

Funding is heavily target driven and thus an examination of funding models is essential to re-engage with prospective employers and employees on what is best for them. When people were asked whether public sector employers were doing enough to help vulnerable individuals enter the labour market, it was clear that more could be done. For example, many national health service staff work fewer than 15 hours a week and therefore do not qualify for tax credits—that is a direct impediment to work.

Private sector businesses express concern about the poor quality of some candidates, with the main barrier cited being a lack of basic capabilities: the three Rs and soft skills. Employment agencies should refocus on quality rather than quantity when it comes to referring applicants for jobs. In short, employers believe that there is too much emphasis on financial reward for companies who recruit additional staff rather than ensuring that the right person is put forward.

Co-operation between business and education is needed to ensure that the right attitudes to work are ingrained as early as possible. For example, they should be ingrained at primary school level rather than in the fourth year of secondary school, when opinions to the contrary may already be ingrained in some individuals.

In a more positive light, mentoring and work placements were praised as an effective means of developing the right attitude—partnerships between employers and local schools were a prominent example. Placements are largely seen as being effective in developing the necessary soft skills, such as workplace discipline and organisation.

However, it was noted that the DWP is not enthusiastic about endorsing longer-term placements as its emphasis is on getting individuals into paid employment as quickly as possible.

This Government understands the importance of engaging with private sector employers to raise awareness of employment options, for example engagement with the British Hospitality Association to improve young people's understanding of the industry's prospects and with the Scottish Retail Consortium to highlight the extent to which employees' skills are constantly upgraded through on-the-job training.

It is interesting that evidence from the third sector echoed the sentiments expressed by the private sector in as much as third sector organisations agree that it is imperative to build the confidence and self-esteem of pupils at school. They fully endorse the requirement for employability and entrepreneurial programmes in

the school system. There was further overlap in that voluntary organisations believe that employability programmes should concentrate on achieving quality and not targets.

It is clear that the third sector wants there to be a move away from short-term, reactive measures in favour of the long term. At the very beginning of the Finance Committee's inquiry, that sentiment was echoed by the Scottish Trades Union Congress, which pointed out that labour market interventions are stronger in most European countries than they are in the UK and, indeed, Scotland, and that such interventions work even when employment is high.

Perhaps most important are the views of service users themselves. Although their experience of employability programmes was in many ways positive, the programmes were seen to focus too much on a specific age group, which often left older individuals feeling excluded. Training programmes are often viewed as mass produced and not suitable for individual needs. Many told of negative experiences when engaging with Jobcentre Plus and the DWP, citing a lack of flexibility and an unwelcoming and intimidating atmosphere.

The SNP Government takes employability matters very seriously and has done much within limited powers to help to improve the overall situation. For example, it has introduced ambitious pilot schemes to incentivise small businesses to take on graduates in permanent posts and, as we have heard, it has delivered fully on our commitment to offer 25,000 new apprenticeship opportunities in 2011-12, as that target has been exceeded.

Opportunities for all is an explicit commitment to a place in education or training for all 16 to 19-year-olds who are not already in education or employment.

We have also developed a regional approach for colleges to make the sector more efficient and receptive, in line with students' needs. Those obligations are reflective of many practical strategies recommended by the International Labour Organization in its 2011 policy brief, primarily delaying the exit of young people from formal education and strengthening the link between education and training systems and the world of work.

Lessons can be learned from the experiences of other European countries. For example, the Netherlands introduced a scheme in 2009 whereby municipalities must offer those aged 18 to 27 who apply for social assistance either a job, some form of schooling or training, or a combination of both. The Investing in Young People Act has undoubtedly contributed to the

Netherlands finding itself at the bottom of the pile in terms of levels of youth unemployment rates in Europe.

Denmark's latest youth plan categorises employment strategies into age brackets. For example, all school pupils aged 15 to 17 years old have to prepare an education plan with their parents, their school and the youth guidance centre.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Gibson, please begin to conclude your speech.

Kenneth Gibson: The plan leads to further education or identifies what the pupil will otherwise do, whether it is training or something else. Those examples are consistent with conjoining education and training and with discouraging an early exit from formal education.

We need to do more for older people and for women, but progress is being made. I hope that the issues that the Finance Committee is deliberating on will be recognised and looked at closely by Scottish ministers.

16:05

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): Across the UK, about 40 per cent of those who are unemployed are aged between 16 and 25 and, as we heard earlier this week, the jobs crisis and the worrying trends in our labour market are placing women at a particular disadvantage. Unemployment can affect different people in different ways, but no matter who they are or what they do, it is a waste of human potential and a social tragedy. If we achieve anything as a Parliament in this session, we must bring Scotland back to a position where full employment is once again within our reach.

It was reported in the press last week that more than 250,000 people have never had a job at all—a figure that has increased in 26 of Scotland's 32 councils as the youth unemployment crisis develops. Long-term unemployment is corrosive. It is demoralising and demeaning to the individual, damaging to society and, as the Institute for Public Policy Research said earlier this year, a "hidden crisis"—the real cost of this country's slowest ever economic recovery.

Those who have become newly unemployed since the crisis began in 2008 and those young people who are entering the toughest labour market in a generation must not be lost to long-term unemployment, which is running at a 16-year high.

It is wrong to say that there are no opportunities at all in the economy. Over the summer I worked with Jobcentre Plus to organise a jobs fayre in my region and we did our best to match up people

who were looking for work with employers who were actively recruiting for new vacancies. However, in some parts of Scotland there are more than 20 people chasing every job. In what the media have termed "employment black spots" there can be as many as 35 people chasing every job.

The challenge for government at every level is to provide real opportunities now—not just opportunities to work, but opportunities to learn and to train, in order to help our people to upskill until the upturn comes. We have to strengthen and accelerate the recovery too, with plans and strategies in place to ensure that growth is sustainable and rich with jobs. The Scottish Government must promote, support and improve employability across the board as well as in key sectors such as construction and hospitality.

I welcome the commitment to retain college places, but scratch beneath the surface and the further education sector is struggling with budget cuts, job losses and growing waiting lists for college courses. Scotland's Colleges says that 30 per cent of FE students come from the most deprived areas, rising to 70 per cent in the hardest hit parts of the country. Almost 23 per cent of the student population in Scottish universities are from the 40 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods. That figure is not good enough, but it is higher than the number of people from the lowest income deciles at schools who obtain five highers and it shows that for many young people, college is a route into university.

I underline the importance of colleges, but the employability infrastructure in Scotland is much wider. I worked with modern apprentices before being elected to this Parliament and it was a very rewarding career. I could see first hand how an apprenticeship could make a difference and I will always be a big supporter of the modern apprenticeships programme.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Angus Training Group Ltd, which is located in my constituency, recently announced a 50 per cent increase in modern apprenticeship trainees for this year, which means that 67 young people from Paisley to Peterhead are coming to Arbroath to train as engineers. Can the member explain how her party's assertion in its motion that

"the Scottish Government's modern apprenticeship programme is failing to produce the necessary skills base for the growth industries of the future"

squares with reality?

Margaret McCulloch: We need to look at the 25,000 modern apprenticeships that are being offered just now. Are they new this year or are modern apprentices who were recruited last year

being carried forward and included in that figure? We need to look into that.

I am also of the view that there are gaps in the programme and the youth employment strategy. There are young people who are not ready for a modern apprenticeship but are closer to the labour market than the get ready for work group. In the past, those young people could be supported through the skillseekers programme, but these days I have to question whether enough is being done for them.

We must also look at the sectors in which we expect employers to provide modern apprenticeships. The majority of businesses in Scotland are small businesses with fewer than 10 employees, and they host many of our modern apprentices. The Government must do everything that it can to support those businesses as the economy comes through its second recession in four years.

In evidence to the Finance Committee, both the FSB and Minerva People Ltd, which is an independent training provider that is based in the south of Scotland, indicated that a single brokerage service would be helpful. I know that the minister addressed the point earlier, but I have another question to ask her. The FSB and Minerva People called for a one-stop shop where information about recruitment incentives, job placements and apprenticeships could be found. When will the single portal that the minister mentioned come on stream and how will it help SMEs to navigate the system with clarity and with confidence?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): You must close now, please.

Margaret McCulloch: We must do all that we can to help young people to gain and retain employment. Today, I have set out some ideas on how we can improve our response. We must also keep the economy at the top of the agenda, because in these troubled times a stable economy, a strong recovery and full employment are things that we must fight for and invest in.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members now have up to six minutes including interventions, as we are tight for time.

16:12

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): I welcome this afternoon's debate on a crucial issue for the whole country. During yesterday's debate on Scotland's future, I stated that when I was growing up, Inverclyde's economic heart was being systematically dismantled by the Tory UK Government. That was at a time when all powers rested with Westminster. I do not believe for one

minute that we want to go back to those dark days, when communities were ripped apart, families were split apart and lives were wrecked. That was the legacy of an uncaring Westminster Government that had little regard for Scotland.

Debates on employability are usually charged affairs, and rightly so. The younger generation are the future of the country, so if they are not being given opportunities, what hope will there be? I am thankful that the Scottish Government recognises their importance and has invested finance, energy and time in the issue. It also knows that the measures of past UK Governments, including the abandonment of apprenticeships and the introduction of schemes such as the youth training scheme, have left a legacy for the country to deal with now.

Time and again, the issue of skills shortages is raised in the Parliament and the Government is asked what it is going to do about the situation—we have heard that in today's debate. I honestly cannot believe that the Scottish Government is being expected, in the space of one or two parliamentary sessions, to right the wrongs of years of failed policies for our younger people.

Further to that, when unemployment statistics are raised in the chamber, we have to accept that it is impossible to get everyone into work, for a variety of reasons. Every one of us will admit that unemployment is a huge challenge; no Government of any colour has fully dealt with it in the past.

I know that from my experience. After I graduated from university in 1997, I was unemployed for six months; I was overqualified and underexperienced. I obtained a job in a factory for six weeks in the run-up to Christmas, which helped me financially, but it also helped me to regain some of my lost self-esteem. I had a student loan, which was a debt that was always on my mind at the time, so I started to put aside money to pay it off. I am thankful that tuition fees had not been introduced, otherwise I would have had an additional debt, and that the SNP Government and the Scottish Parliament had the courage and the guts to be on the side of graduates when we abolished the dreaded tuition fees, irrespective of whether they were at the front end or the back end.

I will highlight a couple of firms from Inverclyde and their experiences. Stepper Technology and its sister company MES Marine & Engineering Services have in the past year taken on 22 new employees, of whom 15 are under 24 years old. Many of those young people have come from welfare to work programmes, including get ready for work, which has helped 16 and 17-year-olds to achieve employment. The managing director—a guy called Tom Smith—told me that

“employers have a duty of care to take responsibility for the future of the young kids within their own community. They are the future, and we the business community have a social responsibility to ensure they are employed and well trained. Without these important elements, what future would the business community have, and Inverclyde too?”

That touches on the point that John Park made about employers’ social responsibility. I congratulate Tom Smith on his positive outlook about employing young people and on his absolute commitment to his social responsibility.

The second firm that I will highlight is a bus company that is based in Inverclyde—McGill’s Bus Service Ltd. I have been told that it continually has vacancies—it currently has 17. It looks for a range of skills and many roles are for trained engineers and bus mechanics.

The skills shortage, which has been touched on, may be due to past Government and college decisions to cut back on particular training programmes. It is nigh on impossible to train bus apprentices fully in Scotland. To be fully trained, a bus apprentice must go to one of the hubs of excellence in England. As a result, Scotland has been deskilled in that sector in the past 20 years.

Margaret McCulloch: Organisations in Glasgow—and, I am sure, throughout the country—will train bus drivers for the public service vehicle licence. If individuals get that qualification, they are guaranteed a full-time job.

Stuart McMillan: Margaret McCulloch obviously did not listen to what I said—I talked about engineers and bus mechanics, not drivers.

I ask new colleges to examine what might be an opportunity to start reskilling some of our younger people. That will not happen overnight, but the deskilling started long before May 2007.

I welcome the debate and I back the motion in Angela Constance’s name. The £30 million and the additional £15 million in funding are welcome. We can all agree that more can be done. If John Swinney’s budget was not being hammered by Westminster cuts, he could put a bit more money into the pot.

I agree with the thoughts of my colleague Colin Beattie and of John Park about community benefit clauses. It is imperative that local authority officials engage fully on use of such clauses, because that will benefit our communities and all our constituents.

I welcome the 26,000 apprentices last year and the commitment for the rest of the parliamentary session. I welcome the “Working for Growth” framework and the partnership approach. I welcome the investment of £180 million in construction skills and the green economy. More still needs to be done, but that will not happen

overnight and will not happen without the full financial accountability that Parliament needs.

I welcome the debate and the Scottish Government’s actions, but we cannot be complacent about our future.

16:18

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I intend to give a speech that I have given several times before in the chamber. That should make my job easier, but given that nobody understood what I was on about the last couple of times, it is necessary for me to repeat what I said and to work hard to ensure that my message gets across.

Last week, the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee heard evidence from a number of cycling organisations. I remarked privately—not on the record—to some of my committee colleagues that, when it comes to efforts to promote cycling as a driver for economic growth, Norman Tebbit does not get nearly as much credit as he deserves. He said that, when his father was unemployed, his father did not sit around worrying about it;

“he got on his bike and looked for work.”

Members might wonder why I mention Norman Tebbit. I do so because I would rather do so myself than wait for somebody to intervene and do the same thing, because I will talk about labour mobility.

A number of members have talked about the employment situation in different parts of Scotland. Ken Macintosh gave the message that I have heard from many people in the Parliament—that there are no jobs. Margaret McCulloch said that, in her area, 20 people chase every job that comes along. However, we heard from Dennis Robertson, who lives in the same town as I do, that there is a labour shortage—if not a skills shortage—in his constituency.

The truth is that the Scottish economy is very diverse. There are areas of high unemployment—some of the highest anywhere in the UK—and there are areas where there are extremely low unemployment and a skills shortage. We are failing to ensure effectively that people who are without jobs can move, if they choose to, to areas where jobs exist.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: At this stage I will advance my argument. As I said, I have done so before and I want to do so again.

The evidence for the fact that there are jobs to be had if people are willing to move to get them

comes from eastern European immigration. I qualify that—as I have done many times before—by saying that I am one of those Conservatives who are very supportive of eastern European immigration. In fact, I have talked to many employers in the north-east who say that, if it was not for eastern European workers, they would have no business at all. Those workers are very welcome, but their existence demonstrates that jobs are available if people are willing to move to get to them.

Stewart Stevenson: Would Alex Johnstone care to let us know what the average number of working people in a family was when Norman Tebbit's father moved, which I suggest was closer to one, and the number of working adults that there are in a family today, which I suggest is substantially closer to two? Is he suggesting that someone with a job should voluntarily surrender it so that they can travel with their partner on the speculative chance of getting a new job?

Alex Johnstone: I am not suggesting that at all. Unfortunately, I do not have the statistics. I do not remember that era, although Stewart Stevenson may do—

Stewart Stevenson: No, he does not.

Alex Johnstone: I will progress my argument slightly. I do not wish to force anyone to move against their will, but I know that there are people who would be willing to move for work, if the possibility was there.

I suggest that the reason why eastern European workers are willing to move to areas of Scotland where there are labour shortages, and why people who are unemployed in certain areas of Scotland are less able to move, is related to housing as much as to anything else. It is a fact that many people from eastern Europe have come from difficult circumstances and are willing, in order to get a start in a new country, to put up with housing conditions that no one in Scotland would put up with. People in Scotland who live in areas of high unemployment but have adequate or appropriate housing are extremely unwilling to give that up in order to move to where there are jobs. We need to deal with that in order to foster labour mobility.

We heard from Elaine Murray about local difficulties involving transport; I acknowledge that transport is a key issue. However, housing is the issue on which I will concentrate. People who want to move 100 miles or more to an area such as the north-east where there are jobs to be had will—if they are moving to highly paid jobs and are able to participate in the private housing market—be able to find a place to stay, although they might pay through the nose for a house.

For people at the other end of the labour market, where they are likely to be less well paid,

or for young people who do not have the appropriate skills but can find a job where they may gain those skills, the opportunity to find housing is virtually zero. In fact, the rules that govern the allocation of housing under the Homelessness Act 2002 mean that houses in the north-east are likely to be allocated to people who are on the local homeless register rather than to people who move there for a job.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member should be closing now.

Alex Johnstone: Intermediate housing, particularly in the mid-market rental sector, is still heavily oversubscribed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must close, please.

Alex Johnstone: I suggest to the minister that the Cabinet needs to take a more holistic view. If we are to get people without jobs into the jobs without workers we must foster mobility, and housing is a key element that we must deal with.

16:24

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I welcome the funding that has been provided by the Scottish Government—both the £30 million that was announced previously and the additional £15 million. The fact that we have a dedicated Minister for Youth Employment also brings real focus to the subject.

As we look to the budget for 2013-14, we are getting a positive reaction for switching resources from revenue to capital spend. However, there is a limit to how much of that we can do without impacting on day-to-day revenue spending. It is not easy to get that balance right, and the Finance Committee will look at that in detail in the coming months. Although the level of borrowing has been too high in the past and is a major cause of our current problems, many academics are now arguing that some capital expenditure in the short term would boost jobs and growth. That is still in the hands of the UK Government, and either it needs to move in that direction itself or it needs to give this country the powers to do so.

As we have heard, the Finance Committee has been carrying out a study into employability and its report is due at the end of November, after which we will probably have another debate. On Friday, the committee held useful workshops in Ardrossan and Dundee, and I was privileged to attend one in Dumfries with Elaine Murray and others. That was hugely informative for me, as I am more used to the urban environment and the problems and challenges that we face there. It was useful to hear of the particular challenges that people face in more rural areas and to meet public, private and

third sector representatives as well as some folk who are seeking employment.

Issues such as transport are often specific to rural areas, and we heard of the need for a training centre for the hospitality sector which is specific to Dumfries and Galloway. Other issues, however, are relevant for the whole of Scotland. For example, it is important that people train for the right jobs. We hear about the need for engineers in the North Sea oil sector and other parts of the energy sector. I am not sure that I agree with the thrust of Alex Johnstone's argument that the issue is mobility, because there seems to be a national shortage of engineers and people with related skills. We now have some North Sea engineering companies coming to Glasgow, but they still find a skills shortage. We need to encourage young people to go in that direction. As a country, we seem to value engineers slightly less highly than they are valued elsewhere, so perhaps we need to change that attitude.

Hospitality and tourism are hugely important both in a city such as Glasgow and in a more rural area such as Dumfries and Galloway. There can be an assumption that there are few opportunities for career progression in the hospitality sector, but we have heard repeatedly that there are good opportunities and that people can get to the top of large businesses in that sector.

On schools, on Friday we were given an explanation of the difference between soft skills and core skills. I know that the minister prefers core skills. However, communication skills, for example, are really important whether in the retail sector or in restaurants.

Another point that came up on Friday—which has been mentioned and on which I agree with Elaine Murray—is that the private sector feels that it is not being properly included by the public sector. However, we were impressed by how well the public sector is working in itself.

The Finance Committee has considered the issue of young people who are far from the labour market. The comment by some employers that there is core of such young people who are virtually unemployable has been widely publicised. That was overstated in the media, but the reality is that some folk need extra support. We, as a society, owe them that. I strongly believe that every person in our society has something to offer. Society gains if everybody contributes, and every individual has the right to feel fulfilled. Of course, for some people employment is not the right route to personal fulfilment; for a youngster who has grown up in a household where nobody works, it will often take more than 26 weeks for them to be able to stand on their own two feet in the workplace.

We also have many disabled people who really want to work and contribute to society. Some can cope in a mainstream environment with a bit of support, but others need greater support. That is why it is disappointing that Remploi facilities are being closed. I think very highly of Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries, in Glasgow, which has managed to change its product over the years. That organisation and others have a valuable part to play, and I welcome the minister's statement that there is going to be a review of that.

I will conclude by touching on the two amendments. The figure of £124 million is, again, mentioned in the Labour amendment as what Labour is looking for. That leaves us with the question of where that money will come from. The health budget is the biggest budget in the country. Therefore, we can presume that the Labour Party would take the £124 million off that budget. Does that mean that it would charge people to visit their general practitioners and to stay in hospital, as well as having them pay for life-saving medicines?

On the Conservative amendment, of course we all support evaluation and audits, as Gavin Brown said. I am an accountant after all, and that is what I like doing, but we know that accountants are criticised for knowing the cost of everything and the value of nothing. There would be certain dangers with putting all the resources into the approaches that are most easily measured. Do we value only college or university qualifications and not help those who are further from work and whom we need to bring closer? The result could be that some of our most vulnerable citizens would be left behind.

16:30

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): In the chamber this week, there has been a great level of debate regarding employment. This issue affects the lives of more than 500,000 people in Scotland at present and it is only right that it be afforded such time and attention.

On Tuesday, we had a debate about women's employment, and it became clear that that should always be of concern to the Parliament. Women in the workplace still suffer discrimination at every level and it is our responsibility to eradicate that from society. However, as that aspect of employability has already been covered in some detail, I will talk about the problems that my region, Glasgow, faces and the strategies that are needed to help the city to cope with the economic downturn.

Glasgow faces challenges in every sector of the job market. It is imperative that we have strategies in place to allow the city to cope. We know that investing in our economy and injecting cash into it

will create growth and jobs, but struggling areas that we have failed to support have taken well over a generation to recover.

Kevin Stewart: Ms McTaggart was present for part of a visit that I took part in to the Clyde Gateway the other week. New companies, including Glacier Energy Services, have gone into the east end of Glasgow with support from the public and private sectors. Is that not to be welcomed and does it not show that investment by the Government is bringing new jobs and investment to the east end?

Anne McTaggart: All jobs are more than welcome in Glasgow.

We are all aware that the times have changed since the 1980s, and so has the job market. We no longer have the major industries in Glasgow, and the problem of unemployment has grown more complex. We cannot allow the mistakes of the past to be repeated. Young people were thrown on the scrap heap and others never worked again and so fell into the trap of benefits. Therefore, it is vital that we all continue to do what we can to prevent history from repeating itself.

Let us take a couple of modern examples. Citizens Advice Scotland noted some time ago that rogue employers are now operating in Scotland and offering zero-hours contracts to people who are desperate for work. Their victims are mainly low-paid, low-skilled workers. Often, they are women who work part time.

Youth unemployment still afflicts one young person in four in Scotland. However, it affects not only school leavers but graduates who are looking for, and failing to find, their first step on the career ladder.

These are complex problems, and all politicians need to work together to find solutions for eradicating them and assisting the people who are involved.

Glasgow City Council is working to combat some of the problems. It is taking notable steps to ensure that the worst effects of the recession are minimised. Those steps include local economic initiatives; using the third sector to support employment to get people back into work; ensuring that the physical regeneration of the city is used to create jobs and employment; and having an absolute commitment to eradicate youth unemployment from Glasgow. Those are all tough measures from a council that is committed to fighting unemployment.

However, we know that those measures are not enough. Historically, Glasgow has a legacy of unemployment and benefit dependency. It still has an unemployment rate of 10.9 per cent, compared with only 8.2 per cent for the rest of Scotland. It

needs radical solutions to enable it to flourish and reach its full potential. Greater capital investment spend on projects would have a major impact on its economy. That would kick-start the city's construction industry, which is vital if its economy is to advance.

We all want employability to improve in Scotland. Our economic future depends on that. I urge the Government to consider taking steps to assist and enable Glasgow's economy to flourish and thereafter allow the city to avoid the issues that have blighted its past.

16:36

Gavin Brown: The debate has been wide ranging, interesting and productive. Members of all parties have put useful contributions into the mix.

I noted in particular Elaine Murray talking about the confusing landscape. It is not easy for employers—particularly smaller employers—to work out what opportunities exist so that they can get involved.

I, too, attended a workshop on Friday last week as a member of the Finance Committee, in Dundee. At that workshop, an owner of a small business made the point that they are in charge of human resources and health and safety, and that they also have to deal with the payroll, win business and clean the office. Trying to find ways to make things as easy as possible for all businesses, particularly smaller businesses, to engage is critical.

Elaine Murray also talked about transport difficulties in rural constituencies. She gave two anecdotal examples, but I suspect that the problem is far wider. Such problems probably translate across much of the country.

My colleague Alex Johnstone talked again about labour mobility and made points that ought to be taken on board.

John Park, as ever, made a fairly thoughtful contribution. He focused in particular on skills utilisation and leadership and management aspects that are sometimes missed.

The convener of the Finance Committee, Kenneth Gibson, rightly focused most of his remarks on those who are furthest away from the labour market. The Finance Committee is involved in an inquiry into that matter. Those people can be easily forgotten because it is far easier, quicker and cheaper to get those who are on the edge of the labour market back into it than to get into it those who may be several years away from even getting close to it. However, we forget them at our peril.

Liam McArthur from the Liberal Democrats touched on two issues that probably deserve a bit more exploration—certainly in the future, if not today. A good look at the distribution of modern apprenticeships in the public and private sectors and a breakdown of them among large, small and medium-sized companies in the private sector would be helpful so that we have a better handle on things. I note in passing that the matter was raised at the Finance Committee and the minister's written response was based on work that was carried out in 2006. That work was useful and it may give us an inkling of where we are now, but it ought to be updated sooner rather than later.

On the key themes, I must touch on colleges, which have featured in the debate. I did not major on them in my opening speech, purely because the minister in front of us does not have specific responsibility for the budget for colleges, but they have been a key feature of the debate that I must comment on. According to the draft budget, there will be a cut in the colleges budget in 2013-14. It does not matter how that is dressed up; there will be a pretty substantial cut from the budget in 2011-12. We can talk about how colleges were well funded in the past and how we would like to do more, but the reality is that, even taking into account efficiency savings, transformation and mergers, there will be a cut in the teaching budget for our colleges in particular.

It is not just politicians who make that point. Yesterday, at the Finance Committee, Professor Jeremy Peat commented on the issue. The *Official Report* of the meeting is not out yet, so I cannot quote him directly, but he stated that he was worried about the resources for the skills development end of further education as he did not feel that it was sufficiently resourced. If I have slightly misquoted him, I apologise, but I have not seen the *Official Report* of the meeting.

It is not good enough for Mr Crawford to stand up and say that the SNP is meeting its manifesto commitments. Since the manifesto was written, youth unemployment has got demonstrably worse and far worse than most of us anticipated. That is the reason for having a Minister for Youth Employment, which was a response to the situation. For the SNP to say that it has met its manifesto commitments is of little comfort to the almost 100,000 people who are sitting out there unemployed.

The other big theme that was picked up by members from every party and mentioned by the minister is the frustration of employers. There is a crowded landscape out there, with many initiatives. For many employers, it is difficult to work out what is going on. I hope that, as I requested at the start of the debate, we will get an update in the minister's closing speech on the

SDS skillsforce and the idea of a one-stop shop, so that if we have a similar debate in several months' or several years' time, employers will be able to say that there is a difference on the ground. It is not how many initiatives we put out there that matters; it is what employers say to us. Only if they are impressed by it and it works for them will it work for people looking for jobs.

I have a final point that has not featured heavily in the debate, but I would be grateful if the minister could address it, even briefly. An announcement was made in May this year about £25 million coming from European structural funds. In June, Alex Neil, who was then Cabinet Secretary for Capital Investment and Infrastructure, said clearly that the £25 million

"now fully approved by Scotland's Programme Monitoring Committee, almost doubles the funding that the First Minister announced in December".

Given that it was "fully approved" in June, can we have an update on the position of that £25 million so that we can see what actions are being taken?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Kezia Dugdale, I remind members that all members who have taken part in the debate should be present in the chamber for the start of closing speeches.

16:42

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I would like to make some consensual comments and suggestions to the minister before addressing some of the points that have been made.

This morning, I visited Fort Kinnaird shopping park in the east of Edinburgh—I am sure that the minister is familiar with it—where 1,400 people are employed in the retail industry. Today, it opened its Christmas jobs fair. It was a pleasant experience to see partnership working there between the public and private sectors in Edinburgh. Fort Kinnaird retail park paid for big portakabins to be set up with computers inside and encouraged people to use them to apply for jobs. There are also desks and space for employment advisers so that the public sector can do its bit and provide careers advisers, DWP officials and all the people needed to do the partnership working and make it work for the people who are desperately in need of employment in the east of Edinburgh.

The jobs fair is going to be there for three and a half weeks. There are 350 jobs available and, in the first three days, 450 people have come through the doors, which gives a good picture of the appetite for Christmas jobs across Edinburgh and what we can do about that.

That work has been driven by the Capital City Partnership, which is an organisation that I am sure the minister is aware of and which I am hugely fond of. It contributes heavily to Edinburgh's joined up for jobs strategy and is doing some great work there. It recognises that it has a key role in job creation—I know that the minister does not always accept that it is within the powers of government to do that. In the CCP's view, it creates jobs by unlocking and de-risking. It has the capacity to unlock latent vacancies, which organisations perhaps do not know they have, by de-risking the process and taking out some of the challenges that organisations face. In doing so, it can provide recruitment support, engagement and the necessary skills to enable small, medium and large businesses to take on people whom they might not otherwise be willing to take on.

If the minister is still informing her thinking about how the job subsidy programme could work in future, I encourage her to consider how the CCP is developing its plans. Fantastic work is being done because SNP and Labour are joining forces in the City of Edinburgh Council to make productive things happen. I say that to the minister in the most genuine way, because we can achieve great things when we listen to and interact and engage with each other.

I have been pushing hard for the business gateway in Edinburgh to become embedded in the council's employability arm. The council is moving towards having a one-stop shop for businesses, which very much relates to what Gavin Brown talked about. When a business contacts the council, it will be able to access information about recruitment, engagement and skills, and the same person at the shop front will be able to guide it through the planning process and deal with building control issues if the business is looking to expand, or deal with environmental health issues.

Small businesses tell me that that is exactly what they need if they are to be in a position to take on more people—young or not. From their perspective and the council's perspective, the one-stop shop is a great way of hiding the wiring, as I was told. There is just one person to deal with, and the business does not need to worry about the mess behind the scenes. It needs only to access the support at the start of the process. I encourage the minister to go and see that fantastic work.

Elaine Murray made an excellent point about people's difficulties in navigating the infrastructure around employability and the desperate need for a one-stop shop. Margaret McCulloch reminded us that we need to retain the aspiration for full employment in this country. We should never lose sight of that ambition. I pay tribute to the leadership that Margaret McCulloch has demonstrated in her community by organising jobs

fairs and linking people who desperately need jobs with employment opportunities.

Stuart McMillan: Kezia Dugdale talked about the Christmas jobs fair. Does the need for such fairs not demonstrate why full employment is not realistic, because there will always be spikes in employment, particularly at Christmas?

Kezia Dugdale: The member needs to look up "full employment", because I think that he does not understand the concept.

Bruce Crawford asked me to be more positive. I am a very cheery and positive person. I welcomed the money for the social enterprise challenge fund the first time the Government announced it and I welcomed it the second time that the Government announced it, so it should come as no surprise to Bruce Crawford that I welcomed it when the Government announced it for the third time, last week.

On the budget, I welcomed the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth's announcement two weeks ago about the creation of 10,000 jobs, and I welcome the clarification from the Minister for Youth Employment today that that will be done through a wage subsidy scheme. It is great that that is happening, but such action was the first thing that Labour called for on the minister's appointment, so why has there been a 15-month delay? I appreciate that we should not hark back to the past, but the point is important.

Angela Constance: My recollection is that the Labour Party's manifesto promised a fund that would create 10,000 jobs for people of all ages and that the fund would not be targeted at young people. Perhaps Kezia Dugdale will concede that the purpose of my appointment was to marshal all available resources and that, since my appointment, I have not just doubled but nearly tripled the available budget, which enables us to move forward with an ambitious wage subsidy programme.

Kezia Dugdale: I am quite willing to accept that. I have encouraged the minister to think flexibly, roll with the times and adjust to the economic climate that we face. She is doing that on youth employment. I should say that she is not doing that on apprenticeships, as members have said, given that about 10,000 of her 26,000 modern apprenticeships are going to people who are already in work.

Graeme Dey, who is no longer in the chamber—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry; I could not see him. Graeme Dey mentioned the increased number of engineering apprenticeships in his constituency, Angus, which I very much welcome. However, if he looks at the overall figures for the whole of Scotland, he will see that the percentage of

apprenticeships that are in engineering has fallen from 13 to 5 per cent; the percentage of apprenticeships that are in construction has fallen from 22 to 9 per cent; and the percentage of apprenticeships that are electro-technical has fallen from 9 to 2 per cent. That is why our amendment refers to the need for the apprenticeship programme to match the future skills needs of the economy.

Graeme Dey: Will the member give way?

Kezia Dugdale: I have only 45 seconds left, so I cannot give way.

Colin Beattie made some excellent points about procurement processes and I encourage him to make a contribution to his Government's procurement bill process. He might be interested to know that only 31 per cent of council procurement spend is in local economies, which is in stark contrast to 39 per cent in Wales and 54 per cent in Northern Ireland. As a country we have a long way to go, and we can look to other nations in the United Kingdom for the lessons on how best to do that.

My colleague Ken Macintosh began the debate by talking about the devastating impact that college and housing cuts have on the employment agenda and youth unemployment, and it is for those reasons that we lodged our amendment. We will vote for the Government's motion but, as outlined previously, we are simply stating the bare facts. It is hard to do that in the current environment, so I encourage members to vote for our amendment.

16:51

Angela Constance: Presiding Officer, I must offer my apologies to you and Anne McTaggart for briefly slipping out of the chamber. It has been a long debate and I confess that I drank a bit too much water.

There have been some notable speeches this afternoon. As always, John Park spoke from a position of knowledge and experience. Dennis Robertson made a resounding speech, as did Bruce Crawford. To be fair, Elaine Murray made an important speech, too, in making the link between housing and employability. I will ask the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities to respond to her wider points on housing, but I must say that this Administration is building more houses than any previous Administration.

I am not sure about Mr Johnstone delivering the same speech to Parliament more than once—that is not cricket. I thought that members were not allowed to do that and it is not a practice to be encouraged.

On a positive note, we have had a responsible discussion about the statistics. Yes, 10,000 more young people are in employment than this time last year, but youth unemployment has risen, as it is rising across Europe. The employment rate for women is higher in Scotland than in the rest of the UK, but women's employment has fallen over the last quarter—although that is not the trend over the past year. We must always look at the trends that underlie the headline figures. It is important that we accurately tell it how it is when we discuss statistics and that we do not compound the situation. For me, one unemployed Scot is one too many and I am sure that that view is shared across the chamber.

"Working for Growth: A Refresh of the Employability Framework for Scotland" can, in essence, be encapsulated in the statement that it is about our people who are looking for work and that we must make the most of our collaborations and partnerships to ensure a person-centred response to help them on their journey. As John Park described, that response can sometimes be rather fractured and unhelpful, and we must always work hard to ensure that our citizens are not passed from pillar to post. If we are serious about economic growth, we must also be serious about tackling inequality and the barriers associated with age, gender and disability.

The debate's largest theme was about the importance of employers. I have always been clear that, after unemployed people, they are the most important group. There is huge untapped capacity and potential in employers, particularly smaller employers.

I know that members are impatient to hear a lot more about our skillsforce, but it is currently being tested by small businesses and will be unveiled very soon.

John Park: One of the biggest issues that we face is the fact that more than 95 per cent of our businesses in Scotland are small or micro. Has the Scottish Government considered how it might pull small employers together or provide a host employer so that they could have the benefit of training apprentices, which many of them do not have at the moment?

Angela Constance: I know that there are many employers—in this instance, I am thinking of larger employers such as Sir Robert McAlpine—that work together with, nurture and support smaller employers in their supply chain.

Another point that John Park and Kezia Dugdale touched on is that we must remove the risk for employers, particularly small employers and sole traders. We must dispel the myths and take away the perceived risks surrounding recruitment, because we have 200,000 sole traders in this

country and if we could encourage them and provide more of them with practical support and financial incentives to take on a young person it would do a lot not just for young people but for economic growth in this country.

Kezia Dugdale: In the spirit of consensus, I mentioned earlier the great work that is being done by Labour and SNP in the City of Edinburgh Council. Will the minister come with me on a joint visit to see what the Capital City Partnership is doing, so that the whole country can learn about what we are doing together in Edinburgh?

Angela Constance: I would look forward to that very much indeed. The Capital City Partnership is no stranger to me.

As the member touched on, the important point here is about the responsibility that individual members have and the work that they can do. Margaret McCulloch is to be commended for organising a jobs fair in her region. I know that Kenneth Gibson is doing the same and that James Dornan is having such a fair this Friday, at which I will be present. I very much welcome what Stuart McMillan said about the companies in the Greenock area in his region—Stepper Technology and MES Marine & Engineering Services—that are leading the way in employing young people.

I turn briefly to the amendments. I am not inclined to accept the Tory amendment. *[Interruption.]* Is that because of Mr Johnstone's speech? There is a little bit more to it than that. It struck me that the amendment was just a bit mean-spirited and contained the implication that we were wasting money. As I intimated to Gavin Brown earlier, I report to Michael Russell and to John Swinney. Anyone who knows anything about John Swinney will know that it is necessary to be robust to get each penny of expenditure past him. I am just so glad that John Swinney is my boss and not my husband. *[Laughter.]* Mr Russell may laugh, but I spend so much time having to account to Mr Swinney on value for money and how I am spending my budget that, unlike Labour members, I have never had time to read Mr Russell's books.

We have had an outbreak of consensus in the tone and substance of the debate but, as Bruce Crawford said, the Labour amendment is a bit of a moanfest of an amendment. I assure the whole chamber that this Government is not in denial. We are most certainly not in denial about Tory cuts, which are being made right now. We are making tough decisions and reforming public services such as colleges while maintaining our priorities. We are providing 116,000 full-time-equivalent places and, through opportunities for all, we have given an unprecedented guarantee to every 16 to 19-year-old in this country who needs a place in training or education.

Instead of griping, members should be promoting the opportunities for all helpline, which is 0800 917 8000. Instead of showboating on politics, perhaps like Margaret McCulloch and Kenneth Gibson they could be doing something in their constituency to give young people practical assistance.

A few days ago, Ed Miliband talked about wanting more apprenticeships. Last week, Johann Lamont talked about cutting them. Let us have some honest politics. How many apprenticeships is Labour going to cut and in which framework? It can give that answer to the 105,000 young unemployed Scots.

Points of Order

17:00

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In response to my question today, the First Minister told me that the figures that I gave on the planning for backroom bobbies across the country were nonsense, based on the assurances of Chief Constable Kevin Smith. However, this document, on planning for backroom posts to be filled with police officers throughout the country, was written, compiled and sent to the Scottish Government by none other than Kevin Smith himself. Will the First Minister correct the record and say that this is not nonsense but the real plan for backroom bobbies being drawn up by his justice department?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I thank Jenny Marra for notice that she was going to raise that matter. As I have said many times before, I am not responsible for the content of the First Minister's answers or anybody else's answers. However, her comment is now on the record.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. On 31 August this year, you wrote to all MSPs to remind them of their duty to be courteous to other MSPs. Rule 7.3.1 of our standing orders clearly states:

"Members shall at all times conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner".

Today, however, when replying to questions on a ministerial statement, not just an MSP but a minister clearly name-called two MSPs in this chamber—behaviour reminiscent of bullying and behaviour that would not be allowed in the playground, never mind our first parliamentary chamber in 300 years. Presiding Officer, will you give a ruling on whether the remarks of the Minister for Transport and Veteran Affairs to me and Mr Johnstone broke the spirit of our standing orders and of the letter that you sent to MSPs?

The Presiding Officer: I thank the member for notice of his intention to raise that point of order. Rule 7.3.1 of standing orders requires members to conduct themselves at all times

"in a courteous and respectful manner"

and to

"respect the authority of the Presiding Officer."

I have had the opportunity to review an extract of today's *Official Report* and I remind all members to refer to other members by their proper names and not to resort to any other form of address.

Defamation Bill

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-04380, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on the Defamation Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Defamation Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 10 May 2012, relating to the privilege that may apply in respect of peer-reviewed material in scientific or academic journals and reports of proceedings of scientific or academic conferences, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Kenny MacAskill.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-04365.3, in the name of Kezia Dugdale, which seeks to amend motion S4M-04365, in the name of Angela Constance, on employability, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 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)
 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)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 50, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-04365.2, in the name of Gavin Brown, which seeks to amend motion S4M-04365, in the name of Angela Constance, on employability, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)

Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 52, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-04365, in the name of Angela Constance, on employability, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that supporting those who are unemployed into work is key to economic recovery and

reducing poverty in Scotland; welcomes the publication of *Working for Growth: A Refresh of the Employability Framework for Scotland*, which recognises the importance of linking employability support with actions to support economic growth in Scotland and the value of further developing a more integrated employment and skills offer to both the unemployed and employers; also welcomes the agreement for shared political governance of the Scottish Employability Forum at UK, Scottish and local authority level and the development of an employability fund, which will move away from a limited range of training programmes and enable regional employability partners to work together to identify and respond effectively to gaps in existing pre-employment support; agrees that measures to support young people into work should remain a priority for the Scottish Government, and further welcomes the announcement of an additional £15 million in funding to develop further employment and skills interventions for young people in the draft budget statement of 20 September 2012 in addition to the £30 million already allocated for 2011 to 2014.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-04380, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on the Defamation Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Defamation Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 10 May 2012, relating to the privilege that may apply in respect of peer-reviewed material in scientific or academic journals and reports of proceedings of scientific or academic conferences, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. I wish you all a very peaceful recess.

Meeting closed at 17:06.

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Thursday 11 October 2012

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